



Challenges to an Individualized Approach Toward Batterers Intervention Programs in the Context of Coordinated Community Response to the Intimate Partner Violence in Lithuania

Ilona Michailovič¹ · Rūta Vaičiūnienė¹ · Svetlana Justickaja¹ · Vaidas Viršilas¹

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Abstract

Purpose Although batterers' intervention programs (BIPs) constitute an important part of the coordinated response to intimate partner violence (IPV) and contribute to increasing the perpetrators' accountability and keeping victims safe, the effectiveness of these programs is still debated. Only recently has the focus of these debates shifted away from researching outcomes by measuring overall program effectiveness toward specific qualities of interventions across program models that may be effective for the distinct client (Babcock et al., *Clinical Psychology Review*, 23(8), 1023–1053, 2004; Zarling et al., *Psychology of Violence*, 9(3), 257–266, 2019). The discussion on the practical implementation of BIPs was supplemented by various significant concepts emerging from new empirical findings, such as differential treatment, motivational interviewing, and effective facilitator–client alliances (Hamel et al., *Partner Abuse*, 11(4), 387–414, 2020; Holtrop et al., *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 32(8), 1267–1290, 2017). This paper aimed to address some of the abovementioned concepts by identifying challenges that arise during the implementation of BIPs in Lithuania.

Methods Using qualitative data from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with BIPs facilitators, BIPs attendees, and various stakeholders, the paper discusses how to contribute to more effective BIPs outcomes.

Results According to this study, the process of implementing BIPs in Lithuania should be systematized by incorporating existing instruments, such as motivational interviewing, risk-based assessment, and differential treatment, evidence-based programs focused on different theoretical approaches, and forms of implementation.

Conclusion The study found that the consistency and integrity of the entire BIP implementation process should be prioritized, and institutional cooperation in Lithuania needs to be improved to achieve a successful coordinated response to intimate partner violence.

Keywords Batterers intervention programs · Intimate partner violence · Coordinated community response · Individualized approach · Differential treatment

Introduction

Today, both the scientific literature (Babcock et al., 2016; Pallatino et al., 2019; Shepard, 2005) and international documents and recommendations (CEDAW General Recommendation No. 19: Violence against Women, 1992; Council of

Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, 2011) agree that Batterers Intervention Programmes (hereinafter, BIPs) constitute an important part of the coordinated response to intimate partner violence (hereinafter, IPV). BIPs also contribute to increased accountability for those who use violence and the safety of those who have received violence (Shepard, 2005). This issue appears to be of particular importance considering the European Union's potential accession to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, which states in article 16 that parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to establish or support programs aimed at teaching perpetrators of domestic violence to adopt

✉ Rūta Vaičiūnienė
ruta.vaiciuniene@teise.org

Ilona Michailovič
ilona.michailovic@tf.vu.lt

¹ Law Institute, Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences, Ankštoji g. 1A, LT-01109 Vilnius, Lithuania

nonviolent behavior in interpersonal relationships to prevent further violence. Although the significance of BIPs' development is undeniable, the effectiveness of the programs is still the subject of debate, highlighting the fact that numerous questions regarding the BIPs and their operation remain unanswered (Babcock et al., 2016). The current study discusses research regarding issues in BIP effectiveness in general and presents practical challenges that arise during BIP implementation in Lithuania from the perspectives of BIP attendees, facilitators, and associated organizations.

The Dilemma of BIP Effectiveness

The conducted studies concluded that there was a lack of empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of programs in the United States, Canada (Babcock et al., 2004, 2016; Cannon et al., 2016; Eckhardt et al., 2013; Gondolf, 2004), and Europe (Akoensi et al., 2012; Arias et al., 2013; Ferrer-Perez & Bosch-Fiol, 2018; Ginés Canales et al., 2015; Hamilton et al., 2012; Wojnicka, 2015), however, there is evidence that some approaches are more effective than others (Eckhardt et al., 2013). Therefore, the question about what, how, and when to evaluate; what elements comprise effectiveness; and finally, what are the standards or reference points for those who need to measure it is constantly raised (Gondolf, 2004; Eckhardt et al., 2013).

One of the most common reasons cited in effectiveness studies for the recurrence of violent incidents is the forced participation of people who use violence in programs and their lack of motivation, which complicates accepting responsibility for their actions. According to various studies, forced, usually court-ordered, participation in programs results in high drop-out rates ranging from 40 to 85% (Babcock et al., 2016). These high attrition rates have been attributed, in part, to a failure to consider the perpetrators' readiness and motivation for change (Lila et al. 2018). As a result, engaging offenders in behavioral correction through motivational interviewing has already become an early component of the correctional process (Stinson & Clark, 2017). Recent studies indicate that motivational strategies improve working alliance and pro-therapeutic behaviors (Santirso et al., 2020), and conclude that the use of various motivational strategies can significantly contribute to BIP effectiveness (Babcock et al., 2016; Crane & Eckhardt, 2013; Kistenmacher & Weiss, 2008; Lila et al., 2018; Silva et al., 2022).

Qualitative research has also been conducted to examine how the court-mandated nature of a BIP can influence people's motivation to change (Holtrop et al., 2017). The qualitative analysis results show that aspects of the therapeutic context may play an important role in the adherence of offenders to treatment, increasing their motivation and improving outcomes (Boira et al., 2013; Santirso et al., 2020). A substantial body of qualitative research

emphasizes the working alliance and the role of the facilitator and the importance of an effective group environment for client engagement in the therapeutic process and motivation to change (Gray et al., 2014; Morrison et al., 2019; Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006). Furthermore, qualitative research has revealed that change occurs through a reciprocal process in which change in the group context facilitates change within participants and vice versa (Holtrop et al., 2017). Recent research has put more focus on the quality of the working relationship between the client, and the group facilitator. For example, the Group Engagement Measure identifies what factors might encourage engagement in the group process and suggests that clients feel more engaged when group leaders show certain leadership skills (Hamel et al., 2021).

