

The Abuse of Parents by Their Adolescent Children

Respect Conference

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Addressing Young People's Use of
Violence in Close Relationships
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**Yvonne Nugent
Department of Social Science
Loughborough University**

Introduction to the Research

- This research is a combination of two distinctive disciplines: Law and Social Policy. The law looks at uncovering the truth when a wrong action has been committed, and social policy looks for an explanation for the wrong action, also referred to as mitigating circumstances (the explainable reasons behind an action).

Aims and Objectives

The principle aim is to create a greater awareness regarding the abuse of parents by their adolescent children. The subsidiary aim but no less important is to contribute to the reformation of legislation. Another subsidiary aim would be to form from the collected data a suitable etiology on the abuse of parents by their adolescent children. Currently, there is no direct definition of adolescent to parent abuse. It is anticipated that through raising awareness on the negative impact adolescent to parent abuse has on the family unit, society and the judicial system (in terms of cost) that a unilateral definition can be put in place, and specific legislation and social policies will follow suit.

Research Focus

- The research examined the experiences and life stories of parents and their adolescent children. This was irrespective of the family makeup, whether the family is based on the patriarchal structure, black Asian minority ethnic (BAME) parenting, a re-constituted family, a lone parent household, divorced, civil or same sex partnership, the parent to child relationship breakdown is what this research has focused its attention on.

Research Design & Approach

- The research design has a multifaceted approach due to the nature of the issues surrounding the abuse of parents by their adolescent children. This research approach, although limited in scope has taken a holistic route that incorporates identification, quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, the judicial process of legislative reform, the creation of social policies and guidelines that will enable the multi agency approach to have form and sustainability.

Multi Agency Participation

- The research was not limited to parents and their adolescent children only, but involved interviewing practitioners. The forty multi agency participants that took part in the questionnaire and interviews for this research were all from various agencies that either worked solely with adolescents or adolescents and their families.

Adolescent to Parent Abuse

- During the interviews for the qualitative data, ninety-seven percent of adolescents denied abusing their parents, yet all ninety-seven percent offered an explanation as to why the abuse happened.
- Research uncovered that the violence used against parents ranges from verbal to physical. This involves kicking, spitting (very common), punching, slapping mainly around the head, biting and swearing.
- Abuse against parents were found to be both men and women, this includes grandparents, step-parents and adopted parents.

Research Findings

- Key findings from this research denote that the likelihood of a parent becoming a victim is not subject to geographical location, culture, race, age, education or financial status, social deprivation or gender.
- These factors highlight the key principle resonated throughout this research that abuse is no respecter of person.

Patterns of Abuse

- This research also highlights patterns of similarity amongst participants. The older the parent, the less probability of seeking help to combat the abuse seemed to be.
- This was a feature found by many researchers in North America and Australia (Cottrell & Monk, 2004; Agnew & Huguley, 1989).

Research Findings

- A Similar pattern was found with the older adolescents. The older the adolescent, the more the justification was for the abusive behaviour, and at the same time minimalisation was a common factor.
- “It was only a kick, one time, ok, twice”.
- “I threw a ball at her, she throws things at me all the time”.
- “Why should I like her, not even my dad likes her that’s why he’s gone mate”.

Patterns of Abuse

- These findings indicate a correlation with the pattern of behaviour found in domestic violence between an abusive men and vulnerable women (Ellsberg et al., 2001; Vincent et al., 2000; Romito, 2008).
- Researchers of domestic violence have uncovered that women are generally reluctant to report a partner for domestic abuse.

The Correlation to DV

- Home Office statistics indicate that on average, a woman may encounter thirty-five incidents of domestic violence prior to calling the police, if she calls the police at all.
- When men are accused of domestic violence, there is a high propensity for men to justify and minimalise the abuse.

Rights of the Child in Perspective

Article 3.1 of the UN Convention states,
“In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative, authoritative, or legislative bodies, the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration”.

Every Child Matters Document

- Take a Strategic Look at the five outcomes:

Being Healthy so that they are physically, mentally, emotionally and sexually healthy, have **healthy lifestyles** and choose not to take illegal drugs.

Every Child Matters Document

- **Staying Safe** from maltreatment, neglect, violence, sexual exploitation, accidental injury and death, bullying and discrimination, crime and anti-social behaviour in and out of school, have security and stability and are cared for.



Every Child Matters Document

Enjoying and Achieving so that they are ready for school, attend and enjoy school, achieve stretching national educational standards at primary and secondary school, achieve **personal and social development** and enjoy recreation.

Every Child Matters Document


- **Making a Positive Contribution** so that they engage in **decision-making**, support their **community and environment**, engage in law-abiding and positive behaviour in and out of school, **develop positive relationships**, choose not to bully and discriminate, develop self confidence, successfully deal with significant life changes and challenges and develop enterprising behaviour.


Every Child Matters Document

Achieving Economic Well-being so that they engage in further education, employment or training on leaving school, are ready for employment, live in decent homes and sustainable communities, have access to transport and material goods, live in households free from low income.

