

# **Child-against-Parent Abuse in Greater**

**Manchester:**

**Key themes, collaboration and preventative  
interventions**

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### **Declaration**

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

Simon Retford

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## **Abstract**

Domestic abuse has been widely researched, however one area relatively absent from such research is that of parent abuse, which sees abuse perpetrated by children against parents. Academic research into parent abuse has begun to increase over recent years, yet this still remains a significantly under-researched area of family violence. This thesis seeks to develop an understanding of key themes and collaborative prevention opportunities in relation to parent abuse in Greater Manchester, and makes recommendations for the development of practitioner responses. Accordingly, the research follows a qualitative paradigm in order to build a better understanding of key issues and to explore opportunities for collaborative responding in the current austere economic climate. The research design consisted of in-depth interviews conducted with practitioners drawn from a variety of public and third-sector agencies working within three boroughs across central Greater Manchester, and utilised open coding in a grounded theoretical approach. The research findings suggest that parent abuse is a unique problem that is complicated by bonds that exist between parent-victims and their abusive children. Parental reluctance to report incidents, through a fear of criminalising or losing their children adds to the difficulties for those responding to parent abuse. Furthermore, the research found problems created by an absence of specific policy, resulting in parent abuse being dealt with via child protection, social care or criminal justice processes. The research also revealed that young male perpetrators were highly prone to mental health and behavioural problems, and there was disproportionate cannabis use amongst young perpetrators. Whilst this may also be the case in the wider youth population, the potential for such correlation is worthy of specific consideration when seeking to further an understanding of parent abuse. Additionally, the importance of collaborative working was highlighted, which revealed opportunities for early intervention. Accordingly, the need for an integrated 'toolkit' for responding effectively to deal with parent abuse is proposed, which considers the key issues identified within this thesis. These issues contribute towards both academic knowledge and

professional practice in an important but under-researched area of crime and victimisation.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

**ADHD: Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder**

**CAMHS: Child Adolescent Mental Health Service**

**DA: Domestic abuse**

**DASH: Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment**

**DV: Domestic violence**

**MASH: Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub**

**PA: Parent abuse**

**PBB: Priority Based Budgeting**

**YOT: Youth Offending Team**

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## **Introduction**

The notion of violence within the family has long been recognised, with, it is estimated, one fifth of all violence occurring within relationships (Newburn, 2013, p.844). The development of better knowledge around such violence has only featured in academic research since the 1970s (Hester, 2005, pp.79-80). As a greater understanding of domestic violence increased, so did the awareness of less common categories of violence committed within the home. One such issue that emerged at the end of the 1970s and early 1980s was that of 'parent abuse', which identified cases of abuse and violence perpetrated against parents by their children, (Harbin & Madden, 1979, pp.1289-90 and Livingston, 1986, pp.930-1). Given the extensive academic research conducted into violence between partners, or that perpetrated by parents against children, the amount of research conducted into parent abuse, over the last 30 years, has been disproportionately low (Tew & Nixon, 2010, p.579 and Jackson, 2003, p.321).

I first became aware of parent abuse in 2009. I am a police officer in Greater Manchester, with over 25 years' service, much of it spent as a Detective officer. Over recent years I have spent much of this dealing with or overseeing cases of abuse involving families. I have also had the privilege to work with many practitioners and managers from partner agencies whose primary roles are to engage with and support families affected by violence. This awareness has led to my conducting research as part of my Master's Degree studies with the University of Portsmouth in 2010.

I have seen an increasing awareness of parent abuse over recent years. However, the issue of 'public protection' and 'safeguarding' vulnerable people has very much been a growing challenge for the public sector, with such problems as honour based violence, child sexual exploitation, adult safeguarding and mental health issues placing increasingly high demands on public sector agencies (O'Hara, 2013, cited by Mattheys, 2015, pp.475-6 and HMIC: Protecting Vulnerable People, 2008, p.1). Furthermore, the onset of austerity driven cuts, by both the Coalition and Conservative governments

has placed increased pressures on the ability of public sector agencies to support those most vulnerable in society (Towers & Walby, 2012, p.6 and Jones, Meegan, Kennett & Croft, 2015, pp.12-13). This presents significant challenges if parent abuse is to be better recognised, and multi-agency responses developed.

Therefore, in order to address the gaps in knowledge, the research question I have posed for this thesis is: “What key themes are shaping parent abuse in Greater Manchester and offer opportunities to develop collaborative and preventative interventions?” In order to address this question, objectives were set which sought to gather data on parent abuse, and develop a better understanding of the problem in Greater Manchester. Furthermore, I felt it important to identify knowledge gaps, thus highlighting opportunities through collaborative responding to pursue a preventative intervention strategy given the austerity threat, and the increases seen in multi-agency working over recent years. The research undertaken followed a qualitative paradigm which saw semi-structured and in-depth interviews conducted with twenty practitioners, from a range of agencies, and across three geographical boroughs in central Greater Manchester. The participants held a range of different roles, which are set out at Chapter two. They also held varied hierarchical positions within their agencies, in order to gather a greater degree of understanding of key issues, both tactical and strategic. The range and depth of data gathered from the research sample was significant, with regards parent abuse in Greater Manchester. This took full advantage of the variety of roles and experience held by those interviewed. Research analysis was able to triangulate the data gathered, and provide sufficient material to set out a good understanding of parent abuse issues seen across central Greater Manchester. Furthermore, a range of preventative intervention opportunities were discussed to develop arguments for how collaboration can positively contribute to preventing parent abuse.

Having gathered the data, the interviews were then transcribed and the data analysed. The analysis followed a grounded theoretical approach, which used ‘open coding’ to identify the various key themes (Bryman, 2012, pp.567-

8). A number of important areas were identified which are set out at Chapters three to five. A key part of the analysis explored the threats faced by austerity, but also highlighted current and future opportunities from collaboration.

The structure of this thesis is as follows. Chapter one will introduce parent abuse and seek to position it, in context to other categories of family abuse and violence. The absence of research will then be explored, as well as the setting out of the problem of under-reporting, and its impact on developing knowledge of parent abuse. Youth violence and substance abuse will then be discussed, and how this impacts on parent abuse incidents. Issues relating to gender of victims and perpetrators will then be outlined, and the influences of 'power and control' in family relationships will be broken down, to explore how such abuse impacts on family dynamics. The ethnicity and demographics of those caught up in parent abuse, will then be discussed.

The Chapter will then explore how parent abuse affects victims, perpetrators and the wider family. Legislation surrounding domestic abuse, and particularly parent abuse will be highlighted, and will include the development of more recent legislation, which seeks to provide greater protection to those suffering abuse in the home environment. Current responses to parent abuse will then be discussed, which will also include how, at times, parents are dealt with punitively, despite being victims of abuse, from their children. The impact of austerity will then be examined in greater detail, to that already highlighted. Multi-agency working in a criminal justice setting will then be outlined, exploring how responses to crime and disorder have developed over recent years.

Chapter two will cover in detail the methodological issues which have influenced the conceptualisation, design and initiation of this research programme. The research question and objectives will be discussed in detail. The development of the qualitative paradigm will be explained, and the constructivist approach taken will be discussed, leading to the highlighting of the research method and ensuing semi-structured and in-depth interviewing process. Key ethical considerations will then be set out, before the structure



of the research sample is explored. The research interview process will then be discussed, and then the data gathering, coding and analytical phases will be explained. Finally, the reflective and reflexive considerations of the research process will be discussed.

Chapters three to five will then set out the analysis and break down the key themes that were drawn from the open coding process. These will highlight important factors, which revealed interaction between the lack of defining parent abuse, and the potential impact on identifying parent abuse cases and gauging its prevalence across communities. The significance of under-reporting by victims will then be discussed, and how all these factors may adversely affect agencies' abilities to respond to abuse. Victimology, perpetrators and the potential causes of parent abuse will then be explored. Problems relating perpetrators learning abusive behaviour from absent fathers will then be examined. Important factors will be explored which could adversely impact on parent abuse incidents, such as mental health and substance misuse. The use of cannabis, and the impact of mental health and behavioural problems in young perpetrators will be highlighted as potential key impactors on parent abuse. Then current responses, opportunities to collaborate and the threats from austerity will be explored, which acknowledges excellent ongoing collaborative activity in Greater Manchester, and discusses opportunities for parent abuse to follow suit.

Chapter six will then discuss the key findings from the analysis, notably, the need to define parent abuse and raise awareness of it, and how not doing this may hinder effective responding to the problem. The unique nature of parent abuse and its complexities will then be discussed, highlighting how parents currently face blame and punitive outcomes when reporting incidents of parent abuse. Furthermore, the parental bonds between parents and their children will be highlighted, and how these complicate the ability of parents to deal with abuse. The need for developing collaborative and integrated responding will be discussed, and the need for the development of a specific risk assessment process. These issues will then be recommended for inclusion within a 'toolkit' of responding to acknowledge and deal with parent

abuse. Furthermore, the above issues relating to cannabis use and mental health in young perpetrators will also be raised as findings that are worthy of further research. The conclusion will draw the thesis to a close, in identifying the above issues which, it is believed, contribute to knowledge in a doctoral context. Then reflective considerations from this research programme will be explored, which also raise potential areas for further analysis.

## **Chapter 1:**

### **Parent abuse: Dealing with a misunderstood and ill-defined problem**

#### **Introduction**

Violence within relationships and families has been a problem for as long as history, however no scientific research explored the problem until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Gelles, 1985, pp.347-8, Nicolson, 2010, p.47, and Newburn, 2007, p.820). The need to sociologically research and champion better responses to the problem only began to increase in the 1970s (Hester, 2005, p.79, Alderson, Westmarland & Kelly, 2012, pp.182- 3 and Harwin, 2006, p.556). Within the confines of family violence, domestic abuse and violence has, over recent decades become a widely recognised problem across all sections of society (Frizzell, 1998, pp. 19-20, Haw, 2010, p.9, and Goddard & Bedi, 2010, p.11). As domestic violence first became to be recognised and discussed, it was highlighted how women were far more likely to become victims of domestic violence and abuse. It was said that because such violence and abuse occurred in the home, it was hidden from view and thus little was known about it (Newburn, 2013, p.842, and Heidensohn & Gelsthorpe, 2007, p.397).

