

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT TO PARENT VIOLENCE AND ABUSE (CAPVA) TOOLKIT FOR PROFESSIONALS

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1. Introduction

Here in Sheffield, we know that child and adolescent to parent violence and abuse (CAPVA) is a complex issue and the evidence we have suggest that it is increasing.

This document is intended to be a guide for professionals working in Sheffield to help them to better understand CAPVA and to help them to safely support families where this is happening. Along with information about what CAPVA, how children and young people feel and what parents can do, there is also guidance about where to seek further help for families and how to access training on CAPVA for professionals.

2. Definition

There is no legal definition of CAPVA. A recent literature review undertaken for the Domestic Commissioner's Office suggests that a working definition could be as follows,

'Child and adolescent to parent violence and abuse (CAPVA) refers to a pattern of harmful, and in some cases, controlling, behaviour by children or young persons towards parents or caregivers, where abusive behaviour can be physical, verbal, emotional, psychological, financial, property-based or sexual. Abusive behaviour can be intentionally harmful and controlling, and/or unintentionally harmful, functioning to communicate distress, anxiety or trauma.'

The types of behaviours identified in the research review that are associated with CAPVA are seen in the table below

Abuse type	Typical behaviours involved
Physical	Punching, kicking, pulling hair, pushing, throwing or pinning, trapping, biting, throwing or hitting with objects.
	In more extreme cases, strangling, using weapons such as knives, the use of poison/gas, and burning/scalding.
Verbal	Shouting and swearing to argue, challenge and intimidate. Demeaning sarcastic and critical language used to humiliate, hurt, and undermine parents' sense of self.
Emotional or psychological	Derogatory names, withholding affection, manipulation, threats, intimidation, blackmail and coercion to obtain control over the household, psychological tactics, e.g. hiding household objects, using 'silent treatment' and other 'mind games', social/obstructive tactics.
	The threatening of self-harm and use of risky and endangering behaviour.
	The use of sexualised language to demean and humiliate.
Economic or material	Destruction of property, e.g. smashing up rooms, kicking or punching holes in walls and doors, smashing windows, destroying parents' personal possessions. The demanding or theft of money and goods, the selling of property, endangering employment, incurring fines, endangering tenancies.

3. Prevalence

It is very difficult to estimate the prevalence of CAPVA, there is no population-level data in the UK so we are not able to state with any certainty how prevalent it is. However, it is becoming more widely recognised and is now understood as a growing social problem though the stigma involved in talking

¹ CAPVA-Rapid-Literature-Review-Exec-Summary-November-2021-Baker-and-Bonnick.pdf

about the issue or reporting it means that many families will often try to hide the abuse or minimise the impact of the behaviour and/or may not recognise the behaviour as abusive.

The limited research and data that we do have suggests that it is predominately boys who are abusive towards their mothers, though it is acknowledged that it is not exclusively boys and there are also girls who are behaving harmfully too.

To inform this toolkit we gathered a number of case studies from various services, including Haven, Children's Social Care, Child and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Sheffield's commissioned, specialist domestic abuse service IDAS. In all of the case studies we received the child or young person causing harm was male and all of those being harmed were either mothers or sisters.

Most of the Sheffield case studies also identified that the children who were harming their parents had some level of additional needs, almost half of the families were known to CAMHS and there was a high proportion of neurodivergence amongst the children and young people.

Research undertaken in by the Economic and Social Research Council² reports that of 1,892 cases of young person to parent violence reported in London in the year 2009/10,

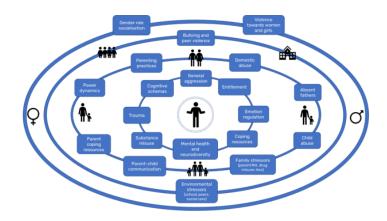
- 77% of parent victims were female
- 87% of those using abusive behaviours were male
- 66% of all cases involved son to mother abuse

Abusive behaviour can start towards parents from a very early age but is most common between the ages of 14 and 16. The comprehensive research review undertaken for the DA Commissioner's office found that 'single mothers do seem to be disproportionally affected – potentially due to their greater likelihood of having experienced domestic abuse from a partner and having fewer social resources to draw upon'³

It can also be helpful to understand CAPVA in the context of children, young people and adolescents struggling to regulate their emotions, rather than CAPVA being a straightforward behavioural problem with a simple solution.

