

'Investigating Adolescent Violence towards Parents'

Respect Conference

**You just don't get it! Young People's Violence in Close
Relationships**

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Adolescent to parent violence (APV)

- ▶ Aka: ‘parent abuse’, ‘battered parent syndrome’, ‘child-to-parent violence/aggression’.
- ▶ Largely unarticulated within academic & policy spheres:
 - Domestic violence
 - Youth justice
 - Child welfare
- ▶ Lack of appropriate legislation, policy and support for families.

One case of adolescent-to-parent violence – Julie, mother of Jack (14)

“I’m dead scared of being taken back to court. . . Everything I’ve tried, it don’t work . . . I’ve tried pulling him out of bed, I’ve tried splashing water on his face, I’ve dragged him out the front door with boxer shorts on and just threw his clothes at him, and nothing has worked. He’ll just lay in bed, and when he gets up, he’ll sit there wrapped in a quilt watching TV.”

“I have got him arrested once, because he hit me, so he got done for assault. . . The last couple of weeks we’ve got on better. Beforehand I didn’t really talk to him, I just spoke to him when I had to because he just gets in a strop. And he has got a bad temper, I mean he punched the wall the other day. Because when I took him to the doctors, he was diagnosed with suffering from depression, he said ‘well don’t hit your mother, punch a wall’, so he went ‘well the doctor said punch a wall’, and I said ‘well yeah, but now you’ve hurt your knuckles, so that was a bit of a dumb thing to do’. It’s like, ‘punch a pillow, yeah, but don’t punch a wall!’”

“It started when he was 13, but he had quite a bit of school time off when he was younger, because my ex-husband used to beat the hell out of me and he used to stalk me so when he was in primary school, which was just across the road, he would refuse to go to school because he knew that as soon as he went to school, he would come round kicking the door in, superglueing the lock, and all that, and I actually think it stems from, he’s scared, he’s not scared to leave me now, but what it actually stems from, he was scared to leave me because he knew nine times out of ten he’d come home and find me full of bruises. . . .Deep down he’s angry with me because I put up with that for two years. It’s definitely why he’s angry, he just throws things around the place and smashes things up, there’s holes in the walls, in the flat and everything, but nobody has ever sat down and said ‘oh yeah, we’ll help you.’”

R: It must be horrible for you – well, it must be horrible for any mum – but especially given what you’ve been through in the past?

J: Yeah it is, about three weeks ago I actually wrote in my diary ‘I hate my son’. I really, really hate him. Because he does, he’s like a miniature ex-husband. He’s very controlling as well. It’s like, if I want to watch something on TV, he’ll go [in sulky teenager voice] ‘Urgh, you go and sit in the kitchen’, ‘I’ll watch this until nine o’clock’ and ‘I’ll do this’ and ‘I’ll do that’. It’s like he’s my husband.

R: And if you argue back?

J: He throws things around, or hits me.

“I try hard just to walk away. I’ll walk out the door, or I’ll walk into the bedroom and read a book. But then if I do that and ignore him, he’ll come into the bedroom and throw everything off the side across the floor, he’ll throw things at me, because I’m ignoring him. So sometimes I just stomp out and go ‘oh well, see ya’. But I shouldn’t have to be the one to walk out. What I think is that if he’s got the anger problem, he should be the one that goes ‘well, time out, I’m going for a walk’. It shouldn’t have to be me to walk out to get away from him smashing into me, or the place.”

Evidence of the problem

- ▶ Estimates vary from 7% to 18% of two-parent families and up to 29% of single-parent families in the US; lower estimates from Canada and Europe (Kennair and Mellor, 2007).
- ▶ Cross-national data from the National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) in the US: 17,957 parental assaults and 2,096 aggravated parental assaults in 2002 (Walsh and Kreinert, 2007).
- ▶ US Department of Justice report on domestic assault: 1 in every 12 offenders aged <18 and 51% of these victimised a parent (Snyder and McCurley, 2008)

