Non-Violent Empowerment: Self-Help Group for Male Batterers on Recovery

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Abstract

This research focused on a new and unique therapy group for male batterers who were violent toward their intimate partners. The group is based on a small self-help group model, where a professional accompanies the group and serves as the facilitator of the process undergone by the group without interfering with the management of the group and its meetings. A total of seven group members were interviewed in a qualitative and phenomenological-interpretive research, which combined an outside observation by two authors with an inside observation by a professional who facilitated the group. The study focused on the method of empowerment of the group members, and it found three central themes: self-efficacy, group efficacy, and social efficacy. The research findings are explained from the new perspective of positive criminology.

Introduction

Men who treat their intimate partners violently (hereinafter "male batterers") are described in the professional literature as having a low self-image, a low

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perception of themselves, and weak ego-strengths. They usually have a strong need for self-control, power, impact, and control over others. In addition, they expect to be entitled to special rights because of the mere fact that they are men. They often use defense mechanisms of minimization, denial, and projection to hide the violent reality from themselves and society (Gondolf, 1985).

Anger, which is the basis for violent outbursts, is the dominant feeling in the emotional world of the violent men. Numerous male batterers explain that the reason for violence is the inability to manage anger and other dominant feelings, such as dependence, jealousy, and separation anxiety (Dutton, 1986).

As from the 1980s, with the increase in the awareness of the need for therapy for male batterers, three main group therapy models for these men were developed. The most common therapy model is the psychological-educational one, which adopts the pro-feminist approach to the problem and aspires to change stereotypes of and prejudices against women, as well as the behavior derived therefrom (Edleson & Syers, 1990). The second therapy model is based on the cognitive-behavioral theory (Beck & Lewis, 2001). The cognitive-behavioral therapy helps the violent man identify the cognitions that led him to behave violently toward his spouse and provides him with tools that will help him communicate with his spouse in a non-violent way. The third model is the therapy of the personality, which is derived from the dynamic approach and tries to change the men's patterns of communication while relating to childhood events and to a behavior acquired by the original family (Schwartz & Waldo, 2003). An additional model, which developed in Israel under the name "Grace Therapy," implements the 12-step program in professional group therapy with male batterers and emphasizes spiritual development as part thereof (Ronel & Claridge, 1999).

The approach that is currently common in therapy groups is to combine various models of therapy (Cavanaugh & Gelles, 2005; Lawson, 2006). A joint base for all these models is that the group is guided by a professional therapist. As a complement for the therapy of these men, a new method was lately developed in Israel—a self-help group for male batterers. The group was established in 2010 in Ramat Gan, initiated by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services and in cooperation with the Welfare Department of the Municipality of Ramat Gan and the Domestic Violence Treatment and Prevention Centre in Ramat Gan. This article is based mainly on qualitative study that was carried out on this group and its members.

A self-help group is an organization of people who share a common distress and sit together, strengthen each other, contribute their experience to each other, and feel that they have a common fate by merely sitting together. The self-help group is characterized by a number of central factors, including the sense of solidarity, the absence of bureaucracy, meeting face to face, and

an informal atmosphere. Unlike the traditional professional help in welfare or mental health settings, which is sometimes considered hierarchic (Horwitz, 1990), the self-help group offers a simple and equal setting, while the members themselves actually manage the group and are included in the creation of the contents and the service they receive (Powel, 1990).

People who attend the self-help group may consider themselves lonely in the world, and the diminishment of loneliness, which is provided by the groups, is a central element in coping with the problem. The group members find out that their life circumstances, the environment, and the family that raised them are significant elements in their situation. They adopt the viewpoint that they are indeed not solely responsible for their situation and for the distress that brought them to the group, but nevertheless, they are solely responsible for changing their lives and solving their problems. This viewpoint leads them to reduce their negative feelings toward themselves with an increasing ability to adopt a more positive identity (Laudet, Cleland, Magura, Vogel, & Knight, 2004).

During their participation in the self-help group, members can undergo a process of empowerment, in which they find out that they are able to initiate and affect the decision making in a variety of areas in their lives and in the lives of others. The group enables its members to carry out meaningful functions, which leads to a situation where a member who joined the group to receive help can learn that he[1] can significantly help others. This discovery on his part can support the increase of the sense of self-value and confidence and strengthen the belief in his personal abilities. In addition, when a group member feels that he is a part of a system that helps others, his life can become positively meaningful. From the help that a group member gives another, he can also learn how to take care of his own problems, his awareness can become stronger, and he can evaluate his past and present decisions and the advice he is given by new and old members (Riessman & Carroll, 1995; Zemore, Kaskutas, & Ammon, 2004).

The group members are gradually conversing and agreeing with each other. They familiarize themselves with each other and help each other outside the boundaries of the group's meetings as well. The open connection allows group members to examine and accept meaningful decisions in their lives in a more creative way. Sometimes, when a group member succeeds in solving a problem with the group's help, his confidence in the change he undergoes, his self-esteem, and his belief in himself and in the group will increase, and he will try to implement changes in additional areas of his life. The connections in the group, the group activities, and experiencing new roles within the group develop the individual's ability to solve problems, to think constructively, and to function interpersonally (Magura, 2007).

