Healing violent criminals

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PTSD: Maintains violence

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

- **Exposure to a traumatic event**
  - **followed by persistent re-experiencing of that event**
  - **plus avoidance and increased arousal**
- **Pervasive and significant factor perpetuating cycle of violence**
- **The good news:**
  - **easily diagnosed**
  - **effective treatment exists**

PTSD

- When traumatised some people resilient, able to cope
- Those with multiple stressors in early life not resilient, do not cope
  - instead "bury" it; may become emotionally numb
  - emotional numbness common observation in psychopaths
- However traumatising event often buried only incompletely
  - after-effects leak out through memories or flashbacks
- Traumatic memories encoded through all senses: smell, taste, sound
- Any sense can trigger reminder of original trauma
  - and emotions can completely overwhelm ability to function
  - PTSD victims can be overwhelmed many times a day or week

PTSD: The completion principle

- **The Completion Principle**
  - **New data (dog which bites) → adjustments to Mental Model**
  - **Traumatic event requires massive change to Mental Model**
  - **If inhibition not strong enough → nightmares, flashbacks**
  - **When inhibition too strong → avoidance symptoms: numbing**
- **In trauma oscillation avoidance ↔intrusion until processing "completed"**
  - **Now Mental Model adjusted, revised model in place**
  - **In PTSD completion of information processing does not take place**
  - **Constant replay of trauma → distress**

PTSD: Re-enactment

- **Re-enactment: Compulsive (unconscious) need to re-experience overwhelming emotion of original event**
  - **traumatised soldiers become mercenaries / police**
  - **abused women may be attracted to men who mistreat**
  - **sexually molested children → prostitutes or paedophiles**
  - **people who received violence as children → violent to others**

- **Some people take victim role – especially if physically weak**

- **Others: "if world made up of victims and victimisers, rather be victimiser"**
  - **School bully, cruelty to animals**

PTSD reflexes can bypass thinking mind

- **Action reflex often does not pass through conscious mind**
- **Special “flashbulb memory” encodes emotion-lading memories**
- **Learn quickly about threat without need for repeated exposure**
  - **(e.g. leaping lion)**
- **Evolutionary survival value**
  - **(next lion: don’t stop to think before running)**

PTSD and violence

- **PTSD common in adults after severe shock; increases propensity to violence**
- **Vietnam, Iraq war veterans violent on return**
  - **Murder, attempted murder, by soldiers honourably discharged**
- **Abuse of children increases risk for later delinquency, violence**
  - **Direct relationship: severity, later tendency to victimise others**

High proportion of violent prisoners have PTSD

- **Relationship, PTSD and imprisonment for violence (Collins and Bailey, 1990)**
- **High rates of PTSD in imprisoned youths (Long, 1991)**
- **PTSD "almost ubiquitous" in Australian female prisoners (Raeside, 1994)**
- **Very high rates of PTSD in violent juvenile prisoners (Steiner et al, 1997)**
- **59% of drug rehabilitation attendees had assocn with PTSD (Fullilove et al, 1993)**
- **Lifetime PTSD prevalence, women inmates in NZ: 37% (Simpson & Brinded, 1999)**
- **Community sample lifetime prevalence 1.3% (Davidson et al, 1991;Wells et al, 1989)**

"The incidence of PTSD is grossly elevated …and more in keeping with … high risk populations such as victims of criminal offences and combat veterans."

- **NSW Dept of Corrections: 24% PTSD in prisoners (Butler & Allnutt, 2003)**
  - **"likely that PTSD ... under-diagnosed"**
- **34% PTSD among American female prisoners (Teplin et al, 1996)**
- **Major implications for treatment of offenders and ex-offenders**

Violent offenders: Treatment

1 – Understand their childhood

- Family environment, rules, parental discipline methods
- Love? Violence? Neglect?
- Identify traumas – e.g. from abuse, neglect, sexual assault, bereavement
- Any overwhelming negative emotions – fear, anger, loneliness, resentment

- Understand
- Empathise
- Heal
  - a) Love
  - b) Completion

Violent offenders: Treatment

2 – Completion Process (imaginal flooding)

