3. Implications of CalWORKs for victims of domestic abuse

Training topics

A. Domestic abuse, poverty and welfare
B. Barriers to employment
C. How batterers interfere with education and employment
D. Resiliency

Participant handouts

Domestic abuse, poverty and welfare
Barriers to employment
Case example—Rhonda
How batterers may interfere with employment
Resiliency model
Protective factors

Trainer overheads

How batterers may interfere with employment
Resiliency model

A. Domestic abuse, poverty and welfare

Review and discuss handout

Review the handout "Domestic abuse, poverty and welfare." While domestic abuse cuts across social groups defined by race, ethnicity and economic circumstances, the combined experience of poverty and violence raises particularly difficult issues for women. Note the risk factors for abuse, which point toward the CalWORKs population. In discussing studies of welfare recipients and abuse, note the percentages of past and current abuse.

Abuse does not make it impossible for victims to work. However, abuse must be dealt with to protect victims from future harm and to make it possible for them to work. Interfering with education and employment is one of the tactics of control batterers use.

B. Barriers to employment

Review and discuss handout

Review the handout "Barriers to employment," noting the following points

- As discussed in the dynamics section, internal barriers can extend to mental health effects such as depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Environmental barriers include the possibility of homelessness if the victim leaves the abuser without support from sources such as social services and shelters
- Supportive services are crucial to stabilizing the life of the victim

C. How batterers interfere with education and employment

Activity

Introduce this activity by saying that batterers' behaviors can also be a significant barrier to participation in CalWORKs activities. Refer participants to the handout "Case example—Rhonda." Ask them to work in pairs to identify two behaviors that interfere

with Rhonda going to school. (Trainer option: Also ask participants to consider strengths.) Discuss as a large group, charting responses on an easel pad.

Review and discuss handouts

Review handout and overhead "How batterers may interfere with employment." Tie to participant responses to the "Rhonda" exercise.

D. Resiliency

Review and discuss handouts

Thus far this section has focused on the difficulties poverty and abuse create for clients. These problems are substantial and, in some cases, life threatening.

People do, however, find their way out of abusive relationships, often with the help of concerned others like CalWORKs staff. The focus of much of the work of social services is now on a "strengths-based" approach to clients and their families. Before going on to the specifics of intervention, we're going to look briefly at one body of research that points to specific actions staff can take in work with victims of domestic abuse.

In recent years researchers have been looking at "resiliency" in children and adults. Studies have identified ways people respond to and "bounce back" from adversity.

Review the handout "Resiliency model." It shows an interaction between a "stressor," such as domestic abuse, and individual and environmental protective factors. Depending on the degrees of stress and protective factors, response can follow a path that goes directly to "reintegration" or that goes through disruption. "Reintegration" can involve a range of responses—from resiliency to dysfunction.

Focus discussion on the handout "Protective factors." Individual protective factors are characteristics staff can look for in clients. Environmental protective factors point to ways they can work with clients that will support moving forward from an abusive situation.

Participant Handouts

Domestic abuse, poverty and welfare

Risk factors

Income: women in families with annual incomes below $10,000 are more likely to be victims of domestic abuse

Age: women age 19 to 29 are more likely to be victims of domestic abuse

Source: Bachman, R., Saltzman, L.E. Violence against women: estimates from the redesigned survey. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Special Report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, August 1995.

Studies have shown that a significant portion of welfare recipients experience abuse

In Massachusetts[1]

- 65% are survivors of domestic violence
- 20% have been abused in the past year
- 18% of those abused in the past year had a restraining order
- 33% of those abused in the past year had police come to their home
- Abused women were 15 times more likely to have a partner who did not like them going to school or work

In New Jersey[2]

- 57% are survivors of domestic violence
- 15% report current physical abuse
- 40% of current abuse victims say their partner actively prevents their participation in a mandatory pre-employment assessment and training program

Source: Taylor Institute. (1997). Trapped by poverty/trapped by Abuse. Chicago: author
[1] University of Massachusetts Boston (1997). In harms way? Domestic violence, AFDC receipt and welfare reform in Massachusetts. Boston: author
[2] Passaic County Board of Social Services. The Passaic County study of AFDC recipients in a welfare-to-work program (study conducted 1995-97).

Domestic abuse survivors turn to the welfare system for relief and support

Welfare is a lifeline to safety. Financial support, medical coverage and other benefits are vital to adults and children escaping a violent environment. Assistance offers an option to staying with a batterer or homelessness.

