



Author response

Perpetrator programmes for partner violence: A rejoinder to Respect

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Purpose. To reply to the comments made by Debbonaire and Todd (2012) in relation to our critique of Respect's Position Statement.

Method. We examined their reply in relation to our original article and to the wider research literature.

Results. We show that Debbonaire and Todd's reply is largely a series of assertions, for which little or no supporting evidence is offered. Their argument is first that we are misplaced in criticizing their Position Statement, and second that the main points of the statement are defensible. We indicate why our criticisms of the statement still stand.

Conclusions. We argue that Respect have not countered our overall criticism of their position that intimate partner violence (IPV) can only be addressed as a gendered issue, that is as a consequence of patriarchal values enacted at the individual level. Instead we advocate a gender-inclusive approach applying a knowledge base derived from robust empirical research on IPV and more widely from research on human aggression.

Debbonaire and Todd's reply to our critique (Dixon, Archer, & Graham-Kevan, 2012) of Respect's Position Statement (Respect, 2009) seems to have two incompatible aims as follows: (1) to distance themselves from the contents of the statement, because it does not fully reflect what they are doing in terms of practice; and (2) to defend major aspects of the statement. With regard to the first, they claim that by concentrating on the statement, we have ignored another document (Respect, 2008), which describes the process of accrediting programmes. It was not our purpose in making the critique to evaluate the process of accreditation, the competence of individual practitioners or how individual services are received by those using them. As academics concerned with the evidence base of practice, we concentrated on the academic rationale underlying Respect's accreditation standard. It is recommended that interventions be based on

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sound, evidence-based theories, as these are more likely to be effective in reducing re-offending (McGuire, 1995). Since a Position Statement can be defined as 'one side of an arguable viewpoint' (www.readwritethink.org) or as a 'declaration of where someone or a group stands' (www.answers.ask.com), concentrating on it would seem to be an appropriate choice for this purpose.

It appears from the reply that certain aspects of practice with which they are involved depart from their position statement: in particular, the claim that they advise, support and refer thousands of men every year. Assuming that these men are victims, rather than perpetrators, of intimate partner violence (IPV), and that they are subject to a training programme informed by research on male victims, this is to be welcomed. However, it is not apparent from the statement that these assumptions are correct. The statement seeks to justify both concentrating on female victims and viewing IPV as a form of patriarchal control. To instigate an evidence-based training programme for male victims requires recognition and knowledge of a much wider and more robust research base than that currently used.

There are mixed statements about Respect's involvement with male victims of IPV. The first is that there is a Men's Advice Line, which deals with thousands of men each year. What is not mentioned is that male callers to this helpline are screened for domestic violence perpetration whereas female callers to their victim helpline are not. Research shows that if women are asked about their use of domestic violence, even those in refuges or victims identified by the criminal justice service contain a substantial proportion who report that they also use violence (e.g. Dobash and Dobash, 2004; Giles-Sims, 1983; Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2003; Saunders, 1988; Stacey, Hazlewood, & Shupe, 1994). Respect's selective screening of male callers is then used to suggest that many male victims are in fact perpetrators (Coulter, 2008).

The Men's Advice Line appears to be independent of the accreditation process, since the authors go on to state that they are expanding accreditation 'to include individual work with men' and that this is a current project. They also state that work with female perpetrators is planned for the future. This is all to be welcomed, again with the proviso that current robust peer-reviewed research on male victimization and female perpetration is being used to inform this practice. The viewpoint adopted in the statement makes it doubtful that this is the case. This is reiterated in their reply, which also has selective citations of the research base, involving studies adopting one particular position, that of patriarchal control as a basis for understanding IPV. Apart from two citations to our own work (Archer, 2000; Dixon, Archer, & Graham-Kevan, 2012), and two other journal articles, the academic basis of Respect's reply comes from the journal, *Violence Against Women*, whose title and content reflect the patriarchal view of male violence. Other citations are to books, reports and online sources, which lack the rigour of the academic peer review process. In being this selective in their reply, Debbonaire & Todd (2012) have continued (as in the statement) either to use a particular selection of the academic research available on IPV, or to make assertions that are unsupported by any cited evidence.

