



# “Growing to be a better person”: Exploring the client–worker relationship in men’s behaviour change group work programs

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ANROWS

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# “Growing to be a better person”: Exploring the client–worker relationship in men’s behaviour change group work programs

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This report addresses work covered in the ANROWS research project PI.17.13 Exploring the client-worker relationship in men’s behaviour change programs. Please consult the ANROWS website for more information on this project.

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# Executive summary

Men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs) are an important form of perpetrator intervention in the domestic and family violence (DFV) context (Mackay, Gibson, Lam, & Beecham, 2015).<sup>1</sup> The programs were established in Australia in the 1980s (Costello, 2006; Mackay et al., 2015). MBCPs are increasingly being used as a form of community-based treatment for perpetrators of DFV (Brown, Flynn, Fernandez Arias, & Clavijo, 2016; Gleeson, 2018; Neave, Faulkner, & Nicholson, 2016). Researchers in Australia have identified a gap in knowledge in MBCPs—that is, a nuanced understanding of the client–worker relationship within these programs (see for example Day, Chung, O'Leary, & Carson, 2009; Jewell & Wormith, 2010; Kozar & Day, 2012; Taft & Murphy, 2007). This study addresses this gap in knowledge by exploring perceptions of client–worker relationships as well as the factors perceived to affect the development of these relationships. Different perceptions were gleaned from MBCP participants, group therapy facilitators (hereafter, “facilitator/s”), facilitators' supervisors and the MBCP participants' (ex-)partners.

The research explored these issues in the context of group therapy at two MBCPs in three rural and urban service delivery sites (the Men and Family Centres in Lismore and Tweed Heads, NSW, and Centacare MBCP in Southport, Queensland). The aim of this research was to explore how multiple people involved in men's behaviour change programs (i.e. the MBCP participants, the facilitator/s, their supervisors and the MBCP participants' [ex-]partners) understand the nature of the client–worker relationship. To address this aim, the research considered the following questions:

- How do male participants of MBCPs and their primary facilitators experience their relationship dyad, including their perception of the purpose, value and meaning of this relationship?
- How do facilitators' supervisors perceive the client–worker relationship dyad, in particular their role in its development?
- How do male participants of MBCPs, their primary facilitators, the facilitators' primary supervisor, and male participants' (ex-)partners perceive and make sense of the factors that affect how the client–worker relationship dyad develops over time, and the impact of these?

## Methodology

The research employed qualitative research methods, informed by critical hermeneutics. Critical hermeneutics is a research method that assists researchers to dig deeply into perceptions people have of the phenomena under study. The basic tenet is that being human involves striving for self-awareness by seeking to understand, analyse, interpret and find meaning in one's life (Kögler, 2008). People seek self-awareness through challenging their pre-understanding. Pre-understanding is composed of pre-conceived ideas, such as beliefs, values and assumptions. Achieving self-awareness involves analysis and interpretation, which is a repeated reflexive process (Kögler, 2013).

Moreover, in critical hermeneutics, the person engaged in analysis and interpretation is challenged to recognise sources of power, and how these manifest during interactions with others (Hendrickson, 2004; Kögler, 2005, 2008). The chief investigator used critical hermeneutics to analyse and expose hidden power dynamics operating in the client–worker relationship dyads, and how these dynamics influenced the behaviour of MBCP participants. This is particularly relevant in the field of DFV, where much of the manifestation of men's violent and coercive behaviour towards women occurs within a relationship.

The study utilised multiple triangulation methods (Denzin, 1978) during recruitment and data collection. Triangulation involves researchers combining two or more theories, data sources, methods, or investigators when studying a phenomenon (Denzin, 1978; Kimchi, Polivka, & Stevenson, 1991). It is useful for increasing rigor, reliability and richness, and reducing bias, in qualitative research (Denzin, 1978; Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018). This study combined data triangulation and investigator triangulation (Denzin, 1978). The chief investigator triangulated data by recruiting groups with different perspectives on client–worker relationship dyads: MBCP participants and facilitators, MBCP participants' (ex-)partners and facilitators' supervisors. For investigator triangulation, the chief investigator engaged five researchers to collect data on the perspectives of the 32 client–worker relationship dyads.

<sup>1</sup> They are also known as “batterer programs” in the United States and “domestic violence perpetrator programs” in the United Kingdom.

Semi-structured, conversational-style in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviews were designed to elicit subjective perceptions of the client–worker relationships. Consistent with critical hermeneutics (Gilgun & Abrams, 2002; Kögler, 1999), this allowed for detailed exploration and interpretation in order to understand the participants’ unique perceptions of each relationship. All participants were informed that information from interviews would be kept private and confidential.

MBCP participants were deemed eligible if they:

- had attended an MBCP at one of the partnering locations within the past 12 months (whether the participant had completed one module of the program, or left the program prematurely)
- were aged 18 years or older and had perpetrated violence against an intimate partner
- were attending voluntarily—that is, not court-ordered to attend the program
- were able to complete the interview in English.

(Ex-)partners were eligible if the perpetrator had attended a MBCP at one of the partnering MBCP locations and if they were able to complete the interview in English. Only (ex-)partners who had previously been involved with the women’s support/advocacy worker at the relevant partnering organisation were invited to be involved in the study. Where it was known women were currently involved in difficult circumstances that might render them unsafe to be involved, they were not invited. This decision was made in consultation with the women’s support workers who had been, or were currently, working with the women.

Twenty-two male participants of MBCPs were recruited to the study. Eleven of these had completed at least one module of the program and 11 had left the program prematurely. Ten facilitators, three supervisors and three current partners of the men agreed to participate. Nine MBCP participants identified client–worker relationship dyads with more than one facilitator. Some workers and supervisors participated in multiple interviews, each about different client–worker relationship dyads. In total, 65 interviews were conducted. Recruitment and data collection occurred from August 2017 to the end of April 2018.

Thematic analysis was undertaken to inductively interpret the meaning of the perceptions of the client–worker relationships participants discussed (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Clarke & Braun, 2017). An inductive approach requires the interpreter to draw meaning from the data itself, rather than external sources such as research literature on the topic (Hyde, 2000). Consistent with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the chief investigator repeatedly interrogated the data for details on who was being discussed, and their roles; what was occurring during the occasions being discussed; how, when, and where did it occur; what reasons were given for its occurrence; and what research participants reported of what it meant to them. The chief investigator used this way of reducing the ideas to explore perceptions, practice wisdom, theory, process and meaning across multiple client–worker relationship dyads, as well as the power dynamics at work in the experiences and the symbolic expression of those. This involved questioning gendered, social, interpersonal, professional, organisational and individual power and status at work as expressed in the data.

To maintain participant privacy and anonymity, great care was taken to present the data by themes, rather than to present the data by client–worker relationship dyads. Meta-themes generated through this process identified and explored individual attributes, individual actions, power, the nature of client–worker relationships, relationship phases, work environment, group aspects, and change. Sub-themes provide details about the characteristics and components of the meta-themes.

## Findings

The overarching finding of the research was that most of the facilitators built effective client–worker relationships by relating to the MBCP participants in a highly personalised manner (hereafter, personalised client–worker relationships). In this study, a personalised client–worker relationship is defined as one that creates an environment that helps the client work towards changed violent and coercive behaviours and attitudes towards women. In a personalised client–worker relationship, facilitators display their personal or human side when engaging with the MBCP participants. Some MBCP



participants and facilitators called this being “real” when engaging in the client–worker relationship. Facilitators used the client–worker relationship to demonstrate care and support, while directly challenging participants to think and behave differently. This approach helped the MBCP participants feel less vulnerable and anxious about attending the program.

The findings revealed that client–worker relationships helped MBCP participants engage, and remain engaged, in highly challenging behavioural change interventions. The client–worker relationships provided the MBCP participants with an experience of relating to male and female facilitators in a way that was positively different to other relationships in their lives. More specifically, the client–worker relationships helped the MBCP participants to think differently about their existing attitudes and behaviours regarding the use of violence and control in their relationships, and to challenge normative ideas on men, women, and power. The relationships provided a safe and nurturing space for the men to make sense of their lives and to become better able to develop healthy, safe and equal relationships. The facilitators did this in various ways, including by:

- holding the men accountable for their immediate behaviour as a way of revealing their hidden assumptions about relationships
- challenging them to think differently about their relationships, behaviours and attitudes
- supporting them to practise new behaviours in relationships.

The client–worker relationship created an experiential opportunity for the MBCP participants, where the interaction with the facilitators, in particular female facilitators, came to embody exactly what the facilitators were trying to teach the MBCP participants. Through engaging with male and female facilitators and observing the relationship between the two facilitators leading the program, the MBCP participants experienced the client–worker relationship as a model of relationships where men and women were equal and men were not violent or coercive. The experience of being in relationships with women who expected respect and equal standing was key in challenging the men to unpack their values and assumptions about women.

Collusion is a form of interpersonal dysfunction that can arise during client–worker relationships when MBCP participants attempt to convince others that they are victims in the DFV situation. This research found that MBCP participants’ attempts to collude created individual and group relational dynamics that undermined facilitators’ attempts to challenge the MBCP participants. It also created an unsafe, controlling, devaluing and intimidating work environment for female facilitators. Potential for collusion to occur was found when there was an exclusive focus on the client–worker relationship, rather than a focus on challenging the MBCP participants to work towards change.

When facilitators challenged attempts to collude, it created an opportunity for the MBCP participants to experience being confronted in safe and positive ways. Participants reported that client–worker relationships were key to preventing and stopping collusion. Employing women as group facilitators can be a strategy for preventing and managing collusion, because female facilitators provide alternative perspectives about female power and male privilege and entitlement. It is also important that male facilitators support female facilitators when they identify collusive behaviour.

The findings of the study are presented according to five main themes:

- determinants prior to building the client–worker relationship (which affected the MBCP participants’ capacity and willingness to engage and build a relationship)
- facilitators’ use of the client–worker relationship to assist program engagement (which relates to the importance of the relationship for making a connection with a facilitator and for building trust)
- facilitators’ use of the client–worker relationship to create a safe group work environment—discussion of this theme outlines the ways in which workers used the relationship to create a group environment in which the men felt safe to open up and make themselves vulnerable
- facilitators’ use of the client–worker relationship to enable change (an important theme related to how the workers used the relationship to foster change)
- challenges and conflicts that arose for workers engaging in client–worker relationships (including challenges and

conflicts relating to expectations, accountability, risk of collusion, unsupportive workplace environments and the need for understanding supervision).

- organisations consider presenting MBCPs as being like an apprenticeship, in the sense that it is the initial learning stage of an ongoing attitudinal and behavioural change process for MBCP participants.

## Implications and recommendations

The knowledge derived from this study has multiple implications, including the need for:

- facilitators and supervisors to carefully consider ways in which they discourage facilitators from making personal disclosure to ensure collusion does not occur
- facilitators to be aware of the grief and loss MBCP participants might experience when client-worker relationships end prematurely
- facilitators, managers and organisations to be aware of the potential for facilitator burnout due to high emotional load, and risk of dependency and collusion
- supervisors and organisations to support facilitators to find a balance between a safe level of disclosure that allows participants to relate to facilitators, while maintaining professional boundaries in order to mitigate risks of collusion
- policymakers to provide flexible options and additional funding for MBCP participants to return to formal MBCPs once they have completed the modules available.

This research opens up opportunities for further examination of the way in which the client-worker relationship contributes to behaviour change for MBCP participants—in particular, sustained change—and also how such relationships impact facilitators. Based on the findings, it is recommended that policymakers and managers of MBCPs allow flexible service delivery options for MBCP participants to continue to engage after the formal program ends, if doing so will support sustained changed behaviour.

Further recommendations emerging from this research are that:

- managers and organisations ensure extensive support specifically related to the needs of female facilitators is available

The implications and recommendations are discussed in more detail in the final chapter of the report.

# Introduction

Men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs) are an important form of perpetrator intervention in the domestic and family violence (DFV) context (Mackay, Gibson, Lam, & Beecham, 2015).<sup>1</sup> They are one specialist element of a broad and complex system of interventions designed to respond to DFV across a range of criminal justice contexts, including custodial and correctional, civil and community settings (Mackay et al., 2015; Vlasis, Ridley, Green, & Chung, 2017). Established in Australia in the 1980s (Costello, 2006; Mackay et al., 2015), MBCPs are used increasingly as a type of community-based treatment for perpetrators of DFV (Gleeson, 2018; Neave et al., 2016). The models used, subject matter, approach to delivery and program duration vary widely across interventions (Mackay et al., 2015).

Some researchers in Australia have identified the need for better understanding of the client-worker relationship in MBCPs (see for example Day, Chung, O'Leary, & Carson, 2009; Jewell & Wormith, 2010; Kozar & Day, 2012; Taft & Murphy, 2007). To address this gap in knowledge, this research, using qualitative research methods, sought to understand the nature of the client-worker relationship, as well as its meaning for male participants working to change their behaviours and attitudes towards domestic violence. Four groups of people took part in this study: MBCP participants (who had completed at least one module of the program, as well as those who had left prematurely), their primary workers (i.e. facilitators), the workers' primary supervisors and, where possible, the male participants' partners or ex-partners. The research explored participants' perceptions of, or meanings ascribed to the experience or observation or understanding of the client-worker relationship dyad, rather than perceptions of MBCP participants' behaviour change related to domestic and family violence.

The study includes multiple perspectives of each client-worker relationship dyad as evidence shows that those involved in, and observing, the relationship have dissimilar perceptions of it (Bachelor & Horvath, 1999; McCabe & Priebe, 2004;

Taft & Murphy, 2007). In particular, some researchers note that knowledge produced about the experiences of men involved in DFV interventions is limited, and there is a need to include these men in research to explore their perspectives of programs and change processes (Brown & Hampson, 2009; Kelly & Westmarland, 2015). The study also includes facilitators' and supervisors' perspectives as research shows that worker and supervisor characteristics influence the client-worker relationship (Day, Kozar, & Davey, 2013; Reimer, 2014a). Further, the perspectives of supervisors and (ex-)partners can deepen understanding of research findings that show that clients in DFV interventions attempt to engage workers in collusion-like behaviours to justify their abusive behaviour. This behaviour is associated with client attrition and increased stress for workers, for which workers need supervisor support (Day et al., 2013).

To address our research aim, we considered the following questions:

- How do male participants of MBCPs, and their primary facilitators, experience their relationship dyad, including their perception of the purpose, value and meaning of this relationship?
- How do facilitators' supervisors perceive the client-worker relationship dyad, in particular their role in relation to its development?
- How do male participants of MBCPs, their primary facilitators, the facilitators' primary supervisor, and male participants' (ex-)partners perceive and make sense of the factors that affect how the client-worker relationship dyad develops over time, and the impact of these?

The research was conducted at three rural and urban service delivery sites (the Men and Family Centres in Lismore and Tweed Heads in NSW, and Centacare MBCP at Southport, Queensland). MBCPs delivered in group mode were selected because group work is the most common mode of delivery of MBCPs (Mackay et al., 2015; Vlasis et al., 2017).

<sup>1</sup> They are also known as "batterer programs" in the United States, and "domestic violence perpetrator programs" in the United Kingdom.

## Men's behaviour change program models

MBCPs have developed from a wide range of DFV intervention theories and approaches that themselves have led to the development of multiple and varied responses (Mackay et al., 2015; Vlasis et al., 2017). Involvement in MBCPs has been found to change some men's long-term behaviour. According to measures related to recidivism, it is estimated that between 5 and 20 percent of men who complete interventions are less likely to re-engage in abusive behaviours towards partners (Babcock et al., 2004; Bennett, Stoops, Call, & Flett, 2007; Brown, et al., 2016; Gondolf, 2002; Vlasis et al., 2017).

Most MBCP interventions are delivered within specialised DFV-focused services, using group work techniques (Mackay et al., 2015; Vlasis et al., 2017). Three international models for perpetrator interventions have been influential on the development of MBCPs in Australia (Mackay et al., 2015). These are the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (the Duluth model) (Brown et al., 2016; Dutton & Corvo, 2006; Mackay et al., 2015), the Transtheoretical Model of change (TTM) (Prochaska & DiClemente, 2003; Prochaska, Redding, & Evers, 2008); and Colorado's Innovative Response to Domestic Violence Offender Treatment (the Colorado model) (Gover, Richards, & Tomsich, 2016; Richards, Gover, Tomsich, Hansen, & Davis, 2017).

Some research has noted that perpetrators of DFV are generally resistant to working with organisations focused on changing their behaviour (Scott & Wolfe, 2003; Vlasis et al., 2017). Other researchers discuss a lack of motivation for perpetrators to contact services as well as a lack of readiness to change, even when mandated (Ormston, Mullholland, & Setterfield, 2016; Vlasis et al., 2017). Furthermore, research has shown high rates of attrition across some DFV interventions, although the reasons for these are not well understood (Cluss & Bodea, 2011; Jewell & Wormith, 2010; Slabber, 2012). Attrition has been found to be related to factors such as motivation to attend, readiness to change and other factors both internal and external to the man involved in the program (Ormston et al., 2016; Vlasis et al., 2017).

## The men's behaviour change programs

The MBCPs delivered by both organisations that participated in the research primarily comprise a blend of Duluth model and cognitive-behavioural approaches. The Duluth model is discussed in greater detail in the State of knowledge chapter. The following descriptions of the participating MBCPs are based on information provided by the organisations through conversations between the chief investigator and MBCP managers.

### The Men and Family Centre MBCP–MEND

The Men and Family Centre has been delivering programs to men who use family violence, and supporting partners and ex-partners who experience DFV, since 1993. The MBCP offered by the Men and Family Centre is called Men Exploring New Directions (MEND) and is broadly based on the Duluth model (S. Wright, personal communication, April 2018), which is introduced in the following section. The program is one of four pilot MBCPs in New South Wales funded by the NSW Office of Women for 3 years (2015–18). The organisation has met the minimum standard requirements set out by the NSW Department of Justice, and also complies with the *National Outcome Standards for Perpetrator Interventions* (Department of Social Services, 2015).

MEND targets men who use violence and abuse in the home. It also offers support to partners or ex-partners of those men. Men enter the program through various avenues. Formally, they are referred from the Department of Corrections, courts, solicitors and agencies in the community services sector. About one third of clients are referred through these pathways. The remainder are considered to be self-referred. However, self-referral is often referral driven by significant others in a man's life (e.g. his partner or ex-partner).

At intake, men are required to agree to engage with the service with a willingness to take responsibility for their behaviour, and to demonstrate motivation to change their behaviour. MEND programs are not suitable for:

- men who are not interested in working on changing behaviours that are disrespectful, controlling, and abusive towards others
- men with significant mental health issues that impair their self-awareness levels or ability to work on improving their self-awareness (this does not apply to most clients with mental health issues but has been an issue in the past for some)
- men with chronic drug and alcohol issues who would be unable/unwilling to turn up clean and sober
- men with significant brain injuries that would impair their ability to comprehend concepts and strategies that require ongoing personal reflection and awareness, behaviourally, emotionally and cognitively.

The primary purpose of MEND is to

develop a coherent understanding of how violence against women and children can stop, and help the men develop a plan, and practices, that minimise future violence. General measures of success in MEND are considered in terms of increased safety of women and children. (S. Wright, personal communication, April, 2018)

MEND is delivered over 32 weeks, with associated women's support and advocacy. The program consists of four closed group modules that run over 8 weeks. Each MEND module is developed around a different theme, including defining violence; self-awareness; responsibility and accountability; and respectful communication. Module activities around each theme are topic-based (e.g. types and cycles of violence, notions of masculinity, experiences of women and children regarding violence, effects of trauma, values and beliefs about being a man and violence, safe behaviour). Each week focuses on engaging men around their experiences of the topics, and their personal responses to questions posed by facilitators. Participant input is essential to the progress of the group. There are always two facilitators. Where possible, this includes a female facilitator. Not all weeks are consecutive, with the program running over the course of one year. Completing the entire program requires completing the four modules.

Once new MBCP participants have completed an intake process, and are assessed as suitable for the group program, they enter the program at the beginning of a new module. Case coordination with relevant services is offered for the man, his (ex-)partner, and any children he may have. This may include, but is not limited to, access and support regarding alcohol and other drugs (AOD), housing, mental health, probation and parole, and family and child protection services. To be accepted into the program, a man must provide the name(s) and contact details of current and ex-partners (particularly where children are involved and shared parenting occurs). The women's support and advocacy service offered by MEND provides referral advice, conducts a risk assessment and develops a safety plan if needed. Information about MEND is also provided to women if they accept support from the service. These measures are designed to ensure the safety of women and children.

Completion of each module requires participants to attend 75 percent of the topics running over 8 weeks. Men can only miss 2 weeks from an 8-week module before they are asked to exit that module, but they are invited to return to the next module following another intake session. When they withdraw prematurely, participants are encouraged to re-engage later and complete the same module from the beginning. Each course is delivered to groups of 8–14 men; however, men also have the option to engage in individual support with a facilitator. Additional individualised sessions can be provided to assist a man to be “group ready”, or for those unable to participate in a group. The Men and Family Centre provides follow-up with clients if they do not attend sessions, and continues to try and engage them and provide opportunities for them to return.

Since 2017, the Men and Family Centre has implemented a new approach to supervision, where staff receive a range of supervision and support options dedicated to the specialist work of MBCPs. All staff participate in monthly group supervision with an external supervisor who has extensive knowledge of MBCP work. Each staff member also receives fortnightly one-on-one supervision with an external supervisor with extensive knowledge of MBCP work. Staff

also receive one-on-one supervision each month with the Men and Family Centre senior clinician, and women facilitators have, in addition, separate weekly group supervision with a senior female clinician. Critical debriefing is available for all staff at any time with either a manager or senior clinician. All of this supervision is dedicated to the special demands and challenges of MBCP work.

### The Centacare MBCP

Centacare has been delivering MBCPs since January 2011, commencing as a pilot program through the Helping Out Families initiative funded by the Queensland State Government. Based on the Duluth model, the primary purpose of this MBCP is to achieve “safe, healthy, non-violent relationships where difference is respected and celebrated ... holding perpetrators of [DFV] to account, and working with them to change their underlying beliefs, values and behaviours” (S. Dowker, personal communication, April 2018). The MBCP is accredited by the Queensland State Government, having met the minimum standards and principles under the *Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012* (Qld) (S. Dowker, personal communication, April 2018).

The program involves working with men using, or at risk of using, DFV. Men enter the program through a range of pathways, including courts (involving referral by a magistrate or the men’s information and referral worker within the court setting), government agencies (e.g. police, child protection services, and probation and parole), non-government agencies (e.g. regional domestic violence services and other generalist family support services) and self-referral.

The MBCP is a 16-week program, with an opportunity to participate in an additional 10-week maintenance and further learning program. Although it is a voluntary program, a large percentage of men do face consequences for non-compliance. These include court referrals, protection orders, probation and parole. In particular, the service collaborates with women’s services. Completion of each

module requires participants to attend 75 percent of the program. Men may miss 2 weeks before they are asked to exit a module. When they withdraw prematurely, the organisation provides limited follow-up, and participants are encouraged to re-engage later and complete the same module from the beginning.

Each course is delivered to groups of 8–14 men; however, men also have the option to engage in individual support with a facilitator to become “group ready”. Helping MBCP participants to become group ready involves facilitators identifying men who demonstrate attitudes and behaviour that may be disruptive in the group (and who may potentially undermine other participants’ opportunities for learning and behaviour change) and working one-on-one to help prepare them for a group dynamic. Group activities involve men attending a weekly group which is topic-based (e.g. types and cycles of violence; notions of power, control and masculinity; the impact of DFV on women and children; values and beliefs about being a man and violence; safe communication and behaviour; goal setting). On program exit, men are offered an opportunity to participate in a 10-week maintenance program and to access parenting programs, individualised counselling and family mediation.

There are always two facilitators. Where possible this includes a female facilitator, which happens 80 percent of the time. Staff receive formal supervision, completed by their service delivery coordinator, on a monthly basis as per Centacare supervision policies. In addition to this, informal daily supervision is provided as needed through an open-door policy and is used to discuss issues in a timely manner as they arise.

## About this report

The remainder of this report comprises six main sections, beginning with the State of knowledge review of client–worker relationships in DFV contexts, characteristics of effective client–worker relationships and how the professional context

impacts the relationship. The chapter following outlines the methodology that underpins this study and the methods used to conduct the research. The Findings chapter reports on the data collected, arranged by themes regarding how the research participants understood the client–worker relationship. Findings in this section include participants’ perspectives on challenges and conflicts experienced in client–worker relationships, and their experiences of how to mitigate such risks and challenges. The Discussion chapter critically analyses the findings in light of the knowledge on client–worker relationships in the DFV context and discusses how the findings both support and expand on previous knowledge. The final chapter considers implications of the research and recommendations for practitioners, managers, organisations, policymakers and future research. The Conclusion includes a consideration of the strengths and limitations of the study.

# State of knowledge review

This rapid review briefly introduces MBCP models and the state of knowledge on the client–worker relationship within MBCP literature. It also includes discussion of the way this relationship relates to types of intervention and issues related to change, engagement, retention, attrition, readiness and motivation.

The literature shows that an effective client–worker relationship is associated with program retention and positive change for clients across a wide range of intervention types and client populations (Bachelor & Horvath, 1999; Clemence et al., 2005). Despite this, knowledge from other fields of practice about effective client–worker relationships has been not well utilised in DFV interventions (Murphy & Baxter, 1997; Walker & Murphy, 1997).

This review incorporates knowledge on client–worker relationship processes in a child and family intervention context. This is because much crossover exists between offender and child and family contexts, in particular in relation to DFV offences. For example, many people who find themselves in offender interventions are likely there because the offence took place in the family or another domestic context. In addition, as in offender contexts, much of the work undertaken in child and family contexts is court mandated or, where technically voluntary, there exists a strong perception of coercion to attend due to threat of child removal into out-of-home care.

## Conducting the rapid review

A rapid review is a state of knowledge review conducted using similar techniques to systematic reviews, but in an accelerated or streamlined fashion. This may include using narrower search terms and publication dates, selective use of databases, and limiting searches of grey literature and consultation with experts (Khangura, Konnyu, Cushman, Grimshaw, & Moher, 2012; Watt et al., 2008). Rapid reviews are becoming more common in policy-related research, where findings are required within a shorter timeframe than for traditional research (Khangura et al., 2012; Watt et al., 2008). Systematic reviews generally take more than 12 months to complete, but a rapid review is more likely to be completed within 5 weeks to 6 months (Khangura et al., 2012; Watt

et al., 2008). Given the limited time period and resourcing available to complete the current research, a rapid review methodology was considered appropriate.

Limitations exist in undertaking such a review (Ganann, Ciliska, & Thomas, 2010; Khangura et al., 2012; Watt et al., 2008). These include findings that are more likely to be descriptive than critical, reliance on the conclusions of an incomplete set of studies, and drawing improper conclusions due to missing relevant and detailed information (Ganann et al., 2010; Khangura et al., 2012; Watt et al., 2008). However, research on rapid reviews has shown that broad conclusions of rapid reviews do not vary considerably from those of systematic reviews (Ganann et al., 2010; Watt et al., 2008).