Domestic violence was initially defined as ‘any act of violence or abuse’ perpetrated by a husband against his wife (Robinson, 2010, p.245, Newburn, 2007, pp.820-1, Browne & Herbert, 1999, pp.2-3). However, as a greater understanding of the complexities of such abuse has evolved, this definition has widened, to incorporate any violence involving members of the same family or those in an intimate relationship (Walby & Allen, 2004, p.5, Lessons Learned from the Domestic Violence Enforcement Campaigns, 2006, p.6, Guidance on Investigating Domestic Abuse-2008, 2008, p.7). In 2000 the Home Office defined the problem as ‘any violence between current or former partners in an intimate relationship... [which] may include physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse’ (Newburn, 2013, p.844 and Walby & Allen, 2004, pp.4-5). Later changes to the definition of domestic violence went on to include family members over 18, who perpetrated such abuse against each

other, 'regardless of gender or sexuality', and included those in same sex relationships (Guidance on Investigating Domestic Abuse, 2008, p.7).

More recently, in 2013, the definition has developed further to include those aged 16 or above, as well as where 'coercive and controlling behaviour' is involved (Bardons & Gay, 2013, p.4). This definition has also moved away from domestic 'violence' to domestic 'abuse' in recognition of wider non-physical abuse, which also includes psychological, emotional or financial abuse (Galvani, 2010, p.7, Browne & Herbert, 1999, pp.7-9, Nicolson, 2010, pp.32-33 and Richards, Letchford, & Stratton, 2008, p.12). A new offence of 'coercive and controlling behaviour' has been incorporated into the Serious Crime Act, 2015, which could implicate perpetrators over ten years of age (Gay, 2015, p.12, Strengthening the Law on Domestic Abuse Consultation: Summary of Responses, 2014, p.11 and Serious Crime Act 2015, 2015, para.3).

Yet despite the increases of research, into violence and abuse within the home, one particular area which has avoided extensive academic research, is abuse perpetrated by children against their parents (Jackson, 2003, p.321, Gallagher, 2004a, p.1, and Walsh & Krienert, 2009, pp.1450-51). Many have acknowledged the disparity between research into intimate partner violence, and this 'parent abuse' (Stewart, Burns & Leonard, 2007, pp.183-4, Walsh & Krienert, 2007, p.563, Tew & Nixon, 2010, p.579 and Gallagher, 2008, p.18). Some refer to parent abuse as a category of, or closely linked to domestic abuse (Baker, 2012a, p.48, Wilcox, 2012, p.277, Bobic, 2004, p.6 and Coogan, 2014, p.e4).

Gaps between parent abuse and domestic abuse have been reported, particularly where responses to it are concerned, with a suggested 'policy silence' for parent abuse. In contrast there has been a range of extensive developments over recent years, in response to domestic abuse involving intimate partners (Condry & Miles, 2012, p.246, Hunter, Nixon, & Parr, 2010, pp.283-4 and Coogan, 2011, p.50). In my own research, which will be set out later, those that were interviewed have spoken about parent abuse in a

domestic abuse setting, but have also linked the perpetrating of parent abuse to mental health and behavioural issues, substance misuse, particularly cannabis, and even child protection. These clearly highlight a complex problem which may be linked to violence and abuse within a family setting, but are also affected by much broader social issues.

### **Parent Abuse**

In contrast to domestic abuse, there is no 'official' definition for parent abuse. Some suggest it is easier to define what parent abuse is not, highlighting that it is more sustained and serious than simply resisting or being obstructive against one's parents, or being a difficult child (Home Office Information Guide: Adolescent to parent violence and abuse, 2015, p.3, Holt, 2013, pp.1-2 and Frizzell, 1996, p.4). Condry and Miles, when recently conducting their research programme into parent abuse addressed this definition issue, and explored data involving 'violent' incidents between 13-19 year olds towards parents and step-parents. The violence was defined as 'threat, use of force or criminal damage' (2013, p.6). This has been further qualified as 'physical violence, threats of violence and criminal damage towards parents or carers by their adolescent children (aged 13-19 years)' (Miles & Condry, 2014, p.1). Yet it is important to also consider emotional and psychological abuse, as well as financial abuse, given the extensive reporting of these non-physical categories of abuse, which can have an equally traumatic effect on parents. In her research of 2001, Cottrell defined parent abuse as that perpetrated against parents which causes 'physical, psychological or financial' harm, in order to gain control against them (Cottrell, 2001, p.3, Walsh & Krienert, 2009, p.1452, Cottrell, 2004, p.16, and Howard & Rotem, 2008, pp.10-11).

Indeed, there are several terms for this kind of abuse: 'parent abuse', 'teenage violence against parents', 'child-against-parent violence', 'adolescent-to-parent violence and abuse', and several more. This in itself can restrict the understanding of the problem (Adolescent Violence in the Home, 2012, p.5, Bobic, 2004, p.2, and Frizzell, 1995, pp.3-4), and many researchers have suggested this lack of a clear definition is likely to hinder

the development of effective efforts to respond to such abuse (Stewart, Jackson, Mannix, Wilkes, & Lines, 2006, cited by Haw, 2010, p. 13, Gallagher, 2004a, p.4 and Frizzell, 1995, p.4). Put simply, how can effective responses be developed if we cannot even agree on a name for the problem?

For the purposes of this research, the abuse in question will focus on that committed by adolescent children, who have attained 'teenage' years. This is because research has recognised adolescents to be the most prevalent abusers (Harbin & Madden, 1979, p.1289, Laurent & Derry, 1999, pp.21-22 and Cochran, Brown, Adams & Doherty, 1994, pp.12-13), and research since then has focused on the most serious abuse, and highlighted how this, in the main, is committed by children within this age group (Ulman & Straus, 2000, p.42, Gelles & Straus, 1988, cited by Monk, 1997, p.23, Cottrell & Monk, 2004, p.1072, and Howard & Rotem 2004, p.14). Furthermore, research has suggested that the onset of violence becomes more acute as most offenders enter their teenage years (Calvete, Orue & Gámez-Guadix, 2012, p.3, O'Connor, 2007, p.38, Robinson, 2010, pp.10-11, and Haw, 2010, p.6). Lastly, my own research suggested that adolescents were known to commit the most abuse towards parents (Retford, 2014b). Consequently, it was felt that these key issues suggested the researching of adolescent-based parent abuse offered the greatest opportunities to develop a better understanding of this problem. The upper age limit for this research is 18 years of age, because under-18 young people residing with parents still place parental responsibility on the parents.

### **An absence of research**

Harbin and Madden (1979) first specifically highlighted parent abuse as a problem, naming it 'battered parent syndrome' (cited by Walsh & Krienert, 2009, p.1452 and Kethineni, 2004, p.374). However, further research has been scarce, particularly in England and Wales (Hunter, Nixon, & Parr, 2010, p.266 and Kethineni, 2004, p.374). The lack of parent abuse research may also have been because researchers believed that it was uncommon (Agnew & Huguley, 1989, p.699, Calvete *et al*, 2012, p.3, and Haw, 2010, p.11).

Alternatively, others have suggested that parent abuse is conceptualised very differently by those who have researched the problem, with some suggesting it is a form of domestic abuse, or family violence, and others linking it to wider delinquency, (Wilcox, 2012, p. 282, Adolescent Violence in the Home, 2012, p.5, O'Connor, 2007, p.29, Gallagher, 2008, p.10 and Stewart *et al*, 2005, pp.200-201).

Practitioners also have different ideas of what parent abuse is (Tew & Nixon, 2010, p.585, Nixon, 2012, p.230, Biehal, 2012, p.257 and Holt & Retford, 2012, p.6). This issue has become very clear in my own research, with agencies particularly those dealing with either child safeguarding or victim care seeing parent abuse as opposing issues. In a practitioner setting, a common example of this involves competing priorities, for example, the interests of the child (in the eyes of children's services practitioners), as opposed to the interests of victimised parents (in the eyes of the police or victim-focused organisations). With agencies working towards different priorities and objectives this can present complications for developing multi-agency and 'joined-up' responding strategies. Of significant importance to this research project is that a distinct lack of research has adversely contributed to an absence of related social policy and responding to the problem (Tew & Nixon, 2010, pp.579-80, Galvani, 2010, p.7 and Holt & Retford, 2012, p.2).

### **Parent Abuse and 'under-reporting'**

Researchers have recognised the difficulties of gauging the extent of parent abuse, suggesting that the 'hidden nature' of the problem makes the understanding of it challenging (Parentline, 2008 cited by Tew & Nixon, 2010, pp.579-80, Holt & Retford, 2012, p.3 and Gallagher, 2004a, p.4). This is believed to be particularly prevalent with parent abuse, because of how the lack of research and under-reporting of the issue has a detrimental effect on the developing of knowledge of the problem, and more importantly, the developing of responses to it (Baker, 2012b, p.267, Condry & Miles, 2013, p.2 and Daly & Wade, 2015, pp.12-13). This issue was a key feature revealed

in the research findings which are discussed at Chapter six. There is wide agreement amongst those specialising in parent abuse research, that by developing a better understanding of it, and contextualising it as a problem, then society, and those with responsibility for supporting families, can respond better in seeking to prevent it (Walsh & Krienert, 2007, p. 573, Peek, Fischer & Kidwell, 1985, pp.1051-2, Paterson *et al*, 2002, p.98 and Howard, 2011, p.7). Furthermore, a better and wider understanding between violence in the home and broader 'youth violence' could also prevent young people from becoming embroiled in wider and longer term problems (Jonson-Reid, 1998, p.160, Cornell & Gelles, 1982 cited by Peek, Fischer and Kidwell, 1985, p.1052).

