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EVALUATING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INITIATIVES

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This paper critiques the approach of identifying ‘best practice’ projects and discusses the problem with simply transferring projects into different contexts. The argument is illustrated by explaining the evaluation process of three domestic violence projects which all had the same aim which was to reduce domestic violence. The evaluated projects all delivered advocacy programmes and were located in disadvantaged areas in the U.K. A more suitable evaluation approach is proposed whereby practice principles are transferred rather than projects and this is presented in the form of a ‘practice model’.

Introduction

The question of understanding the effectiveness of interventions aimed at reducing or responding to crime has engendered various debates about the ‘what works’ approach (Martinson 1974, Sherman et al 1997, Pawson and Tilley 1994, McGuire and Priestley 1995). Some of the criticisms levelled at evidence-based practice have suggested that there is a lack of understanding about the mechanisms through which programmes are expected to work, that the evidence base is weak and that initial specification of the problem has been incorrect (Tilley and Laycock 2002, Read and Tilley 2000). The successful replication of projects into different contexts has also been questioned (Pawson and Tilley 1997). Despite these problems research findings from ‘what works’ evaluation frameworks have typically been used to identify ‘best practice’ projects and to recommend that particular initiatives are ‘rolled out’ across different areas of the country; the Youth Inclusion Programme, for example.

This paper argues that this approach is inherently problematic because it involves transferring descriptions of the implementation of projects into different contexts, neither of which lend themselves to generalisations. In the following discussion we suggest a more suitable approach, which involves transferring responses to interventions and activities, practice principles and factors which influence decision-making processes of survivors.¹ This approach evolved from the

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¹ The transfer of practices, rather than policies, is the subject of this paper. Transferring policies are located in a different framework and set of understandings (see Dolowitz and Marsh 1996).

identification of tensions between the ‘what works’ perspective and the research framework we chose to adopt. A model of good practice was developed using findings from a study on the effectiveness of three domestic violence advocacy projects. The projects were funded by the same Home Office Crime Reduction programme starting in 2002, and all had development support. The projects shared the same overall aim: to reduce repeat domestic violence, and they proposed similar objectives: to deliver an advocacy service. There were commonalities between the areas as they were located in large cities in the UK and marked by pockets of severe social and economic disadvantage. All of the projects were committed to working with minority ethnic women and successfully recruited advocates from the same ethnic groups as the area within which they were working. All three projects were managed by voluntary not-for-profit organisations.

Research data and approach to evaluation

Over a two year research period a range of methods were used to evaluate the projects including the use of comparison groups of non-service users, observations and ‘shadowing’ advocacy workers, project information on service users, and in-depth interviews. In total 62 semi-structured interviews were carried out with women who were accessing the projects, 32 interviews were conducted with partner and local agencies and 220 case files of women were analysed. In addition, 631 women were tracked through the police database. The tracking method was utilised to ascertain the possible influence a project may have had on a woman’s situation or case with regard to reporting incidents and repeat victimisation. The process of tracking involved identifying a woman who had reported to the police and who was then referred to one of the advocacy projects. The woman’s case was tracked over a year to understand how many times she reported to the police again, and the nature of the violence. The woman’s level of reporting six months prior the project referral and six months after the referral was monitored. A comparison group consisting of 258 women who were not referred/did not take up referral were also tracked within the police database. The comparison group was matched by ethnicity and age and only those women who had reported at least one incident to the police were included. Seventy-five structured observations of the advocates at work were also conducted. Variations between the three projects were used to improve the research and to interpret the data (Riccio and Orenstein 1996).

The range of collated data were drawn upon to hypothesise about advocacy and to understand if it works, how it works and its limitations and subsequently to develop a model of good practice (figure 1). This has been achieved by exploring a number of explanations and assessing which explanation best ‘fits’ the data. Quotes from interviews with women and advocates have been selected for illustrative purposes and primarily to demonstrate mechanisms of change. They have been selected where the process of change have been made explicit by the interviewee thereby minimising the interpretative judgements made by researchers. This approach, we believe, lends itself to a more robust approach to data analysis.²

The case files were researched and analysed by formulating a coding scheme for the level of engagement a woman had achieved with the project and by classifying each woman’s case accordingly. For example a woman who had not met with the advocate and had only had contact over the phone was classified at the 0 level support. By contrast, a woman who had engaged intensively with the advocate over a prolonged period of time and empowered women to take actions to overcome her problems was classified at level 3. Themes from the tracking information and the statistics gleaned about repeat victimisation were incorporated into the development of the model.³

The context within which the research on the domestic violence projects took place informed how the research approach was developed. From the outset the intention was to generalise from the findings so that they had relevance to initiatives beyond the three evaluated domestic violence advocacy projects. The evaluations were funded by the Home Office under the auspices of their Crime Reduction Programme which is rooted in the ‘what works’ perspective and a methods-driven approach, and we were under pressure to comply with this framework. Our evaluation approach was discussed at research meetings with Home Office staff and an amicable compromise was reached in that we examined the initiatives from a ‘what works’ perspective and had the scope to develop an approach that we thought was more suited to generalising findings.⁴ The theoretical tensions between the two

² During the research the research team had regular discussions about the findings; we were reflexive, challenged our assumptions, drew many pictures about the change processes, and explored different scenarios and possibilities. This process was an important part of the research process, and one which we believe improved the quality of the research and led to a better understanding of the data.

³ Further details of the tracking analysis can be found in the Home Office Research Study 290 which collates all the findings from the Domestic Violence Crime Reduction Programme (Hester and Westmarland 2005).

⁴ Our particular thanks are due to Alana Diamond who listened to our point of view and accommodated our perspective as far as possible within the Home Office research approach.

perspectives gave us the opportunity to refine a more robust approach as the discussions highlighted to us the problems of generalising. This paper summarises how our practice model evolved from this situation by discussing the limitations of the what works perspective (without dismissing it entirely) and explaining why we used a different approach to find, in our opinion, better ‘ways of knowing’ (Oakley 2000). It is acknowledged that although good practice models can be developed for the prevention of other types of crime, the model presented in this paper is in specific to domestic violence.