4. Risk Factors

CAPVA can occur in families from all socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities and cultures. There is no clear set of circumstances that cause CAPVA but an ecological model is useful to understand the range of interlinked factors that my make CAPVA more likely. It is very important to remember that young people and their parents can both be 'victims' and 'perpetrators' at the same time.



Key influencing factors within an ecological model

² Adolescent to parent violence: Framing and mapping a hidden problem - Rachel Condry, Caroline Miles, 2014 (sagepub.com)

^{3 3} <u>CAPVA-Rapid-Literature-Review-Exec-Summary-November-2021-Baker-and-Bonnick.pdf</u> p3

Child Level Risk	CAPVA as part of a wider pattern of aggression
Factors and	Difficulties around mental health
Processes	 Neurodiversity
	Substance misuse
	Trauma
	Difficulties with emotional regulation
	 Narcissism
	Rejection 'schemas'/insecure attachment
	Entitlement
Family Level Risk	Historic and ongoing domestic abuse
Factors and	Child abuse
Processes	 Issues around poor parent – child communication
	 Parenting practices or 'styles' which either lack boundaries or
	impose too many controls with harsh consequences
Community Level	 Young people's relationships with their peers (can be violence
Risk Factors and	endorsing and/or victimising
Processes	 Stressors relating to poverty and/or school
	 Intersections with Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Child
	Criminal Exploitation (CCE)
Cultural Risk Factors	 Gender role socialisation, especially the 'gendering' of
and Processes	parenthood and family violence and children's reactions to
	perceived gender roles.

Neurodivergence

Although some may suggest a relationship between neurodiversity and CAPVA, Bonnick and Baker note that caution needs to be exercised, clearly not all children who are neurodivergent will go on to be abusive towards their parents.

In families where children are neurodivergent it may be that their harmful behaviour towards their parents is an attempt on their part to communicate distress, or perhaps to try to 'control an environment that is confusing and/or frightening' and this needs to be explored and taken into account by professionals working in this context.

5. Children & Young People's Experience and Voices

Most of the research and information on CAPVA is focused on parents' (primarily mothers) experience of how it affects them and suggests ways in which parents can prevent CAPVA by changing the way that they parent their children. Though helpful, this has led to a gap in understanding as to why young people behave in this way, it is also important to remember that the young people who behave harmfully can often be victims themselves, of domestic abuse and/or neglect.

"...he was always hittin' my mum. And when he hit me, I used to tell me mum and she didn't used to do anything because she was scared of what he'd do to her." (Dan, male, 15)

In her PhD Thesis⁴, the impact of CAPVA on young people is explored by Victoria Baker who identified that the impact on the young person themselves can extend to, but is not limited to, the following domains of young people's lives.

• Impact on Relationships

CAPVA has a significant negative impact on young people's relationships with their parents, their siblings and their wider families. CAPVA is often a hidden factor in family breakdown, particularly adoption breakdown.

Relationships between children and parents can be harmed permanently by such periods of abuse, with long lasting damage being done to the parent-child bond, especially those cases where children are removed from their parents' care. Mothers are generally more affected by CAPVA and therefore, it is the mother-child relationship that is often most harmed.