Despite concerns over methodology of research and sample sizes (Bobic, 2004, p.3 and Jackson, 2003, p.326), data suggested that between 9-15% of parents have been abused by their children (Crichton-Hill, 2006, p.21, Tew & Nixon, 2010, p.579, and Cottrell & Monk, 2004, p.1072). Furthermore, research has suggested that 55% of parents, whose children went in to social care admitted that they had faced violence from them (Tew & Nixon, 2010, p.580). Whilst published data does differ significantly on rates of violence (Paterson *et al*, 2002, p.90, Monk, 1997, p.23, and Bobic, 2004, p.3), there seems to be consensus on the percentage of children who use violence against their parents, this being suggested at around 3% (Cornell & Gelles, 1982, cited by Jackson, 2003, p.322, Gelles & Straus, 1988 cited by Monk, 1997, p.23, and Agnew & Huguley, 1989, p.699).

Further research sought to break down data further, suggesting that single parents, particularly mothers, faced a much higher risk of attack, at 29% (Bobic, 2004, p.3, Livingston, 1985, cited by Paterson *et al*, 2002, p.91, Walsh & Krienert, 2009, p.1453, and Jackson, 2003, p.322). The 29% perpetrating rates against single mothers were drawn from research by Livingston (1985, p.924), which suggested single mothers ( $n=44$ ), who had been single parents for several years, reported violence at the hands of their children. Livingston had conducted surveys with single mothers, which was based on a simple questionnaire and had been sent to the mothers involved. Parents had been



selected from a support-based organisation in the United States which had agreed to support the research programme. Of the original sample chosen ( $n=669$ ), there had only been a 22.6% response rate ( $n=151$ ) (Livingston, 1985, p.929). Putting this into context, researchers in the United States suggest that over 2 million parent abuse-related assaults occur every year, however no figures are available for England and Wales (Eckstein, 2004, p.365, Cornell & Gelles, 1982, cited by Agnew & Huguley, 1989, p.699, and Brezina, 1999 cited by Pagani *et al*, 2004, p.528).

A well-publicised and large-scale study conducted by Condry and Miles, has gone some way to contextualising the scale of abuse in the London Metropolitan Police area, however they themselves urge caution in seeking to extrapolate this across the rest of the country (2013, p.13). Condry also acknowledges under-reporting, during her own research, suggesting that the abuse reported is only the 'tip of the iceberg' (2015). Of those known to have faced violence from their children, between 60-80% were mothers (Sellick-Lane, 2007 cited by Adolescent Violence in the Home, 2012, p.6 and Condry & Miles, 2013, p.8). Although mothers, it is believed, are more likely to report such abuse than fathers (Condry & Miles, 2013, p.5, Bobic, 2004, p.18 and Gallagher, 2008, p.50).

Whilst some suggest parent abuse is increasing, others question whether incidents are rising, or more parents are reporting abuse (Cottrell, 2001, p.6, Laurent & Derry, 1999, p.26, and Monk, 1997, p.132). The latter is certainly a widely-held view amongst participants of my own research. Yet despite these arguments, 'under-reporting' of abuse remains a concern. Furthermore, from a senior manager's viewpoint, how can one attempt to commit resources to responding to this problem, if one does not have a clear picture of how big the problem is? This is likely to remain a significant challenge to those seeking further funding towards parent abuse, in an era which demands 'evidence based' solutions.

## **Youth violence and substance abuse**

The perpetrating of parent abuse may be exacerbated by substance and alcohol abuse (Kethineni, 2004, p.380, Howard & Rotem, 2008, p.30, Pagani *et al*, 2004, p.532, Home Office Information Guide: adolescent to parent violence and abuse, 2015, p.5 and Walsh & Krienert, 2009, p.1457), with intoxication raising the level of threat of violence (Stewart *et al*, 2005, p.202 and Stewart *et al*, 2007, p.184). In as many as 50% of all parent abuse incidents, alcohol or other substances may have played a contributory factor in the incidents (Kethineni, 2004, p.383, Howard & Rotem, 2008, pp.30-1, Pagani *et al*, 2004, pp.532-3, and Cottrell, 2001, p.4). Research highlighted that parents reported most children engaging in substance abuse were using alcohol, and this interfered with parents' abilities in engaging with their children and setting boundaries (Biehal, 2012, p.257, Bonnick, 2012b, p.15 and Calvete *et al*, 2012, p.11).

Male children were more prone to commit abuse whilst engaging in substance abuse (Walsh & Krienert, 2009, pp.1457-8, Stewart *et al*, 2005, p.202, and Walsh & Krienert, 2007, p.573). Although there has been frequent discourse regarding substance abuse among children, there has been little exploration of connected problems, particularly the financial and emotional abuse perpetrated against parents. Some have recognised the problems of abusive children, in effect, blackmailing their parents for money to buy drugs (Edenborough, 2007, p.65, Retford, 2014a, and Ibabe, Arnoso & Elgorriaga, 2014, p.54). Most research focuses on the substance abuse itself and how this affects the children's' behaviour, which fails to take account of the connected complexities of the psychological intimidation perpetrated against parents and extorting money from them.

## **Gender**

Statistical research into parent abuse has varied significantly, with some suggesting that between 60-87% of victims were mothers (Kethineni, 2004, p.382, Monk, 1997, p.26, Walsh & Krienert, 2009, p.1454, and Nock &

Kazdin, 2002, p.199). Mothers are four to five times more likely to suffer parent abuse than fathers and lone mothers may be particularly at risk (Fawzi & Faoud, 2013, p.732, Wilcox, 2012, p.278, Gallagher, 2004a, p.2, Kethineni, 2004, p.375, and Kennair & Mellor, 2007, cited by Holt, 2009b, p.2). Mothers may also be more prone to abuse, in their capacity as the primary carers in most homes, and thus more likely to bear the brunt of problems from abusive children (Monk, 1997, p.43, Nock & Kazdin, 2002, p.196, and Stewart *et al*, 2006, cited by Holt, 2009b, p.4).

Although, most research highlights mothers as primary victims of parent abuse, fathers can be at a higher risk of abuse by older adolescent children, particularly sons or step-sons (Adolescent Violence in the Home, 2012, p.8, Walsh & Krienert, 2009, p.1054, Coogan, 2011, p.351, Agnew & Huguley, 1989, p.701, and Peek *et al*, 1985, p.1054). Sons are by far the main perpetrators of serious violence, and that perpetrating increases as the children get older (Cornell & Gelles, 1989, cited by Gallagher, 2008, p.104, Edenborough, 2007, p.75, Eckstein, 2004, p.369, and McKenna *et al*, 2010, p.5). Peak violence against parents ranges between the ages of 15-17 years of age (Evans *et al*, 1988 and Wilson, 1996, cited by Howard, 2011, p.3, Condry & Miles, 2013, p.4, and Horsburgh, 2012, p.12).

Daughters have been said to be more likely to assault mothers and commit emotional abuse, with single mothers particularly at risk (Bobic, 2004, p.4, Browne & Herbert, 1999, p.197, Biehal, 2012, p.259). Again methodological variances in defining parent abuse, and specifically the categorisation of such abuse has impacted on data findings and the predominance of perpetrating by male or female children (Walsh & Krienert, 2009, p.1453, Monk, 1997, p.24 and Peek *et al*, 1985, p.1052). Yet despite the methodological anomalies, some have questioned, given the commission of parent abuse by both sons and daughters, whether this category of family violence is a 'gendered crime' like some other categories of abuse (Wilcox, 2012, pp.277-8, Baker, 2012b, p.270, and Howard & Rotem, 2008, p.10).

Some argue that parent abuse, whilst involving a degree of gender-related abuse, is much more complex than that and also involves power and control dynamics within the family environment. Some also question whether an understanding of these problems is inhibited by a greater focus on child protection (Wilcox, 2012, p.277, Adolescent Violence in the Home, 2012, pp.7-8, Baker, 2012b, p.268 and Coogan, 2011, pp.350-1). There are similar arguments which suggest that placing a reliance that women are likely to be victimised by male perpetrators, be they partners or children, is overly simplistic. This, it is argued, fails to consider that all involved are likely to make definitive choices in how they behave towards parents, and that research widely acknowledges the involvement of female perpetrators in parent abuse (Baker, 2012a, p.48-9, Calvete *et al*, 2012, p.12 and Daly & Nancarrow, 2008, p.6). Others however disagree, highlighting that the plight of many female victims suggests otherwise (Tew & Nixon, 2010, p.584, Condry & Miles, 2013, p.16, Wilcox, 2006, cited by Holt, 2009a, p.4, and Holt, 2009b, p.349). Many in fact draw strong comparators to adult domestic abuse, highlighting how women form the majority of victims (Condry & Miles, 2012, p.244, Horsburgh, 2012, p.12 and Tew & Nixon, 2010, p.584).

In considering my own understanding of the problem, and my recent research interviews with many practitioners, I believe that parent abuse is, to a greater degree, a gendered issue, disproportionately impacting on mothers. However, this should not detract from the greater problem: that of *raising awareness of parent abuse, as a problem affecting many families across society*. In addressing this matter, greater encouragement can be given to victims and families to come forward and be heard, and thus care should be taken in overly focussing on female victims. This could be to the detriment of fathers, who are less likely to report abuse. Furthermore, it is equally as important to develop better structured responses to this problem, for the benefit of all concerned, both male and female.

## **Ethnicity and demographics**

Research has suggested that white families are more prone to parent abuse than those of ethnic minority origin, despite a belief that ethnic minority families are more likely to report such abuse (Condry & Miles, 2013, p.11, Hong *et al*, 2012, p.434, Walsh & Krienert, 2009, p.1454 and Laurent & Derry, 1999, p.23). However, the likelihood of under-reporting on the parts of minority groups has been raised, which may also impact on the accuracy of data (Haw, 2010, p.100, Stewart *et al*, 2004, p.206, Ulman & Straus, 2000, p.42, and Kethineni, 2004, p.389). Other research has disputed this, suggesting little difference in rates of abuse (Cornell & Gelles, 1982 and Cottrell & Finlayson, 1996, cited by Monk, 1997, p.30, Paulson, Coombes & Landsverk, 1990 cited by Hong *et al*, 2012, p.434, and Cottrell & Monk, 2004, p.1073).