Domestic Violence: A Brief Background

‘Domestic violence’ has been defined inconsistently and such uneven conceptual understandings and usages were evident in the projects that were evaluated as well as between different agencies involved in the initiative. According to the Home Office (2004) domestic violence is ‘any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or families, regardless of gender or sexuality’. The remit of the evaluation was violence against women and correspondingly, this paper focuses on women’s experiences of domestic violence. A particular feature of domestic violence is that it occurs as part of a continuum of violence; sometimes there may be serious physical violence, and at other times there are verbal taunts about the incompetence of the woman and her ‘ugliness’ (Hanmer and Saunders 1984; Kelly 1987; Stanko 1987). The forms of abuse can include controlling behaviour, for example; limiting a woman’s contact with her family and friends, scrutiny of and restriction of her actions, threats to hurt, rape and murder (Edwards 1986, Dobash et al 1996). The consequence of any of these behaviours is that a woman’s life becomes full of uncertainties and insecurities, and a woman is always ‘expecting’ the next assault, be it verbal or physical (Mooney 2000). Domestic violence is therefore an ongoing crime, made up of a series of incidents, many of which a woman keeps private. Few incidents are ever reported, particularly to the police (Pahl 1985; Mirrless-Black 1999)⁵ and the response from the police to such crimes has been found to be inconsistent alongside a general reluctance to acknowledge its seriousness and to employ criminal sanctions (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Stanko 1985).

⁵ For this reason it is more accurate to use reports to the police just as a measure of repeat reporting and not as an indicator of repeat victimisation. The conventional method of measuring repeat victimisation

Governments, legal systems and social agencies have a central role in recognising and responding effectively to domestic violence (Gordon 1988, Pleck 1987), an identifiable change from the 1970s and early 1980s when violence against women was confined to the preserve of the women's movement (Zedner 1997). During the late 1980s and 1990s initiatives across the country were funded to provide women with support and assistance in coping with and/or fleeing from a situation of domestic violence. Evaluations of such domestic violence initiatives have found that crisis intervention strategies whereby women are supported after reporting an incident to the police are effective, but in different ways for each individual. The links and responses of other agencies to domestic violence have been found to be influenced primarily by the commitment and approach of the support workers rather than formal training and paper policies (Kelly 1999). The evaluation report which incorporates the findings from this paper's research, similarly found that different approaches were required for women according to whether they were experiencing domestic violence but not necessarily seeking help and those women who were subject to repeat victimisation and were actively seeking help. It was also recommended that as domestic violence is an under-reported crime, an intermediate aim should be to increase reported incidents to the police, and in the longer term, the aim should be to decrease the number of reported incidents (Hester and Westmarland 2005).

Domestic violence and the experiences of ethnic minority women have been researched although it is argued that research which has considered gender inequality and violence against women has omitted the role of ethnicity in this relationship. Women are often treated as a homogeneous group and therefore omitted from both research on ethnic inequality (which focuses on Black and White males) and research on gender inequality (which has often overlooked ethnicity) (Gill 2004, Daly and Tonry 1997). Some have argued that ethnic minority women are doubly victimised: first by the violence from their partner and then by society, which does not provide adequate support and interventions to women in these situations (Newham Asian Women's Project 2003, Mama 2000). The intersections of class, 'race' and gender oppression interact both to create conditions under which violence occurs, and to keep black women living in violent situations (Mama 2000:55). Research suggests that as well as structural factors, South Asian women's experience of domestic violence includes additional 'cultural' or religious factors which impact on the process of

is by using reports to the police which may be sufficient for repeat property crimes like burglary or theft but for domestic violence it is less certain.

violence as well as the available avenues to leave or take action against the abuse (Barton 1987, Mama 1996, Rai and Thiara 1997, Batsleer et al 2002, Gill 2004). Although notions such as honour and shame are not specific to South Asian cultures, it is argued that *izzat* (honour) exerts a particularly powerful influence on South Asian women's lives and that shame can serve to isolate a woman and her children from the community (Rai and Thiara 1997, Gill 2004).

This paper considers the conceptual and methodological problems of evaluating projects that respond to such a complex crime, and questions the usual process of ascertaining what an 'effective' project is and its subsequent transfer into different contexts. The paper is structured as follows: firstly the research transfer problem is discussed and secondly a solution is put forward which includes transferring causal mechanisms, factors which enable women to make decisions to leave and factors that influence the decision-making processes of service users. Thirdly, a practice model is presented using these practice principles as key components around which advocacy could be effective.

The transfer problem

Transferring good practice requires at least three stages; firstly to identify what can be generalised or replicated: the research problem. Secondly, that the findings from the research are understood and capture the imagination of policy makers and practitioners: the knowing problem. Thirdly the transition from 'knowing to doing': the practice problem. This paper is about the first stage: the research problem. Others have explored the second and third stage, and these require the explanation of other sets of problems, which were outside the remit of our study (e.g. Nutley, Walter and Davies 2003). Arguably however, where a research framework makes linkages between all three stages of the transfer problem, the value of the research is increased, as the findings are more likely to influence policies and practices.

Research problems

Assessing the effectiveness of projects, or social programmes, and then generalising from the findings has taxed researchers for many years (Campbell and Stanley 1966, Cronbach 1982). Within the area of crime prevention this continues to be a contested issue (Hope 2002). As Pease has noted, 'if no-one knows what simple crime prevention can do, there is no benchmark against which to understand the political, social and economic reasons why it fails to make simple changes' (Pease 1997:964).

