Adolescent to parent violence: key findings for police services

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This project aims to raise awareness of the issue, and develop recommendations for effective police policies to support practitioners and help families experiencing APV.

The research findings presented in this briefing draw upon an ESRC-funded research project which represents the first large-scale study of adolescent to parent violence in the UK. They are based on quantitative and qualitative analysis of 100 police case files for reported incidents of APV and 20 in-depth interviews with police officers across two English police forces. The findings highlight the different contexts surrounding the incidents reported to the police, the ways in which they are responded to, police perceptions of APV and of the families reporting it, and the main challenges the police encounter in dealing with APV cases.

Aims of the APV Project

- To investigate how violence is experienced and negotiated by parents and adolescents.
- To explore how APV cases are currently processed and managed within the criminal justice system.
- To develop practical policy recommendations for families experiencing APV, police, youth justice, and others who work with these families.

Legal issues and practical implications

- Lack of an official recognition of the problem of adolescent to parent offending. Not officially defined as domestic violence if the adolescent was under the age of 18 at the time of offending until 2013, and of 16 from now on. Children of a younger age still lack an official definition.
- Consequent lack of police policy specifically guiding police forces on how reported incidents should be responded to.
- Consequent lack of specialist knowledge and training to respond to the problem.

For further information please see:
Practical issues. Necessity to remove perpetrators from the home to protect victims in high risk cases clashes with parents’ responsibility for providing a home to their children. Often no alternative but returning the adolescent to their home address.

Obstacles to prosecution. Parents’ reluctance to report and potentially criminalize their child, parents reporting and later refusing to make a statement or making a statement and later withdrawing it. Difficulties in pursuing an unsupported prosecution and to go against the parents’ wishes.

What issues arise in police responses to reported incidents?

Discretionary powers. Due to the lack of official recognition and policy surrounding adolescent to parent violence, there are high levels of police discretion in responding to reported incidents.

Tensions. Positive intervention policies often clash with youth diversionary policies and with the aim to respect the wishes of victims.

Alternative options. To deal with cases informally, work in partnership with social services or use “Youth Restorative Disposals” to deal with juveniles responsible for minor offences.

What are Police forces’ main challenges?

Practical issues. Necessity to remove perpetrators from the home to protect victims in high risk cases clashes with parents’ responsibility for providing a home to their children. Often no alternative but returning the adolescent to their home address.

Obstacles to prosecution. Parents’ reluctance to report and potentially criminalize their child, parents reporting and later refusing to make a statement or making a statement and later withdrawing it. Difficulties in pursuing an unsupported prosecution and to go against the parents’ wishes.

It is crucial that APV is formally recognised, allowing the police to deal with it in a more consistent and appropriate manner and to facilitate training, policy and practice in this complex and sensitive form of family violence.

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