



Men & Family Centre Inc.
Northern NSW

**Report on the 2005 survey results of the Men Exploring
New Directions program**

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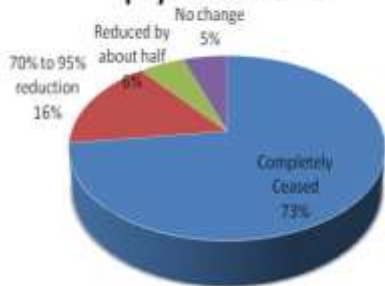
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Executive Summary

This report should give substantial encouragement to the men and women working in the Men Exploring New Directions (MEND) project of the Men & Family Centre.

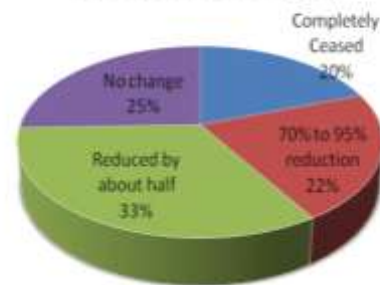
Women's reporting on reduction of physical violence



Both the quantitative and qualitative data present a picture of considerable success in achieving the MEND projects aims; *'To end violence and foster respectful relationships'*. When asked about reduction of physical violence 73% of the partners¹ of the men who attend MEND said that that it had completely stopped since he attended the program. A further 16% reported that the violence had significantly reduced. The women indicated that emotional and verbal violence is more difficult to stop with 22% saying it had reduced considerably and 20% reporting it had stopped altogether.

The men's survey responses correspond to the women's answers. The short stories that both men and women tell give a sense of remarkable change that these families have undergone. It is clear by these responses in particular that the support that women receive is a vital aspect of the program. In a few cases her increased safety has been achieved more because of the MEND project's support of her efforts than the work with him.

Women's reporting on reduction of emotional violence



Partner's reports of the positive change in the men's relationship and care for their children is a particularly heart-warming aspect of this survey.

Family violence is far too prevalent in Australia. MEND, according to the figures and stories in this survey can have a very significant role in bringing it to an end. This report recommends that the Men & Family Centre maintains and expands MEND and that funding bodies be encouraged to continue to support it.

He's changed completely- the counselling helped to bring about changes in his life that really helped: helped with perspective about job changes, guilt around his younger son. He realised I wouldn't put up with his behaviour anymore – that his behaviour had been extreme. Partner

¹ The term "partner" is used throughout this document to represent women who are either current partners or ex-partners of the men who participate in MEND.



Introduction

MEND description and history

Northern Rivers Mensline was established in 1993. In those first years the number of calls by men concerned about their anger, abusive behaviour or violence surprised the volunteer Mensliners. Even more disconcerting was the lack of any specific service to refer these men to. In response to these calls the 'Anti-violence Project' was initiated in 1995. The demand for this project has remained steady since that time. The Anti-violence Project is now called Men Exploring New Directions (MEND). This program still has the same basis; to respond to requests from men who are concerned about their own use of violence or abusive behaviour.

The Men & Family Centre's MEND project consists mainly of group programs for men and a Partner Support program integral to the men's programs. At least two and up to six MEND groups (including one for Indigenous men²) have been held every week in the Northern Rivers region of NSW since early 1996.

MEND formed as a response to requests from men in the community. Most participants are voluntary with approximately 20% having legal or child-protection pressure to attend.

As a condition of entry to MEND, partners and/or others at risk of the man's violence are contacted and offered support. Partner Support takes the form of regular (usually monthly) phone calls and the option to attend Women Exploring New Directions (WEND), a nine week group program. Support for each partner continues according to her need irrespective of whether the man continues to participate in MEND.

Garry* – State Rail worker

There was this huge mess of violence and anger and out of control crap. My wife might want to walk away and get away from me and I would go even more ballistic and make things even worse. I look back on it and would think what a f...ing idiot I was. Why didn't I stop then and there and then that little bit extra wouldn't have happened and made it this bad? But that's not even the point either, if I hadn't started in the first place I wouldn't have hurt my wife and family.

Definition of violence and abusive behaviour

MEND's working definition of abuse and violence includes all behaviours that have the effect of hurting, dominating, controlling, intimidating or illegitimately restricting another adult's freedom. This definition includes all forms of physical violence and extends itself to include behaviours like, yelling, the silent treatment, mind games and guilt trips. This list includes much that many Australian families would label as common, everyday events. MEND's approach is to invite all people to reflect on their behaviour in order to bring about more respect and care in relationships.

² The Indigenous men's group has been delivered in partnership with the local Indigenous family service Rekindling the Spirit

* All quoted names have been changed throughout this document.



All men coming to the MEND have used verbal and emotional abuse. At Intake, one half report having used physical violence. Men's violence toward women generally has a greater impact on women, than women's toward men because of the societal context of men's privileges and sense of entitlement.

MEND targets men because it was men who asked for such a service. Women also request programs for their anger or abusive behaviour and the Men & Family Centre has provided a limited number of Women Exploring Anger programs in collaboration with local women's services.

Regions serviced

MEND services the general Northern Rivers of NSW area with some men from western towns driving over an hour to attend each weekly session. During the period of this survey MEND was operating continually in Lismore with two or three groups per week. It was also operating in Ballina, Byron Bay and Kyogle from time to time.

Survey processes

The report presents anecdotes and quantitative data from a telephone survey conducted in 2005 which was able to reach 83 men and 65 women

This is not an independent evaluation of MEND although students who did the actual telephone survey work were not part of the Men & Family Centre and had not worked in the program before. The scope of the survey is limited as well. There has been no attempt to compare a particular couple's responses. A man's length of attendance can vary from a week or two to well over a year, no link has been made between the length of time a man attends MEND and the degree of change his partner reports.

Letters advising of the survey were sent giving time for people to decline an interview before phone contact was attempted. A female TAFE Community Welfare Diploma student, on placement with MEND called the partners and delivered the women's survey. A male student delivered the men's survey. The number of attempts to make contact were limited to three because of student placement time restrictions.

The principle focus of the survey was on the degree of change of behaviour of the men who attended the groups. Later questions focussed on the changes in relationships and parenting that could be attributed to attending MEND. Other information such as needs for additional services like men's accommodation, improvements regarding employment and ideas for enhancement of any of the aspects of the project were also considered important. Feedback on the effectiveness of the women's support program was particularly relevant.

The survey was designed and coordinated by Stuart Anderson who at the time was the

Jenny, partner

"MEND has been great for us. That he was going showed he cared. The issue has been resolved. Now we have a normal family: average argument, a low level of anger, manageable."



manager of the Men & Family Centre. Every attempt has been made to be objective in the collection and reporting of this survey. Some questions elicited far more material than can be included in a short report and the responses that are quoted have been selected so as to represent the range of experiences. All quotes and figures are represented as they were gathered from the survey worker's transcripts and notes.