Those who have a methods-driven approach to evaluations are typically concerned with how well researchers have adhered to the pre-chosen methods and the validity of the findings are judged accordingly (Chen and Rossi 1992). Some argue that where evaluations are methodologically rigorous, by using random control design for example, ‘the findings should be **generalisable** to similar settings in other places and times’ (Sherman, Rogan and Schmidt 1992:2-20 bold in the original). Hope similarly remarked, in reference to a quasi-experimental evaluation of the burglary projects in the Safer Cities programme carried out by Ekblom and colleagues, ‘this study represent(s) a highly reliable replication, capable by virtue of its ‘quasi-experimental’ design of yielding generalisable conclusions’ (Hope 2002:52). The argument is, where an evaluation is scientifically rigorous, causality can be assumed and that this causal relationship will continue across contexts and in different situations. The presumption is that successful projects and programmes can therefore be replicated. However, as Popper (1968) has noted ‘things may be similar but not the same’ and it is not possible to strictly replicate successful projects based on mere similarity as things which are similar are only similar in certain respects (Popper 1968: 420-1). In other words it is recognised that a successful project in one location may not be successful in another, bringing into question the value of replicating projects (Pawson and Tilley 1997: 130-5).

Within the methods-driven approach judgements are made about causality in the absence of any knowledge about how the intervention has ‘worked’ or ‘not worked’ as Ekblom *et al* appreciate in describing their quasi-experimental evaluation, ‘This evaluation was not designed to explore the *causal mechanism* by which action may have led to outcome’ (Ekblom *et al* 1996: 74 italics in original). However making causal inferences in the evaluation of programmes is necessary and making these judgments can be problematic (Campbell 1979; Cordray 1986). It has been argued that the certainty of making inferences from a low to a high level of generalisation within the quasi-experimental framework can be improved by studying the causal processes as this facilitates explanations about how a programme has had an effect (Mark 1998). But how judgements are made and ensuring that they are open to scrutiny remains open to debate.

In theory-driven approaches the aim is to develop theories, which explain the effect of the intervention. The intention is to develop a strong theory as this enables researchers to explain how research findings will vary across different sites; ‘generalisability to other persons, places and times requires a theory to help us make

and investigate such generalisations' (Grange 1998: 241). Chen and Rossi argue that developing a causative theory is necessary for generalisations to be made; that it is necessary to understand how impacts can be generated and it is the information about how changes come about that can be generalised (Chen and Rossi 1992:3). Similarly Pawson and Tilley (1997) have argued that in order to replicate research findings in other circumstances it is necessary to establish a plausible context – mechanism – outcome configuration to ensure a project will 'work' in another context. Pawson and Tilley (1997) argue that in order to ascertain the necessary conditions for this to occur, an accumulation of research findings improves theory. The creation of more explanatory information makes extracting general principles from the data possible, and generally principles are the necessary conditions for decisions to be made. They argue that it is these principles or generative causal mechanisms which are transferable (Pawson and Tilley 1997:120-123).⁶

To identify causal mechanisms researchers formulate hypotheses and then try to disprove them. 'Good' researchers are always looking for alternative explanations until they are satisfied that the data fits one particular explanation better than other explanations or hypotheses, and is therefore the most plausible (Popper 1968, 1969). Methods are selected according to the hypotheses being 'tested' and the most appropriate method is chosen as the best way to 'falsify' the hypothesis being 'tested'. The expectation is that many different methods may be utilised during an evaluation. This contrasts with the methods-driven approach where experimental designs are considered to be the 'gold standard' (Oakley 2000).

The difficulty in searching for possible causal explanations is that possible hypotheses and data collection to 'test' hypotheses are endless and as different hypotheses are explored the research takes on new dimensions. In contrast research grants are typically time-constrained and have limited funds, hence the search for possible explanations is curtailed (Weiss 1997a). Furthermore the search for causal explanations is not straightforward, as unlike a statistical approach it does not necessarily involve identifying common characteristics shared by projects. As Sayer (1992) has noted 'Neither common nor distinguishing properties need be causally relevant' (Sayer 1992:115). This raises the possibility that even in well-funded

⁶ Objections have been raised about the realist evaluation approach to replication on the grounds that the process lends itself to political judgements and is therefore open to bias (Hope 2002). However these objections are raised from a methods-driven perspective and made on methodological grounds which misunderstands that from a theory-driven approach principles are transferred, rather than the interventions themselves.

evaluations researchers may fail to identify causal mechanisms and the uncertainty surrounding findings is compounded by the knowledge that what has happened in the past is not necessarily going to occur in the future (Popper 1968). As the discussion above demonstrates, the task of generalising from research findings arising from a small number of projects, and in particular one project, is full of uncertainties. This knowledge encouraged us to continuously reflect on and question our analysis of the data and the inferences we made. We realised that with limited resources and a time constraint, showing how we conducted the research was important. Uncertainties and ‘unknowns’ were bound to remain at the end of the research period and by making the research process transparent the credibility of the model could be more accurately assessed.

A transfer solution

Our starting point for finding a solution to the transfer problem was to hypothesise that advocacy work within a crime reduction context was not necessarily effective.⁷ It was evident that when women had already made up their minds to end a violent relationship and the perpetrator did not know where the survivor lived, the role of the advocate was primarily in supporting a woman with the consequences of her decision. This support included enabling a woman to use available services to meet her needs; to prosecute the offender, to obtain housing and benefits, or to resolve immigration difficulties, for example. In supporting these women the advocates were not actually contributing to a reduction of crime as that had happened independently of their work.

We then examined those cases where a woman had left a violent relationship but continued to suffer harassment and violence,⁸ and where a woman was using the service but had no, or few, intentions of leaving the violent perpetrator. We found that in particular circumstances and situations an advocate can enable a woman to believe that she can change her situation and leave a violent relationship and actually change her situation so that the perpetrator is no longer able to continue the harassment and intimidation after she has left. The initial timing and style of the advocate were important situational factors. Where a woman felt that her world had ‘collapsed

⁷ The word advocacy is used as two of the three projects evaluated called the workers advocates. The third called their front-line staff outreach workers. Other projects may use the term support workers. We consider these job titles as interchangeable.