However, some have questioned whether parent abuse within certain minority groups, could be because of cultural factors related to the treatment of women, as perpetrators sought to exercise a 'perceived' right of control and power, as they grew older, bigger and stronger (Baker, 2012b, p.272, Eron, Huesman & Zelli, 1991 and Serbin & Karp, 2002, cited by Boxer *et al*, 2009, p.107, Gallagher, 2008, p.63, Haw, 2010, p.29, Hoffman & Edwards, 2004, p.187 and Ogbu, 1981, cited by Hong *et al*, 2012, p.442). Again, it is believed that methodological factors may influence data, through a lack of inclusion of ethnic minority groups in research. Such methodological issues concern researchers highlighting 'culturally [in]appropriate' engagement with ethnic minority groups, when seeking to identify cases of parent abuse (Hong *et al*, 2012, p.449), as well as the inclusion of ethnic minority groups within 'families characterised by social disadvantage' (Nock & Kazdin, 2010, p.194). Some may argue that such standpoints are less than empathetic towards ethnic minority families facing parent abuse, particularly if we remember how isolated victims of parent abuse can feel. Further methodological issues will be highlighted later in this Chapter. Despite the uncertainty of abuse rates amongst ethnic minority groups, the fact remains that such communities are

known to encounter problems engaging support, and I believe this should be considered when developing responses to help victims of parent abuse.

Many suggest that parent abuse is more common in 'middle' and 'upper-class' families (Charles, 1986, cited by Cottrell, 2004, p.40, Gallagher, 2004a, p.8, and Paulson *et al*, 1990, cited by Ibabe & Jaureguizar, 2010, p.617), however, others disagree arguing class plays little or no part in such abuse (Cornell & Gelles, 1982, cited by Agnew & Huguley, 1989, p.701 and Kethineni, 2004, p.377). In Greater Manchester, practitioners have reported that many families come from less affluent backgrounds, however these practitioners tend to be from youth justice or other agencies working with mainly under-privileged families. It must also be considered whether families from less affluent backgrounds are more likely to seek help from statutory agencies, whilst better-off families may have the means to seek help more discreetly or have the ability to privately call on a greater number of resources and support (Frizzell, 1996, p.36, Edenborough, 2007, p.73, Gallagher, 2008, p.115, Stewart *et al*, 2004, p.206, and Jackson, 2003, p.328). Of further significance is that mothers, already victims to intimate partner violence, are deemed more susceptible to abuse from their children (Coogan, 2014, p.e3, Gallagher, 2008, cited by Haw, 2010, p.26 and Cornell & Gelles, 1982, cited by Gallagher, 2004a, p.6).

Most 'demographic' data for perpetrators is similar to that of victims. Despite the higher-risk adolescent age group identified, some children become unruly at an early age, and get worse as their size and strength increases (Howard & Rotem 2008, p.15, Harbin & Madden, 1979, p.1289, and Browne & Herbert, 1999, p.199). Additionally, a lack of 'positive' male role models may also adversely impact on, particularly, male perpetrators (Cottrell & Monk, 2004, p.1081, Edenborough *et al*, 2008, p.469, Howard & Rotem 2008, p.55, and Laurent & Derry, 1999, p.25). Notably, smaller and less physically built children could be more prone to use violence, as a means of demonstrating their power against parents (Cottrell & Monk, 2004, p.1081, and Monk, 1997, p.135). Yet this is at odds with early research from Harbin & Madden and others, who claim that bigger boys are more likely to be violent (1979, cited

by Edenborough, 2007, p.71, Cornell & Gelles, 1981 and Heide, 1995, cited by Eckstein, 2004, p.369).

### **Impact on victims, perpetrators and the wider family**

The views and attitudes of victims are important to understand. Some victims have at first denied being abused or attempted to conceal the abuse (Harbin & Madden, 1979, p.1290, Walsh & Krienert, 2009, p.1452, Howard & Rotem, 2008, p.19, Agnew & Huguley, 1989, p.699, and Edenborough *et al*, 2008, p.470). The causes behind this concealment and non-reporting may be because of a feeling of shame, that 'their' child has been violent towards them (Laurent & Derry, 1999, p.21, Home Office Information Guide: adolescent to parent violence and abuse, 2015, p. 6, Howard & Rotem, 2008, p.14, Ulman & Straus, 2000, p.55, Crichton-Hill *et al*, 2006, p.21, and Gallagher, 2004a, p.8). Such shame may be due to a feeling of inability on the part of parents, thinking that they have failed as parents and been unable to stop the violence (Adolescent Violence in the Home, 2012, p.8, Parentline: When family life hurts, 2010, p.6, Crichton-Hill *et al*, 2006, p.21, Stewart *et al*, 2007, p.190, and Walsh & Krienert, 2007, p.573). There is also a fear of being labelled as 'bad' mothers or parents (Bobic, 2004, p.10, Eckstein, 2004, p.382, Paterson *et al*, 2002, p.91, Edenborough *et al*, 2008, p.470, Cottrell, 2001, p.11, and Howard & Rotem, 2008, p.29). Most concerning of all, however, was that some parents feared that they would not be believed or suitably supported by agencies (Agnew & Huguley, 1989, p.699, Paterson *et al*, 2002, p.95, Eckstein, 2004, p.383, Jackson, 2003, p.322, Holt, 2009b, p.6, and Tew & Nixon, 2010, p.588). Within central Greater Manchester, practitioners have told me that parents do not know where to turn for help and feel extremely isolated when facing abuse by their children.

Having considered the impact of abuse on victims, similar concerns have been raised regarding the impact on the children involved, when perpetrating parent abuse. Many child perpetrators commit other types of crime and anti-social behaviour (Stewart *et al*, 2007, p.183, Agnew & Huguley, 1989, p.709, Cottrell, 2004, p.82, Howard & Rotem, 2008, p.17, and Kethineni, 2004,

p.378). Statistical research tends to support this, suggesting between 54-84% of abusive children displayed other violent behaviour, many from an early age (Cochran *et al*, 1994, p.7, Nock & Kazdin, 2002, p.200, and Evans & Warren-Sohlberg, 1988, p.12). The research which has focused on perpetrators has highlighted frequent behavioural problems from an early age and a propensity to violence (McKenna *et al*, 2010, p.2, Pagani *et al*, 2004, p.529, Baker, 2012b, p.269, Shea *et al*, 1997, cited by Jackson, 2003, p.327 and Bobic, 2004, p.7). Ultimately, it is claimed, such issues can make offenders more susceptible to violence in the longer term, extending into adulthood (Downey, 1997, cited by Howard & Rotem, 2008, p.16, Baker, 2012a, pp.48-9, Gallagher, 2004a, p.7 and Kethineni, 2004, p.377).

It is also recognised that parent abuse does not just affect victims and offenders, and can place siblings and others equally at risk (Adult Violence in the Home, 2012, p.9, Holt & Retford, 2012, p.4, Kratkowski, 1985, cited by Ulman & Straus, 2000, p.45 and Hong *et al*, 2012, p.442). Although statistical rates are not clear, it is suggested that siblings can be equally at risk of abuse and injury, particularly younger siblings (Cottrell, 2001, p.14 Parentline, 2008, p.14, Stewart *et al*, 2005, p.203 and Bobic, 2004, p.4). Longitudinal studies have particularly shown that the problem of prolonged abuse within families has a significant impact on all concerned, both of a personal nature, but also in relation to wider social relations (Calvete *et al*, 2013, p.4, Peek *et al*, 1985, p.1056, Holt, 2009a, p.345, Ibabe & Jaureguizar, 2010, p.617, Boxer *et al*, 2009, p.107, and Gallagher, 2004a, p.4).

## **Legislation**

There have been distinct and drastic changes over recent years to the way in which domestic abuse and violence is responded to. Successive governments have sought to put victims at the 'heart' of the criminal justice system (Hall, 2009, p.4 and Joseph, 2006, p.47). Accordingly, there has been a significant shift in recent years, particularly by the police, to take a firmer approach to supporting victims of such abuse, leading to the notion of 'positive action' (Edwards, 2001, cited by Burton, 2008, p.13 and Guidance



on Investigating Domestic Abuse, 2008, p.26). Such actions were also engrained within government policy, in seeking to be more supportive on victims and 'tougher on crime' (Harwin, 2006, p.562, Violence Against Women Crime Report 2008-2009, 2009, p.19, and Specialist Domestic Violence Courts Programme Guidance, 2005, p.5). It is recognised how many countries have shifted policy and legislation in this direction, in a move to reduce the harm and abuse caused to mainly women victims (Hamby, 1998, p.239 and Hester, 2005, p.82).

Such moves were also seen as a need to better respond to the interests and safeguarding of victims of such abuse, by narrowing the 'justice gap' (Padfield, 2010, pp.104-5, Hester, 2005, p.88, Burton, 2008, p.14 and Harwin, 2006, p.564). Significant concerns have been raised regarding such gaps, specifically in relation to the attrition rates of domestic abuse cases. Such attrition has been attributed to the criminal justice system not taking seriously the cases involved, particularly where there were female victims (Newburn, 2013, p.849 and Hester, 2005, p.81). Yet despite the moves to better respond to domestic abuse victims, concerns remained regarding interventions. Accordingly, a host of new initiatives were developed with the aim of improving justice outcomes for victims, reducing offending, increasing reporting and better safeguarding victims (Specialist Domestic Violence Courts Programme Guidance, 2005, p.6, Hall, 2009, p.4 and Saving Lives, reducing Harm, Protecting the Public, 2008, p.17). Significant legislation also sought to better protect those suffering domestic abuse. The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 introduced offences making it illegal to pursue a 'course of conduct' which caused harassment or distress to victims (H.M. Government, 2012, para3 and Burton, 2008, p.13).

Further legislation was introduced with the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004, which, it was claimed, implemented the most significant changes for domestic abuse victims for decades and sought to reduce the attrition rates still seen (Joseph, 2006, p.47 and Hester, 2005, pp.79-80). This legislation gave greater rights to same-sex couples and criminalised the breaching of non-molestation orders, which sought to prevent contact of

victims by perpetrators (Lessons Learned from the Domestic Violence Enforcement Campaigns 2006, 2006, p.28, Hester, 2005, pp.79-80, and Joseph, 2006, p.47). More recently in 2013 the roll-out of Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs) was seen across England and Wales, after successful piloting in parts of the country. These orders banned contact by perpetrators with victims following domestic incidents, even where victims were reluctant to support prosecutions (Gay, 2014, pp.6-7 and Bardens & Gay, 2014, p.5).