"I think it's because I've lived with my mum all my life, permanently, and with my dad it's only been visits, and he was away for a year and a half, and I saw him like, for day visits when he was in prison. And then, since he's been out of prison I've seen him less and less. 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. Especially because me and my mum are so similar, it's much easier to clash than it is with my dad." (Penelope, female, 17)

"I think personally they'd be more likely to hit mothers, because even... I mean even in the society we're living in today like, it's more likely that the father's gonna be away working and we still live in... what is effectively a patriarchal society, so... like, a mother might be seen as a smaller figure than the father and the...father might be seen as someone who still is quite untouchable, or... or very removed from the situation, just based on work or whatever." (Alan, male, 17)

Physical Impact

Sometimes young people are injured by hitting walls or doors or by throwing things. Sometimes parents may retaliate with violent behaviour towards the young person which results in them being harmed, some parents may try to restrain their young person which could also lead to injury. Children and young people may self-harm as a coping strategy as a result of the shame they feel about their behaviour, research also tells us some young people may also be taking risks elsewhere in their lives to enable them to cope with their home lives, for example by using illicit substances, running away from home, engaging in unsafe sexual behaviour, staying out until late with unsafe peers etc.⁵

"So I was arguin' wiv' 'em [Mum and Nan] and then...after that I went into my room and just ended up smashin' my room up and just...punched the wall and things like that." (Jason, male, 16)

"And like she [Mum] threw somethin' at me but it didn't hit me, it went on the floor. And like, I picked a vase up from the side and I threw it on the floor. And it hit the floor. And then she kicked it near me – the glass – and I picked the glass up, threw it at the floor and I cut all me finger." (Dan, male, 15)

Impact on Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

Depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and suicidal tendencies are often *co-occuring* issues in the lives of young people who are using CAPVA.

Young people are likely to feel guilty about their behaviour with this sometimes being referred to 'shame-based rage'⁶.

⁴ Baker, V. Exploring adolescent violence and abuse towards parents: the experiences and perceptions of young people. Doctor of Philosophy thesis, University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), (2021). Available online at http://clok.uclan.ac.uk/39684

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

"I kinda channel everything into anger... 'cos I know how to deal with that. Like if I feel really depressed, I'll make myself as angry as I can... 'cos I can deal with it." (Alan, male, 17)

Sometimes families can develop a very negative view of the young person and define them only in terms of their violent behaviour, which can mean that children and young people develop very low self-esteem which could lead to anxiety and depression and a reduced ability to deal with the everyday demands of adolescence.

"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, female, 17)

• Impact on Education

Children and young people who are involved with CAPVA are more likely to have the co-occuring problem of low educational attainment, there are also links between CAPVA and young people who refuse to attend school.

Impact on Young People's Freedom and Agency

Young people might experience restrictions on their lives that are imposed as consequences of CAPVA, such as grounding, the removal of phones and computers, not being allowed to attend extra-curricular activities or see friends. This can lead to young people leading very 'narrow' lives.

"I wanted my freedom, even though I didn't deserve it, and I wasn't safe to have it..." (Ruth, female, 18)

Where the CAPVA is extreme and places parents and siblings at risk, young people could be removed from their family home.

"Well, like two and a half months ago they wouldn't let me... 'cos I went out, just for a breather...the social worker said 'don't let him back in the house', so they didn't, so I started kicking through the door, and then my stepdad come out, so I go 'let me in', he pushes me away from the door, so I smack him, 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, male, 15)

• Legal Impacts & implications

Young people might be arrested and criminalised because of their behaviour, CAPVA often also takes place in the context of other youth offending behaviour which may result in ongoing involvement from youth offending teams and services. Often families will call the police as a 'scare tactic' to try to frighten the young person into stopping their harmful behaviour, however, this criminalisation can also have a longer term, limiting impact on the young persons future.

In Baker's study, young people who were spoken to said that things were at their worst when they were aged between 14-16 when 'fights' would happen on an almost daily occurrence

"Some of them would just be arguments, some of them would be like me pushing her and give up an'...some of them would be like...over the phone. 'Cos I wouldn't come home, I'd be like, "I'm refusing to come home, I'm not telling you where I am". And then yeah...some of them would be like the really, really violent ones. But it just depended...but mostly every single day there'd be a problem..." (Ruth, female, 18)

• Impact on other family members

Siblings can be impacted directly by experiencing violence and abuse themselves or indirectly, as their parent's attention is focused on their sibling who is behaving harmfully or by seeing and experiencing the abuse and its impact. Their everyday lives may also be harmed by their experience of this type of abuse, for example, by not being able to access extra-curricular activities or have friends visit their homes etc.

