

Men Stopping Violence (MSV)

BACKGROUND

Men Stopping Violence (MSV) is a social change organisation that works with the social structures, belief systems and institutional practices that compound VAW and sexism against women. MSV is located in Atlanta, Georgia in the United States, and works locally and nationally.

The organisation intervenes with men across a variety of platforms including advocacy, policy, batterer interventions and workshops. MSV is staffed by men, but directed by and supported by women and women's organisations.

The organisation was started in the 1980s when two therapists, Dick Bathrick and Gus Kaufman, decided to begin working with men who batter. Before starting their first group, Bathrick and Kaufman consulted with organisations in the Atlanta area that supported battered women, as to the advisability of such an endeavour. This consultation evolved into a more direct model – the battered women's movement supported the work of Bathrick and Kaufman only if the women activists themselves had a say in, and directed the work of the men.

PROGRAMME OF ACTION

MSV has a broad range of interventions within the VAW cycle. These include:

- Training of clergy, corporations, physical and mental health practitioners, legal, criminal justice and military personnel and other leaders nationally and locally;
- Education of the public through presentations for schools, universities, and work places, faith communities and civic groups;
- Influence of public policy, both legislative and non-legislative in alliance with other national and local advocacy organisations;
- Interventions with individual men through telephone contacts, orientation classes, courtroom interventions, 24-week classes, and an ongoing Community Restitution Programme for men who complete the 24-week curriculum;

- Mentoring of teenage males, giving them opportunities to observe and engage in dialogue with men who are taking steps to hold themselves and other men accountable for abusive choices;
- Training of interns who want to become change agents for ending VAW;
- Publication of incisive writings that advance analysis and stimulate thinking on the issue;
- Alliances with other organisations locally, regionally and nationally – those working specifically toward ending men's violence against women and also those working to end racism, sexism, homophobia and classism – to help build a strong social justice movement.¹⁶

APPROACH

As men were beginning to work through their own collusion with a patriarchal system, their desire to begin to directly intervene with perpetrators became a functional reality. Yet these interventions could, and often did, do much harm to the struggle against VAW. The reasons for this are manifold, but have at their root the socialised need that men have to dominate social movements. The negotiation that was at the initial starting phase of MSV has informed their work since. The recognition that women must *always* be in charge of the movement, and that their voices determine the direction of the interventions – with men and women – forms the core philosophy of MSV.

According to Red Crowley, a facilitator with MSV, a key feature of their approach is consultation with women. He gives an example of this and states that when working in rural areas of Georgia, he saw that the newspapers carried pictures and identification of women and men who had been arrested for DUI (driving under the influence). These public 'outings' of drunk drivers was part of the social consequences of their behaviour. Crowley felt it would be a good idea to publicly 'out' batterers in the same manner, and received permission from the court system and the newspapers to do so. Before instituting this intervention, Crowley went for feedback to the battered women's movement. They were very concerned and felt that by public exposure of the batterer, particularly in such small and intimate communities, would publicly

expose the 'shame' of his partner. Further, they felt that instead of feeling anger towards the perpetrators, the communities would feel pity for them. While the intention was good, Crowley needed (and followed) the advice and direction of the women's movement that identified the need of the women as paramount.

At the core of MSV's approach is a belief in social change. Crowley thinks that the potential for change is located within institutions, as this is the space where male supremacy is replicated, supported, encouraged and promoted. In their work, MSV has seen that the most logical way in which to begin to engage institutions, is through the provision of classes to individual batterers. As Crowley puts it, 'This is the vehicle for entrée into systemic change.'¹⁷ Most of these social institutions are dominated by men, and because men 'think in terms of their own self-interest if we can help them deal with the court calendar or with problematic men within the faith community, if we can offer them that service, then they will be more amenable to MSV implementing programmes with and for men within those institutions.' This pragmatic approach appears to allow such NGOs access to groups of men that would otherwise be inaccessible within their institutional contexts, similar to the approach adopted by Rozan (see above in report).

PROGRAMME OF ACTION

MSV's work with perpetrators takes the form of classes – 24 weeks, 2 hours per week. Two facilitators lead the classes, and MSV always ensures that the facilitators are representative of a multiplicity of backgrounds: one is always a man of colour, with a white male partner. Facilitators often 'call' each other on racist, classist, homophobic and sexist remarks, and their deconstruction of their own behaviour within the class enables them to explore the intersection of race, gender and class. Facilitators are intensively trained – they must go through a one-year internship, which includes six months of attending classes. Once men become facilitators, they monitor each other, and in turn are monitored by the women who run and collaborate with MSV. In this regard, accountability groups have been set up so that facilitators engage in a constant growth process.

The curriculum of the classes centres on a deconstruction of male sexism and privilege. The format is interactive, and facilitators are given leeway to engage with issues as and when they come up. There are a few building blocks for the class – they utilise the Power and Control wheel, examine abusive behaviours, and engage with the ideas of masculinities. Other subjects can include father/son relationships, the male emotional system, blaming and accusative behaviours, sexuality, and assumptions and expectations of partners. The classes are not rigid and didactic because each group is different, has a different level of awareness, and different needs.

SUMMARY

MSV's model regards the most effective interventions with men as those that are conducted by men informed, supported, engaged and *directed* by women and the women's movement. These interventions may be the most holistic, sensitive and honest about patriarchy and the impact of male supremacy on women, and the women's' oversight ensures that men are accountable both within and without the organisational framework.

The MSV model also shows that there are many entry points to institutional change, and that working within institutions for gender equality can sometimes only be accomplished by working with a knowledge of men's and institutions' self-interest.

The MSV model places emphasis on accountability – men working within the organisation must commit to a process of growth.