Considering the mixed evidence on BIP effectiveness and the gaps in current interventions, recently conducted studies propose a paradigm shift in batterer intervention programming to a care model employing trauma principles with men (Voith et al., 2020). and ensuring individualized care, treatment integrity, and qualified mental health professionals' engagement (LeBlanc & Mong, 2021).

Looking for a New Approach

Another issue concerning BIP effectiveness is the dominance of a specific approach used when working with BIP attendees. Today, several main approaches are underpinning BIPs, with fundamentally different starting points. The Duluth model (Domestic Abuse Intervention Project [DAIP], launched in 1980 in Duluth, Minnesota) represents one of the primary and most widely used pro-feminist approaches aimed at power-and-control and the deconstruction of patriarchy. According to various studies, this is the most widely applied approach; for example, in the United States and Canada, more than half of all programs are based on this perspective (Cannon et al., 2016). However, the pro-feminist model is mainly criticized for its "one-size-fits-all" approach, and thus this non-individualized application of the program is seen as one of the reasons for the low program effectiveness. While studies indicate that IPV offenders come from a variety of backgrounds, many of them are forced to participate in "one-size-fits-all" programs that do not cater to their specific needs and do not outline how programs should be adapted or modified to address specific populations (Hamel et al., 2020). Those who engage in abusive behavior are automatically labelled as batterers, but no actual diagnosis is identified because the perpetrators are fitted to the treatment rather than the treatment being tailored to the perpetrator (LeBlanc & Mong, 2021).

As it is widely acknowledged that the combination of psychoeducation on power and control dynamics (i.e., the

Duluth Model) and cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) techniques, which are widely used in BIPs, has limited effects on reducing or preventing violent perpetration, new techniques that show more promising results are being developed. In the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)-based program, for example, significantly fewer participants received new charges, domestic assault charges, or violent charges than in the Duluth/CBT program. The primary difference between Duluth/CBT and the ACT-based ACTV program (Achieving Change Through Values-Based Behavior) philosophies is that the ACTV model does not teach or require that the content of participants' thoughts change for behavior to change, only the way they respond to their thoughts (Zarling et al., 2019). The Mind-Body Bridging (MBB) program results also show that MBB participants had better outcomes than the comparison group, with 9% of MBB participants failing to complete treatment compared to 29% of the comparison group. Recidivism rates for the MBB group were also lower (4% vs. 9%) at follow-up (Tollefson & Phillips, 2015). Such strategies as motivational tools (Boira et al., 2013; Santirso et al., 2020) and evidence-based assessment (Gover, 2011), which are used in addition to BIP, are also among the most promising approaches to improving BIP effectiveness. In addition to recidivism rates, BIP can lead to a number of positive outcomes for male perpetrators and their families, in addition to recidivism rates. According to recent research that examined a wide range of success indicators using innovative research methods, men demonstrated their ability to acknowledge and respect women's views by being more approachable, leaving space and time for her to speak, listening to her so she felt heard, and actively seeking her opinion (Kelly & Westmarland, 2015). BIP also improves the ability to understand, cope with, and express emotions in nonviolent ways (Arvidsson & Caman, 2022).

Despite new approaches and promising results, many countries, particularly those in Eastern Europe influenced by the Soviet Union for nearly half a century, have not systematically implemented intervention for domestic violence perpetrators. The most difficult issues associated with working with people who use violence in this region are the insufficient number of programs and organizations working in the field and, second, the lack of a coordinated system of working with perpetrators (Wojnicka, 2015). According to empirical research conducted in this region, a one-size-fits-all approach is prevalent, with poorly coordinated inter-institutional alliances. One-quarter of the BIPs surveyed do not participate in inter-institutional networks for a coordinated response to IPV, and one out of every three programs does not collaborate with victim support and counseling services and has no contact with the abusers' current or ex-partners. As a result, victims are not informed about or otherwise involved in BIP implementation, which unquestionably affects not only the

evaluation of the program's effectiveness but also complicates the coordination and monitoring of the entire process of ensuring victim safety (Ginés Canales et al., 2015).

The current paper seeks to shed light on the situation in Lithuania by identifying recent challenges to BIP implementation that may be replicated in other Eastern European countries or in different non-European contexts. It also aims to reflect on ongoing debates on BIPs' implementation, which include various elements of the correctional process, such as risk assessment, participants' motivation, application of differential treatment, overall process coordination, and cooperation among inter-institutional alliances.

Present Study

Overview

According to the Lithuanian Department of Statistics, in 2020, there were a total of 58,553 reports of domestic violence registered with the police, of which only 7132 qualified as offenses, implying that pre-trial investigations were initiated in only 12.2% of cases (the absolute majority of which, 6732) were related to causing minor health disorders (Lithuanian Department of Statistics, 2020). Given the gravity of the offenses, the vast majority of people convicted of domestic violence (or released from criminal liability by imposing another criminal measure) are listed in the data register of the Lithuanian Probation Service's regional offices. In 2020, there were a total of 5820 people on the above-mentioned register. Of those, 2219 were required to take part in the BIP and 1888 finished it (Prison Department under the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020).

The regional offices of the Probation Service in Lithuania organize and run programs for changing violent behavior. These programs are also carried out by certain men's crisis centers, non-governmental organizations, and volunteers with whom the Probation Service has collaboration agreements. In Lithuania, either the feminist-psychoeducational or CBT models, which are currently dominant globally (Saunders, 2008), are used; alternatively, a combination of the two approaches is used in practice. Individuals who have used domestic violence may be eligible to participate in the group program "Intervention Programme for Domestic Violence Offenders," which is based on the Duluth model, and, in some cases, in the cognitive behavioral correctional program "One-to-One," which is based on CBT. These programs are supplemented by interventions based on motivational interviewing; depending on the person's level of motivation, the probation officer may refer the perpetrator to the motivational program "Behavior–Conversation–Change"

(hereinafter, BCC, which was introduced for application in the Lithuanian penitentiary system in 2005).