"I think it normalises the aggression. I think it normalises... like, violence and abuse in the home. And I think when you get that danger, you get the danger of them growing up to be abusive and aggressive." (Alan, male, 17)

Sometimes young people are placed, or go to live, with their grandparents and in this context the violence and abusive behaviour can either start, continue or even worsen. For some grandparents, this can result in serious harm and injury

"She was getting knives out of the kitchen drawer and threatening us and [my husband] had had some quite serious... He'd had a black eye and he'd had something thrown at him that had hit him on the side of the head and he had to go for stitches. She really hurt my hand one day and I thought it was broken so I'd ended up in A&E." (Bev)

In Sheffield, specialist services report that a significant number of children who are involved with CAPVA leave the family home to live with another family member, often a grandparent or sometimes the adult perpetrator of domestic abuse. This is often to keep the parent and other siblings (and the child demonstrating harmful behaviour) safe from further incidents/harm in the short term. However this creates a concern around the divide between the child that has moved out of the home and their siblings and/or parents and other family members. Where the child or young person moves to live with the adult perpetrator of domestic abuse, there are additional concerns around the parenting influences and continued control from the adult perpetrator.

In Sheffield, there is help for children and adolescents aged 11 -15 who are involved with CAPVA in their families. The Level Up Programme is delivered by Cranstoun and can support children and young people who are showing signs of controlling and abusive behaviours towards family members or their own partners. Level Up is made up of 10 sessions of one to one work which focus on a range of behaviours including coercive control, gender and stereotyping and conflict resolution. Enquiries and referral information can be sought by emailing levelupsy@cranstoun.org.uk

6. CAPVA, Parents and Parenting

It can be hard for parents to recognise whether the behaviour of their child or young person is violent or abusive. Most parents have difficulty accepting that their child is violent towards them. Parents should be supported to trust their instincts and listen to their own warning bells.

Violence from children and young people is NOT a normal part of growing up.

Parents may find themselves

- Changing their behaviour to avoid confrontation with their child or upsetting their young person
- Being afraid for their own safety or the safety of other family members
- Feeling as though they are 'walking on eggshells' trying to keep the peace and predict their young person's wants and needs

Parents may also be feeling

- Alone and isolated and with little hope for the future
- A sense of shame, humiliation, and feelings of guilt for their children's behaviour
- Unsupported by professionals and 'blamed' for their child's behaviour
- Frustrated at a lack of services that are available for them
- Despair at not having a harmonious family life

It should also be noted that parents often feel a real sense of loss that the child they used to know, love and enjoy appears to have left them, and in extreme cases it may not be safe for the young person to continue to live in the family home leading to parents feeling as though the relationship may never be fully repaired.

Parent's work lives may also be affected with worries and anxiety extending to the workplace where they may not be able to concentrate on their job. Feelings of stress and anxiety may also lead to parents taking time off work to seek support and the additional cost of counselling, potential legal fees and repairing damage to property caused by children and young persons can add significant financial pressure to families.

Parents need to feel supported enough to be honest with professionals and feel as though they can ask for help without judgement. They may not want to report their children's behaviour to the police because they are concerned about their future and they do not want to compromise their life chances or opportunities. Some parents may also feel that they won't be believed, they will be blamed and they may lose family and friend's support if they bring the young person to the attention of police or other services.

Past Experiences of Domestic Abuse

The link between children's experience of domestic abuse and CAPVA should not be ignored and parents who have experienced domestic abuse in their own relationships need to feel supported, 'partnered with', believed and trusted. In the case studies we gathered in Sheffield, most mentioned that there was a history of domestic abuse perpetrated by children's fathers or stepfathers towards their mothers.

Survivors of domestic abuse tell us that they can find their children's behaviour very triggering and distressing and it can feel to them as though it is a direct replica of their abusive partner's behaviour. In these instances, parents may benefit from additional domestic abuse informed support from a specialist domestic abuse service.

It is important to remember that some parents may not have had positive experiences of working with services in the past and this also needs to be taken in to account.

