

# **Violence Towards Parents: Current Research and Debates**

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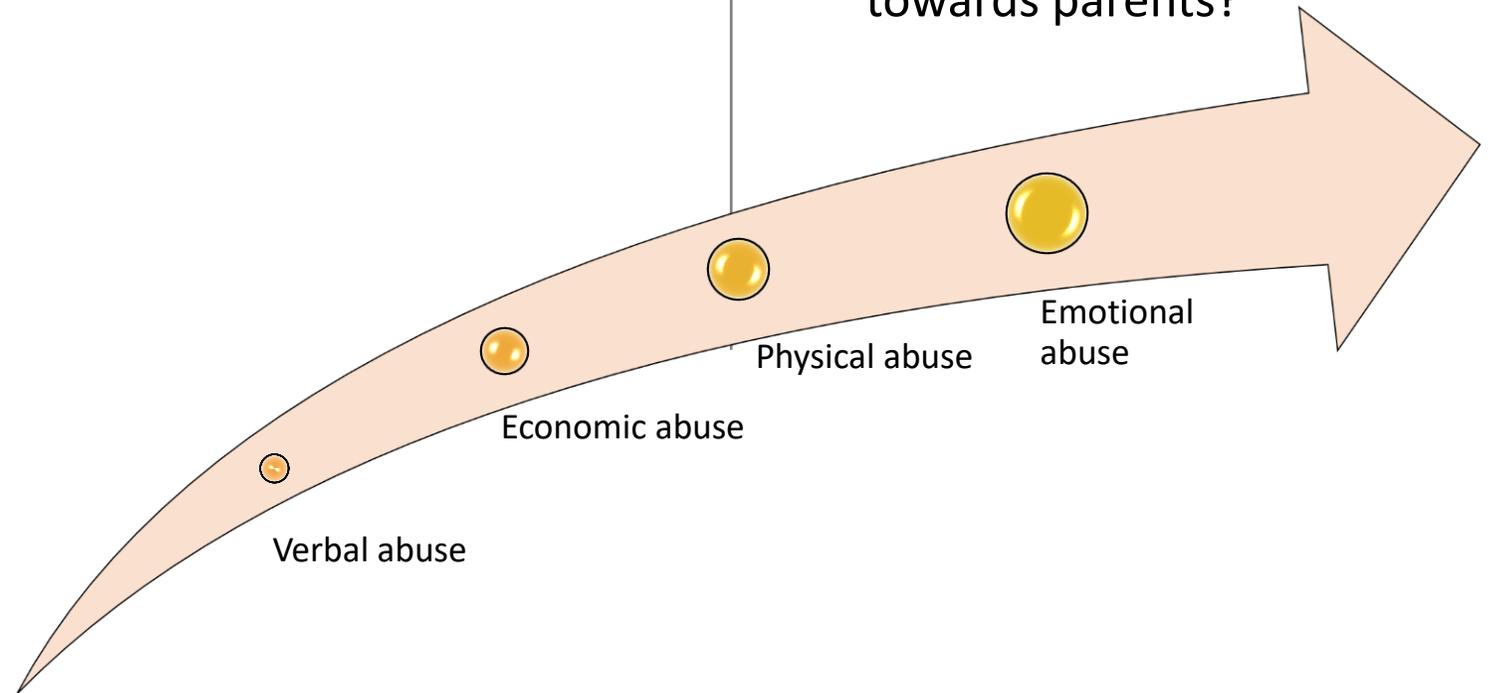
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# Violence towards parents:

## Overview

- 'a *pattern of behaviour* that uses verbal, financial, physical or emotional means to practise power and exert control over a parent' (Holt, 2013:1)

- Should it be considered as 'domestic abuse'?
- To what extent is child/adolescent violence distinct from adult-instigated violence towards parents?



# Child/ Adolescent family violence:

## Prevalence

### Self-report surveys

**UK school survey (n=819)**  
(McCloud, 2018):

- 4.3% - 'any physical aggression'
- 64.4% - 'psychological aggression'

### International surveys:

- 4.6% (Spain)
- 20% (Chile)
- **Victims:** Mothers (80:20)
- **Instigators:** Gender symmetry

### Criminal Justice Data

**MPS data** (Holt et al, unpub.)

- Year-on-year increases until 2018, then decreasing
- Most common outcome: 'evidential difficulties'
- Highly under-reported

### International CJ data:

**Victims:** Mothers (70:30)

**Instigators:** Sons: Daughters  
(75:25)

Violence  
towards  
parents:

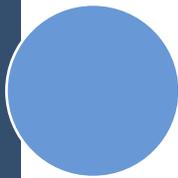
Pathways

Wider  
harmful  
contexts

Violence  
towards  
parents

History of  
family/domestic  
abuse

Mental health  
problems/  
substance  
misuse



Violence  
towards  
parents:

Young  
people's  
experiences

## Motivations

- Growing up in an environment where there was violence
- 'Being told what to do' a trigger point
- Wider context of loss
- Perception of unable to control their emotions
- (Papamichail and Bates, 2019)

## Harms

- Physical
- Emotional
- Damage to self-worth & identity
- Financial
- Family relationships
  - Removal from family home
  - Time spent in care + legal repercussions (e.g. criminalisation) = further harms

Violence  
towards  
parents:

Parent/Carer  
experiences

## Harms

- Physical
- Emotional
- Relationships
- Social
- Financial
- Employment
- Housing

“I felt very low and very desperate. I felt like I’d gone through this massive upheaval to get their dad out, so that we could heal and mend and move forward, and that I was being consistently beaten down by the children.”

(Mother)

# Violence towards parents:

## Barriers to help-seeking

- “The big barriers are parents recognising it as abuse and violence. They don’t want to think of their child using abuse and violence. Equating those behaviours with something that is not the norm and not OK. Is this normal teenage behaviour, or is it something going beyond that? Recognising it’s a thing is the first barrier – that’s where raising awareness is really important.”
- (Lead practitioner – CAPVA specific service)

### **Personal barriers**

- Shame, stigma, guilt
- Fear

### **Organisational barriers**

- Appropriateness/ safety of setting
- Time available
- Quality of relationship

### **Intersectional barriers**

Violence  
towards  
parents:

Adoptive  
parents and  
kinship carers

- “I was scared. I was intimidated. I think my heart was breaking for him. Because you can see the damage that’s there, but you can't put a plaster on it [...] you feel you're a failure, you feel absolutely failed, and it's a mixture of emotional turmoil. Even when he was abusive, the mothering, maternal instinct comes over the top, the need to protect them. They didn't ask to be born, their mum messed it up and Gran can't afford to.”
  - (Grandmother kinship carer)
- Children often have additional and complex needs
  - Parents/carers often don't know the child's history
  - ‘Fighting fires they didn't start’
  - Sense of being child's ‘last resort’
  - Professional assumptions that its ‘to be expected’

# What have parent/carers found helpful?

## Naming the abuse

- Validation of experiences produces relief

## Being listened to (and listening to others)

- Articulation opens up alternatives and helps with coping

## Developing strategies to establish boundaries

- Implementing 'consequences' reduces abuse over time

## Developing strategies for self-care

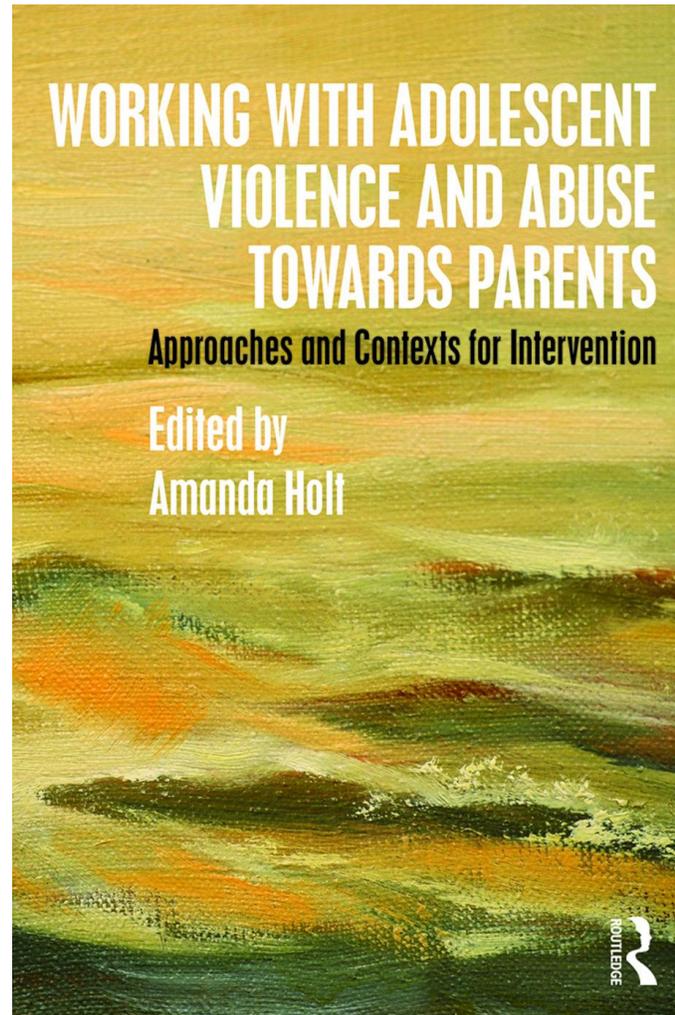
- Addressing physical and emotional needs makes parents feel stronger

## Education about the dynamics of adolescent family violence

- Learning about the role of power and control useful for parents and young people



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