In 2020, a total of 446 people participated in the Lithuanian Probation Service's "Intervention Programme for Domestic Violence Perpetrators" based on the Duluth model, with 357 completing the program (Prison Department under the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020). As a result, only 7.66% of the total number of people on the register (446 out of 5820) took part in the Duluth program. This low rate of participation is due to various factors, including a lack of program facilitators and limitations imposed on contact work due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, the most important reasons are related to the court-imposed obligations to participate in BIP. Thus, in 2020, only 2219 out of 5820 domestic violence perpetrators were ordered to participate in the BIP, accounting for 38.12%. In comparison, according to various studies, in the United States, this figure is around 80–90% (Price & Rosenbaum, 2009). In contrast, the court orders assign a too short timeframe for participation, preventing the majority of people who use violence from participating in the Duluth program. Even though the program usually lasts for 6 months in Lithuania, the court may only order participants to take part for a few months. If this happens, only short motivational programs or unapproved BIPs run by the non-government sector can be used as alternatives.

The risk–need–responsivity model (RNR) predominates in the Lithuanian offenders' resocialization system (Žilinskiene & Tumilaitė, 2011), so risk assessments can be initiated for those probationers admitted to BIP. Only adapted and approved methodologies (set by the Order No V-211 of the Director of the Prisons Department under the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania) are used in Lithuania to assess adult criminal behavior. The risk assessment data is used to develop a sentencing plan that considers the perpetrator's needs, behavioral correction measures, motivation to change, and so on. However, it should be noted that the risk assessment is only applied to probationers, that is, those on conditional release from prison or sentence suspension. The vast majority of people who use violence, in contrast, are not subject to probation or risk assessments for their criminal behavior. In 2020, the risk of criminal behavior was assessed for 856 people out of 5,820 domestic perpetrators under the supervision of the Probation Service, representing only 14.7% of the total number of domestic perpetrators (Prison Department under the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020). Therefore, most domestic abusers' assessment of the risk of criminal behavior is replaced by the first interview with a probation officer, during which, among other things, the person's motivation to participate in a program to change his or her violent behavior is evaluated. Thus, the statistics show that only a small proportion of people who use violence in Lithuania participate in behavioral correction

programs. Hence, it is necessary to consider a balanced, coordinated, and evidence-based approach toward working with perpetrators to change their violent behavior, also identify the challenges and effectiveness of the use of BIP, and combine different BIP approaches or elements.

This study does not intend to present generalized data but rather to research participants' perceptions, interpretations, and beliefs, obtaining a detailed and comprehensive picture of the specific topic from their perspective. Hence, the study aimed to explore the challenges of BIP implementation from the different perspectives of the BIP facilitators, the program participants themselves, and other institutions working in the field of IPV. The goal of this paper is to identify the factors that can contribute to more successful program implementation and to highlight the main challenges encountered during program implementation by drawing on the unique perspectives of key stakeholders (attendees, facilitators, and associated organizations) to make this paper unique.

Methods

The paper is based on a qualitative study in which 50 semi-structured interviews and three focus group discussions were conducted. The majority of the empirical data was gathered from the interviews with BIP facilitators (22 interviews) and with people who had perpetrated IPV and who took part in a BIP (24 interviews). Furthermore, representatives of the child protection service, IPV victims' advocates, and other non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives, county policy makers, and municipal officials, as well as police officers and prosecutors, took part in the focus-group discussions. The research was carried out in 2020 and 2021 in two regions, Vilnius and Klaipėda, where BIPs are implemented most intensively.

The sample of professionals from various stakeholder institutions working in the field was formed by selecting the most experienced and active experts and using snowball sampling (when research participants recommended other respondents). The interview guidelines for BIP facilitators covered six thematic blocks: (1) information about BIP (nature of programs); (2) access to programs and the entire process of BIP implementation; (3) specificities of working with different groups of perpetrators; (4) difficulties and challenges in running BIP; (5) opportunities for collaboration with other institutions; and (6) training and professional development. Interviews with BIP facilitators took an average of 46 min.

In the case of BIPs attendees, the sample was formed with the assistance of BIP facilitators, to whom researchers provided specific guidelines for selecting research participants. The guidelines included particular features such as the length of time since completing the BIP, the type of violence, and the number of violence episodes (including

first-time domestic violence perpetrators and repeated perpetrators). These guidelines aided researchers in ensuring a diverse group of participants. Individuals interviewed were people who were enrolled in or had completed BIP at the time of the interview (up to two years before). Our research participants were convicted of crimes ranging from minor bodily harm to homicide. The interview guidelines for the qualitative study with BIPs attendees included three blocks of questions: (1) knowledge about BIP before entering probation (and the program) and the situation of a domestic violence episode; (2) the person's experience participating in BIP (evaluation of BIP goals, facilitators, benefits of the program, etc.), and (3) the evaluation of life after completion of the program (some changes experienced, changes in relationship with intimate partner, continuity of behavior correction, etc.). Interviews with BIPs attendees took an average of 33 min.

In the final phase of the research, three focus-group discussions were held with various stakeholders working in the field to discuss cooperation and coordinated response to IPV. In total, 18 different representatives from governmental and non-governmental institutions took part in focus-group discussions, which lasted an average of 96 min. All interviews were conducted by experienced researchers, and before each interview, verbal or written informed participant consent was obtained. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed with MAXQDA software, following a qualitative content analysis approach. All members of the research team (authors of this paper) independently coded two interviews from both groups (facilitators/focus group participants and program participants) to begin the analysis. Each coder went line by line through the text to assign thematic codes and sub-codes. Following this phase, the researchers met to review and discuss the coding; a unified system of codes and subcodes was developed during these meetings. The remaining interviews were coded using an established code system. During the course of the coding process, some clarifications and additional useful codes were added. The findings were only used in a summarized manner, and participants' anonymity was guaranteed. This analysis seeks to focus on the challenges and problems of implementing the approved BIPs in Lithuania, with the goal of discussing and reflecting on the prospects of effective, integrated, and individualized application of evidence-based programs.

