



ADVANCING HEALTH EDUCATION & RESEARCH

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# AVA Research Review

## ADVANCING HEALTH EDUCATION & RESEARCH

**Review Title:** An Ecological Examination of Factors Influencing Men's Engagement in Intimate Partner Violence Groups

**Reviewer:** C. Timothy Dickel, Ed.D., NCC, Counselor Education Program, Education Department, Creighton College of Arts and Sciences, Creighton University, Omaha, NE

**Article:** Roy, R, Chateauvert, R, & Richard, M-C. An ecological examination of factors influencing men's engagement in intimate partner violence groups. *J Interpersonal Violence* published online 21 December 2012; DOI: 10.1177/0886260512469110

**Article Summary:** Chateauvert and colleagues present a qualitative study of the factors that influence the engagement of men in Canadian treatment groups for perpetrators of intimate partner

violence (IPV). Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological model and participant interviews and focus groups, the authors' findings provide insights into individual, programmatic, and societal factors that lead to engagement in this treatment option. Believing that engagement results from factors in the individual and from factors outside of the individual, this article defines engagement in terms of attendance, contribution, relating to the group, agreement with the group expectations, attention to working on one's own problems, and willingness to work on the problems of others. Results of the study are reported according to each of Bronfenbrenner's levels of ecological influence.

#### **Brief Overview:**

The authors conducted 27 semi-structured individual interviews with men who participated in IPV treatment groups. Additionally, two focus

groups with 13 men participating in IPV groups were conducted for clarifying and validating results from individual interviews. Interviewees had participated in varying numbers of the 25 required group sessions, with three participants having dropped out of treatment before completion.

### ***Aims/hypotheses of the article:***

Many perpetrators of IPV are required to participate in group sessions intended to change their behavior. The authors' review of the literature on participant engagement during group IPV treatment revealed little information about the impact of influences outside the group. This study was intended to explore individual factors as well as broader factors (programmatic and social) associated with increased engagement in treatment.

### ***Relevant findings:***

The use of the Bronfenbrenner ecological model enabled the authors to report findings for each level of the conceptual model. At the ontosystemic level, engagement was enhanced for men who were older, had good incomes, respected the contract within the group, desired to change, and believed in the usefulness of the group. However, engagement was a challenge

for those with additional issues such as psychological distress or drug and alcohol issues. Few men were engaged because they wanted to return to a relationship with the abused partner. At the microsystemic level, invested time supported ongoing engagement with interviewees reporting changes and influential moments of insight after five or more meetings. Relationships with other members of the treatment group were described as important, particularly in the early group sessions when welcoming and nonjudgmental members supported engagement. Interviewees also reported that engagement was easier when, from the very early stages, facilitators presented themselves as human, professional, and engaged in the group. An open-ended structure for IPV groups was favored in promoting engagement as it related to opportunities for participants to develop through supportive, self-realized growth. At the mesosystemic level, interviewees thought it was important for members of their social network to acknowledge IPV as a problem, for without that, the men might doubt the necessity to change their behavior. Surrounding networks also helped bolster group membership through "listening, showing interest, or

giving encouragement." At the exosystemic level, the practices of the agency offering the treatment became the focus. Fees for group participation were perceived as a hindrance in promoting engagement, especially for men of lower income. In addition, the access to facilitators for individual support was perceived as lacking. At the macrosystemic level, both the stigma that IPV was defined by physical violence and the influence of normative expectations of men being able to solve problems on their own made acknowledgement and engagement more difficult.

### ***Authors' Conclusions:***

The authors' goal "was to determine the personal and social factors that influence engagement in IPV groups." As a result of this study, the authors raise the issue of the financial cost of participation as a detriment for those of lower income. Another issue raised by the authors was the fact that participants often had to wait until there was space available for them to join a treatment group. The authors point to the fact that their data is consistent with those of other studies including the findings that men who are employed tend to be more engaged, while those with lower incomes have a higher probability of dropping out.

Because there seems to be an interaction between the characteristics of group members and programs, the authors recommend that men be screened to gain knowledge of potential issues that might interfere with engagement.

***Potential limitations of the article/ findings:***

This study addresses some important concepts related to the development and structuring of IPV group treatment programs. Evidence from this limited study, however, is far from definitive due to the small size. While the authors did seek maximum variation sampling and systematically gathered and analyzed the data, there is still room for further study to tease out each of the themes derived from the 27 interviews and 2 focus groups of 12 individuals. It is important to remember that the study reported themes mentioned by interviewees, but does not imply that the majority of interviewees expressed the theme. In addition, there were individuals who refused to participate in the study, and their voices were lost to the researchers.

***Reviewer's Comments:***

This study contributes to our understanding of factors shaping engagement of men in IPV group therapy. The study appropriately used qualitative

research with a sample of 27 interviewees and 2 focus groups to explore perceptions of engagement among men participating in group treatment. While the sampling is limited, the findings can help in designing and conducting IPV therapy within groups. The screening of potential group members is essential, for employment, income, and even personal characteristics seem to influence engagement. The results can also help agencies offering IPV group treatment consider factors external to their treatment program that can impact the engagement of their clients. Much human capital is involved in the treatment of IPV perpetrators, and there are expectations for the group treatment from the courts, the general public, and the families of both perpetrators and survivors. Thus, it would seem that learning about the characteristics of members before the group begins would enable the best use of resources.