Numerous organizations and self-help groups that are active today follow the 12-step program, which was originally a way of life of coping with an alcohol addiction. The program was created by the founding members of "Alcoholics Anonymous" (AA) and is the basis for the recovery program of other groups, of which the largest and most outstanding ones are "Al-Anon," "Narcotics Anonymous" (NA), and "Overeaters Anonymous" (OA; Ronel, 2000). According to the 12-step program, the coping is expressed in three areas—behavioral, mental, and spiritual. In addition, it tries to show the group member his powerlessness over the problem with which he copes. The 12-step program examines how this powerlessness affects the way members lead their lives and offers them a lifestyle that will enable them to stop "fighting with the world" and to even be at peace with it and gain an increasing peace of mind (Atkins & Hawdon, 2007; Ronel, 2000). One development of the program in Israel is its implementation in the field of professional treatment of domestic violence (Ronel & Tim, 2003), which is also expressed in the self-help group for men in the way presented below.

The idea of self-help groups for male batterers is not new. A group in a similar format has existed in the United States for years—"Batterers Anonymous" (BA), which operates under the guidance of a professional and is free for its participants. The group was established in 1980, and its purpose was to help men who were interested in managing their angers and reduce their abusive behavior. The participation in this group was proved to be effective for helping individuals find alternative ways for violent and domineering behavior (Hamm & Kite, 1991; health.groups.yahoo.com/group/batterersanonymous/message). According to the report of the U.S. Ministry of Health, which examined effective therapy methods for male batterers, the anti-violent message that the BA group conveys helps male batterers contain their violence through emphasizing the results of the violent behavior. Concurrently, a concern of professionals is raised due to the fact that male batterers join the BA group without completing a significant therapy process for violence in a professionally guided group and that these groups might unintentionally encourage an aversive image of women (Macy & Goodbourn, 2012).

In 2010, a self-help group for men who graduated from therapy for domestic violence was initially established in Israel. It is by any means a voluntary group, in which all the members come by their own choice, with no pressure or incentives by law enforcement agents. The group started to meet (and is currently meeting) once a week in the Domestic Violence Treatment and Prevention Centre in Ramat Gan, and enjoys the support of a moderator-participant, who was trained as a social worker (the second author here). The social worker is qualified and experienced in the field of domestic violence, and he serves as the group's facilitator. He helps the group members shift

from a situation where their meetings and administration are managed by professionals to independent operation and management of the group. The facilitator helps the group participants take responsibility for operating the group and develops proficiencies in them that increase their confidence and help them believe in the power and the skills they have as individuals and as a group (Belkin, 2005). The facilitator trains group members to experience new behaviors that help them cope with their need for containment and a sense of confidence, which some are used to getting from their professional moderator. The process is based on setting the group's target, experiencing self-management, and learning how to prepare the group for right functioning and how to direct the meetings and make sure that they are carried out according to the rules approved by the members themselves. The members of the group are men who participated at least 6 months in professional therapy, where they acquired basic skills in abstaining from violence at home.

During the 4 years lifetime of the group, there were 47 participants, each of them for at least three meetings. Usually, 5 to 12 members participate in a given meeting. Occasionally, some members decided to leave the group because they felt either they no longer needed its assistance in preventing violence or they needed a professional group therapy. Since its establishment, the group went through a process in which its members became dominant in managing the group and in recruiting new members. The group members learned to lead the meetings, and some members even completed a training of the 12-step program for treating domestic violence to enhance their ability. Currently, the social worker still attends the meetings as a member-participant, provides knowledge, and trains the group members for independent activities. At any stage, this social worker was not the direct therapist of any of the group members, and his declared role in the group is as a co-leader, cooperating with one of the members who leads the group.

To reduce the subjective "blind spots" of their own violence, which could harm theirs and other members' recovery, the leaders of the group are individually supervised by the social worker, with extra emphasis and awareness on those blind spots. One of the leaders' roles is to uncover the blind spots in the group, and, thus, to model a message of self-responsibility for their peers.

One focus of this article is the examination of the way in which this self-help group implements the principles of positive criminology (Ronel & Elisha, 2011; Ronel & Segev, 2014). Positive criminology is a new perspective in criminology. It argues that a fundamental change undergone by a criminal is possible when he is exposed to integration processes of human concern and emphatic social acceptance in addition to and instead of the conventional exposure to rejection and to negative labeling. Whether rejection and negative labeling could implement any change in individuals has been questioned by positive

criminology and by various researchers (Eisikovits & Buchbinder, 1996; Gil, 1996; Ronel & Tim, 2003; Tifft, 1993). The positive criminology approach conveys a message of hope and belief to the violent individual, according to which he can leverage his past and harsh experiences while taking responsibility for his problems and trying to change his life. Positive criminology emphasizes the positive powers within the individual, helps him gather these powers from within himself, and thus paves his way to reintegrate in the community (Elisha, Idisis, & Ronel, 2012). Positive criminology is a perspective that includes a variety of theories and close models, such as restorative justice (Shachaf-Friedman & Timor, 2008; Zehr, 1995), desistance from delinquency (Kazemian & Maruna, 2010; Maruna, 2004), strengths perspective (Van Wormer & Davis, 2003), encouragement of hope (Burnett, 2010; Martin & Stermac, 2010), and recovery (White, 2009).

The study dealt with the impact of giving during self-help processes in the lives of the participants and focused on the question of how the empowerment of the male batterers in the self-help group is implemented. This research is a part of a broader research that has not yet been published.