Research Findings: Challenges of the BIP Implementation in Lithuania

External v. Internal Motivation

One of the most difficult challenges that many program facilitators face, regardless of the program's content or focus, is

the motivation of the people who used violence against their intimate partners:

It's almost as if nothing is missing from the program. Except that the same clients' willingness and motivation are not present the next time. "What do I need here?" you know, "What do I need here?" Well, you know, you have to work hard with the person... because, you know, there are still people in their forties coming in (Facilitator of program #12)

The fact that people who use violence are brought into the programs through external motivation, such as

a court order, is regarded as one of the most critical factors determining the attrition rate and the program's overall impact. The experts who participated in focus group discussions emphasized that programs are facilitated at the very last stage, making it difficult to motivate people and achieve quick results with very advanced levels of violent behavior:

The issue is not so much with the programs themselves as it is with the fact that help arrives too late, when relationships have practically broken down and the person as a person has already degraded, particularly in the probation service. We know that a significant proportion of them, we are dealing with the third or fourth stage of cancer. You cannot, of course, expect very high results when working with such people. (Psychologist, non-governmental organization representative, focus group discussion #2)

Furthermore, as evidenced by the interviews, there is still a very formalistic approach to programs, with the belief that neither participation nor active engagement is required:

As usual, 99% of the people arrive with a negative attitude, treating us as enemies. Either they believe: "Well, we'll come and sign, that's all". That is, after all, the mindset. They think I agreed to everything, so they sentenced me, and they gave me some kind of program here, but it's like school – "if I want to go, I will, if I don't, I won't". (Facilitator of program #11)

Therefore, BIP facilitators that took part in our research also stressed the critical importance of motivating people before engaging them in the program:

Of course, we also sometimes use the BCC's motivational program, which in the reality is not designated for perpetrators, but we adapt it in a way that, for example, when talking mainly about the violence itself. If we see that the person needs to be motivated. Because in the program, of course, when he goes to the program, it is very important that he admits that he has used violence, that he does not deny it. The BCC with its motivational nature helps the person a

lot, motivates him a little bit to go through it. (Facilitator of program #14)

Although the program facilitators who participated in the research did not doubt the importance of motivational interventions, the assignment of a motivational BCC program in Lithuania is not mandatory, and it usually depends on the decision of the probation officer who supervises the perpetrator and his or her judgment on whether a motivational program is necessary. The data on the frequency with which the motivational program is assigned to the people who perpetrate domestic violence are not collected; consequently, it is not possible to speak about the extent to which it is used in the work with perpetrators of violence. As the program is nonobligatory in nature, usually its assignment remains at the discretion of the probation officer and may depend on a variety of factors, such as the officer's own interest in conducting the program in addition to his or her existing workload, and so forth. As the result, it can be argued that, although a tool to motivate people who use violence is available in Lithuania, its effectiveness and the extent to which it is used in general is not yet clear.

Analyzing the participants' own assessment of their initial readiness, willingness, and need to participate in a BIP program, it can be observed that before entering the program, many of them had little knowledge of such programs, and even less of their aim or purpose:

Well, I didn't. I hadn't come across it before I mean, that's the punishment they gave me. It was the first time the punishment had been like that, so it sounded interesting. (Program participant #5)

Since all the participants were admitted to the program by court order, some of them considered their participation coercive:

I don't know, maybe there are some people who like it and who may say it's good, that it's a plus, but consider it as a violence and it is the same violence but from the other side. Roughly speaking. [Smiles] (Program participant #13).

Some were also driven by a desire to complete the program as soon as possible, seeing it as an element of punishment to get over of as soon as possible:

... so that, you know, the whole situation moves forward faster in a sense, so that nobody really blames me for not doing anything here. Here in one word, I wanted to do this and the program, to do everything properly. So, that there were no such reproaches. (Program participant #14)

Thus, as we can see from the interviews, the majority of the people who entered the BIP program had never heard

of such programs before and were strongly influenced by an external motivational factor, that is, the desire to avoid imprisonment or to escape the officials' attention. In other words, the motivation to change harmful behavior comes primarily from avoiding the harmful consequences to oneself rather than to others.

For some participants, the motivation to change and adopt the behavioral patterns suggested by the program has gradually increased:

It was really embarrassing in the first days to have to confess something in front of everyone here. Well, it was really uncourageous, but then, as time went on, these were quite normal people, normal professionals. So, I knew a lot of things myself, but they explained it much better. Well, they were really nice. I don't regret having participated It really makes sense The probation ended, but I went to finish it on purpose. Well, really, I got that diploma, I don't regret it I gave up alcohol ... she is happy You've changed, you've started to think differently (a girlfriend says). You can ask herself, I'll bring her She's waiting downstairs now. (Program participant #2)

However, there were some participants whose negative attitudes toward the need for the program did not change, in other words, they did not get motivated to change their behavior. For example, one participant felt that it was impossible to change an older person because their worldview, habits, and attitudes had already been formed.

Although, to be honest, I'll tell you, when a person You can change the worldview of a 17- to 20-year-old, as they say, in some other way. Some input when you raise children, yes? And by the age of 50, a person has already formed He has already been raised, so to speak, according to his culture, in his own way If someone has been raised not very well, for example, it's unlikely that he'll give anything to anyone. Hardly anything. Well, for the young, that's relevant. (Program participant #15)

Another participant noted that he only attended the program out of respect for the facilitators:

I listened, I gave my opinion and that's it. I think nobody can change a person. He can change himself. Do you understand this? The facilitators were really good, they did their job, I honored them, I listened to them, I gave some kind of my opinion and that's it. And so ... well, nobody can change anything if the person doesn't want to change himself. Do you know what I mean? (Program participant #18)

It should be noted that the negative evaluations of the program may be related in part to denial of the violent

behavior or attempts to minimize the guilt (e.g., by stating that it was a “coincidence,” “just a slander”), or criticism of the content of the program. This could indicate that some people were not motivated enough to participate in the correctional process, or that they lost motivation during the process.

