

Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse

Background

The Home Office has produced The Information Guide - Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/420963/APVA.pdf) which was published in March 2015. This guide was developed through the hard work of a range of statutory agencies, academics specialising in this area and the Third Sector. The guidance was produced as part of the Governments ongoing work regarding the Violence Against Women and Girls Action Plan (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-violence-and-abuse>).

It marks an important step to a wider recognition of a serious problem that affects many families. The guide will be very useful for Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) in considering what a coordinated response might look like to an issue that has always existed but for which there has previously been no specific guidance for agencies.

Introduction

Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse (APVA) is a hidden form of domestic violence and abuse that still has no legal definition although it is touched upon in the most recent cross government definition of domestic violence and abuse.

“any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse.”

The definition includes those over the age of 16, but does not apply to those under 16. The guidance recognises and deals with young people under the age of 16. Research would suggest that APVA tends to most frequently occur between mothers and sons but it does also occur between father and son, mother and daughter and most rarely between fathers and daughters. It is hard to get an accurate picture of the scale of the problem as APVA is not specifically recorded on police, health or social care databases and like other forms of domestic abuse is definitely under-reported.

APVA is likely to involve a pattern of behaviours similar to those practitioners would recognise where domestic abuse and violence is taking place. These could include physical violence from an adolescent towards a parent and other types of abusive behaviour, including emotional, financial and psychological abuse. There may be ongoing coercive behaviours but it may be episodes of explosive outbursts characterised by physical violence rather than a pattern of abusive controlling type behaviour.

Whilst it is not unusual for adolescents to demonstrate healthy anger and at times there will be conflict and frustration with their parents; there is a difference between healthy anger and violence or behaviour which instills fear in their parents or carers.

Awareness of the impact of domestic abuse and violence on children is growing but sometimes this is taking place in homes where Family Violence is a daily reality. This might include domestic abuse, APVA and high levels of inter family conflict which may lead to physical violence. The 4Children report *The Enemy Within: Families Experiencing New Levels of Conflict and Violence* (http://www.4children.org.uk/Files/8424c693-fa81-4bfe-a919-a01d0136d016/TheEnemyWithin_Report.pdf) revealed that children will be overwhelmingly the most likely victims in these families with up to 950,000 either experiencing or witnessing physical violence.

Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse

For practitioners it is a complex area of practice where the boundaries between victim and perpetrator can be unclear. While it is important that the young person takes responsibility for their behaviour, it is also important that a young person using abusive behaviour against their parent receives a safeguarding response from across the agencies. There may be a number of agencies who need to be involved and a range of responses starting from Early Help aimed at preventing the behaviour from escalating to more statutory interventions.

The young person may be reluctant to admit to the abusive behaviour and be difficult to engage but this does not mean that the parents and siblings should not receive support in themselves. It is important that the needs of the whole family are considered and the absence of a specific children social work intervention shouldn't mean that other agencies including adult services shouldn't provide a coordinated response, working alongside other local authority partners.

The Information Guide provides a section on the role that health, education, social care, housing, police and youth justice have to play. Each section not only examines the role of the agency but also provides some practical suggestions for practitioners. The guide has a very useful section (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/420963/APVA.pdf#page=7) that sets out advice for all practitioners including risk assessment, safety plans and suggestions for creating links between MARAC and MASH.

Unnecessary criminalisation of the young person should try to be avoided, although the police's involvement is very important in helping to maintain safety. Unlike domestic violence and abuse perpetrated by adults, it may be more appropriate for the adolescent to be considered for out-of-court disposal. This is a controversial area and practice across Safeguarding Board areas will differ considerably, especially if police and criminal justice agencies do not have agreed protocols in place covering APVA. There may be no other option but to prosecute in some cases where serious acts of violence have taken place. However most parents wish to maintain and improve upon the parent-child relationship and don't want their child to be criminalised, they just want the violence and other behaviours to stop.

APVA is not an issue of poor parenting, it is far more complex than that and practitioners are encouraged in the guidance to move away from the position of blaming the parents for the young person's behaviour.

There is no single explanation for APVA. There may have been a past history of domestic violence and abuse within the family and additional issues may also be present including substance abuse, mental health problems and learning difficulties. However, in some cases there is no clear explanation as to why the behaviour has occurred.

It is important to understand the pattern of behaviour within the family unit and the history of the relationship between the young person and the parent. Siblings may also be at risk either of being abused or becoming abusive. Practitioners should be aware that the young person may be a victim of abuse themselves although this does not excuse the abusive behaviour it may help explain it.

It can be very difficult for a parent to disclose the problems that they are having and parents report feeling isolated, guilty and ashamed of their child's behaviour towards them. They fear that in reporting APVA, it will be their parenting that will come into question and they may not be believed or be blamed by the people they tell. They may also be concerned that if agencies get involved their child may be taken away from them or criminalised. APVA is a form of domestic abuse and the same sensitivities apply when working with the victim.

The guidance is an important first step to developing practitioner confidence and agency responses. The final section of the guidance provides examples of successful interventions from across the UK as well as a useful resources section for practitioners.

The message throughout the document is to identify the problem early and to focus on prevention and intervention in an area which causes harm and distress to all those involved.

Contact Us

To find out more about working with tri.x contact us on:

Telephone: 024 7667 8053 or visit our website www.trixonline.co.uk

Copyright: The content of this Policy Briefing can be accessed, printed and downloaded in an unaltered form, on a temporary basis, for personal study or reference purposes. However any content printed or downloaded may not be sold, licensed, transferred, copied or reproduced in whole or in part in any manner or in or on any media to any person without the prior written consent of Signis Group.