⁸ Many women who leave their partners still continue to suffer abuse and threats as suggested by the London Borough of Newham domestic violence forum website (www.newhamdvf.org.uk/Introduction.html).

around her', this gave the advocate an opportunity to build up a new life with the woman. This situation arises not necessarily through 'crises' but an endless accumulation of violent events and other social and economic circumstances. Advocacy work therefore has the potential to reduce domestic violence crime and prevent further incidents. The difficulty is that advocacy can be quite limited in its effectiveness, as one advocate stated:

You cannot underestimate the power of the emotions that the man holds over the woman, and at the end of the day she has to be strong herself to see it through. That's why we are called advocates, we can persuade only so much and then it is out of our hands. The important part is that we show the woman how to be strong and make her feel less isolated and charged with information and knowledge.

(CRP VAWI⁹ Advocate, 2002)

But for some women the presence of a project can make an enormous difference as the following comment from a woman service user illustrates:

I didn't contact anyone because I didn't know who to contact. I didn't know what services were out there so I tolerated the situation for six years, I didn't understand and had no one to guide me. If I had I known that I could have got this kind of help then I would not have put up with the abuse for six years

(CRP VAWI Project user, 2002)

Advocates face many constraints in their work and cannot be expected to be successful with all women and we recognise that for some women and in some areas there are particular barriers which make it more difficult for advocates to assist women. Some cultures and religions make leaving violent relationships even more complex especially in some communities where 'culture' carries the burden of protecting minority identities in the face of external hostility (Patel 2000: 169, Gill 2004). Racism (both at individual and institutional level from agencies), shortage of housing, and inadequate practices of statutory services mean that advocates have to challenge such agencies (Burman and Smailes 2002) as part of their daily work. Particular circumstances of women also make it more difficult to assist them, for example, where there are language barriers, disabilities, and mental health problems. The presence of children also makes the situation more complex for advocates to assist and support a woman, particularly if she has a son over the age of fourteen years and needs access to a refuge (some refuges are unable to accommodate young men in order to ensure the emotional security of other women and children at the refuge).

Having accepted that there was some merit in advocacy as an effective intervention, we then turned to the problem of generalising research findings. The

⁹ Crime Reduction Programme (CRP) Violence Against Women Initiative (VAWI).

following account gives a sense for how the possible solutions were developed as a consequence of adopting, and rejecting, a ‘what works’ framework and utilising a theoretical approach. Drawing on the literature on replication we identified the possibility of transferring mechanisms of change, causal mechanisms (Weiss 1997b), practice principles (Pawson and Tilley 1997), and factors which influence the decision-making processes of service users. The following section discusses each in turn.

Transferring causal mechanisms: women’s responses to interventions and activities

Our argument is that the way in which the ‘what works’ approach is framed does not enable generalisations to be made. An example of crime prevention devices illustrate the point, as the ‘what works’ approach advocates the use of locks and bolts or panic alarms or mobile phones. The use of a mobile phone enables women to call an advocate whenever they are threatened by their violent partner or they want reassurance. For some women who did not already have a mobile phone and who felt they could hide one without the knowledge of their abusive partner, it may have been beneficial. But for other women a mobile phone issued by an advocate could have made the violence worse if the perpetrator found out the woman had been seeking help. It is also possible to envisage situations where a woman may have had a mobile phone but could not use it for one reason or another such as that she had no credit left, she couldn’t find it in an emergency for example. Similarly issuing new locks and bolts may have been useful to stop a perpetrator entering the home but useless if he shared the home with the woman and useless at stopping him from harassing the woman by shouting and banging on the door. For these reasons we would say that it is very hard to generalise from the ‘what works’ thesis, as crime prevention devices may work for some women in some circumstances and in particular situations. As can be seen in the illustrations above, the decisions made by a woman, and the perpetrator are key to our understanding of whether or not a crime is prevented. Thus what is transferable is information about the decision-making processes rather than the type of crime reduction measures.

In our research we adopted Weiss’s concept of ‘mechanism of change’ to understand decision-making processes, as she has stated that ‘The mechanism of change is not the program activities *per se* but the responses that the activities generate’ (Weiss 1997a:46). A mechanism of change can be a woman’s new understanding that domestic violence is a serious crime, a woman’s improved

knowledge of the criminal justice system, or about her rights, or about how to use a bank account or access child benefits.¹⁰

Transferring factors that enable women to make decisions to leave: practice principles

One of our interests was to grasp whether the ideas and assumptions embodied in the projects contained underlying principles which informed practices and if these principles provided the necessary conditions for women to make decisions to leave a violent relationship. Early on in the research we interviewed bid writers, and project managers to find out about ‘the programme logic’ of their bid and how this was working in practice (Connell *et al* 1995). None of the interviews worked well as the interviewees were largely unable to explain the relationship between the aims, objectives, activities and outcomes of their project. Their understanding of setting up and managing a domestic violence project was informed by the ‘what works’ thesis rather than having a theoretical understanding of how the project was going to make a difference. The interviews suggested that there was a preoccupation with outputs and meeting targets, and a mind set which implicitly correlated outputs and impacts. According to the logic of this thinking; the more outputs the more impact a project is likely to have. We found that those who wrote the bid put in numerous objectives and a long list of outputs and outcomes to make the bid ‘successful’. In the words of one principal bid writer ‘to win funds, you have to show you are doing lots’. Thus one project had nine interventions and thirteen outcomes with many targets such as a 36 per cent reduction in repeat crimes and a 30 per cent reduction in rape case attrition. Another had seven interventions and 12 expected outcomes.

There was also an implicit assumption that there is a linear relationship between crime prevention devices and the reduction of crime. Thus the reasoning was that the more mobile phones costed into the bid, the more reporting to the police would increase and the more likely domestic violence would decline. Similarly the more locks and bolts that were used, the more perpetrators would be deterred, and more incidents of domestic violence would be prevented.

