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## Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for men who physically abuse their female partner

*This user abstract presents the following Campbell systematic review: Smedslund G, Dalsbø TK, Steiro A, Winsvold A, Clench-Aas J: Cognitive behavioural therapy for men who physically abuse their female partner. Campbell Systematic Reviews 2011:1*

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Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is frequently used as treatment for men who physically abuse their female partner. Findings from a Campbell systematic review, however, reveal that there is not enough evidence to draw conclusions on its effect.

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### **PARTNER VIOLENCE – A WIDESPREAD AND SERIOUS PROBLEM**

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Partner violence is a serious problem in societies worldwide, affecting women in particular. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), partner violence is the most common form of physical abuse perpetrated against women. It is, however, difficult to form an overall picture of the problem, and to do something about it, as this type of abuse generally takes place in the private family sphere and the violence is seldom reported by the victim.

The abuse can take many different forms - psychological, sexual or physical – but, regardless of the type of abuse to which a woman is subjected, it has physical, psychological and social consequences. This review focuses only on physical abuse perpetrated by men against their female partner.

Domestic violence also has consequences for the children who witness the abuse. Studies show that the majority of physically abusive men have witnessed or been subjected to abuse during their childhood.

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### **WIDESPREAD TREATMENT – NO DOCUMENTED EFFECT**

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Cognitive behavioural therapy is frequently used as treatment for physically abusive men. The goal of the treatment is to bring about changes in the way that physically abusive men think about violence and the circumstances which lead to violence, thereby interrupting the chain of events that leads to physical abuse.

The objective of this review is to examine whether cognitive behavioural therapy helps men to stop physically abusing their partners. However, there are still too few randomised controlled trials to draw firm conclusions about the effectiveness of cognitive behaviour therapy for male perpetrators of domestic violence.

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## **ABOUT THE SYSTEMATIC REVIEW**

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This review included six randomized controlled trials from the USA involving a total of 2,343 participants.

Four of the studies compare a group of men who receive cognitive behavioural therapy with a control group who receive no treatment but are released on parole, carrying out community service or under supervision. The other two studies compare cognitive behavioural therapy with other forms of treatment (process-psychodynamic group treatment and facilitation group). Following the course of treatment (a period of up to 26 weeks and a follow-up period of 1-2 years) the level of repeated violence is measured.

The studies fail to provide a clear picture of the effect of cognitive behavioural therapy on physically abusive men, as they point in different directions. The individual circumstances surrounding each study can determine how the therapy is carried out and thereby the effect of the therapy. However, on the basis of the information available, it is not possible to determine which variations are decisive. As the studies point in different directions, the idea that certain variations of the therapy may have both a positive and negative outcome cannot be ruled out.

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## **COMPULSORY OR VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION?**

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The review includes studies where enrolment in the CBT program is voluntarily as well as those where enrolment is compulsory. The findings of the review do not, however, show any clear correlation between voluntary participation and a positive outcome of the treatment or compulsory participation and a negative outcome of the treatment.

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