Method

The research was implemented through the qualitative-phenomenological method, which considers an individual as the form of the meanings and interpretations that one adopts and bestows upon the social reality in which one lives. This methodology is alert to the patterns characterizing the phenomena and provides awareness to the conceptual built-in perspective (Patton, 2002; Schilling, 2006). The phenomenological research method examines the events of the person's life and focuses on the individual's interpretation of these events. It integrates participants' quotations, which mirror their daily world and provide a small window to understand it, their way of thinking and their interpretation of the events. The individual describes his personal experience of the world and from this experience, the researcher methodically concludes the underlying meaningful themes (Higgins, 2009; Shkedi, 2003; Zabar Ben Yehoshua, 1999). This research method was elected as suitable for the current study in view of the focus on the subjective experience of the self-help group participants, that is, how they experience the process of change within the group (Lindsay, Roy, Turcotte, & Montminy, 2006).

Participants

Seven men who participated in the self-help group and had a past of intimate partner violence were interviewed for the study. The interviewees were between the ages of 38 and 54. Three were married, two divorced, one

single, and another separated. The seven interviewees are fathers to children between the ages of 3.5 and 23. The duration of the interviewees' participation in the group ranges from 5 to 9 months during the conduct of the interviews. In addition, two more people were also interviewed at different points of time: the social worker who helped establish the group, continues to accompany it, and to provide it with technical and emotional support and information that should help the group members become independent (as mentioned above, he joined the authors as the second author here), and a senior employee of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services—Ronit (an alias), who was one of the initiators of the group under study.

Tools and Procedure

The participants were located by the self-help group facilitator who mediated between the interviewer and the seven group members who agreed to be interviewed. There were participants who did not agree to be personally interviewed and refused an observation of the interviewer in the group's meetings. Therefore, the interviewer was not present in the meetings.

The data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews according to an interview guide that was written in advance. These interviews enable the men to describe their experiences in the group and their perception of the impact of these experiences on the processes of their emotional and social growth. Initially, every participant signed an informed consent form, as approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). They were promised that they could leave the interview at any stage and withdraw from any question. The research was based on a dialogue with the participants, while maximally expressing their understanding and viewpoint. To prevent biased responses, the interviewer did not present his early viewpoints before the participants. Questions that intended to encourage thought in the interviewee were included in the interviews. To strengthen the credibility of the study, data were gathered from various sources, as presented above (Shkedi, 2003). The names of all interviewees included in the study are aliases.

The interviews with the self-help group members and the social worker were carried out in the Domestic Violence Treatment and Prevention Centre in Ramat Gan. The interview with Ronit took place in the Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO) offices in Tel-Aviv. The interviews were held with a minimum interference of the interviewer, so that the experiential and authentic conversation of the interviewee would not be detrimentally affected. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour, and was fully audio-recorded and transcribed later by the interviewer.

After the transcription of the interviews, they were being analyzed in a number of stages. In the first stage, they were read continuously and strictly and accompanied by remarks that were written down during the interviews. In the second stage, the interviews were read again more thoroughly and categories of contents were identified therein. In the third stage, these categories were divided into groups, and through the reduction of parallel findings, a number of central categories of meaning were created. The division into these categories is the major part of the qualitative analysis process of the text, as it forces the researchers to examine the meanings of the text and connect all its sections together (Shkedi, 2003).

The data analysis process was carried out through a continuous dialogue between the three authors who represent different perspectives: the first author and the interviewer, who observes the group closely from the "outside"; the second author and the facilitator of the group's process who observes it from the "inside"; and the third author and the principal researcher who observes from the "outside," but participates in the steering committee that initiated the project and the research. In the "Findings" section, numerous quotations of the men's actual language will be introduced, and, thus, it will be possible to be directly impressed by the findings, and the authenticity of the research will be strengthened. The study does not offer any generalization of the findings, apart from that carried out solely by the readers.

Findings

In this section, we will introduce the findings from the interviews with the participants. The central themes on which we will focus here are self-efficacy, group efficacy, and social efficacy. The theme of self-efficacy relates to contents that deal with self-awareness through identifying with another, with internalization and implementation of the tools learned in the group, and with the development of a new scale of values. The theme of group efficacy is about training group members as moderators and leaders to replace the group's moderator-participant and to include them in the development of the group. The theme of social efficacy is engaged in new values of membership that were developed among the participants, in the feeling of unity and solidarity and in their constant giving and availability for each other.

Self-Efficacy

Awareness through identification. Some participants mentioned that they sometimes deal with struggles and processes that are shared by other group members. They analyze their experiences and think how they can implement the

solutions they heard from their peers in their daily lives. According to them, they tend to sincerely share their indecisions with their members and are open to listen to advice that will prevent them from reaching situations that might spur violence.

According to some participants, sometimes, when they face situations that led them to act violently in the past, they remember similar stories heard in the group and the solutions offered to the member who raised the problem. Danny described it as follows:

> You are always informed where you are through listening to the problems of others. I think about how he coped with the situation and about how I would have coped with it and thus, I learn more about myself, where I got and where else I can get to.

Some participants mentioned that through mutual listening and trying to "step into someone else's shoes" and help him, they learn and internalize facts about themselves. They listen to the stories of others and recognize in their behavior negative patterns with destructive consequences on their lives. Some participants noticed that when later they were in a similar situation, they found out that they were more aware of their behavior, and this awareness led them to act differently, in a more restrained and moderate way. They mentioned that they remember the price that the member paid under specific circumstances when he did not control his behavior and that memory significantly restrains them while facing a similar situation:

> I had a problem with my wife. She did something frustrating to me, which made me furious. The group did not meet that day so I called a group member who calmed me down. He reminded me of things we worked on in the group and it helped me keep my distance and not act violently. (Amitay)

Internalization and implementation. Some participants mentioned that they experience the group's influence not only during the meetings but also during the weekdays. According to them, they believe in their ability to implement a change, and this belief affects their self-confidence. As opposed to the desperation that took control over them in the past, knowing that there is a group that will always listen to them and accept them without being judgmental calms them down and fills them with hope. Therefore, the members feel free to think about replacing their automatically violent behavior with the alternative ways of reaction to which they were exposed in the group: "You keep things compressed in your guts for a whole week. Knowing that in a few days you will be able to talk about it in the group is already calming you down" (Shimon).