"We are afraid if we say how bad our children's behaviour is, it will be our parenting that is attacked.. We love them and want everything to be ok...I personally was begging for help for years in one way or another...giving us confidence and the tools we need and believing us will go a long way in making families lives better" (A Service User)

Children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse in their families are more at risk of using abuse and violence towards their own parents. Research suggests that around 50-80% of young people who are involved with CAPVA had also themselves experienced domestic abuse in their homes. This could be for multiple reasons and may include the following

- Children and young people who are involved with CAPVA as a response to parental aggression, either to defend themselves or to prevent one parent from harming another
- Some children and adolescents have feelings of anger and resentment about their experience and re-direct these feelings towards their non abusing parent (usually their mother)
- Some children and adolescents may be experiencing trauma as a result of their experience of domestic abuse and this may subsequently lead to poor mental health, poor emotional regulation skills etc which could lead young people to become involved with CAPVA
- When a child and/or young person experiences domestic abuse and then goes on to be involved with CAPVA it could be that they are modelling what they have experienced and seen in their families – this idea is the most widely understood theory of why CAPVA happens and is in line with the idea of intergenerational abuse and violence.

Research on post separation abuse and coercive control by Dr Emma Katz⁷ identified that children continue to be harmed post separation by their abusing parent, this can also lead to CAPVA worsening or even starting post separation. For example, some abusive fathers may use 'admirable fathering' post separation to undermine children's mothers.

'Admirable' fathers may present as very convincing and as needing help and support to professionals but their primary motivation is often to continue to abuse the children's mothers and to interfere with the mother-child relationship, often by criticising and blaming children's mothers when they are having contact, this can lead to children not seeing their mothers as a parent with authority and agency and therefore, not a parent who they need to respect.

Parenting and CAPVA

Parenting styles are often influenced by parents own experiences, their culture or by the society in which they live. It is important that parents are supported and not blamed for their children's behaviour.

There are some parenting practices which may result in, or worsen, CAPVA including,

- Parents who feel they should sacrifice everything, including their own happiness and wellbeing to make their children happy
- Parents who feel guilty for breaking up the family (if they have left an abusive relationship for example) and overcompensate by giving everything to their young people
- Parents who feel overly responsible for their children's emotional wellbeing and that of other family members
- Parents who give their child too much freedom
- Parenting that is too strict, or authoritarian
- Parents who are unavailable either physically or emotionally for their children
- Where there are two parents in the home, conflict in parenting styles can mean that the young person manipulates his or her parents

In Sheffield, there is help for parents where CAPVA is happening. The Triple P Teen Plus programme is delivered in Sheffield via the Parenting Hub three times per year. This programme supports parents to cope with the challenges that CAPVA brings and where CAPVA is identified by the referrer, or in the course of the programme, the parenting team are able to support with additional sessions for those parents. Referrals can be made to this programme via Liquid Logic (for those with access) or by securely sending an Early Help Assessment Part 1 form to the relevant Early Help office.

There are no simple answers or quick fixes for parents where their children are behaving harmfully. Sometimes parents may never truly know what has caused their child to behave in this way. The child or young person is not likely to stop their abusive behaviour on their own, in fact, it may worsen over time.

With the right help and support from others, parents can facilitate the change that needs to happen, even the smallest bits of progress can feel like a massive improvement in the situation.

Top Tips

 Parents need to focus on their own self-care and wellbeing and believe that they are important too and should be treated with respect.

 Children who are involved with CAPVA are likely to be hypervigilant and experts at reading non-verbal cues so will be able to sense when their parent is 'bottling up' their anger which may add to feelings of frustration and distress, often one person's emotional brain can trigger another's!

⁷ Katz, Emma, Anna Nikupeteri and Merja Laitinen (2020) When Coercive Control Continues to Harm Children: Post-Separation Fathering, Stalking, and Domestic Violence. *Child Abuse Review*, vol. 29, no. 4, pp. 310–324.