This point about the quality of the evidence is crucial. The most reliable research evidence is derived from meta-analytic or systematic reviews published in high-quality peer-reviewed journals (e.g. Archer, 2000; Straus, 2011). In addition to such reviews, the preferred individual studies are representative surveys that are not framed in terms of crime or violence against women (e.g. Carrado, George, Loxam, Jones, & Templar, 1996; Grandin, & Lupri, 1997; Sorenson, Upchurch, & Shen, 1996), and longitudinal studies (e.g. Moffit, Caspi, Rutter, & Silva,

2001). Respect is certainly aware of such research as one of this paper's authors (Nicola Graham-Kevan) presented the findings from these to both Respect executive at their 2008 roundtable (slides available at <http://www.respect.uk.net/pages/research-roundtables-research-roundtable-2-does-gender-matter-684.html>) and their 2008 annual conference.

Debbonaire and Todd seek to dismiss our critique as 'a critical analysis of just one briefing paper'. A Position Statement is not the same as a briefing statement: it sets out a particular viewpoint or argument, in this case the academic basis of their accreditation programme. In terms of evidence-based practice, it is crucial for the credibility of their programme. If it were just another briefing paper, we would expect their response to concentrate on setting out alternative lines of evidence that were missing from the original. They do not do this, instead devoting most space to seeking to defend key aspects of the statement, largely without providing any empirical supporting evidence. The remainder of our rejoinder deals with these.

Feminism

This section of the response consisted of a series of assertions unsupported by any evidence. Here we provide two examples to illustrate the level of their discourse. They asserted that our linking feminism to the patriarchal view and considering it to be ideologically based were 'inaccurate and careless' and ignored 'vast bodies of academic work'. No rationale for these statements was provided and not a single example of the supposedly vast body of research was cited. The important point we seek to make is that over the years, many feminist researchers and activists have understood and promoted partner violence as one example of inequality between men and women. Consequently, the explanations offered by such groups, as in the Respect statement, have primarily involved patriarchy. However, as robust research evidence does not support this premise, alternative theories and hypotheses for the aetiology of IPV should be considered. A second assertion made in the response was to attribute to us the view that 'to take a gendered perspective is to take the side of women'. If they meant by this that the gendered view involves a bias towards selectively prioritizing female over male victims, this is manifestly what their statement entails. Their screening of men but not women provides an overt example of this bias.

Debbonaire and Todd further argue that because the feminist approach takes men into consideration, their notion of a gendered perspective includes men as well as women victims of IPV. However, while they take men into consideration, the language and phrasing of Respect's aims are clearly gender biased (Respect, 2008). For example, it is stated that for an organization to be considered for accreditation it should include reference to the following concerns in their written model of work: That they are concerned with increasing '... the safety of women, children and others at risk of experiencing domestic violence'; 'To provide information and support to women in order to empower them and to develop their ability to increase their own and their children's safety' (p. 5) and 'To work with other professionals to ensure that men who use domestic violence are treated as responsible and accountable for their behaviour and for changing it' (p. 6). There is an absence of gender-neutral terminology that might encourage professionals and organizations to recognize and attend to the needs of both sexes as potential victims and/or perpetrators of IPV. Furthermore, when the feminist approach considers men, it is from the perspective of 'critical men's studies', critical being a label attached to studies rather than to men: nevertheless, it also aptly

sums up their approach to men, since this type of work views masculinity in terms of men's problematic behaviour. None of this is relevant to our point that IPV needs to be viewed from a wider perspective, incorporating both gender-inclusive research on partner violence and a background of evidence-based research on human aggression. We based our criticism of the Respect statement on their view that IPV is a special case that can be isolated from findings in research on human aggression. Their reply merely reiterates a series of assertions that are present in the statement, without further elaboration or evidence.