Results from previous surveys

Four surveys have been completed each of which covered two years of MEND work. Women partner's experience of violence ending is summarised as follows:

- 1996- 1998 One third of partners reported that all forms of violence cease, one third reported significant reduction in violence.
- 1998- 2000 One half of partners reported that all forms of violence cease, one quarter reported significant reduction in violence.
- 2000 -2002 One ninth of partners reported that say all forms of violence cease, two thirds reported significant reduction in violence.
- 2003 – 2005 Over two thirds of partners reported that physical violence ceased altogether, one third reported emotional and verbal abuse were reduced by more than 90% .

Geoff - factory worker

When I first come here I didn't expect it to be that helpful. (However) The things that are being said are pretty much helping me. I was a bully and control freak with everything around me. I'm becoming aware of that line and of the consequences of the actions I do take. I'm mellowing out a bit.



Men's Intake Demographics

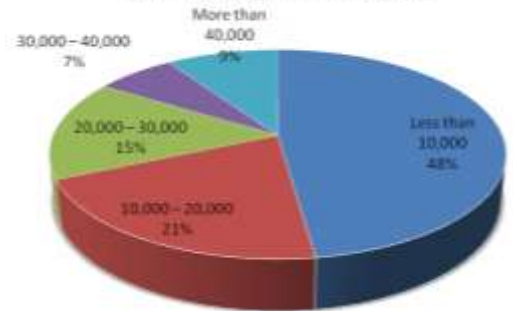
The charts illustrate the situations and issues facing men who enter MEND. These are intake data of 195 men gathered over a similar period to that covered by the survey.

Most men coming to MEND are living on the poverty line on an income of less than \$10,000 per year. By observation at Intake, men from the various trades are the most prevalent group, middle-class men with tertiary education do attend but in much smaller proportions.

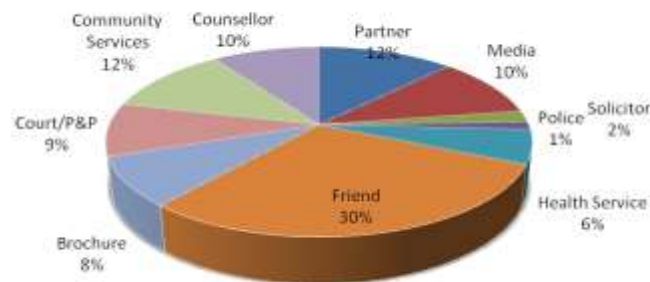
More men came through a recommendation from a friend than for any other referral source. This may be because men trust this source more than any other.

About quarter of the men indicated that they found MEND almost as soon as they realised they needed it. Half had been looking for such a service for months or years.

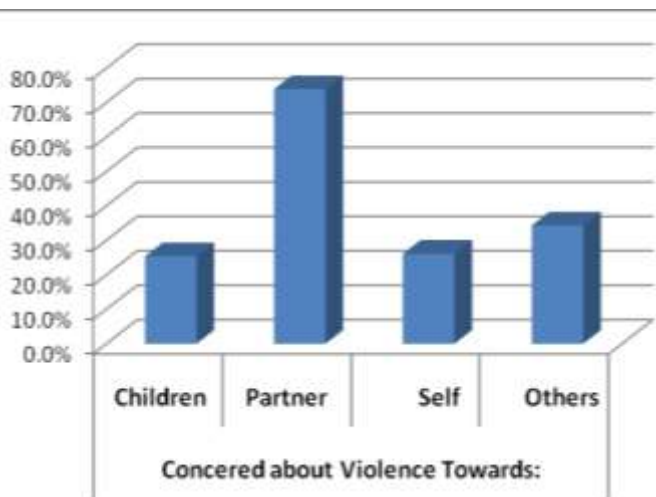
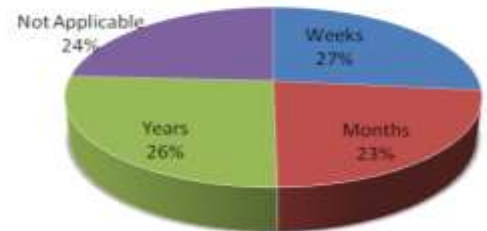
Men's income at Intake



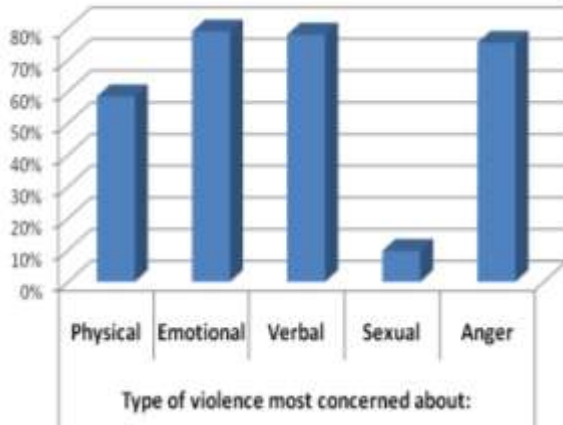
How men heard about MEND



Have been looking for a service like MEND for:



At Intake men can tick more than one of the categories represented in the chart. 70% of men indicated concern about violence toward their partner. Many men indicated that they were concerned about violence toward themselves. That nearly one third of men were concerned about their violence toward their children is of great concern and needs further research.



When a man attends Intake he has not necessarily thought about how he would describe his violent acts. 'Anger' as a category has been included because at that stage it is common for men to think of anger and violence as the same thing. Some men were willing to disclose and discuss sexual violence.

Almost one third of the men coming to Intake (30%) said that alcohol or other drug use was an issue regarding their use of violence. MEND facilitators observe that men's alcohol and drug use tends to decline as they progress through the program. Drug abuse issues are addressed as they arise within Intake and the group programs, and men are referred to specialist services as well.

One quarter of the men indicated that they took some form of mental health medication, most commonly anti-depressants. Discussions regarding managing depression are occasionally held in MEND.

20% of the men at Intake had a current AVO and 20% were facing court on violence issues at the time.

24% indicated that they have had a previous conviction regarding violence.

MEND participant who had been in jail for assault:

You realise what you've been missing, what was before was all bullshit. It's like opening your heart. You've got to be game and bold, it's a different form of courage



The Women's Survey

Sixty five women completed an interview over the telephone. This represents approximately one third of all women on the MEND data-base for the period 2003 to 2005.

Summary of women's survey

Telephone Support

1a) 94% remember receiving a letter after partner joined MEND

1b) 91% received a phone call soon after receiving the letter.

1c) 91% reported that this was their first contact with any agency regarding the abuse.

1d&e) The number of times per month that women wanted to be called varied a great deal. The pattern generally was weekly or fortnightly calls at first and settling to once a month or less. 95% said that the calls took place as arranged.

