

Understanding and addressing intimate partner abuse perpetration by men in substance use treatment

KEY MESSAGES

ADVANCE is a perpetrator intervention for men in substance use (alcohol and/or drugs) treatment who use abusive behaviour towards a female (ex)-partner. ADVANCE has been offered to 94 men. While the sample is small, findings have demonstrated reductions in abusive behaviour and substance use. Longer term follow-up is required to explore whether these findings are maintained.

Our research has shown that both the in-person group-based and digital ADVANCE (ADVANCE-D) interventions can be delivered safely by trained staff in substance use treatment (facilitators). However, staff require protected time for delivery.

The content of the interventions was well-received by men and facilitators. Some men preferred digital over in-person sessions as they offered increased accessibility.

Not all facilitators and integrated women's support workers were able to adhere to every aspect of the intervention delivery. Further analysis will explore the impact of model fidelity and address the current limitations of the evaluation due to small numbers.

Training and supervision for facilitators and integrated women's support workers is needed. Ongoing integrity support is required to promote and ensure adherence to the intervention delivery plan.

Delivering ADVANCE and ADVANCE-D requires carefully managed risk and safety planning, achieved through professionally trained profiling of risk and vulnerability factors. Supervised completion of

ADVANCE-D website sessions and in-person (rather than remote) coaching sessions at substance use treatment services could enhance men's attendance, completion and engagement, and ensure adherence to all aspects of the intervention.

Integrated support for female (ex)-partners alongside regular case management meetings and clear respectful and information sharing protocols, are essential components of the ADVANCE and ADVANCE-D interventions.

Co-training between facilitators and women's support services is needed to build strong professional relationships across services working with men and supporting women.

Applicability of ADVANCE and ADVANCE-D in other settings and populations remains to be tested.

During the study, the cost per man for facilitators to deliver ADVANCE-D was £131 (\pm £98), plus £106 (\pm £137) to support his (ex)-partner. Training and integrity support costs were £1728 per staff member (with 3 facilitators and 1 integrated support service worker were trained at each site). The costs of sustaining the digital platform for ADVANCE-D were £4536.

The estimated total costs for delivering 8 groups of ADVANCE-D with 8 men for 2 years (total of 64 men) would be £40,000 (including training and integrity support, delivery staff time, digital platform costs and support for (ex)-partner), £625 per man, including support for one (ex)-partner. This cost increases to £54,528 for groups of 12 men, £568 per man, including support for one (ex)-partner.

Around 6 in 10 men in substance use treatment have abused a partner, a figure much higher than in men in the general population. Substance use is a strong and consistent risk factor for the perpetration of intimate partner abuse, and many other risk factors are elevated among men in substance use treatment, including adverse childhood experiences, mental health problems and general violence.

Substance use treatment staff have highlighted a lack of referral options for this group of men, and a lack of confidence about how to address intimate partner abuse perpetration in routine work. As men in substance use treatment infrequently meet the criteria for perpetrator programmes, targeted approaches are needed.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

ADVANCE was a six-year programme of research (October 2016-June 2022) to improve our understanding of the risk factors for intimate partner abuse perpetration by men in substance use treatment towards women, and how best to address the abuse.

To develop the ADVANCE intervention, we consulted service providers and experts-by-experience and reviewed the evidence of what works to reduce abusive behaviour for men who use substances. Our interviews with men in substance use treatment and their female (ex)-partners showed that men's substance use was linked to their use of abusive behaviour including when intoxicated, craving, in withdrawal, and when acquiring substances. As a result of these findings, we developed the ADVANCE integrated intervention to address intimate partner abuse perpetration and substance use simultaneously in substance use treatment services.

WHAT IS THE ADVANCE PROGRAMME?