Barriers to employment

Domestic abuse is a barrier to employment

Internal barriers

- Low self-esteem, including past unhappy encounters with schooling, lack of family support for education and lack of positive role models
- Self-doubt about one's ability to learn, which is sometimes exacerbated by actual learning disabilities (i.e., dyslexia, ADD, etc.)
- Sense of powerlessness
- Guilt about taking time away from one's family for self-improvement (if dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder)

External barriers

- Batterer may sabotage work effort (stalking, etc.)
- Children may be manipulated to take sides with the batterer or may react negatively to new child care, school, transportation or other arrangements.
- Environmental instability

  Housing problems
  Community violence
  Health and financial difficulties

- Need for supportive services

  Child care
  Transportation
  Personal counseling
  Measures taken to stop violence (restraining order, criminal case) interfere with work schedule

Case Example—Rhonda

Rhonda is 21 and has five children, Marsha, age 6; Toni, age 4; Kyle and Cayman, age 3; and Arturo, age 1. Rhonda has a sixth-grade education. She is living with her current boyfriend, Raymond. He is the father of the twins and Arturo. Rhonda has shared that Raymond is an unskilled laborer who completed the eighth grade but is barely literate. He has a sporadic work history, and a history of alcohol and drug abuse. When he drinks, he gets physically abusive, but Rhonda claims he is going to Alcoholics Anonymous because he was arrested for driving under the influence. He has been clean for at least two months. They have one car between them, and it needs tires and a brake job. They use it only for emergencies. Rhonda says after the birth of the twins she tried going back to school, but that was when Raymond was using drugs. It was just too hard trying to cook, clean, take care of the children and go to school. Raymond was no help, and she thinks he was jealous. One time she thought she saw him outside the school, but when class let out he wasn't there. She made some new friends at school, but Raymond always had something bad to say about them. Now, Rhonda thinks it will be different.

What can go wrong?

How batterers may interfere with employment

1. Becoming violent and inflicting visible signs of abuse: The pain from physical injuries is often enough to interfere with employment. If the injuries are severe enough, the victim may require hospitalization. Even minor injuries can require emotionally distressing explanations.

2. Promising childcare that they fail to deliver: This may be in the form of promising to be available and not showing up or showing up late, with friends or drunk.

3. Taking anger out on the children: This may take the form of projecting blame for the abuser's upset on the non-abusive partner, and then being short-tempered, or verbally or physically abusive with the children.

4. Destroying or hiding items needed for training, education or work.

5. Promising to do household chores and then reneging on the promise: The prospect of work and full-time responsibilities at home can be overwhelming.

6. Frequently calling work and getting victim "in trouble" with employers.

7. Showing up at the job or training site unannounced. Stalking.

8. Transportation sabotage: Taking the only available means of transportation, purposely breaking the vehicle, or failing to keep a promise to fix the car.

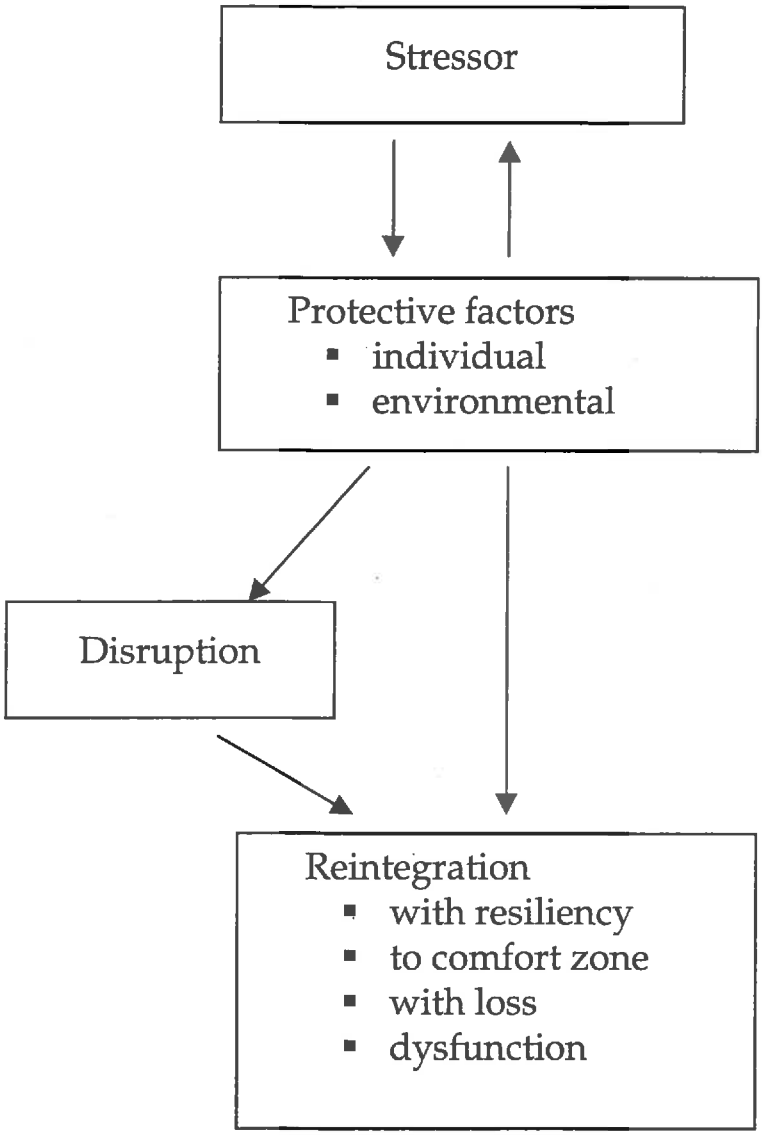
9. Failing to give important messages about employment or training, or from school, doctors or CalWORKs staff members.