Case Study I


- Daniel is a married man in his 40s. He lives in a large house with his new wife, one step-son and three biological children from a previous marriage. Daniel has sole custody of his three children. He works part time and his current wife works full time. Daniel believes he has low self-esteem due to the humiliation he feels from being physically and emotionally abused by his eldest daughter Rachel who is 15 years old.
- According to Daniel, the physical abuse towards him and his current wife commenced one year after his divorce and remarriage. Prior to his divorce, the birth mother of Rachel and the other children were victims of abuse by Rachel. The birth mother does not have any contact with the children due to the abusive behaviour she experienced from Rachel.

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- Daniel has a good social network and both his immediate and extended family are aware of the abuse. The paternal grandparents try and take the children alternate weekends as a way to help Daniel and provide essential support. Rachel seems to have a good relationship with her siblings and grandparents, but a great deal of anger towards her biological parents.
 - There have been no allegations of child abuse or domestic violence towards the children's mother or Daniel's current wife. This has been investigated as a matter of clarity by Children Services, but no wrong doing was found. The children are all in good general health are good achievers at school and are well adjusted. Daniel and his family receive support from a voluntary family service provider. Daniel is treated as a victim of abuse by the service providers. There are questions whether or not Rachel is using drugs, but that is unsubstantiated with evidence. She does not cooperate with the family worker as she is in denial regarding the abuse, although the abuse has been witnessed by the family worker and her manager.

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- Daniel has had his daughter arrested on several occasions. Daniel feels let down as his daughter was ordered by the court to attend the Youth Offending Service to attend classes that was mainly about perpetrating criminal damage. He felt that the punishment was not befitting to the crime. Daniel believes that calling the police did not help his daughter or his family.
 - His expectation was that she would receive psychological or appropriate intervention to help her deal with her violent and abusive behaviour. Her brief psychological assessment found that Rachel had no mental health issues.
 - The family has received counselling but the abuse continues.

Case Study 2

- Aril is a 19 year old sibling of an abusive brother. She lives with her mother who is a single parent and one brother who is 16 years old. They live in a comfortable house in a nice neighbourhood. Her mother works as a professional full time and Aril attends university full time.
- Aril is experiencing immense difficulties within her family home because she witnesses her mother being physically abused by her brother and feels completely hopeless.

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- Aril has a good social network and is close to her friends and extended family. Her friends and extended family do not know that her mother is violently abused by her brother on a continual basis and she is afraid to tell anyone.
 - Aril is scared to leave her mother alone in the house, and worries every time she is away from her mother. She lives in fear for her mother and it is interfering with her studies, social life and her health. She finds it difficult to build a healthy relationship with her brother because of the way in which he treats their mother.

Case Study 3

- Lola is a lone parent in her 50s. She has always lived alone with her children.
- She lives in a luxury house with her two children, age 17 and 20 years old. She works full time as a professional. Lola does not value her strength and independence. She has dealt with a number of complex issues in life, and has learnt to be self-reliant and deal with issues admirably as they come along.
- Lola does not have a good social network and no extended family. She has been the victim of physical and emotional abuse from one of her children for 7 years. Lola feels guilty and ashamed and suffers from anxiety. She refuses to attend counselling as she feels responsible for the physical abuse and believes no one will understand.

- Lola's guilt derives from her being a lone parent, and believes her children are angry at her for this. It has been the subject of many arguments within the home over the past years. The abusive son will not attend family counselling, and Lola does not value the benefit of attending alone or with the other child. Lola has spoken to the school about the abuse and violent outburst she has experienced. She has asked that her child has a mental health assessment. It was deemed unnecessary as the child's behaviour at school was exemplary.
- The police were called on one occasion when the child verbally and physically abused Lola in public and the police were immediately informed by members of the public. Lola refused to press charges as in the past the child was arrested, given a warning by police and sent home. This experienced angered the child and as a result the child was extremely verbally abusive to Lola and laughed at her for thinking that the police would have taken action.

Conclusion

- Securing and providing for the welfare of children and young people is in keeping with the Every Child Matters Document, 2004 relating to the 'Five Outcomes' recommended by the Government. The implementation of specific legislation relating to the abuse of parents will provide provisions and security for the child or young person.
- This will ultimately enable the child or young person to receive help for their violent behaviour, which in turn may enable them to achieve emotional and economic success. The Childcare Act, 2006 part 1 s.2 states that the duty of the Government is to provide for the 'physical and mental health and emotional well-being of a child.

Law, Policy & Practice

- Currently, there is a limitation on what multi agency services can offer due to the lack of targeted social policies which derives from legislation.
- However, practitioners can still offer intervention, support and guidance based on the current laws in place and thinking more strategically about the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act, 2006. Although parents who are abuse are not technically included, the element of vulnerability is present and therefore it can be viewed from that perspective.

My Details:

- Yvonne Nugent
- Loughborough University
- Department of Social Science
- Brockington Building
- Leicestershire, LE11 3HE
- Y.M.Nugent@lboro.ac.uk
- M: 0751 66 15984