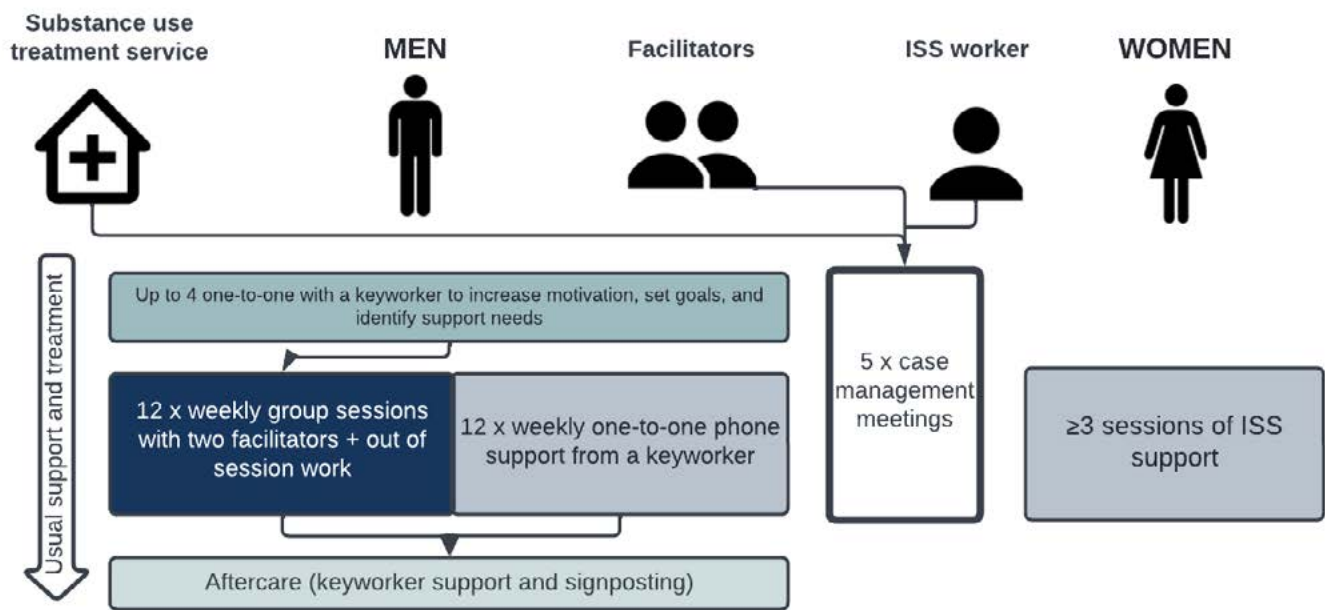
ADVANCE is a 16-week intervention that can be delivered as a group-based in-person intervention or as a digital intervention (ADVANCE-D) by two trained staff from substance use treatment services (facilitators). A booster session is available one month post intervention.

ADVANCE has a strengths-based model that promotes personal motivation and responsibility as key to facilitating meaningful change. ADVANCE incorporates an understanding of gendered power dynamics and reflects the complex links between substance use and intimate partner abuse perpetration by highlighting individual risks for intimate partner abuse, including substance use, poor emotional regulation, and poor stress-coping. ADVANCE teaches men how to reduce these risks by promoting self-regulation, distress tolerance, and personal goal setting.

Integrated support services (ISS) provide support to women and proactively inform women about the intervention and their (ex)-partner's involvement. ISS workers attend case management meetings with ADVANCE facilitators during the intervention to identify and manage any (changes to) risk.

The ADVANCE group intervention was delivered in-person in substance use treatment services in England (London, South West, the West Midlands) during 2018-2019. In a trial, 54 men who had been abusive towards their female (ex)-partner in the past year were randomly allocated to receive the ADVANCE group intervention (plus usual substance use treatment) and 50 were allocated to receive only their usual substance use treatment. At the end of the intervention, intimate partner abuse (an overall measure of psychological, physical and sexual abuse), controlling behaviours, and depressive and anxiety symptoms had reduced for men in the ADVANCE group compared to those who had received their usual substance use treatment only.