We also found that within projects and across agencies people were working with different understandings of domestic violence and how to respond to it. Some perceived that a couple living in an intimate relationship could have a crisis or a series

¹⁰This is different to the mechanisms concept used by Pawson and Tilley. For Pawson and Tilley a mechanism is ‘advice’, repair and security upgrade’ or ‘search warrant’ (Pawson and Tilley 1997).

of crises. According to some projects, reporting to the police signifies a 'crisis' and reactions to domestic violence should be responsive to crises. Agencies should respond promptly and take all action necessary to prevent the next crisis. Others perceived domestic violence as an on-going process that may occur over many years and which may consist of continuous threats rather than involving any specific crisis or serious physical violence. On the basis of these assumptions, agencies believed that an appropriate response is to provide the opportunity for on-going support. Two of the advocacy projects had quite different filing systems, which illustrates the different perspectives towards domestic violence; one project archived their files in any order in a basement within months of a case being opened, whilst in another project all the files were kept open, were organised so any woman's file could easily be found, and were highly accessible.¹¹ Furthermore there is an issue of causality about which the advocacy projects themselves had different expectations. In one project it was anticipated that reporting to the police would increase as the advocates would be able to encourage women to report, and in another it was expected that the advocates would reduce reporting to the police as their advocacy work would reduce the number of 'crises' a woman experienced, thereby reducing the need to report to the police.¹²

Where advocacy projects understood that living with domestic violence is difficult seven days a week, 24 hours a day, the workers were more likely to be proactive, phoning women regularly to talk to them or contacting them by means which were safe for a woman and the advocate, by going to school gates where a woman picked up her children for example. The proactive work recognises that women benefit from ongoing support even though they are not always actively seeking it themselves. Where advocates provide a predominantly 'crisis' intervention service, they typically wait for a woman to contact the service and tend to make the assumption that a woman is coping or does not want any assistance if she does not contact the project. Some advocates were quite adamant that their work did not have a crime reduction effect and that their role was primarily supportive and to give neutral advice, whilst others were equally sure that they could prevent domestic violence and that a project should operate within a criminal justice context to emphasise that

¹¹ This difference was not due to the physical size of the office; both were more or less the same size and had the same number of advocates using the space.

¹² This difficulty made interpreting the reporting patterns of the women to the police before the project and after the start of the project to obtain before and after measures to assess if the project had impacted upon repeat victimisation, proved to be particularly unclear where the number of incidents were the same in the before and after period. We did not feel in a position to be able to judge, on the

domestic violence is a serious crime. Similar differences of opinion were found between workers in other agencies.

All three of the advocacy projects clearly stated that they were client centred. In practice this approach was quite different; in one project the advocates were careful not to 'lead' the women in any way and were non-judgemental about the decisions the women made, believing that women have the right to self-determination. In another project the advocates had a clear understanding that their role was to assist women leave their violent relationship, did not hesitate to positively encourage women to take legal action against the perpetrator and were often quite assertive with a woman in advising that she should not return to the violent partner. The advocates felt that they were acting in the best interests of the woman.

These findings illustrate that how practitioners perceived and understood the problem of domestic violence informed how they responded to their clients. We drew on the work of Karl Popper and recognised that policies and projects are trial solutions to solve a problem, in this case the problem of domestic violence (Popper 1969; Burgess 2002). We hypothesised that how projects formulate the domestic violence problem and how other agencies and key workers conceptualise the problem would inform us about the proposed solution. During the research we devised interview schedules to address these issues and in our analysis of the data we asked ourselves whether the aims and intentions of the project were an appropriate solution to the domestic violence problem? Could they make a difference? Instead of directing all our research energies and resources towards evaluating if the projects had met their aims and objectives – which we were funded to carry out – we also adopted an additional agenda, namely to examine if the projects were appropriate solutions to the problem of domestic violence. This approach enabled us to draw out principles of working which were generalisable.

*Transferring factors that influence the decision-making processes of service users:
how advocates work*

The 'what works' approach tends to make assumptions about similarities between the same types of projects and therefore relies on transferring projects into different contexts. It assumes that if two projects look the same, they both work in the same way as well. We found that the similarity between the projects fell apart when we examined the everyday working practices of the advocates. More subtle differences in

basis of the data, whether no difference meant no change or if no difference meant that advocates had been successful in encouraging women to report more to the police.

how they approached their work, how they formed relationships with women survivors and with representatives from the police, the housing department or the crown prosecution service were apparent, and it was these differences which enabled us to identify how effective the practices were. Differences in the attitudes of other agencies varied across locations and required the advocates to adopt a range of strategies to assist women. Some challenged staff from other agencies whilst others cultivated personal relationships. In one police Community Safety Unit (CSU) the staff were willing to work with the advocates and were keen to learn from them how best to work with Pakistani women, whilst in another CSU the police were not interested in the project, and did not necessarily see the advocates as a resource. Thus in some localities it is easier to 'get results' than in others and transferring projects which have the 'best results' could be more a statement about the area and relationships between agencies than the work of the project itself. Thus in one project the local context made it much easier for them to work as there was a clearly defined problem with Asian women accessing services as there were no services available with the linguistic or cultural skills necessary to reach them (Parmar and Sampson 2003a, 2003b, 2003c). In this area, the police, housing and health services were grateful that there was a service for them to make referrals to.

We analysed and interpreted the research interviews with staff and workers from a range of agencies and with women survivors, observations at meetings and notes from sessions shadowing the advocates, using the Popperian concept of 'situational logic' (Popper 1969). Situational logic assisted us to understand decision-making processes as it recognises that according to the logic of their situation people and institutions pursue certain goals or aims and they do this by assessing which is the best way of achieving these goals within the given situation. Jarvie (1972) draws our attention to the possibility that a person or institution may find they need to choose between several different options in their pursuit of certain aims and highlights the significance of meanings and emotions in analysing the logic of the situation and understanding why particular decisions are made.

The use of situational logic to analyse the findings enabled us to question the validity of transferring projects. The differences in the ways the projects operated explained more about how the work of an advocate was more or less easy or difficult, than providing information about how their work made a difference to the decision-making processes of women. We therefore rejected the idea of identifying 'best practice' projects and turned our attention to understanding more about how advocates

could or could not influence the decision-making processes of women who were trying to leave a violent relationship.