The Coalition government, as a result of widespread lobbying by victim's groups and charities, recently implemented a consultation process, seeking views on legislating against 'coercive and controlling behaviour... [within] intimate relationships' (H.M. Government, 2014, p.11). This culminated in the recommendation to legislate for such offences, but both within intimate and family relationships, and has been incorporated into the Serious Crime Act, 2015 (Gay, 2015, p.12, H.M. Government, 2014, p.11 and Serious Crime Act 2015, 2015, para.3). Therefore, this could see young perpetrators of parent abuse, above ten years of age, being criminalised for exhibiting coercive and controlling behaviour. However, whilst criminalising young people opens up further debates, and whether it acts in the interests of both the children and parents, any successes of this legislation remains to be seen. Parents would need to come forward, and be willing to prosecute and potentially criminalise their child. Furthermore, it also remains to be seen whether the police and the Crown Prosecution Service have the resolve to investigate, and prosecute such offences.

Yet despite all these legislative improvements for dealing with domestic abuse, it appears that none gave cognisance to the particularly complex issue of parent abuse. In fact, it has been suggested that legislation has been implemented which made parents more vulnerable to the behaviour of their children, in the eyes of the law (Condry & Miles, 2012, p.243, Hunter & Piper, 2012, pp.222-3 and Potito, Day, Carson & O'Leary, 2009, p.374). Indeed, the Children Act 1989 puts children's interests as 'paramount' in any safeguarding activity involving families, and also set in place the notion of

'parental responsibility' (The Best interests of the child principle, 2011, para.1 and Hester *et al*, 2009, pp.92-3). Furthermore, with regards the notion of a legislative 'pendulum', there were those who argued that this was weighted very firmly in favour of the child, even if they were perpetrators of parent abuse (Holt, 2013, pp.89-90 and Routt & Anderson, 2015, pp.37-8).

Parents suffering abuse are acutely vulnerable to the behaviour of their children, particularly where the children come to the attention of agencies and the criminal justice system. Where this happens, parents can face being subjected to Parenting Orders, a particularly punitive measure, which holds them responsible for the future behaviour of their children (Holt, 2008 cited by Baker, 2012b, p.268, Goldson & Jamieson, 2002, p.89, and Holt, 2009b, p.2). Victims of parent abuse can, therefore, be held responsible and criminalised for the behaviour of their children, even if they are the ones subjected to that behaviour (Condry & Miles, 2013, p.14, Hunter & Piper, 2012, p.220, and Robinson, 2010, p.8).

There are many that argue how parents do not have the option of leaving the home, to get away from their abusers, because of their parental responsibility (Coogan, 2011, p.350, Tew & Nixon, 2010, p.585 and Kennair & Mellor, 2007 cited by Howard, 2011, p.8). This issue makes mothers particularly vulnerable to being further victimised and held responsible for the behaviour of their abusive children (Tew & Nixon, 2010, pp.584-5, and Holt, 2008, cited by Baker, 2012b, p.268). Consequently, there has been wide discourse questioning whether responses to parent abuse lie within the justice system (Coogan, 2011, p.350, Holt, 2009b, p.7, Hunter *et al*, 2010, pp.283-4, Nixon, 2012, pp.237-8 and Miles, 2014, p.15). One could also argue that parent abuse is unique, compared to other categories of abuse or crime, because the victims involved face the very real risk of punitive sanctions by the authorities. This will be discussed further at Chapter six.

There is a risk that the state's response to perpetrators and victims of parent abuse is to criminalise them through the criminal justice system. Is this really acting in the interests of children and indeed parents? Many would disagree,

myself included. Far better, I believe, to adopt a more engaging process, working with parents and children, to stem the abusive behaviour and work towards bringing the family together in a socially cohesive manner. In stopping such behaviour through positive, rather than punitive means, this also presents opportunities to stem longer term abuse as the children get older.

## **Responses**

Parents state they feel ignored, helpless or held responsible, when seeking support from agencies and the criminal justice system, (Cottrell, 2004, cited by Baker, 2012b, p.268, Coogan 2014, p.e7, Holt, 2009a, p.347, and Edenborough, 2008, p.471). Furthermore, there are many arguments which suggest little has been done to find effective solutions to parent abuse (Gallagher, 2004b, p.96, Nixon, 2012, p.238, Parentline, 2008, p.22 and Cottrell, 2001, p.29). To add to such concerns, there are those who question whether a 'blame culture' could have developed as a result of social policy changes which have placed greater scrutiny on parental responsibility (Tew & Nixon, 2010, p.584, Condry & Miles, 2012, p.244, and Holt, 2013, pp.83-4). Consequently, if parent abuse is to be effectively tackled, a greater understanding should be built, of the problem, how it impacts on those involved, and how current resources should be invested to better respond (Adolescent Violence in the Home, 2012, pp.17-18, Howard & Rotem, 2008, p.10, Condry & Miles, 2013, pp.15-16, Wilcox, 2012, pp.284-5, and Monk, 1997, p.2). It is suggested that this can only occur with better reporting of abuse, by victims, so that a clearer understanding of the problem can take place, allowing a formulation of a plan to resolve it (Cottrell, 2001, p.29, Ibabe & Jaureguizar, 2010, p.622, and Paterson *et al*, 2002, pp.97-8).

Furthermore, in developing a greater understanding of parent abuse and its complexities, informed practitioners are more likely to adopt better approaches to respond and may blame parents less for the behaviour of the children (Wilcox, 2012, pp.283-4, O'Connor, 2007, p.84, Nixon, 2012, p.232 and McKenna *et al*, 2010, p.16). This in turn could encourage parents to come

forward and highlight their abuse (Kennair & Mellor, 2007, p.218, Eckstein, 2004, p.379, Jackson, 2003, p.328, and Hunter *et al*, 2010, p.275). Other research has suggested that better reporting and support mechanisms could provide earlier intervention opportunities to families affected by parent abuse (Bonnick, 2012a, p.27, Browne & Herbert, 1999, p.211, Haw, 2010, p.47, and Agnew & Huguley, 1989, p.700). Such intervention could greatly assist victims through wider support networks, to learn from each other's' experiences and the experiences seen when responding to intimate partner violence many years ago (Edenborough *et al*, 2008, p.471, Bobic, 2004, pp.8-9, Howard & Rottem, 2008, p.68, and Cottrell, 2004, p.157).

Simply responding to parent abuse in a 'siloed' approach via 'youth' or 'family' violence discourse will not resolve the behaviour, because of a failure to deal with all of the issues (Monk, 1997, p.48, Holt, 2012, p.295, Tew & Nixon, 2010, cited by Horsburgh, 2012, p.5 and Crichton-Hill *et al*, 2006, p.21). Accordingly, this complex type of abuse should be tackled by means of 'integrated' responses, where agencies work better together (Agnew & Huguley, 1989, pp.710-11, McKenna *et al*, 2010, p.14, Jackson, 2003, p.328, Holt, 2013, p.116, Cottrell & Monk, 2004, p.1093 and Ibabe & Jaureguizar, 2010, p.622). Furthermore, there is wide agreement amongst researchers that developing greater inclusion of victims into responding is essential, so that victims trust those agencies supporting them, and thus are able to share their experiences of abuse (Stewart *et al*, 2005, p.209, Wilcox, 2012, pp.282-3, McKenna *et al*, 2010, p.14, and Jackson, 2003, p.322).

Presently, it is highlighted that there are minimal specific responses targeted at parent abuse (Holt & Retford, 2012, p.2, Hunter & Nixon, 2012, p.211 and Nixon, 2012, p.236). Notably, Australia and Canada have seen parent abuse research over recent years highlight opportunities for better responding. The 'Step Up' programme, which originated in Seattle, USA, was seen as a pathfinder for innovative responding, and has been mirrored in the United Kingdom. This programme, itself, modelled on the 'Duluth' process of integrated community responding to domestic abuse, put forward a method of working with parents and children to address behavioural and parenting

issues. This then seeks to re-address the relationships between the parents and children through cognitive behavioural and restorative methods (Horsburgh, 2012, p.37, Adult Violence in the Home, 2012, p.54, and Miles, 2014, p.16). A similar programme, 'Break4change' has been running for several years in Brighton, and is Youth Offending Service based. This programme seeks to run parallel sessions for parents and children, exploring cognitive and behavioural issues, with the intention of resolving some of the key triggers to abusive relationships (Wilcox, 2012, p.285, Condry & Miles, 2012, p.247 and Holt, 2011, p.188).

In London, the 'Parent Abuse and Reconciliation Service' (PAARS) are a small charity working closely with families delivering intensive support to teenagers, who are abusing their parents (PAARS, 2014, paras1-3 and Holt, 2013, p.155). Similarly, in Wakefield, West Yorkshire the Rosalie Ryrie Foundation's 'Do It Differently' programme also provide group and individual support for parents and teenagers, working closely with the Local Authority and local agencies, tackling cognitive and behavioural issues to overcome the abusive problems in families (Adolescent Violence in the Home, 2012, p.49 and The Enemy Within, 2012, p.32). Lastly, the 'Respect' charity which works with domestic abuse perpetrators has a 'Young People's Programme' to work with young abusers, which is based in several towns and cities across the country (Respect: Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse, 2014, paras1-4). These projects demonstrate the improvements made in responding to parent abuse over recent years in England. But on a national scale, they also demonstrate the lack of joined up and strategic responses available to those suffering abuse, in that small-scale solutions involving committed agencies and charities are providing important and much needed work, albeit on a localised scale.

With the increase in recognition of parent abuse over recent years a number of key practitioners and researchers in the United Kingdom have worked with the Home Office to begin to raise awareness of the problem, resulting in the publication, in 2015 of the 'Home Office Information Guide: Adolescent to parent violence and abuse'. This is aimed at providing advice to practitioners

in a range of areas from housing to the police, and includes useful guidance to practitioners. Whilst this 35-page document is only guidance, I believe this is a very important step to raising awareness and developing an understanding of those affected by parent abuse.

