

Adolescent-to-parent violence and abuse: The experiences and perceptions of young people

Victoria Baker, PhD Student (VLBaker@uclan.ac.uk)
Connect Centre in the School of Social Work, Care & Community
University of Central Lancashire (UCLan)

Background

Adolescent-to-parent violence and abuse (APVA) or 'parent abuse' (PA) is becoming more widely accepted as a social problem that needs addressing.

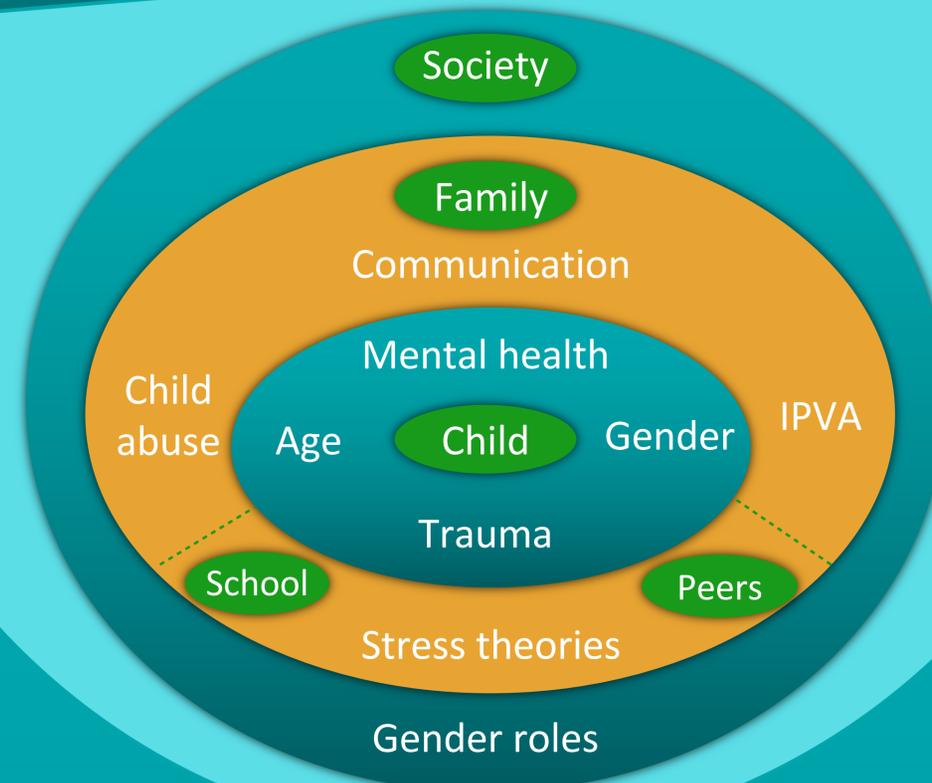
Current research focuses on the risk factors predicting abuse, with in-depth accounts coming from practitioners and parents rather than young people themselves.

In order to effectively support families experiencing this issue, young people's experiences and perspectives on why they use violence at home need to be understood.

Focus

This research is focused on young people's accounts and perceptions of...

1. The nature of parent abuse
2. The impact of parent abuse
3. The contexts within which it arises
4. And how it might be addressed



Framing

Similar to research coming out of the family therapy and domestic violence fields, this study emphasises the relationships between power, control and gender, the role of interparental violence and abuse, victim/perpetrator duality, and trauma.

An ecological model of parent abuse has been used as an overarching framework (see above), recognising the importance of individual, family, peer, and societal factors in explaining the phenomenon. Within this, child development and agency are also emphasised.

Method

A sequential mixed methods design was used

Phase 1: Surveys (n=221)
"how common is parent abuse and what does it look like?"

Phase 2: Depth interviews (n=21)
"how do young people experience parent abuse and how does it impact them and others?"

Sample

1. 210 young people aged between 16 and 18 in further education (follow-up interviews with 10)
2. 11 young people aged between 14 and 18 attending a court-ordered 'Youth Offending Service' (YOS) (interviews with all 11)

Adolescent-to-parent violence and abuse: The experiences and perceptions of young people

Victoria Baker, PhD Student (VLBaker@uclan.ac.uk)
Connect Centre in the School of Social Work, Care & Community
University of Central Lancashire (UCLan)

The nature of parent abuse

Young people (both male and female), described using a range of violent and abusive behaviours towards parents.

“And the last straw, ‘cos I ran out of the house afterwards, I smashed her head against the wall” (“Penelope”, 17 years old)

“Erm, because, I was feelin’ violent, I was rippin’ me curtains down”
(“Jenn”, 14 years old)

“I was like, “I’ll file reports on you ‘cos you hit me...even though she didn’t”
(“Ruth”, 18 years old)

“I always threaten me stepdad but...not me mum...as much”
(“Pete”, 14 years old)

“I was just screamin’ for hours, callin’ her names, tellin’ her how disgusting she is, tellin’ her how much she failed”
(“Jodea”, 17 years old)

Mothers were nearly always the targets of abuse. In some cases, this was because they were parenting alone, but in other cases, young people explained it was because they were closer to their mothers, were scared of their fathers, and knew their mothers would never leave them.

