



Hasaan Munim  
Research Assistant  
Austin 009  
1515 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
(617) 496-0917  
hmunim@law.harvard.edu

**To:** Jim Greiner  
**From:** Hasaan Munim  
**RE:** Lynette Feder & Laura Dugan, *A test of the efficacy of court-mandated counseling for domestic violence offenders: The Broward experiment*, 19 Justice Quarterly 343 (2002).  
**Date:** August 15, 2018

---

**Title:** A test of the efficacy of court-mandated counseling for domestic violence offenders: The Broward experiment  
**Authors:** Lynette Feder & Laura Dugan  
**Location:** Broward County, FL  
**Sample:** N = 446  
**Timeline:** 5 unspecified months in 1997  
**Target group:** Men convicted of domestic violence  
**Intervention type:** Court-mandated counseling  
**Research papers:** <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07418820200095271>  
**Partners:** Broward County Courthouse, National Institute of Justice

### **Abstract**

Practitioners of domestic violence counseling for offenders developed programs untested by researchers for impact. Researchers sought to test the impact of a popular program, the Duluth Model, in Broward County, FL by randomizing convicted offenders into court-mandated counseling. The findings indicated that the Duluth Model did not reduce incidence of key outcomes, including reoffending and rearrest.

### ***I. Policy Issue***

In the 1980s, pro-arrest policies aimed at reducing the incidence of domestic violence increased. In response, court-mandated counseling arose in order to change the behavior of domestic violence offenders while finding an alternative to incarceration in a period of prison overcrowding. Using a feminist orientation, such domestic violence counseling programs encouraged men to confront sexist beliefs and accept responsibilities for their abuse. The Duluth Model, the most popular of such programs, focused on behavior modification in relation to battering. Early efficacy research indicated that counseling reduced frequency and severity of domestic violence. However, prominent researchers in

the early 1990s noted the methodological shortcomings in previous impact studies. Ineffective treatment may harm victims more than no treatment at all by providing victims with a false sense of security. Could courts affect behavioral change among men convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence through counseling?

## ***II. Context of Evaluation***

This 1997 study took place in Broward County, Florida at the two courts that exclusively handled domestic violence cases. Study participants included all men convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence during the five-month period, with few exceptions (n = 404).

## ***III. Details***

The study randomized to a control or experimental group through the last digit on the court docket number, even for experimental or odd for control. The experimental group faced one-year probation and 26 weeks of group sessions from a batterers intervention program which followed the Duluth Model. The control group served one-year probation without mandated counseling. The probation office tracked each man's compliance with the program.

Researchers gathered information through interviews with batterers, victims, and official records. Researchers interviewed convicted batterers, who needed to consent to interviews, at the time of adjudication and 6 months after adjudication. Researchers interviewed victims at adjudication and then 6 and 12 months postadjudication. Official records provided information on demographic and criminal history information. Probation records and computer checks tracked new arrests of defendants after adjudication.

Approximately two-thirds of men attended all sessions, with only 13 percent attending none at all. The median age for the men was 35 years, with an underrepresentation of white people, over representation of black people, and an approximately equivalent representation of Hispanic people to the south Florida population. Batterers tended to be of lower socioeconomic status versus Broward county.

## ***IV. Results and Policy Lessons***

*Social Desirability:* Researchers administered a test of desiring social approval to indicate whether the men truthfully answered their questions. The experimental and control groups did not significantly differ on this test of truthfulness, indicating the truthfulness of their responses.

*Offenders' attitudes:* Men's attitudes on beliefs on the acceptability of wife beating, responsibility for the act, and their attitudes towards gender roles did not substantially change after the court-mandated counseling program. The offenders' own estimates of the likelihood of hitting their significant other did not change.

*Victims' attitudes:* Surveyed on the same scales as men, victim attitudes did not change, including on the victims' estimates of facing domestic violence again from their partners.

*Offenders' and victims' self-reports of abuse:* Men's self-abusive behavior did not significantly change. Women's reports of self-abuse, though at a higher baseline, did not change after their partners received counseling.

*Rearrests:* During their one-year probation, approximately 24 percent of men in both groups faced rearrest. The authors initially found a significant association between number of counseling sessions attended by offenders and a decrease in rearrest likelihood. Using conformity variables, such as employment and age, to control whether having a high stake in conformity deterred arrest, this association dissipated.

Ultimately, the researchers concluded that the court-mandated counseling sessions did not produce positive outcomes in terms of reoffending and rearrest during the one-year follow-up period.

#### ***V. Quality of the Study***

The study described its randomization procedure well and reported results of tests of equivalence between experimental and control groups. The randomization groups created were nearly statistically equivalent. They noted that judges overrode random assignment in 3.5 percent of cases, an acceptable range of misalignment.

Furthermore, they noted possible factors that would violate the integrity of the experimental and control conditions, such as unequal monitoring and assignment to non-counseling programs. There were not significant differences between the groups in any of the assessed factors.

However, the controversy surrounding the experiment limited its efficacy. The study faced low victim response rates, high staff turnover, among other unspecified problems. The low victim response rate (30 percent) was an issue because victims were the best sources of information on continuing abuse.