- **Trace somatic (body) location of negative emotion**
- **Trace negative emotions back to their roots, through “stackattack” thread**
- **Re-experiencing of negative emotion, at heightened intensity**
- **Discharge all negative emotions – achieve state of total peace and calm**

Violent offenders: Treatment

3 – Anger Diary, Skills training

- **Identify stages of Anger and Violence**
- **Train the person to control through breathing, understanding, alternative response patterns, new ways of thinking**
- **Record and explore all Anger incidents**
  - **Identify patterns, roots**
  - **Explore consequences**
  - **Teach new ways of thinking**
    - **e.g. My Business, Your Business, God's Business**
  - **Teach responsibility**
- **Establish new behaviour patterns**

Violent offenders: Treatment

4 – Cognitive Restructuring

- **Completion process removes vast well of negative emotion**
  - **leaves a vacuum**
- **Teach that one's "Being" does not have to be established by history**
  - **Can be created by conscious choice**
- **Help person create their own, new, "pro-social" Being**
- **Put into practice through new commitments, new patterns**

Violent offenders: Treatment

4 – Cognitive Restructuring: new pro-social "Being"

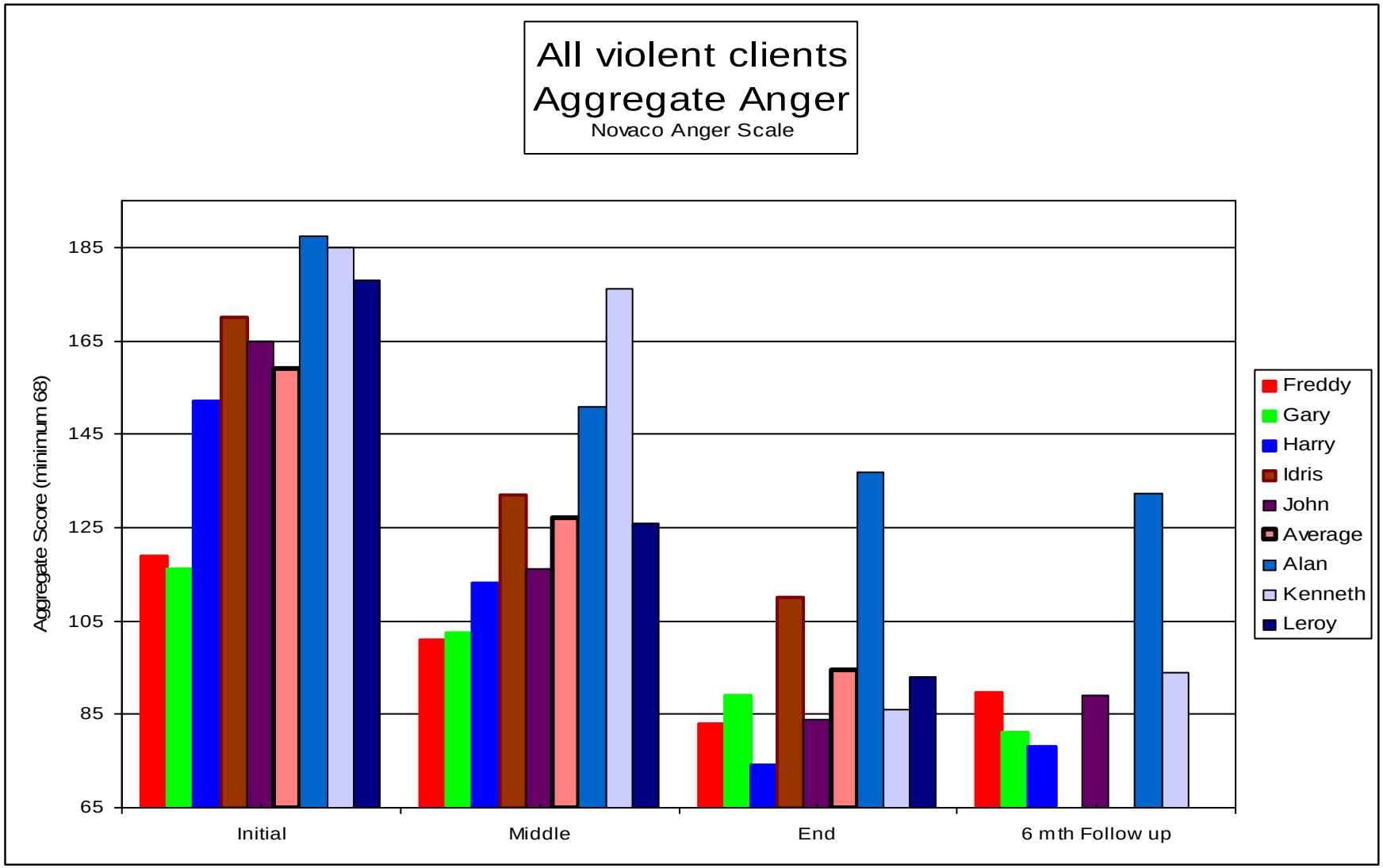
- ***"I am Harry, respected, happy, compassionate, loved and loving, enjoying life."***
- ***"I am Idris, a loving, happy, contented and caring man, moving ahead and aware of my feelings."***
- ***"I am Kenneth, an ethical, humble and expressive man, giving and receiving love, leading a calm and peaceful life."***

