



**SON-TO-MOTHER
VIOLENCE:
REBUILDING
RELATIONSHIPS
FOLLOWING
EXPERIENCES OF
VIOLENCE**

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CONTEXT

- Trauma resulting from domestic violence can significantly **impact the relationship between mothers and their children**
- Increasingly, there is acknowledgement that **mothers can experience violence and abuse from their sons** & that this most often occurs in the context of trauma arising from a history of domestic violence
- The situation is complex because the **mother-child relationship has different power dynamics and responsibilities than intimate partner relationships**
- Mothers and their children need responses that **address the trauma, re-builds attachment and prevents the reproduction of violent and abusive behaviours**
- Whilst there is a growing body of literature on child-to-parent violence, there is a **limited evidence base on such programs**

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM



Program aims to rebuild respectful relationships between mothers and their sons following experiences of DFV



Works with boys aged between 11-17 years and their mothers in circumstances in which the son is using violence within the home



Delivered over 20 weeks and includes group therapy and joint mother/son counselling sessions



Restorative program informed by trauma and attachment theories, which aims to bring about behavioural change by:

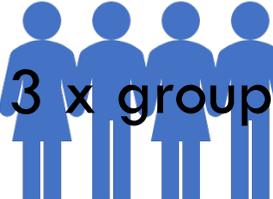
- addressing joint trauma
- rebuilding mother-son relationship
- challenging harmful gendered beliefs
- increasing mother's parenting confidence



Group facilitators and women's advocates provide 'check-in' support outside of group

STUDY AND PARTICIPANTS

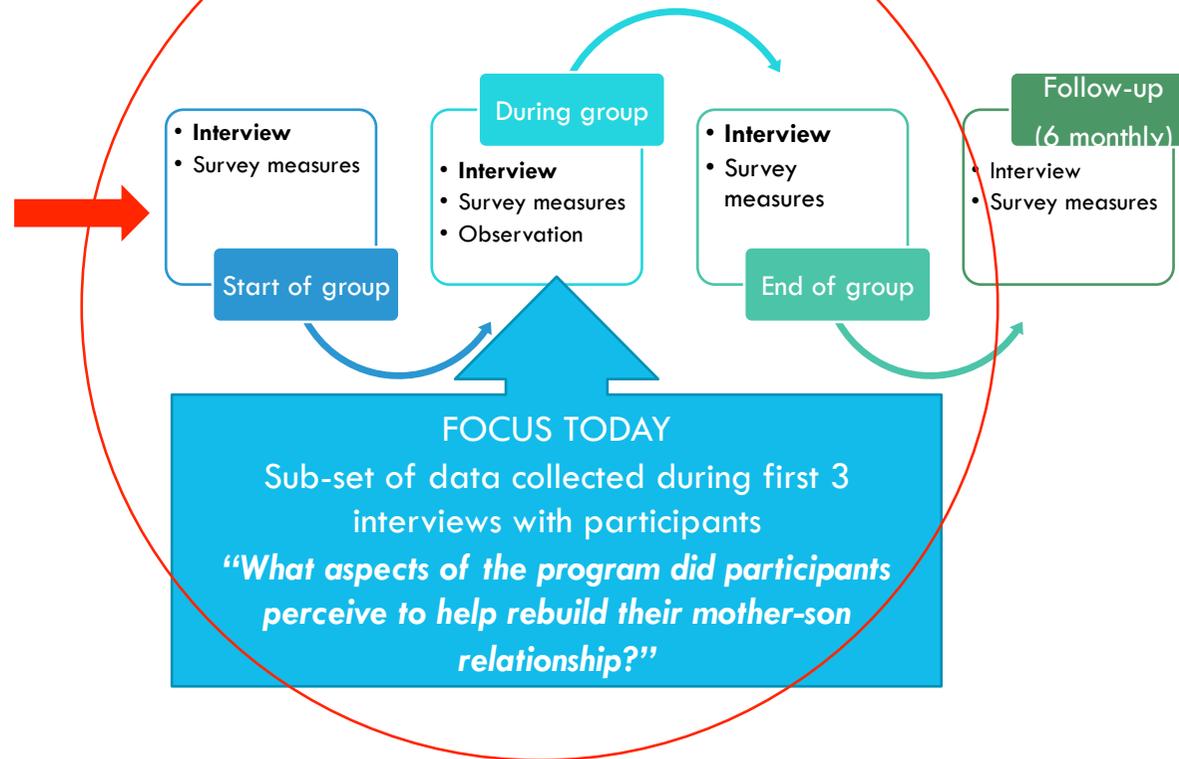
3 x groups



Participants:

- 8 x women
- 7 x sons (aged 13-16)

group facilitators & women's advocates (n=6)



GROUP CHARACTERISTICS

Group 1 (2017)

- 4 mother-son dyads completed program
- 2 mother-son dyads unable to complete

Group 2 (2017)

- 4 mother-son dyads completed program
- 2+ mother-son dyads unable to complete

Group 3 (2018)

- 5 mother-son dyads completed program*
- 2 mother-son dyads unable to complete



ONGOING VIOLENCE



CARING RESPONSIBILITIES
& CHALLENGES WITH
CHILD CARE



FINANCIAL ISSUES &
ACCESS TO TRANSPORT



EMPLOYMENT



COURT & CHILD CONTACT
ARRANGEMENTS



ONGOING DISRUPTION &
MOVING

THE MOTHER- SON RELATION SHIP



Mothers and sons
described a feeling of
disconnection from each
other

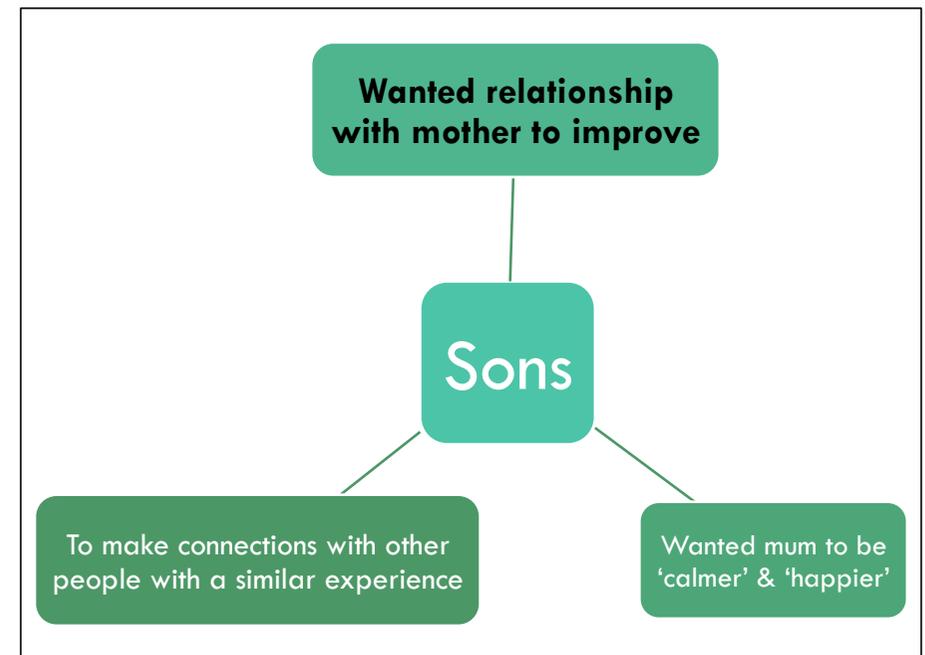
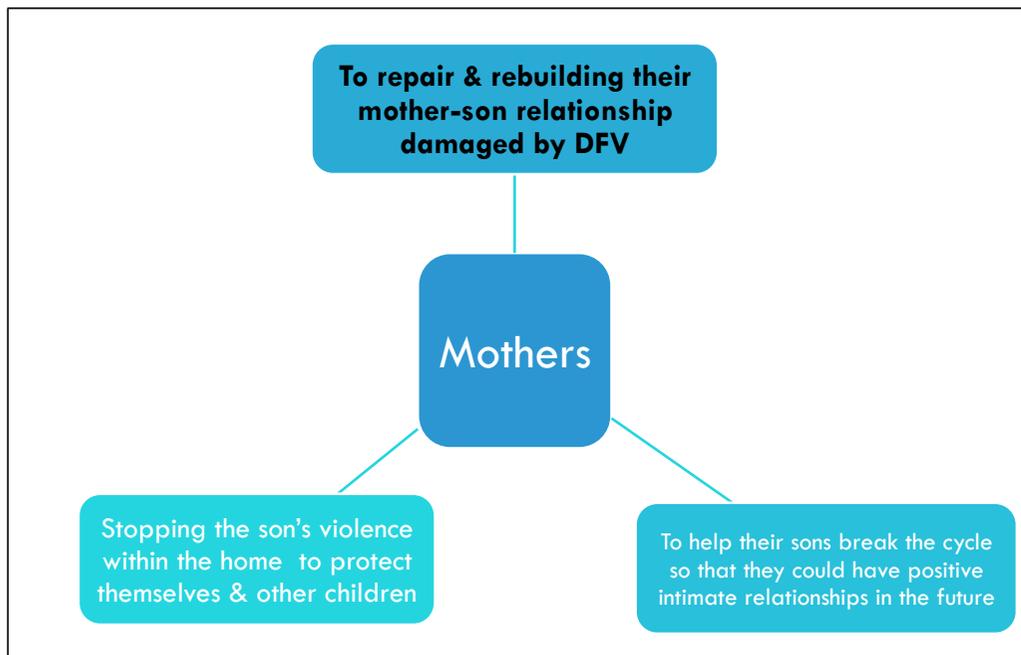


