

Towards a Common Understanding of Different Types of Intimate Partner Violence: Implications for Practice in Healthy Marriage and Domestic Violence Programs

An Airlie House Conference May 13-15, 2009

Co-sponsored by NHMRC and NRCDV

Background, Goals , Questions and Outcomes

Summary

This conference will address a complex issue—different types of intimate partner violence and their implications for practice— that has been a source of considerable tension for a number of years and has caused confusion and uncertainty among healthy marriage and domestic violence practitioners. Over the past few years new research and emerging practitioner experience suggests that it is timely to take stock of what is being learned that can help improve our understanding and develop guidelines for practice.

At this conference, key scholars will be invited to clarify the state of research on typologies of intimate partner violence and the challenges this presents for practitioners. In breakout groups representatives of the healthy marriage and relationships (HMR) and domestic violence (DV) fields will share lessons learned from the recent collaborations between these two fields in several states—Oklahoma, Texas, Florida, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Alabama and Kansas.

Background. In the last 10 years, there has been increased attention in academia paid to identifying different types violence within intimate relationships. Some of this attention has been focused on reconciling what appear to be contradictory research findings related to the characteristics of victims and perpetrators, especially gender differences (e.g., see the work of M. P. Johnson), and to understand perpetrator behavior and inform or justify certain intervention or prevention strategies (e.g., see the work of Holtzworth-Munroe, Gottman & Jacobson, and Gondolf). New terminology has been developed in attempts to capture distinctions between characteristics of different types of intimate partner violence, including “intimate terrorism,” “situational couple violence,” “characterological violence,” “violent resistance” among others. These terms however remain not well understood or widely used within the domestic violence and healthy marriage fields. Nor have their implications for intervention been much discussed.

Recently, some attempts have been made to use these domestic violence typologies within the context of healthy marriage programs to determine who should be included in marriage education programs and who should not, and to make assertions about which types are dangerous and which are not. It is these latest developments that are raising considerable questions among domestic violence advocates and healthy marriage practitioners.

Historically, it has never been necessary for domestic violence advocates to distinguish between “types” of violence or abuse when responding to requests for assistance from victims. However, domestic violence advocates -- and government funders -- are now asking the growing number of publicly funded healthy marriage and relationship programs to identify when domestic violence is an issue for couples and, if so, to carefully explore whether and when it would be safe and helpful for them to participate in the marriage education programs being offered or whether they should be referred to other kinds of services. This requirement to identify and respond to domestic violence requires that clearer distinctions be made between what is commonly understood to be domestic violence (involving a pattern of coercive control, including violence or other tactics of abuse by one intimate partner against the other) from conflicts between couples that escalate out of control, particularly when this conflict has resulted in the use of violence or abuse by one or both of the partners.

For the past several years healthy marriage and relationship grantees, funded by the government, have been required to consult with domestic violence experts in their community to develop specific protocols customized for their programs that explain how their program addresses the issue of domestic violence within any screening processes, the curriculum and so forth. (This requirement has also applied to those responsible fatherhood grantees who are working with both parents.) Based on these experiences in the field additional questions are being raised including:

- What screening and assessment tools exist or should be developed to help HMR practitioners distinguish between different types of violence or abuse within relationships?
- What level of training is required to ensure that such distinctions, and their meaning for HMR education intake and support decision, are being made appropriately and consistently?
- Do we know whether and when “situational couple violence”, which some research suggests is the most prevalent type of violence among couples, especially young couples, can develop into other types of violence?

- For those HMR grantees who are serving high school populations, what messages should they give about dating violence, acquaintance rape, and other types of couple conflict?

Against this backdrop, the co-sponsors are bringing together in a retreat-like conference healthy marriage and domestic violence researchers and state and community leaders from states in which significant healthy marriage activity is occurring and where there is a good partnership between these two fields to thoughtfully and comprehensively explore the following overarching questions:

- *How do we best distinguish between domestic violence and other types of conflict and abusive behavior that occurs within intimate relationships?* This requires a thorough discussion of current research typologies and terminology, the data sources and contexts in which they were developed, their application in other settings or contexts, and points of controversy.
- *What are the implications of these definitions and distinctions for the administration and practices of national, state, and local program initiatives?* This requires an exploration of “on the ground” experience in developing domestic violence protocols, screening and assessment approaches and tools, training implications, and roles differentiation among HMR and DV program staff.

Conference Goals

In plenary sessions and breakout groups the conference participants will address the following goals and tasks:

- To develop some common understanding of the different types of intimate partner violence identified by researchers, and recognize issues about which there is as yet no consensus.
- To develop some agreement about the benefits for practitioners of understanding these differences,
- To identify the numerous practical challenges involved in doing so in a variety of program settings and couple circumstances.
- To identify a number of scenarios in both healthy marriage and domestic violence service settings, and develop responsible response options that would be helpful to guide front line practitioners and administrators

- To consider what kinds of information based on these insights, can usefully be shared with young people and with the public more generally – through preventive, public health information activities
- To brainstorm avenues for sharing the lessons and insights of this conference to a variety of audiences in a practitioners Guide and other publications , through briefings, administrative guidance, technical assistance and other activities.
- To identify issues and questions that need further research and/or to be tested and evaluated in pilot demonstrations.

Conference Outcomes

The co-sponsors are committed to the following two short term conference outcomes.

1. Practitioners Guide. The immediate goal of the conference is to develop a consensus document—a Guide— that will provide guidance to grantees and other practitioners in both fields. Based on the conference discussions a practitioner’s *Guide to Better Understanding Different Types of Intimate Partner Violence and Implications For Healthy Marriage Programs and Domestic Violence Advocates* will be drafted by the NHMRC and NRCDV team. The Guide will acknowledge that there is no clear blueprint for how to address these complex issues, but will suggest some general principles and approaches that the participants could agree on in the light of our present knowledge. This draft will be circulated for review and comment to all the participants before revisions are made and the Guide is published and disseminate and used in technical assistance and training activities.

2. Follow-Up briefings. The NHMRC and the NRCDV will plan to have a number of informal DC-based briefings to discuss the conference and the Guide with groups of federal officials (e.g.Head Start/Early Head Start, Children’s Bureau, Office of Child Support, OPRE, ASPE, Office of Justice Statistics) and national organizations interested in HMR, DV and RF such as NCSL, National Fatherhood Institute, National Fatherhood Leadership Group, CMFCE, NCFR, National Coalition Against Domestic Violence etc.

Additional results of the conference may emerge in the longer run— such as additional research funded and launched, new training curricula developed, etc.