A Practice Model

The model of practice (figure 1) that we developed through our evaluation approach draws on the experiences and views of the women and on the factors described in the previous section which are: the mechanisms of change or causal mechanisms, practice principles that operated across situations and in different local circumstances, and factors which influence the decision-making processes of the service user: in this case women fleeing domestic violence (Parmar and Sampson 2005a, 2005b). The particular principles discussed here apply specifically to advocacy projects and would need to be adapted for other approaches to reducing and responding to domestic violence.

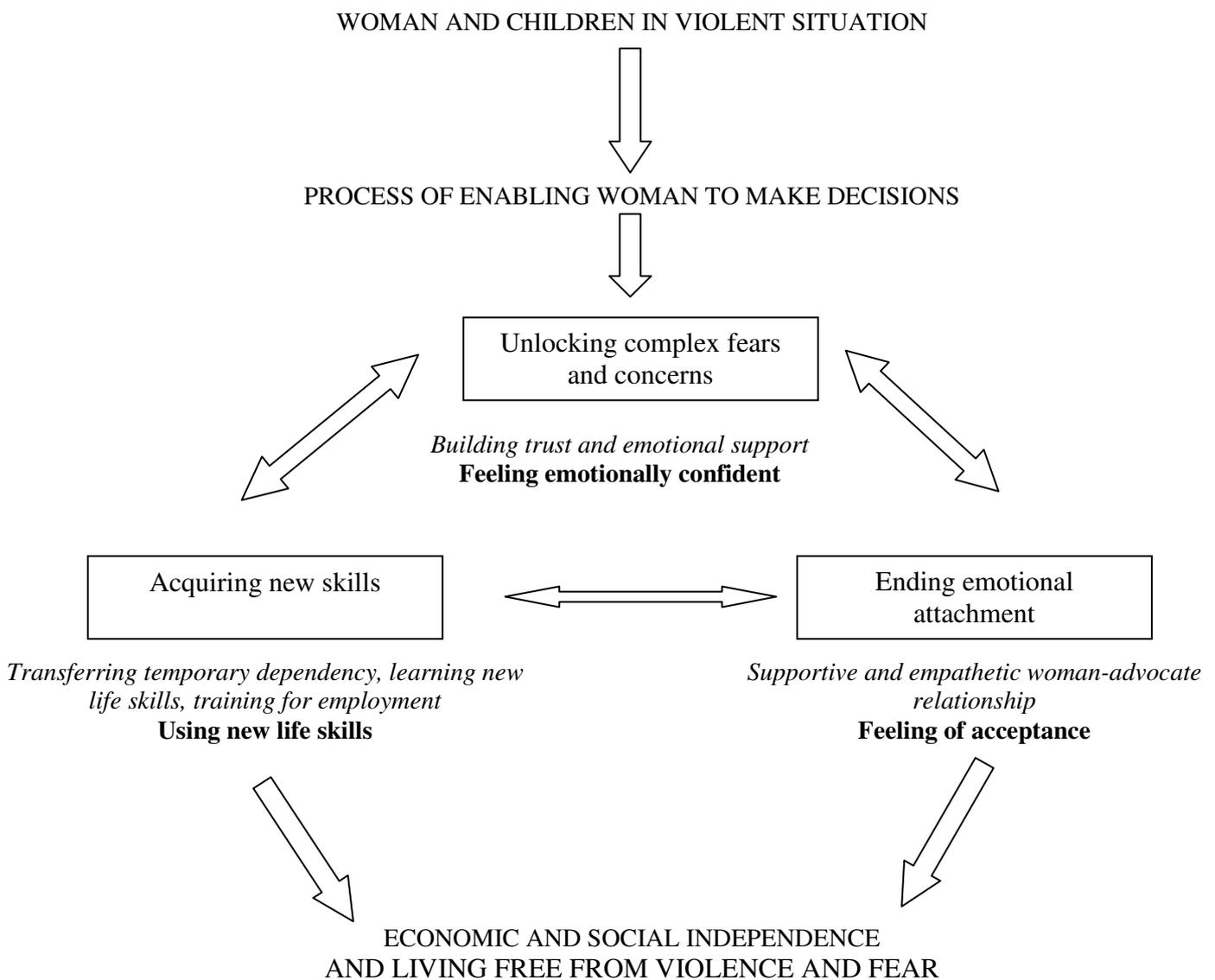
Our judgements are informed by the perspective of the women survivors as we have assessed the value of an intervention by its contribution to improving the quality of a woman's life. The model assumes that an advocate can enable a woman to decide to leave a violent relationship and support her through her decision to leave and to become economically and socially independent. The model represents the necessary conditions, which enable women to resolve the domestic violence that they are experiencing.

The proposed model arises from research findings from three similar advocacy projects, which primarily advocated for women and their children. The projects did not aim to stop the violence by working with men, rather they aimed to use the criminal justice system to prosecute men for their criminal behaviour. There was an implicit belief in these projects that to be free from violence, a woman will live independently from her violent partner and we have made the same assumption in the practice model. Where reconciliation is the aim of a project a different, a more neutral approach is required which works with both partners. The mechanisms of change that lead to a cessation to violence are likely to be different for these types of projects as they have a different understanding of how violence in an intimate relationship can be stopped. An alternative model of practice would therefore be required for such a situation to the one proposed in this paper. The projects from which the principles for advocacy have been developed were located in large cities and specifically in areas that were largely economically and socially disadvantaged, and with a few pockets of affluence. Whilst domestic violence is a universal crime, it is likely that the response to women living in poverty will be different to those who are economically 'better-

off' (Burman and Smailes 2002). We would expect the mechanisms of change to remain the same but the emphasis of the advocacy work to be less about enabling women to learn new life skills, for example.

To summarise, in the following model the conditions in the boxes are the factors which enable women to make decisions; the enabling context. The practical conditions of the advocate-woman relationship are represented in italics; the processes of change. Finally, the outcomes of these practice principles are represented in bold type. These components of the model are discussed separately below.

