



The A.C.T. Program: A Model for Significantly Reducing Recidivism Among Domestic Violence Offenders

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Overview

The Accepting Change Today (ACT) program is a psycho-educational, group oriented, confrontative program with an emphasis on accountability. This program is a partnership between Law Enforcement Agencies and Mental Health Professionals in Allegany County, NY. The primary goal of ACT is to help abusive male partners stop, and not repeat, violence against their female partners. This is done by challenging the men to examine their belief systems and recognize their emotions. The facilitators of the program provide educational and behavioral tools necessary for the men to overcome their patterns of domestic violence and lead a fulfilling life.

The foundation of this group can be distilled into three concepts: Respect, Responsibility, and Reality. The integration of these three items leads to long-term behavioral changes. This program teaches the men the means by which to re-establish dignity and integrity for themselves and for their current or future relationships



ACT II Figures

The program is a collaboration between the Allegany County Probation Department, the District Attorney's Office and Sheriff's Office, and Alfred University. In year one:

- 42 referrals were received, 28 evaluations completed and 18 acceptances into the program granted
- The majority of the men accepted into the program were a result of Court Orders or conditions of probation/parole of DSS supervision
- From the program's inception in 1996 until the author's retirement in 2007, there was only a 16% recidivism rate, compared to rates of over 50% for other national batterer's programs

Referrals and Evaluations

REFERRALS:

- Referrals (mandated order) come from mostly probation and DSS.
- Occasionally there is someone who self refers, they voluntarily are taking the class
- Once accepted into the program they may begin the program. To be accepted a person must complete an evaluation, assessment and orientation.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT:

- DVI (Domestic Violence Inventory) The DVI is designed for adults (male and female) domestic violence offenders.
- Has 155 questions, it takes about 30 minutes to complete
- The DVI correlates at the .001 significance level with other tests
- Participants will take the DVI before beginning the program, as well as after they finish; this helps gather data on effectiveness
- The evaluation consists of a clinical interview, lethality assessment, and a historical look at their relationships, family and social history
- Participants also take a pre-test created specifically for this program; it consists of 25 true/false questions.



Background Statistics

UNITED STATES:

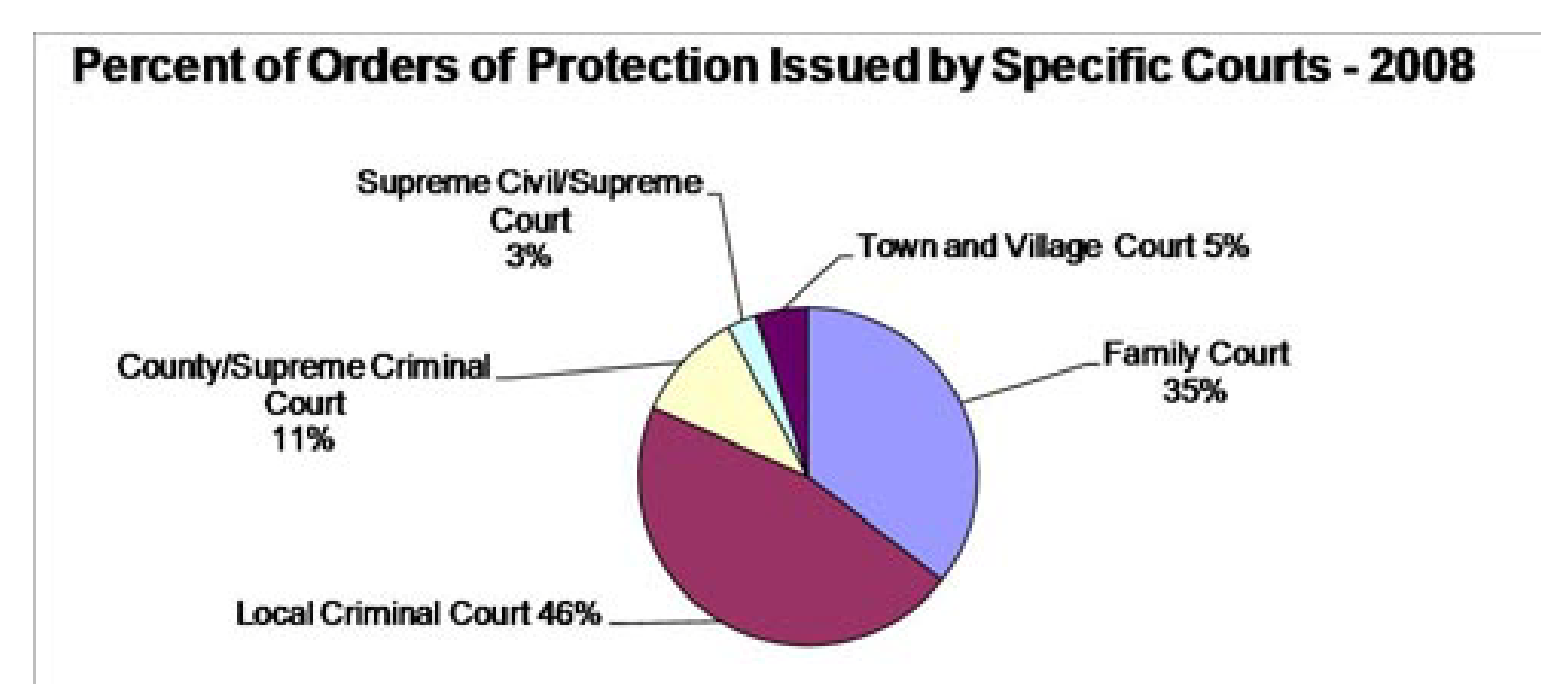
- 1 in 4 women will experience some form of domestic violence in their lifetime
- 96% of women are perpetrated by a male partner
- Women suffering from sexual assault by a partner were more likely to experience PTSD and either threatened or actual suicide
- 33% of intimate partner rapes, 26% assaults and 43% of stalking, victims seek mental health counseling; a study found that these experiences led to 18.6 million mental health related visits
- In 2005, 30% of stalking victims were stalked by a current or past partner
- In 2006, 60% of 1836 women were killed by an intimate partner,
- 57% of these victims were killed with a firearm
- From 2001-2005, children 12 years old and younger resided in 38% of households in which there was DV perpetrated against a female