10. Canceling appointments necessary for employment.

11. Belittling efforts.

12. Throwing emotional temper tantrums—pleading, begging, can include suicide attempts.

Resiliency model



With enough protective factors, reintegration can occur without disruption

Adversity does not automatically lead to loss or dysfunction

Adapted from Richardson, G.E., et al. (1990). The resiliency model. Health Education, 21 (6), 33-39.

Protective factors

Individual

- Life skills, including decision making, assertiveness, impulse control and problem solving
- Ability to form positive relationships
- Sense of humor
- Internal locus of control
- Autonomy and independence
- Positive view of future
- Flexibility
- Capacity to learn
- Self-motivation
- A sense of personal competence
- Feelings of self-worth and self-confidence

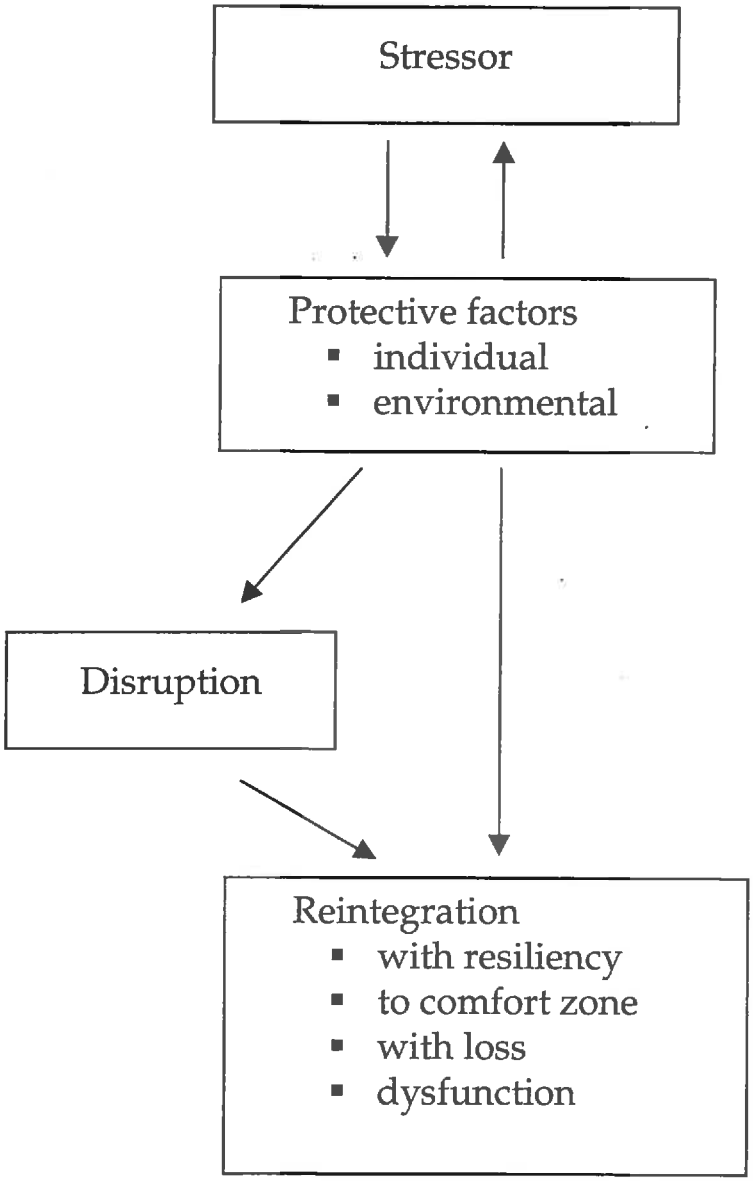
Environmental

- Interactions that have a high-warmth, low-criticism style
- Clear boundaries (rules, laws, norms)
- Supportive relationships
- Access to resources for meeting basic needs (food, clothing, housing, health care, employment)
- High and realistic expectations for success
- Opportunities for meaningful participation, including in decision making
- Appreciation for unique talents of each individual

Adapted from Henderson, N., & Milstein, M. (1996). Resiliency in schools. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Trainer Overheads

How batterers may interfere with employment

- Inflicting visible signs of abuse
- Broken promises about childcare
- Taking anger out on children
- Destroying or hiding education or work materials
- Promising to do household chores
- Calling at work
- Showing up at job site
- Transportation sabotage
- Failing to give messages
- Canceling appointments
- Belittling efforts
- Throwing emotional temper tantrums

Resiliency model