Figure 1: A Practice Model



The statements in bold text in the model signal the responses to activities and the necessary responses are: feeling emotionally confident, the feeling of being accepted, and using new life skills. The following account explains the responses and shows how one of the interviewed women summed up the position of many who are experiencing violence in the home when she said:

I felt like a caged animal ... I feel like I can't live or can't die. My life has been wasted, I can't move forward or back.
(CRP VAWI Project User, 2002)

A successful project is one which will enable women to move forward, and during the research, we explored what factors enabled women to make decisions that would enable her to leave a violent relationship. Where an advocate was able to engage with a woman on an emotional level they were more able to influence the decisions made by women that lead to a cessation of violence. A good advocate enabled a woman to understand her fears, to recognise those fears which were constraining her decision-making and to assist a woman to break her emotional attachment to her violent partner. In addition a good advocate was also able to offer support to a woman after she had made a decision to leave. Where advocates were able to make a woman feel accepted for who she was, this gave her the confidence to make decisions, and when a woman learned or practised new life skills such as using money, and how to use public transport, she was able to make decisions. These women demonstrate the importance of gaining confidence and in particular receiving emotional support:

I feel as though I have ownership over my court case and what is happening and that is why I am determined to see it through to the end. [The project has] been crucial to the mental and emotional process as I have no friends or family that can help me.
(CRP VAWI Project User, 2002)

Work by advocates that shows an understanding of a woman's situation gives her a feeling of being accepted which was significant for the women:

If you had seen me before I met these girls [the advocates] you would have thought this girl not going to make it. I used to stay inside the house and feel sorry for myself. But these girls make you understand that it wasn't your fault.
(CRP VAWI Project User, 2002)

I feel more understood by someone who speaks and understands the culture of being Bangladeshi in the UK. They just know what you mean and how difficult it is to live with an abusive partner and the complicated decisions that have to be made when deciding to seek help.
(CRP VAWI Project User, 2002)

Two women explain the significance of being able to use their new life skills:

I didn't even know how to use the bus but the workers helped me.

When I managed to escape from my husband I had no idea of life outside and didn't know how to shop, how the currency worked, how to get to the children's school, what and when there were school holidays, what day of the week it was, how to use public transport, and how to communicate in English. I was completely helpless.
(CRP VAWI Project Users, 2002)

Practice principles

In the model above the factors, which enable a woman to make the decision to leave, the practice principles, are in the boxes. They encompass understanding complex fears and concerns, ending emotional attachment, and acquiring new skills. From the findings we extrapolated that a practice model required women and children to move from a situation of experiencing violence to one which enabled them to make decisions so that they can have economic and social independence and live free from violence and fear. Increasing the economic and social independence of a woman and her children is a solution to the problem of a woman often blaming herself for her situation, for the shame that she feels, and fears about being excluded from her community. For some women there are additional problems, a lack of confidence due to a lack of knowledge about using money, having bank accounts or using public transport, and a lack of skills to find employment, including speaking English and being able to use computers. The purpose of improving a woman's social and economic independence is also to enable her to leave her violent partner, to reduce the number of times she returns to the violent relationship and to increase the social skills and the opportunities for a woman to find paid work which provides her with sufficient income to meet her needs.

In the words of an advocate:

I know there's a lot of family pressure in this kind of situation . . . you don't have to put up with it. . . you should be able to be free from abuse. . . I understand the family pressures . . . I come from an Asian background.
(CRP VAWI Advocate, 2002)

The proposed advocacy model conceptualises support and crime prevention as integral in the sense that crime prevention measures are supportive in so far as they enable a woman to feel safer, and meaningful support includes offering crime prevention advice and assistance. However, the argument is that neither support nor crime prevention precautions are necessarily going to bring about a desistance in the violence unless they enable a woman to change her understanding of her situation. In other words her response to the support and/or crime prevention measures is to move

towards social and economic independence. An effective advocate will therefore continuously assess the reaction of a woman to these interventions.

Understanding complex fears

Once a woman recognises that she is a victim of a serious crime she may make the decision to leave, or want the perpetrator to leave, and will primarily require practical assistance from the advocate to carry through with her decision. Other women will retain an attachment to the perpetrator or to their particular situation, and be indecisive about ending the relationship. Typically, a complex set of fears 'lock' a woman into a violent relationship and we would argue that a good advocate is one who enables a woman to understand her fears and to understand that these fears are preventing her from making a decision to leave. In support of the strength and complexity of the emotion of fear, Abrahams (2004) found that 'fear, almost amounting to terror' (2004:271) was the predominant emotion that women recalled from their arrival in a refuge. Where a woman understands her fears, she is able to perceive her situation differently and with the support of an advocate can gain the confidence to make decisions about changing her situation and to carry the decisions through. As one woman explains:

I didn't realise how scared I actually was until I spoke with my advocate, he threatened to kill me so many times, told me to commit suicide but I carried on, not able to see the fear he had put in me.
(CRP VAWI Project User, 2002)

A woman's fear goes beyond concerns for her own safety and those of her children, it also includes fears about living alone or only with the children, and fears that arise from depression, and the possibility of being less economically stable or living in greater poverty. Safety planning alone is, in this model, an insufficient response.

Ending emotional attachment

Women typically find it difficult to leave a violent relationship, they often return to their violent partner, sometimes leave again and return on several further occasions (Mama 1996; Cretney and Davis 1997). A successful advocate can assist women in the process of ending emotional attachments by developing a supportive and empathetic relationship with a woman so that the woman temporarily transfers her 'attachment' to the advocate. Where this occurs a woman may not return to a violent partner or may return on fewer occasions. Breaking emotional ties with a violent

partner, even when he lives separately from the women, can be harder when children are involved and when the woman will lose standing in her own community (Patel 2000, Gill 2004), has difficulties accessing services, and may experience institutional racism. In these situations the work of the advocate is more complex and demanding. One of the particular challenges for an advocate is responding to a woman who is facing an escalation of the violence due to her decision to leave. In these circumstances confidence and trust between the woman and advocate underpins a woman's resolve that despite the worsening of her current situation, she will be free from violence in the longer term.