Developing such understanding to deliver effective responding is important, given the cuts to public spending, which will be highlighted below (Astall *et al*, 2010, p.46 and Acheson, 2012, p.8). Furthermore, the importance of collaboration between agencies has been highlighted as important to developing more efficient and effective responses (Potito *et al*, 2009, p.374, Astall *et al*, 2010, p.25 and Lowndes & McCaughie, 2012, p.9). There is also an argument which suggests that the economic climate presents a greater need to deliver earlier intervention to families affected by abuse, not least because of the cost benefits involved, in seeking to prevent longer term abuse (Parentline: When family life hurts, 2010, p.28, Hughes, 2010, p.27 and Ghosh, 2010, p.384). It has been said that such cutbacks, in the face of the challenging economic situation, offers ideal opportunities for greater collaborative working, and the pooling of agency resources, in order to deliver more efficient public services (Boardman, 2010, p.2, Hughes, 2010, p.26 and Lowndes & McCaughie, 2012, p.9).

### **Austerity**

With the onset of the economic downturn in 2008 and the election of the Coalition government in 2010, spending cuts in the United Kingdom have been significant and unprecedented (H.M. Treasury Spending Review 2010). Furthermore, there are arguments that the UK has introduced some of the harshest austerity policies in the European Union, which have hit hard many vulnerable groups, including those caught up in family violence (De Benedictis, 2012, p.5, Women's Budget Group, 2010 cited by Lowndes & McCaughie, 2012, p.3, Stephenson, 2012, pp.860-1, and Towers & Walby, 2012, p.3). Yet, perversely, this may help public sector agencies, because there is wide agreement that the cutbacks have placed significant pressures on agencies to cope with the demands they already face, and work more

closely with other organisations (Ghosh, 2010, p.384, Brown, 2011a, pp.22-3, and Lowndes & McCaughie, 2012, p.6).

However, the arguments to develop early intervention face significant pressures from the challenges to cut budgets further. Despite the promises to protect 'the vulnerable', the opposite effect is inevitable, in the face of such huge economic pressures. Accordingly, opportunities to support such vulnerable groups have diminished, potentially leading to further increases in familial abuse (Brown, 2011a, pp.22-3, Lowndes & McCaughie, 2012, pp.6-7 and Towers & Walby, 2012, pp.4-5). In light of the recent election of a Conservative government and further promises from the Chancellor of more cutbacks, the future of public services is likely to change significantly, with many suggesting that those most vulnerable will suffer (Draw up 40% cut plans, George Osborne tells Whitehall departments, 2015, paras 1-5, Police fear cuts will impact on public safety, 2015, paras 1-2, and Parry, 2015, paras 1-5).

### **Multi-agency working in a Criminal Justice setting**

Over recent years the notion of multi-agency working has significantly increased, and has developed because of a need for agencies to work closely together. This is because of the realisation that one agency or organisation could not single-handedly solve problems affecting communities. This has been particularly important for agencies within the criminal justice sector, in light of increases in violent crime, but also in the face of higher public expectations (Joyce, 2013, p.99, Hester, Pearson & Harwin, 2009, pp.238-9, and Newburn, 2013, p.581).

Key legislation that significantly raised the profile of agencies needing to work together to reduce crime was introduced by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. This placed, on a statutory footing, a duty on local agencies, including the police, local authorities and their partners, to form Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, in order to develop and implement strategies to reduce crime and disorder (Joyce, 2013, pp.102-3, Crawford, 2007, p.894,



Saving Lives, Reducing Harm, Protecting the Public: 2008-2011, 2008, p.30 and Guidance on Investigating Domestic Violence, 2004, p.78).

However, the closer working of agencies, to reduce crime, particularly that involving the vulnerable in society, has also been brought about as a result of high-profile cases where things have gone wrong. The cases of Victoria Climbié and 'Baby P' have contributed to large-scale and very public scrutiny where agencies have failed to work together to safeguard those most in need. This has led to the development of key doctrine such as 'Every Child Matters' and 'Working Together' (H.M. Government, 2010, p.8, Safeguarding Children, 2008, p.63, Brown, 2011b, p.315 and Galvani, 2010, p.31).

Accordingly, there has been, over recent years, a great deal of improvement in the way in which agencies work together, however there is still much scope for greater integration between agencies to deliver better and more effective outcomes (Wilcox, 2012, p.278, Straka & Montminy, 2008, p.257, Routt & Anderson, 2011, p.15 and McKenna *et al*, 2010, p.14). The complexities of parent abuse are likely to make policy development between agencies complicated, however the current push for greater inter-agency cohesion is likely to offer significant opportunities to do so (Coogan, 2011, p.348 and Edenborough, 2007, p.292).

Furthermore, in recent years responding to crime through restorative justice has sought to put victims more at the heart of the justice system, and been seen as a better way of dealing with young offenders (Kirton, 2013, pp.352, Hoyle & Zedner, 2007, p.485 and Newburn, 2013, p.768). A greater awareness has been developed of how criminalising young people can have longer term effects throughout their lives, and there has been a realisation that by treating young offenders in the same manner as adult offenders, this may not be in the best interests of the children concerned (Newburn, 2013, pp.763-4, Kirton, 2013, pp.360-1 and Morgan & Newburn, 2007, pp.1035-6).

Following the implementation of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Youth Justice Board was created to oversee a new youth justice system, with the

aim to reduce youth offending and seek earlier intervention against young people caught up in crime, through multi-agency and joined up responding (Morgan & Newburn, 2007, pp.1032-3, Kirton, 2013, pp.353-4 and Newburn, 2013, pp.567-8). Working within the youth justice system were Youth Offending Teams (YOT), made up of practitioners from various agencies who worked closely with young offenders, by a means of close supervision. YOT practitioners had key roles in assessing the risks posed by young people, and measuring and addressing their vulnerability (H.M. Government, 2011, p.11, Brown, 2011a, p.8, Youth Offending Teams, 2007, p.7, and Morgan & Newburn, 2007, pp.1033-4). The development of the youth justice system, it has been said, was as a result of a shift towards a harsher regime of controlling youth offending, and has been said to be counter-productive to longer-term prevention of offending by young people. This is because of the risk of stigmatising young people and failing to take account of the notion that those involved were children, rather than criminals (Morgan & Newburn, 2007, p.1036, Smith, 2003, cited by Newburn, 2013, p.759 and Case & Haines, 2014, p.3).

Accordingly, in recent years there has been an argument to shift youth justice focus more towards the notion that youth offenders are first and foremost children. This has been 'championed' under the banner 'children first, offenders second' and been seen as a means of delivering 'positive youth justice', which seeks to encourage young offenders to engage more with practitioners in order to deter them from offending. This process seeks to move away from current 'disengaging' and risk-focussed youth justice activity. The strategy seeks to be more child-centric and aimed at encouraging the engagement by those involved, through developing plans built 'around' the individuals concerned (Haines & Case, 2015, pp.47-8, Drakeford, 2009, p.8, Case & Haines, 2014, p.3, Smith, 2014, p.7 and The Police Foundation, 2010, p.32). The 'children first' concept argues that the youth justice process created as a result of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 simply seeks to hold young offenders responsible, in the eyes of society, rather than working with children in a manner that motivates and engages

with them to direct them away from crime (Case & Haines, 2015, p.171, and Haines & Case, 2015, pp.47-8).

It has been reported that such approaches, which deal holistically with young people, have seen promising results, and has diverted many away from the youth justice system (Drakeford, 2009, p.8, The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2009, p.12 and Smith, 2014, p.7). Such youth justice methodology may, therefore, present opportunities for developing better responding to parent abuse, as part of the need to develop integrated responding. Such arguments will be set out further at Chapter six.

### **Theoretical approaches and situational understanding of Parent Abuse**

Such has been the lack of research into parent abuse, that there is a similar lack of theoretical discourse in seeking to frame such abuse (Bobic, 2004, p.5 and Boxer *et al*, 2009, p.106). This may be because of a lack of clear understanding of how parent abuse manifests within families and specifically within perpetrators (Nock & Kazdin, 2002, p.194, Calvete *et al*, 2012, p.9 and Frizzell, 1996, p.4). Whilst adolescents have been firmly theoretically placed as offenders in the community, the same cannot be said of the perpetrating of abuse, against parents, in the home (Condry & Miles, 2013, p.3 and Cottrell & Monk, 2004 and Peek *et al*, 1985 cited by Crichton *et al*, 2006, p.21). There is a real need to develop a theoretical understanding of parent abuse, in order to better understand and thus respond to the problem (Holt, 2011a, p.188 and Coogan, 2011, p.356). Conventional theoretical frameworks pertaining to family violence tend to 'flow' from the stronger towards the weaker individuals within families, whereas the reciprocal notion of parent abuse appears at odds with this (Agnew & Huguley, 1989, p. 700, Ulman & Straus, 2000, p.41 and Pagani *et al*, 2004, p.529).

Agnew & Huguley (1989, pp.702-3) also suggested that parent abuse may be connected to social control, strain theory and differential association; themselves all linked to the concept of wider delinquency. Social control theory is said to be a matter of human nature, based on the concept of social

control and low thresholds for abiding by such social norms by the individual (Hirschi, 1969 cited by Monk, 1997, p.36 and Agnew & Huguley, 1989, p.703). Strain theory is said to be the concept of delinquent behaviour by individuals who cannot get what they want, and may pursue illegitimate methods to achieve their goals or become frustrated and angry (Merton, 1938, Cloward & Ohlin, 1960, and Cohen, 1955 cited by Agnew & Huguley, 1989, p.703). Cohen (1955) developed this theory further adding that he believed frustration and a need to achieve status was also a factor affecting such behaviour (cited by Newburn, 2013, p.180). Differential association theory is said to be where individuals learn such behaviour from associates whose own behaviour is delinquent or at odds with social norms, and is said to be particularly relevant to learning such behaviour from one's peers (Sutherland & Cressey, 1978 cited by Agnew & Huguley and Newburn, 2013, pp.151-2). As will be seen in chapters three to five, such behaviours are common amongst many teenager perpetrators of abuse, however as will be seen with other theoretical paradigms, there may be a variety of issues prompting such behaviour.