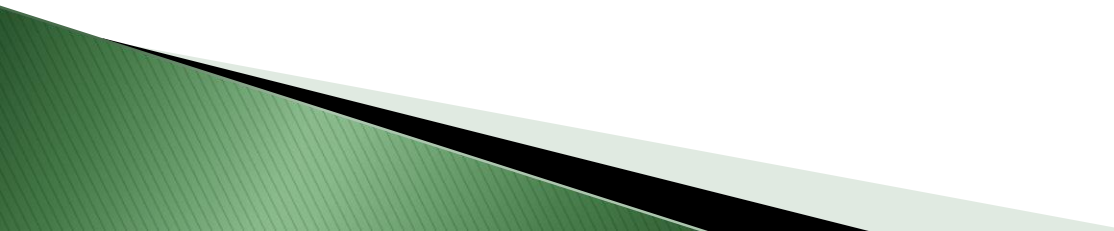
Characteristics of APV

- ▶ Mixed reports regarding demographic characteristics associated with APV (gender, age, ethnicity and socio-economic status)
- ▶ A number of studies have found
 - Mothers aged >40 most likely to be victimised by sons, aged 14–17 (Walsh and Kreinert, 2007)

APV in the UK

- ▶ British Crime Survey 1996: 3% domestic violence cases involved child-to-parent violence (Mirrlees-Black et al. 1996).
- ▶ Parentline Plus 2008: 8% of 30,000 calls to helpline were about physical aggression from children.
- ▶ Parentline Plus 2010: between 2008 and 2010 helpline received 22,537 calls from parents regarding aggression from their children; 7,000 concerned physical abuse.
- ▶ Parent Abuse Research Network (PARN)
 - Many parents on parenting orders report experiencing violence and abuse from their children (e.g. My previous research; Hunter et al., 2010).

Investigating APV

- ▶ 2.5 year ESRC funded project which started in August 2010.
 - ▶ Focus on deliberate physical violence directed at mothers and/or fathers by their adolescent (13–19 years) children (this age group has been chosen to span the full transition to adulthood).
 - ▶ Interviews with parents, young people, police officers, youth justice workers.
 - ▶ Fieldwork with the police and youth justice services and analysis of case files.
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Investigating APV: Research Questions and Objectives

1. To map the contours of the problem of adolescent-to-parent violence.
2. To explore how adolescent-to-parent violence is experienced and negotiated by parents.
3. To explore the perspectives of adolescent perpetrators.
4. To investigate how violent assaults committed by adolescents to parents are currently processed and managed within the criminal justice system.
5. To develop practical policy recommendations for parents and young people in families experiencing adolescent-to-parent violence, police, youth justice, and others who work with these families.

Initial findings

- ▶ Unarticulated in official discourse and not recognised as a distinctive form of family violence, however:
 - Initial figures from police suggest that it is a significant problem.
 - Police and youth justice workers report routinely dealing with cases of APV.
 - Domestic violence practitioners and other support services (e.g. Victim Support) report APV as an increasing problem.

Why the silence?

- ▶ Excluded from official definition of domestic violence.
 - ▶ Falls between cracks of different services.
 - ▶ Likely to be under-reported:
 - Stigma, shame, lack of escape routes
 - Fear of repercussions for children
 - ▶ Potential resistance to idea of APV:
 - ‘Last taboo in family violence’?
 - Fear of moral panic
 - ▶ Youth justice – fundamental dissonance with conceptions of adolescent–parent relationships.
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Implications?

- ▶ Police figures – APV not necessarily flagged as domestic violence – difficult to locate cases and count/estimate the extent of the problem.
- ▶ Lack of procedure in terms of who should investigate reported cases and how they should be managed.
- ▶ Reported cases likely to be tip of iceberg and representative of a particular profile of APV cases.
- ▶ Lack of recognition of APV means that parents may not identify themselves as victims and may be reluctant to seek help.
- ▶ When parents do seek help there is a lack of appropriate support – whose problem?
- ▶ Need for policy/guidance for practitioners and appropriate intervention programmes for parents and young people – not necessarily a criminal justice response.

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