A search specific to the study focus was conducted within ProQuest, Expanded Academic ASAP and Academic Search Premier databases. Accordingly, search inclusion criteria focused on literature related to DFV that was attentive to the client–worker relationship in MBCPs (including associated common terms related to these foci). Search terms included “working relationship”, “worker relationship”, “therapeutic alliance”, “client–worker relationship”, “working alliance” AND “domestic violence”, “family violence” AND “men’s behaviour change”. Only research published since 2000 was included; this year was chosen because it is when researcher interest in the client–worker relationship/therapeutic alliance began to accelerate. This yielded 23 relevant results. Additionally, the researcher consulted two senior practitioners of MBCPs and two international authors in the field to ensure key literature was included. Subsequently, the search was broadened to include peer-reviewed publications related to offender programs and interventions within a criminal justice context. The researcher also included an ANROWS State of knowledge report (Mackay et al., 2015) and a recently published Australian review on MBCP programs (Vlais et al., 2017). The total number of publications with content related to the study focus was 42. In line with rapid review methods (Khangura et al., 2012), the review process involved conducting a descriptive summary of the found literature, in order to synthesise key ideas related to the study focus, followed by critical appraisal. Critical appraisal involved assessing the literature for methodological assumptions, biases and limitations.



## Men's behaviour change program models

MBCPs have developed out of a wide range of DFV intervention theories and approaches that have themselves led to the development of multiple and varied responses (Mackay et al., 2015; Vlasis et al., 2017). These include, but are not limited to, psychoeducation, family therapies, Narrative Therapy, relationships counselling, person-centred practice, Moral Reconciliation Therapy, cognitive behavioural therapies, group therapy, the Transtheoretical Model of change (TTM), Motivational Interviewing, restorative justice, the risk–need–responsivity framework, and feminist and other critical theories (Mackay et al., 2015; Vlasis et al., 2017).

Most MBCP interventions are delivered within specialised DFV-focused services, using group work techniques (Mackay et al., 2015; Vlasis et al., 2017). Some programs include a requirement to adhere to predetermined aspects of delivery such as format and content, program length and goals (Mackay et al., 2015; Vlasis et al., 2017). However, some people argue that new ways of delivering interventions are required, as the move to rigid adherence to programs has resulted in the focus shifting from the process of change or unique characteristics of intervention contexts to delivering programs correctly (Morran, 2006; Vlasis et al., 2017). Concerns have been raised about how rigid adherence to program models can limit participant engagement, as well as the extent to which interventions address highly individualised notions and expectations related to need, choice, consequences, personal responsibility, accountability and personal goals into the future (Kozar & Day, 2012; Morran, 2011b; Vlasis et al., 2017). Some have further argued that programs delivered in this way may be experienced as punitive (Kozar & Day, 2012) and that work is required from a strengths-based approach, including helping participants critically reflect on their strengths, as well as their deficits (which interventions usually focus on) (Morran, 2011b).

Hence, debate exists over whether to follow a highly structured group treatment model or to tailor interventions around a casework model in which a specific worker engages closely with the MBCP participant and focuses on their unique circumstances (Mackay et al., 2015; Rasanen, Holma, & Seikkula, 2012; Vlasis et al., 2017). Casework approaches, which

are currently less commonly used, might draw on ecological theoretical frameworks to include familial, community-wide and social–structural factors that impact on the perpetrator's behaviour (e.g. loneliness, substance misuse and poverty) (Mackay et al., 2015; Vlasis et al., 2017). However, while different approaches are important to explore, concerns about individualised casework in MBCPs—including safety issues for workers—have been raised (Vlasis et al., 2017).

Three international models for perpetrator interventions have been influential on the development of MBCPs in Australia (Mackay et al., 2015):

- the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (Duluth model), which is the most well established and commonly used treatment model for DFV (Dutton & Corvo, 2006; Mackay et al., 2015)
- the Transtheoretical Model of change (TTM), which integrates a wide range of psychotherapeutic and behavioural theories on change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 2003; Prochaska, Redding, & Evers, 2008)
- Colorado's Innovative Response to Domestic Violence Offender Treatment (Colorado model), which is based on differentiation according to risk (Gover, Richards, & Tomsich, 2016; Richards, Gover, Tomsich, Hansen, & Davis, 2017).

### Duluth model

The Duluth model, developed in 1981, is underpinned by feminist theories of male dominance. The primary goal of the program is to challenge male participants to acknowledge how patriarchal social norms (such as male privilege and hierarchical thinking that places men above women and children) manifest in men choosing to behave in dominant and controlling ways towards women (Dutton & Corvo, 2006). The Duluth model is intended to be delivered in a community context to offenders of DFV who are not incarcerated for their violence. Using psychoeducational and cognitive behavioural ideas (Mackay et al., 2015), this approach provides a time-limited, specific program of treatment, which all participants follow.

Critiques of the Duluth model challenge the primary notion underpinning this intervention that associates DFV with

men's dominance of women. Instead, they consider that many other factors contribute to men's violence against women and they adopt a wider lens than a feminist one to understand and intervene in DFV (such as by examining the issue through an ecological framework, as well as drawing on sociological and psychological theories) (Brown et al., 2016; Dutton & Corvo, 2006). Critics challenge the notion that only men exert power and control over women and argue that the Duluth model fails to adequately address how offenders' psychological, emotional and socio-economic issues, and their personal experiences of violence and powerlessness, may contribute to their offender behaviour (Dutton & Corvo, 2006). Furthermore, they question the efficacy of an adversarial, time-limited, one-size-fits-all approach to such a complex issue (Brown et al., 2016; Dutton & Corvo, 2006; Gover et al., 2016).

### Transtheoretical Model of change

Originally designed for treatment with smokers, the TTM has since been used across various fields of practice (Prochaska et al., 2008), including with offender populations (Burke, Gielen, McDonnell, O'Campo, & Maman, 2001; Casey, Day, & Howells, 2005). According to the TTM, successful change involves 10 processes that transcend intervention techniques and strategies (Burke et al., 2001; Casey et al., 2005; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983; Prochaska et al., 2008): consciousness raising, dramatic relief, self-re-evaluation, environmental re-evaluation, self-liberation, helping relationships, counterconditioning, reinforcement management, stimulus control and social liberation (Prochaska et al., 2008).

The processes of change operate through a series of sequential stages—pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance—at a cognitive and behavioural level (Burke et al., 2001; Casey et al., 2005). According to Casey et al. (2005), the TTM can be useful to assess offenders who might be unsuitable to undertake a program, and also to motivate participants to become ready to change their behaviour.

Critics of the TTM argue that there is limited empirical evidence to support it (Casey et al., 2005). Some argue that human processes are too complex for change to be sequential

in the manner described by the model, and that change is not as orderly as described (Bandura, 1997). The notion of complexity has been raised specifically in relation to offender populations. Critics argue that the set of behaviours and motivations to change in offender populations is more complex than experienced in relation to smoking cessation (Casey et al., 2005). Critics further argue that, since this complexity makes it difficult to assess the various factors related to changing offending behaviour, the efficacy of the TTM as a standalone approach with offender populations is questionable (Casey et al., 2005). However, with respect to the client-worker relationship, a qualitative study of the TTM with women ending abusive relationships found helping relationships to be an especially important part of the entire change process (i.e. during each stage) (Burke et al., 2001). Burke et al. (2001) found that it was particularly important for successful change that the women developed trusting, non-judgemental, supportive and caring relationships with others, including with professionals. They also found that helping relationships with professionals were important for successful progression from pre-contemplation into action stages, and then action to maintenance.

### Colorado model

The Colorado model is a differentiated approach to DFV (Gover et al., 2016). The differentiation occurs by way of adopting a casework approach to working with offenders and distinguishing the level of treatment according to measures of high and low risk (Gover et al., 2016; Richards et al., 2017). Rather than providing a one-size-fits-all intervention, treatment is differentiated by three levels and participants can move between the levels depending on their progress (Gover et al., 2016; Richards et al., 2017).

Underpinned by socio-ecological theories, the model involves assembling a multidisciplinary team from a variety of organisations and disciplines to provide casework according to participant needs. Team members are responsible for ensuring participants identify and work towards certain goals that address clinical issues related to their violence and controlling behaviours, as well as supporting participants to succeed and holding themselves accountable to agreed goals (Gover et al., 2016). Moreover, the Colorado model draws on cognitive behavioural ideas whereby participants are

supported to achieve attitudinal and behavioural changes related to “domestic violence competencies”. As such, successful completion of the program involves participants demonstrating changed thinking and behaviour related to competencies such as understanding violent behaviour and its effect on others, anger management, non-violent communication, healthy relationships, empathy and accountability (Gover et al., 2016).

Criticisms of this model include that it might be difficult with such a non-directive approach to maintain progress towards changed attitudes and behaviour, and that lack of standardised measures of success make it difficult to ascertain treatment success (Gover et al., 2016; Richards et al., 2017). Furthermore, some scholars have discussed the need for specialised responses for men where mitigating factors are present, such as social welfare issues—for example, poor mental health, drug and alcohol issues, or addictive behaviour. In response, perpetrator interventions are increasingly being influenced by approaches mindful of lived experience and peer-to-peer practice, and the circumstances and needs of particular population groups, such as young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and communities (Mackay et al., 2015; Vlasis et al., 2017).

### Effectiveness regarding change

One of the most important foci for MBCPs is for men to change their abusive attitudes and behaviours towards women and children (Mackay et al., 2015; Vlasis et al., 2017). Although a very high—and, some might argue, unrealistic—standard, a key theme related to measuring effectiveness of MBCPs is the extent to which men have not only changed in the short term but continue to abstain from DFV over the course of their lives (Morran, 2011a, 2013).

Empirical evidence has found that approaches underpinned by the two dominant theoretical approaches—feminist-psychosocial and cognitive-behavioural—have minimal effectiveness (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004). However, this is a fraught area of understanding, where empirical evidence regarding the nature and effectiveness of MBCPs is limited. Furthermore, studies of effectiveness are hampered by a lack of agreed upon and standardised outcomes measures of success

(Geldschläger, Gines, Nax, & Ponce, 2014). Others argue that using recidivism as a measure for success lacks nuance, in that it does not capture a wide range of behavioural and attitudinal change that might be considered good outcomes in other dimensions of the man’s life, family and wider community, and it does not measure structural dimensions of DFV (Vlasis et al., 2017). In addition, much of the research has evaluated interventions using narrow measures of effectiveness, most of which are related to only capturing known acts (mainly acts that reach the higher standard of what constitutes a crime) and reducing recidivism. Furthermore, little is known about what contributes to effectiveness, including women’s perspectives of this (Vlasis et al., 2017), and there is limited understanding of which components of practice contribute consistently to change (Rasanen et al., 2012; Vlasis et al., 2017).

That said, involvement in MBCPs has been found to change some men’s long-term behaviour. According to measures related to recidivism, it is estimated that between 5 and 20 percent of men who complete interventions are less likely to re-engage in abusive behaviours towards partners (Babcock et al., 2004; Bennett, Stoops, Call, & Flett, 2007; Gondolf, 2002; Vlasis et al., 2017). Additionally, Gondolf (2002) found that all but those perpetrators deemed to belong to the highest risk group showed some level of sustained change. Again, however, there are difficulties measuring effectiveness by risk categories where it is difficult to include the range of complex social and personal issues that accompany some abusive behaviour—such as psychopathologies and cultural, disability, age, gender identity, social-structural and economic issues—but also impact program effectiveness (Vlasis et al., 2017).

### Engagement, retention and attrition

Closely related to client change are notions of engagement, retention and attrition. Engagement involves MBCP participants consistently attending the program and actively participating in program tasks when they do. Retention relates to participants completing the program to the extent the program organisers deem acceptable, while attrition is the situation arising when participants drop out of the program prematurely.

Engaging MBCP participants has been found to be difficult. Some research discusses a lack of motivation for perpetrators to contact services and a lack of readiness to change, even when mandated (Ormston, Mullholland, & Setterfield, 2016; Vlasis et al., 2017). Catalysts found to increase motivation, create readiness to engage in change, and desist from violence include offenders experiencing emotional responses and being informed of the negative consequences of violence on family, as well as the knowledge that their behaviour might result in criminal charges (Vlasis et al., 2017; Walker, Bowen, Brown, & Sleath, 2017). However, understandings of the nature and role of such catalysts for change is relatively under-researched in MBCPs (Walker et al., 2017). In research with offenders, the most commonly reported negative emotional responses are guilt, shame and fear (LeBel, Burnett, Maruna, & Bushway, 2008; Leibrich, 1996; Walker et al., 2017). When researching within an MBCP context, Walker et al. (2017) found that MBCPs being informed of the negative consequences of violence on family, and experiencing negative emotional responses—in particular, guilt and shame—work together as a deterrent to ongoing violent behaviour. However, gaps exist in knowledge about the association between the client–worker relationship and such catalysts for change.

Studies regarding the effectiveness of MBCPs indicate that while motivational techniques are good at keeping men in the program, interventions need to provide more challenges to men to change—this creates the accountability to change. However, some research has noted that perpetrators of DFV are generally resistant to working with organisations focused on changing their behaviour (Scott & Wolfe, 2003; Vlasis et al., 2017). Research has shown high rates of attrition across some DFV interventions, although the reasons are not well understood (Cluss & Bodea, 2011; Jewell & Wormith, 2010; Slabber, 2012). Attrition has been found to be related to factors such as motivation to attend, readiness to change and other factors both internal and external to the man involved in the program (Ormston et al., 2016; Vlasis et al., 2017).

Some research has found that motivation-enhancing intervention may be beneficial for increasing participants' engagement in programs (Scott & Wolfe, 2003). Scott et al. (2011) found that attending additional interventions prior

to the DFV-related intervention improved rates of DFV program completion. However, this research also concluded that attending previous interventions did not increase the extent to which the workers deemed the men to have met program goals related to engagement and accountability:

Approximately 20% of clients were rated as having participated inappropriately or not at all in group (i.e., score of 2.0 or less), and 18% were rated as having taken absolutely no accountability for their abusive behaviour (i.e., score of 1.5 or less), with an additional 20% rated as taking limited accountability (i.e., score of 2.0). (Scott et al., 2011, p. 146)

Scott et al. (2011) concluded that while group attendance is a necessary dimension, it is not alone sufficient to stimulate change. It is clear that much still needs to be understood about aspects of the change process in MBCPs, including engagement, attrition, retention, motivation and the readiness to change (Vlasis et al., 2017; Westmarland & Kelly, 2013).

## The client–worker relationship—Terms and theories

Extensive literature has shown that effective client–worker relationships are associated with program retention for clients across a wide range of intervention types and client populations (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003; Clemence, Hilsenroth, Ackerman, Strassle, & Handler, 2005; Flaskas, 2004; Ruch, Turney, & Ward, 2010). An effective client–worker relationship is defined as one that creates a working environment that helps the client work towards positive change (Bachelor & Horvath, 1999; Clemence et al., 2005; Horvath, 2000; Turney, 2010).

Various terms are used interchangeably to discuss the professional relationship between clients and workers in social and therapeutic services practice. These include therapeutic alliance, therapeutic relationship, working alliance, working relationship, worker–client relationship and helping relationship (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003; Coady, 1993; Meier, Barrowclough, & Donmall, 2005; Proctor, 1982). The term used throughout this report is client–

worker relationship. Most researchers use Bordin's (1979) definition, which notes that the client–worker relationship comprises a mutual agreement between worker and participant regarding intervention goals and assignment of tasks, and the development of an emotional bond (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003; Horvath & Symonds, 1991; Martin, Garske, & Davis, 2000; Marziali & Alexander, 1991).

Research on the client–worker relationship in an offender context also draws on Bordin's (1979) theory (Brown & O'Leary, 2000; Kozar & Day, 2012, 2017; Santirso, Martín-Fernández, Lila, Gracia, & Terreros, 2018; Taft et al., 2003; Taft & Murphy, 2007). Specific to research on the client–worker relationship in an offender context, agreement on goals has been explained in terms of the participants in the client–worker relationship dyad agreeing on the areas they intend to target for purposeful change and what they agree to achieve through the intervention (Brown & O'Leary, 2000; Santirso et al., 2018). Assignment of tasks is explained as the participant accepting the therapeutic strategies and techniques required to achieve the goals, and actively participating with the intervention process to do so (Brown & O'Leary, 2000; Santirso et al., 2018). Development of bonds indicates a personal attachment, and capacity to communicate and negotiate (Brown & O'Leary, 2000; Kozar & Day, 2012). This involves factors such as mutual trust, appreciation, liking and empathy (Kozar & Day, 2012; Santirso et al., 2018). An effective client–worker relationship has been found to relate more to worker and client agreement on the goals of the offender intervention, rather than other factors, including demographic, interpersonal and psychiatric factors and relationship status (Brown et al., 1997; Cadsky et al., 1996; Rondeau et al., 2001). Criticisms exist of the relevance of Bordin's (1979) theory of the client–worker relationship to offender contexts. These relate to concerns that the theory was conceptualised in voluntary therapeutic contexts, where the participants were generally willing to attend and work towards change. This is considered quite different to offender contexts—in particular, where participants are mandated to attend, which may affect the client–worker relationship (Polaschek & Ross, 2010). Such criticism draws on evidence that client resistance to engaging is higher in offender contexts than in others, and that participants tend to be more anxious, aggressive and oppositional, which impedes the client–worker relationship

(Morran, 2006; Ross et al., 2008). Furthermore, it has been noted that in an offender context, while it is common for clients to act and sound compliant, behaviour change may not extend to life outside the client–worker relationship dyad (Ross et al., 2008).

To account for the perceived shortfalls in Bordin's (1979) theory, Ross et al. (2008) developed a revised theory of the client–worker relationship that was particularly mindful of empirical evidence from contexts involving therapy with offenders. This revised theory elaborates on relevant participant and worker variables. It also posits new ideas on possible influences of the wider context around the client–worker relationship, and the impact of the interpersonal dynamic on the client–worker relationship and on participant change. This theory extends Bordin's (1979) theory by elaborating on participant and worker variables and interpersonal factors, as well as including external and contextual variables as influential to the client–worker relationship.

Briefly, the components of the theory (Ross et al., 2008) include:

- worker characteristics related to personality, interpersonal interactions and professional technique, and worker expectations of participants regarding change
- participants' competencies, goals and expectations; for example, regarding being in a client–worker relationship, motivation to engage and change, and belief in ability to change
- external/contextual variables; for example, characteristics of the work environment that may restrict and impede the client–worker relationship and how group dynamics might affect the client–worker relationship
- interpersonal worker/participant processes and emotional reactions to each other, and how these impact the client–worker relationship.

However, these ideas are yet to be empirically tested, and there is limited attention paid to power dynamics both within and external to the client–worker relationship.

## Evidence that the client-worker relationship influences outcomes

Although there is limited research specifically on the client-worker relationship in the DFV context, it has been found to influence various factors in DFV interventions. For example, there is some evidence of a positive association between the client-worker relationship and client change regarding increasing empathy and communications skills and reducing both mild and severe psychological and physical aggressive behaviour (Brown & O’Leary, 2000; Taft, Murphy, King, Musser, & DeDeyn, 2003). The client-worker relationship is influential in both directions—a problematic and distrustful client-worker relationship has been found to result in less success in meeting program goals, and better client-worker relationships have been found to lead to better outcomes (Scott & Wolfe, 2003).

In a meta-analysis of factors influencing positive client outcomes in psychotherapeutic treatment, Lambert (1992) identified the client-worker relationship as one of the most influential, accounting for 30 percent of the positive outcome. Of the other three factors, Lambert (1992) found the intervention technique used and the treatment recipient’s expectation and hope for positive change both accounted for 15 percent of the positive outcome. The fourth factor, accounting for 40 percent of the positive outcome, related to factors external to the treatment client, such as personality characteristics and support the person receives during treatment.

The development of effective client-worker relationships in a criminal justice and corrections context is a crucial factor in bringing about positive change (Rosenberg, 2003; Ross, Polaschek, & Ward, 2008; Taft & Murphy, 2007; Taft, Murphy, Musser, & Remington, 2004). Within offender contexts, there exists little research, analysis and theory on the nature and development of effective client-worker relationships or of the role of different characteristics within these (Kozar & Day, 2012; Ross et al., 2008; Wormith & Olver, 2002). More needs to be done to understand the personal qualities (e.g. beliefs, values and assumptions) and professional variables (trainable qualities) that are required in the client-worker relationship, as well as what they contribute to it (Marshall et al., 2003;

Ross et al., 2008). Furthermore, Ross et al. (2008) argue that while there is some guidance for workers on how to develop effective client-worker relationships, more empirical analysis is required about what workers and clients contribute to the affective bond; the best worker and client characteristics required for good client-worker relationships; how workers and clients can develop characteristics known to work; and the training requirements for workers. In addition, Ross et al. (2008) argue that more needs to be done to understand the client-worker relationship across a range of intervention contexts—for example, mandated compared to voluntary, and group compared to individual work.

The majority of research in offender contexts has been conducted using quantitative techniques; one of the few qualitative studies of the client-worker relationship in this area was conducted by Kozar and Day (2017). Much research on the client-worker relationship in an offender context has used the Working Alliance Inventory (WAI) (Horvath & Greenberg, 1989) to measure the strength of the client-worker relationship with mandated offenders, offenders in corrections settings and sex offenders (Brown & O’Leary, 2000; Dowling, Hodge, & Withers, 2018; Kozar & Day, 2012, 2017; Polaschek & Ross, 2010; Taft et al., 2003; Taft et al., 2004; Watson, Daffern, & Thomas, 2018; Youssef, 2017). Many versions of the WAI have been developed and found to hold a high degree of reliability and validity in measuring the strength of the goals, bonds and tasks between worker and client in an offender context (Santirso et al., 2018; Taft et al, 2004; Taft & Murphy, 2007).

The WAI has been used in a number of studies in the MBCP context. For example, Brown and O’Leary (2000) used an observer version of the WAI to assess the strength of the client-worker relationship of 70 participants in a cognitive behaviour therapy treatment group for men who had engaged in DFV. Taft et al. (2003; see also Taft et al., 2004) used the WAI with 107 men engaged in a program due to violence against their intimate partners. They examined factors contributing to the formation of effective client-worker relationships within community-based group therapy programs using cognitive behaviour therapy. Polaschek and Ross (2010) used the WAI with 50 men incarcerated for violent behaviour. Their study examined the association between the client-

worker relationship and workers' rating of participants' motivation to change. Santirso (2018) also used the observer version of the WAI with 140 men mandated to undertake a community-based MBCP. The offender groups in these studies all focused on similar issues (Brown & O'Leary, 2000; Kozar & Day, 2017; Santirso et al., 2018; Taft et al., 2003; Taft et al., 2004). This included reducing violence within the home and challenging the participants to take responsibility for their violent behaviour. It also included holding the participants accountable to behaving in non-violent ways, acknowledging the role of personal cognitive processes (such as choice) in violent behaviour and challenging the participants to choose non-violent responses over violent ones when communicating and resolving conflict.

Some research on the client-worker relationship in an offender context, within both a criminal justice and corrections context, has found that a client-worker relationship has a positive influence on treatment outcomes (Brown & O'Leary, 2000; Ross et al., 2008; Santirso et al., 2018; Taft et al., 2003; Taft et al., 2004). This includes findings that client-worker relationships are associated with participants' reduced aggression and violent behaviour (Brown & O'Leary, 2000; Polaschek & Ross, 2010; Santirso et al., 2018). A client-worker relationship has also been found to act as a support for men engaging in DFV to resolve trauma experienced earlier in life, particularly trauma related to prior experiences of abusive relationships (Sonkin & Dutton, 2003).

Program engagement, completion and reduced premature disengagement have been found to be associated with client-worker relationships in offender contexts. For example, Brown and O'Leary (2000) found the client-worker relationship to be crucial to therapeutic success and completion, including finding it positively influenced participants' willingness to engage in the intervention and work towards change. In addition, some have found that worker characteristics and techniques that promote and enhance the development of client-worker relationships in DFV contexts might improve treatment outcomes (Taft et al., 2003; Taft et al., 2004). Client-worker relationships have been found to improve motivation to participate in an offender intervention program, thus reducing recidivism rates (Babcock et al., 2004; Santirso et al., 2018; Taft et al., 2004). A client-worker relationship has

also been found to assist participants' positive engagement in group processes (Brown & O'Leary, 2000; Polaschek & Ross, 2010; Santirso et al., 2018; Taft et al., 2003; Taft et al., 2004). The importance of early client-worker relationship development to enhance program engagement, even as early as the first session, is supported by many (Brown & O'Leary, 2000; Taft et al., 2004; Tufford, Mishna, & Black, 2010).

Mixed views exist about the association between the client-worker relationship and offender program engagement, completion and motivation to change. For example, Polaschek and Ross (2010) found that it is not imperative to create a strong client-worker relationship initially, because it is possible to develop the client-worker relationship over time. In addition, some have found that being motivated to change was not required for early client-worker relationship development (Taft et al., 2003; Taft et al., 2004), while others have found that a strong client-worker relationship improves motivation to change behaviour (Polaschek & Ross, 2010; Santirso et al., 2018). In addition, some have found no significant correlation between being motivated to change and early client-worker relationship development (Brown & O'Leary, 2000; Taft et al., 2003). Polaschek and Ross (2010) also argued that lack of motivation early in treatment is not necessarily indicative of poor outcomes, nor should it be used to select participants out of interventions who are not initially motivated. Given the mixed evidence about the client-worker relationship in the offender context, it is clear that further in-depth analysis of how the relationship relates to motivation to change behaviour and engage in an intervention is required.

While quantitative research has contributed to knowledge about factors that are involved in effective client-worker relationships in an offender context, in-depth explorations about the processes involved in client-worker relationships in such contexts are limited (Kozar & Day, 2017; Taft et al., 2003). Consequently, deep understanding of client-worker relationship processes and participant and worker characteristics and techniques is limited. This includes how the client-worker relationship is developed and maintained in offender contexts, and how it relates to change. However, some in-depth examination of the client-worker relationship using qualitative techniques has been completed in the child and family field, which may be useful for developing understanding

in an offender context. Hence, the following section presents research on worker characteristics and techniques for effective client–worker relationships in contexts specific to DFV, as well as within child and family interventions more broadly.

## Characteristics of effective client–worker relationships

Characteristics found to enhance the development of effective client–worker relationships in an offender context include workers developing trust with participants; being supportive and rewarding suitable behaviour; displaying honesty, genuineness and transparency; demonstrating empathy and warmth; and being competent and credible (Marshall et al., 2003; Serran, Fernandez, Marshall, & Mann, 2003). These findings are supported by Kozar & Day et al. (2017), who found that worker characteristics that help client–worker relationship development include demonstrating respect, empathy and transparency; validating the participant; being flexible in approach; using humour to manage conflict; being collaborative; and being strict about professional boundaries.

### Trust

Developing trust has been found to be important in offender research (Marshall et al., 2003; Serran et al., 2003) but has not been comprehensively explored. Research in the child and family context consistently shows that gaining trust is fundamental to building and maintaining an effective client–worker relationship because it supports and increases clients’ openness and willingness and their cooperative attitude towards workers (de Boer & Coady, 2003; Fernandez, 2007; Reimer, 2013b; Zeira, 2007). This research has also shown that, once established, trust facilitates clients’ positive responsiveness to worker challenges to meet goals (de Boer & Coady, 2003; Reimer, 2013b).

Drawing on the child and family context, self-disclosure is a key factor for building trust with families where child protection issues have arisen. Self-disclosure enhances participants’ ability to identify with workers, and improves their preparedness to be honest about their underlying issues and to work towards change. In a child and family context,

self-disclosure involves participants identifying with workers in some way, including finding some kind of similarity with them (de Boer & Coady, 2003; Reimer, 2013b)—for example, similar life experiences, social background and values (de Boer & Coady, 2003; Fernandez, 2007; Hersoug, Høglend, Havik, & Monsen, 2010; Maluccio, 1979). In work with families, some have also found that it helps to build trust when parents discover workers have their own parenting experiences (Maluccio, 1979; Paris & Dubus, 2005; Riley, Brady, Goldberg, Jacobs, & Easterbrooks, 2008; Taggart, Short, & Barclay, 2000). Often disclosing something that is already publicly known is enough to spark an initial trusting connection, thus reducing concerns about crossing professional boundaries (Reimer, 2014b).