However, others suggest other theoretical factors influence the behaviours of parent abuse perpetrators. Cottrell and Monk (2004, pp.1075-6) propose a 'nested ecological theory' which they argue considers such factors as gender inequality, ineffectual parenting, and substance misuse, as impacting on the perpetrating of abuse. It is claimed that the development of such a nested approach may offer an important perspective in understanding multiple causational factors pertaining to parent abuse. Similarly, others argue that 'single issue' theories are unlikely to fully grasp the complex issues which underpin parent abuse, and that the developing of a more ecological understanding may be necessary (Edenborough, 2007, pp.50-51).

More recent research into the responding to parent abuse has put forward social learning theory as an important factor in understanding parent abuse, because of the suggested manner in which behaviour and aggression is acquired through social learning processes (Bandura, 1973, cited by Edenborough, 2007, p.41, Biehal, 2012, p.260, and Cottrell, 2001, pp.124-5).

Similarly, stress theory is also suggested to impact on young people, who are unable to cope with stressful issues, and respond in aggressiveness as a means of dealing with situations (Kratcoski, 1985, cited by Kennair & Mellor, 2007, p.211, and Cottrell, 2001, pp.125-6).

From a situational perspective, stress theory may account for situations where young people become aggressive towards parents, as a result of their coping mechanisms being ineffectual and as a result they react towards parents in a given situation (Agnew & Huguley, 1989, p.704, Edenborough, 2007, pp.56-7 and Biehal, 2012, p.256). Such reactions, it has been suggested, may be a defensive factor against overly harsh parenting, or a means of getting their own way (Huguley, 1992 cited by Kethineni, 2004, p.377 and O'Connor, 2007, p.26). However, it is important to consider how current society has evolved into one which is extremely materialistic. Cohen and Felson (1979) put forward a 'routine activity theory' which suggested the abundance of potential 'targets' for individuals, and an absence of guardians of those targets (cited by Newburn, 2013, pp.292-3 and Hale, 2013, pp.294-5). Felson goes on to suggest how 'routine' criminality is likely to be committed by those with low social self-control, and are likely to target the weak, seeking something that they want (1994, cited by Rock, 2007, pp.17-18 and Newburn, 2013, pp.292-3). This would seem to meet the criteria where young perpetrators seek to obtain property from their parents and would certainly seem to fit some of the circumstances which will be set out in Chapters four and six. Furthermore, situational factors will also be discussed further in these Chapters.

With regards the notion of 'power and control' discussed earlier, a better understanding of power within families may also need to be considered and framed against parent abuse (Tew & Nixon, 210, p.580). Yet there are those that remind us how difficult the development of such theoretical frameworks may be, when parent abuse remains an ill-defined problem which sits across a spectrum of conceptual areas (Frizzell, 1996, p.4). Interestingly, the drawing of comparators to other family violence frameworks has been highlighted as potentially important, in that lessons may be learned for

developing a better understanding of parent abuse (Condry & Miles, 2013, p.15). Continuing to neglect the development of such theoretical understanding may, it is claimed, leave a significant void in fully understanding the predicament of parent abuse, and a broader understanding should be developed if better responding to such abuse is to be developed (Peek *et al*, 1985, p.1052 and Murphy-Edwards & van Heugten, 2015, p.17).

### **Methodological factors and Parent Abuse research**

Many research publications on parent abuse have discussed how methodological factors have created problems in fully understanding parent abuse, and how certain methodologies could adversely affect the accuracy of data, particularly where the rates of abuse have been explored. Much of the existing parent abuse research data is drawn from across three decades, and involve an array of research methods. Indeed, Cottrell and Monk (2004, p.1072) refer to the rates of abuse drawn from academic papers published between 25 and 30 years ago. Agnew & Huguley (1989, p701) highlight how Peek *et al* drew perpetrating rates over a number of years, yet used different periods and date-parameters on which to attempt to compare rates of abuse. Furthermore, Peek *et al*, (1985, p.1053), also rely on data drawn from adolescent males admitting using violence against their parents, which is, I believe, open to an over-reliance on young males admitting their actions.

Others have highlighted problems in defining and assessing the types and extent of violence and abuse against parents by their children, so that inconsistent factors are incorporated into attempts to better understand perpetrating (Boxer, Gullan & Mahoney, 2009, p.106). Similarly, Gallagher (2008, pp.74-5) raises concerns over 'method variance' and a frequent over-reliance of researchers to use only one source of data, be they victims or perpetrators, particularly where researchers are asking individuals to admit to violent or abusive activity. Where such self-reporting takes place, there is also the risk that those participating in the research will exhibit a degree of bias in what they report (Haw, 2010, p.121 and Gallagher, 2008, p.75).

Care should also be taken, when considering the rates of parent abuse. Condry and Miles (above) used police-recorded data of parent abuse incidents and they explored 1892 cases across the London Metropolitan Police area. However, care should be taken in relying on police recorded crime statistics, which are said to be less reliable than the British Crime Survey (Newburn, 2013, pp.72-3). There are no specific crime categories for parent abuse, and therefore researchers must screen all crime to identify cases of parent abuse. If reporting officers do not record the links to perpetrating against parents, then such crimes will be hard to identify. Furthermore, in considering that year-on-year the MPS records in excess of 700,000 crimes, this is no easy task (Latest Crime Figures for London, 2016). The research outlined in Chapters three to five will also suggest that very few incidents of parent abuse are reported as 'parent abuse' specific incidents. Similar methodological issues have been argued in past research.

Further weaknesses in data have centred on methodological concerns, particularly because of a reliance on small samples of research participants (Walsh & Krienert, 2007, p.563, Laurent & Derry, 1999, p.24, Hong, Kral, Espelage & Allen-Mears, 2012, p.448 and Bobic, 2004, p.3). The methodological concerns have also centred on the disparity of 'measuring' parent abuse, particularly with regard to the research samples involved (Monk, 1997, pp.23-4, Haw, 2010, p.121, and Gallagher, 2008, p.16). Others have raised concerns over 'defining' the categories of perpetrator, victim, and indeed the nature of abuse suffered and the levels of violence used against parents (Bobic, 2004, pp.3-4, Agnew & Huguley, 1989, cited by Kethineni, 2004, p.376, and Walsh, Krienert & Crowder, 2008, p.204).

Many previous research programmes have been fraught with inconsistency and apparent poor methodological planning (Hong *et al*, 2012, p.448). Importantly, such methodological factors have been highlighted as impeding any real attempts to establish the generalizability of parent abuse data (Cornell & Gelles, 1982, p.461). Developing any detailed understanding of a little-understood social problem will, of course, not be without its challenges, and despite these issues research has sought to contextualise parent abuse

for the good of the families involved (Holt, 2012, pp.293-4 and Holt & Retford, 2012, pp.1-2). Accordingly, an awareness of such problems should be borne in mind if drawing inferences from research papers, which themselves, acknowledge potential weaknesses in data, as this could very well undermine the credibility of that research. However, such concerns should be put in to context when seeking to evidence the nature of parent abuse and its prevalence. Simply to 'write off' the threat from parent abuse because of disparate methods in research is, I believe, not helping us acknowledge and develop a better understanding of the problem. It is with the above issues in mind that I have sought to set out my own methodological strategy in the manner that I have. This will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

## **Conclusion**

If better resolution opportunities are to be developed with regards parent abuse, then a better understanding should be formulated of the problem itself (Boxer *et al*, 2009, p.115, Howard & Rottem, 2008, p.10 and Monk, 1997, p.2). Similarly, the importance of developing a wider breadth of understanding of causational issues has also been proposed (Calvete *et al*, 2012, p.13, Condry & Miles, 2013, p.16, Wilcox, 2012, p.284, and Stewart *et al*, 2005, p.209). Equally, there is a need to better empower both professionals and families, in recognising and dealing with parent abuse, in order to better support those involved (Coogan, 2014, p.e8, Ibabe & Jaureguizar, 2010, p.622, Jackson, 2003, p.328 and Paterson *et al*, 2002, pp.97-8). Perhaps most importantly, designing, testing and implementing effective responding strategies have been put forward as essential, to support families through the traumas of such abusive relationships (Holt & Retford, 2012, p.8, Kennair & Mellor, 2007, p.218 and Miles, 2014, p.16).

Government policy changes to domestic violence definitions, as well as the austerity measures will mean that the developing of new policies geared towards parent abuse are likely to be difficult (Holt, 2013, pp.144-5, Hunter & Piper, 2012, p.225 and Wilcox, 2012, p.283). Furthermore, it is suggested



that too little has been done over recent years to assist families facing such abusive relationships, and that government policy has too often been rhetorical and populist in its approach (The Enemy Within, 2012, p.28, Hamby, 1998, p.213 and Williams, 2010, pp.133-4). The announcement by the government to bring a process of devolution to Greater Manchester may offer some opportunities to better responding to parent abuse, given the arguments that greater powers given to locally elected representatives will allow funding based on local needs (Devolution, what would it mean for Manchester? 2015, para 4 and Leyland, 2015, para 4). As Harbin and Madden first suggested in their research (1979, p.1291), if an effective response is to be provided for parent abuse, then a diverse response is necessary. Current research would suggest that this is still the case. It is therefore reassuring that there is ongoing integrated responding to parent abuse in place, in some areas. There is still, however, room to cascade such responding to other communities.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

This Chapter will set out the methodological considerations of this research programme and highlight the key research and philosophical principles of the research design. My background as a police officer, Detective and senior police leader will be described as the basis for my decision making in choosing this area and method of research. The research question and objectives will then be outlined, in preparation for developing an understanding of the research paradigm chosen. Issues of epistemological and ontological awareness will be discussed in this Chapter, in recognising how these and the philosophical 'stance' of the researcher can shape both the design and outcomes of research. Being aware of these issues is important if one is to remain objective to one's research aims and values.