1f) When asked in what ways the calls helped them and their family, most women said 'Support'. Two of the sixty five mentioned safety as an important factor.

1g) When asked for suggestions to improve the telephone support nine had suggestions for change. Some wanted extra calls and at different times of the day. The statements indicated a general satisfaction with the service.

1h) Twelve women responded enthusiastically to the question regarding whether they would recommend this phone support. Only one women said she would not recommend it.

Women's comments

"You can feel so alone and isolated... it's good to know you haven't been forgotten"
"I felt so hopeless and so despairing. If it could turn around for me, it can for anyone"
"It's really good that partners are cared for too"
"The letter and the phone call are very good because in this situation, it's difficult to reach out, so being reached makes all the difference"

Degree of current contact with partner

2a&b) Respondents were asked if they had significant contact with their partner and therefore had a reasonable basis for judging the changes in his behaviour. Of the 65 women, 39 were living with him, 20 had significant contact and 6 had little or no contact.

Separate accommodation for men

2c) At the time of the survey the M&FC were considering setting up some accommodation for men who were committed to attending MEND in order that their partner and children could stay living with stability in the family home. The Northern Rivers of NSW has an ongoing housing shortage, it is very difficult to find suitable accommodation. Most women



were enthusiastic about such a possibility, if not for their partners, at least for others. The Men's Accommodation Project has since been established with three units being used by men for six month leases on condition that they attend MEND.

3) What sort of violence did you experience?

and

5) How much has each type of violence/abuse been reduced?

Questions 3 and 5 were key in terms of evaluating the effectiveness of MEND's primary goal – to end violence and abusive behaviour. Question 4 (*What sort of changes have you noticed in your partner's behaviour?*) was asked to open up the area and help a woman think about what changes she had noticed. Question 5 then asked for a quantitative evaluation of change.

According to the 65 women that were interviewed:

- 37 had experienced physical violence
- 54 had experienced verbal abuse
- 51 had experienced emotional abuse
- 22 had experienced financial control
- 8 had experienced sexual abuse

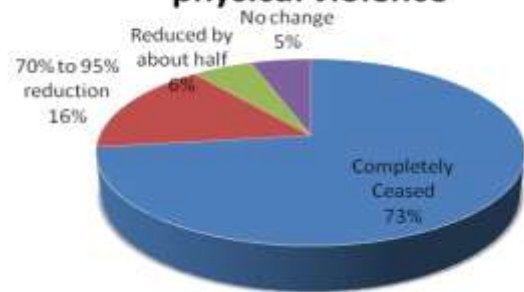
The pie charts illustrate the percentages of these women who report various amounts of reduction in abusive behaviour.

73% of partners report that the physical violence completely ceased with a further 16% reporting a 70% to 95% reduction in physical violence.

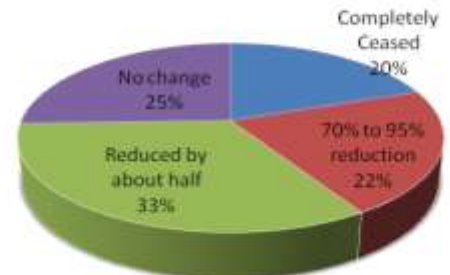
Other evaluations have reported that physical violence is easier to stop than emotional and verbal, for example (Gondolf, 1998). This was found in the survey: the partner's reports show that while there is significant change in emotional and verbal abuse with nearly half of the men making very significant change this is not as remarkable as the reports on the reduction of physical violence.

Eight women of the sixty three surveyed reported sexual abuse. This sort of abuse is discussed regularly in MEND programs with men admitting to a variety of tactics that put pressure on their partner to have sex. The chart below shows three women saying that the

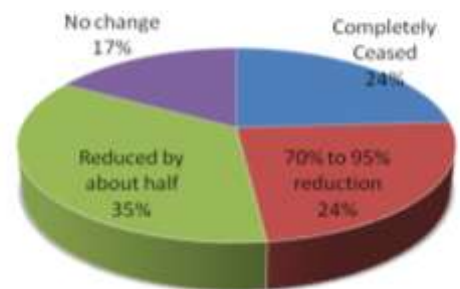
Women's reporting on reduction of physical violence



Women's reporting on reduction of emotional abuse



Women's reporting on reduction of verbal abuse

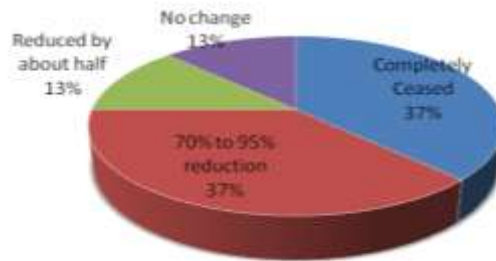




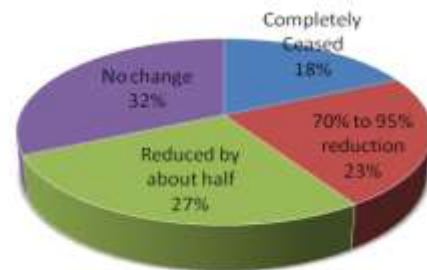
sexual abuse has completely ended, four say it has reduced by 50 to 95 percent and one reporting no change.

Financial abuse covers a wide range of behaviours including withholding an equal share of household income, interrogating about spending, spending money without consultation and refusing to pay for essential food, clothing and household items. Twenty two partners who experienced this type of abuse reported that a relatively high number did not change their behaviour. Certainly MEND discussions often swing toward the difficulty men experience in negotiating family financial matters. High levels of frustration are disclosed regarding the different values each member of a couple may have on how money is spent.

Women's reporting on reduction of sexual abuse



Women's reporting on reduction of financial control/abuse



4) What sort of changes have you noticed in your partner's behaviour?

The statements below are representative of women's responses from the most bleak to the most optimistic.

He is worse towards me since I took the AVO out on him. He didn't stay on with the counselling/groups coz he knew I wasn't going to come back. I think it would have benefited him if he would have. He breached his order and changes have only occurred since that as he's now on a good behaviour bond and he knows I'll charge him if I have to.

The greatest change is that he has acknowledged he has a problem but I don't think it has altered his behaviour. Others say there has been little or no change. I'd be surprised if he's changed. I've seen the woman he's involved with now and she seems to react the same way I did. My gut feeling is nothing's changed.



He's on medication now which has eased stuff. He still plays games though not as bad (shit fights). He uses the anger scale and often says he's up in the 'red zone'. I don't play anymore – I refuse to. He's more considerate and understanding.

He's a lot more communicative. More patient. He has starting assuming responsibility for his issues – “I do feel depressed” He started looking at his childhood and looking at his attitudes that made him unable to communicate. He started naming feelings and his self-esteem increased.

Doesn't yell anymore, no more assault/hitting, takes responsibility in the relationship now.