Their relationships were
characterised by
interactions where they
both feel misunderstood,
yet unable to communicate

“[In one activity we had to] share good memories... he says ‘I’ve deleted all the memories. I don’t have any memories of any fun times’, but then we did this exercise... where he had to [search] for a happy memory, but eventually he came up with one and... draw it, and you know we both actually had a really good time”

- Astrid

HOPES & EXPECTATIONS FOR THE PROGRAM



FEATURES OF THE GROUP PERCEIVED TO HELP REBUILD RELATIONSHIPS



Shared language and strategies



Having experiences acknowledged



Positive time together

POSITIVE TIME TOGETHER

- Rare experience for the group members
- Mothers were surprised that sons continued to attend
- Mothers & sons valued that there were less competing demands during this time
- Scaffolded activities that helped them to interact
- **Suggests that the group may create a space in which the mother-son attachment can be strengthened**

“I’m happy that I’ve got this one day of the week where I can just go out and have my mother to myself, and I wouldn’t mind having some more time like that, maybe once a fortnight, where we go out and see a movie, something like that... but she keeps on saying that she’s busy, all that...all the other kids fighting for [her] attention also” - Connor

HAVING EXPERIENCES ACKNOWLEDGED

- Both mothers and sons identified that the program helped them to **better understand the experience and impact that the DFV had on the other:**

Mothers did not realise that their children had witnessed as much of the DFV as they had

Sons did not realise the extent to which their mothers had tried to protect them

- This suggests that the program provides opportunities for mothers and sons to **empathise with & better understand each other's experiences**
- It appears that this new understanding contributes to a rebuilding and strengthening of the mother-son relationship & helps sons to place the blame for the DFV on the perpetrator

SHARED LANGUAGE & STRATEGIES

- Group program & booklet provided a shared 'toolkit' of strategies
- Most valued were the concrete/visual aides that could be displayed at home
- Developing a shared language for discussing emotions, conflict & violence was also valued as it helped to express needs & bring attention to certain behaviours in more positive ways
- Both mothers & sons reported that this supported de-escalation of situations & repair after incidents



Most of the mothers identified that these strategies & new shared language helped them to feel more confident in their parenting, particularly regarding setting boundaries & consequences for their sons

IMPLICATIONS

- The accounts of participants demonstrate a need for intervention with an attachment & trauma focus to assist in DFV recovery, as well as addressing the son's violent behaviours
- Prior to the group, sons & mothers were inhibited from disclosing their experiences to each other. This was identified as a key barrier in rebuilding their relationship in the aftermath of the DFV.
- To help rebuild relationships, the findings suggest that group programs need to provide:
 - A safe and scaffolded space for connection that seeks to minimize impact of 'outside' distractions
 - Resources, visual aids & shared language to support mothers & sons to implement new behaviours at home
 - Activities that provide safe space for self-disclosure and the development of empathy for the other's experiences