NEW YORK STATE:

- 2007
 - 62% of females were victims of intimate partners
 - 40% were victimized by a boyfriend or girlfriend
 - 61% of those crimes consisted of simple assault which includes Assault, Harassment and Aggravated Harassment
 - 15% of those crimes were intimidation
 - 73% were victimized by "personal weapons" which are defined as hands, feet and/or teeth

2008

- 220,719 Orders of Protection were issued, a 6% increase from 2007



- Domestic Homicide increased by 7% and most femicide (82.4%) resulted after an argument
- 12% High School girls have been physically abused by a partner, 8.6% were victims of forced sexual contact
- Three teens aged 16-19 were killed by an intimate partner

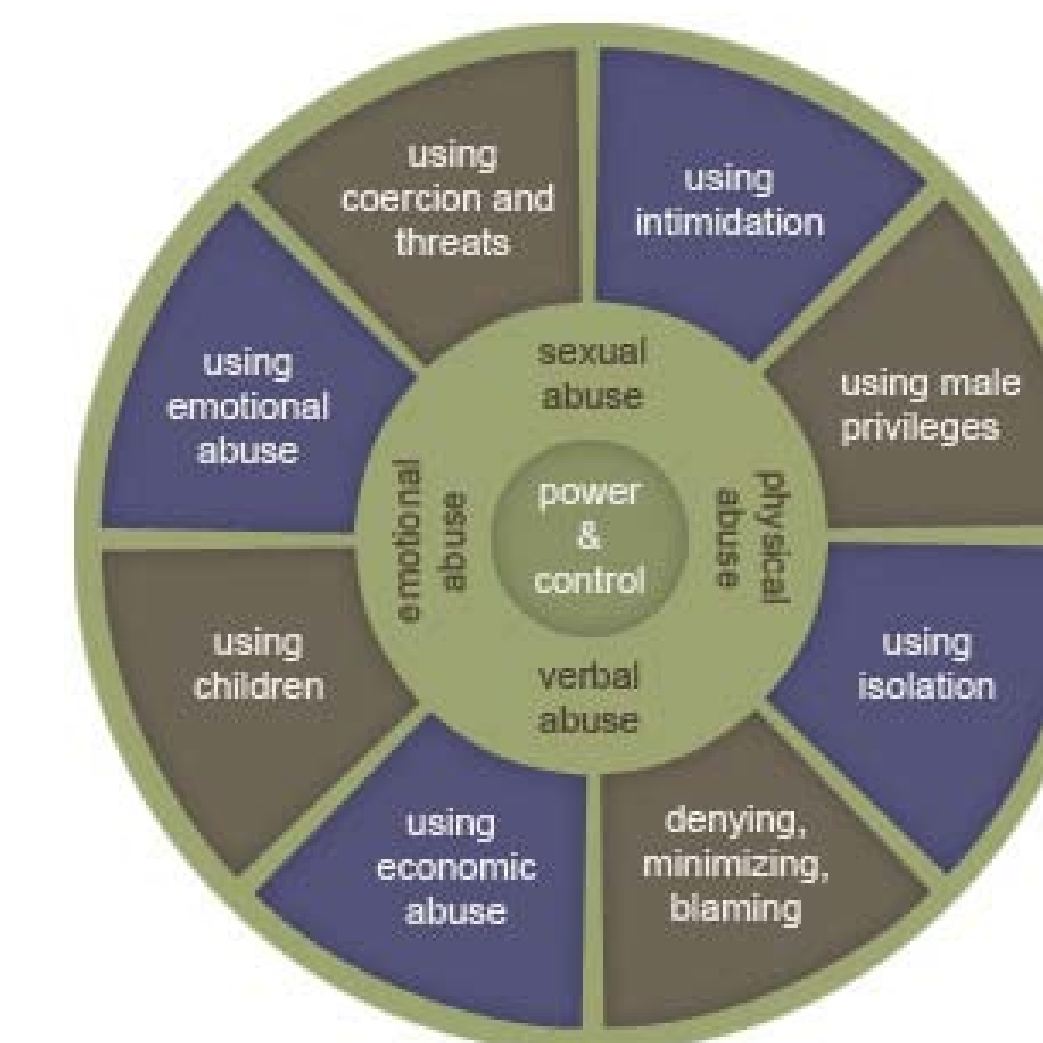


ALLEGANY COUNTY

- 2007-2009
 - 673 Domestic Incident Reports filed with law enforcement agencies alleging incidents of domestic violence
 - There were 780 calls made to the DV 24 hour hotline
 - 96 survivors of domestic violence were enrolled in the CHANCES program, a support group
 - 100 active cases in the Integrated Domestic Violence Court
 - 282 Orders of Protection granted in the Family Court, County Court and Integrated DV Court; orders consisted of both temporary and permanent orders (6 months to over a year)

Orientation

- Orientation consists of both pre-tests and a clear explanation of what the program entails
- As part of the orientation, the participant is required to sign a contract that outlines the expectations, rules and possible consequences when those rules are broken (See handout for program rules)



- Pretest
- Program Philosophy
- Program Description
- Power and Control Perspective
- Power and Control Wheel
- Batterers Intervention vs. Anger Management

Class Structure and Completion

- Each group member must participate in and complete 12 units and take a final exam before successfully completing.
- Any class they miss or are absent from they must make up.
- Each section is covered for three weeks with readings and homework from each week.
- After approximately 12 weeks of participation, the participant is required to make a full oral disclosure about their abusive behaviors to the group and facilitators. Participants are critiqued on this disclosure. It is at this time that facilitators usually have a good grasp of whether they are beginning to take full responsibility for their actions and are no longer using blame, minimization, denial, excuses or justification.
- Every four weeks after the disclosure is completed, participants do extra writing projects that become a behavior plan to ready themselves for their completion.
- Once they finish the 12 units, individuals will take a cumulative final exam that covers everything they have learned over the previous weeks. They will take this the week after they complete their last unit.



Future Goals