Figure 1: Structure of the ADVANCE in-person group intervention



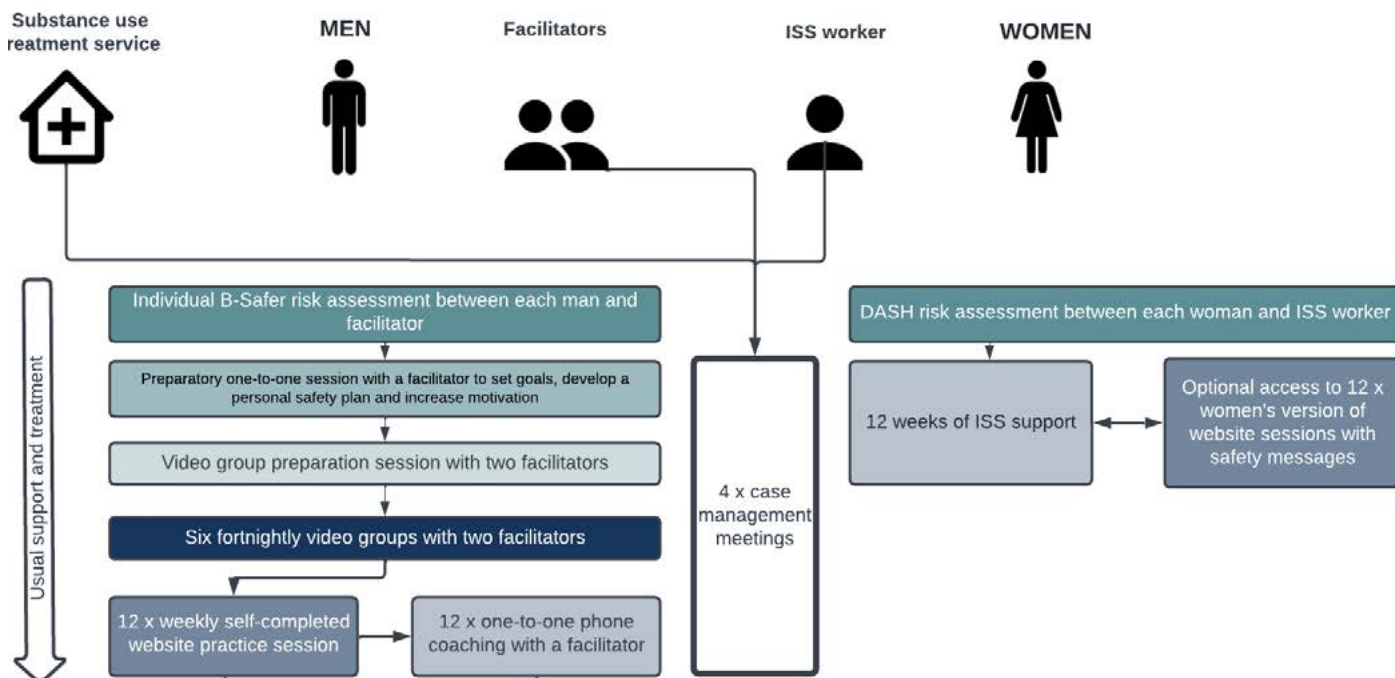
EVALUATION OF ADVANCE-D

The ADVANCE group intervention was adapted for digital delivery in response to COVID-19 restrictions. ADVANCE-D comprises eight core sessions delivered by 2 trained facilitators (a 1:1 session, a ‘welcome’ video group and six fortnightly video groups), and twelve weekly self-directed website sessions with a digital coach to recap and practise skills learned in the group followed by a one-to-one video/phone coaching session with a facilitator.



Figure 2: Digital coach

Figure 3: Structure of the ADVANCE digital (ADVANCE-D) intervention



ADVANCE-D was piloted during 2021-2022 with 40 men in substance use treatment services in England (three sites in London, one each in the South West and the West Midlands), Scotland and Wales to explore whether it was feasible to deliver the intervention digitally. Tablets with data were supplied to men to address digital poverty. Data top-ups were contingent on attendance. All (ex)-partners were offered a smartphone with data. Men's mean age was 41. The majority were white (78%), not employed (72%) and in a relationship (70%).

Many men preferred the convenience of the digital delivery of ADVANCE-D saying that accessing it from home and talking to facilitators by phone was "*easier... it's not as daunting*" than travelling into a service, especially for those with social anxiety or who were employed. Others would have preferred "*face to face*" feeling "*you're a bit more engaged*".

Men found the overall content "*really good*" especially the videos as they "*stick in your head a bit more*" and felt the intervention had "*given me the tools I need to do things a bit different and stop things getting worse*".

Men became more accountable for their behaviour, acknowledging:

"that you can be abusive in tons of different ways and some of my behaviour was abusive... I would be very defensive or aggressive in the way that I said stuff"

Men rated the intervention and facilitators highly:

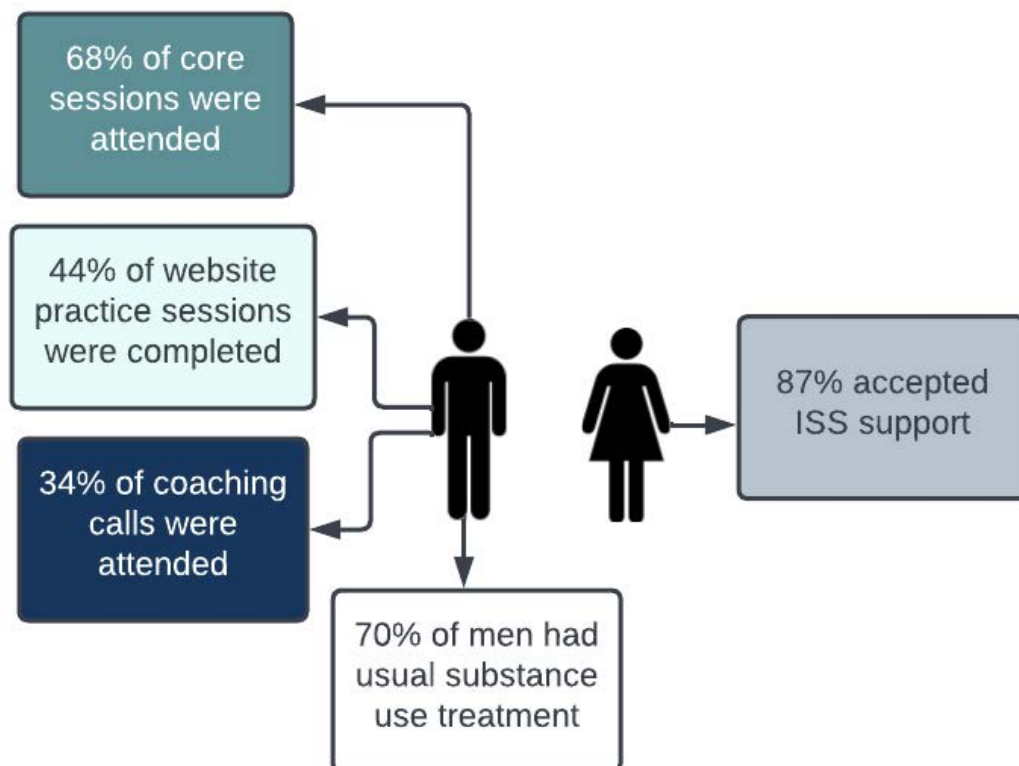
"Coaching calls were absolutely brilliant when I was going through tough times.... They reinforced the messages that we were doing in the groups, and it was real-time support with what was going on in my life, which I think is invaluable"