He sees he has to help himself – not blame anyone else. He met guys that were so bad, it really shocked him that he was going down that track. The shock value was good for him. He did not want to be like the other men in the group. He saw that he had gone too far. He realised I was serious about leaving. He's handling the issues/problems with our teenage daughters much better

He's changed completely- the counselling helped to bring about changes in his life that really helped: helped with perspective about job changes, guilt around his younger son. He realised I wouldn't put up with his behaviour anymore – that his behaviour had been extreme.

It made him realise his behaviours were wrong. Made him seek for extra help. From the person he was to what he is today – huge changes! The referrals gave him access to other groups and things he needed help with. We get along well now.

6) What effects have these changes had on your life personally and socially?

Questions 4 and 5 give a fairly direct picture of the changes that the women have noticed in their partners. It was important to gather more information on what impact these changes (if any) had made on the women's own lives.

The responses to this question were almost universally positive. Even if he had not changed much it was clear that she had become stronger and clearer about not putting up with abuse. Future surveys may have to concentrate on the reduction of abuse and violence taking into account not only the men's program but the women's support program as well.

Personal changes are dynamic – indescribable. We've a beautiful friendship which we hadn't had for 13 years. He had to date me all over again. Every fortnight he takes me out to dinner. Socially we're a lot stronger with respect for each other's values.

Personally, I'm able to focus on myself –not treading on egg-shells. I'm starting to work at the markets and can now go out and have coffee with girlfriends etc because he looks after the kids. It's giving me good time and space from the kids which makes me less irritated.



Better. More liveable/bearable. It helped us stay together otherwise I'd have walked and I don't know where he'd have been.

If he carries on, I just walk away and do my own things anyway. It's much much better – enormously different. I decided to give the marriage another go as a result

7) How have the changes affected the children?

The quotes below by partners are selected as representative of all the responses to this question.

They've gained a friendship with both of their parents. They can talk to us. We've put all our energy back into the kids where it should have been in the first place.

Big deal. The eldest would draw back from him and that scared him because he remembered doing that with his Dad as a kid. He didn't want to pass it on. He controls himself around them now.

The biggest change for them is that they're more confident socialising and much better in public places (really big change)!

Good. All in positives. Eldest son more relaxed. He actually sleeps now. Better relationship with daughter. It takes time for the trust to come again but slowly it's happening.

None. He's the same as he's always been.

Initially it was hard. Now they are rebuilding a relationship. He's working really hard to fix things and slowly they are getting better.

Better. Especially with older one. Our younger one is failing at school but we're both talking to her about it. Civil discussions, not yelling.

The older son got the abuse. He's alright now – slowly getting back his self esteem. Not afraid of him as much anymore and quite able to speak up for himself to his Dad now. He gets more cuddles from his Dad. Dad still has guilt about how he treated him – he's held back a lot with showing affection.

The biggest change for them is that they're more confident socialising and much better in public places (really big change)!

Not so many arguments. The boys are quite good. They can discuss things with either of us. He rings them nightly. They've been good the last 12-14 months.

8) In what way is he taking on the role of a parent?

This question elicits whether the man has extended his taking of responsibility to parenting and the welfare of his children. Most women were positive about the man’s increased involvement with their children. Some were understandably wary and pessimistic about his ability to change.

His whole attitude has changed – more interactive now and treating them with a lot more respect.

He disciplines as we’re one rather than him making decisions on his own. We’ve the same views on parenting now (practice “magic 1,2,3 – time out). We did a parenting course together. He realised he didn’t want to parent the way he’d been parented: letting them run, speak etc. etc.

He’s more in the here and now with them. He used to be angry with them all the time. He picks up our boy from Day Care if I need him to – he helps me out now, whereas, it used to be all my responsibility.

He’s become more involved. He feels more secure in his place in the family and can take on a more supportive role. Because he still gets angry about insignificant stuff, the kids don’t take him seriously. They see him more as another kid than parent figure. They don’t pay attention to him as a disciplinarian – I always have to step in.

Since he’s been home, he’s not taking any role. He was doing wonderful things with him when we were apart.

He’s always been a present father and quite involved. His approach hasn’t really changed much. He’s starting to talk about parenting more though!

9) Did you have to do anything to encourage your partner to go to MEND?

M&FC had assumed that most men come to MEND ‘Wife mandated’, that is they come because they fear she will leave or not come back. Men are seen traditionally as unwilling to seek any sort of help for personal or health issues. The results of this question indicate that given an appropriate service many men will willingly access ‘counselling’.

Fourteen of the twenty five responses indicated that the men were willing to go or attend with some encouragement. Eleven of these twenty five said that an ultimatum or court order was what made him attend. More research is needed on what makes the difference in men’s willingness to attend programs like MEND.

Men's willingness to attend MEND



I attended WEND (after going along to support another friend) and then he went to MEND 2 weeks later.



He went willingly.

I range the police. Police told him to go. They shamed and shocked him into going.

Went to the police. The police mentioned MEND to both of us.

I told him to get help because of his drinking. That's when he went.

I had to coerce him originally – then it was like; “This is beneficial so I’ll keep going”.

10) Can you suggest any improvement to the MEND program

There were a large variety of responses to this question. The most common response was the need for follow up telephone calls to men who had stopped going. This has been initiated and has had a very positive result.

The second most common response was that more one to one counselling should be available. It is possible that many men do not want to attend a group program, but they still want to engage with a counsellor on their particular controlling behaviour.

Better follow up

It did what it was meant to

Women need to take more responsibility for own actions

Need MEND for teenage boys

Some men feel out of place when physical violence is discussed as they have not used this control tactic

More one to one counselling needed

11) Did you attend WEND?

Ten of the sixty five women said that they had attended the WEND support group. This group is open to any women who have experienced violence. Most WEND participants do not have a partner in the MEND group. WEND was originally designed as the principle support mechanism for partners however it was soon realised that most women preferred the regular telephone calls.

11.a) If no, what were the barriers to attending WEND

Quite a few women said that they did not think that their partner’s violence or abusive behaviour their particular problem. In other words they felt strong enough in themselves and wanted him to address his behaviour. Others mentioned childcare, transport and work difficulties.

12) In what ways has attending WEND impacted on your life?

The ten women who did participate in WEND gave very positive feedback for this question. For example:



Getting to know other women and connect with them intimately in the same situation – to feel their wisdom and brilliance. Having somewhere to go on a regular basis where you can remember things that keep you on track and active in building your own life. It strengthened me. Lizette and Gerda are amazing women and leaders – very inspiring.

It let me get rid of the bad feelings about myself and the situation I was in. I felt OK for how I felt. Mainly helped me with my self-esteem knowing “I am a good person”.

Gave me choices I never thought I had. The group was like a reflective mirror – I could see myself. It was so scary but was the testimony of my changing. So glad I got it when I was younger and not older.