The debate on the use of self-disclosure in offender contexts is unresolved and requires further empirical examination. While some argue that self-disclosure helps build the client–worker relationship because it provides a sense of similarity, others argue that it can lead to professional boundary violations and distract from focusing on change (Goldfried et al., 2003; Marshall et al., 2003). Moreover, despite calls for client–worker relationships with offenders that are honest, genuine and transparent, self-disclosure is usually discouraged (Kozar & Day, 2017; Marshall et al., 2003; Serran et al., 2003).

### Support

The most common approach to working with participants in MBCPs is confrontational and punitive (Kozar & Day, 2012; Murphy & Baxter, 1997; Taft et al., 2003). Critics of the Duluth model note that the worker approach to participants is adversarial and involves judgement, humiliation and an underlying assumption that all participants subscribe to male dominance ideas (Dutton & Corvo, 2006). Offender research has found that an aggressive, confrontational approach has a significant negative effect on clients (Serran et al., 2003). A confrontational approach has also been found to impede effective client–worker relationships and limit treatment (Murphy & Baxter, 1997; Rasanen et al., 2012; Taft et al., 2003; Taft & Murphy, 2007). This has been found to occur through undermining development of trust, honesty and openness, including when clients make themselves vulnerable during treatment (Dutton & Corvo, 2006).



Conversely, in offender research, supportive approaches to client–worker relationships have been found to lead to positive program outcomes (Kozar & Day, 2017; Marshall et al., 2003; Serran et al., 2003). Supportive approaches include rewarding and validating suitable behaviour (Kozar & Day, 2017; Marshall et al., 2003; Serran et al., 2003) and providing follow-up contact, using motivational interviewing techniques and tailoring interventions to individuals (Taft, Murphy, Elliott, & Morrel, 2001). Others report that workers validating and rewarding suitable behaviour and behavioural change is supportive of the client–worker relationship (Kozar & Day, 2017; Serran et al., 2003).

In the child and family literature, being supportive involves workers being responsive to the issues and needs that clients identify early on, including providing practical, emotional and social support quickly (Reimer, 2013b; Ribner & Kneipaz, 2002; Taggart et al., 2000; Zeira, 2007). This requires active listening, interpretation and reflection (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003). Workers acknowledging and celebrating the participant’s achievements have also been found to be important in the child and family context, sitting alongside worker positivity and positive reinforcement, a focus on client strengths, and the expression of hope for client change and a better future (de Boer & Coady, 2003; Doel, 2010; Drake, 1994; Paris & Dubus, 2005; Reimer, 2010; Trotter, 2006).

Although a confrontational approach to the client–worker relationship has not been explored in depth in offender research, in the child and family practice context it has been found to impact on the developing client–worker relationship in a variety of ways. Client–worker relationships with confrontational and punitive characteristics have been found to model abusive ways of relating and, as such, do not challenge participants to change their behaviour (Taft & Murphy, 2007). A confrontational client–worker relationship may also mean the developing relationship is typified by a client displaying behaviour that assists in avoiding, interrupting and sabotaging its development in order to regain some power that the client may consider lost due to feeling forced to engage (Reimer, 2013b; Tanner & Turney, 2003; Zeira, 2007). This includes relationships characterised by a slow journey from distrust to trust, often through clients

displaying ambivalence and testing the worker (Reimer, 2010). Furthermore, confrontational client–worker relationships that remind clients of past abusive relationships can trigger defensive and self-protective responses. For example, in relational practice with families where child neglect is an issue, Reimer (2010) found it was common for both male and female clients to initially approach workers feeling highly vulnerable. This included heightened fears regarding potential worker judgement, pressure to engage due to threats of criminal intervention, and historical experiences and stigma regarding the child protection system.

In a child and family context, success building a client–worker relationship has been found to occur when workers consider that participant resistance and ambivalence may be a protective response from clients, rather than treating people as oppositional and thus untreatable (Reimer, 2013b). Resistance is often demonstrated until they have established the trustworthiness of the worker and feel some level of equality with them.

## Emotional investment versus detachment

Research in an offender context has found that research workers adopting an empathetic, warm and understanding stance has helped to support the development of a client–worker relationship (Kozar & Day, 2017; Marshall et al., 2003; Serran et al., 2003). Some scholars have reported that a client–worker relationship involving compassion, rather than taking a punitive stance, positively impacts men’s motivation to engage (Ormston et al., 2016; Stosny, 1994; Taft et al., 2001; Tolman & Bhosley, 1990). Some have found that effective workers bring to the intervention both personal and professional aspects, which have also been linked to client progress (Marshall et al., 2003; Serran et al., 2003). This is also posited in the revised theory of the therapeutic alliance for offender contexts by Ross et al. (2008). In this theory, Ross et al. (2008) argue that the client–worker relationship is a particular type of social interaction. This means where affective, or emotional, dimensions are present, it is highly likely that both workers and clients will experience the client–worker relationship at a personal, or emotional, level.

However, this facet of the client–worker relationship in offender contexts remains both contentious and relatively unexamined empirically. Differing views exist of the extent to which a client–worker relationship needs to be a deeply interpersonal connection (Kozar & Day, 2012). The difference of opinion relates to ongoing debate about professional boundaries, what constitutes boundary violation, how these relate to collusive behaviour, and the complex nature of empathy in client–worker relationships—in particular, in contexts involving statutory involvement. The debate also concerns whether it is better to adopt a detached/ objective position in relation to clients versus developing more of an emotional bond, which usually involves some degree of self-disclosure (Kozar & Day, 2017). This study aims to contribute to knowledge around such issues, in particular related to boundary issues and their relationship to collusive behaviour, in the client–worker relationship in MBCPs.

Drawing on the notion of an interpersonal schema outlined in the broader therapy research on the client–worker relationship (Safran, 1998), Ross et al. (2008) argue that workers’ and offenders’ family and developmental histories and institutional experiences affect their interpersonal abilities, as well as their expectations and their motivation for change (Ross et al., 2008). For example, Ross et al. (2008) argue that early attachment experiences and prior experiences with relationships and the interpersonal schemas they develop often influence offenders’ capacity to build client–worker relationships. This is supported in research where workers with difficulties making secure attachments have been found to be less capable of building effective client–worker relationships, while evidence of prior secure and caring attachments in workers has been found to predict the development of effective client–worker relationships (Black, Hardy, Turpin, & Parry, 2005; Dunkle & Friedlander, 1996; Hersoug, Monsen, Havik, & Hoglend, 2002). In addition, the capacity for emotional responsiveness has been found to help shape the extent to which offenders engage in client–worker relationships, where the ability to learn from emotions supports reflection and change (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Howells & Day, 2006). This has been found in the child and family literature as well (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003; Safran & Muran, 2000).

The notion of emotional investment has also been raised in child and family practice contexts, where concerns have been raised about workers engaging in ways where they become emotionally invested in the client. Some argue that an approach where workers become emotionally invested in clients may result in workers feeling the same kinds of emotions that clients experience (Reimer, 2010). For example, emerging evidence in a child and family practice context suggests that client feelings of despair and hopelessness can influence the worker to feel the same way, depending on the source of the negativity (Reimer, 2010). This can lead to workers failing to challenge clients’ ingrained ways, values, beliefs and assumptions, which may in turn undermine the change process (Safran, 1998). Some have found that relating to clients in an emotionally engaging way can be emotionally demanding on workers because it involves the risk that workers will open themselves up to clients, invest in their lives and genuinely care for them (McMahon, 2010; Reimer, 2014b).

Emotional investment can also be a factor in collusive worker behaviour. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1987) defined collusion as “a secret agreement or understanding for purposes of trickery or fraud”. Rasanen et al. (2012, p. 359) argue that collusion is “one of the greatest challenges facing treatment providers for domestic violence perpetrators”. In an offender context, concerns have been raised that lack of clarity remains around what it means to relate “well” or “poorly”, and around how relating in an empathetic manner can become confusing and can potentially result in participant dependence and reduced autonomy (Kozar & Day, 2012, p. 483). Others have reported concerns that a gentler approach might lead to collusion regarding abusive and controlling acting-out behaviours or, at the very least, be seen to be doing so. For example, workers adapting to client behaviour by becoming detached from, or colluding with, clients in order to develop or maintain a client–worker relationship, or to avoid becoming cynical or burned out, has been found to be an issue when building client–worker relationships in an offender context (Costello, 2006; Rasanen et al., 2012; Ross et al., 2008). In order to find a way forward, some researchers have argued for interventions that balance a confrontational style with a motivational style (Acker, 2013; Morran, 2011b), although this requires further analysis. It is clear that this is considered challenging work for both clients and workers in

DFV contexts, and requires a delicate balancing act between a confrontational and controlling approach and one that is perceived to be softer, more empathetic and supportive (Kozar & Day, 2012; Rasanen et al., 2012).

This dimension of engaging empathetically and becoming emotionally invested in clients is also fraught across other human services practices. As reported in the child and family field, effective client–worker relationships involve a genuine emotional connection (de Boer & Coady, 2003; Reimer, 2014b). Empathy has been found to require balancing care with objective distance (Kenemore, 1993; McMahan, 2010; Trotter, 2006). Workers in effective relationships have been found to balance professionalism with an informal or casual manner (de Boer & Coady, 2003; Reimer, 2014b). In essence, this means workers being authentic, which means revealing “safe” aspects of their personal self to clients when in the professional role. Doing so has been found to help clients recognise the humanness of the worker, thus enhancing their capacity to see the worker as like them, which facilitates a trusting client–worker relationship (Reimer, 2017). Recognising the humanness of the worker helps clients to become more likely to open up honestly about the issues behind their behaviour and about what is stopping them from changing, and to be open to worker challenges to change. It is particularly helpful for clients to feel that workers are treating them as human beings, rather than as clients who have been labelled, often numbered and de-identified from their humanness (de Boer & Coady, 2003; Doel, 2010; Drake, 1994; Maluccio, 1979; McMahan, 2010; Ribner & Knei-Paz, 2002). Moreover, some have found that professional distance may actually be harmful to the client–worker relationship (Doel, 2010; Green, Gregory, & Mason, 2006).

Some studies have even equated this approach to being “friend-like”, rather than workers being friendly (de Boer & Coady, 2003; Doel, 2010; Drake, 1994; Lynn, Thorpe, Miles, with Cutts, Butcher, & Ford, 1998; Reimer, 2014b; Ribner & Knei-Paz, 2002). However, such studies are clear that there are key differences—such as workers remaining completely attentive to their clients and not expecting support or attention back—between professional relationships of a friend-like nature and friendships (Reimer, 2014b). Where clients have discussed the difference between professional relationships

with friend-like characteristics and friendships, they have reported there is a difference because they do not need to reciprocate support to the worker (Reimer, 2014b). While this friendship-like element exists in effective client–worker relationships, some have reported the need for upfront awareness that the relationship only exists for professional purposes, which primarily relate to developing and working towards goals of client change (Reimer, 2014b). In addition, some studies have found that empathising too closely results in a tendency to refrain from challenging clients, which can undermine the change process (McMahon, 2010; Trotter, 2006). Clear communication is required concerning the participants’ roles, limitations and expectations at a level clients can understand (de Boer & Coady, 2003; Drake, 1994; Ribner & Knei-Paz, 2002), including ethical, professional and legal boundaries (Doel, 2010; Kenemore, 1993).

## Respect and flexibility

Related to being supportive and empathetic are respect and flexibility, both of which Kozar and Day (2017) reported are important worker characteristics in offender contexts. While understandings of these are limited in offender research, in other contexts respect and flexibility have been found to help workers and clients negotiate the process of working together; they have also been found to help build a sense in clients of greater agency over the decision-making process (Altman, 2008; Drake, 1994; Reimer, 2013b; Ribner & Knei-Paz, 2002). This is particularly helpful for clients who are not attending voluntarily. Flexibility also involves a preparedness to focus beyond the referring issues, as clients can use this as a way to test the genuineness, attentiveness and responsiveness of workers (Reimer, 2013b).

Furthermore, respect, flexibility and patience have been found to facilitate a safe environment, and to build empowerment through supporting clients to feel more in control of the process (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003; Friedlander, Escudero, & Heatherington, 2006; Priebe & McCabe, 2006; Reimer, 2010). In a child and family context, respectful behaviour has been found to involve open and transparent communication by workers, including relaying both what they are doing and why in a way clients can understand (de Boer & Coady, 2003; Reimer, 2013b). Respect and flexibility also require providing

adequate time for clients to raise deeper issues when they are ready, accepting that people think differently (so as not to push their views onto clients) and recognising clients as human beings and not cases (de Boer & Coady, 2003; Friedlander et al., 2006; Priebe & McCabe, 2006; Reimer, 2013b).

### Worker competence and professional credibility

Worker competence and professional credibility have been found to support the development of effective relationships in offender contexts (Marshall et al., 2003; Serran et al., 2003). This is supported, and further discussed, in a child and family context, where many have argued that client perceptions of worker confidence, competence and depth of knowledge influence client–worker relationships in child and family practice (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003; Altman, 2008; Maluccio, 1979; Reimer, 2013a). Professional competence and credibility involve workers having good intuition, extensive skill-based competence and high self-esteem (de Boer & Coady, 2003; Reimer, 2013b). Competent workers have been found to be able to conduct themselves in ways that help clients feel safe and comfortable throughout the change process. They have also been found to be able to challenge clients throughout the change process in ways that do not breach the client–worker relationship.

### Collaborative approach

Another factor for effective client–worker relationships in an offender context involves workers facilitating a collaborative approach, or an equal partnership (Kozar & Day, 2017), but this has not been explored in depth. Again, a collaborative approach has been reported to be important in child and family practice (de Boer & Coady, 2003; Doel, 2010; Drake, 1994; Kirkpatrick, Barlow, Stewart-Brown, & Davis, 2007; Reimer, 2013b; Ribner & Knei-Paz, 2002; Zeira, 2007). In child and family practice, this kind of approach involves workers and clients acknowledging that this is the client’s process, and negotiating the changing process and expectations together (de Boer & Coady, 2003; Drake, 1994; Reimer, 2013b). Collaboration has been found to help build trust and empowerment and develop skills, and supports a shared understanding of boundaries, purpose and focus on change

(Doel, 2010). However, it is also important for workers to understand the power differential that exists between them and the clients while actively and consciously negotiating this, including by giving clients some degree of authority over the change process (de Boer & Coady, 2003). Such an approach is achieved through being attentive to, and trying to understand, the client’s perspectives and meaning.

### How the professional context impacts the client-worker relationship

Ross et al. (2008) have expanded on traditional psychotherapeutic thinking about the client–worker relationship by arguing for the inclusion of factors in the wider environment thought to have a potential impact on the client–worker relationship in offender contexts. They include the organisational environment in which the client–worker relationship is conducted, and supports placed around the relationship in the organisation as well as wider social and professional contexts.

An example of an organisational factors that might impede the client–worker relationship is offenders’ repeated experiences of poorly managed and painful relationship termination that did not occur due to the natural conclusion of therapy or the client having achieved their goals, but due to worker turnover, inmate transfer or for some other institutional reason (Reimer, 2010; Ross et al., 2008). Another issue at the organisational level relates to the need for supportive staff supervision. According to Ross et al. (2008), this includes issues related to workers more quickly becoming mentally overloaded due to having to build client–worker relationships with multiple people, each with different characteristics and interpersonal schemas. Given the range of stressors that have been found to emerge, workers are supported when they receive professional supervision by managers who understand the importance of a personalised approach to client–worker relationships (Reimer, 2014b).

One social contextual factor that may impede the client–worker relationship is where participants are mandated to attend. Despite this, Polaschek and Ross (2010) found that it is possible to form effective client–worker relationships with violent incarcerated men who are mandated to undertake

treatment. However, more research is required to explore aspects of this type of context and its impact on the client–worker relationship. Furthermore, most of the research on the client–worker relationship has been conducted in the individual therapeutic context, leaving a dearth of knowledge related to such relationships in group work contexts (Reimer, 2014a; Ross et al., 2008). This is problematic, since group work brings a different set of issues to the client–worker relationship than is present in individual work.

Finally, at a wider professional level, a personalised approach to practice is still looked upon negatively throughout the human services sector, meaning that workers may experience additional pressure due to professional norms to keep a professional distance (Green et al., 2006; Maidment, 2006). This can create additional stress for workers who may find themselves accused of acting unprofessionally or unethically at times, despite believing that the personalised relational approach is more effective for supporting client change (Reimer, 2014b).

## Further research

In conclusion, despite increasing agreement in recent years that the client–worker relationship is a crucial factor in DFV interventions, little is known in this specific context about which characteristics of such relationships are important for client change (Brown & O’Leary, 2000; Kozar & Day, 2012; Rasanen et al., 2012; Ross et al., 2008; Taft & Murphy, 2007; Tufford et al., 2010). According to Ross et al. (2008), while there is some guidance for workers on how to develop effective client–worker relationships, more empirical analysis is required about the characteristics that workers and clients contribute to the affective bond; the best worker and client characteristics required for good client–worker relationships; how workers and clients can develop characteristics known to work; and training requirements for workers. This includes conducting further research to understand which personal qualities (beliefs/values/assumptions) and professional variables (trainable qualities) are required, and what they contribute to the client–worker relationship (Marshall et al., 2003; Ross et al., 2008). In addition, further research is required about treatment processes in these contexts in

order to uncover the mechanisms for effective client–worker relationships, and about how they contribute to improved treatment outcomes (Polaschek & Ross, 2010; Ross et al., 2008; Santirso et al., 2018; Taft et al., 2003; Taft et al., 2004).

This study responds specifically to researchers in the offender field who have reported the need for better understanding of client–worker relationship factors, in particular as they relate to attrition and motivation, to increase engagement in MBCPs.

# Study methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology, involving the overarching theory that informed the study (i.e. critical hermeneutics) and the research methods employed (including sampling, recruitment, data collection, and data analysis), as well as the ethical considerations relevant to the research. For this study, the perspectives of the MBCP participants and facilitators are considered as “insider” perspectives (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). The MBCP participants and facilitators are considered to be insiders due to being the only two parties directly involved in the client–worker relationship dyad, and hence having had firsthand experience of their relational dyad. Perceptions from supervisors and (ex-)partners constituted “outsider” perspectives on the client–worker relationship.

## Theoretical framework: Critical hermeneutics

The research was interpretive in nature, therefore it drew on critical hermeneutics. The goal of interpretive social science is to understand and explain how people experience life, including what motivates them, where power is hidden, and how they understand and make meaning of their lives in light of this (Harrist & Gelfand, 2005; Kögler, 2005). The foundational idea in critical hermeneutics is that a central feature of our humanity is the capacity and desire of people to raise their self-awareness through making sense of their lives (Kögler, 2008).

According to critical hermeneutics, people seek to raise their self-awareness through representation and interpretation. Representation, or symbolic expression, becomes a starting point in the hermeneutic process of meaning-making and understanding (Kögler, 2008). People achieve symbolic expression through communicating their pre-understandings in representative ways, for example through writing, images and behaviour (Kögler, 2008). Pre-understandings comprise pre-conceived ideas, such as beliefs, values and assumptions that are integral to an individual’s personal identity or sense of self. For most people, pre-understanding is developed without challenge during childhood and is heavily influenced by the individual’s family, social and cultural background, and the power relations existing in these contexts (Kögler, 2008). Pre-understanding is so deeply embedded in individuals’

understanding about themselves that it has become taken-for-granted knowledge and is assumed to be truthful (Kögler, 2008, 2013). Critical hermeneutic interpretation involves a person consciously paying attention to and challenging the symbolic expressions they have developed while trying to make sense of their lives. Analysis and interpretation involve a recurrent reflexive process of building understanding by moving from the whole to parts, and back to the whole (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003).

Reflexivity involves the interpreter actively and honestly challenging their internal dialogue, which includes critically examining and transforming one’s pre-understanding, interests and social practices (Kögler, 2013). However, critical interpretation of self is not a completely internalised activity. Although it requires the interpreter to undertake an internal critical dialogue, it also requires the interpreter to engage with people with different perspectives in order to help challenge pre-understanding (Kögler, 2013). Critical interpretation of self requires a person to engage with others to achieve self-awareness through a deliberate process of looking beyond themselves (Hendrickson, 2004; Kögler, 2008). Known as *distanciation*, this requires interpreters to locate themselves in a space between being engaged with, and detached from, that which they are thinking about as they seek self-understanding (Kögler, 2013). Interpreters must authentically engage with their pre-understanding, while simultaneously remaining distanced or detached enough to engage in reflexivity, or critical self-reflection of their pre-understanding. Authenticity, according to Gadamer (1989), involves being open to engage with, and challenge, one’s self in good conscience, which involves an honest preparedness to challenge the symbolic expressions we have distorted and not acknowledged. Reflexivity also involves intentional and authentic engagement with others, considering their different perspectives, and interpreting and challenging one’s own position and pre-understanding in light of the critical perspective others provide (Kögler, 2013). When undertaking data analysis for research purposes, hermeneutic analysis and interpretation involve the researcher continually checking and rechecking what was interpreted against the pre-existing framework, information from the literature, new information from the data, and raised awareness of the phenomenon being analysed (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003).

While some elements of the client–worker relationship between MBCPs and facilitators occurs in public view, as with all relationships, parts of the client–worker relationship operate in the private space between those directly involved in the relationship dyad. In order to comprehensively access, analyse and make meaning of the client–worker relationship it was important to use a research method that facilitated gathering accounts of the perceptions of those directly involved, and that would allow the researchers to dig deeply into these perceptions. Critical hermeneutics was chosen as it allowed an exploration and interpretation of the research participants’ meaning-making of their experience and perceptions of their client–worker relationship dyads. It assisted the researchers to dig deeply into the perceptions of the nature of client–worker relationships in this practice context and examine how the relationship related to MBCP participants’ change process.

Moreover, power is a central consideration in critical hermeneutics. Critical hermeneutics calls on the person engaged in interpretation to also attempt to make sense of, and challenge, the familial, social and cultural symbols hidden as fact within the person’s pre-understanding (Kögler, 2013). In critical hermeneutics, the person engaged in interpretation is expected to recognise the familial, social and cultural sources of power, and how these manifest during interactions with others (Hendrickson, 2004; Kögler, 2005, 2008). Interpreters are also challenged to acknowledge social and cultural inequity, including their own status (both socially and culturally) but also in relation to others (Kögler, 2005, 2008). This is crucial for developing self-awareness, where opening ourselves up to considering others’ views, and making ourselves available to others’ challenges, involves a genuine belief that those challenging us are of an equal status to us (Kögler, 2005). In this study, critical hermeneutics was used to analyse and expose hidden power dynamics operating in the client–worker relationship dyads that result in power and privilege being experienced by some of the people and groups involved at the expense of others. This is particularly relevant in the field of DFV, where much of the manifestation of men’s violent and coercive behaviour towards women occurs within a relationship.

As the reflexive process continues and people challenge their pre-understanding by adopting ideas from other people, new understanding emerges. Insight and personal freedom emerge when interpreters challenge and reconstruct their understanding about themselves, including in relation to status and power, through incorporating the perspectives and experiences of others (Kögler, 2005). At this time, the interpreter should become more able to articulate his or her transformed symbolic expression in light of the way others understand the world (Kögler, 2013).

Critical hermeneutic perspective-taking means that one person does not appropriate the hermeneutic process on behalf of the person with whom he or she is engaging, thus allowing the interpreter to achieve freedom to engage in his or her own process of reconstructing self-identity (Kögler, 2005). Moreover, such perspective-taking also leads to empathetic understanding of the other (Kögler, 2005, 2013). In this study, critical hermeneutics was useful to assist understanding and analysis of the perceived realities of those involved in the client–worker relationships being explored, and to critically analyse these in the light of both internal and external forces impacting upon the relationships.

## Triangulation methods

The study utilised triangulation methods (Denzin, 1970). Triangulation is a research method that involves combining multiple methodologies, methods, data sources, theories and/or investigators when studying the same phenomenon (Denzin, 1978; Kimchi et al., 1991). Triangulation is considered a valid way to increase reliability in qualitative research (Denzin, 1970; Fusch et al., 2018). Triangulation adds rigour, increases the depth and breadth of data collected as well as saturation of data, and decreases investigator bias (Denzin 1970; Fusch et al., 2018). Denzin (1978) described four types of triangulation that can be combined to augment the impact of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, methodological triangulation and theoretical triangulation.

During recruitment and data collection, this study achieved data triangulation through person triangulation (Denzin, 1978). According to Denzin (1978), data triangulation involves

gathering data from multiple sources, for example at different times, in different locations and from different people. Person triangulation involves engaging people in the study who have different perspectives on the study focus (Denzin, 1978; Fusch et al., 2018). During this study, person triangulation involved recruiting groups of people with different perspectives on client–worker relationship dyads. MBCP participants and facilitators were recruited to discuss their perspectives on their client–worker relationships. Additionally, MBCP participants’ (ex-)partners and facilitators’ supervisors were recruited to provide their perspectives on the client–worker relationships that they observed.

## Partnering organisations and study sites

The research involved two partnering organisations—the Men and Family Centre and Centacare MBCP—and three study sites (i.e. partnering organisation sites). Two sites were in regional NSW (one in Lismore, the second in Tweed Heads) and one was in urban Queensland (Southport).

The study sites were selected for their extensive and long-term experience in MBCP work. For example, the Men and Family Centre MBCP is involved in the pilot program of the NSW Government’s Safer Pathway approach, which provides streamlined, coordinated support to domestic violence victims (Women NSW, 2017). Two regional locations were selected to maximise recruitment of MBCP participants who live in regional communities to the study, due to regional communities being less densely populated than urban communities. The Southport site was chosen in order to compare programs operating under different contexts—that is, to compare an urban and two regional sites that operate under different state legislation.

## Research team

The Southern Cross University research team consisted of the chief investigator (female) and four research assistants (one male and three female) with extensive experience working in social welfare practice with vulnerable clients, including

some DFV practice experience. The chief investigator has extensive professional experience in child and family practice, and experience conducting research and publishing on relational practice with vulnerable populations. The male research assistant has professional experience facilitating MBCPs. One female research assistant, who was undertaking her doctoral degree at the time, has experience running support programs with partners and (ex-)partners of men involved in MBCPs. The other female research assistants have extensive experience in peer work, disability, mental health and community work. The team also included an experienced research manager with extensive experience in mental health practice who managed the research participant recruitment, provided liaison and undertook administrative tasks.

An issue raised in qualitative research relates to researcher subjectivity and influence on the data (Cruz, 2015; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). This is because all investigators have pre-understanding—or personal assumptions, beliefs and values—of the phenomenon they are investigating (Cruz, 2015; Fusch et al., 2018; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). Their pre-understanding can lead investigators to collect and analyse data in a biased way (Cruz, 2015; Fusch et al., 2018; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003).

All members of the research team approached data collection and analysis activities with pre-understanding of client–worker relationships, DFV, perpetrators of DFV, and perpetrator intervention programs. To minimise the impact of this, in the debriefing prior to beginning data collection, each interviewer was encouraged to adopt an open, curious and empathetic stance (i.e. demonstrating sincere interest in listening to, and learning about, the participant’s perspective) (Minichiello et al., 1995). They were asked to treat each participant as an expert in their perceptions of the client–worker relationship dyad they were discussing. The researchers were also advised to take a distanced and reflexive approach towards themselves and the research participants’ perceptions of the client–worker relationship dyads (Cruz, 2015; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003).