For me personally, it [the program—author’s note] has given nothing. Well, I’m saying, I’ve seen more stressful situations in my life than I’ve been shown in those programs. Sometimes there are funny situations there [starts laughing]. Well, just funny ones [laughs] I’m a psychologist myself. I don’t really need the help of a psychologist for 100 years. I can work with myself. Well, just. Well, hold on to something if I need to, to calm down somehow I simply don’t see a problem here, at least for myself For these people, maybe this program would be more valuable than for me. Cause I say that this is just a coincident case. There is a fight, but I didn’t fight. There was a situation which I didn’t like, when a kid acted somehow mean to his mother Well, and I was maybe somewhat at that time, drunk, so to speak, so that too. That’s all. What’s the Russian word for that? I gave a slap, that’s what it means. (Program participant #7)

Both program leaders and participants emphasized that participant motivation, engagement, and overall program effectiveness are highly determined by the program leaders’ competence and professionalism:

I would say that the facilitators should be flexible and talk to the person because, you know, just like in psychotherapy, there are many schools and directions, but the effectiveness is more or less the same and depends on the personality of the therapist at the core. Any program will work if the personality is strong. It works if you stand where you need to stand. Yes, I would say that the facilitators play a significant role. (Facilitator of program #10)
It is heavily dependent on the facilitators. The professionals... and they, how can I put it, advise and prompt us, and they, you know, they demand that you do something on your own. (Program participant #8)

As the statements by the BIP facilitators and participants show, motivation is therefore one of the indispensable elements for successful participation in the program. While the facilitators’ professionalism and preparedness are critical in motivating court-mandated individuals to participate as actively as possible in the program, the facilitators also emphasize the importance and need for interventions based on motivational interviewing. As it has already been noted, although there is a BCC motivational program in Lithuania, the assignment of the program to the particular person

remains at the discretion of the probation officers and often depends on the officers’ capacity and interest to conduct the program as an additional workload.

One-Size-Does-Not Fit All, and the Necessity of Differential Treatment

BIP participants’ motivation may depend not only on their internal motivation, but also on such factors whether the approach toward behavioral change is individualized and whether the program is well matched to the participants. Despite the lack of assessment or screening tools in Lithuania that could contribute to the individualization of correctional work with people who perpetrate domestic violence, BIP facilitators and other experts stressed the importance of analyzing the case and providing any additional assistance that is required.

This occurs occasionally, for example, if a person has other problems and needs, whether psychological or physical, or if he is unable to come abstinent to the group, for example, he is unable to come sober, and sobriety is one of the basic criteria in this group, he is unable to participate. As a result, it is necessary to direct him first to solve the addiction problem, after which he can participate with us if he has already stopped drinking alcohol. It’s that kind of individual work with a person. It’s more like, what’s the word? It is not an assessment, but rather some kind of screening or selection, confirmation of whether a person is suitable to participate in this group program, as we need to confirm the people who are sent to us by the probation. (Facilitator of program #13)

So, perhaps we should also consider the recipient of our assistance: who they are, how we help them, in what way, and what the intervention’s content is. Because cognitive functions... low cognitive functions exist. There are mostly addictions, and the addictions are deeply ingrained. We have families, we no longer use the term “families at risk,” but we also have families who have been at risk for 14 years. That means there was addiction, violence, relationship issues, parenting skills issues, and everything else. It’s a difficult thing to look at <...>. There have long been issues. So, perhaps we should talk about two different groups of people here? I mean, people who come with motivation, apply themselves, and have sufficient resources to participate in the programs, so perhaps the program content should be different there? And then there are those who lack resources, lack cognitive skills, and are unmotivated in any way; what programs should be designed for them? What should the content be? So, perhaps that should be discussed as well? (Psy-

chologist, child protection service representative, focus group discussion #2)

Furthermore participant selection is required because, in some cases, participation in a group is not suitable for everyone and can have serious consequences for the group dynamics:

No, I would think that they should probably work with them individually, because the person who is already against the program and doesn't recognize that there had been violence, then he is already setting all the others in the group against. For example, we have even excluded a person from the group because he was causing destruction (Facilitator of program #4).

In Lithuania, as already mentioned, in addition to the Duluth program, there is also an individual program based on CBT called One-to-One. However, program facilitators observed that this program could only be proposed to a limited extent due to its peculiarities and the additional resources required:

First and foremost, there are limited human resources, time resources, and our basic functions... We are currently solving many problems in our district, such as how to implement these programs, because, for example, the program "One-to-One" is very specific, with a very narrow selection of participants, and it is also a cognitive program, similar to the therapy program. It's also quite long, with 12 sessions, one every week or two... (Facilitator of program #16).

During the interviews, participants were also asked whether the group program was the right form of participation or whether they felt comfortable, and those who participated in the individual program were asked about their needs for participation in the group program. Some program participants pointed out that the program they had attended was not suitable for everyone:

The program itself may be fine. But I'm saying, who is it for? For what person? Is it for the person who is totally irrelevant, or is it for the person who behaves like this often, or constantly? Is this probation helpful for him, I do not know. For me, personally, probation has neither helped nor hindered me. For me, as I say, it is interesting. (Program participant #21)

The analysis of the interviews, on the other hand, revealed that the majority of participants were satisfied with the format of the program they were directed to. Those who took part in the individual program reported that they could not imagine how it would be possible to learn something in a group, and vice versa: those who took part in the group

program said that it would have been "difficult" and "not interesting" in an individual program. In terms of the form of participation in a particular program, both the individual program and the group program participants gave similar positive evaluations:

It's even better in a group. There, you don't have to ... yourself and all the time. One person speaks, then the other one, and so somehow the time passes faster. And you get to hear the different people's experiences ... (Program participant #22)

I have no idea how it's supposed to work. I ... for example, my head can't take it. Group. I have no idea what should be done there. How do people prepare the program there. In general, what do they do there ... because such a program, in my opinion, is to be only individual. (Program participant #21)

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the implementation of a differential treatment toward working with people who perpetrate partner violence in Lithuania is indeed possible to some extent, as the Probation Service has at its disposal some of the resources necessary for such implementation, that is, group and individual programs, a motivational interviewing program, approved and scientifically based methodologies for assessing the risk of offending behavior. However, the current process lacks systematicity, human resources, and more effective management of existing measures.

