

This article is based on the following Campbell Review:

Lynette Feder, David B. Wilson: *Court-mandated interventions for individuals convicted of domestic violence*. Campbell Collaboration, 2008



This article was written by SFI Campbell and has been approved by the authors of the Review.

See also www.sfi-campbell.dk

COURT-MANDATED TREATMENT DOES NOT BRING AN END TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence often results in court-mandated treatment. However, the most reliable current research cannot document that court-mandated treatment prevents further domestic assaults. This is the conclusion of a new Campbell Review.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS A WIDESPREAD AND SERIOUS PROBLEM

The world health organization WHO assesses that domestic violence is the most common form of violence against women. Women who are exposed to domestic violence suffer serious mental and physical injury. Moreover, this violence may have a number of negative repercussions for the children in the home. Therefore, there is a large demand for programs that can prevent the violence and any repeated episodes.

MANDATED TREATMENT

In efforts to stamp out the violence, it has become a widespread practice in the USA and several European countries to sentence the violent partner to a court-mandated treatment program. This may be part of the requirements of a release on parole or a conditional discharge sentence. The treatment consists of group sessions with dialogue and therapy aimed at teaching offenders to take responsibility for their violent actions, deal with their rage and ultimately change their behavior. The purpose is to prevent repeated assaults.

In court-mandated treatment the violent partner is legally obligated to undergo treatment. Treatment programs based on voluntary participation may suffer large dropout rates. Thus court-mandated treatment programs provide a method for ensuring that violence offenders remain in the treatment program. Additionally, court-mandated treatment programs also serve as an alternative to imprisonment and in this way can relieve pressure on overcrowded prisons.

DOUBTS ABOUT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COURT-MANDATED TREATMENTS

A new Campbell Review has examined the effect of ordering violent partners to undergo treatment. The researchers summarized the best studies in this area and analyzed whether court-mandated treatments prevent repeated assaults. The conclusion is that the current evidence raises doubts about effectiveness of court-mandated treatment in reducing the probability of repeated domestic violence. Existing research can therefore not guarantee that court-mandated treatments actually do more good than harm. The Review emphasizes that even though there is an acute need for methods

to stop and prevent repeated violence, forcing the violent offender to undergo treatment might not result in positive effects.

ABOUT THE REVIEW

All studies conducted between 1986 and 2003 that examine the effect of court mandated treatments were searched for in the review. The researchers' conclusions are based on ten studies that were assessed to be of sufficient high quality. The studies are all carried out in the USA and include a total of 3,614 participants. The participants are adult men, 18 years and older who have been sentenced for committing violence against their partner. This may be violence committed against current or former spouses, cohabiters or violence between dating couples.

The violent offender participates in group sessions, from 8 to 32 therapy sessions distributed over a one year period. Therapy is either based on a psychoeducational or cognitive behavioral approach. Psychoeducation focuses on increasing the batterer's understanding of violence and its implications, teaching the male batterer to take responsibility, solve conflicts and learn to deal with their rage. Cognitive behavioral therapy mainly focuses on changing thought patterns and convictions that lead to the violent behavior.

All ten studies compare two groups: A group that is given a court-mandated treatment and a comparison group which is given an alternative sentence. 5 of the studies are experimental (RCT). The alternative sentence may consist of a conditional discharge without requirement to undergo treatment or an order to do community service. In the studies the two groups are compared in relation to the number of repeated police reports, arrests for violence and the victim's own assessment of whether their partner's violent behavior continues. The findings showed a small positive effect when official measures of repeat violence were examined but no effect when victim reports of repeat violence were used. The inconsistency in findings across measures and the greater credibility of the victim based data raise serious concerns about the effectiveness of these programs.