Despite this, the data will have been impacted by team members’ pre-understanding. Therefore, the chief investigator engaged multiple investigators (known as investigator triangulation). When using a standard interview protocol,



this can help reduce the potential for bias (Denzin 1970; Fusch et al., 2018; Thurmond, 2001). In this study, five researchers using a common interview protocol conducted the research interviews. To lessen the influence of the chief investigator's pre-understanding during the analysis phase of the research, a member of the research team provided a reliability check based on one client-worker relationship dyad. This involved conducting an analysis independently of the chief investigator but following the same process (described below). Once completed, the researcher and chief investigator met to discuss themes.

## Participant recruitment

Purposive convenience sampling, a combination of two sampling techniques (i.e. purposive sampling and convenience sampling), was used to recruit participants to the study. Purposive sampling is common to qualitative research where the information being sought relates to a specific context, and the best people to provide information about that context are those who have experienced the phenomenon themselves. Convenience sampling is commonly used in qualitative research when expertise is required that is easily accessible and those experts in the topic are willing to be involved. Purposive convenience sampling was therefore used because of the specialised nature of the research, where the focus was the client-worker relationship between participants of MBCPs and their facilitators.

The aim was to recruit participants so that each study site was represented by at least three participants: the participant in the MBCP, the facilitator and the facilitator's primary supervisor. This was to be done for ten client-worker relationship dyads at each site. Where possible, the perspectives of the male participants' (ex-)partners were to be included.

Agency consent was sought via completion of an agency authorisation Form (Appendix A). Recruitment and data collection occurred from August 2017 to the end of April 2018. Recruitment of facilitators and supervisors, MBCP participants and (ex-)partners of MBCP participants occurred separately.

## Recruitment of facilitators and supervisors

Initially, the chief investigator sought agency consent for the study. This involved gaining approval from the directors of the partnering organisations for agency staff and clients to participate. Once this was achieved, using the study's worker information sheet (Appendix B), agency managers informed facilitators and supervisors employed at the partnering organisations about the study. There was no obligation for staff and supervisors to become involved. However, all facilitators and supervisors employed at the three study sites at the time of the study agreed in principle to participate if they were identified for an interview. To identify which facilitators and supervisors to interview, MBCP participants (once they had been recruited, as described below) were asked to name facilitators with whom they felt they had built a client-worker relationship that they deemed significant to their change process. Interviews with identified facilitators were conducted as soon as possible after the interviews with the MBCP participants. Interviews with the supervisors of identified facilitators were conducted as soon as possible after the interviews with the facilitators.

During data collection, several facilitators at the participating organisations left their employers. One of these facilitators agreed to continue their participation. Consequently, ten facilitators and three supervisors were involved in the study.

Once facilitators had agreed to participate, phase two of participant recruitment commenced.

## Recruitment of MBCP participants

The partner agencies helped recruit MBCP participants to the study. In order to facilitate a successful recruitment process, this strategy used the trust already established between the agency and eligible participants. This involved assigning an experienced MBCP facilitator to compile a list of potential MBCP participants who would be eligible for the study.

MBCP participants were deemed eligible if they:

- had attended an MBCP at one of the partnering locations within the past 12 months (irrespective of whether or not they completed the program)

- were aged 18 years or older and had perpetrated violence against an intimate partner
- had attended voluntarily—that is, they were not court-ordered to attend the program
- were able to complete the interview in English.

The following participants were excluded from the research:

- current clients of an MBCP
- people with limited English
- participants who may have impaired capacity for informed consent (e.g. due to a serious mental illness/intellectual disability)
- men the MBCP facilitators and supervisors considered “most violent”
- men mandated to attend a MBCP.

MBCP participants were split into two categories: participants who had completed at least one module of the MBCP and participants who had left the program prematurely. The assumption was that men who completed at least one module of the program were more likely to have established an effective client–worker relationship, where at least some of those who left the program prior to completing at least one module may have been less likely to have established an effective relationship. It was hoped that doing this would generate data to compare the two types of working relationship cases. The aim was to achieve a 50:50 split of men who had completed at least one module compared to men who had not completed at least one module. This aim was achieved (see Table 2).

Once eligible MBCP participants were identified, the recruitment continued as follows:

- A staff member from the partnering organisation phoned potential participants to inform them of the research. They advised the MBCP participants that the research was separate to the MBCP and that there was no obligation to return to the program or to be involved in the study. MBCP participants were informed the research was looking into how men attending MBCPs and their primary facilitators work together, and that the researchers would value their input. Potential participants were informed that showing interest at that point did not equate with commitment—it

simply provided an opportunity to hear more about the project if they wanted to. This step helped maintain privacy and maximise voluntary informed consent.

- Where MBCP participants indicated interest in finding out more about the study, the staff member asked if they would be willing for their name and contact details to be forwarded to a research manager from the research team, who would contact them within two weeks.
- The research manager contacted the potential participants, gave them more details about the research, and asked for verbal confirmation of whether or not they wished to be involved. If they did wish to be involved, the research manager informed them that a researcher would be in contact in the next two weeks to arrange an interview.
- The research manager assigned the MBCP participants who agreed to be involved to research assistants, who made contact and arranged a time to complete the interview.

Using a handover process to recruit the MBCP participants helped to minimise any sense of obligation to engage in the research because of its connection to the MBCP. The MBCP participants were offered an opportunity to withdraw at each stage of this recruitment process.

### Recruitment of (ex-)partners

(Ex-)partners were eligible if the perpetrator had attended a MBCP at one of the partnering MBCP locations and they were able to complete the interview in English. Only (ex-)partners who had previously been involved with the women’s support/advocacy worker at the relevant partnering organisation were invited to be involved in the study. However, where it was known women were currently involved in difficult circumstances that might render them unsafe to be involved, they were not invited. This decision was made in consultation with the women’s support workers who were working with the women.

Where MBCP participants agreed to be involved, the partnering organisation assigned a different staff member (who had previously supported the women) to contact the (ex-)partners by phone and inform them of the research. The staff member assigned to this role at the Men and Family

**Table 1:** Facilitator and MBCP participants, and client-worker relationships, by gender, location and program completion

		MBCP participants (pseudonyms)		Men and Family Centre facilitators				Centacare facilitators			
		M <sub>1</sub>	F <sub>1</sub>	M <sub>2</sub>	F <sub>2</sub>	M <sub>3</sub>	F <sub>3</sub>	M <sub>4</sub>	M <sub>5</sub>	M <sub>6</sub>	M <sub>7</sub>
Men and Family Centre	Liam	x <sup>a</sup>									
	Paul	x	x								
	<b>Matt<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>x</b>									
	<b>Sam</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>								
	<b>Pete</b>	<b>x</b>									
	<b>Aaron</b>			<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>						
	<b>Nigel</b>	<b>x</b>									
	Kyle	x									
	<b>James</b>	<b>x</b>									
	Joel	x									
	Steven	x					x				
	John	x	x								
	<b>Billy</b>			<b>x</b>							
	<b>Jett</b>	<b>x</b>									
	<b>Denny</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>								
<b>Nyle</b>	<b>x</b>										
Centacare	Martin						x	x			
	Lionel						x		x	x	
	Ryan						x				x
	Don							x			
	Brian							x			
	<b>Jed</b>								<b>x</b>		

Notes: <sup>a</sup> An x denotes a client-worker relationship.

<sup>b</sup> Bold indicates MBCP participants who left the program prematurely.

Centre was also a qualified researcher, so was employed as a research assistant to the project to conduct interviews with (ex-)partners who agreed to be interviewed.

The recruitment process continued similarly to that outlined above for MBCP participants. The women were also informed that, if they agreed to be involved, the research project team would not inform the (ex-)partner of their involvement. When the women agreed to be involved, the staff member arranged interview times and conducted the interviews.

## Participant sample

The partnering organisations invited 110 eligible male MBCP participants to the study (n=60 Men and Family Centre; n=50 Centacare). Of these, 64 agreed for the research manager to contact them with further information (n=51 Men and Family Centre; n=13 Centacare). After learning further details of the study, 31 MBCP participants were recruited. However, when arrangements were being made to conduct interviews, two men were unable to be contacted for interview after having agreed, two declined when interviewing arrangements were being made, four withdrew before being interviewed (citing work commitments) and one did not attend the arranged interview (citing no reasons).

The total number of MBCP participants recruited to the study was 22. Sixteen men were from the Men and Family Centre, and six from Centacare. Table 1 shows the 32 client–worker relationship dyads identified. All twenty-two MBCP participants discussed a client–worker relationship with male facilitators, and eight participants also discussed a client–worker relationship with female facilitators (i.e. they had more than one client–worker relationship. In total, nine participants noted a client–worker relationship with more than one facilitator as being notable).

Ten facilitators were recruited to the study, three women and seven men. One MBCP participant identified that he had developed a client–worker relationship with three facilitators, eight MBCP participants had two facilitators, and 13 MBCP participants had one facilitator only. All MBCP participants

who indicated having developed a client–worker relationship with one facilitator named a male facilitator. Of the MBCP participants who identified more than one facilitator to have assisted their change process, one named two male facilitators, seven named a male and female facilitator, and one named two male facilitators and one female facilitator. Three supervisors were involved in providing immediate supervision of and support for the 32 client–worker relationship dyads.

As indicated above, 11 MBCP participants who had completed at least one module and 11 who had left the program prematurely were recruited to the study. Table 2 shows complete and incomplete rates for MBCP participants across the three study sites. This is also represented in Table 1 where a bold cross indicates that MBCP participants left the program prematurely.

Although 11 MBCP participants recruited to the study had completed at least one module and 11 had left the program prematurely, this was not achieved evenly across the three sites. Of the 11 who completed at least one module, five were recruited from the Men and Family Centre Lismore site, one from Tweed Heads and five from Centacare in Southport. Of the 11 who had not completed the MBCP, eight were recruited from the Lismore site, two from Tweed Heads and one from Centacare.

Three women (ex-)partners were recruited to discuss their perspectives of the MBCP client–worker relationship dyads. At the time of the research, all three women who participated in interviews were in a relationship with their partner, who was the MBCP participant.

Regarding the (ex-)partners of the 22 MBCP participants, 12 had been engaged with the women’s support worker at the time of the MBCP and were invited to the study. Of these:

- three were recruited to the study and completed interviews
- three were recruited to the study but extenuating circumstances prevented interviews being completed (two were too busy and one had moved interstate)
- six either stated a range of reasons for not wanting to become involved or did not respond to the invitation—

**Table 2:** Complete and incomplete MBCP participants across the three sites

MBCP Site	Completed at least one module	Left MBCP prematurely
Lismore (Men and Family Centre)	5	8
Tweed Heads (Men and Family Centre)	1	2
Southport (Centacare)	5	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>

reasons included that they had not been in contact with the MBCP participant since the intervention (so felt they had nothing to contribute), they did not have time, they did not feel safe to participate or they no longer lived in the vicinity.

One (ex-)partner was not invited because she was deemed to be in an unsafe situation at the time of the study. In addition, one MBCP participant did not have a partner at the time of his involvement in the MBCP, and three MBCP participants requested that their (ex-)partners not be contacted for an interview.

## Data collection

Drawing on the central location of dialogue, or conversation, in critical hermeneutics (Kögler, 2005), this study adopted a “conversational” approach to gather data on the client–worker relationship dyads. Dialogue exposes us to other ways of thinking, and to how the person with whom we are in conversation has been impacted, including by being objectified, and any resultant suffering (Hammond, Anderson, & Cissna, 2003; Kögler, 1999). Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were selected as an appropriate research method to facilitate a conversational approach (Minichiello et al., 1995). Critical hermeneutics provided a way to conduct exploratory critical analysis during the interviews in order to understand the participants’ personal and unique perceptions of their experience of each relationship they were involved in or observed (Gilgun & Abrams, 2002; Kögler, 1999). Interviews involved asking questions of a subjective nature and exploring and interpreting research participants’ meaning-making about their experiences and observations of the client–worker relationships. Interviewers were instructed to focus on drawing out how the research participants made sense of the client–worker relationship, in particular their ideas about how the relationship helped the research participants to work towards change for the MBCP participants.

As previously mentioned, this study used investigator

triangulation during data collection (Denzin, 1978). Sixty-five interviews were conducted (n=22 with MBCP participants, 32 with facilitators, eight with supervisors, and three with [ex-]partners). The chief investigator conducted 22 interviews, and the four researchers conducted 16, 15, eight, and four interviews respectively.

Data collection involved conducting one semi-structured, in-depth interview with each participant in the client–worker relationship dyad, as well as with the facilitator’s supervisor. Where possible, the (ex-)partner of the MBCP participant was interviewed. Interviewers used a focus sheet with prompts (see Appendix C) to capture the development of the client–worker relationship in a wide chronology incorporating the time before the client and facilitator met, when they met, once the relationship was developed and during the closure to the intervention. The interviewers used open-ended prompt questions to keep the interview focused on the nature of the client–worker relationship as expressed in the research aim, using probing and clarification questions throughout that brought participants back to focus on how what they were saying related to the relationship. Interviewers were instructed to ensure probing and clarification questions helped research participants explore unexamined beliefs, values and assumptions about the client–worker relationship. This included exploring how research participants represented the client–worker relationship and how the MBCP participants worked towards change. Interviewers were also instructed to use probing and clarification questions to challenge the research participants to explore alternative ideas to explain how they had represented the client–worker relationship. In this way, the interviewers were trying to challenge the research participants to become detached from their pre-understanding of the client–worker relationship and look upon the relationship as something that influenced attitudes and behaviour. The interviewers were also instructed to question and challenge details and research participants’ representations of that experience while adopting this stance. This was in order to bring to light and critically analyse hidden ideas about the purpose, value and meaning of the client–worker relationship in the change process. The interviewers

received regular debriefing, moderation and support after completing interviews. This was to support the researchers while also ensuring that data collected remained focused on the study aim and limiting the extent to which it was affected by investigator bias.

There were three supervisors working across the sites, two for the Men and Family Centre and one at Centacare. Interviews with supervisors covered multiple client–worker relationship dyads, depending on how closely the supervisor had worked with the facilitators with respect to each MBCP participant. Some facilitators and supervisors were required to discuss more than one client–worker relationship dyad. When this occurred, the researcher clarified which particular relationship dyad was being discussed during each interview. This was to ensure each interview addressed the relationship dyads independently of each other. Interviews were conducted with each research participant individually, within 12 months of the MBCP participant completing the program or withdrawing from the MBCP module. All participants were informed that all information from any interviews about the client–worker relationship would be kept private and confidential.

Prior to the interviews beginning, all participants were informed that they would engage with the researcher in one-on-one conversational interviews (duration approximately one hour) where they would be invited to discuss in detail their perceptions of the client–worker relationship. In the case of MBCP participants, prior to the interview beginning they were informed that the facilitators they named, the facilitators’ supervisors and the participants’ (ex-)partners would be invited to provide a perspective on the client–worker relationship dyad. They were also told that they would not be informed if their (ex-)partners agreed to be involved or not. At this time, participants were given an opportunity to withdraw from the study if they did not feel comfortable with any point in the consent form.

At the beginning of each interview, the researcher conducting the interview informed the participant that s/he would like to hear the participant’s perspective on the client–worker relationship, and invited the participant to discuss his/her perceptions of the relationship s/he either participated in or observed. The researcher also explained to participants that they (the researcher) may ask clarifying and probing

questions to gain in-depth understandings of what the participant meant. The researcher explained this as part of the process of the interviewer interpreting the participant’s perceptions, as accurately as possible.

All participants were informed the researcher would be using a digital MP3 voice recorder during the interview to ensure the data was collected as accurately as possible (Minichiello et al., 1995). All participants consented to the interview being recorded. Once participants agreed, the device was placed on the table between the interviewer and participants, and participants were informed it could be turned off at any time during the interview if the participant preferred. Verbatim transcriptions of the recorded interviews were made by a professional transcription service and checked for accuracy by the research manager. Care was taken to add punctuation accurately; however, “thinking” words (such as “um”) were removed. Transcripts were de-identified and names were replaced with pseudonyms. All participants were invited to examine the de-identified transcripts of their interviews for accuracy, and were provided an opportunity for withdrawal from the study or to have some of the information in the transcripts redacted if they no longer felt comfortable for it to be included in the study. Four participants responded to the invitation and were emailed their transcripts as a Microsoft Word document, but did not make suggestions for retractions or changes.

## Data analysis: Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis was undertaken to inductively interpret the meaning of the perceptions of the client–worker relationships participants discussed. An inductive approach requires the interpreter to draw meaning from the data itself, rather than external sources such as research literature on the topic (Hyde, 2000). Thematic analysis is a method researchers use to identify, analyse and reduce data to meaningful patterns, or themes, which they then report as an interpretation of the data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Clarke & Braun, 2017). As an analytic approach, it facilitates deep explorations of the meanings people ascribe to the phenomenon being examined (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis involves researchers actively decontextualising data from individual data sources, and organising them into conceptual categories, or codes, to represent the researcher's interpretation of the meaning (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Clarke & Braun, 2017). In thematic analysis, data analysis is iterative. This means the researcher reads the data multiple times, disassembling and reassembling the data with each reading, and analysing and interpreting knowledge and meaning with subsequent readings (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). During each reading, the researcher reflects on the interpretation and interrogates the data for meaning within and across the phenomenon being studied (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). This is because different accounts will provide a unique interpretation of the same themes, which must be drawn together by the researcher to form an internally consistent set of ideas and insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Analysis and interpretation required the chief investigator to focus on what was said in the recounting of participants' experiences, observations and perceptions, and the meanings ascribed to these, rather than how, or in what order, the information was reported (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Consistent with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the chief investigator interrogated the data for details on what and who was being discussed, and their roles, as well as what was occurring during the occasions being discussed, how, when, and where it occurred, what reasons were given for its occurrence, and what research participants reported of what it meant to them.

In line with the iterative nature of thematic analysis, the chief investigator read each transcript multiple times. First, the chief investigator read each transcript through without taking notes. This was in order to become familiar with the broad ideas expressed. In the next reading, each transcript was categorised by attributes that would later be useful for deeper analysis of patterns. Attribute categories were client-worker relationship dyad number, location, complete/incomplete and facilitator gender. Subsequent re-readings (five readings in total) were undertaken to develop deeper understanding of the meanings participants were attributing to their reported perceptions in the context in which they were discussed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Emerging themes

were then compared across similar experiences, where common elements and patterns were brought together to posit generalisations of the phenomenon being discussed (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Continuing the iterative process, and as the themes relating to similar ideas were merged, sub-categories were clustered under broader themes. Contradictory and disconfirming elements that stood out were also used to enhance the exploratory nature of the research and test the reliability of the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An important part of interpreting the data required questioning the power dynamics at work in the experiences and symbolic expression of those. For example, this involved questioning gendered, social, interpersonal, professional, organisational and individual power and status at work as expressed in the data.

Throughout the data analysis process, the chief investigator engaged reflexively with the data. The reflexive process involved the chief investigator attempting to be open to the data and consider them as a collection of perspectives on the client-worker relationship, rather than categorising them according to her pre-understanding of client-worker relationships and MBCP participants.

The following meta-themes were generated through the data analysis process: individual attributes, individual actions, power, the nature of client-worker relationships, relationship phases, work environment, group aspects and change. Sub-themes provide details about the characteristics and components of the meta-themes.

The chief investigator used computer data analysis and management software, specifically NVivo (Version 8), to manage the complex and vast array of raw data.

## Ethical considerations

Study recruitment commenced after ethics approval from the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee (ECH-17-161). For this research study with vulnerable populations discussing sensitive topics, relevant

ethical issues include duty of care, participant safety (in particular for [ex-]partners), privacy and confidentiality, voluntary informed consent, a retrospective approach and recompense for expenses.

### Duty of care

All researchers have a duty to protect research participants from harm and to make sure that the research is of as much benefit to those participants as to the researcher and community (Macdonald & Macdonald, 1995). With this in mind, the researcher structured the recruitment and interview processes to minimise potential discomfort or distress for participants. This included ensuring those who recruited participants and conducted the interviews were experienced social welfare professionals with prior experience working with vulnerable populations, specifically in the area of DFV.

The interviewers were instructed to be aware of participants who displayed signs of distress and to refer the participant to a pre-arranged support person in the MBCP as required. In addition, interviews were conducted in safe and familiar soundproof rooms at the partnering MBCP offices. The interviewers contacted MBCP participants and (ex-)partners within three working days of the interview to query how they were feeling, reminding the participant of the agreement to aid and support participants as required. A support person was available for the duration of the interview outside the room. During and after the interview the advocate was able to engage with the participant to provide emotional support and ensure appropriate support services. However, no participant required the advocate to engage and provide emotional support.

### Participant safety

The safety of participants underpinned all aspects of the study. This included ensuring the interview was conducted in a safe and private location and reminding participants of the option to withdraw at any stage. During recruitment, researchers were careful to ensure participants did not feel compelled to join the study. Participants were also informed their involvement in the study had no bearing on their involvement with the service.

There was a risk that disclosure to MBCP participants that (ex-)partners would be invited to participate could create safety issues for some women. Consequently, the men were informed that the researchers would not disclose which (ex-)partners agreed to contribute. The men were reminded that the focus for interviews with (ex-)partners would be the client-worker relationship, not each man's personal relationship. (Ex-)partners were also informed about these arrangements. Three men requested that their ex-partners not be contacted for an interview.

The partnering organisations are very familiar with women making disclosures of violence. Participants were informed that Southern Cross University and partnering organisation policies required the researchers to disclose information about violence to the partnering organisation, and that the partnering organisations would act according to their policies, such as by contacting police. However, no instances of this occurred.

### Privacy and confidentiality

Usual privacy and confidentiality issues were complicated in this study by the rural context. Due to the small population size in the study area, the specific nature of the social welfare intervention under study and the need to recruit participants with MBCP experience, the sample size from which to recruit was small. Care was taken at the project development stage to maintain privacy and confidentiality during recruitment, data collection, analysis, reporting and dissemination.

All research participants were interviewed individually. No information about what was said during interviews was disclosed to any other study participant. Only the interviewer and the chief investigator know the details of the client-worker relationship dyad, and only the chief investigator knows which pseudonyms relate to particular client-worker relationship dyad case numbers.

Care was taken to analyse and present cases in a disaggregated and de-identified manner. Each participant was given a pseudonym, which was used for the duration of the project, including in publications. Findings are reported using the



relationship dyad number, and the participant's role in the dyad (e.g. MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 1, male facilitator in Relationship Dyad 30, supervisor from the NSW location in Relationship Dyad 15, (ex-)partner of MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 20). The deliberate choice to not use pseudonyms together with the relationship dyad number is an additional effort to maintain anonymity. Maintaining anonymity in rural communities can be difficult, particularly for research focused on the small number of people attending MBCPs. The partnering organisation and researchers were concerned that even minor details about research participants included in the quotations may make it possible to reconstruct who is being discussed, in particular if MBCPs were linked to facilitators. In order to ensure links between the original members of each client-worker relationship are not lost, a key sheet has been stored securely according to Southern Cross University research policies.

Participants were provided with multiple opportunities throughout the interviews for the recording device to be switched off. Recorded data was deleted immediately after transcription had occurred. The transcription documents were de-identified and secured in a password-protected folder on the Southern Cross University cloud according to the university's research data storage policy. No paper copies were made of interviews.

## Voluntary informed consent

Before subscribing to the study, and again at the beginning of each interview, participants were told that their participation in the interview was voluntary and they could withdraw at any stage (including after the interview if they felt concerned about what they had said and/or potential implications of this). They were also informed that being involved in the study was not linked in any way to their, or their (ex-)partner's, involvement with the service. No participants withdrew after they had participated in an interview.

## Retrospective approach

Involvement in the study only commenced after participants had completed their MBCP engagement, and took place within 12 months of having ceased involvement with the

organisation. This retrospective approach was taken to ensure minimal disruption to the client-worker relationship and intervention in the program. A retrospective approach was also taken in the hope that participants would not feel obligated to become involved out of attachment to the organisation, or feel stigmatised while still undertaking the intervention.

## Financial recompense

MBCP and (ex-)partner participants were given financial recompense for travel and potential childcare expenses by way of a \$30 shopping voucher. Recompense was provided to acknowledge and show respect for their perceptions, experiential wisdom, and time and energy required to participate. All MBCP and (ex-)partner participants accepted the payment. Although it is difficult to know for sure, it did not appear that the recompense was considered an inducement or influenced responses during interviews.

Facilitator and supervisor participants had time allocated for the interviews as part of their normal workday hours and received no other recompense from the project.

# Findings

This chapter outlines the findings from interviews with the MBCP participants, their facilitators, the facilitators' primary supervisor, and the MBCP participants' (ex-)partners. These interviews were analysed for what the participants perceived to be the purpose, value and meaning of the client-worker relationship in terms of changing the MBCP participants' violent attitudes and behaviours towards women. In presenting the data, some of the researcher's interpretation using a critical hermeneutic frame of reference is included.

The chapter outlines the findings with respect to the five main themes and related sub-themes:

- **Pre-existing determinants:** Certain elements existed prior to the development of the client-worker relationship that affected the MBCP participants' capacity, and willingness, to engage with the program and build a relationship. A related sub-theme is that the MBCP participants experienced strong feelings of vulnerability when engaging initially.
- **Facilitators' use of the client-worker relationship to assist program engagement:** This relates to the importance of the client-worker relationship for making a connection with a facilitator and for building trust, and was found to involve the facilitators engaging with the MBCP participants in relatable and authentic ways. A sub-theme was how the facilitators engaged in this way by using self-disclosure to achieve trust and an emotional bond.
- **Facilitators' use of the client-worker relationship to create a safe group work environment:** This outlines the ways in which the facilitators used the client-worker relationship to create a group environment in which the men felt safe enough to open up and make themselves vulnerable. Sub-themes explore how the facilitators used the safe environment to help the MBCP participants develop empathy and an emotional investment in the facilitators. These became factors in the men's change processes.
- **Facilitators' use of the client-worker relationship to enable change:** This theme relates to how the facilitators used the client-worker relationship to foster change, by situating the relationship as a place for the MBCP participants to practice relating to people in non-violent and caring ways, even when confronted and feeling vulnerable. Sub-themes included how the client-worker relationship helped foster change—that is, how it helped

the facilitators to learn about the man and why he was violent; how it challenged the man to learn about himself and why he was violent; and how it challenged, taught and guided the man to think and act differently.

- **Challenges and conflicts that arose for facilitators engaging in client-worker relationships:** These include challenges and conflicts relating to expectations, accountability, risk of collusion, unsupportive workplace environments and the need for understanding supervision.

Consistent with qualitative research, this chapter provides a combination of researcher analysis of the reported findings and direct quotes from participants to illustrate and encapsulate the themes. The participants are referred to by the relationship dyad with which they were involved, and pseudonyms are used in the quotes.

## Pre-existing determinants

MBCP participants, facilitators, supervisors and (ex-)partners of MBCP participants were asked to discuss their perceptions of the client-worker relationship prior to MBCP participants attending the program, and when beginning to build the relationship. Some factors related to MBCP participants' feelings of vulnerability were found to negatively affect their capacity and willingness to engage with the program and build a client-worker relationship.

## MBCP participants' feelings of vulnerability

Many MBCP participants discussed a heightened sense of vulnerability upon initially attending the program. This sense of vulnerability, which created either a barrier or motivation to engage in the program, emerged for the MBCP participants upon realising what coming to the program meant. Feelings included apprehension, fear, wariness, embarrassment, disappointment and shame.

Some MBCP participants reported how coming to the program initially manifested as embarrassment and disappointment in themselves for needing to come to a MBCP. The MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 3 said, "Obviously I was,

you know, disappointed in myself and sort of the charges that were being laid and whatever and didn't want be that person." Some MBCP participants also expressed feeling:

- resentful because they did not consider themselves to have the issues being discussed
- fear at the thought of meeting other violent men
- unsafe about having to deal with their personal issues
- anxious because coming to the MBCP group was a new and unfamiliar experience, so they did not know what to expect.

