Child-to-parent violence & abuse

Victoria Baker
Connect Centre, University of Central Lancashire
So what is child-to-parent abuse?

Parent abuse is defined as:

“any act of a child that is intended to cause physical, psychological or financial damage to gain power and control over a parent”

(Cottrell, 2001, p.3)
What does it involve?

- Power and Control
- Coercion
- Financial abuse
- Destruction of property
- Fear
- Emotional abuse
- Violence (actual or threatened)
- Verbal abuse
- Emotional abuse
He picked me up the first time and threw me across his bedroom, and then I was actually scared of him."
(Mother, England; Holt, 2009)
Verbal abuse

“...The derogatory things that would come out of my boys’ mouths is a major concern...not just calling me ‘slut’ and ‘whore’ and things like that, really disgusting things that they’ve told me to do with my friend Amanda because they hate her...they’ve gone and told me to do sexual things”

(Mother, Australia; Howard & Rottem, 2008)
“[He’d be] with me 24 hours a day and I couldn’t even get to make a call...if he’d go and have a shower, I’d have two minutes, stolen moments so quick to make a call...I’d sit down and he’d sit next to me. I’d get up, he’d be behind me. I’d go to the toilet, he’d be behind me.”

(Mother, Australia; Howard & Rottem, 2008)
Economic/material abuse

“He has punched and kicked me while on holiday, kicked holes in most of my doors, smashed a TV...”
(Parent, UK – Holt, 2011)
One size doesn’t fit all

• Parent abuse spans ages, ethnicity, gender and SES
• Profiles depend upon the type of research used
• In the youth justice literature, the typical pattern is of single mothers being abused by their teenage sons
• A history of domestic abuse and child abuse
• Substance misuse and mental health problems
• Different styles and patterns of parenting
• No one theory explains it fully
• Mothers can be the target of abuse due to their position as “law-maker”

“I think in terms of the power balance, the parent and child relationship is never equal . . . but then that power imbalance changes, and that young person starts to subjugate his mother. And that child, in his head, is taking control back. (DV-N)” (Holt & Retford, 2013, pg. 5).
“Unfortunately I was always the ‘no’ person in his life...most of his animosity was directed at me cos I ws the authoritative figure...” (Tanya) (Clarke, 2015, pg. 52)
Power and control

• Parent abuse is an inversion of the typical power dynamic typically found in parent-child relationships
• This inversion is also true for the typical power picture of “abused” and “abuser” – victims are perceived as having less power than their abusers, whilst parents are typically viewed as having more
• These social perceptions are part of the stigma surrounding the issue
So why does it matter?

- Physical, emotional, psychological, and financial consequences
- Destruction of property and the home
- Fear from the threats of violence
- Injuries from physical violence
- Psychological distress
- Resentment
- Alienation
- Impact upon other family relationships
The impact of parent abuse

“I can’t deal with her when I have become so stressed with her behaviour myself. I feel broken because of her”

“She seems to have no respect for me as a mother. I feel unable to cope as I have no one to turn to I feel as if I am no longer a good mother it has took all of my confidence and has depressed me. I feel a total failure.”

(Parentline web survey respondents, 2010)
The scale of parent abuse

• A significant and increasing problem in the UK
• In 2013 there were 1,892 reported cases of 13 to 19 year olds committing violence against their parents in London alone
• Parentline reported that between 2008 and 2010, approximately 7% of calls to their helpline (6,148) concerned children’s physical aggression in the home
• With the figure raising to 15% (12,296) for verbal aggression
• Figures range from 5 to 29%
Challenges - Reliable estimates of scale

• A hidden and underreported issue
• Stigma – the “unfit” parent
• Shame
• Fear of criminalisation of children
• Fear of removal from the home
• Physical aggression is more likely to be acted out at home, making the problem an “invisible” one
Challenges - What’s in a name?

• Parent abuse is referred to by a number of different terms –
  ➢ Child-to-parent violence (CPV)
  ➢ Adolescent-to-parent abuse (APA)
  ➢ Adolescent-to-parent violence and abuse (APVA)
  ➢ Parent abuse
  ➢ Originally, “Battered Parent Syndrome”

• Definitions – lack of UK Government definition
Clear definitions improve outcomes

- Clear definition of the issue
- Robust identification of cases
- Suitable provision of support
- Improved outcomes for families
Exercise 1 - Defining and Identifying parent abuse

• In groups, think about and discuss times you may have come across CPV in your work, or even outside of your work
• How did you identify what was happening?
• If you have never come across it, how do you think you might identify CPV – would it be obvious? What indicators would you look for?
• What behaviours would you classify as abusive towards parents?
• Would it be easy to apply this definition to your work in order to identify cases?
So we’ve identified the problem...

...now what do we do about it?

Back in your groups!
Exercise 2 - Responding to parent abuse

In your groups, think about about:

• When cases have arisen, what have you done?
• Did you feel confident in the decision you made?
• Was their clear guidance available?
• Looking back, would you have made a different decision? What could have helped you to make a better one?
• If you have never come across a case, what would you do if you did?
• How confident would you feel in doing it?
Last year, the Home Office, in partnership with Oxford University and Manchester University, published guidance on adolescent-to-parent violence and abuse (APVA).

The guidance covers an overview of the issue, including explanations and challenges, and also practitioner advice on how to respond to cases, broken down by statutory sector.
General advice for practitioners

• Safeguarding
• Risk assessment:
  o Environmental factors
  o Emotional self regulation
  o Multi-agency work (MARAC, MASH)
• Safety planning
• Safety of practitioners entering homes
• Importance of training
So let’s take a closer look...

Guidance by statutory sector

• Different focuses e.g. Parents, children, family, impacts
• Problems inherent within that particular service context (e.g. parent blaming, minimising)
• Where practitioners may come across cases
• Context of the work (e.g. clinics or homes)
Exercise 3: Reviewing the guidance

On you own or in pairs, read the guidance relevant to your sector, or the general advice if they don’t apply.

Now go back into your groups to discuss:
• Was it useful? If so, how?
• What was good?
• What was bad?
• Any surprises?
• What could be added?
What services and support are available?

• Charities and helplines:
  • Parentline Plus (Family Lives)
  • Wish for a Brighter Future
  • RESPECT

• Using therapeutic approaches such as:
  • Functional Family Therapy (FFT)
  • Solution-focused brief therapy
  • Non-violent resistance
  • Attachment and trauma-based approaches

• Online forums and resources
  • www.holesinthewall.co.uk
What will you take away from today?

General thoughts?

Anything specific you will take away?

Anything you are going to follow-up on?

What could Connect do to help?
Thanks for coming!

We need workshops like this, bringing practitioners and researchers together, to bring evidence to bear on practice.

Let’s keep the conversation going!

vlbaker@uclan.ac.uk