Facilitators valued the “*thorough*” risk assessment at the beginning of the intervention and thought the intervention content was “*fantastic*”, “*valuable*” and “*comprehensive*”. Some believed delivering the group virtually made it more “*accessible*” and gave men more “*flexibility to attend*” but others reported that men had not “*got to grips with the technology*” and that “*not having faces on screen distanced people*” could make it difficult to manage risk. Several facilitators highlighted difficulties in contacting men for coaching calls.

Attendance and completion varied across delivery sites:

- On average men attended/completed 11 of the 32 sessions
- Attendance was comparable to other studies of interventions that address intimate partner abuse perpetration by men in substance use treatment
- Men understood the purpose of the sessions and reportedly increased their knowledge and skills about the topics covered
- The majority found the website easy to use

Figure 4: ADVANCE-D attendance



REDUCTIONS IN THE USE OF ABUSIVE BEHAVIOURS

Of the 25 men whom researchers interviewed at the start and end of ADVANCE-D:

- 68% reported they had reduced their abusive behaviour
- 40% reported they had reduced their controlling behaviours
- 29% reported an increase in alcohol-free days in the past month
- 46% reported an increase in drug-free days in the past month

Men also reported reductions in using their/ their (ex)-partner's children against her and propensity for anger.

Women reported similar reductions in abusive behaviour experienced. Of the 11 women whom researchers interviewed at the start and end of ADVANCE-D:

- 73% reported a reduction in experiencing abusive behaviour
- 46% reported a reduction in experiencing controlling behaviours

Women also reported reductions in men using their children used against them.

Women's interviews corroborated men's to an extent, in that they reported positive outcomes from the programme:

"I do think his behaviour has changed, and I think it's because he realises that not everybody in this world is perfect... it has opened his eyes that everyone has their own different feelings and opinions. It's not going to be his rules and his regulations. I'm not one of the children. I'm an adult. We're equal partners"

"He'd normally hold everything and then throw it in my face in an argument, but now we're having conversations about it"

Women valued the linked support stating:

"I don't share this sort of stuff with my friends or family, any issues with him to do with drugs, arguments, or anything like that, so to talk to somebody else about it is really helpful"

"To be able to say that I do feel scared sometimes. To know there is somebody who can check up. And they can ask if I feel ok. Do I feel safe and ok. It feels like I have back up"

Facilitators also reported they had seen behaviour change in men in the group:

"By the end of it, they were completely able to identify with behaviours, able to remove self from action and able to understand the whole idea of this was to help them. They were also able to reflect on the positive influence it had on their relationships...They saw the benefit it was bringing. Once they got going and they saw the benefit, then they wanted more of it because it really did help the relationship"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The ADVANCE programme of research was funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) (RP-PG-1214-20009). The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the NHS, the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care. The lead sponsor was King's College London and the co-sponsor was South London and the Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust. The research was led by King's College London, in collaboration with researchers from the Universities of Edinburgh, Bristol, Manchester and York. The development of the ADVANCE group and digital interventions was led by the University of Edinburgh, with King's College London, Respect, Mary McMurran Independent Consulting Psychologist and Rochester Institute of Technology. All intervention manuals and training materials and content are copyrighted.



Further information

More information about the research programme and all resulting publications can be found here <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/advance> or by contacting Gail.Gilchrist@kcl.ac.uk