These feelings mostly related to a realisation that others considered the man a violent person, and the associated senses of shame and feeling judged. Some MBCP participants talked about assuming that everyone else viewed them as archetypal violent abusers ("woman-beaters"), and feeling ashamed to be considered this way. For example, as reported by the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 3:

I guess to make it easier to explain, there's a bit of shame coming to a place like this in this course. So, there's a bit of shame. There's a bit of embarrassment. There's a little of fear. I guess we're worried about how we're going to be perceived by a different person ... by a woman, you know, "Am I [a] woman-beater? What does she think of me?", that sort of thing.

The sense of shame came from awareness that someone deemed the MBCP participant to be violent and abusive towards women, and the realisation that by walking into the program, that could no longer remain hidden. Following on from this, some MBCP participants reported how the experience of hearing other people say their behaviour was violent and abusive helped them challenge their pre-understanding. The MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 3 said:

When you come here you go through a process of—of immense, you know, having your son and your—and your partner say to you, like, "You're freaking us out. You're really scaring us." It's—you go through a process of, like, pretty full on shame. So you're really shamed. Then you go into, like, the guilt. Then you sort of, trying to keep on that. And the reason why we come is so that ... it's like maintenance on yourself.

The MBCP participants who talked about these initial feelings discussed how the feelings either motivated them to engage, or created a barrier to engaging, in the program and feel willing to develop a bond with the facilitator. Some MBCP participants and facilitators reported how the realisation of what they had done to the people they loved overrode the strong, self-protective emotions. For example, the facilitator in Relationship Dyad 1 noted that the MBCP participant was motivated and willing to actively engage in the work, rather than resistant. Upon exploring perceptions for this, the facilitator noted:

He wasn't here to avoid jail. I think that he knew that his wife would probably leave if he didn't do something about himself and I think that was a big motivator but I don't think it was his motivator. I think his motivator was that he didn't want—well, it's intertwined with the child in the corner kind of cowering ... it was about actually him being a better man. It was about him saying: "For me to be a better man I actually have to be a better man for them, not for me ... It's like I have to make myself a better person for my family."

As noted by this facilitator, the MBCP participant was undertaking a reflexive process and realising he needed to change his behaviour, which, in the facilitator's words, involved the MBCP participant realising he needed to "be a better man" for his family.

However, some facilitators, supervisors and MBCP participants reported how, for many MBCP participants, initial feelings of anxiety and fear manifested as some form of resistance to building a client-worker relationship. This was particularly encapsulated by the female facilitator in Relationship Dyad 11, where the client-worker relationship was reported to have taken a while to develop. The facilitator discussed her perception about when the MBCP participant changed from resisting to being actively engaged in the work once he gained self-awareness around his behaviour:

I reckon that quite a lot [that] did make him shift was that one-on-one session ... And that was what opened everything up really ... so we look at the relationships with their parents, their childhood and their ideas of family and how that shaped through their family of origin. So, it's a kind of fairly therapeutic session ... And

just getting them to reflect on how that's shaped them as a man, as a father if they've got children. How that's shaping the person they want to be ... I see the lightbulb go on and I think yeah, you're on board now ... I think it's more around him having a better sense of the father he wanted to be.

The facilitator further discussed how it was not so much the client-worker relationship that made the difference to the MBCP participant, but his new understanding of himself, where he had come from and how this had impacted his past and present behaviour. According to the facilitator, the MBCP participant had begun to see with new awareness what this meant for the people around him, as much as for himself. The facilitator also noted how, prior to this point of raised self-awareness, the MBCP participant was guarded and there was a lack of connection in the client-worker relationship, but that after this point he engaged more authentically with the facilitator.

Data from the MBCP participants and their facilitators also showed some MBCP participants engaged in resistance towards the facilitators, or what they were trying to focus on. This resistance took many forms. It included MBCP participants being reluctant to talk or engage in group processes, or engaging in disruptive or confrontational behaviour, such as not letting the facilitators or other men talk, or using derogatory humour. It also included MBCP participants missing meetings, or attending when in breach of organisational policy (e.g. under the influence of alcohol or drugs). The MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 5 expressed this as follows:

There was a massive amount of resistance in me first of all to change, and to take this stuff on. Because, like, I got a lot of power. I don't want to have to give up my power. And, even though I could intellectually understand what they're talking about, my heart was like "No, fuck that" ... As a man I'm superior and all this other shit, yeah, yeah. And that, not from my head but from my heart that would kick up. And I saw it happening with other people too.

These expressed feelings amounted to the MBCP participants feeling powerless and vulnerable at the earliest stages of building a relationship with the facilitators. For example,

some MBCP participants discussed how when attending the group, prior to building a client-worker relationship with a facilitator, they felt disempowered, which they were not used to. Furthermore, upon beginning to build a client-worker relationship with the facilitators, some MBCP participants discussed finding themselves in situations where they felt emotionally uncomfortable or not in control of the situation, and had an emerging realisation they would have to confront their pre-understanding about self and power and change their behaviour.

## Facilitators' use of the client-worker relationship to assist program engagement

A number of facilitators discussed how the client-worker relationship was an initial factor in MBCP participants becoming engaged with the program. The male facilitator in Relationship Dyad 21 noted:

I've got to get this guy on board. I can't collaborate if he's staying separate, so I've got to try and engage him really quickly. I'm not going to do a psycho-educational program with him. All I'm doing is a human being to a human being, and trying to get him [to] recognise that I'm not a threat in any way, shape or form.

As illustrated here, facilitators relating as one human being to another was perceived to be important in helping the MBCP participants feel more positive about engaging in the program. A number of study participants discussed the importance of the facilitators coming across in such a way that the MBCP participants could identify with the facilitator as a "person".

## Relatable, authentic and credible facilitators

Many facilitators, MBCP participants and supervisors reported an array of characteristics which helped the facilitators to come across as one human being to another. This was most commonly discussed as the facilitators coming across as relatable, authentic and credible, involving facilitators displaying qualities such as honesty, trustworthiness, friendliness, warmth, empathy and respect, and being non-

judgemental and collaborative. In addition, MBCP participants reported that the facilitators maintained hope, optimism and expectation that the MBCP participants could and would change. Furthermore, the client–worker relationship helped the MBCP participants listen to facilitators’ perspectives and accept them as credible. This was reported to especially occur when facilitators came across as competent facilitators with relevant life experiences, particularly personal experiences of DFV and behavioural change.

Some supervisors, facilitators, MBCP participants and (ex-) partners expressed that an important aspect of facilitator relatability is presenting in a way that demonstrates they have also experienced a behavioural and attitudinal change process. Facilitators speaking from experience, and sharing personal insights of a change journey, helped MBCP participants learn processes regarding how to achieve attitudinal and behavioural change. This was illustrated by the (ex-)partner of the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 14:

[The facilitator’s] transparency makes him seem more human. He’s not just a person on a pedestal that tells you that this is good for you. But, “Hey, I’ve actually been there, and I’ve actually experienced A, B, C, and D, and I know that it can be done if you want it, and if you work hard at it.”

The MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 21 expressed a similar view when reflecting on a facilitator’s lack of honesty in the way he presented himself to MBCP participants. The MBCP participant reported noticing a perceived contradiction between what the facilitator was saying were acceptable attitudes and behaviour, while at the same time coming across as aggressive. He talked about how this reduced the facilitator’s credibility and impact in his eyes:

[MBCP participant:] But for me it wasn’t dirty enough, you know, I wasn’t—it wasn’t raw enough. It was still dressed up a bit. I think. And if I was to really get to the core of that, I would say well, I don’t think he was really well healed.

[Researcher:] Okay because he’s not being honest with himself, or what?

[MBCP participant:] Yeah, well I would just say I don’t think he’s really well healed. I don’t think he was a shining example of change, you know, even though his behaviours might have been good for some long time and all that sort of stuff, just in his—he sort of had a soft aggression to him, like a passive aggression, and all that sort of stuff.

One could argue that the facilitator’s inauthenticity discouraged trust, respect and motivation to work towards change for this MBCP participant, because they perceived the facilitator to be living by the principles he was challenging the MBCP participant to change. This sentiment was further supported by MBCP participants who discussed how facilitators’ relatability, authenticity and credibility was enhanced when they saw and engaged with facilitators within the local community. This was expressed as follows by the (ex-)partner of the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 6:

... because we live near the ocean, and [the male facilitator] surfs all the time. [MBCP participant also] surfs. And actually, we saw him out, around at [a local restaurant] one night. So, yeah, I think [MBCP participant] ... feels comfortable enough, or has been able to make contact with him outside of the program.

One concern raised is that this kind of situation might create a risk of MBCP participants and facilitators becoming confused about the difference between personal and professional relationships. This potential for boundary violations, which is explored further in the section on collusion, was mitigated by facilitators being explicit that the client–worker relationship existed to help MBCP participants change their behaviour, and clear that personal relationships between MBCP participants and facilitators would not develop outside the work environment.

To explore further the notion of how facilitators used relatability and an authentic approach within the client–worker relationships, the MBCP participants and facilitators were asked to describe other relationships they had experienced that had similar attributes. Most MBCP participants and facilitators described relationships being like a family member, friend, mentor or coach.

Some MBCP participants and facilitators described the client–worker relationship in familial terms, that is, it felt like talking or engaging with a family member—in particular a parent, older sibling, aunt or uncle. As the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 14 said, “He was almost like a father figure or uncle to me.” Both male and female facilitators also expressed similar sentiments. For example, the female facilitator in Relationship Dyad 18 noted how some MBCP participants considered her as like a sister:

Some of the guys would say to me, “You’re like our big sister.” They’d kind of go, “You feel like a big sister to us.” Even though they might be the same age as me, or older even. It was that kind of, “You’re kind of safe with me, but I’m going to tell you what I think, if I need to.”

Furthermore, some MBCP participants and facilitators drew a comparison between the client–worker relationship and a friendship, arguing that the client–worker relationship involved friend-like qualities. For example, the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 23 reported how the “friendly nature” of the facilitators helped create an environment that was familiar and not like that commonly experienced when attending a professional (or “clinical”) intervention:

Like I said, it’s not clinical. It is—you walk in, “Hey, how you going?” It’s just like walking into the pub, you know, “How you going? Sit down and have a drink.” Quite literally: there’s coffee, there’s milk, have a drink. Yeah, it’s just—it’s relaxed, you know.

Experiences of the “friendly nature” included feeling that the relationship provided someone to lean on, and to help get people through a challenging time, but also involved a sense of egalitarianism, trust and reliability. For example, the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 10 noted:

If he played the role of the facilitator that was like, you know, some high and mighty, I’d think he was an absolute wanker, and I wouldn’t be around him. So, I suppose it is, it’s an equality, it’s borderline a friendship, you know. I know it’s not like hanging out with my mates and stuff like that, but that thing that I said about the trust I’ve got with a few mates, and I’m sure they’re the same with me ... What [the facilitator’s] got is it’s just a person that I can trust and talk to. I know that he’s there, I know that he supports me, you know, growing to be a better person,

to be a safer person, and everything, you know. So I know that he’s dedicated to do that and I suppose that dedication then rubs off on me to be dedicated myself to do that.

Furthermore, drawing on the notion of the client–worker relationship having friendship-like qualities, the female facilitator in Relationship Dyad 18 expressed her perspective this way:

I think the aspects that it’s like a friendship, which for me is just how I approach human beings, is that I care about you. I care about your wellbeing. I really care about the wellbeing of your children and your partner, whether you’re together or not. That’s why I’m here. And so that level of genuine caring and compassion is there for me, and I’m not afraid to talk about it and say, “That’s why I’m sitting in this seat. That’s why I’m here. That’s what I’m going to bring to this group.” And you can see guys’ bullshit detectors ticking over, and they’re going, “Is she for real? Is she okay? Is she going to be ...” You know, whatever. But my experience is that by being honest and caring, and at the same time kind of being, “Hang on a minute; can we stop for a minute? Why did that laughter happen in the group right now?” [i.e., challenging them].

The friendship-like qualities of the client–worker relationship facilitated dialogue, opening up opportunities to hear new perspectives and to be challenged to critically reflect on preconceived ideas, personal values, and beliefs about women and acceptable ways of relating to women. This is because it created a safe and nurturing work environment of genuine care, which is a key theme discussed later in the chapter.

Most participants who described the client–worker relationship as being friend-like also discussed its differences to a friendship. In trying to understand the idea further, some MBCP participants and facilitators noted similarities to other relationships like mentoring, coaching, teaching or apprenticeship-type relationships. For example, the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 15 said:

Yeah, it’s not a friendship. And I was pretty sure from the first start I don’t have to be your mate. It was one of [the facilitator’s] first sentences. Then actually, yeah, it’s a little bit like my apprenticeship ... My boss went from

this whole thing from the start, “So you might hate me in this time, because I will drag you through shit. When you fuck up I will tell you you fucked up.” Yeah, it’s pretty much like your apprenticeship on a certain point.

Finally, attributes related to the client–worker relationship being viewed like a mentorship, coaching relationship or apprenticeship included loyalty (explained as committing to the man through a difficult change process), challenge, trust and honesty. Facilitators presenting this way helped MBCP participants build a client–worker relationship because, like an apprenticeship, the men identified with the process as a learning process. MBCP participants reported how, as with a mentorship or apprenticeship, the people they were learning from knew what they were talking about because they had been through a similar process. This was also reported to give the MBCP participants hope early in the process that they could also change.

### Facilitators’ use of self-disclosure to make a connection and build trust

MBCP participants reported that coming across as relatable included the facilitator making him or herself somewhat vulnerable and equal. This approach was only possible through facilitators disclosing elements of their personal self. Disclosure helped facilitators achieve engagement and helped the MBCP participants believe the facilitators were genuine, and like them in some way (i.e. relatable).

Facilitator personal disclosure made both the MBCP participant and facilitator vulnerable to each other, thus requiring mutual trust and respect. As noted by one supervisor:

The self-disclosure brings the humanity into the room. We can’t be perfect. We’re humans, we have bad days. We make mistakes. That’s where both facilitators go ... [laughing] “Yeah, I’ve had my bad days. I’ve had my road rage.” But, in actual fact, that’s yesterday ... So, we use it as an opportunity. You can see their attention. You need to get their attention.

Examples of personal disclosure reported by facilitators, MBCP participants and supervisors included similar interests

(e.g. surfing, music), personal challenges and vulnerabilities (e.g. child abuse, drug or alcohol addiction), and experiences of DFV. Most MBCP participants and some facilitators reported facilitators using disclosure of personal experience of DFV. This was either as abuser, in the case of three of the male facilitators, or having been abused, in the case of two of the female facilitators. Where this was reported to occur, it reinforced the idea of mutuality in the client–worker relationship. For example, as noted by the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 1:

There was no kind of, “I’m better than you” sort of stuff, or “I’m qualified”. He did let us know frequently that this was the program, this is why you’re here, and he’s been in a similar position. So, he wasn’t squeaky clean kind of sitting up there on his pedestal. That’s probably one of the biggest things that I could relate to him, because he was there. He told us about situations and we told him about our situation. We were on level ground, we were on the same page.

Some MBCP participants talked about facilitators’ personal disclosures in terms of being able to see something of themselves in the facilitator or discovering some point of similarity. A number of these participants noted that by doing this, facilitators redressed the power imbalance that they commonly experienced in relationships with professionals in MBCPs. These ideas were summed up by the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 21:

One of [the facilitator’s] main things is he’s really open. He’s an open book in group. So he leads the way. He doesn’t expect everyone will dig deep. He digs deep first. He spills what his history involves, and the things he has experienced being through—all the way back to his childhood traumas ... It just helps, because it’s encouraging. You know, you can see someone who has ... has changed incredibly. You know, for me to see that, and then for him to sort of really humbly open up to a group of men, and lead the way that—I don’t know, it’s just inspiring. It just makes you feel safe. It makes you feel safe to have someone lead the way. I mean, if we had someone there who wouldn’t disclose anything, I don’t know if I could have shared anything ... I would be suspicious of the facilitators. ... So, it’s a give and take thing. You know, you get it given to you, and it’s easier

to give back ... I don't know why it makes a difference. I think it's just that human connection thing. Yeah ... Just to feel trusted, to feel trusted—to trust someone else, and I mean trusted, that's not the right word. But safe ... you trust the situation enough to be safe enough to be vulnerable.

When facilitators opened up in this way, it helped the MBCP participants feel safe to honestly and openly disclose their own vulnerabilities. Other MBCP participants similarly reported how facilitator disclosure helped them feel empowered to engage in honest dialogue about their behaviour, inspired them to work towards change and gave them hope they could change. By way of contrast, some MBCP participants reported how they usually experienced professional power as surveillance, control and regulation of their behaviour, which created a barrier to being open and honest with the facilitator.

Personal disclosure by both male and female facilitators was reported to be equally important, albeit with different outcomes for the MBCP participants. For example, personal disclosure was reported to help the MBCP participants hear a different way of thinking about their situation through the life experience (in the case of male facilitators) of someone who has previously struggled with what it means to become aware that you have been abusive. The MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 4 discussed this in the following way:

I know there's a lot of anger management classes you can do, but again, that's most probably people that haven't been in that situation, and I just don't like psychs. I don't see [the male facilitator] as a psychiatrist. I just see him as another person that's been in that situation. And [the female facilitator, she's] been in that situation, or on the receiving end of that situation.

Some MBCP participants reported that when male facilitators disclosed, they felt inspired, motivated and optimistic because they could see the male facilitators had learned to interact in non-violent ways.

The female facilitators also used personal disclosure of aspects of their lives, especially of their DFV experiences, to

support the work and to challenge the MBCP participants. The female facilitator in Relationship Dyad 18 illustrated this in the following way:

Personal disclosure needs to be, for me, about them, not about me ... I can talk generally about, "in my journey". And men will often say, "We can tell that you've had stuff happen in your life." They say it in a way that's not putting me down or anything like that. They'll kind of say, "We can tell you've lived a life, and that you've come from a lived experience."

The value of the female facilitators engaging in personal disclosure was summed up in the following way by the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 5:

[MBCP participant:] Having a female facilitator in the room was amazing. That dynamic was super helpful ... that someone had been through—well, people had been through this stuff from both sides basically ... And also, the self-disclosure of her experiences of men's violence was amazing. Probably even better than anything [the male facilitator] did for changing my ... you know, when a woman says "I've been a victim of that, I've survived that, and this is what the effects have been for me, leading even to this day from years past", a big sense of shame, and really wanting things to change. Really, really motivated to change.

[Researcher:] And you could relate those experiences to, say, like your own partner and things like that?

[MBCP participant:] Yeah, and even my own experiences of being abused by people. So, I was like "Oh, wow, that's what I've done", you know what I mean? Yeah. And, through the group I started to realise I think that ... the whole power-over thing is really shitty. And that I'd negatively been affected by it, and that I was negatively affecting other people by mine, was really ... deep and helpful for me to want to motivate change.

The facilitators used personal disclosure as both a tool and mechanism. It provided a way to engage the MBCP participants in a trusting relationship. Through this relationship, the facilitators shared alternative perspectives. However, as



noted by the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 5, the facilitators also challenged the men to become aware of their attitudes and behaviours that were harmful to themselves and others in their lives, in particular the women with whom they were in intimate relationships. In this way, the facilitators used personal disclosure as a tool to engage the MBCP participants in the behaviour change process, but also as a mechanism for attitude and behaviour change.

## Facilitators' use of the client-worker relationship to create a group work environment

All the MBCP participants referred to how the client-worker relationship contributed to them feeling safe, which helped them engage, build trust, accept challenges and work towards change. Some MBCP participants described the relationship with their facilitator as “nurturing”, “warm” or as a “supportive mechanism”. Many facilitators and supervisors reported that the client-worker relationship helped the MBCP participants to feel comfortable working with the facilitators. They also attributed the feeling of safety to trust-building between facilitators and MBCP participants.

The facilitators also used the client-worker relationship to challenge the men to raise their self-awareness about how their behaviour was not safe for other people, in particular their (ex-)partners. This was illustrated by the male facilitator in Relationship Dyad 16:

We're here to learn how to be safe and respectful. Really, that's the bottom line. So, we can say all these other words about not controlling, and non-violent, and not abusive, all of that sort of stuff. But we're really here to learn how to be safe and respectful 100 percent of the time, regardless of what's happening ... They can't do that stuff without some form of relationship, like without them knowing that I'm not just some bullshit artist, or without them having some faith that what I'm telling them is real, yeah, and that they can trust that. But they can also challenge it.

This involved using the experience of safety within the client-worker relationship to guide the MBCP participants

to reflect critically on their behaviour, and to work towards becoming men who created safety in their relationships.

A safe and trusting client-worker relationship created a new experience for the MBCP participants, where they could become attentive to deeply hidden preconceptions about themselves and DFV and open up about these. This was encapsulated in the following way by one supervisor from the New South Wales site, as follows:

And building up the relationship is about building up a relationship that he may never have experienced before, which is a relationship of trust where he feels safe in a way, and that he's having to go places emotionally. That he's come to an understanding that he has an inner life, which a lot of men don't. I mean, masculinity generally doesn't value the kind of inner life ... So, once you start to value your own inner life, you start to see other people have got inner lives. But also, the fact that if you hurt someone, it actually causes you pain now. So, it's not just about giving them information. It's not just some kind of CBT [cognitive behaviour therapy] sort of thing.

The client-worker relationship provided a valuable opportunity for the men to open up in dialogue with the facilitator about what was really going on, which was important in helping them become more self-aware. This is illustrated in the example of one facilitator in Relationship Dyad 12:

So, his guard was down, and he was talking about the things that were really important. It felt to me that it was [a] really strong, open and healthy working relationship. We were really making progress versus those relationships where it is quite evident that you're stuck. You are just not getting anywhere.

Making progress involved hearing alternative perspectives on the experience of abusive relationships and being challenged to understand the meaning of the MBCP participants' behaviour for others. It also involved being challenged to reflect critically on how they would feel if someone who purported to care for them treated them in ways they had treated the people in their lives who they purported to care for.

## Demonstrating and teaching empathy and care

Some MBCP participants, facilitators and supervisors raised the idea of the value of empathy and care in the client–worker relationship in helping them work through the change process. Some MBCP participants described empathy as a type of compassionate understanding facilitators had of them, due to having been through something similar themselves. For example, when discussing how the male facilitator demonstrated he was genuinely concerned and wanted to help, the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 11 said:

He was able to just empathise with you and he was just—yeah. So, I think because he could bring himself into reality where you are at ... He really knows, it's not just through books and degrees, it's through experience ... But he would definitely demonstrate compassion for every individual, empathy.

Regarding empathy, some MBCP participants said that the client–worker relationship felt like a safe environment for them to be honest about their feelings when facilitators demonstrated empathetic understanding. Some MBCP participants reported that facilitators demonstrated empathy by being comforting at times, and explaining what to expect throughout the intervention and change process.

The notion of care was linked to, but differentiated from, empathy. An example of this is reported by the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 2:

I think [empathy and care are] different because empathy is, "I can understand what experiences you've gone through". Care is, "I can't under—I might not be able to understand what you've gone through, but I can see that you're suffering, and I want to help you in some way."

Some MBCP participants and facilitators reported how learning empathy was a crucial facet in the change, and that facilitators used empathy to teach MBCP participants what it feels like to care for another person. For example, the female facilitator in Relationship Dyad 9 reported how she used the empathy developed through the client–worker relationship to provide MBCP participants with a challenging insight into what it may be like for the women and children who are on

the receiving end of their abusive attitudes and behaviours. The power of this lay in an MBCP participant feeling empathy for a woman he had come to care for, in this case the female facilitator. Another female facilitator in Relationship Dyad 9 used this type of approach to challenge the men to make a similar connection regarding their partners:

I remember just sitting with this level of frustration to the point that I couldn't anymore and I just said, "I'd just like to invite everybody to stand up" and then I did and, you know, I'm only a very little person, and I don't think that really—well, it is more effective, I have to say. But just me being in a room of 14 men standing, and I said, "This is what I look at every day and my partner is not abusive. So, I'd just like you to think about what that's like for [your partner]. You're not at imminent threat from her, and she's responding to your abuse. She's doing what she has to. But you're not unsafe. I'm actually unsafe just here doing this" and [the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 9] responded to that. He said, "That was amazing. That really did something for me."

When the facilitators demonstrated empathy, it helped the MBCP participants to become emotionally invested in them and supported the change process. This emotional investment was noted by some facilitators as being especially helpful for keeping the men engaged when confronting and challenging them about their violent behaviour. This is illustrated through the words of the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 16 who, when discussing his client–worker relationship with the male facilitator being like a father–son relationship said, "Well you kind of don't want to let your dad down I suppose ... He seemed to care." The MBCP participant discussed how this connection helped him persevere despite the experience being difficult, confronting and challenging.

Some facilitators discussed using the emotional investment the MBCP participants had developed with female facilitators to confront the men to critically reflect on how they chose to be violent towards some women, but not others. The MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 6 said:

There were a number of times where she was either—nervous is not the right word—but apprehensive about saying something, or she was taken aback because of some of the commentary that was coming out from some of

the members. It's quite visible to see that she was upset by some of the reactions at times. But she's a trooper. She stuck firm with it. For someone—in that instance I can understand it would have been hard for her, a group of eight and sometimes up to 12 men, some of them on the front foot. For her to sort of stand firm and give—not be a female advocate but just trying to get people to understand, men in particular understand, what can go on and how it can impact people et cetera et cetera ... We're the ones there as the students so to speak.

When the MBCP participants responded in respectful and non-violent ways, the facilitators would challenge the MBCP participants to question themselves about why they could do this with the female facilitators who they had an emotional connection with, but not their (ex-)partners.

## Facilitators' use of the client-worker relationship to enable change

Facilitators, MBCP participants, (ex-)partners and supervisors all reported that the primary purpose of the client-worker relationship was to challenge and support the MBCP participants to change their behaviour. For example, as noted by the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 1, "He [the facilitator] was there for me, and I was there to sort my shit."

### Learning about each man and why he is violent

Some facilitators reported that a client-worker relationship involving trust, respect, honesty and openness helped them gain insights into the MBCP participants and their needs. As such, the client-worker relationship helped the facilitator to learn about the MBCP participant, including why he was violent and what he needed in order to change. The facilitator in Relationship Dyad 1 illustrated this:

Without a doubt, what I'm doing here is I'm attempting to support men to change their behaviour, and that means their violence, whether it's physical or emotional or spiritual or mental. They're abusive. They're controlling. Any use of intimidation or dominance. Any form of power over. And I'm really clear about that. I don't have any qualms about that. But I don't believe for a second

that that's possible ... without an understanding of their position ... You have to get to know them. You have to form a relationship with them.

Some facilitators reported how learning about the MBCP participants helped them tailor their approach to working with men during group processes. They reported how tailoring the approach made it possible to challenge the men in such a way that they stayed engaged in the program. Tailoring the approach included attentively observing and listening in order to ascertain the men's unique characteristics, such as personality, needs, communication style and potential triggers for strong emotions. As noted by the male facilitator in Relationship Dyad 2, the client-worker relationship helps with

gauging ... how vulnerable, how sturdy, how robust each individual is. Like, how capable are they of being directly told straight up that, "You're actually behaving like a four-year-old child in a 40-year-old's body, and, you know, that's actually kind of really off mate," you know. I can't say that to some men, because they just wouldn't understand it, or wouldn't take it, or it would just hurt them really badly.