Prevalence debates

This section – again almost completely framed in terms of evidence-light assertions – concerned our criticism of Respect's fundamental position that gender is the most significant factor for considering IPV. We have already criticized their case in some detail. Respect's response is to repeat yet again criticisms of the Straus' Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS), which we countered in our article.

Here we note (as before) that the CTS has been used by feminist writers when convenient, and criticized when it is not. When feminist researchers have used the CTS or similar incident-based scales, they have either measured only male-on-female acts or collected data for both sexes and only reported male-against-female acts (e.g. DeKeseredy, 1988; Mooney, 2000). Similarly, Debbonaire and Todd seem willing to cite incident data when it suits their argument, as in the case of British Crime Survey data (see below).

Debbonaire and Todd's reply seeks to define acts of aggression in terms of coercive control. This can only serve to confound the measurement of aggression with what is assumed to have caused it (i.e. men's desire to control women). Similarly, insisting that incident-based measures be replaced by those that include 'meaning, context and consequence' opens the way for measures that have different meanings for different researchers and of course the research participants.

What Debbonaire and Todd appear to be doing is making the measures used in studies of IPV less clear by introducing other meanings than physical aggression, even though physical aggression is the basis of social and legal concerns about IPV. In contrast, the trend in the academic literature on IPV is to refine the measures rather than to make them more open to different interpretations. For example, in an extensive quantitative review of population and agency studies, Straus (2011) distinguished between measures of perpetration, such as acts of aggression, and those that measure consequences, such as injury and homicide. As he points out there can be symmetry in acts of aggression and asymmetry in its effects. A similar point is made in a review of family violence research in relation to evolutionary principles, by one of the current authors (Archer, 2012).

Debbonaire and Todd again raise the issue of self-defence. We devoted a separate section in our article to considering the evidence. It did not support the oft-repeated view that women's IPV can be solely attributed to self-defence. As we indicated, most cases of IPV involve both partners as perpetrators and victims (as is the case for other forms of aggression: Jennings, Piquero, & Reingle, 2012). A number of studies show that women outnumber men among those who are sole perpetrators of IPV, which cannot, by definition, be self-defence. In addition, seven studies that have specifically asked about self-defence find that only a small percentage of women's perpetration (from 5 to 15%) did involve self-defence (Straus, 2011, p. 283).

Homicide data

As we stated, homicides form a very small proportion of IPV incidents, and we criticized the Respect statement for generalizing from the sex ratio for homicide to 'domestic violence' as they do in their statement. We stated that it is clear that women are more likely to be killed by an intimate partner than men are. This forms part of an escalating pattern from inclusive to more dangerous forms of aggression, where there are proportionately more female than male victims. This is what we would expect from physical conflicts between two individuals differing in size and strength (see following section for elaboration): inclusive incident-based measures involve similar numbers of men and women using physical aggression; for the more damaging acts measured, such as 'beat up' (Archer, 2002) and injuries (Archer, 2000) around two thirds of the victims are female; a higher proportion, around 77%, is apparent for UK homicides by partner. We wrongly mentioned a figure of two thirds for homicides. As Debonnaire and Todd point out, according to UK Home Office figures, the overall percentage for the decade 2000–2010 is 77% female victims, about 10% higher than the two thirds we cited, ranging from 68 to 82% in different years (not 75 to 80 % as in the text of Respect's reply). US samples tend to show higher percentages (see Straus, 2011, Appendix Table 6), which is where our figure came from.

The relevance of gender to IPV

We were accused of ignoring the evidence from various data sets showing that women feature more than men in a range of specific categories of victimization. These categories were injuries from IPV, partner homicide (see previous section), sexual assault, post-separation violence, and stalking. We mentioned most of these in our original article. We do not claim that sex differences in these measures are unimportant: simply that we do not start with the assumption that gender is the primary (and in practice the only) risk factor to be considered.

