Perpetrators of Domestic Violence: Co-ordinating Responses to Complex Needs

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Abstract: The development of services for perpetrators and victims of domestic violence in Ireland has been an essential aspect of service provision for those whose lives are affected by domestic abuse and violence. Perpetrator programmes in Ireland are delivered through a combination of non-governmental bodies and the Probation Service. Since the 1980s, a network of perpetrator programmes aimed at changing the abusive behaviours of male perpetrators of such violence has developed around the country by voluntary self-governing bodies supported by a combination of charitable and voluntary contributions and State funding. Careful monitoring of both victims and perpetrators involved in these programmes ensures the safety of victims and their families. However, to date, there has been a dearth of evidence as to their effectiveness generally and a lack of information on their impact on different types of perpetrator with multifarious complex needs. Simply put, if programmes are not effective, violent recidivism will ensue. Ultimately understanding what interventions work best, and for whom, is vital to protecting victims of domestic violence and a key step to the cessation of such violence. Applying the main insights from leading international empirical research, this paper proposes that a range of criminogenic and non-criminogenic factors (e.g. substance use, mental health and personality attributes) may be hindering some perpetrators’ engagement with current programmes. The capacity to provide a more co-ordinated and differentiated service to domestic violence perpetrators will be enhanced through co-operation and co-ordination with other complementary organisations. This is identified as a priority in the National Strategy for Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2010–2014.

Keywords: Domestic violence, perpetrator programme, interagency co-ordination of services, differentiated and evidence-based approach.