- Therefore, parents could be supported to develop a genuine 'calm presence', this could be achieved by relaxation or meditation techniques, parents taking time to focus on self-care can be hugely beneficial for the parent/carer and child relationship.
- Parents can be supported to better emotionally regulate, for example, by encouraging them
 to seek support from others and 'offloading' their worries could lead to them being more
 emotionally available for their children.
- It helps to remain focused on ways to build a trusting and respectful relationship rather than viewing the relationship with the child or young person as a 'battle' with winners and losers.
- Remind parents that the best time to strengthen their relationship with their children is when things are calm and going well, not at times of stress and crisis!
- Every day is a new day and brings with it opportunities to strengthen the parent/caregiver child relationship.
- Focusing on the behaviours that are harmful is a helpful approach, the behaviour is the problem, not the child.
- Deciding which behaviours parents can ignore (this can be very difficult) is a good idea, as is encouraging parents to think carefully about what they can 'let go of'!

Safety Plans

Parents need to be supported to acknowledge the problem, helping them to name what is happening is a good start to taking action. Talking to a trusted professional, friend or family member can really help too.

Parents need to know that in times of crisis when they are afraid for either their own, or someone else's safety they can ring the police. This is an extremely difficult decision for parents to make but violence, threats of violence and assault are all crimes that can be reported and the attendance of the police can sometimes de-escalate and calm the situation. Parents may feel that calling the police is not an acceptable option or possibly they themselves have had a negative experience with the police in the past, but the readiness to do so, clearly explained to the young person may indicate to them that their behaviour is not acceptable and will not be tolerated.

Parents can be supported to talk through and strengthen their existing **safety plan** (it is likely they have one already) with professionals or supported to create their own, which could include the following

- Making plans about where to go and who could support if an emergency arises
- Keeping a list of numbers needed at all times (family members, support services, police etc)
- Keeping a mobile phone with them which has credit and is charged
- Trying to keep some money set aside for a taxi if needed
- Keeping a spare set of house and/or car keys in a safe space
- Making sure (if age and developmentally appropriate) other children can use the phone and know emergency numbers
- Keeping a diary with dates and brief details about the CAPVA can help, both to understand the scale of the issue and also should legal action be needed at a later date
- Parents should also make sure that they use their 'I' statements to celebrate progress and improvements in the relationship i.e. 'I feel so much happier when you speak to me with kindness'

In the case studies we gathered in Sheffield, we also found that where parents were able to talk to each other about their experiences in support groups, for example, helped them to feel empowered and supported and more able to help their children.

7. Pathways to Support

Helpful numbers/sources of support

- Independent Domestic Abuse Services Sheffield (IDAS) 0808 808 2241 www.idas.org.uk
- South Yorkshire Police in an emergency ring 999, for all other enquiries ring 101
- Men's Advice Line (advice and support for men experiencing domestic abuse) 0808 8010327
 https://mensadviceline.org.uk/
- Galop (support for LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse) 0800 999 5428 https://galop.org.uk/
- Sheffield Safeguarding Hub (Sheffield Children's Social Care) 0114 2734855 https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/social-care/children-social-care
- Sheffield Family Intervention Service (FIS) 0114 2037485
 https://www.sheffielddirectory.org.uk/localoffer/about-the-local-offer-and-other-information/how-to-access-council-education-and-social-care-services/family-intervention-service/
- Family Lives (formerly known as Parentline Plus, a national charity offering help and support
 in all aspects of family life) 0808 800 2222
 https://www.familylives.org.uk/advice/teenagers/behaviour/teen-violence-at-home
- Haven (Specialist Charity supporting children and young people affected by domestic abuse)
 0114 2130590 https://www.havenorg.uk/
- **Sheffield Parent Hub** 0114 2057243 https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/social-care/positive-parenting
- Cranstoun (Level Up Programme) 0114 3211377 www.cranstoun.org.uk /
 https://cranstoun.org/news/domestic-abuse/new-scheme-to-spot-harmful-behaviours-in-children/

8. Training for Professionals

Training for professionals on CAPVA is accessed via the Early Help Partnership, for more information, contact EarlyHelpTraining@sheffield.gov.uk