Some participants said that they understood they should get help from each other to avoid violence, and, therefore, they attentively listen to the advice of others in the group and learn how to more effectively behave, which helps them with their progress. They mentioned that through the stories of others, they learn what they should do and what to avoid. They implement it in their daily lives and learn different behavioral patterns, which facilitate the daily struggle for them. Jacob's story is an example of such a case:

> There was a big fight. We cursed each other in front of the children. The wife told me to get out of the house. I remembered that the group members suggested that I should not reply—I should just get out of the house for a 2-hour walk and calm down. I told the wife that it was no problem. I left the house and did not answer the phone until the day after.

According to some participants, they succeed to be supported by each other in significant issues whereas before, they acted according to their automatic instincts and thoughts, which usually took them to places where they did not want to be anymore. Accordingly, they became more open to hear new opinions and to act according to them. Jacob said that when he decides to share an event with his friends, their reactions make him sometimes change his attitude toward that event:

> One time I told my friends about something that happened to me with an inspector who gave me a traffic report. They helped me change the way I looked at it, and made me understand that I am lucky that things did not get even more complicated.

New scale of values. Some participants mentioned that they felt that a new scale of values had developed in them, which helped them examine themselves and act unlike the past in different daily-life situations. They described this value system as real, available, and applicable, and according to them, every meeting proves to them that a change can be made and implemented over time. Danny said that with the group's strength and the broad help that he provided to other members, he felt more obligated to progress and not to go back and act according to the violent behavioral patterns of the past. According to him, his sense of responsibility for others in the group, which he has not experienced in other professionally led groups, helps him create a "Book of Rules" that he carries with him during the day and that enables him to live in peace with himself and with the environment:

> You hear things, you write them down and suddenly you understand that you can follow their advice. You create a book of rules for yourself, which teaches

you what to do in a number of situations, how to stay calm . . . It helps you down the road. It is like when you take driving lessons. First you have to understand what traffic signs are. This is our language which is always with us and helps us.

According to a number of participants, in difficult daily circumstances, they sometimes remember a similar situation that was shared by a group member a number of meetings ago and thus change the behavior or the aggressive tone that took control over them in that sensitive situation. They mentioned that they felt fully satisfied when they realized in the moment of truth that they acted differently from the way they had in the past. In addition, they feel that they can, through teaching, transfer this scale of values to other men who are in a situation similar to theirs.

> It is important for me to continue in this group in order to contribute from my experience and knowledge to others and help them get to where I am today. Thus, I will also have a place to voice my problems to others and be supported by them. (Amitay)

Group Efficacy

The patient as the therapist. During the first months after the group was established, two of its members and the process facilitator participated in a course that taught them the 12-step program for treating domestic violence. Part of the self-help group's meeting is designated to learn the 12-step program, which is taught by these group members who participated in the course. Dror, one such member, said that he came to the self-help group after years of therapy, with a wish to feel the therapist's experience, help others, and contribute from his experience:

> I thought that that time I could contribute to others, as if I knew how to play with both roles of the therapist and patient in my professional life, so I thought that I was in such an advanced stage that I could also assume the role of the therapist with other people who coped with violence. I know something about the subject and I have a lot to give.

At a later stage, other members also related to this aspect of providing their knowledge to others in the group. Danny, for example, stated during the interview that he considered himself as a significant factor in the group and tried to contribute from his experience to its members. He felt that he knew a lot and was glad to pass this knowledge on to the group members: "I pass my knowledge on to the group, and thus I give them the strength and the facts

from which they will know how to cope, to see the things differently and to understand how they can improve themselves."

According to some participants, they felt that they gave the self-help group members around them more than in other groups in which they had participated in the past. They stated that the feelings experienced by them following the giving are positive and strengthening and told how the giving affected their self-image and mood. For example, Amitay said that apart from the good feeling he had after giving, he was aware that when he gave to another, he also maintained his ability to help himself as well as his awareness and his knowledge:

> I am extremely attached to the group and its members and I enjoy giving and contributing. While doing this, I feel that it made me feel good, the group is very important to me . . . I know that my knowledge can vanish if I stop participating and helping others. I give and contribute from what I have, but I know that the more I participate and learn, I will also be able to contribute to others, which is my purpose.

The participating leader. As said previously, the group facilitator, the second author, and two additional group members, participated in the 12-step course for treating domestic violence. The facilitator shares his acquired knowledge with the group members, provides them with relevant professional material, and directs them to relevant organizations in the community that will be able to help them with the development of the group. The mere fact that he is included in the group as a member-participant (although, in his background, he is a professional and *not* a male batterer) and not as a professional leader made some participants more attentive to his advice as a group member than to the advice of professional leaders from therapy groups in the past. This is reinforced also by the fact that he is not perceived as their group therapist, and he never had any therapist-client relationship with any of them.

Apart from his participation in the meetings and his availability for the members, the facilitator helps direct the group, advises its members in technical and personal matters, and assists them in issues related to the management of the group.