Implementation of BIP Programs: Inter-Institutional Cooperation and Coordinated Response

Inter-institutional cooperation and coordinated action are essential to ensure that the resources available to all relevant institutions working on domestic violence are used in a purposeful and effective manner. The importance of a coordinated approach, *inter alia* the involvement of all relevant institutions and a joined and coordinated response to IPV, was also highlighted by the program facilitators and other experts who participated in the research:

Well, basically, I think the first thing here is a conversation between all the institutions interested in implementing this and helping people, and it depends on the approach of the municipality itself <...> Without that approach, then it is difficult, because for the Probation Service themselves, without that cooperation, without that support, it is very difficult to overcome these challenges and to take on that responsibility alone, because we ...first and foremost, there are limited human resources, time resources, and our core functions. (Facilitator of program #16)

Begin with a question or a case. " It would be even better to discuss the case because it involves many pro-

cesses that are inconvenient, unworkable, repetitive, and inefficient across all institutions, and we would like our institution, the Welfare Centre or the Centre of IPV victims' advocates, to initiate the case. Then, as the public prosecutor suggested, we can discuss who can do what, to the greatest extent possible, and to do more than is possible. The action then begins. At this point, I'd like to say. (Senior specialist, municipal social service department, focus group discussion #1)

Various stakeholders and program facilitators emphasized a number of issues that arise during the cooperation process that should be addressed in order to make the cooperation more effective. One of them very formalistic and bureaucratic approach:

But the institutions all operate differently and within the confines of the law, and there is a nasty phrase. I hate that phrase "in accordance with the law." <...> Everyone is working within the framework of the law, but the person is left behind, and those critical cases, the examples show that programs are programs, ideas are ideas, but when everyone is working for themselves, there is no common communication, and that is where the trouble usually occurs. Those programs lose their meaning, their, shall we say, attractiveness, and the, shall we say, human aspect, that there is a person behind it all. (Legal councillor, private sector, focus group discussion #3)

Shorten that path because these women are really shocked, and then you have to go and get the certificates, then you have to go and ask the investigator, who doesn't always give out orders, then you have to go to the municipality, and now it's even more complicated because of the quarantine. They don't have computers, no place to scan and sign, no documents to submit to the municipality, and what should that person do? (Public attorney, focus group discussion #3)

The joined work of various stakeholders is also often hampered in situations where authorities act in a chaotic manner, offering a range of different interventions simultaneously. In this case, in addition to the BIP, people who use violence participate in other programs (e.g., take part in parenting skills training, visit psychologists, or addiction recovery counselors) organized by municipal social services or other institutions. The institutions, fearing that they may be accused of being passive toward a family with problems and not ensuring a variety of measures, decide to hedge their bets and offer, sometimes unreasonably, a number of different measures or programs to the individual at the same time:

I see the fear among the case managers themselves, the social workers, that God forbid something happens again in that family, ... it's not the family and

their relationship here, ... because those people... will happen, but the worker, that he didn't offer something to them. And from that fear, the situation is that the process is, let's say, chaotic, exaggerated, and so on. Instead, of being, let's say, coherent. And people are often so lost when they come: "Today I have to go to a mediator, to an addiction counselor, to a psychologist ... and, you know, I don't know, it's going to make my head spin." It would indeed make me dizzy. [Laughs] This is supposed to be such a flexible, individual, step-by-step job. Then it would really work. (Facilitator of the program #16)

According to the program facilitators who took part in the research, one of the most important elements of a coordinated response is close collaboration with victim support organizations. However, both the research and the interviews with program managers highlighted that such cooperation is often complicated. The negative and hostile attitude demonstrated by the victim support organizations was also highlighted by the BIP facilitators who participated in the research:

I don't know. Actually, sometimes that understanding is probably needed, because the organizations that take care of victims are often hostile to perpetrators [smiles], aren't they? And the people who run the program for perpetrators say that: "There is no fire without smoke" [laughs]. And that's a bit of a contradiction, actually How to improve it? Well, simply probably through some kind of cooperation. (Facilitator of program #17)

In contrast, negative attitudes tend to change, and professionals from victim support institutions who participated in the focus groups highlighted the benefits of cooperation with program facilitators:

We have some cases where we even simply organize the case-study discussion groups with probation, because they have a man who comes to this batterers' intervention program, we have a woman who comes as a victim. We see a greater impact ... on both, on their relationship, specifically on their awareness, to understand the problem of violence itself, to integrate some, well, let's say, changes into their relationship, into their behavior, into their awareness, into their thoughts, into their attitude, into the future. (Specialist, Centre of IPV victims' advocates, focus group discussion #1)

Cooperation becomes particularly relevant when the victim of violence and the person who uses violence remain living together after the offense. In such cases, the involvement of the victim of violence into the behavior change process plays an important role in changing

the behavior of the partner and in the further development of a nonviolent partnership, as the abuser's behavior change takes place in interaction with the victim, who has to learn how to recognize and assess the changes in the aforementioned abuser's behavior. The research reveals the importance that participants themselves attach to the involvement of their spouse or partner in the process of changing violent behavior. In terms of the content of the program and its shortcomings, some participants noted that addressing intimate partner's violence would require understanding and support from both sides, which was lacking in the program itself:

Well, I think the program is a bit underdeveloped. Why? Because, in principle, in these things there need to be two parties. Although maybe at least if not all together, then separately, so to speak Because one party—he understands that, but there has to be a second party that wants this, you understand? That's why I think that if something like this is done, it needs both parties. So that there is a full understanding. Program participant #15)

Furthermore, program participants expressed concern that the benefits of participating in the program are one-sided, “only for me maybe,” which is not enough to change the relationship.

Yeah, they won't do anything, these courses, to improve our relationship, because the other party is not involved and it's only for my benefit, maybe. In the future maybe. Well, I don't know. (Program participant #22)

The other group of participants, however, saw the victim's involvement as a means of sharing responsibility and punishment for their violent behavior. These participants frequently avoided admitting guilt by blaming the victim and discussing specific causes of violence related to the victim. Thus, on the one hand, victim involvement can be viewed as an opportunity to strengthen the process of change in violent behavior and its outcomes; on the other hand, victim involvement can only be considered after assessing potential risks and ensuring victim protection. It means that the question of whether victims of violence should participate in the program should not be approached mechanically, with one or the other option, such as involving victims from the beginning or, conversely, refusing to do so, being chosen. Instead, this issue must be addressed on a case-by-case basis, depending on persons' motivation and attitude, most notably by acknowledging the violence and accepting responsibility.