The variations in sex differences for the different measures of victimization raise some interesting questions. Considering physical aggression within an intimate relationship, why is that women are more likely to be injured or killed by a male partner in western nations where they are as likely as their male partners to cross the line from verbal to physical aggression? The simple and obvious answer is the size and strength difference between men and women (Archer, 2009, 2012; Lassek & Gaulin, 2009), which in statistical terms is very large, and is exacerbated by assortative mating for height. (i.e. women tend to choose men taller than themselves). What is remarkable is the high proportion of men injured by their partners: the figures are 38% from a meta-analysis of 20 studies (Archer, 2000) and 35%¹ from a more recent analysis of 14 studies (Straus, 2011). From the same perspective it is also remarkable that such a high percentage of men are killed by their partners (23% according to the Home Office figures cited by the Respect authors). Based on size and strength differences, a figure of around 95% would be expected in both cases. The reason that it is lower is likely to be due to the restraint most men in modern western nations have about hitting women, even if they themselves have been hit (Cross, Tee, & Campbell, 2011; Felson, 2002). Rather than reflect on considerations such as these, Debonnaire and Todd reiterate their mantra that 'Gender is the most significant factor for being a perpetrator or victim of domestic violence',

¹ This figure was taken from Appendix Table 2, rather than from the slightly different figure in the text.

when the evidence clearly indicates that the degree of male and female perpetration and victimization depends on the type and severity of the aggressive acts considered.

A full understanding of IPV requires consideration of what the different measures from different populations mean. As Straus (2011) pointed out, if women are as likely as (or more likely than) men to initiate IPV, and yet are more likely than men to be injured or killed, perpetrating partner violence is by itself a risk factor for women's victimization. They are in the position of a weak person who selectively picks fights with obviously stronger people.

Services for male victims

As indicated above, we were commenting solely upon the Position Statement, the academic rationale for Respect's accreditation programme. The statement argued throughout for a view that women are the primary victims of IPV. Given this assumption, it is surprising that Respect have been running a programme for male victims for 5 years. Of course, this to be welcomed, but we would caution about the suitability of an approach rooted in an assumption about the gendered nature of IPV for dealing with male victims. It is also worth noting that, with the exception of Hines and Douglas (2010), the other eight cited sources on male victims are from a feminist perspective.

Research, practice and police work better when they work together

Everyone agrees with the title of this section, although research seems to mean something different to Debbonaire and Todd and to ourselves. They state that they have a strong commitment to research, but this turns out to be to a particular type of research that conforms to their narrow preconceptions. Again, this section relies on assertions unsupported by evidence, rather than the extensive academic research on IPV that is currently available. We could find no details of their Mirabel project either in their response or on Respect's website, and so are unable to comment on this.

Conclusion

Debbonaire and Todd's concluding section is, again, a series of polemical assertions unsupported by research evidence, yet at the same time accusing us of ignoring a vast body of (unspecified) research linking gender and IPV. We do at least welcome the assurances that they are dealing with male victims of domestic violence, but remain sceptical of how effective this can be from a perspective that begins with the assumption that gender is the most significant factor for perpetration of IPV. Indeed, it seems from their statement and from their reply to our article that it is the only factor they are prepared to consider. This produces a very one-dimensional approach to IPV that separates it from a wide range of aggression research linking IPV to variables known to influence aggression in other contexts, such as self-control, anger, attachment styles in relationships, the need to control others and personality characteristics such as neuroticism (e.g. Archer, Fernández-Fuertes, & Thanzami, 2010; Bates, 2011; Dumas, Pearson, Elgin, & McKinley, 2008; Finkel, DeWall, Slotter, Oaten, & Foshee, 2009; Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2008, 2009; Hellmuth & McNulty, 2008).

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