Gave me the ability to stand up for myself; set boundaries. I saw that I was entitled to be treated better and I’m not selfish to expect more. Very empowering.

Made me realise there are ways I can take charge of my life without having to change the other person. I can take daily steps not to be drawn in.

13) Further comments

The range of statements, while overwhelmingly positive, vary a great deal. Below are a few samples:

Thank goodness for MEND. We wouldn’t be back together otherwise. It was a great opportunity for him to look at himself. I’m glad he had the courage to go. Great facilitation to get him to change his behaviour!

I’m glad it’s there. It came at a very appropriate time. I hope he continues going. I recommend the women be on the same level as the men – the phone contact was really good for that.

It’s something every man and woman should do. Everyone there needs a gold medal. I can’t thank them enough. It’s making a huge difference in people’s lives. Invaluable invaluable service!.

What you’re doing is great – it’s an opportunity for people to get help and support. Maybe you could use couples that the program has worked for to come and share their experience with the group.

Good on whoever organises it. It probably got him through our breakup. If he did not have it, he may have hurt himself at least. Much better communication. Helped him to understand himself more and manage areas of need. Really positive.

I think the system of contacting the female partner is great. I was surprised. My husband needed more support. Someone to call him rather than he initiate. He was more a victim (of his emotions) than me.



POWER ON! Not enough groups. I was glad for the opportunity. I encourage you guys all the way. Thank you for being there. I think it's a really good service. Seeing him today from what he was 2 years ago – huge impact. It helped a lot!

It's a great service overall. Follow-up service was excellent.

He's really tricky. He probably had everyone at your place fooled.

I wish you well in everything. Great program – makes us better people to ourselves and then extend that to the greater society. Brings greater awareness to people.

Just thank you. It's helped. Only once I've said to him "You have to go back". He'd go back if it got bad again. He's made a big effort, I'll give him that. You're like a lifeline – I know you're there.

A very worthwhile thing. I don't think it works for everyone, but it did help my husband a lot. Different courses for different horses.

His needs are too great. He can't fix himself up unless he's honest. I'm sure it would help others esp. women because they need help and, as it turned out, it was a relief for me.

I think it's a deserving program. I would encourage anyone to go. I think it's important that the women get attention too, otherwise it's pointless.

Great for the men. Helps others handle life better because life's hard! If the men will listen, they will learn.

I was happy with the lady that rang. No pressure on me – she asked good questions. I've suggested it to a few of my friends.

Women running the WEND group are marvellous. Fantastic ability, compassion and concern – really outstanding.

100% to the group. They've done a marvellous job for my husband. Advertise more so men know about it without having to wait for years!

All in all, it's been very good for our situation. It's worked out. We're on the right path. Lucky that it's fallen into place.

Completely positive experience for him. Changes. He's spoken very positively about it. It really pulled him through our separation. So good that it's there.



I wish it was more known to the public in general that there is help. Facilitators are fantastic, dedicated women.

I think that it's great you exist. I didn't know anything was out there. Getting that one call made me think "Oh good, he's done something." The phone call was good confirmation about him and for me that if I do need help in the future with any baggage, it's there.

It's a really good program. It would be good if you could make people more aware about the courses.



The Men's Survey

Eighty three men completed an interview over the telephone. This represents a little over one third of all men who completed Intake for the period 2003 to 2005.

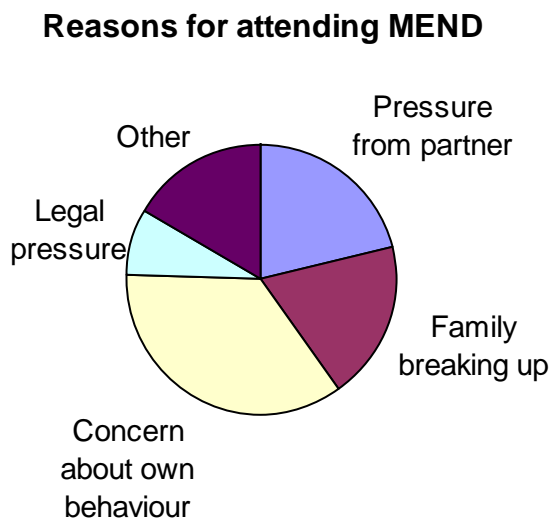
Following is a summary of the results, using the questions as headings.

1) Are you still attending MEND?

Thirteen men were attending MEND at the time of the survey.

2) What was your initial motivation in attending MEND?

More than a third of men said that they were concerned about their own behaviour and this was an important aspect of their motivation to attend MEND. This corresponds with partner statements in which 7 of the 21 women said that he went out of his own concern.



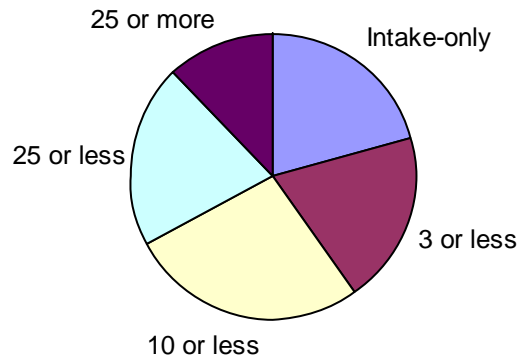
- I wanted to see what they (MEND) did.*
- I had a family problem, I slapped my daughter.*
- My own character flaws were threatening the marriage.*
- My wife encouraged me, I enjoyed it after.*
- I wanted to curb my anger.*
- It had been a difficult time managing (family dynamics).*
- I wanted some contact with others in the same boat.*
- Break up from partner, contact with others needed.*
- I needed anger management.*
- It was self interest. I knew I needed something to change.*
- Seeing counsellor, Lifeline suggested MEND.*
- Wife pressure was what made me attend.*
- Supervision access for kids.*
- I wanted to find out more about being a man*



3) Roughly how many groups have you attended?

This chart shows that 70% of the men interviewed have attended less than ten groups (including Intake). MEND is a voluntary program, and men usually join the Open MEND group initially. Men can join at any time, the group themes and exercises continue in a cycle over twelve weeks. Men come and go according to their own motivation and desire for change. M&FC recommends that a man attend for at least six months, however it is clear that only a small proportion of men do.

Amount of MEND attendance



4) What kept you coming to the group?

Chill out, safe place, other peoples stories, others presence all in the same boat.

Wanting to deal with stress, better myself and learn how to handle it.

The fact that it was beneficial, I realised I'm not on my own.

My sense of responsibility, the capacity of my own anger (to be destructive).

Listening to other's stories similar to mine.

What it was about, how the process worked.

Other's stories, I realised the stupidity of it all.

Counsellors pushed in a good way, I looked forward to the groups.

Wanted to see the progress that can be made, my own behaviour.

Enjoyed and kept learning.

Sharing with other fellows.

5) Why did you decide to stop coming? What would make the difference in you deciding to come again?