Some participants mentioned that they felt pretty close to the facilitator who they considered an unexceptional participant. Some participants even stated that they considered him the closest person to them in the group. Golan claims that their relationship is friendly and reciprocal:

> A. is our friend, a leader in parentheses. I personally like him a lot. He is a great guy . . . I know him well. He also opened up to me and I feel comfortable to approach him after the meeting whenever I feel like.

Danny says that the facilitator is a significant figure who glues the parts of the group together. He claims that he does not know how the group will get along without him:

> I do not know how long the group will continue without A. He is like the group's father and mother. When he is not here anymore, one member may not arrive, another will say "I also do not want to participate" and thus everything will deteriorate. It is like a football team without a coach. We will not have the push of someone strengthening us.

The mere participation of A as a group member and not a professional leader gave the group significant advantages. Some participants talked about the fact that it was easier for them to listen to the advice of the group members than to those of the professionals who led groups in which they participated before. According to them, the mere thought that all group members who share a room with them in their meetings went through the same experiences makes them feel comfortable and prevents the unpleasant feeling that they sometimes experience when a foreign object penetrates into their warm corner. In view of A's function as a process enabler and not a professional leader, his presence does not interfere with this perception of the men.

Jacob, for example, stated that although he appreciated the work of the professional leaders, he sometimes felt that their presence blocked him and disturbed him: "Sometimes there is this thought—why does he tell me what to do? Does he know what I am talking about? Has he ever gone through something like this in his life?" Dror said also that it was easier for him to put his ego aside and follow the advice given by people who went through similar difficulties and experiences in the past:

> You find it more difficult to be reflected by [professional] leaders than by group members . . . Advice from group members are more accepted, a lot more accepted. Like "I have been there and I understand you a lot better. I am not just an academic who experiments something and conveys it to you theoretically."

According to the personal experience of the group facilitator, the second author here, it is a breakthrough and pioneering in the field of treating male batterers. The role is complex, and it requires the simultaneous wearing of a number of hats: whether to help the group members to advance and to independently manage the group and recruit new members, to provide the group members with professional advice when necessary, or to participate in the meetings and share his experiences as a man, a spouse, and a father.

The facilitator role in the self-help group integrates the familiar and known standpoint of a professional in the field of domestic violence, who has the

experience and the authority, and the equal standpoint, "at eye level," where the men share the journey and become colleagues, people with whom one can share professional and personal experiences, and sometimes even friends.

Involvement in the group's development. The interviews showed that some participants had a strong will to expose the group to other men to recruit new members and increase their impact. They were interested in developing the idea of the group and "spread the news" in Israel. Some participants said that they felt the need to cherish the good they received until then and give back to society and to others by helping other male batterers exit the cycle of violence and transfer a part of the things they received in the self-help group to them. It seems that the group implemented a significant change in their lives and they wished to continue and affect other people who are in a similar situation of distress: "The purpose of this group is that one day we will rise and create our own group, while each graduate who feels that he can contribute will open such groups in different locations" (Shimon).

The participants disagreed about the group's format, the way according to which a new member is accepted by the group and the way in which the 12-step program should be integrated in the meetings. For example, some participants were wondering whether the group should be open for every person who wishes to participate therein or whether prerequisites should be set for whoever wishes to join it: "We weigh the possibilities and wonder if it is better that in the future the group remains open for people who have not been treated in the past" (Tal).

> Actually, it is a self-help group which should be open to everyone. Maybe at the end we will decide that we recommend him to go to additional therapy, so that he will derive more from his participation in the group. We will not force him, but we will warmly recommend it. (Dror)

Social Efficacy

New membership values. Some participants said that because of their membership in the group, they understood the term "membership" differently. They said that for the first time in their lives, they encounter such a meaningful and real friendship. Subsequent thereto, they understood that real friendship was shown in the expression of one's real feelings without veils and in the feeling that the person beside you would accept you and help you in distress—a kind of help that excludes interests and comes from the heart. They said that in the past, they felt that desperation had overcome them and then they felt hopeful, because they knew that they had friends who would listen to them without being judgmental and help them with anything.

The participants said that after they found out that people were willing to help them and accept them as they were, it was easier for them to listen more attentively to the things said in the group and to identify and learn from the stories of others who coped with similar situations. Amitay, for example, stated that he decided to take a significant step in his life because of this trust in his friends and the knowledge that they would be there for him when he was forced to cope with the problems of divorce:

> These group members helped me with something that no other group members ever did—to cause my divorce . . . The people in this group are more connected and really wish for each other's well-being. This convinced me to look at the situation from a different standpoint and take this step. It was not easy for me. I have been separated for 6 years and it was difficult for me to let go of the fantasy that we were a happy family living together.

Some participants felt "supported" when other members encouraged them to make the right choice, to look at the event from all angles and not to fear change, and, at the same time, promised them that they would be there for them and support them whenever problems arise. Shimon and Golan mentioned how they felt about the support of the group members:

> One time I really felt how great was the help of the group-members. I had a problem and it seemed that everyone volunteered to help me with it . . . it was extremely important to me. I understood that I was not alone and that there are others who care.