There is a consensus among stakeholders' institutions that, in order to have response to domestic violence more coordinated, the municipalities, which have information on

all the social services and measures currently available in a given region, should take a more proactive role in the of services to change violent behavior. The need for a stronger coordinator's role is also highlighted by the victims' advocates who participated in the study:

First of all, the municipalities themselves should take the initiative here, and the municipalities should set up some kind of inter-institutional cooperation working groups or something, with the participation of specialized complex assistance centers, probation, the police and children's rights. Different institutions and then we could probably solve those problems. (Specialist, Centre of IPV victims' advocates, focus group discussion #2)

In Lithuania, BIP providers are somewhat marginalized, whereas the organizations advocating for women against violence call for a greater emphasis on enforcing criminal liability for perpetrators. Seeing the problem of domestic violence through the lens of a single institution complicates the coordinated joint action of all stakeholders, which, according to our findings, lacks coherence, integrity, and systematic cooperation.

Discussion

While both academics and policy makers agree that a coordinated community response to IPV is not possible without BIP, the qualitative aspects of BIP implementation are still at the margins of research and social policy discourse (Aaron & Beaulaurier, 2016). The implementation of BIP faces several challenges, including high attrition and an increase in participants who are unmotivated to change, as well as recidivism rates among those who have completed BIP (Aaron & Beaulaurier, 2016; Cannon et al., 2016). On the other hand, recent studies on BIPs using alternative models for intervention have demonstrated more promising results (Voith et al., 2020; Zarling et al., 2019; Gray et al., 2014; Kelly & Westmarland, 2015). In recent decades, researchers have been delving deeper into the factors that influence the quality and efficacy of BIP, and there is a growing need for a thorough examination of the entire BIP implementation process. Promoting qualitative research to examine the impact of BIPs constitutes a promising avenue for informing outcome research and ultimately enhancing the continued implementation and adaptation of BIPs (Holtrop et al., 2017).

First, one of the major challenges identified in our research by the BIP facilitators and representatives of stakeholders for effective BIP implementation is the motivation of BIP participants. In research and correctional work with

BIPs attendees, it was observed that the use of interventions based on motivational interviewing is inevitable when the persons who use violence deny or minimize their violent behavior and blame the victim or other circumstances. As a result, motivation enhancement therapy and other motivational interview-based interventions have become more widely used in working with IPV offenders, implying that the use of motivational interviews can significantly contribute to BIP effectiveness (Babcock et al., 2016; Crane & Eckhardt, 2013; Kistenmacher & Weiss, 2008; Murphy & Eckhardt, 2005). In our research study, the motivational interview was also considered as an essential element of the BIP application process that could contribute to successful program completion. Our findings indicate that some persons denied their guilt, blamed the victim, or refused to accept responsibility for their violent behavior after participating in the Duluth program. It is possible that these individuals were not motivated enough to participate in the BIP or lost motivation during their participation in the BIP due to inadvertent selection of the BIP, lack of competence of the BIP facilitators, or other factors. According to experts in the field who took part in focus group discussions, BIP participants' violent behavior is usually progressed and led by a variety of other social problems, so motivating them is the first step. Thus, while the need for motivational interviews is undeniable, the extent and impact of its use in Lithuania, as demonstrated by this research study, has yet to be investigated. In accordance with previous research (Bouchard & Wong, 2021; Morrison et al., 2019; Silvergleid & Mankowski, 2006; Hamel et al., 2021), our research participants, BIP facilitators and attendees, emphasized the significance of working alliances and the role of the facilitator. Some BIP participants stated that they were encouraged in a positive way by the facilitators and other attendees, which motivated them to complete the program.

As has already been mentioned, the one-size-fits-all approach is widely used in Lithuania and throughout the Eastern European region, as well as the lack of different well-designed evidence-based programs and the poor use of risk assessment tools. The difficulties associated with the widespread use of a one-size-fits-all approach could be addressed by systematically utilizing the resources available within the Lithuanian probation system that are partially suited to more individualized treatment. Both BIP stakeholders/facilitators and participants brought up the issue of BIP attendee heterogeneity and the need for program content differentiation. Interviews with BIP participants revealed that some of them were not willing to admit their violent behavior, therefore specific correction approaches should be selected in some cases. This logic is also described in empirical research (Hamel et al., 2020), which explicitly warns that the one-size-fits-all perspective used in the Duluth model may not only lead to poor program effectiveness but

may also contribute to participant demotivation. In addition, BIP facilitators emphasized that the incorporation of individual and group versions of programs based on traditional Duluth and CBT theoretical and methodological approaches, as well as new alternative programs, would be reasonable and greatly appreciated. However, the current implementation process of BIP lacks human resources and more effective management of existing measures by evaluating what is already available in correctional treatment and what programs are lacking to make treatment more effective. Promising outcomes of alternative programs, such as the previously mentioned ACT-based ACTV program, demonstrate that its flexibility is better suited to the heterogeneity of the population of men who engage in IPV than the one-size-fits-all model (Zarling et al., 2019). The inclusion of such alternative programs could aid in supplementing existing BIP practices and implementing an individualized approach.

Furthermore, in Lithuania, evidence-based methodologies for assessing the risk of criminal behavior are only applied to probationers, whereas the vast majority of people who perpetrate partner violence are not probationers; as a result, the risk of criminal behavior is not assessed at all. Recent research emphasizes the importance of risk-need-responsivity assessments, which allow for the determination of both the length and intensity of treatment in accordance with the client's risks and criminogenic needs (Gover, 2011; LeBlanc & Mong, 2021). The importance of screening for prior service utilization history, which can help identify clients with complex psychosocial health issues who require higher levels of support in achieving behavioral change, is also emphasized (Morrison et al., 2021a, b). As Voith et al. (2020) suggest, further investigation into underlying pathways leading from childhood trauma to adulthood perpetration of IPV, including environmental factors (e.g., community violence, gang involvement, and prosocial activities) and health factors (e.g., substance use), could provide valuable insights for earlier intervention.