### Challenging the man to learn about himself and why he was violent

Some facilitators, MBCP participants, supervisors and (ex-)partners reported that the client-worker relationship helped facilitators challenge the MBCP participants to develop greater, and more critical, self-awareness about their violent behaviour and the underlying reasons for this. For example, the (ex-)partner of the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 16 said:

The rapport that he has with [the male facilitator's] he can at least see his life through someone else's eyes. He's listened to [the male facilitator's] stories and gone, "Shit, I've done that". Or he listens to other people's stories and goes, "Oh shit, I've done that too".

This idea was supported by MBCP participants, and was explained in the following way by the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 12:

I felt very strong attachment to the facilitators. I liked being with them, talking with them ... I felt that I wanted to be near them, and talk to them, because I felt that it was helping, making some change ... I liked the way that they presented stuff, and I felt that inch by inch, as it were, it was helping me to unravel, and helped me to understand what's going on inside my head, so the nuts and bolts could fall together. And it did, a lot, in a lot of things. Driving all that sort of stuff, you know. It really changed my life.

The female facilitator in Relationship Dyad 15 discussed this as follows:

[Facilitator:] We might have all sorts of content and a theory we're exploring that week or whatever, but unless I've got a respectful working relationship with that man, then we can talk about theory and whatever ... [Pause]

[Researcher:] It's not going to make a difference.

[Facilitator:] No.

Some facilitators discussed how they used the client-worker relationship to challenge the MBCP participants' representations of themselves as victims in the situation, which they used to justify their violence. The facilitator in Relationship Dyad 10 articulated this as follows:

Most men, pretty much all men, come here saying, "I'm a victim, but I'm being accused of being a perpetrator". What I do is, I say, "Your victim status has some validity, but you're not a victim, you're actually an adult ... and the way you responded to feeling like a victim was the behaviour of a fucking idiot" ... and I don't use that language until the relationship is there.

In this way, the client-worker relationship was reported to provide a forum for the MBCP participants to listen to, and take notice of, outside perspectives on their violent attitudes and behaviours, and to gain insight into themselves. The client-worker relationship was identified as a key factor in determining whether or not the MBCP participants were interested in what the facilitator had to say when discussing challenging ideas. As such, the client-worker relationship

helped the MBCP participants learn new ways of thinking about their situations, including why they held attitudes that support violence and chose to engage in violent behaviour.

Furthermore, the client-worker relationship with female facilitators was particularly useful for helping the men gain awareness of, and develop insight about, their violence towards their (ex-)partners. For example, the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 15 noted:

So [I] heard from [the female facilitator's] version. And also [the female facilitator] can stay in there and say, "Oh I feel all right now, uncomfortable or a little bit hurt. Not really want to be here right now" ... sometimes I don't understand, when I try to go back and analyse the whole situation, what we could have done to—or what I could have done to make her feel uncomfortable. And that's just what I try with my partner as well and other females as well ... She definitely gets me to the point where I think about how I react when another woman is around ... Yeah, different perspective ... she definitely challenged me on this point.

This MBCP participant talked about how the respect and care he had developed for the facilitator helped him take note when she spoke, and he wanted to learn from her. In his mind, this was particularly useful as he used it to try to think more deeply about the challenge she laid out and to make sense of the impact of his behaviour on other women. He argued that the client-worker relationship enhanced his capacity to understand the issues because, without it, he would not have thought about the issue in relation to other women.

Some female facilitators similarly reported how their client-worker relationships helped the MBCP participants consciously pay attention to differences between how they related to the female facilitators compared to their (ex-)partners. For example, the female facilitator in Relationship Dyad 18 reported feedback from MBCP participants about the way in which a client-worker relationship with female facilitators challenged the men to critically self-reflect:

A number of men have said things like, "I realise how important it is to have a woman in the room, because you kind of remind me about my partner, but you're not my

partner, and you're not coming across like my partner. But the way you're expressing yourself, and the way you do express yourself, I kind of wish that I could be more like I am in the group with my partner.”

Female facilitators also discussed the way in which the client–worker relationship between MBCP participants and female facilitators contributed to challenging the men to better understand themselves, including their values, beliefs and assumptions about violence and their violent behaviour. For example, the female facilitator in Relationship Dyad 16 said:

I'm in a space where it's unique. I'm the only woman in there and the expectation that they respect me is actually really not fair. They don't respect their partner. There's something in their value system that says women are less than them. So, me expecting respect in there is almost unfair, yet I will get it, even on a superficial level. I will get it because of all the things that support them to be violent at home. Their value system might say I can't be disrespectful in this room. Just like I can't at the bank, or at the coffee shop, or wherever I am when someone's done something to piss me off. But I can at home because my value system says that when she does that, I can ... It takes it from the superficial to the core. So, if a man can genuinely respect me and understand what that feels like as a human being—be challenged by me, have fun with me, do whatever we do in our relationship—then my belief and my hope I guess, is that he takes that into his relationship with his partner. Where he can have genuine respect for her which eliminates the possibility of abuse ... So, it's about his experience, and being able to relate it to something. His experience of that, and whether that happens or not, I hope that it does, but I can't work with him on any other level other than on a genuine personal level. And if we can get to that, and he experiences that from a woman, and for all those reasons I talked about, then there is potential for him to have that at home, and respect her.

This facilitator argued that the client–worker relationship with a female facilitator supports challenge and change at a deep level, because it taps into what having a personal connection with another human being means. She argued that through this relationship (where the man learns to relate

to the female facilitator as another human being, not as a female), the facilitator challenges the man to reflect critically on the kind of values he holds that allow him to be abusive to his female partner but not to women in a professional context. This facilitator reported how she is conscious of how she uses the personal connection with the man through the client–worker relationship to challenge this paradoxical set of values and behaviour. As such, a reported value in the client–worker relationship lies in the concrete experience of being in a respectful and equal, yet challenging, relationship with a woman, rather than merely teaching concepts about respect and non-violence towards women.

Some facilitators also explored the association between poor client–worker relationships and unsuccessful attempts to challenge the MBCP participants to explore their violence and the underlying reasons for it. This occurred for male and female facilitators. The female facilitator in Relationship Dyad 22 summed up these ideas in the following way:

Before we had a connection, he was dismissive and disrespectful, so I had to build connection to achieve acceptance, respect, and for him to be willing to listen and hear. Because it was obvious right from the beginning, I didn't have that without any relationship with him, so I had to build that to get that.

Others also reported how, when the client–worker relationship seemed weak or rapport seemed limited, the MBCP participants seemed unwilling to see themselves as an abusive person. Instead, they saw themselves as victims, and were unwilling to critically reflect on the violence as a choice.

## Challenging the man to think and act differently

The client–worker relationship, when it was a safe, supportive, nurturing and empathetic environment, was reported to become a platform from which the facilitators could challenge the man to understand his values, beliefs, assumptions and behaviours, and the impact of these on himself and others. A primary purpose of the client–worker relationship is helping the MBCP participant understand that the process of change is difficult but imperative to involvement in the MBCP. This also involved the facilitators establishing expectations about

the men's involvement in the MBCP, and holding the men accountable to engage actively in the work of behaviour change.

Facilitators, MBCP participants and supervisors reported how facilitators needed to challenge and confront the men, albeit in a caring and supportive way, when their behaviour or attitude did not align with the purpose of the work. This specifically involved encouraging the MBCP participants to engage in a safe, respectful and equal manner with the women and children with whom they were connected and recognising when they demonstrated positive change. Facilitators reassured the MBCP participants that they would be there as a support to help the men learn new ways of behaving. The client-worker relationship was considered central to this learning process.

### A role model for different ways of being in a relationship

Many MBCP participants and facilitators reported how the client-worker relationship provided opportunities to role model and practise what a healthier and more beneficial relationship looked and felt like. This is illustrated through discussion with the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 5.

[Researcher:] So overall, how do you think that connection with the worker, the connection with [the male facilitator], just overall changed your behaviour?

[MBCP participant:] Totally man, totally, 100 percent, chalk and cheese. Like I've done some anger management stuff through some drug rehab or some shit like that, and some clinicians coming up, and they've got a slide show, and you're all sitting down, and ... No connection. And no change. Whereas you walk in with [the male facilitator], there's that self-disclosure, the guy's got a fair bit of wisdom outside of this stuff, and that really opened me up to want to change ...

[Researcher:] So, he was a role model?

[MBCP participant:] A little bit, yeah. I'd definitely say that, I'd go as far as to say that.

This conception of the facilitator as role model was supported by the (ex-)partner of the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 14:

I'm not like a psychologist or whatever, but I feel like [the male facilitator] was almost like a ... well, he is, he's a positive male role model in [the MBCP participant's] life, and his father wasn't that, and his uncles weren't that.

MBCP participants learned new ways of behaving in relationships by having a space to see good relationships in action. The MBCP participants heard personal disclosures of abusive behaviour that they could relate to their own experiences. They reported how the facilitators demonstrated the change they were talking about. This included how men and women can safely and respectfully disagree, as noted by the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 15:

So, it's not just [the male facilitator] talking about things. Then also [the female facilitator] comes [in] on a certain point, "I agree with all ... he is saying, but this part is wrong, and I think you have to see it more from this side." Yeah, the main thing is she just brings this—they're good at what they're doing.

These client-worker relationships were characterised by facilitators and MBCP participants mutually displaying honesty and humility and feeling safe, and by personal disclosure of vulnerability. The client-worker relationship created a culture in which the MBCP participants could participate in new ways of relating with men and women that they could then take into their personal relationships. Through engaging with male and female facilitators and observing the client-worker relationship between facilitators, the MBCP participants experienced the client-worker relationship as a model of relationships where men and women were equal, and that were not violent or coercive. This direct experience of being in relationships with women who expected respect and equal standing was key to challenging the men to unpack their values and assumptions about women.

Another key sub-theme relates to the MBCP treating the men with understanding and ensuring the MBCP message and actions are consistent. Part of this involved the experiential nature of these client-worker relationships. That is, the men got

to actually experience, rather than just hear about, concepts about how to behave differently in relationships. For example, when the facilitators confronted and challenged the MBCP participants, it was usually done with care, through adopting a guidance/teaching approach, rather than berating the MBCP participants. As such, the client-worker relationship provided an experience of being in a respectful relationship that involved a caring response to conflict. This was noted as follows by the female facilitator in Relationship Dyad 12:

The guys have got to call their partners by their first name. Not “she” ... So, we get a sense of who that person is as well and I challenge them all the time if they call them something else. “What’s her name?” [The MBCP participant] made the point of making a little dig ... about it. He wouldn’t call her by her name, and he wouldn’t call her anything, and it was a real problem. Then I could see that he was pressing my boundary around that, and I thought I’m not going to push you on that. I’m just going to keep reminding you. What I do normally is if somebody does the opposite in a group I’ll just say “I love how you use such-and-such’s name, I appreciate that.” I just role model it from other people without kind of pinpointing him and saying “Why won’t you call her name?” I don’t make an issue out of it ... No one’s actually kind of role modelled them respectful communication.

This was further supported by the supervisor at the Queensland site when discussing the notion of change taking time, and how at times during the program men may fail to act in ways they have been taught. The supervisor argued that it is important at these times to have an understanding, supportive, non-judgemental and flexible workplace that can accept that some men might need to come and go at times. The supervisor further argued that if men are not treated like this, and are not invited to stay connected or to reconnect with the organisation, it reinforces their previous negative experiences of relationships. In doing so, the organisation could be seen to be working against its primary purpose, which is to seek men’s behaviour change.

Furthermore, some facilitators and MBCP participants reported that the client-worker relationship provided an opportunity for the MBCP participants to see alternative, non-violent ways to react when they may not know the

answers, or when they made a mistake. The facilitator in Relationship Dyad 14 illustrated this:

Yeah, not knowing is actually part of being alive. This is one of the things that, as boys, or men ... we’re taught not to not know. If we don’t know, we’ve failed. Whereas in actual fact, if we don’t know, that’s really authentic and genuine and it’s a great way for us to learn, to find out ... They’ve met all these experts, yeah. If they’ve come through Corrections [Corrective Services] or they’ve come through solicitors, or they’ve come through the courts in some way, or the police. They haven’t met anyone yet who has said to them, “Geez, I’m actually a bit baffled”.

The MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 10 explained this further, arguing that the client-worker relationship was a factor in learning new ways of communicating. When discussing this idea, he reported that he had not grown up with the kind of language he was now learning was necessary for engaging in healthy relationships. He discussed how, by hearing the facilitator admit that he did not know the answer, it changed his thinking:

I love the way [the facilitator] talks in group all the time ... he voices not being able to express what’s happening to him, but he knows something’s happening, you know. I suppose, that’s the thing, is when you’ve got, you know, long-term behaviours that’ve been dysfunctional that you don’t really know how to deal with, instead of acting out and, you know, being negative about it, to be able to actually go, “I don’t know what’s going on, I’m scared about this, I need to talk to you about this, but I don’t know how to talk about it.”

He discussed learning safer, more appropriate and respectful ways of engaging in situations where he felt vulnerable and where conflict was present. In particular, he discussed having increased self-awareness about feeling vulnerable and learning to express what is actually going on for him, rather than behaving violently. As such, he discussed learning how to become more open in his relationships with others.

## A place to practise non-violent ways of relating

The client–worker relationship was also used to provide the MBCP participants with opportunities to practise new ways of behaving and relating to people (in particular, when challenged), as reported by the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 23 when speaking about his primary facilitator:

With the experience and the skills he’s got, he could so easily destroy anybody, you know, in their mental safety. But he didn’t. He used all of his skills and experience to make us feel, if anything, more comfortable, more safe ... The way he uses [power], you know. We’re all—in group we’re all men—we all have the capacity of being powerful, you know, we’ve all got the capacity to kill anyone smaller and [more] frail than us. He has the power to mentally destroy us with our own realisations. But instead he helps us to understand them and process them and use them in a way that’s beneficial to us.

This quote is an example of the MBCP participant’s pre-understanding, or symbolic representation, of maleness being challenged. Without the client–worker relationship, the man would not have had this experience of feeling vulnerable and realising how the facilitator responded differently to the MBCP participant’s expectation. The client–worker relationship provided a place to practise empathy, and confronted and challenged people in safe and respectful ways.

Many MBCP participants discussed how the client–worker relationship provided opportunities to practise being in relationships quite different to the violent ones they were used to. For example, the facilitator in Relationship Dyad 1 identified that an underlying reason men need to attend the intervention relates to a paucity of relationships where men can learn to be, and practise being, the kind of men they want to be—for this facilitator, the client–worker relationship is a central “vehicle” for change:

What I am trying to do is provide some of that connection, some of that space of, “I don’t know how to live in a society, and be the man that I think is decent, respectful, worthwhile, powerful, passionate, all of the nice things that we want me to be, on my own” ... I think that’s

true for all men. And so how do we connect each other through some form of relationship? And this has been the vehicle for me.

Similarly, the male facilitator in Relationship Dyad 18 discussed how the facilitators use the client–worker relationship as a tool for the men to practise change:

... so, him seeing that I don’t respond violently, or in a way that’s controlling, when there’s difficulty in the relationship, whether it’s with him or another group member. He sees me just consistently coming back to a non-violent way of engaging in [the] relationship. The way that the relationship supports that when he escalates in [the] group is sometimes ... actually by just naming it, saying that what’s going on right here is relational, you’re escalating because of what is going on between you and I, a question I’ve asked or something I’ve challenged you on. So, let’s see if we can, you know, if you can manage yourself, you know, so you don’t start blaming others, or start to get threatening or whatever. Like, I wouldn’t say that overtly, but it’s actually a thing saying right now, right here, the way that you engage in this relationship is being tested ... So, you’re using the relationship in that moment by almost naming it as the thing that’s on the table you know.

The quote illustrates how facilitators use the client–worker relationship to demonstrate a different way of communicating between men. The facilitator used the client–worker relationship to challenge the MBCP participants to learn to do the same and build an expectation and belief in each man that he can change and become more able to express himself in this more respectful way.

The facilitator in Relationship Dyad 14 discussed a situation that arose with one MBCP participant who had spent weeks talking about women in a disrespectful and dehumanising way. The facilitator described how he spent this time trying to counter the MBCP participant’s language gently, in order not to back the man into a defensive state. According to the facilitator, this involved the facilitator providing a different perspective on the behaviour and linking the man’s attitude to concepts about men’s violence that they were learning.



However, the facilitator reported that he finally felt compelled to challenge the man in a more forthright way. After doing so, the facilitator recounted that the MBCP participant phoned the facilitator out of session time to request an individual appointment. The facilitator expressed being surprised the MBCP participant had done so, because he had ignored the facilitator for so long, being highly dismissive of the facilitator's requests to speak more respectfully of women. The facilitator reported how, upon meeting, the MBCP participant opened up about facts about his life that left him very exposed and vulnerable to the facilitator. The facilitator summed this up, including the role of the client-worker relationship, in the following way:

So, he rang me ... and said, "I need some one on one, can I have some one on one with you". He came and he bled his soul and he talked to me about his relationship with his mother and all sorts of stuff, you know. I was kind of a bit surprised, because I knew there was a mutuality in it and a connection, but I didn't think he liked me very much.

As such, the client-worker relationship can demonstrate this new way of relating to others. As noted by the male facilitator in Relationship Dyad 18:

You know, this sort of stuff that you're talking about, like all of it's about how I do relationship in the moment you know and actually walk the talk, actually embody the work of people like [Alan] Jenkins who, you know, talk about power all the time.

In this kind of way, the client-worker relationship supported the MBCP participants to reflect critically on their violent attitudes and behaviours, and ways in which they hold power over other people, in particular women. It provided an environment where the MBCP participants were challenged to engage in dialogue with alternative perspectives on power and violence, including from facilitators who may have experienced either being an abuser or being abused. From within the client-worker relationship dyads, the MBCP participants learned respectful and non-violent alternatives, and practised these in safety.

In addition, some MBCP participants talked about how they were using the techniques and knowledge in how they related

to other people in their lives—for example, in the case of the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 10, with his children:

I suppose that's the language that [the facilitator] uses on a regular basis that I'm starting to use ... yeah just being able to express something that you can't express ... Yeah, it's awesome, it's working with my kids and everything, that's really changed a lot.

Some study participants reported a sense of the wider sphere of influence of the MBCP work. Some facilitators and MBCP participants discussed the value of the client-worker relationship as a starting point for men to build networks with other men who want relationships that are safe and respectful of men and women. This was encapsulated by the facilitator in Relationship Dyad 1:

... [trying] to support [the men] towards conversation. So, to be able to support them when they're sitting at the footy club just talking about women in a certain way to be able to engage in that conversation in a way that's supporting this work, and helping to alter that work. But without making a pariah of themselves or without out-casting themselves, those sorts of things.

By this, the facilitator meant that the client-worker relationship created opportunities for change that extended beyond the men with whom a working relationship was directly made. This amounted to a perception of how the client-worker relationship makes it possible to vicariously influence the lives of many other people with whom MBCP participants have interpersonal relationships. This was noted by the male facilitator in Relationship Dyad 21:

I will give him information to keep him safe. Primarily because this is the guy I'm talking to. But also, if I can convince him to change a little bit of his life before he leaves that room. I'm also starting that, I've lit the blowtorch paper of this firework where he will get the message, and it is going to help somebody else. If he's got a partner, kids, grandkids or the next-door neighbour.

This was supported by participants across all four cohorts (MBCP participants, [ex-]partners, facilitators and supervisors). For example, the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 23

reported that he now sees opportunities for change among his network of friends:

Well, most of my friends I've known for a long time. They know how cranky I can be. They know how frustrated I can be and yet they're still here. If they can see that I'm making progress then, you know, hopefully they can see that they can make progress too.

This type of idea was also supported by the (ex-)partner of the MBCP participant in Relationship Dyad 14. She noted that the client-worker relationship made men accountable for learning how to challenge other men in their networks to behave in a more respectful and less violent way:

And that's been the biggest thing for [MBCP participant], which is what I was saying before, was that he was taught this, and he was taught that maybe you should be pulling up the men in your life who say these kinds of things, or behave in that kind of way. Because it's reminding them from another man who they respect, or whatever, that, "Hey man, it's probably not cool."

Through engaging in open dialogue with the facilitators, and being challenged to consciously apply new perspectives to their own lives, the client-worker relationship helped facilitate a reflexive process for the MBCP participants. This helped the MBCP participants to challenge themselves and raise their self-awareness about their violent attitudes and behaviours.

## Challenges and conflicts that arose for facilitators engaging in client-worker relationships

Research participants identified a number of challenges related to building effective client-worker relationships. A client-worker relationship creates certain expectations and a sense of accountability that can increase facilitators' emotional load. There is also a risk of collusion, which can create unsafe working environments for female facilitators. The following section explains these challenges in further detail.

## The client-worker relationship can heighten the emotional load for facilitators

One challenge for facilitators occurred when it became apparent that MBCP participants had engaged in behaviour outside the group that was contrary to the way they behaved when in the group, such as perpetrating DFV again. Some male and female facilitators, and their supervisors, reported how this created an increased emotional load on the facilitators, which manifested differently across gender lines. As explained by one supervisor from the New South Wales organisation:

I think it has a different impact on men and women [facilitators]. I think on the men there's a disappointment [and] a bit more acceptance. It's like, "This hasn't gone well" but I guess they probably expect based on their own experience that there's going to be relapses, and there's lots of stuff-ups, and the process is really slow. Whereas I find the women perhaps are a little bit more attached to "This needs to happen this week because there's a woman that's not safe and that is just not okay ..." Not to say that us male workers don't think about women and children, obviously, but it's a different experience to know for the woman worker what she's just gone through after three months of hope. She might have let her guard down. She might be heaps more hopeful. Then he's done this to her. How wounding, for her, sort of, heart, or for her spirit ... I think that the anger toward the men for the female facilitators in a relapse I think is more clear, more emphasised ...

Facilitators concurred. For example, some male facilitators reported a tendency to feel let down and disappointed, while some female facilitators reported experiencing more of a breach of trust by the MBCP participants. Both male and female facilitators who spoke of this said the different responses were due to how the MBCP participants' behaviour triggered a reminder of a facilitator's own experiences of DFV. The male facilitator in Relationship Dyad 10 summed this up in the following way:

A lot of my discomfort with seeing [MBCP participant] have difficulty with those experiences was relating to my experience of it. Seeing similarities in that space of, I guess, shame, that realisation, that beginning of starting to confidently see the bigger picture of things and just

thinking, “Oh shit. I have never considered myself a bad person, but I have been doing this thing wrong all my life ...” I feel the struggle and in ways, I feel his pain. It’s me revisiting my memories, but me also relating to his experience of it.

In addition, while facilitators of both genders reported feeling let down and disappointed, depending on the level of violence perpetrated, the female facilitators were more likely to express feeling unsafe to continue working with the MBCP participants. Male facilitators reported a tendency to feel empathy, remembering their experiences of changing their behaviour as a series of backwards and forwards steps over an extended period. Female facilitators were more likely to recall their own experiences of previously violent partners or ex-partners breaching trust through incidences of violence. This created an emotional load on male and female facilitators alike.

Facilitators also discussed the heavy emotional toll experienced when MBCP participants left the program. The facilitator in Relationship Dyad 10 encapsulated this idea when speaking about one client–worker relationship dyad in particular: “These are really strong words, but it kind of touches on aspects of grief and loss. This relationship is ending and it’s not going to be the same again.” For this facilitator, the client–worker relationship ending was felt so profoundly that the facilitator even associated it with the experience of grief and loss when a friendship ends.

Some facilitators reported how the broader professional context—that is, outside the organisation—can negatively affect facilitators. One reported concern related to the burden facilitators who engage in personalised client–worker relationships carry when other professionals do not fully understand the role and value of client–worker relationships conducted this way. For example, the male facilitator in Relationship Dyad 9 said, “There’s some real challenges for me, in the sector, with it, because a lot of people [say] ‘Oh, that’s not professional’.” The facilitator reported how this occurred during a conference of the DFV sector when he and a colleague were involved in a session discussing working with MBCP participants in a personalised way. Both he and his colleague (who was also part of the study) discussed how

this resulted in other professionals at the conference judging and deriding their professionalism. Both the facilitator and his colleague reported how this placed a higher emotional burden on them, including making them feel ashamed of their personalised approach, and it negatively impacted their confidence.

The facilitators and supervisors who raised these kinds of challenges reported informal and formal ways the organisations supported facilitators to maintain emotional and physical wellbeing so they could maintain their client–worker relationship with MBCP participants. Formal supports included maintaining regularly scheduled team and individual supervision sessions with supervisors and, in the case of one of the partnering organisations, with an independent psychologist. Informal supports included encouraging colleagues to debrief and support each other, and supervisors maintaining an active approach to providing incidental supervision. This included supervisors actively inquiring about facilitators’ wellbeing soon after group sessions outside of regular formal supervision sessions. Some facilitators and supervisors from both partnering organisations also discussed making sure there were clear policies in place and messages throughout the workplace about physical and emotional safety, in particular for women, as well as developing a collegial workplace environment where staff were encouraged to support each other to report to supervisors instances where people felt unsafe.

### Collusion and the client–worker relationship

Research participants reported that the risk of colluding with the MBCP participants was another challenge faced in client–worker relationships. Some facilitators and supervisors reported collusion to be a concerning form of improper client–worker relationships between facilitators and MBCP participants, where those involved in the relationship dyad do not make clear that the primary purpose for the client–worker relationship is professional—that is, primarily related to MBCP participant change.

When discussing collusion and the client–worker relationship, some facilitators and supervisors discussed the challenge facilitators experience when trying to create a personalised

client–worker relationship—with these relationships reported to be characterised by mutual respect, empathy and care—instead of a relationship that is more adversarial, clinical and emotionally distant. As noted by the female facilitator in Relationship Dyad 18:

It's slippery work, because you're kind of wanting to create that really safe place that is compassionate and respectful, and nurturing. And yet, at the same time, be really alert to any of the stuff that's going to slip them away back into that space, or create an environment where they're colluding together, where it gets really difficult to do the work. And the levels of honesty drop, and the levels of self-disclosure drop, and they get caught in blaming everyone else ...

This is partly because, as noted by the facilitator in Dyad 18, collusion undermined the primary purpose of the work, and created inequity and distrust within the MBCP group.

Some facilitators, supervisors, MBCP participants and (ex-)partners described collusion as a range of disrespectful and abusive attitudes and behaviours towards women. Reported examples of collusion included abusive and dehumanising talk regarding women—that is, according to one of the supervisors in Lismore, attitudes and behaviours that worked to “deny women’s experience and, in a sense, valorise male experience”. As noted by the supervisors, collusion created an unsafe, controlling, dehumanising and intimidating group environment for female facilitators. The supervisor from the Southport site discussed this idea:

... the moment that goes wrong, and he's just talking directly to you, and it's clearly collusion, you start to put at risk your colleague's position in the room. So, they may feel unsafe, and threatened ... it's more so as we start to shut a woman down through fear and intimidation and control.

Some facilitators, supervisors and (ex-)partners also reported that collusion occurred when MBCP participants tried to maintain and convince others of the notion of themselves as victims. This involved perpetuating, within the group, a history of hurt and trauma that men carried through to their current relationships with women—for example, accounts

of DFV experiences being the fault of men's (ex-)partners, or due to trauma or experiences of poor parenting as children. The potential for collusion occurred when MBCP participants tried to recruit others to agree that it was trauma and distress that was the problem, and not their violent attitudes and behaviours towards women. The (ex-)partner in Relationship Dyad 5 expressed this in the following way:

There's a tendency a lot of the time [for the men] to victimise themselves in these situations. If it was just a whole group of guys, they might get a bit carried away.

