

## Police attitudes and sensitisation

*Section 4 introduces the issues arising from police attitudes that restrict effective actions to control violence against women and children from male family members and others known to them. Suggestions are made on ways to sensitise officers so that their views can begin to change. To create effective training modules the relevance of formal policy, force organisation and management are discussed. As the Duluth model has become a regular feature of police and inter-agency training, this Section concludes with its importance for police sensitisation to the issues involved in domestic or family located crime.*

### Current issues

The role of the police in strategies to address crimes against women and children is crucial and central. However, research from many countries, such as Australia, Bangladesh, Britain, Canada, India and New Zealand, indicates that the response of the police is not always as satisfactory as it could be. Crimes against women and children tend to be treated with less seriousness than crimes against men or property. Even homicide of women in domestic relationships can be responded to as less problematic than public stranger crime by the criminal justice system, beginning with the police. The criminal justice system often is a last resort for victimised women and children when crimes occur within the home. While pro-active policing is taking place in some jurisdictions, at least some of the time, the police prefer to take on the role of conciliator or mediator, if indeed they become involved at all.

The unsatisfactory response of the police on the safety of women and their children remains a major problem. The most important effect is that women assaulted within the home are not confident of the response of the police. They may think that the police will not treat their complaints with the seriousness that they deserve or that they cannot take action. This means that women are wary of reporting crime against themselves to the police. This results in women suffering further victimisation and possibly also direct attacks on their children.

It is important that the police response is more sensitive and effective in order that the individual complainant can be assured of an appropriate and useful response and also to assist in refocusing societal attitudes towards violence to women and children as unacceptable behaviour. The police, with responsibility for maintaining civil order devolved from the state, have the potential to make a major contribution to the public perception of violence through responses that unambiguously identify violence both inside as well as outside the family as unacceptable behaviour. This will contribute to a recognition that the human rights of women and children in the home are no different from those of men. Police responses are the result of a number of factors, including the wider societal trivialising of violence in the household, but this can be ameliorated if the attitude of the police is more appropriate and if the police are sensitised to the particular crimes against women and children and their role in the elimination of such behaviour.

Fundamentally, attitude change within the police must stem from two strategies:

- the seriousness of crimes against women and children must be acknowledged by each police officer, both through informal force norms, or police culture, and through formal force policy
- the crimes must be viewed from a victim-centred perspective, where the question to be addressed is what actions should officers take to assist the complainants and to curtail the criminal behaviour of the offender.

## Sensitising officers

The acknowledgement of crimes against women and children through informal force norms and formal force policy interact to produce a more sensitive policing system. The question is how to achieve this result. Different strategies are being followed in different jurisdictions. These include:

- the recruitment of women and ethnic minority officers
- recruiting officers with particular skills for responding to crime involving women and children. Women, for example, are being recruited not only as officers, but also forensic scientists and police surgeons
- raising the status of police work with these crimes by providing higher status to officers at all levels who reveal appropriate responses to training, these incentives can be financial and promotional
- gender-sensitive training at recruit level and later on in officer training, and in placing recruits with trained partners who can act as role models
- developing peer pressure within police forces to shape informal attitudes to reflect the seriousness of the formal force policy
- formal policy that acknowledges the seriousness of the behaviour, including evidence gathering approaches that remove the onus of laying a charge against the offender by the woman
- the adoption of a pro-arrest policy for offenders who commit crime in domestic settings
- formal policy that stresses the maintenance of careful records, so that the seriousness of the behaviour and the adverse effects on individual women and children and the wider community become clearer; record keeping that provides information for attitudinal change within the force, as the police will acknowledge the existence of a problem if it is revealed by records
- the introduction of victim-friendly systems for investigating and gathering evidence on crimes of violence, such as victim examination suites.

As these strategies suggest, successful training requires more than classroom inputs even when it is regularly followed up. Learning is both an informational and an organisational issue. In addition to these suggestions, some forces have:

- developed a system of defining annual objectives. These may, for example, directly specify greater attention to crimes of violence against women and children, such as domestic violence, or these crimes can be overtly recognised by forces through a more generally worded objective on violent crime. Objectives focus the organisation in directions that are in particular need of attention and can be altered annually as required. Defining policing objectives can be undertaken both at a force and local divisional level, thus allowing for overall responsibilities and specific local needs to be addressed at one and the same time
- set up domestic violence and child protection units. These facilitate the development of expertise in investigation and can provide a career move from uniformed to criminal investigation. Units that are fully integrated, in that they are staffed by male and female officers who can arrest, prepare statements, undertake further investigation as required, prepare files for court, develop reservoirs of expertise that can be shared within divisions as officers finish their assignment in the specialised units. This type of organisation provides apprentice-type training and cascades it outwards as officers are reassigned to other duties.

## Training modules

The following should be taken into account when planning specific training modules:

- the economic, social and political context of each society
- sensitising high level officers to issues of family violence in order to encourage the adoption of a victim-centred approach to the investigation of such crimes

- taking advantage of help from the community, such as involving women's groups in police training
- using the police to train within the community, explaining their role and practice to the community groups and schools
- enhancing police training through methods such as video training, kits and protocols
- recognising that the recruitment and training of women officers will not change the perspective of all members of the force
- only training women officers places too much strain and responsibility on a limited section of the force. Where women are recruited they must be trained, but so must the male members of the force; training only women officers also marginalises the issue by portraying it as a women's issue rather than a crime that concerns and involves the entire police force
- training and appropriate recruitment is an ongoing and continuous process
- passing on new information regarding crimes against women, such as knowledge about and the effect of the rape trauma syndrome
- training needs to go beyond the job requirements and engage each officer at a personal level in order to change personal values, attitudes and practices. Only then will the assumptions, stereotypes and attitudes currently reflected in police responses to violence against women change.