If I hadn't had the project I don't think I would have survived, I would have gone back to him.

(CRP VAWI Project User, 2002)

They put me back on my feet and gave back my independence.

(CRP VAWI Project User, 2002)

The 'ending emotional attachment' box represents the findings from women who expressed that they could only take action against their partner after they felt more detached from him. Women who went back to their partners suggested that they felt emotional ties and loyalty towards them:

Before I left him for good I kept going back cos ... I felt as though I could never be apart from him – in my heart and in my head. I would always be thinking about him, and always sad. But my advocate helped me to see that I wasn't a nothing without him and that I could go on and live a better life separate from him.

(CRP VAWI Project User, 2002)

Acquiring new skills

The emotional attachment of a woman to an advocate should be temporary as long-term dependency is inappropriate and not practicable. Part of the process of transferring temporary dependency from the advocate is learning new skills. Inextricably linked to emotional attachment are feelings of trust and confidence in the advocate. These feelings facilitate the disclosure of very private problems and difficulties such as the absence of everyday practical skills. We found many examples of an advocate assisting a woman to acquire new skills and starting the process of transferring a woman's emotional attachment for example, instead of making a telephone call to the housing office on behalf of a woman, one advocate asked the woman to come to the office and sat with her whilst the woman made the telephone call herself. Another advocate showed a woman how to do her financial budgeting,

another showed a woman how to pay her bills, and how to catch a bus.¹³ For a woman to become independent she often needs to acquire skills from other institutions and from people other than an advocate. An advocate is able to assist a woman ‘move on’ by finding her a training course, or opportunities for employment.

Influencing decision-making processes: how advocates work

In the model the sentences in italics are statements about how the advocates work successfully. These are: building trust and emotional support, temporary attachment to the worker and a supportive and empathetic woman/advocate relationship, transferring temporary dependency, learning new life skills and training for employment. To be able to influence the decision-making processes of women advocates formed a relationship with a woman based on trust and emotional support. Where this was successful a woman has a temporary emotional attachment to worker. The following experiences of the women illustrate the point:

The project allows me to feel as though I can offload – it’s like having a friend who also helps you practically.
(CRP VAWI Project User, 2002)

No one is ever too busy for you. Even though you may have to wait, it’s not usually a long wait and you know that you will feel better after speaking to your advocate
(CRP VAWI Project User, 2002)

The family couldn’t help me as much as the project helped me. The project gave me the support I was unable to get from home. That includes emotional support. I felt I could tell the project anything, call them over and they were willing to come when I needed them. I just wanted someone to talk to and I wanted help and advice. I don’t know anything about the legal system but they helped me a lot.
(CRP VAWI Project User, 2002)

Advocates who were non-judgemental and actively listened were able to support women emotionally, a factor identified by Abrahams (2004) as being of equal importance to being respected, believed and given the time to talk and be heard. As the following interviewee explains:

I didn’t need the advocacy support because I knew my rights. I got some emotional support. They helped me a lot emotionally. I think the project is really good, it’s the only place I went where I didn’t feel intimidated. You feel that you’re not being judged and felt listened to.
(CRP VAWI Project User, 2002)

¹³ Many women who are survivors of domestic violence are well-paid, have professional jobs or are independently wealthy, and many women have well-developed social skills and sophisticated coping strategies. More affluent women were not typically in contact with the projects we evaluated, and this is why our proposed advocacy model emphasises the importance of acquiring new skills.

The key to the success of the advocate is to enable women to make decisions which will change their everyday lives and to support women through the consequences of the decisions they have made:

If something does happen I know I can get hold of my advocate straight away on the phone, this makes me feel safe and that someone who knows my situation, story, and level of fear, is there to help me out.

(CRP VAWI Project User, 2002)

I would not have been able to proceed with the legal process if it hadn't have been for my advocate. Just knowing she was there, beside me through the process was the best kind of help I could have hoped for.

(CRP VAWI Project User, 2002)

Advocates were able to allow women to become dependant on them emotionally and as a source of support temporarily after she had become detached from her partner:

In the beginning I used to call my advocate all of the time – every day – two or three times – as I felt I couldn't do anything on my own after I left him. Then slowly, after a few months, I didn't need to call her as much and she showed me that I could do things for myself and I that I would be okay.

(CRP VAWI Project User, 2002)

The practice model presented above encapsulates how the transfer of practice principles provides an appropriate response to the problem of domestic violence through advocacy work. By finding out how advocacy work can make a difference the processes of change can be documented and conceptualised in a practice model. This approach enables generalisations to be made about practices which are necessary to effect change.

Conclusion

This paper has described how the evaluation of three domestic violence projects evolved and how a theory-driven approach to evaluation enhanced our research. This approach was more conducive to questioning the problem of domestic violence, rather than a methods-driven approach. One of our focuses during the research was to understand how to generalise from the findings of three projects and to make them relevant in different contexts. To achieve this we developed a practice model which focused on mechanisms of change which explain the reasons why a woman escapes domestic violence and how this occurs. The relevance of this model is confined to projects where the ethos is to support the decisions of women to leave violent partners and to live free from violence. The model suggests the necessary practices for advocates to achieve these changes. The expectation is that the practices remain

agents of change in different historical and cultural contexts. This is not to understate the importance of the context in influencing practice, but rather to argue that these are the required practices, which produce change and those that advocacy projects will benefit from. Our aim was not necessarily to resolve the tensions between the ‘what works’ approach and ours, but rather to identify and suggest a more suitable means of transferring effective practices across different situations. The way in which the projects conceptualised the problem of domestic violence was essential to understanding the response of advocates as discussed in the paper. The model underlines the processual nature of the problem of domestic violence and the need for policy responses to reflect this rather than to conceptualise it as a set of discrete incidents.

In summary, it is argued that the knowledge that arises from the evaluation framework suggested in this paper has the potential to make a more substantive contribution to improvements in the criminal justice system than relying on a ‘what works’ approach to evaluation which is currently ‘in fashion’. Crucially our approach informs policy makers and practitioners how interventions work.

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