Research participants reported that collusion occurred between MBCP participants and facilitators when the men resisted the challenge to change and facilitators accepted and agreed with the man's account. The female facilitator in Relationship Dyad 18 expressed this as follows:

I felt like he was paying too much attention to me, and almost like he wanted something from me that kind of crossed that professional boundary ... I remember him making a comment about one of the other guys in the group. A little bit like he wanted to have a side conversation with me ... and it's just like, “Mate, you're actually a participant in this group.” It felt like he felt that the boundaries had blurred a bit, and he was somehow in this special relationship, where he was kind of like, “in” ... And I think that's the thing; you want to build a real connection with them, but not build a special relationship. It's not a special relationship, because therein lies a bunch of risks.

Research participants reported that issues emerged where one person in the client–worker relationship related to the other as with a form of adoration or by giving extra attention. Others who discussed this likened this situation to one where the MBCP participant wanted to be considered differently—for example, where he had the facilitator as an ally. The supervisor from the Southport site discussed this idea in the following way:

So, “I'm going to meet with you one-to-one; we'll take the female facilitator out, and I'm going to get you on the side.” Bam, we've got collusion. And so, you know, “Actually, I've been hard done by, and you'll go easy on me, and I won't learn anything.”

Having the facilitator involved as an ally created a situation where the MBCP participant had someone on his side in order to avoid the discomfort that comes with being challenged to change. In this way, a collusive client–worker relationship actually works against the purpose of the behaviour change program.

Moreover, some facilitators, supervisors, and (ex-)partners reported that collusion that occurred between MBCP participants could fester if facilitators did not shut it down. Facilitators also enabled collusion to occur when they let the distinction blur between professional and personal in the client–worker relationship, or allowed a working relationship to become exclusive. This could give the MBCP participants the impression that one of them was different to the others.

Potential for collusion in a client–worker relationship is related to the emotional investment that develops. Facilitators and supervisors reported that there is a risk that emotional investment can occur when focus shifts from the purpose of the work to the client–worker relationship itself. Some discussed a fear of spoiling the client–worker relationship, as well as the positive feelings that a strong emotional connection with an MBCP participant brings up in a facilitator. The supervisor from the Lismore site expressed this idea as follows:

We know that if we really like a client compared to a client that we sort of stay a little bit more removed from it's tricky. It gets a little bit—we start to wonder what in terms of judgement or ... how much of our want to keep going is because we really enjoy their company and how much of it's because they need the work done and all that sort of stuff.

Some facilitators, supervisors and (ex-)partners reported concerns that client–worker relationships where collusion occurs might create a situation where facilitators do not pursue the men's accountability for transferring their changed behaviour to their home environment. The facilitator in Relationship Dyad 5 discussed this idea:

This is where it gets a bit tricky. There's a caution I have, because [seeing progress in the MBCP participants is] what I want. Sometimes perhaps the belief that you have this impact on another human being is also seductive.

It gets you to not pay attention to the things that might contra speak to what you would want to see. What you want to see ... The seduction in this process is that you're a facilitator, you have this power to change people. Then you have a collusion of delusion. He's trying to convince you that he doesn't need the change, or that he's changing, because he's image-managing himself. Because that's the nature of DV [domestic violence] perpetrators. Image management is high. Now, you believe that you are a change agent; put the two together. You want to see what you want to see, and they want to give you what you want to see ...

In addition, the (ex-)partner in Relationship Dyad 16 raised concerns that what appears to be a close client–worker relationship can mask the reality that the man is not practising or sustaining the change that he demonstrates in the group. She argued that this can create a situation where the facilitators are somewhat blinded to the reality of the man's behaviour:

I have almost thought about calling [the male facilitator] and just asking "Is he getting it from your perspective", because he's not getting it when he comes home. I wanted to get it from the professional's perspective. I can't judge what their relationship is, because I don't know why it's not coming home. But, that's to do with [MBCP participant] and not to do with ... He probably did the whole—and he kind of does it with everyone—tries to be cutesy and nice and God knows what it is. He spins this mirage so people don't see him for who he is ... I don't know what he goes in there and says, because actually on the end of that fourth day of when he decided to stay in bed, was going to group. He got out of bed to go to group. Does he go there and actually say I've just spen[t] four days in bed ignoring my [(ex-)partner]? I don't know. Or maybe he doesn't tell them anything. That would be my assumption, because someone would say to him, "Dude, what are you doing?"

This (ex-)partner went on to say that it may also have been helpful for her to have been involved in some way, as it could have provided an outside source of information for the facilitators and a different perspective on the extent of the man's change. In this way, the facilitators would have been alerted to contradictions in the man's representation of his

behaviour at home. This would have worked to bring to light hidden dimensions of power occurring out of sight of the facilitators, helped the facilitators further challenge their pre-understanding of the man, and provided an opportunity for critical discussion to occur between the facilitators and the man to challenge him to change.

### How collusion was prevented and stopped

Some MBCP participants, (ex-)partners, facilitators and supervisors reported that facilitators prevented and stopped collusion by challenging it quickly, openly and unequivocally. The (ex-)partner in Relationship Dyad 5 recalled it as follows:

There was even this one instance where someone had told a sexist joke, and apparently [the female facilitator] was just like, “That is not fucking okay. Don’t be talking that stuff in this room.”

Some facilitators and supervisors discussed the importance of a purposeful client–worker relationship in stopping collusive behaviour. This reportedly involved facilitators being explicit about the purpose of the client–worker relationship and actively guarding against and challenging collusive behaviour. One of the supervisors from the Lismore site illustrated this in the following way:

I think we build it into the relationship from the start. So, certainly at intake the message that [the male facilitator] tries to give is that “I’m here to support you, I’m here to help you, sometimes that help is not going to look like what you think it looks like. I’m here, I’m going to keep you accountable to help keep a woman safe, and to help you to change.” That’s always on the table from the start. Even though he may not grasp it. Then, it’s just kept on the table all the time ... Making that boundary really, really, clear from the start, but, also holding all the way through.

Maintaining this boundary involved facilitators ensuring the purpose of the client–worker relationship and the reason for its existence in the context of men’s behaviour change was always at the forefront of interactions. One strategy involved making explicit that the relationship would not exist outside the work environment and that it only existed to help the MBCP participant change his behaviour. For example, when discussing a situation where the facilitator in Relationship Dyad 9 felt that the MBCP participant had begun to act in

a collusive manner, the facilitator noted:

I’m still going to be direct and I’m still going to be honest. And I’m still going to have this sense of, “We’re not here to create a friendship, we’re here to support you to learn how to be safe to be with. To learn about being respectful, to learn about your own narcissism, and your use of power in amongst all of that, you know, coupled with your privilege and your entitlement. So, we’re here to do that regardless ...” So, those types of conversations get had.

As noted by this facilitator, one of the critical factors in facilitators challenging collusion is using it as an opportunity to discuss the power inherent in the MBCP participant’s attitudes and behaviours. This involved using the collusive act in the group as an example of the man’s use of power. When the facilitators addressed collusion, it also created an opportunity for the men to experience being challenged in a way that was safe and positive. Another strategy that facilitators used to keep the focus on the purpose of the client–worker relationship was to ensure that when they engaged in self-disclosure, they only disclosed relevant information to meet the men’s needs or to illustrate the point being made. This way, they avoided disclosing information that was too personal or worked to meet the facilitator’s needs.

Furthermore, facilitators and supervisors reported ways in which collusion was managed by organisational systems and relationships. This occurred through supervision, supportive collegial relationships and a policy that male facilitators complete the MBCP as participants prior to employment. Supervisors supported facilitators to avoid and manage collusion through maintaining an honest, open, trusting, respectful and caring professional relationship with their staff. They also reported creating an open culture in the organisation where people are facilitated to respectfully challenge each other’s behaviour with respect to the primary mission of the organisation. A supervisor at the Lismore site reported this as follows:

As the supervisor, I need to sort of be devil’s advocate almost. And for those guys it definitely helps if I meet them because if I don’t meet them I don’t know that their charisma’s influencing the workers’ sort of perspective if you know what I mean? I mean every now and again a worker will say to me, “I really like this guy” and I go, “Okay that’s great” because firstly—it’s almost like they’re

acknowledging it for the purpose of saying “That’s having an impact on my work with him.” It’s just good for me to go okay this guy’s got whatever that is that we talk about amongst these fellows sometimes.

As previously noted, it is important for supervisors to be actively engaged in the life of the organisation, including by building some level of client–worker relationship themselves with the MBCP participants. Through working in this way, supervisors begin to understand the context of the client–worker relationship. This increases the likelihood that supervisors will engage in open and respectful discussions with facilitators when they need to challenge facilitators to consciously pay attention to their representation of clients, if that representation strays from the intended purpose of men’s behaviour change. This idea was supported by a few facilitators who reported they did not feel supported by their supervisors when discussing concerns they had about the work. For example, some facilitators reported they had difficulty bringing details about close client–worker relationships to supervisors. The male facilitator in Relationship Dyad 10 discussed this as follows:

There [are] some things that you can’t take to supervision. And supervisors often don’t work with the clients, so they just don’t understand, maybe. As a practitioner, we’re not about to quite articulate the intricacies of that relationship. You can’t unpack everything. And ... hallway conversation and debriefing with your co-facilitator, with my co-facilitator, that was probably the most helpful. That shared kind of informally, “It sucks that [male facilitator] is leaving.” And then some of the more formal stuff, the more formal debriefing like, “Okay, well, what does this mean for the group?”

The feeling among the facilitators who discussed this was that despite heavy emotional loads that left the facilitators unsure of their professional capabilities, they reported feeling unsafe to seek the support of their supervisors. When pushed to discuss reasons why, some discussed feeling that because supervisors do not facilitate groups and get to know the men themselves, they cannot relate to the facilitator when discussing the details of the client–worker relationship.

Facilitators who discussed these feelings reported knowing of no other formal mechanisms for support they could access to help them deal with them, apart from seeking the support of other MBCP facilitators. Many MBCP participants, facilitators and supervisors reported how support between colleagues prevented collusion and was helpful for challenging collusive attitudes and behaviours when they arose. Facilitators who discussed this idea reported that, in order to maintain self-care, it was helpful to seek out colleagues who also had experience of personalised client–worker relationships. While not specifically related to the change process for MBCP participants, this kind of situation was reported to increase the possibility of poor facilitator mental health and burnout, thus reducing the facilitator’s capacity to engage in client–worker relationships.

According to some facilitators, MBCP participants and supervisors, a helpful contribution by the female facilitators was their perspective on underlying power at play in the group dynamics related to male privilege and entitlement, which played out through collusive behaviour. One of the Lismore supervisors discussed this:

The perspective of our women facilitators is really critical, because it’s the women who are going to bring it to us and say, “Look, what happened in the group there looked, to us, like collusion.” The women ... are always bringing their experiences to the table, and they are experiences that we don’t have. So, they are always bringing to us new understandings of the way that men can collude with each other to discount women’s stories.

The presence of female facilitators in the groups and an organisational culture of respect for female facilitators and their experiences of DFV helped to prevent collusion. The presence of women in the groups also challenged the unexamined assumptions of MBCP participants and male facilitators that were in play.

Some facilitators, MBCP participants and supervisors reported that it was important that male facilitators responded alongside female facilitators as a united front when collusion occurred. This involved male facilitators being alert to female facilitators’ discomfort and together challenging the MBCP participants. The supervisor at the Southport site explained

this in the following way:

In a previous team, my colleague, she had a system that was so basic, it was beautiful. She just pushed her chair back ... She just disengaged from the group. It was a natural response ... we talked about that, and so she'd say, "When I do that, I want you to step forward, because I just need a moment. It's like it's hit me; I don't like it. I need time to let it slide off. You need to name it. You need to say what it is."

The supervisor further explained that when collusion occurred, the male and female facilitators responded in a unified way and role modelled appropriate ways of engaging with women to the MBCP participants—in particular, ways that are equal, caring, respectful and safe.

Some organisations have a policy in place requiring male facilitators to complete the MBCP modules prior to employment as a way to prevent collusion. One supervisor at the Lismore site discussed this as follows:

When we're training our male facilitators ... They go in the group. They don't sit around and have a special men's space or something like that. It's just rubbish. They go into the group and we want to see them being able to talk about how violence and privilege [have] played out in their lives and feel that they have an understanding of that. That's really, really important. It's the critical thing ... If you don't, there's no way you can be a facilitator because you would collude and you'll make it much more unsafe for women.

As noted by this supervisor, the requirement for male facilitators to undertake the MBCP as participants prior to conducting groups has important hermeneutic implications. Experiencing the group required the facilitators to actively engage in the process of honestly challenging their hidden assumptions, beliefs and values about male privilege, as well as their abusive and controlling attitudes and behaviours towards women. Through this experience, the facilitators were engaging in the same process they required of the MBCP participants they would later work with. This involved becoming aware of their pre-understanding and representation of self, engaging in uncomfortable discourse around alternative perspectives, and learning to change in relation to abusive and controlling attitudes and behaviours towards women.

Finally, some participants challenged the way in which collusion is discussed in the professional DFV community. The facilitator in Relationship Dyad 1 expressed this the following way:

The fear that we will collude in the violence as opposed to supporting men to collude in the change is so big. It's really challenging. It's so challenging. In nine years, I reckon I can rattle off an enormous list of men who not one of them would say I ever colluded with them once. But I was friendly with them. I was kind to them. I had compassion for them. I treated them with respect. I don't think that's collusion.

Agreeing with the behaviour or accepting the behaviour. Or doing that thing where he's saying, "Everything that I'm accused of doing is what she was doing", and saying, "You poor thing" [would make a relationship one of collusion]. If I were to say "You poor thing", that would need to then be followed by, however, "Let's have a look at what your actual choices were and what you chose to do" and all of that blame stuff.

It's never stopped being purposeful for me. I know what I'm doing here. Without a doubt, what I'm doing here is I'm attempting to support men to change their behaviour, and that means their violence whether it's physical or emotional or spiritual or mental, they're abusive, they're controlling, any use of intimidation or dominance, any form of power over. And I'm really clear about that. I don't have any qualms about that. But I don't believe for a second that that's possible to be done without an understanding of their position. You have to get to know them. You have to form a relationship with them.

As noted, some facilitators reported that there is such heightened sensitivity and fear around collusion and lack of in-depth understanding of client-worker relationships in MBCPs that the way collusion is discussed can work to undermine the development of effective relationships. When facilitators discussed this, they expressed concern that people outside the client-worker relationship dyad, in particular other professionals, might perceive the relationship to be collusive when it may not be at all.



## Conclusion

In this MBCP context, client–worker relationships were found to be important in helping men challenge and work towards changing their violent attitudes and behaviours. Client–worker relationships with personalised qualities were reported to help to create a safe environment for the men to increase self-awareness of their violent behaviour and its impact on victims/survivors. As such, the client–worker relationship was found to help ameliorate some motivational barriers to the MBCP participants engaging in the program, including feeling anxious about attending the program and prior negative experiences of professional relationships.

Appropriate levels of self-disclosure were an effective way for facilitators to demonstrate to the MBCP participants their relatability, authenticity and credibility, and to make an emotional connection. In particular, the client–worker relationship was reported to be of great value as a tool for the MBCP participants to learn and practise safe ways of being in relationships with others. This related to challenging the MBCP participants to observe, think about and practise ways of behaving, in particular towards women, in a respectful, safe and egalitarian manner.

However, a number of challenges were found to exist when undertaking client–worker relationships where clear professional boundaries are not in place. These included the heightened chance of an increased emotional load for facilitators, and risk of collusion between MBCP participants and workers. Client–worker relationships where these conditions exist may undermine facilitators’ attempts to challenge the MBCP participants to be authentic about how they represent themselves, and to encourage more respectful attitudes towards women.

# Discussion

In line with other research on the client–worker relationship in an offender context (Brown & O’Leary, 2000; Kozar & Day, 2012, 2017; Santirso et al., 2018; Taft et al., 2003; Taft & Murphy, 2007), this study applies components of Bordin’s (1979) theory to the DFV offender context. Components of Bordin’s (1979) theory that are relevant include mutual agreement between worker and participant regarding intervention goals, assignment of tasks and the development of an emotional bond (Brown & O’Leary, 2000; Kozar & Day, 2017; Santirso et al., 2018). The findings elaborate on ideas from Bordin’s (1979) theory and also counter some of the criticisms levelled at it. For example, this research counters the criticism that Bordin only considered client–worker relationships in a voluntary therapeutic context, by successfully applying the theory to an offender setting. The study elaborates on Bordin’s theory in showing how it is relevant for MBCP participants who were actively resistant to engaging in the program.

The study also found evidence to support and apply aspects of Ross et al.’s (2008) revised theory on the client–worker relationship in offender contexts. As such, the discussions in this chapter are structured around Ross et al.’s theory (2008), specifically:

- participants’ competencies, goals and expectations
- worker characteristics
- interpersonal processes and emotional reactions to each other
- external and contextual variables.

## Participants’ competencies, goals and expectations

### Feelings of vulnerability and effects on building an effective client–worker relationship

The research found that the MBCP participants experienced a level of vulnerability upon initially attending the program. This involved an array of feelings that emerged for the MBCP participants upon realising what coming to the program meant, including apprehension, fear, wariness, embarrassment, disappointment, resentment, guilt and

shame. These feelings mostly related to a realisation that others may consider the man to be a violent person and an associated sense of shame and feeling judged. This finding supports other research in an offender context which has found catalysts that can increase motivation and readiness to change, and desistance from violence, include offenders experiencing strong negative emotions such as guilt, shame and fear (LeBel et al., 2008; Leibrich, 1996; Vlasis et al., 2017; Walker et al., 2017). This study expands the understanding of guilt, shame and fear in an MBCP context, in particular in terms of how these emotions helped some MBCP participants realise they needed help to change (i.e. to “be a better man” for their family) and motivated them to build a client–worker relationship with facilitators, despite feeling afraid to do so. Moreover, this study demonstrated how facilitators use the care and empathy MBCP participants develop for them through the client–worker relationship to build an empathetic, caring and nurturing relational environment where MBCP participants feel safe to open up honestly about their guilt, shame and fear.

However, some MBCP participants reported ways in which feeling these kinds of emotions made them resistant to changing their violent and coercive attitudes and behaviours; resentful about being required to attend the MBCP; and guarded, afraid and anxious knowing they were going to have to talk about their violent behaviour, and especially that they had to do this in a group. This supports research in an offender context that has found high levels of client resistance to working with organisations focused on client change (LeBel et al., 2008; Leibrich, 1996; Scott & Wolfe, 2003; Vlasis et al., 2017; Walker et al., 2017). Similar to other research in an offender context, this study found high levels of resistance to engaging with and doing the work, as well as anxiety and aggression among some MBCP participants, with these impeding attempts to build a client–worker relationship (Morran, 2006; Ross et al., 2008).

MBCP participants’ feelings of vulnerability (especially during the early stages of the MBCP) and perceived powerlessness manifested as resistance to engaging in the MBCP and building a client–worker relationship. Examples of this resistance included turning up late to group, aggressive behaviour during group, being disrespectful towards female facilitators

and non-compliant behaviour during group activities. This finding is in line with research in the field of child and family practice (Reimer, 2013b; Tanner & Turney, 2003; Zeira, 2007).

Despite some arguing for the importance of developing the client–worker relationship as early as possible to enhance program engagement (Brown & O’Leary, 2000; Taft et al., 2004; Tufford et al., 2010), the findings of this study lend support to other literature that has noted it is not imperative to build a client–worker relationship early in the process of an MBCP participant’s engagement with an intervention (Polaschek & Ross, 2010). In most of the client–worker relationship dyads in the study where the facilitators met MBCP participants’ resistance, a relationship developed eventually when facilitators were able to persevere and convince the men they were authentic in their care and commitment to working towards change with them.

Similar to other studies conducted in a DFV context, this study found that an effective client–worker relationship creates motivation to change (Brown & O’Leary, 2000; Taft et al., 2001). Additionally, this research has shown that building a client–worker relationship that creates motivation to change requires patience and flexibility at a number of levels—that is, among facilitators, supervisors, organisations, policymakers and program funders. This may involve allowing facilitators and organisations to engage with MBCP participants beyond the time limitations of structured programs, and being flexible when MBCP participants do not seem to be initially engaging with the program.

In this research, shame as a factor related to change presents differently to previous research in an offender context which found that MBCP participants can be effectively shamed into changing their behaviour for fear of the consequences (see for example Vlasis et al., 2017). This study found that feelings of vulnerability, such as shame, motivated some MBCP participants to engage in the program and be willing to develop a bond with the facilitator. MBCP participants’ motivation to engage and build a client–worker relationship was related to realising they perpetrate violence against women (and children) they love, and needing to make meaning from this, for example, by understanding why they behave this way. For these MBCP participants, engaging in client–worker

relationships with the facilitators provided an opportunity to hear alternative perspectives on acceptable behaviour towards women. Being in a situation where they heard alternative perspectives—in particular, when reinforcing the perspectives of loved ones—became important for some MBCP participants’ early critical analysis of pre-understanding about their own attitudes and behaviours towards women. Upon realising alternative representations that others (particularly loved ones) had of them, and consciously paying attention to these, some MBCP participants were prepared to challenge the representations they had of themselves as behaving in socially acceptable ways. The study demonstrates that some men may become willing to accept the program strategies and techniques required to achieve change, including engaging in a client–worker relationship, and actively participate in the process.

## Worker characteristics

Facilitator characteristics were found to be an important factor in effective client–worker relationships. As posited by Ross et al. (2008), worker characteristics relate to the worker’s personality, interpersonal interactions and professional technique, along with the worker’s expectations of participants regarding change.

## Balancing personal and professional qualities

In this study, the client–worker relationship was found to become a motivator to men to authentically engage in the program, particularly for MBCP participants who had exhibited resistance early on. As noted previously, authenticity involves a person engaging with one’s self in good conscience (i.e. with an honest preparedness to challenge the symbolic expressions they have distorted and not acknowledged) (Gadamer, 1989). MBCP participants’ authentic engagement was achieved through facilitators building client–worker relationships by relating to the MBCP participants in a highly personalised manner—that is, by building on individualised shared and subjective understandings as people with lived experience or professional expertise of this issue. Some MBCP and facilitators called this being “real”. Doing so helped the MBCP participants feel less vulnerable and less anxious

about attending the MBCP. This supports other research in an offender context that has found that workers who bring both personal and professional aspects of themselves to the intervention have success with client outcomes (Marshall et al., 2003; Serran et al., 2003). However, this study provides an in-depth exploration of relating in a personalised way.

Facilitators described relating in a personalised way as an approach to engaging with the MBCP participants that goes beyond the professional façade and sees them connect as people/individuals. This finding is similar to research on the client–worker relationship in a child and family practice context, where workers in a client–worker relationship were found to balance professionalism with an informal approach (de Boer & Coady, 2003; Reimer, 2014b). Facilitator inauthenticity was found to undermine client–worker relationships because it led the MBCP participants to lose respect for facilitators and become demotivated about working towards change.

Some facilitator qualities that helped to create effective client–worker relationships included optimism and an expectation that the men can and will change. Other qualities included honesty, friendliness, warmth, empathy, respect, competence, and being non-judgemental and collaborative. This corroborates other research in an offender context that has noted the importance of the same worker qualities (Kozar & Day, 2017; Marshall et al., 2003; Serran et al., 2003). This study contributes new insights into how facilitators in MBCP contexts demonstrate these qualities. Qualities that were evident in personalised client–worker relationships were likened to those in other relationships that MBCP participants considered important in their lives. This included family relationships (such as with parents, siblings, aunts and uncles) and other relationships, such as with friends, mentors and a boss. This is similar to findings on the client–worker relationship in a child and family context, where the working relationship was likened to the kinds of relationships experienced with friends and with family members such as parents and aunts/uncles (de Boer & Coady, 2003; Reimer, 2014b). However, the study further contributes to developing understanding of the client–worker relationship in an offender context by exploring the ways in which the MBCP participants likened the relationship to one with a boss, mentor or coach, with a similar dynamic between the male facilitators and MBCP participants.

## Self-disclosure

Disclosing elements of their personal selves was an important way for facilitators to create a human-to-human relational dynamic in the professional context. The facilitators used personal disclosure to engage the MBCP participants in trusting relationships where MBCP participants and facilitators could engage in open dialogue and share alternative perspectives. Disclosure helped facilitators show they were credible and relatable, which were characteristics crucial to building an effective client–worker relationship. This finding supports other research on the client–worker relationship in an offender context and more broadly (de Boer & Coady, 2003; Fernandez, 2007; Hersoug et al., 2010; Maluccio, 1979; Marshall et al., 2003; Reimer, 2013b; Serran et al., 2003; Zeira, 2007). For example, the study found that facilitators telling MBCP participants about shared interests helped the MBCP participants see similarities between themselves and the facilitators, which helped to build trust.

Furthermore, as has been found previously in research on the client–worker relationship in a child and family context, facilitator self-disclosure did not need to be deeply personal, but it did need to be relevant to the MBCP participants and not motivated by an attempt to meet the worker’s needs (Reimer, 2014b). Moreover, when facilitator self-disclosure did involve some kind of account of the facilitator’s personal challenges and vulnerabilities, in particular when related to DFV, the impact on the MBCP participants was powerful. This has also been found in a child and family practice context with worker disclosure of parenting, in particular of challenges they have experienced (Maluccio, 1979; Paris & Dubus, 2005; Riley et al., 2008; Taggart et al., 2000).

Worker self-disclosure is usually discouraged in work with offenders (Kozar & Day, 2017; Marshall et al., 2003; Serran et al., 2003). However, this study found that facilitator disclosure helped facilitators and MBCP participants develop an effective client–worker relationship. The findings of the study expand knowledge of worker disclosure in an offender context by providing insights into the process involved. In this study, when facilitators disclosed relevant aspects of their personal DFV experiences, it helped create an egalitarian dynamic in the client–worker relationship because the facilitators showed

they trusted the MBCP participants with personal information, potentially prior to the men trusting the facilitators. This helped the MBCP participants feel safe to disclose their own vulnerabilities and empowered to engage in honest dialogue about their behaviour. Facilitators' disclosures of their DFV experience also gave the MBCP participants hope that they could change and motivated them to work towards change.

Facilitators disclosing personal experiences created opportunities for the MBCP participants to see alternative representations of DFV, in particular from male and female facilitators who had experienced DFV and male facilitators who had engaged in a behavioural change process. In a sense, personal disclosure was like holding a mirror up to the MBCP participants. Personal disclosure of others' experiences challenged the MBCP participants to see perspectives of DFV outside of themselves, and face up to a representation of themselves as abusers. The male facilitators provided a representation of change from abuser to non-abuser, while the female facilitators provided a representation of what it might be like for the MBCP participants' (ex-)partners.

## Interpersonal processes and emotional reactions to each other

Processes between facilitators and MBCP participants were found to be supportive of effective client-worker relationships. According to Ross et al. (2008), interpersonal processes include emotional responses between the people involved in the client-worker relationship dyad and how these impact the working relationship.

### Using client-worker relationships to create a safe work environment

The findings show client-worker relationships facilitated an environment in which the MBCP participants felt safe enough to accept being challenged. As safe environments, the client-worker relationships created opportunities for the MBCP participants to engage in dialogue with male and female facilitators and with other participants. This facilitated the participants hearing alternative perspectives of themselves and their behaviours. It also provided opportunities for the

participants to be challenged to critically reflect on their preconceived ideas, personal values and beliefs about women and acceptable behaviour towards women.