> The group members always lend me an attentive ear. Wow, I am lucky to have them, I am happy . . . If I have a problem and, for example, I lose control, I can call one of my friends, listen to their advice, talk, it is like a lesson for me, like therapy. (Golan)

Unity and solidarity. A number of participants emphasized the feeling of unity and solidarity that exists in the group. They mentioned that the fact that the group members simultaneously volunteered to help a member in distress created a situation where the member who received the help was more connected to the group and would be interested to reach out and help another member in distress later on. Some members, who are currently unable to give to others as they would have liked to, said that observing the power of giving and its effects, as expressed by the stories of the group members, makes them want to continue to attend, grow, and develop:

> This is what is good with all this mess. We are all in the same boat and each of us takes care of the other. Everyone has something to give . . . look, one time I

myself felt how much everyone's sharing helped me and improved my feeling. When I see something like this, I want to also succeed automatically and help those who anyway are in distress. I want to volunteer and help them like they volunteered in the past for me. (Shimon)

From their experience in the self-help group, where others identify and understand the personal information they disclose, some participants said that they learned to accept the shortcomings of the other and encourage them to talk honestly:

Here it is easier for people to say what they really feel. In my previous groups, there was the group and then there was "after the group"—things we talked about after the meeting and after the leader had left. We did not talk during the meeting, but here we still talk about the things during the meeting. (Amitay)

Participants also said that the group being a warm and intimate place helps them neutralize their past opposition to change, to seriously relate to things that are said in the group, including those that touch the most painful areas, and to go on a journey where they identify shifts in their sometimes-strict viewpoint about intimacy in relationships and life. Danny describes this journey and says,

You work harder on things which you did not relate to or you did not see right away in your head. When you participate in the group, you clean the disc and see things differently. It is like a "restart," like a computer. You clean up all the garbage you have and the result is—a different person from the one that came in.

Giving and constant availability. An outstanding aspect of the new membership and a feeling of solidarity are expressed in the strong involvement that continues beyond the group's hours, and this is what attracts them to the group. Some participants said that they wanted to be a part of a social network that always provides a solution and faster than what they have expected. They indeed became part of the group and felt the sense of security that came from the constant availability of the members.

Some members mentioned that it was important for them to be updated on their friends' experiences during their daily lives and to try helping them both in routine and in emergency situations. They described how they wait for the opportunity to help another member who is in crisis even without him asking for it:

When someone is in a situation in which he is about to break or fall, I give him my phone number and tell him that before he reaches a situation like this or thinks about doing something wrong, he should call me and we will talk. (Danny)

Amitay related to the way in which the constant availability of the group members affects his ability to help them and be helped: "Only in this group I started to call group members and consult with them. If you feel that you are going to explode or to act exaggeratedly, you place a phone call and thus receive encouragement and support."

Some members mentioned that their week-long giving process contributed to them as much as it contributed to those who were helped. They mentioned that they saw themselves continuing in the group for years, because they believed that the time devoted by them to the group during the week facilitated their lives outside the group and made it more effective:

> I have to continue and strengthen myself, because if you have it bad you cannot give to others. If you feel good and are strong, you can cope with difficulties and those around you will be happy . . . I will not give up on this group and I will continue to stay with it a long time, because when you give, you also receive, which fills you with a good feeling and this is better than anything else. (Danny)

According to some participants, those who offered help in the group had a "spark in the eyes." They initiated phone calls during the week, checked the conditions of their friends, and felt that their volunteering was active, alive, and breathing. Amitay said that apart from the good feeling that he had after giving, he was aware of the fact that when he gives to another, he also maintains his ability to help himself and preserve the awareness and the accumulated knowledge:

> The group is very important to me. I know that the knowledge can disappear if I stop to participate and help others. I give and contribute from what I have, but I know that if I participate more and learn more, I will also be able to contribute more to others, which is my purpose.

Ronit, a senior employee in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services, introduced the vision about the self-help group to male batterers and its uniqueness compared with groups that are guided professionally:

> The idea was to take from the world of contents of the work with addicted people and try and create a self-help group for male batterers with two objectives. One, to strengthen the change implemented by a male batterer during the therapy he received in the Center for Treating Violence, and two, to encourage male batterers to ask for any kind of help in order to exit the cycle of violence. The fact that a man who went through therapy gives to another man who is under therapy helps preserve the change implemented in the man who started therapy.

Ronit said that the idea was that every member should feel obligated to give to the group members, and, thus, he himself will be strengthened:

> The violent man will meet other men, tell them about the change implemented in him and serve as a model. It strengthens him. He includes his healthy part in the dialogue with men who are too pessimistic to seek help and he will feel good about the fact that he succeeds in helping male batterers from his experience.

Discussion

The study examined the personal and social processes undergone by male batterers in the self-help group. Below, we will present the main findings and examine the way in which the self-help group for male batterers implements the principles of positive criminology.

Giving to another is a central principle in the self-help group (Riessman & Carroll, 1995). The participants spent a lot of time to voluntarily give to male batterers inside and outside the group. They considered their membership in the self-help group a mission, which enabled them to leverage their life experience to help others. In addition, they tried hard to attract new members to the group and to help more male batterers. Yalom and Leszcz (2005) pointed at the fact that self-help groups are characterized by supporting and reinforcing utterances and not by confrontation. The group reinforcements strengthen the individual and make it easier for him to believe in the group and open up to it. Indeed, one outstanding characteristic of the self-help group for male batterers, which allows its participants to talk openly about their feelings, is the reaction the man received after his sharing was over, as extreme as it might have been. According to the participants, when a group member talked about his angers and his indecisions, he would always receive support, empathy, and warm words that encouraged him to continue sharing in future meetings as well. Even when the group member cannot speak about his harsh feelings, which may lead him to violence, he listens to other men in the group who talk about similar feelings and who receive warm and supporting reactions. Thus, he feels relieved and is legitimized to one day dare and talk about his own experiences.