The reasons for stopping attending tended to be:

- Felt that he had achieved his goals of stopping abusive behaviour



- Cost and travel becoming difficult
- Work demands impinged on attending
- His experience of MEND was negative

Some long days, group becoming less necessary, red lights worked (Anger management) realized that life was basically under control again.

Cost, time away from my family, transport.

Had a better hold on things, felt able.

Conflict diminished, MEND is beneficial for awareness but no need now.

Went as far as I could, learned enough techniques, enough info.

Work pressure, had to find time for things to settle down.

6) What sort of violence & abuse did you use before attending MEND? Has it reduced, if so how much?

The charts below illustrate the men’s responses to this quantitative question. The men were asked to put a percentage figure on the changes in their own behaviour. If they thought they had completely ceased the behaviour this would indicate 100% reduction.

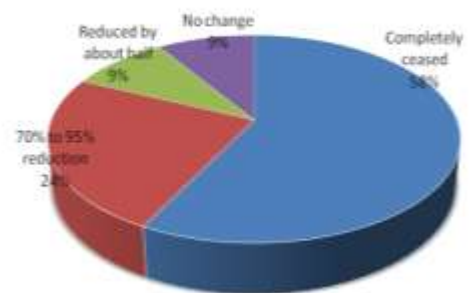
83 men were interviewed:

- 33 reported using physical violence
- 59 reported using verbal abuse
- 47 reported using emotional abuse
- 9 reported using financial control
- 7 reported using sexual abuse

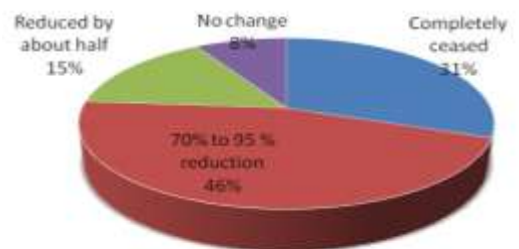
The survey was conducted on a ‘whoever can be reached’ basis. Therefore the 83 men willing and able to take part in the survey are not necessarily partners or ex-partners of the women who were surveyed. No attempt has been made to match responses from couples.

Although there were different numbers of men and women in this survey, the resulting charts are similar. The men are not as optimistic as the women in their reports of ending physical violence, 58% of men report complete cessation compared to the women reporting 73% not using physical violence any more.

Men's reporting on reduction of physical violence



Men's reporting on reduction of verbal Abuse

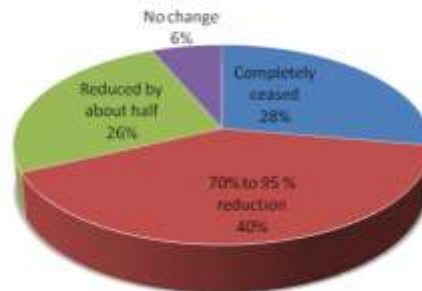




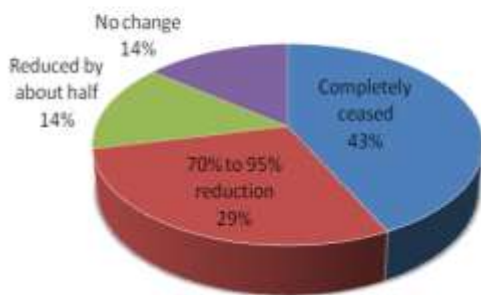
The verbal and emotional charts are a little different with the men estimating more change than the women. (Women about 22% ceased, Men about 30% ceased)

The sample of women and men reporting sexual and financial abuse are small and therefore the proportions of reported change are not reliable. Given this, the men's sexual abuse chart shows similar results to the women's while nearly twice as many men report the cessation of financial abuse than the women report.

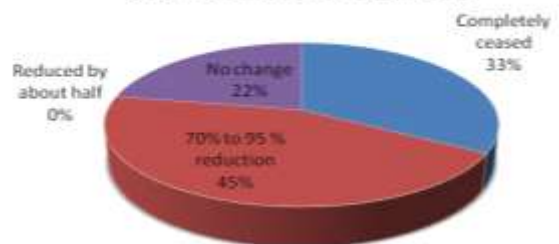
Men's reporting on reduction of emotional Abuse



Men's reporting on reduction of sexual abuse



Men's reporting on reduction of financial control/abuse



7) What sort of changes have you noticed in your behaviour and attitude since attending MEND?

- ❖ *Realised I didn't need to be self centred. Good network of people to talk to helped.*
- ❖ *When really stressed go and do something else.*
- ❖ *Happier, helping out more, still stressed but less, wouldn't mind doing a few more groups.*
- ❖ *Better understanding of my own behaviour.*
- ❖ *Think more before anything, can see it coming better.*
- ❖ *I don't get in people's face now, I can redirect things better.*
- ❖ *More relaxed, I can talk now, I don't take it out on everyone else.*
- ❖ *Learned a strategy not to explode, to gauge myself, more awareness.*
- ❖ *Same bloke, things still get to me.*
- ❖ *I realised I do get irritated, I'm more observant.*
- ❖ *More settled, don't need to spark up.*
- ❖ *Calmer.*
- ❖ *Saddened by some of those men's stories, I walk away, don't react. Do something else.*



- ❖ *I think before I shoot off my mouth.*
- ❖ *I'm better able to assess challenge or threat*
- ❖ *Easier going, more relaxed, patient.*

8) Do your children / step children think you have changed as a father?

- ❖ *Daughter gives me crap still but I'm handling it better, bonding better, more cuddles. They now come to me.*
- ❖ *I'm not so abrupt*
- ❖ *Yes I have less anxiety, talk is easier.*
- ❖ *I'm nowhere near as grumpy.*
- ❖ *Certainly I'm a lot calmer verbally, I've changed for the better.*
- ❖ *You'd have to ask them that, relating is better.*

9) How do you think MEND played a part in the changes you made?

- ❖ *I was empowered. Group with male and female facilitators played a good part; she definitely had a positive impact.*
- ❖ *Playing the (healthy) role now, bills are payed before the deadline, can do your own thing.*
- ❖ *Quite significant, I can be open now.*
- ❖ *Increased my awareness.*
- ❖ *Opened my eyes up.*
- ❖ *Given the idea to cool down somewhere else.*
- ❖ *Empathised on how to take action, encounter with other men as to how far,.*
- ❖ *Knowing about Build-up (MEND concept on thoughts that increase anger), how to recognise this better.*
- ❖ *MEND gave me appropriate responses, general awareness.*
- ❖ *MEND was a big part, it opened new doors, 100% change.*
- ❖ *Started making them because the men were there, the serious problems, lack of life's skills. We have a forced perception of what we should do. Realized that my problems are minor, I just have to sort them.*
- ❖ *I wasn't alone, I later (could) detached observing others behaviour, I can do things differently now.*
- ❖ *MEND let you understand a lot more, see it from another point of view, get it off your chest without fighting the one you shouldn't.*

10) What effect has this had on yourself?

