Adolescent to parent violence: a research study from the Centre for Criminology

Rachel Condry
Centre for Criminology, Faculty of Law

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The Study: ‘Investigating Adolescent Violence towards Parents’

• 3 year ESRC-funded project (Aug 2010-Sept 2013)

• Definition of APV as “Physical violence, threats of violence and criminal damage towards parents/carers by their adolescent children (aged 13-19 years)”

• Aimed to investigate how violence is defined, experienced and negotiated by parents and adolescents and how violent assaults committed by adolescents within the home are currently processed and managed within the criminal justice system.
What we did

• Metropolitan Police data (April 2009 – March 2010). Analysed all reported incidents of APV involving 13-19 year old perpetrators against parents/step-parents/grandparents in one year (1,892 cases).

• Analysed 100 Police Case Files (50 from London Metropolitan Borough, 50 from a Home County force)

• Interviews with 120 people: 40 parents (35 mothers, 5 fathers); 18 young people (12 sons, 8 daughters); 41 practitioners (youth justice, parenting, dv, and other experts); 21 police officers (in two forces).
Key findings

- First analysis of cases of APV reported to the police in the UK. 1,892 cases where the perpetrator was 13-19 years and the victim was a parent in the London Metropolitan Police area in a one-year period. We provide some of the first evidence from the UK that this hidden and complex form of family violence exists and as such is in need of formal recognition and response.

- Within these recorded cases, son-to-mother violence is most common: 87% of suspects were male and 77% of victims were female. However, it is not exclusively so, and these figures might represent reporting patterns (e.g. mothers more likely to report than fathers) rather than actual patterns of experience.

- APV is mostly absent from the policy sphere, despite being widely recognised by practitioners.
Parents’ experiences of living with APV

“It could be anything, absolutely anything. You never knew. We were always walking on egg shells, all of us.”

“[S]he’s punched me, she’s kicked me ... She’s called me a useless mother, you know, and spat in me face and.. yeah, I’ve had bruises ... absolutely covered in bruises.”

“He'd gone for me a couple of times. He'd threatened to hit me with a padlock that were on a bandanna. He'd pulled a knife out on me as well.”
“[If I argue back] 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.”
Key findings (cont.)

• Changes in the domestic violence definition in 2013 – improved recording?

• Parents and families fall between the cracks of different services

• Stigma and shame

• Few escape routes for parents

• Multiple pathways to APV – no single explanation

• APV stretches across the social spectrum

• Is it beginning to emerge onto the public agenda?
Some challenges

• Researching a problem that is not on the public agenda.

• Parents not understood as ‘victims’; young people as offenders only outside the home.

• Power and control – inverts conventional understandings of intergenerational dynamics

• Not wanting to over-criminalise young people – most appropriate response outside CJS?

• Managing media coverage and representation of the problem.
Our project website for further information:

apv.crim.ox.ac.uk
QUESTIONS