These measures have been introduced in differing degrees in Commonwealth jurisdictions. In addition, some jurisdictions have:

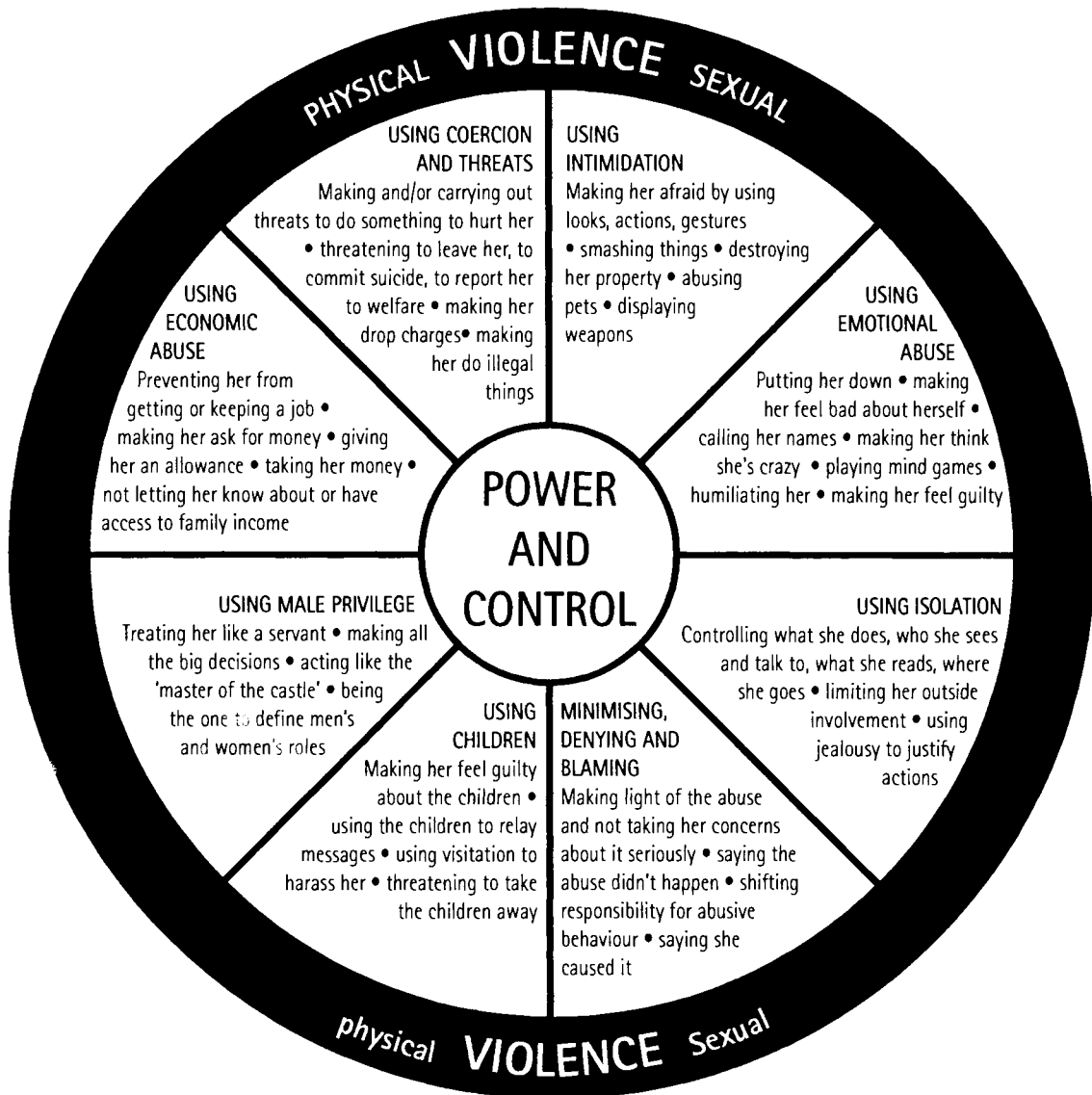
- introduced training of senior officers for management, supervision and inspection of work of individual officers in relations to violence against women and children
- included a historical perspective in training to show officers the background of current beliefs and practices and to draw attention to improvements in policing over time, and the remaining deficiencies
- adopted the Power and Control Model, developed by the Duluth Project (see Figure 1).

The **Duluth Model**, or wheel, demonstrates visually the forms taken by family violence against women. Children also may be victimised at the same or different times by the perpetrator of violence against their mothers. Women may experience all these forms of violence at the same time, or only some aspects, but research shows that the longer men are left unchecked by the criminal justice system and community, the more likely it is that the forms taken by violence will be extended. The reason for this is that violence against women and children is the result of behaviour that seeks to control through the exercise of power. The Duluth Model is therefore, called the power and control model.

It is highly recommended to begin training on police attitudes with this model. Allowing officers to discuss how they feel about the rights of men to control women through the exercise of power should be encouraged. What are legitimate and illegitimate uses of power? The formal policy can then be introduced along with what its systematic enforcement would mean to the disruption of the behaviours contained in the wheel. The duties of police officers can then be addressed.

Police attitudes are often a reflection of attitudes held within the community. Fundamental change and the acknowledgement of violence against women as serious will only occur within the police if it also occurs within the community. Community attitudes also must be addressed by education of a formal and informal nature occurring at all levels, from primary school to the professions and this is happening in some countries. It is critical that the legal profession receives sensitisation so that the seriousness of the issues is reflected in trial procedure and sentencing practice. Police training based on the Duluth model in inter-agency or joint training contexts is also required.

Figure 1: The Duluth Wheel



Domestic Abuse  
Intervention Project  
206 W. Fourth Street  
Duluth, MN 5580  
USA