- ❖ *Empowered.*
- ❖ *Made me a better person, sitting back more.*
- ❖ *Simple to see what I was doing, could see from the third party, can stop before starting.*
- ❖ *Realise a bit that I'm not the only one.*



- ❖ *Helped me a lot, better quality of life, don't just take it out- talk ok now in more control, I know she's not the only one to have a bad hair day, don't presume so much.*
- ❖ *I hold off my tendency to explode; do tend to go into self destruction but not anger anymore*
- ❖ *More aware of who I am.*
- ❖ *Appreciation and perspective, I can stand back and take a breath, ... is it my problem?*
- ❖ *Healing affect. Stop hurting others, myself.*

11) What effect has this had on your (ex) partner / your relationship/s?

- ❖ *Can talk more.*
- ❖ *Things on track, we got married.*
- ❖ *Relationship split.*
- ❖ *More people than just me, words can hurt too, things are easier.*
- ❖ *Was sceptical, not now, She says "Don't you counsel me". She can now come to me, safer.*
- ❖ *I'm unsure, perhaps she's happier to have a less angry person.*
- ❖ *General awareness.*
- ❖ *Less suspicions, talk more, more relaxed.*
- ❖ *More affectionate, rubs off on her a bit, she would read the stuff, talk about things better.*
- ❖ *Not much of a difference.*
- ❖ *Not really played much of a part, communications were good.*
- ❖ *Formed a relationship a few months into MEND, still continuing*

12) What effect has this had on your children?

- ❖ *Heaps, I just want kids to be happy.*
- ❖ *Better now.*
- ❖ *Can see change better now.*
- ❖ *Happier.*
- ❖ *Come to me now, safer, can talk about anything now.*
- ❖ *Less emotional*
- ❖ *More loving, easy to express care.*
- ❖ *Listen more to them now, MEND takes away the selfishness.*

13) What effect has this had on you socially?

- ❖ *Moved south, made new friends, closer to family.*
- ❖ *Things are better; if someone needs me I'll give them a hand.*
- ❖ *My son is most important now, work most other times.*
- ❖ *Not much trouble now, I have the skills to pick up danger signs early.*
- ❖ *Helped in relationships with men.*
- ❖ *Pretty good more level headed, sixth sense, switched on, know when the traffic lights (anger) moves, can sense it better.*



- ❖ *Increasing awareness, helped me appreciate tension! Nice to use tools I learnt appreciation, choices.*
- ❖ *Easier to talk, things flow easier.*

14) Do you think that MEND has had an impact on your ability to get and hold work? How?

- ❖ *I'm not so self centred, I've realised: If you can give a bit – you get back. MEND helped with doing a Certificate 4.*
- ❖ *I'm going to TAFE now.*
- ❖ *Yes! I was too stressed before, but can work better now, work is more significant.*
- ❖ *Yes certainly helped to be more employable.*
- ❖ *No - self employed.*
- ❖ *Wasn't dealing with it, now can just do it.*
- ❖ *No have had bad back, physically no change, pensioned.*
- ❖ *No, I'm too much of a misfit, but I'm still doing Uni.*
- ❖ *Same job, no problem holding work.*
- ❖ *No longer jealous so I can go to work.*
- ❖ *I come across as a better person, I get in and get it done.*
- ❖ *I was a Workaholic, MEND made me realize that I'm a obsessive compulsive, how else do you run a 7 day a week business. MEND group definitely helped me to be me.*
- ❖ *Same job, yes positive affect.*
- ❖ *A lot more relaxed with it, less stressed, was agitated now I'm not, so work is easier.*
- ❖ *That wasn't the problem; there were issues that affect it, easier to work now.*

15)

What other goals did you have in attending MEND?	16) Did you reach them?
<i>I didn't want to get so agro e.g. Japanese Whaling, Chappelle Corby etc. Wife used to have to assure me that they're only movies, they're only acting (violent content and so on) but I hated them.</i>	<i>I can get up and walk out now. Less agro but still happens.</i>
<i>To make me a better man, get out of a cycle of difficulty.</i>	<i>Yes, but not fully, I'm on the right track, a few more classes will make the difference.</i>
<i>Just needed to talk as there wasn't anyone or anywhere else to go.</i>	<i>I definitely got what I wanted, and can re-attend MEND soon.</i>
<i>To get through it, first few groups were a bit strange, waste of time but once settled in excellent. Attending 8 or 9 is good.</i>	<i>Yes.</i>
<i>Manage anger, stress.</i>	<i>Yes compared to then.</i>
<i>Learn to talk without abuse, to listen.</i>	<i>Yes pleased as to where I am now.</i>
<i>To try and sort out anger.</i>	<i>Yes</i>



<i>To be a better person.</i>	<i>On the way, its time, age.</i>
<i>A better understanding of me.</i>	<i>Things are never too smooth too long.</i>
<i>Get my married life back together.</i>	<i>Yes we did.</i>
<i>To sort out my frustration, she kept telling me what I should do.</i>	<i>Definitely, don't get angry anymore, can walk away now. Proud of being different, now I can be.</i>
<i>None except to better myself, deal with it.</i>	<i>I'm not dead yet.</i>
<i>Be with other blokes, touching down.</i>	<i>Yes good group, people spoke what they thought.</i>

17) Were there any accommodation issues that were a problem for you when first attending MEND? And 18) If the opportunity were available would you have been interested in staying in a temporary house provided by Men & Family Centre?

Eleven men out of sixty one said yes.

19) Can you tell us about anything that you believe should be changed in the MEND program?

Most men said the program was fine as it is; there were a few critical responses such as:

- ❖ *Yes, suggest to have different types of facilitators, one that's out there on a masculine way, and one that allows the group process to work its own way out rather than be pushed.*
- ❖ *Size of class should be limited to 8 or 9 max.*
- ❖ *Intake is quite an intense experience.*
- ❖ *Blokes who were mandated should be in a different group, they made it difficult.*
- ❖ *I had a problem with one facilitator, he pigeonholes, it's like his way or the highway.*
- ❖ *Occasionally the group stagnate on some issues, would have liked to go a bit deeper.*

20) Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Many men praised the service, with some critical responses toward the program and its facilitation.