Bowen and Gilchrist (2004) pointed out how important it is that a male batterer takes responsibility for his life during therapy and have an internal desire to change his perception and his way of conduct. When the male batterer adapts to therapeutic goals designed for him by external people and that he considers insignificant, his behavior will not change significantly over time. The self-help group instituted the responsibility for therapy on the men

themselves and thus showed them, in practice, how to be responsible for their recovery. The self-help group members considered themselves independent, they felt obligated to undergo therapy, and it was important for them to be focused in the meetings and to raise essential issues that bothered them and for which they could receive solutions from other group members. Participants who avoid taking active responsibility for their lives were mirrored by the group members with respect to the thought pattern that may lead to violence. Opposition to the change of the passive perception that focuses on others was gradually diminished during the self-help group meetings, while the change was offered by the members who had the same viewpoint, implemented a change, and found out that it improved their quality of life. This illustrates how the self-help group implemented the active client approach, which perceives therapy as a process in which the client learns to be actively responsible for the change in his life (Bohart & Tallman, 1996).

Male batterers, as argued by Ronel and Tim (2003), are characterized, at least during the moments of violence (not only physical), by high self-centeredness and are obsessively concerned with the satisfaction of their needs and desires. They are often blind to the needs of their intimate partners, in particular, and sometimes also to those of other people, in general. Their relationships are characterized by "me–this" (Shoham & Addad, 2004). The self-help group directed the men to intensively work for others, which enabled them to digress from their self-centeredness (Ronel, 2000). Giving to others both inside and outside the group demanded the transfer of attention to the wishes and needs of others while practicing patience and understanding. It enabled them to learn a new relationship of "me–you" (Shoham & Addad, 2004).

In the meetings of the self-help group, the positive and strengthening feelings bestowed by giving allowed the participants to leverage their life experiences and help others through it, as described by the "Helper Therapy" principle (Gartner & Riessman, 1977; Riessman, 1965). A number of members in the self-help group mentioned that by giving to another who is in a past or present situation similar to theirs, they remember the beginning of their therapy process and appreciate their advancement compared with the past. This examination of their advancement motivates them to persevere in the therapy process and maintain their non-violent behavior. Nevertheless, it seemed that the participants did not feel mature enough to give up their comfort for another. They did not hurry up to open additional groups in Israel. They felt comfortable in their own self-help group, and the major part of their effort was directed to recruiting new members to their group in Ramat Gan. In other words, unlike the 12-step groups, where personal recovery is expressed in the contribution of the individual to the expansion of the groups

(Ronel, 1995; White, 1998), in the self-help group under study, such an ideology had not yet been developed, and there still was no expansion to other sub-groups for male batterers, which can place a question mark on the survivability of the group over time.

An additional means of empowerment that the self-help group members receive was positive social appreciation. Through the membership in the self-help group, the participants did significant work—They contributed to changes in the lives of their colleagues who were male batterers. This is a social action with a positive status. For this work, they experienced support and appreciation by other male batterers in the self-help group and in various domestic violence therapy centers, and also from different therapy agents and in their homes. In addition, they felt that in contrast to the past, they now had something to offer to society. They were appreciated for their achievements, and they felt that they had something to be proud of. Thus, they turned the negative labeling of the male batterer into positive social proficiency (Maxwell, 1984; Ronel, 1995), which is internalized as personal success. Therefore, through giving to others, they get to positively strengthen their self-appreciation.

Weinstock's (1999) study found that male batterers were emotionally overwhelmed when they experience feelings of fear of intimacy and separation anxiety. In his opinion, their inability to cope with these feelings leads them to use violence because of a need to actively take an action to feel that they control the situation. The self-help group addressed the need for control and attempted to positively channel it. The group taught them to take responsibility for their own recovery and to assist in the recovery process of other group members even in activities beyond the boundaries of the group meetings. Through this work, the men learned how to also direct their need for control to positive channels in their daily lives.

Hamel (2007) emphasized the importance of transferring the value of equality for the violent man while being a part of a couple, as, in his opinion, the man acts violently to preserve the feeling that his status has an advantage over his intimate partner's. Relations of equality are depicted in the nature of the self-help group. There were no leaders and no led members in the group—equality prevailed and all learned how to overcome disputes through mutual cooperation and respect. When a male batterer was a part of this equality, he was exposed to new forms of discussion, cooperation, and problem solution. Therefore, the self-help group actually showed its members the value to which they were directed and let them more actively experience it. This value of perceived congruency in therapy was mentioned by Rogers (1957) as one of the most essential and necessary for change, and it was also adopted by positive criminology (Ronel & Segev, 2014).

Laudet et al. (2004) described the loneliness experienced by most attendees of the self-help groups and mentioned that in the group these feelings are relieved. Spending time with a group of people who cope with similar problems provides a sense of security and diminishes loneliness. Similar to their argument, a significant support net was created between the men in the self-help group. It made the lives of its members fuller and their daily coping easier while developing feelings of closeness and trust and having the support of friends.

Gondolf (2002) mentioned that the male batterer considers society hypocritical and alienating. He feels that it will never understand him, and he usually protects himself from it and presents a false appearance before it. He is busy with defense and is not open to learn new things. In the self-help group, the men arrived at a place where most members had values similar to theirs, and their participation in the meetings was not reported to any institutional organization. The group member was given the opportunity to remove the veils, to express what was in his heart, and to speak freely. The fact that he did not feel threatened by the group members enabled him to maintain openness and, in contrast to his habits in the past, to consult with other people and adopt ways of coping that would enable him to act differently than in the past and to abstain from violence. This sense of universality may be experienced in a professional group as well, as Lindsay et al. (2006) described.