### Nurture and empathy

An effective client-worker relationship was enabled through the nurturing, empathetic and supportive approach the facilitators took towards the MBCP participants. This finding is similar to that of other research in both offender and child and family contexts (de Boer & Coady, 2007; Kozar & Day, 2017; Maluccio, 1979; Marshall et al., 2003; Reimer, 2014b; Ruch et al., 2010; Serran et al., 2003; Trotter, 2006). The facilitators used genuine care and empathy for the MBCP participants to provide an alternative perspective on what nurturing relationships and empathetic relationships feel like, and to support the MBCP participants through the difficult change journey. Through this experience, the MBCP participants learned empathy and how to be empathetic towards others. In particular, the client-worker relationships helped the experience of genuine care in relationships become real for the men when they felt empathy for the female facilitators with whom they had developed emotional connections, and when they became emotionally invested.

The emotional connection and investment found to be present in the client-worker relationships in this study equate to Bordin's (1979) notion of affective bond. This finding provides further evidence of the relevance of Bordin's theory to an offender context (Brown & O'Leary, 2000; Kozar & Day, 2012). Workers' adoption of an empathetic stance has previously been found to be important in research in an offender context (Kozar & Day, 2017; Marshall et al., 2003; Serran et al., 2003). This includes workers adopting a nurturing approach, which has previously been found to increase motivation in clients to engage in interventions with workers (Ormston et al., 2016; Stosny, 1994; Taft et al., 2001; Tolman & Bhosley, 1990). The findings of this study extend current knowledge about facilitators adopting an empathetic and nurturing position in MBCPs. In particular, the findings further explore the emotional bond that develops when facilitators adopt a caring, nurturing and empathetic position, especially as it relates to the client-worker relationship between MBCP participants and female facilitators.

The findings show that emotional investment became a crucial aspect in MBCP participants experiencing and learning empathy. Emotional investment was likened to the kind of care one might develop for a mother or father. It manifested as a form of motivation in the MBCP participants related to wanting to repay the care the facilitators showed and persevering, despite feeling afraid and uncomfortable, because of not wanting to let the facilitators down. In particular, the emotional investment the MBCP participants developed in the facilitators became important for determining whether the MBCP participants were interested in what the facilitators had to say. In this way, the client–worker relationship helped the MBCP participants learn new ways of thinking about their situations, including why they held attitudes that perpetuate violence and chose to engage in violent behaviour. However, risks arise when MBCP participants and facilitators become emotionally invested. For example, the study showed increased risk of emotionally invested facilitators becoming hesitant to challenge MBCP participants or, at worst, colluding with them, for fear of damaging the client–worker relationship. Furthermore, risks might arise regarding MBCP participants’ motivation and action to change if they become emotionally invested in one facilitator exclusive of others, and that facilitator changes role, leaves the organisation, or there is a breach of the client–worker relationship. When this occurs, MBCP participants might lose motivation to attend group sessions or continue to work towards change.

### Using client–worker relationships to enable change

Central to the work of MBCPs is that participants cease violent and aggressive attitudes and behaviours towards women. The primary purpose of the client–worker relationship involved creating an environment where the MBCP participants could be challenged and supported to change their attitudes and behaviours.

### Challenging the MBCP participants to change

The client–worker relationships provided new experiences of power and opportunities for facilitators to challenge the MBCP participants to reflect critically on their pre-understanding about men and women, build self-awareness and learn different values and ways of behaving. These

client–worker relationships also became important in terms of challenging the MBCP participants’ representations of themselves as victims, which the men used to justify their violence. In this way, the client–worker relationship was reported to provide an important opportunity for the MBCP participants to become aware of outside perspectives on their violent attitudes and behaviours, and to consciously work towards gaining insight into their selves and challenging their preconceived ideas about acceptable ways for men to relate to others, especially women.

Based on the way in which the MBCP participants represented the client–worker relationship like a friendship or apprenticeship, the men seemed to understand it in a similar way to these other kinds of relationships. As noted previously, the MBCP participants expected the client–worker relationship to be a place where they would hear alternative perspectives, learn new attitudes and behaviours, and be challenged to relate differently when in relationships. At this point in the intervention, the MBCP participants and facilitators had reached agreement on what the MBCP participants needed to do to change, and the men actively participated in the program to attempt to achieve this change. This supports other research in an offender context that has found that an important part of engagement in interventions is that the participants accept the strategies and techniques and actively participate in the program (Brown & O’Leary, 2000; Cadsky et al., 1996; Kozar & Day, 2012; Rondeau et al., 2001; Santirso et al., 2018).

### Learning about participants and tailoring responses

In order to achieve change, the facilitator learned about the MBCP participant, especially looking for insights into why he was violent and what he needed to be able to change. Doing so helped the facilitators to respond flexibly to participants and to tailor the ways in which they work with individual men during group sessions. These ideas have also been found in research in offender and child and family contexts (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003; Friedlander et al., 2006; Priebe & McCabe, 2006; Reimer, 2010; Taft et al., 2001; Taggart et al., 2000; Zeira, 2007). In this study, facilitators used active listening to discover each man’s unique characteristics, such as personality, needs, communication style and potential triggers for strong emotions. Tailoring the approach meant

facilitators knew how much they could confront and challenge different MBCP participants in the moment, and which topics were either acceptable or off-limits at the time. Taking a tailored approach was not possible without having developed a client–worker relationship where men had opened up about themselves. Facilitators used a tailored approach to help men remain engaged in the group through difficult times, rather than having them disengage prematurely.

#### Using the client–worker relationship as a model for, and to practise, safe relationships

The findings of this study contribute new insights into how the facilitators used the client–worker relationship as a model of respectful and egalitarian relationships between men and women. This is inconsistent with other research in an offender context that has found workers adopt a confrontational and adversarial approach to model abusive relationships (Taft & Murphy, 2007). The findings from this study add to those that call into question the current, common practice of workers adopting a confrontational and adversarial approach.

#### Collusion and the client–worker relationship

Collusion worked to create an individual and group relational dynamic that undermined facilitators' attempts to challenge the MBCP participants to critically reflect on, challenge and change their attitudes and behaviours towards women. Collusion was described as involving a range of dehumanising, disrespectful and abusive attitudes towards women. It also included talk and behaviour that deified men's beliefs and experiences, and devalued those of women.

Potential for collusion was found when the focus was on the bond, not the goals and tasks—that is, on the emotional investment rather than on challenging the MBCP participants to work towards changed attitudes and behaviours. An example of when such a situation might arise is when facilitators become anxious the client–worker relationship might be damaged or dissolved if they challenge the MBCP participant. Some facilitators, supervisors and (ex-)partners raised concerns that emotional investment by facilitators in the MBCP participants might reduce facilitators' capacity to notice when the MBCP participants were not working towards change,

as well as their capacity to challenge the men at such times. Issues can also arise when MBCP participants misinterpret the nurturing aspect of the client–worker relationship as friendship, rather than as a purely professional relationship having friendship-like qualities, and when facilitators do not counter this idea. This situation can occur when the MBCP participants experience facilitator support, help and care in a way they may never have experienced before. They may consequently misinterpret the client–worker relationship as a friendship and feel let down when it does not transpire this way. However, it also requires the facilitator being so emotionally invested that he or she does not want to hurt the MBCP participant's feelings, so does not clarify that the relationship exists for professional, not personal, purposes.

A collusive client–worker relationship undermines the primary purpose of the work. Facilitators in this study recognised that collusion shuts down openness, transparency and authenticity, and undermines opportunities to challenge MBCP participants to change. Research in offender contexts has shown that clients can convince workers that their change is real, yet continue to engage abusively outside the organisational context (Ross et al., 2008; Safran, 1998). In this way, collusion undermines the qualities the program is trying to teach the MBCP participants. Furthermore, collusion undermines the kinds of behaviours the facilitators are trying to role-model through personalised client–worker relationships.

This study extends other research by highlighting how, when facilitators challenged attempts to collude, they created an opportunity for the MBCP participants to experience being challenged in a way that was safe and positive. In this way, the client–worker relationship was found to be key to preventing further attempts by MBCP participants at colluding with facilitators. This relates to the idea discussed earlier that MBCP participants respect, listen to and accept facilitator challenges when they are emotionally invested in a facilitator through the client–worker relationship. However, the onus was on workers to be explicit about the primary purpose of the client–worker relationship, because doing so helped facilitators establish professional boundaries with the MBCP participant in order to prevent excessive emotional investment.

## External and contextual variables

This research found that a number of factors operating externally to the client–worker relationship dyads impacted upon the client–worker relationship. This supports the hypothesis by Ross et al. (2008) that it is important to understand external factors—in particular, characteristics of the work environment—that may restrict and impede the client–worker relationship. In this study, relationships external to the client–worker relationship were identified as a source of support for facilitators. This mainly occurred between facilitators and supervisors, and day to day through collegial relationships with other MBCP facilitators.

### Supervisors

Supervision ensured the client–worker relationships—in particular, the emotional investment in the MBCP participants—did not lead to burnout due to heightened emotional load and collusion. Supervisors need to maintain honest, open, trusting, respectful and caring professional relationships with their staff.

The importance of supervisors in supporting workers involved in client–worker relationships has been noted in other research on the working relationship in an offender context (Ross et al., 2008). This study extends knowledge in an offender context of the effects on workers who cannot access supervision that involves a supportive component. Some facilitators reported feeling unsafe to discuss with their supervisor some aspects of their client–worker relationship with MBCP participants. Their experiences of their relationships with their supervisors did not encourage or support them to seek out their supervisors regarding client–worker relationships that may have been collusive, or that were at risk of being so. Facilitators who discussed this felt their supervisors held beliefs and assumptions about client–worker relationships that did not align with the level of nurturing and self-disclosure the facilitators valued. Some facilitators felt concerned that supervisors would misread the client–worker relationship as collusive when it was not, because the supervisors did not witness the way facilitators worked with MBCP participants. This kind of idea has been raised previously in research on the client–worker relationship in a child and family context.

Studies have found that it is important that supervisors understand client–worker relationships, and that workers are less concerned about bringing working relationship challenges to supervisors when supervisors have prior experience of client–worker relationships themselves (McMahon, 2010; Reimer, 2014b). This study found that facilitators had limited options for support other than seeking the support of other MBCP facilitators with similar experiences who were familiar with MBCP participants and relationship dynamics within the group. While not specifically related to the change process for MBCP participants, a perception of unsupportive supervisors and limited options for support can reduce facilitators' capacity to engage in client–worker relationships. Limited opportunities for support by people outside the group work environment can increase the facilitator's emotional load, leading to poor facilitator mental health and burnout.

### Professional discourse about client–worker relationships

This study found that some professional discourse about client–worker relationships contributes to the emotional burden facilitators experience in MBCP contexts. Some professional discourse negatively impacted facilitators' confidence, created a feeling of exclusion and isolation from professional norms, and made facilitators feel ashamed of their personalised approach. This is consistent with research on client–worker relationships in a broader context, which has found that some professionals still look negatively on personalised working relationships and that this increases worker stress due to working against professional norms (Green et al., 2006; Maidment, 2006). This study has developed understanding of this in an MBCP context. Professional discourse that did not fully appreciate the hidden but highly productive dynamics of personalised client–worker relationships, and that sought to disparage facilitators for these, created further stress for facilitators. This kind of discourse may undermine facilitators' attempts to engage MBCP participants in ways that create opportunities to challenge men regarding their abusive attitudes and behaviours.

In order to engage in client–worker relationships, facilitators carefully negotiated expectations in the wider professional context that they should engage in an adversarial manner,



which is commonly used in this context. Facilitators who reported witnessing an adversarial approach argued that such an approach does not help the MBCP participants engage, nor create the right conditions for the men to challenge themselves and work towards change. These facilitators argued that MBCP participants experienced success related to their behaviour change when engaging in client-worker relationships characterised by a human-to-human connection. This suggests that current ways of discussing collusion throughout the profession may be an overreaction to how much of a risk it is, and may result in undermining the development of effective relationships. The study also found that facilitators interpreted the tone of this professional discourse about client-worker relationships as an indicator of a lack of respect for workers at the front line, because it does not acknowledge and trust the professionalism of workers.

## Rural and urban contexts

The MBCP sites were located in rural and urban contexts. No notable differences about the characteristics, processes, purpose, value or meaning of the client-worker relationship dyads were raised in relation to the different contexts. Although some MBCP participants and facilitators discussed how seeing the facilitator go about his or her daily life helped MBCP participants relate to the facilitator, absence of this did not create barriers to developing client-worker relationships.

# Limitations

This study was conducted with MBCP organisations operating in a community treatment context with MBCP participants attending voluntarily. The intervention approach for both organisations was group work and was influenced by the Duluth model of MBCPs. The findings of this research need to be considered in light of previous research on engagement, attrition and motivation in mandatory offender contexts (Day et al., 2009; Jewell & Wormith, 2010; Slabber, 2012; Taft & Murphy, 2007). The findings also need to be considered in light of research that shows that group work brings a different set of issues to the client–worker relationship than is present in individual work (Ross et al., 2008). As such, any readings of these findings outside the context of this research (e.g. client–worker relationships with MBCPs operating in a justice context, when working with individuals, and when using other MBCP models) should be undertaken with caution.

In addition, the specificity of the context of this research may also limit the relevance of the study findings beyond the study context and sample. For example, each program had long waiting lists for men to be involved in the MBCPs, and many of the men experienced having to wait to begin a module after having undergone the intake process. Knowing involvement in the group program was limited may have changed how facilitators and MBCP participants approached engagement when they finally had the chance. As such, the purpose, value and meaning of these client–worker relationships need to be considered in light of engagement in interventions that do not have a similar feeling of privilege involved in attendance.

Another limitation of the study pertains to diversity of the sample. Eligibility criteria and purposive convenience sampling resulted in the sample being of limited diversity with respect to cultural background, gender identity, sexual identity, adult age and disability. Only four MBCP participants identified as being from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background. In addition, only MBCP participants who had exhibited violent attitudes and behaviours towards intimate partners were included. Consequently, findings may not reflect relationship factors particular to people within or outside of certain groupings.

Finally, despite efforts to match the numbers of (ex-)partners involved in the study with that of MBCP participants, only three (ex-)partners agreed to be interviewed (researchers initially anticipated that 15 [ex-]partners would participate). It is difficult to speculate why only three women opted to be involved in the study, but the worker undertaking recruitment of the (ex-)partners commented that during discussions with some women, two primary reasons were given for why (ex-)partners did not become involved: the women were not privy to their (ex-)partners' experiences with the MBCP, so felt they had nothing to contribute on the client–worker relationship; or they were trying to put their experiences of violence behind them, so did not wish to become involved. Hence, the findings are limited by the ways in which this reduced the possibility for alternative perspectives in the client–worker relationship dyads from people not directly involved but still closely connected to the process. As such, the findings may be limited by lack of critical attention on the client–worker relationship paid by this important observer group.

# Implications and recommendations

This chapter draws on the findings derived from this study to discuss their implications for policy and practice. We also make recommendations about how to better support facilitators and organisations to deliver MBCPs in ways that ensure workers are engaging in effective client–worker relationships with MBCP participants.

## Practitioners

The findings of this study reveal that the potential for collusion is high in client–worker relationships. This is an important finding because, while effective relationships have been found to involve facilitators relating to the MBCP participants in a highly personalised manner, collusion undermines the work MBCPs are trying to conduct. For example, collusion creates an unsafe, controlling, devaluing and intimidating work environment for female facilitators. This undermines facilitators' attempts to challenge the MBCP participants to change their attitudes and behaviour towards the women to whom they have been violent. Supervisors need to carefully consider ways in which they discourage facilitators from making personal disclosures because of fears of collusion, support facilitators to appropriately disclose, and challenge facilitators to remain vigilant to collusion potentially occurring. This can occur through supervisors building trusting working relationships with facilitators, and conducting regular supervision sessions that are characterised by honest communication and critical reflection, and are supportive rather than punitive.

The findings also suggest the need for MBCP facilitators as frontline workers to critically reflect on whether or how their beliefs, values and assumptions about worker disclosure and the notion of collusion is informed by evidence. It also challenges these frontline workers to become better informed about research evidence on the nature of client–worker relationships. Furthermore, workers across the sector should be mindful of the emotional load their colleagues may experience when undertaking MBCP group work, and respectful when giving constructive criticism.

## Managers and organisations

Managers in organisations that provide MBCP services have an important role to ensure supervisors and workers are supported and held accountable to the purpose of the work. Managers and organisations should support supervisors and facilitators to find a balance between a safe level of disclosure that allows participants to relate to workers, while maintaining the ability to challenge MBCP participants in order to mitigate risks of collusion. This can be achieved through providing supervisors and facilitators regular access to evidence-informed professional development and training opportunities on effective client–worker relationships in MBCPs.

It is imperative that managers and organisations ensure the availability of extensive support for supervisors and facilitators, specifically related to the different needs of male and female facilitators. This relates to findings that the client–worker relationship in MBCPs can increase the emotional load on facilitators, which manifests differently across gender lines. Managers and organisations can support supervisors and facilitators by:

- considering the different roles in the client–worker relationship for male and female facilitators in ongoing program development
- developing clear policies and messages throughout the workplace about physical and emotional safety, in particular for women
- developing a collegial workplace environment where staff are encouraged to support each other to report instances where people feel unsafe
- ensuring adequate time is available in supervisors' and facilitators' workloads for regular formal supervision
- developing policies for supervision, and training for supervisors, to ensure supervisors strike a balance between taking an empathetic and supportive approach during supervision and challenging facilitators to engage in critical reflection regarding their client–worker relationships, in particular when discussing potential collusion.

Managers and organisations also have a role to ameliorate risks related to the development of emotional investment in client–worker relationships. These relate to maintaining facilitator consistency and easing MBCP participants into new

client–worker relationships where required. It is recommended that managers and organisations:

- ensure facilitators are assigned to run a module in its entirety
- allow a prolonged handover phase when facilitators have to change roles, so MBCP participants have time to build a client–worker relationship with another facilitator, or
- offer flexibility so MBCP participants can follow the facilitator to their new role, if the role continues to be related to treatment.

Finally, organisations should consider presenting MBCPs as similar to an apprenticeship, in the sense that it is the first learning stage of an ongoing attitudinal and behavioural change process for MBCP participants.

## Policymakers

Behaviour change takes a long time, and it is challenging to maintain the values, attitudes and behaviour change learned during the MBCP process without the support of others. It is therefore recommended that policymakers provide flexible options and additional funding for MBCP participants to return to formal MBCPs once they have completed the modules available. New initiatives will require additional funding for DFV programs to provide ongoing intervention, where MBCP participants can continue to be supported in the kinds of relationships they experienced in the MBCP. It might also involve developing new models of support (along the lines of the peer-to-peer models), where MBCP participants can engage with alumni of such programs in less formalised settings. However, no new program should come at the expense of funding for interventions, programs and supports for women who have experienced DFV. Additionally, it is recommended that policymakers engage women who have experienced DFV in developing new programs for MBCPs.

## Future research

A number of implications and recommendations have emerged from this study for further research on relational practice in MBCP and other DFV contexts. Regarding the

study sample, purposive convenience sampling resulted in the study sample being of limited diversity (with respect to cultural background, gender identity, sexual identity, adult age and disability). The issue of limited diversity is further compounded due to this study being conducted on the client–worker relationship in only one MBCP model (the Duluth model). Furthermore, despite extensive efforts to recruit (ex-)partners of MBCP participants to the study, only three (ex-)partners agreed to be interviewed. Consequently, findings are not reflective of what might be happening in these diverse contexts.

To overcome such implications, it is recommended that further research incorporate alternate methodologies, such as intersectionality (Nixon & Humphreys, 2010), designed to centre multiple and simultaneous experiences of disadvantage and oppression. It is further recommended that research on the client–worker relationship in other modes of MBCP delivery, in particular the Transtheoretical Model of change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 2003) and the Colorado model (Gover et al., 2016; Richards et al., 2017) be conducted. In addition, it is recommended a different sampling method be used to recruit (ex-)partners to the research if a study of similar methodology is conducted in future.

# Conclusion

This study has provided new insights into aspects of the client–worker relationship in MBCP contexts that were previously unexamined in depth. In particular, this includes new insights into how the client–worker relationship itself, especially when it is personalised, can serve as a tool for MBCP participants to become motivated to change their attitudes and behaviour regarding women and their violence towards women. The study has also provided deeper understanding of collusive behaviour in MBCPs. Furthermore, the study found that factors such as client and facilitator characteristics, interpersonal factors among those involved in the client–worker relationship dyad, and factors external to the relationship impact upon client–worker relationships in MBCPs. Considering this study did not focus on the association between the client–worker relationship and change, nor on questions of recidivism, a significant recommendation for future research is that studies are needed that investigate the relationship between the client–worker relationship and change—and in particular, sustained change. Greater knowledge and guidance about the nature of client–worker relationships in MBCP contexts will be important for generating improvements in engaging with, and retaining, a client population that has been reported to be extremely challenging to engage and hold within intervention programs.

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# Appendix A: Agency authorisation form



## Exploring the Client-Worker Relationship in Men's Behaviour Change Programs

### Agency Authorisation Form

The Management Committee/Board of ..... (name of service) supports this study in principle.

We are aware of what is required for involvement in the study and what is being asked of workers, supervisor and clients/ex-clients of the service.

Once approval from the Southern Cross University Ethics Committee is granted, we provide consent for eligible clients and staff to be approached by the researcher, or her representative, and invited to subscribe to the study. In addition, we authorize that:

- staff will take part in their interview during work hours, and that this will be added to their work plan rather than being an additional load to their work.
- interviews may be conducted at the service where required
- former clients, and their partners/ex-partner who have participated in the study be offered supplementary assistance and intervention if they wish after their involvement in the study, as long as this complies with our core business, policies and service agreement with funders.

Signed .....

Position .....

Date .....

*Any questions?*

If you have any questions about the study please call me, Liz Reimer, on 07 5589 3171 or

[liz.reimer@scu.edu.au](mailto:liz.reimer@scu.edu.au)

# Appendix B:

## Worker information sheet



### Exploring the Client-Worker Relationship in Men's Behaviour Change Programs

#### Participant Information Sheet (workers)

*What is the project about?*

My name is Liz Reimer. I am a researcher at Southern Cross University.

I have often wondered what it is like for men who go to Men's Behaviour Change group programs when they have to work with a worker. There are lots of Men's Behaviour Change group program workers and men working like this in Australia; but, not much is known about how they work with each other, what helps them, what gets in the way, and what they think of it.

So, I am doing some research on how workers and men worked together during a group program. It is looking at what that working relationship was like. I would like to hear what men who have done this have to say about what that working relationship was like for them, and how it helped or didn't help them change their behavior.

As someone who has directly experienced a working relationship with a man involved in a Men's Behaviour Change group program, I would like to know what you think. I invite you to talk to me about what you think about how the working relationship helped, or didn't help, the man you worked with. Being involved in the study is voluntary. I will use what you tell me to help workers learn more about working with men in Men's Behaviour Change group programs.

I am going to talk to men, other workers, workers' supervisors and partners or ex-partners who, like you, know a man who has just stopped working with a worker at a Men's Behaviour Change group program. It is very important to get different people's ideas. This is because they will have different opinions on how the working relationship helped, or didn't help, the man change. I hope to talk to people living in Northern NSW and South East Queensland. No one will tell any of these people that you spoke to a researcher.

The researcher will talk to you on your own about the working relationship between you and a man involved in a men's behaviour change group program. Apart from the person who interviews you, I will be the only person who knows what you said. Other people from my research team will talk to other people involved in the working relationship. Like with you, the conversations will not be shared with anyone except me. When I write my report, I will change everyone's names and not put anything in it that can be used to guess who people are.

*What would you do if you wanted to talk to me?*

If you want to talk about your experience, or would like more information about the study before deciding, please phone or email the Project Officer for the study, Ms Kristie Dullat (07) 5589 3171 or [kristie.dullat@scu.edu.au](mailto:kristie.dullat@scu.edu.au).

Ms Dullat, will ring you, answer questions and, if you would like to go ahead with an interview, make a time for you and a research assistant to meet and talk. Most of the time will be spent with you talking to them. It will be like telling them the story of what you experienced when working with the man involved in



## Exploring the Client-Worker Relationship in Men's Behaviour Change Programs

the Men's Behavior Change group program; from the beginning to the end. You will not be asked any questions about the reason why he was attending the program. This research is only about what it was about the working relationship between the worker and the man that helped, or didn't help, the man change.

You might tell the researcher things like what you did together, important moments, how you felt at different times and what it was like for you to work with the man. The sorts of questions that they will ask are:

- How was it for you at the beginning?
- What worked well?
- What changed?
- What did the working relationship mean for you?
- How did it unfold?
- What might have been done differently, and how?
- How did it change?
- How was it for you when the group ended?

You will only meet with the researcher **one** time. The meeting will take about 1 hour, unless you want to spend more time than this. You will have breaks any time you want during the meeting. If you don't want to talk to the researcher any more, tell them and they will stop the meeting. You will have the meeting in a room that is private at your workplace.

The researcher would like to tape your meeting on a tape recorder, but they will not do this unless you say it is okay. If you do not want them to use a tape recorder, they will take notes. When I have had what you said written out, I will contact you to show you a copy to make sure it is clear.

*What will I do with what you tell me?*

I will keep the tape, notes and copies in a secure place for five years. They will be locked in a filing cabinet in my secure office at the Gold Coast campus of Southern Cross University. After that time the recordings will be destroyed. The notes of your interview, with your name removed, will be kept in a password protected folder on the Southern Cross University network.

After I have looked at what you and the men, workers, supervisors and partners/ex-partners have told me, the Men and Family Centre and Centacare will write some information sheets about what I learned. You will be invited to read these on their websites. If you would like to receive this invitation, please give your email address or phone number to the person who interviews you.

*Your participation*

You do not have to talk to me or my research team. It is voluntary. Also, this is an independent study. It is not being done by the Men and Family Centre or Centacare. It is being done by me in my position as a researcher at Southern Cross University. If you do not want to talk to my research team, or wish to withdraw when you are talking to one of them (even up until after you have read the copy of what you said), it will not affect your employment at the Men and Family Centre or Centacare in any way.





## Exploring the Client-Worker Relationship in Men's Behaviour Change Programs

The person who interviewed you will call a couple of days after the meeting to see what you thought about it or if you want to talk about it. If you any have worries before they phone you, please call me. If you feel you want to discuss concerns further I can put you in contact with someone to speak to.

It is also important to know that information about current violence towards women and children must be acted upon in a manner that is consistent with the protocols of your service, such as referring the clients to a specialist support service, or a child protection agency or Police, if that is necessary.

*Any questions?*

This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Southern Cross University. The approval number is ECN-17-161

If you ethical concerns about the project or the researchers, or any questions about your rights as a participant please contact the Ethics Complaints Officer on the following email address - [ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au](mailto:ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au). All information is confidential and will be handled as soon as possible.

If you have any questions about the study please call me, Liz Reimer, on 07 5589 3171 or [liz.reimer@scu.edu.au](mailto:liz.reimer@scu.edu.au)

# Appendix C:

## Probing and clarification questions



### Exploring the Client-Worker Relationship in Men's Behaviour Change Programs

#### Interview Focus Sheet

The researcher will ask you to go through the working relationship from beginning to end

Start with even before you met

- What happened?
- What did you see?
- What did you do / not do at this point in time?
- At this point, what were you thinking about working with them? Why did you think that?
- At this point, what did you feel about working with them? Why did you feel that?
- What was it about the person that made you think / feel this?
- At this point, how did the working relationship help you (or not help you) do what you were there to do? Why do you think that?
- At this point, what did the working relationship mean for you? Why do you think that?

Ok, so you have met now...now talk about what it was like when you met.

Go through the questions again.

The researcher will help you talk about all of the relationship from beginning to end like this. You can look at these questions as much as you want.

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*to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children*