Violent offenders: Treatment

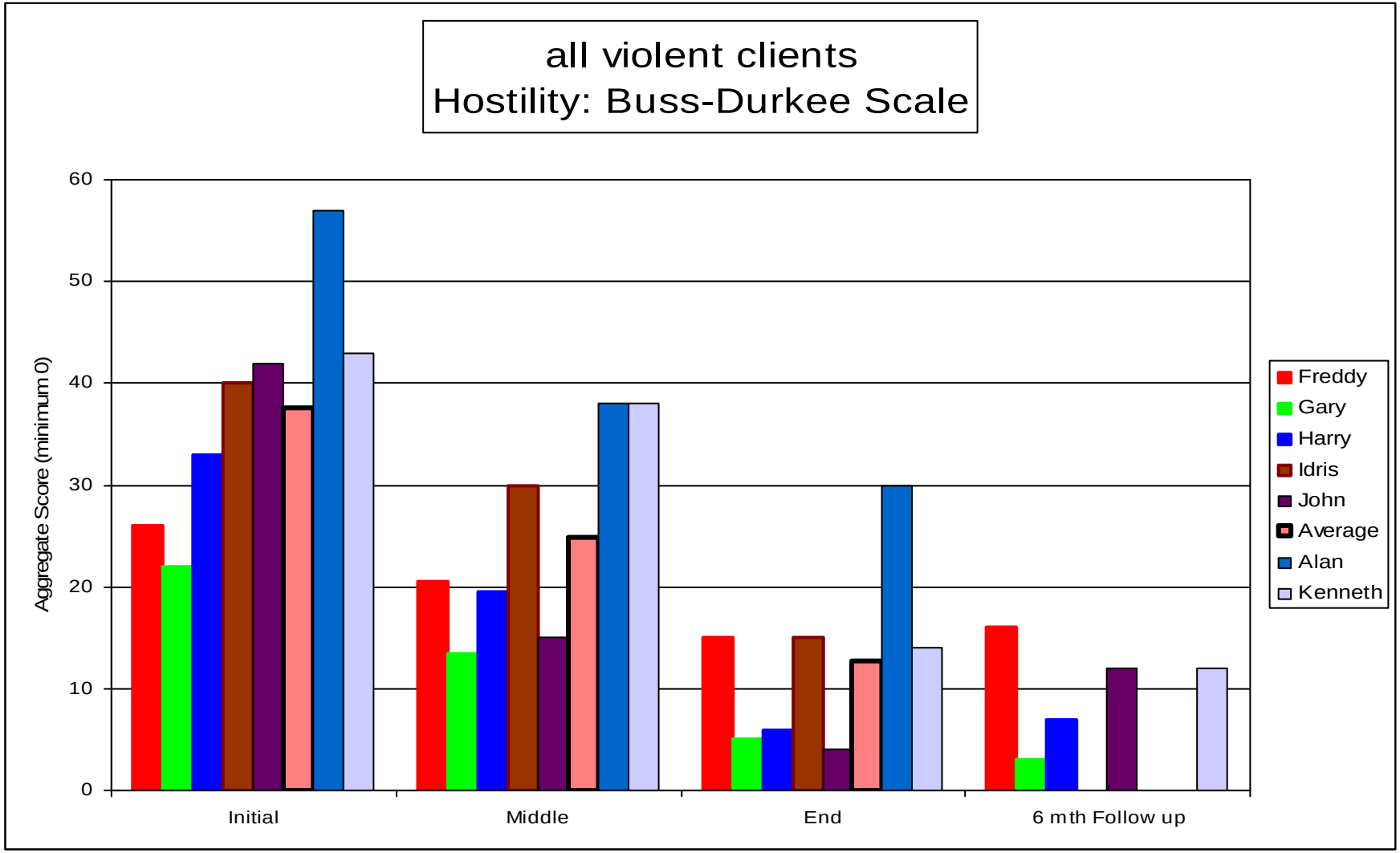
5 – Life Goals for Health

- **Encourage the person to set challenging, pro-social life goals**
- **Give life meaning, transform inner and outer quality of life**
- **Life becomes about self-actualisation**
  - ☞ **And making a difference**

Violent offenders: Outcomes



Violent offenders: Outcomes



Violent offenders: Outcomes

6-12 months after completion of course:

- **Hostility dropped 70%**
- **Thinking about Anger down 66%**
- **Arousal related to Anger down 82%**
- **Anger Behaviour down 82%**
- **Triggers setting off anger down 63%**
- **PTSD symptoms (I of E scale) from 27+ to 0-2**

Violent offenders: Early childhood

Kenneth:

- **Serving 6 years in Parkhurst for stabbing someone 12 times in chest**
- **Prison assaults on inmates and staff. "A risk to the public"**
- **On initial psychometric tests: 10 out of 10 on likelihood to assault**
- **Some brothers very violent; 1 in prison; 1 on Crimewatch**

- **Expelled from 3 schools for fighting, swearing, assaulting teachers**
- **…and setting fire to school canteen**

- **Claimed parents not violent: "happy childhood"**

Violent offenders: Case Study

Kenneth with the non-violent father:

- **Severely bullied by bigger brother**
- **Dad "not violent" – but "beat the shit" out of his brother**
- **Kenneth smacked around the arms and legs (as therapy continued the stories of being smacked grew more and more frequent)**
- **Dad would fly into a rage if room not tidy, and smack them**
- **Dad also shouted at them a lot**
- **Dad attacked and assaulted a teacher who had hit Kenneth, aged 8**

Violent offenders: Case Study

Kenneth's father's Rules for Life:

1. **Never hit a woman**
2. **Never force yourself (sexually) on a woman, or molest a child**
3. **Leave old people alone**
4. **Never grass on no one**