Nevertheless, it seems that a few participants found it still difficult to devote themselves to the ideas raised by other group members without the presence of an external figure who observes and supervises the process they undergo. Some self-help group members were still worried about the departure of the social worker and about becoming absolutely independent in operating it. This concern was contrary to one of the initial purposes of this self-help group—to teach the participants to take responsibility for their recovery process, to develop self-belief in themselves, and to reduce their dependence on people from the outside.

Ronel (1995), in his in-depth study of NA, found that during the group process which the individual undergoes in the self-help group, self-acceptance and making peace with his own weaknesses are gradually developed by identifying with others and accepting them into the group. This self-acceptance is a central and significant condition on the way to recovery. It can be seen that the term "unconditional acceptance" was expressed, at least declaratively and aspired toward, also in the self-help group for male batterers and served as a significant part therein. The participants conveyed the message to each of the other group members that they accept him in spite of his past and that they believe in his power to implement the change. Through social acceptance, the individual in the self-help group could learn to accept himself and take responsibility for his wrong actions.

The provisions mentioned above can be concluded by the demonstration of the principles of positive criminology. Further to the aforesaid, positive criminology argues that individuals who were criminals or violent may undergo a fundamental change when they are exposed to an integrative social experience that is characterized by human kindness and empathic social acceptance instead of rejection and negative labeling. The positive experience demonstrates for these individuals the aspired values and lets them meet a new reality of life, which may encourage them to change previous patterns of behavior and thought. Positive criminology argues that individuals with criminal or violent background can be reintegrated in society through the adoption of a positive and accepting approach that will help them accept social norms and increase their involvement and responsibility for their surroundings (Ronel & Elisha, 2011; Ronel & Segev, 2014).

In the self-help group described here, through the positive experience in the group, the members were given the opportunity to start developing empathy and a sense of belonging toward others in society. A number of participants mentioned during the interviews that in the past, they felt rejected by society. This viewpoint led them to anger, frustration, and alienation, and from it came the desire to fight society and the people who compose it. Currently, after a significant period in which they were part of a group, they said that through giving to others within the group and through recruiting members into it, they felt that they could contribute to society. They felt that they opened a window for the implementation of significant changes in the lives of many others, which satisfied them and made them proud.

Maruna's (Kazemian & Maruna, 2010; Maruna, 2004) crime desistance approach is considered a representation of the perspective of positive criminology. Accordingly, the offender was usually awarded by temporary immediate satisfaction that fades quickly away. Therefore, crime desistance emphasizes the need to find internal rewards instead of external ones, which provide the feeling of an alternative and continuous reward. Through a certain behavior, which is significantly different from the offender's behavior in the past, he succeeds in finding a meaning outside the cycle of crime and in developing a feeling of self-value that does not depend on others (Addad, Vignansky, & Haimi, 2008). To internally motivate an individual to change and preserve it, he should feel that the reintegration is carried out by his essential work. Indeed, it seems that the voluntary giving and the reactions it encourages increased the confidence of the participants in the self-help group, changed the way they saw themselves, and raised their confidence in their ability to contribute to and integrate in society.

A significant term in positive criminology is hope. Martin and Stermac (2010) found that focusing on hope can encourage prisoners to find lives that

are worthy of living and motivate them to implement a change in their lives. In addition, focusing on hope may reduce the risk of committing crime in the future. Burnett (2010) found that emphasizing hope among offenders improves different areas, such as coping with difficult situations, interpersonal relationships, employment, and education. Hope provides the offender with targets to focus on, which he uses as support in moments of crisis and which prevent him from acting destructively during these moments. In the self-help group, the impact of hope on the participants was outstanding. The change revealed to the participants in the processes they underwent filled them with vitality and gave them hope to continue self-work that might improve their lives and the lives of other male batterers. The self-help group gave the participants something they could belong to, which encouraged their recovery and was available to them all the time. It gave them different tools to help them cope with daily problems, to avoid violent behavior, and to focus on giving to others, which changed the way they perceived themselves and the environment.

In spite of the favorable findings of this study, one cannot ignore the unavoidable limitations. First, the research focused only on the subjective experience and did not examine the actual "before and after" changes in the lives of the men. Second, the study examined a small number of men who were the members of only one group. Third, the study did not methodically compare the group experience in the self-help group with the experience of similar therapy groups. Such valuation is strongly meaningful as the self-help group members expressed strong criticism of their former experience in a professionally led group; however, it is unclear whether it is simply the nature of unsatisfied clients who experienced a new group model, or whether there is something inherent in professionally led groups that warrants such pointed and forceful criticism.

Future studies might solve these limitations and compare men in the self-help group with their colleagues in other groups. In addition, a future study might examine how the vision of the self-help group develops, that is, opening additional voluntary groups for treating violence that are managed by male batterers in Israel. In addition, it will be possible to examine how professionals perceive the ability of male batterers to abstain from violence over time without professional help and their willingness to direct male batterers to the self-help group.

In conclusion, this study presents a new therapy model in Israel that may reduce the dependence of male batterers on public services. It seems that the personal empowerment that follows the mutual support and the giving to others in the self-help group significantly improved the lives of the group members with the minimal help of professionals. The self-help group members

stated that after giving inside as well as outside the group, they feel more independent and they more strongly believe in their abilities. They stated that in the past, they felt rejected by society and today they feel as its equals. They believe that they can contribute and that they can leverage their past and their experience by transferring knowledge to other men who are in the same situation.

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Note

1. This article, which is mostly focused on men's recovery, is written in the masculine gender for convenience purposes only, and it equally applies to both women and men, without any distinction whatsoever.

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