However, in Lithuania, the assessment of individual needs and individualization of treatment is based on an initial conversation between the probation officer and the person who uses violence, during which, as previously stated, the probation officer's decisions may be influenced by the officer's will and various practical circumstances. BIP facilitators stressed that if they see it necessary, they will try to analyze some peculiarities of the case and provide any additional assistance that is required. According to program facilitators, many BIP participants have substance use issues that should be addressed before entering the program, as well as other long-term issues that should be addressed concurrently.

The study also reveals that various procedural issues arise at different stages of the BIP process. For example, participation in the BIP is not mandatory for more than half of the persons who use violence. Moreover, the

ordered period of participation is frequently insufficient for those required to participate. These and other factors, such as a lack of BIP facilitators or other resources, contribute to a very low participation rate in approved BIPs (e.g., up to 8% of BIPs attendees in the Duluth program annually). Although tools, as already been mentioned, for systematic and consistent application of BIPs appear to be available in Lithuania (evidence-based risk assessment, BIPs based on two different approaches: feminist-psychoeducational and CBT, and motivational programs), their use is complicated by a lack of clearer and consistent regulation of the BIP process and a unified approach. As demonstrated by the Lithuanian example, the initial assessment of the offender is critical because it allows not only for the identification of the most appropriate interventions but also for the direction of collaboration with other stakeholders, such as victim advocates. It also assesses an offender's motivation, responsiveness to change, and any areas that require additional intervention from social services.

Finally, it is now recognized that the issue of all relevant institutions' involvement and cooperation must be addressed first to improve the outcomes of BIPs and strengthen perpetrator accountability (Pallatino et al., 2019). Even though reducing perpetration is an essential component of such approaches, BIPs are frequently overlooked in coordinated community responses to IPV (Kelly & Westmarland, 2015). As previously observed (Ginés Canales et al., 2015), one-quarter of the BIPs surveyed in the Eastern European region do not participate in inter-institutional networks for a coordinated response to IPV, and one out of every three programs does not collaborate with victim's support and counseling services. Cooperation between BIP and women's victim advocates is also complicated by the fact that most organizations advocating for victims and some Lithuanian scholars are skeptical about the obligation of the person who uses violence to participate in a program to change his behavior and the safety of victims. The proponents also stress that the effectiveness of BIPs is not approved by research (the data varies), calling for a stronger focus on victim-centered prevention programs, education and awareness-raising campaigns, and early primary prevention, which involves all men and boys (Vaigé, 2016). Victim support institutions and male BIPs facilitators often tend not to collaborate but to compete since they view domestic violence prevention in a very narrow way, exclusively through the prism of their own institution's goals (Pallatino et al., 2019). The negative and hostile attitude demonstrated by the victim support organizations was also highlighted by the BIP facilitators who participated in the research. Our research also revealed tensions between BIPs and victim support organizations based on a mistrust of BIP effectiveness. It results in victims not being informed about or otherwise

involved in the BIP's implementation. The importance of victim involvement in the process of working with persons who use violence was emphasized in our study by both BIP facilitators and BIP participants. However, risk assessment is required when determining whether victims should be involved in the process. Our findings show that BIPs attendees who blame victims for the violence are very interested in involving victims in the process to share guilt and punishment.

Furthermore, institutional collaboration in responding to domestic violence is complicated because institutions view the phenomenon of violence only through the lens of their institution and operate solely by replicating their own institutional goals. Moreover, problems with cooperation between the institutions are encountered at various levels, and working with persons who use violence is not yet recognized as a priority in this system. However, our research reveals the stakeholders' urgent need for coordination of the entire response to IPV, and this alone could be considered a positive momentum toward recognizing its importance. Thus, our research supports the findings of other studies (Kelly & Westmarland, 2015; Pallatino et al., 2019), namely that the effectiveness of BIPs (including perpetrator accountability) can be increased when all key stakeholders are involved, acknowledging common goals and practices, and coordinating the entire process.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations to our study should be noted. To begin with, while the research team provided guidelines to BIP facilitators for selecting research participants, the sample of participants was formed with the help of facilitators, which may have had an impact on the research results. Second, not all study participants enthusiastically agreed to participate or showed a keen interest in our study. Third, since this study is based on data drawn from two regions in the probation office of Lithuania (out of five) that work with people who perpetrate violence, it is not clear to what extent our findings might be generalizable to other regions of the country. Future studies should continue to explore the peculiarities of BIP implementation in other regions as well. Another limitation may be that interviews were conducted with BIP facilitators and BIP attendees without interviewing survivors. Therefore, it would be appropriate for future studies to include reports from survivors regarding the behaviors of their partners. This could enhance our knowledge about the effectiveness of correctional work with people who use violence. Despite the limitations of this research, the current study provides relevant data, highlighting challenges to BIP implementation practice in Lithuania that may be replicated in other countries.

Conclusion

The current study presents the situation in Lithuania by identifying recent challenges to BIP implementation that may be replicated in different contexts. The study also reflects ongoing debates based on qualitative research on BIP implementation, which includes various elements of the correctional process such as motivation of program attendees; the role of engaging environment and facilitators; the application of evidence-based assessment and individualized treatment; and cooperation among inter-institutional alliances. Despite its limitations, our study confirms the importance of using various measures and standardizing their application with the goal of strengthening the individualized approach while implementing BIP. The consistency, integrity, and coordination of the entire BIP application process should remain a priority. For more stakeholders to begin trusting and appreciating the critical role of BIPs, and for those programs to become more effective, it is vital to first envision the various BIPs as an integral part of working with persons who use violence.

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Declarations

Ethics Approval The research study was carried out in accordance with the guidelines for Assessments of Conformity with Research Ethics issued by the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures of the Republic of Lithuania and approved by the Commission of Academics Ethics and Conformity with Research Ethics of the Law Institute of Lithuania.

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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