Violent offenders: Case Study

Kenneth's father's Rules for Violence:

* **Hit him first**
* **Get in fast, hit him hard**
* **Put him down**
* **Make sure he stays there**

Violent offenders: Case Study

Kenneth's offence matched his father's Rules:

* **A man struck his female partner, knocking her down**

* **This broke the rule "never hit a woman", so Kenneth**
  Punished bad behaviour (physically)
  "Hit him first"
  (stabbing with a knife)
  Put him down
  (but it took 15 knife stabs to put him down)

Fortunately for both victim and Kenneth, he did not die

Healing violent criminals

Kenneth: Outcome

"I am Kenneth, an ethical, humble and expressive man, giving and receiving love, leading a calm and peaceful life."

"My Vision is of a world where everyone is loved, fulfilled, accepted and happy, with friends, support and a place to go. The environment's protected and there's freedom from war and drugs."

"It's working. I'm feeling better about myself. I'm no longer grouchy in the mornings, I get up half an hour earlier, I'm more friendly, I go out and exercise which I never did before, I speak to people, people speak to me in a more friendly way because I'm friendly to them."

"……..I am even calming friends down when they get aggressive …."

Healing violent criminals

RS: Outcome

"Before I completed WAVE's "End to Violence" Programme I was angry with the world; meaning society, my community and my life. This anger caused me not to think about life or anything in a positive way, therefore I led a life down a path of destruction. One year on from completing the programme I am at peace with myself and all that the world, society and life can throw at me. I am now in a content place in my life where I am able to see life in its real reality and I am able to deal with it in a rational way without even a thought of violence."