Typological approaches

To better understand the nature and causes of domestic and family violence, US researchers in the 1990s, concerned about the risks of accepting narrow, unitary conceptions, sought to differentiate types of violence, and groups of perpetrators and victims [Boxall et al 2015]. Early typological groupings were characterised as "situational couple violence", "intimate terrorism", "violent resistance", and "mutual violent control" [Johnson & Ferraro 2000]. In the decades since, various authors have developed and expanded on these typologies, which essentially focus on physical violence and vary according to perceptions of the presence or absence of coercive control. Michael Johnson and his colleagues have been working on understanding patterns of domestic and family violence for many years and this work has been very influential in Australia [Kelly & Johnson 2008].

Some Australian judicial officers and legal practitioners in the family law jurisdiction have shown considerable interest in the typological approach, for example in some instances typologies are referenced in best practice materials, and are relied on in decision-making. This is despite a much broader legislative approach taken in Australian jurisdictions to recognising a range of behaviours, in addition to physical violence, as constituting domestic and family violence [Wangmann 2011].

Consequently, researchers were prompted to investigate the utility of typologies in the Australian context, particularly among professionals responsible for the management of domestic and family violence matters, such as police, lawyers, service providers and treatment practitioners [Boxall et al 2015]. Respondents expressed a number of concerns about adhering to typologies in identifying abusive behaviours, including:

> Criteria are inflexible and don't satisfactorily account for anomalies or outliers;
> Criteria may be too abstract and subjective, and therefore open to challenge;
> The unique, complex and non-standard nature of specific cases, and the corresponding need for individualised responses, may be overlooked;
> It may encourage a less rigorous approach to the assessment of behaviours and associated risks;
> Static classifications are unlikely to be appropriate for behaviours and relationship dynamics that change over time;
> They felt they didn't have the necessary skills to apply the typologies in different contexts accurately and consistently.

Instead, these professionals expressed a strong preference for basing their judgments and assessments on: experience; knowledge; best practice; information elicited using risk assessment tools and from interagency databases; observations of perpetrators' behavioural patterns and violence histories; and direct interviews with perpetrators and victims. They did however indicate that typologies may have a complementary application in their practices, for example in: supporting existing knowledge; assisting risk assessment; better screening of families for referral to alternative dispute resolution processes and services where likely benefits are identified and safety is ensured; determining perpetrator treatment options and violence prevention strategies that address the underlying cause of violent behaviours; and continuing professional education and training [Boxall et al 2015].