- ❖ *It was good.*
- ❖ *I believe MEND groups to be a very important thing in alleviating DV.*
- ❖ *No, should be more Men & Family Centres, Johnny (Howard) should put some cash for services like M&FC.*
- ❖ *Wonderful centre, MEND ought to be entitled to more resources, need more places like MEND.*
- ❖ *Good because it put my life back together.*
- ❖ *It's good that there's something like MEND in the community. It's a good idea to listen to other people.*
- ❖ *Grateful for MEND for where it took me.*
- ❖ *If it could be promoted better.*



- ❖ *I just want to get back into it, MEND.*
- ❖ *Respect for the facilitators.*
- ❖ *Deeply appreciate MEND, prevented assault charges.*
- ❖ *Glad there is some support such as MEND.*
- ❖ *Follow ups are good, letters to partners good.*
- ❖ *It's a great thing, facilitators are helpful, can't speak highly enough.*
- ❖ *Like to come back one day, what's needed is real straight talk, I still need help.*
- ❖ *I wish that there were more sessions per week, every 2nd or 3rd day.*
- ❖ *Viva la MEND, was just what the doctor ordered, liberating as a man, being helped with a strategy.*
- ❖ *Did the job for me.*
- ❖ *It was easy to be a part of.*
- ❖ *Significant, felt grateful to relate to those leaders.*
- ❖ *Men & Family Centre is great.*
- ❖ *It's been an amazing group to be involved with, should be proud to have it in the community.*
- ❖ *Ladies at MEND are helpful as well.*
- ❖ *Keep the work up, its valuable, use it.*
- ❖ *This area is fortunate to have MEND; the men are gentle and caring.*
- ❖ *Worthwhile, important. More of them needed, hope they continue, made good friends, fond memories, some pain but can't talk highly enough.*
- ❖ *MEND was good, some of the men were a bit soft, 10 years ago I couldn't put up with it, now I do.*
- ❖ *Very grateful somebody was there at the time, walked out feeling better.*
- ❖ *Closed group tend to eat the time easily. Topics arise so we go with them. If we could extend to 10 weeks instead of 8 we could study cultural issues.*
- ❖ *Facilitators have expectations sometimes, I need more time to think than others sometimes, other people are different. But there's no real change needed in the program, I should attend a closed group.*
- ❖ *Just had a good time and made good friends, I will be back.*
- ❖ *Appreciate the group, I'm happy because I get follow up calls from MEND, it's comforting.*
- ❖ *I found it was a good social experience; one facilitator was a bit engrossed and demanding, confrontational.*
- ❖ *You get to see how people are, it is really good but I never came back.*
- ❖ *The guys do a top job.*
- ❖ *Wish it would go longer, and the Ballina group is closed.*
- ❖ *It's a great thing that MEND exists. It has obviously helped me to change my life. It needs to be publicised better.*
- ❖ *Very useful, you don't feel like you're the only one.*
- ❖ *Overall it's a great organisation.*
- ❖ *Good group for men that need help.*
- ❖ *Pleased, it's done a great service.*
- ❖ *Relaxations are a good thing, positive feedback, would be good if more classes were available in other areas.*



Conclusion

It is clear from just the women's reports that MEND has facilitated significant change for the better in most men who have attended the program. The men's reports and the Abusive Behaviour Inventory³ give a very similar picture, there is no doubt that the program is successful. The stories of change regarding MEND participant's improved engagement with their children are also heartening.

Even if a man does not change his abusive behaviour there are nevertheless two important outcomes in terms of reducing violence. Firstly MEND stays in regular contact with the partner supporting her to do whatever it takes to stay safe. Secondly the partners often state that they feel no remorse in leaving their abusive men, knowing that the men have had the opportunity to take responsibility and work for change in their behaviour. In these situations it is more likely that women will leave and less likely that they will return.

One of the surprising results of the women's survey was that 91% of women who receive Partner Support had not had any contact with any other Domestic Violence related service. It is well known that women experiencing violence can become very isolated, MEND is a venue through which women can be reached and given support. That this support is independent of whether a man stays with the program is vital. Even if the men's program gave lukewarm results, just the fact that these women get access to ongoing support gives enough reason to continue the program.

Recommendations

Continue and further expand the MEND program.

The primary recommendation is that MEND be continued and, if possible, duplicated in other areas as well as extended to other towns in the Northern Rivers. That such a high proportion of men came through the recommendation of a friend indicates that programs like MEND have to operate continuously and for the long term. One off programs will not generate the word of mouth referral.

Other recommendations are:

Increase awareness in the Police and Health services of the MEND program

From the survey results, Police and Health services only account for 1% and 6% respectively of how men find out about MEND. It could be inferred that this figure is disproportionate to the anticipated numbers of potential MEND participants that these two

³ The Abusive Behaviour Inventory is administered at Intake and then every two months giving a quantitative score for the changes in physically and psychologically abusive behaviour. The ABI results will be added to this survey when available.



sectors could provide. It is clear that these two service sectors could provide a greater amount of referrals to MEND.

Investigate the high drop-out rate after Intake

There is always room for improvement and one area to be investigated is the high drop-out rate of men after Intake before the group program. Almost half of the men who complete Intake do not go on to participate in a MEND group.

Develop reminders for MEND participants

One of the consistent requests from the women regarding improving the program was for some sort of reminder to men who missed a MEND session. While the women may have held strong hopes for his change, they did not want to be the ones 'nagging' at him to attend. For some women this may have increased the risk of his violence. 'Men's Follow Up' has since been established. Many men have had a small crisis which prevented them from attending the session and they appreciate the call and the chance to talk through their situation. Others seem happy with the reminder.

Consistent promotion of MEND

Nearly half of the men at Intake indicated that they have been looking for a service like MEND for months or years. This suggests that services like MEND should be available in every region and that consistent promotion of these programs is important. Much of Australia is missing out on the invaluable opportunity to offer thousands of families a way to reduce or end violence and abuse in their home.

Continue biannual surveys

An enormous amount of intriguing information useful to improving MEND and to the wider community is uncovered in the telephone surveys. The issue of women wanting MEND to do reminder calls is just one example of progressive improvements MEND can make. The Men & Family Centre should endeavour to continue bi-annual surveys and if possible, find the funds to engage an independent organisation to do further research on MEND.

*Stuart Anderson: Program Director; Men & Family Centre Training & Research.
Report last revised September 2009.*



References and useful reading

Gondolf, E. "A 30-Month Follow-Up of Court-Mandated Batterers in Four Cities". *Paper presented at Program Evaluation and Family Violence Research: Durham, New Hampshire, July 1998*

Frances, Ruth "Another Way of Knowing" Preston Creative Living Centre, Vic 1997

Jenkins, Alan "Invitations to Responsibility" Available from Dulwich Centre, Adelaide SA. 1993

Ken McMaster & Arthur Wells "Innovative Approaches to Stopping Family Violence" Steele Roberts Publishers, NZ 2003

"Stopping Violence Groups". Northern Metropolitan Community Health Service (SA) Out of print, available as photocopy from Men & Family Centre.

No To Violence "Mirrors, Windows and Doors" can be read on-line at http://www.ntv.net.au/ntv_three.htm No To Violence has an excellent policies and procedures manual regarding men's behaviour change programs.

<http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/> for large number of journal articles mainly on working for victims

www.menandfamily.org.au Men & Family Centre website