- 1) Start to track efficacy of the program through the use of a Pre/Post DVI assessment
- 2) Start to track recidivism rates of men who have completed the program to determine how often they commit another offense against a partner and in what length of time
- 3) Enhance the safety and security and quality of life of women and children through the use of the tools and techniques taught in the program.
- 4) Increase program enrollment by 20%
- 5) Link with other successful programs at the state and national levels
- 6) Involve additional graduate students in program facilitation



Applied Theories

The ACT II program is based on two well-known theories: Cognitive-Behavioral (CBT) and the Social Change Model (SCM). The cognitive-behavioral component of the program draws heavily from the teachings of Albert Ellis. The followers of CBT view violence as a learned behavior. This model sees the violence, in part, as a skill-deficit, stress management, or anger control problem.

The SCM view is a multi-step approach to changing the abusive behavior. The stages of change are:

•Precontemplation

- When the individual is not yet acknowledging that there is a problem behavior that needs to be changed. It is during this step in the ACT II program when the offenders will be the most resistant, defensive, and manipulative.

•Contemplation

- When the individual is acknowledging that there is a problem, but is not yet ready or sure of wanting to make a change. This is when the facilitators in the program witness the most bargaining from the men. During this time, the men are most open to receiving new information about their problem behaviors, and are more likely to accept educational interventions.

•Preparation/Determination

- This is when the men make the commitment to change. This stage is when the men begin to become actively involved in the class. They are more willing to share their own emotions, and are more receptive to practicing the new skills in their daily lives.

•Action/Willpower

- During this step, the individual not only believes that they have the ability to begin making changes in their life, but are actively involved in taking those steps. This is the step during which most people succeed or fail based on their willpower.

•Maintenance

- This is when the individual avoids temptations to returning to their problem behavior(s). The men in this stage are constantly reformulating the rules of their lives and are acquiring more new skills in the class to deal with the chance of relapse.

•Relapse

- It is fairly common for a person who is ceasing a problematic behavior to suffer from at least one relapse. The hope of the ACT II program is to reduce the chance of re-offending. The integration of the three core concepts (as described in section labeled Overview) will aid in reducing the chances of relapsing.



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