“I think it’s because I’ve lived with my mum all my life, permanently, and with my dad it’s only been visits...so I’ve kind of lost that connection, so it would be weird to start an argument with someone you’re not...it’s easier to start an argument with someone that you know every little detail about and you’re that close to, because it’s easier to clash.” (“Penelope”, 17 years old)

Adolescent-to-parent violence and abuse: The experiences and perceptions of young people

Victoria Baker, PhD Student (VLBaker@uclan.ac.uk)
Connect Centre in the School of Social Work, Care & Community
University of Central Lancashire (UCLan)

The impact of parent abuse

Patterns of violence and abuse impacted upon mothers' mental and physical well-being, as well as having financial, legal, and relationship implications.

"I remember her mentioning...that I'd actually made her start to feel suicidal, 'cos she couldn't deal with...the way I was being"
(*"Ruth"*, 18 years old)

"I think she got like, glass in her leg or somethin' "
(*"Jo"*, 14 years old)

"it's ruined my relationship between me and my mum"
(*"Jo"*, 14 years old)

"She said that erm...one day, I'll wake up and then, she'll be gone"
(*"Dan"*, 15 years old)

"...so I smack him [stepdad], about three times, and then I go in the house and the police end up turning up, arrested me, and then taking me into care"
(*"Pete"*, 15 years old)

"There's lots of holes in the walls"
(*"Dan"*, 15 years old)

Young people's self worth was also impacted, which in two cases resulted in suicide attempts.

"And I think obviously, you are gonna feel like, I felt like I wasn't good enough and I was not good enough for anyone because I was violent and stuff, so obviously I took the overdose"
(*"Penelope"*, 17 years old)

"I almost felt like there was...it was...I'd got to a point of no return with her and that...I...I was a burden...And...I just felt like...she'd probably be better...without me there"
(*"Ruth"*, 18 years old)

Adolescent-to-parent violence and abuse: The experiences and perceptions of young people

Victoria Baker, PhD Student (VLBaker@uclan.ac.uk)
Connect Centre in the School of Social Work, Care & Community
University of Central Lancashire (UCLan)

The contexts of parent abuse

Young people discussed a range of contexts from which their violence and abuse towards parents arose. Explanations centred around five main intersecting themes, with a sixth theme exploring how interviewees' accounts often acted to redirect accountability and blame away from themselves and back towards parents.

Violence, abuse, and trauma

“Cos that's what happened to me. People have been violent to me...that's how it's brought me...up ” (“Jenn”, 14 years old)

Stress and coping

“...when I was in year ten and we had our mocks going on so I was really stressful at that time. Had a lot going on with friends at that time. And me and my Mum clashed over something and I got quite violent...”
 (“Penelope”, 17 years old)

Blame

“Do you know if I seen someone angry on the street, I'm not gonna go up to them and make them more angry by taking their phone off 'em, d'ya know what I mean? Or tryin' takin' their drink. Because then, I'd probably just get hit wouldn't I?” (“Jenn”, 14 years old)

Power, control, and agency

“Like say if she says like, “Oh, that doesn't go with that” or “I don't like them shoes” or “You're not gettin' this, you're not gettin' that”.”
 (“Jo”, 14 years old)

Communication

“I just don't like people shoutin' at me and arguin' wiv' me...and it just gets me really angry.” (“Dan”, 15 years old)

Anger and emotion regulation

“...violence was 'cos I was over-the-top angry. It's just that, if I get angry and cross the line, I can like, lose control of myself.”
 (“Penelope”, 17 years old)

The root causes of young people's violence seemed to lie in their histories of abuse and trauma, meaning they were angry and resentful, struggling to regulate their emotions in the face of everyday stresses and strains, and were often being parented by mothers who were dealing with their own trauma around abuse.

Adolescent-to-parent violence and abuse: The experiences and perceptions of young people

Victoria Baker, PhD Student (VLBaker@uclan.ac.uk)
Connect Centre in the School of Social Work, Care & Community
University of Central Lancashire (UCLan)

Addressing parent abuse

Young people's thoughts on how parent abuse might be addressed focused on things that parents could do, things that young people could do, and things that services could do.

Talking, listening and understanding (not shouting)

"It's really such a communication barrier that was between us, and I think, if we just learnt to let that barrier down, let that wall down, and just sit down and talk more, about everything, then it would just stop everything arising" ("Penelope", 17 years old)

"So...and I think that's what kind of...made me stop doing what I was doing, because I had someone that I felt understood where I was coming from...I knew that actually, things could be better. I just need to start acting good!" ("Ruth", 18 years old)

Quality time

"And build up...a relationship again...by going out and doing stuff together. So we'd go out for like lunch an' stuff, or even just go out for a walk, or a bike ride. Or we'd watch a film together. Get some chocolate, watch a film, you know. And...I felt like actually, that really helped" ("Ruth", 18 years old)

"Do summit the person enjoys...like, going mooching up hills or summit" ("Pete", 15 years old)

Space to grow and space to calm down

Penelope: "Erm, I think from being in hospital, they gave me obviously techniques and like everything that I...My Mum was told that if I need to walk away from a situation that she has to let me walk away. So I can have time to calm down and like take a step before I do cross that line."

Interviewer: "And do you find that helpful?"

Penelope: "Yeah, definitely because obviously if you're still in the heat of it, it's gonna build up more and more and then if you take a step back, it's easier just to calm down before you go into it any further." ("Penelope", 17 years old)

Mediators, confidants, and healing past trauma

"Because...I know for a fact I couldn't speak to mum...but speaking to a therapist helped." ("Ruth", 18 years old)