The research strategy and design will then be highlighted and how this pursued a qualitative and constructivist concept, in seeking to develop knowledge of a little understood area of domestic abuse. The research method will then be discussed outlining the plan to conduct semi-structured and in-depth interviewing of practitioners involved in dealing with cases of parent abuse. The design, recruitment and nature of the research sample will then be examined and how this structure sought to triangulate the data gathered, through the ensuing interviews. Key ethical and data protection considerations will then be set out, which sought to contribute to the validity of the research. The grounded theory and open coding of the analysis will be highlighted, in seeking to identify key themes, which could address the research objectives. Lastly, the reflective and reflexive processes of the research 'journey' will be considered and explored.

## **The Research subject**

As a police officer working in Greater Manchester for over 24 years, a significant wish for my research topic was to explore an area which impacted on policing. In the current economic climate, where public sector agencies are under immense pressure to increase efficiencies, and with far less resources, I also wanted to explore opportunities to promote collaborative responses between agencies, including those from the third sector. I also felt that this was in keeping with a key objective of professional doctorate study, namely for research to contribute to both knowledge and professional practice (Neumann, 2005, cited by Lee, 2009, pp.17-18, Scott, Brown, Lunt & Thorn, 2004, p.113, and Bourner, Bowden & Laing, 2001, p.71).

## **Setting a Research question & objectives**

A significant part of research involves the planning and preparation for the research process, which should begin to take place from the very outset of choosing the issue to be researched (Kothari, 2013, p.12, Davies, Francis & Jupp, 2011, p.37, Robson, 2011, p.71, and Hagan, 2006, p.25). Therefore, an important part of this research process, is to effectively set the research question, and decide what problem is to be explored, but which also considers the scale of the forthcoming research (Gilbert, 2008, cited by Davies *et al*, 2008, p.37, and Fox *et al*, 2011, pp.7-8). Furthermore, the research question is likely to include a number of sub-questions, in effect setting out the research aim and objectives for the project (Robson, 2011, p.62, Fox *et al*, 2011, p.115, and Silverman, 2010a, pp.190-1).

Having identified the research topic, I then began to formulate the research question, following a suggested process of systematic review and research (Marshall & Rossman, 1999 cited by Lewis, 2011, p.48, Davies *et al*, 2011, p.37, and Fox *et al*, 2011, p.185). I also began to consider epistemological and ontological factors, in deciding how the research process would be structured, and what I was looking to achieve. Important links have been drawn between methodological design in an academic setting, and the

philosophical and conceptual standpoints of the researcher. This has been said to be particularly important at a doctoral level (Trafford & Leshem, 2008, pp.96-7, Lee, 2009, pp.72-3 and Cruickshank, 2003, p.94). Accordingly, it is extremely important, in seeking to convey one's methodological rationale, and put forward one's findings, to set out one's understanding and application of epistemological and ontological factors (Trafford & Leshem, 2008, pp.96-7, Lee, 2009, pp.72-3).

Epistemology is said to relate to the theory of knowledge, and in a researching context is important when considering the design and conceptualisation of one's research programme (Honderich, 2005, p.260, Moser, 2002, p.3, Etherington, 2004, pp.71-2, Davies *et al*, 2011, pp.79-80 and Bryman, 2012, p.27). This is because, in a social research setting, particularly when pursuing a qualitative paradigm, there are said to be significant considerations between the researcher and the subject being researched, by way of 'interaction' (Snape & Spencer, 2011, p.13, Bryman, 2012, pp.28-9 and Fox *et al*, 2011, pp.10-11). Given that epistemology relates to the nature and account of knowledge, the possessing of an epistemological awareness will enable the researcher to better gauge the depth of their understanding, and thus enable a richer research process to take place, with more informed outcomes (Moser, 2002, p.3, Snape & Spencer, 2011, p.13, Bryman, 2012, p.6, and Trafford & Leshem, 2008, pp.96-7). This approach can also allow the researcher not only to better understand knowledge, but also be aware of its limitations and can also contribute towards what one recognises as one's beliefs and values (Jones, 2007, pp.63-4 and Moser, 2002, pp.3-4). Consequently, epistemology is extremely important to enabling the researcher to formulate, develop and design the style and process of their research (Bryman, 2012, p.19).

Recognising such research outcomes, whilst being aware of one's own philosophical position, and being able to 'test' research data, in a manner which seeks to provenance its integrity and credibility is important, to the final research findings (Snape & Spencer, 2011, pp.13-4, Lee, 2011, pp.67-8, and Trafford & Leshem, 2008, pp.96-97). It could therefore be suggested that

having an on-going awareness of epistemological progress is essential if one is to successfully navigate the research 'journey', in a manner which maintains doctoral quality, but also allows the researcher to know how they have travelled from 'A to B'. Accordingly, I began to record my thoughts on research design and explore how my research would develop the required knowledge and how this developmental journey would be epistemologically shaped (Snape & Spencer, 2011, pp.13-14 and Bryman, 2012, p.6).

Ontology is said to relate to the science of reality or existence and as with epistemology, is extremely important in a research setting, as it contributes to the contextualisation of the issue under research (Honderich, 2005, p.670, Cruickshank, 2003, p.94 and Fox *et al*, 2011, pp.9-10). Similarly, ontological considerations are equally as important as epistemological issues, when beginning and seeing through the research process (Bryman, 2012, p.6, Snape & Spencer, 2011, p.12, and Davies *et al*, 2011, p.80). It is highlighted how ontology and the way in which issues are perceived and understood, are philosophically important to the individual who is considering the matter at hand (Johnston, 2007, p.639 and Honderich, 2005, p.670).

Ontology, and an awareness of one's beliefs, is important if the research undertaken is to attain any degree of credibility, not least because maintaining such an awareness can positively influence how one sets out one's research findings (Snape & Spencer, 2011, p.11, Davies *et al*, 2011, pp.80-1 and Etherington, 2004, pp.71-2). Consequently, some suggest the nature of ontology and realism can have a significant impact on the interpretation of research data, specifically in relation to how the researcher can objectively make sense of and interpret the data which they have gathered (Davies *et al*, 2011, p.80 and Trafford & Leshem, 2008, p.97). I felt maintaining both an epistemological and ontological awareness was important, as I began developing my research plan, in order that I could fully understand how my own views and position were affecting the unfolding research process, as well as being cognisant of how such awareness could contribute to maintaining credibility and validity in the research outcomes.

Many highlight the direct correlation between the values and beliefs of the researcher and how they will ontologically influence the process of research design and the ensuing research (Bryman, 2012, p.6, Trafford & Leshem, 2008, pp.96-7, and Snape & Spencer, 2011, p.11). As with epistemology, these issues would seem to demonstrate the importance of maintaining on-going reflective and reflexive awareness, throughout the research process, in order that the researcher is cognisant and considerate of the way in which their own ontological perceptions may shape all aspects of the research 'journey'.

As highlighted above, when exploring both epistemological and ontological issues, many also directly link the importance of the researcher's standpoint on positivist or constructivist paradigm, as these are also likely to influence research design, methodology and outcomes (Feilzer, 2010, p.8 and Davies *et al*, 2011, pp.80-1). This is important as constructivism and interpretivism is said to be subject to the philosophical influences of those directly involved (Devitt, 2007, p.768, and Honderich, 2005, p.441). Furthermore, some also suggest that research findings are more open to interpretation (Honderich, 2005, p.441, Devitt, 2007, pp.768-9, and Silverman, 2010a, p.226).

Constructivism is closely aligned to qualitative research, and ontologically sees social issues considered against social settings, thus enabling the interpretation of data to reach defined outcomes (Bryman, 2012, p.33, 2006, pp.6-7, and Bachman & Schutt, 2008, p.20). Key to the notion of constructivism is that one's understanding of the world is based on our ontological awareness, in that we think about what happens to us in a manner not rigidly fixed to 'scientific reason' (Bachman & Schutt, 2008, p.20, Snape & Spencer, 2011, pp.6-7, and Robson, 2011, p.24). These issues were important to me, given that I was looking to explore and develop a greater understanding of parent abuse in Greater Manchester, thus developing a rich picture of knowledge, where perhaps the full depth of findings would be unclear to me at such an early stage of the research process (Davies *et al*, 2011, p.28, and Fox *et al*, 2011, p.17).

## **The 'Researching Practitioner'**

Key to my seeking objectivity and thus credibility in my research was a recognition of the need to incorporate and understand my own views and philosophical beliefs within the research. Having had several years of working within multi-agency settings and spent over 25 years as a police officer, being primarily victim-focussed it was important that I sought to maintain objectivity in my research gathering and analysis. Such issues are important as they are implicitly related to how research is gathered and disseminated (Ritchie & Lewis, 2011, p.19 and Davies *et al*, 2011, pp.80-1).

Although I did not consider myself an 'insider' researcher, I was familiar with the multi-agency dynamics involved in the practitioners' roles, particularly the police officers. I therefore felt it important to conceptually distance myself from the participants, and seek to gather data, analyse and report on the findings as objectively as possible, so as to contribute to the integrity of my data (Fox *et al*, 2011, p.153). This was particularly important, given my awareness as a 'victim-focussed' practitioner, and needed to become more aware of factors which impacted on perpetrator issues within my research. I maintained this awareness and reflexivity when developing my literature review and over the course of several months became more aware and open to the needs of young perpetrators, who themselves can be said to be vulnerable and equally in need of safeguarding as the parents.

I was also aware of the need for objectivity, given that two of my research participants were fellow police officers; but also that several other participants worked closely with the police. This was further compounded by the seniority of my own policing role, and I was acutely aware that there may be 'power dynamics' brought to bear in the research interviews, even though I did not mean there to be. I therefore made it very clear to all the research participants, particularly the police officers, that I was first and foremost a researching distance-learning student. I insisted on being called by all participants, by my first name, and ensured that the interviews took place at a place and time of their choosing. I knew a number of the individuals that I

interviewed and knew that they had the confidence and character to treat me as the 'student' and ultimately have their say in the interviews, without shying away from the key issues.

I believe this strategy worked well, given the depth of open discussion generated within the interviews. I was also able to treat the process as a learning experience for myself, and I believe this positively contributed to the objectivity of the exercise. Such objectivity is deemed important, not least for maintaining the credibility and integrity of the research process (Fox *et al*, 2011, pp.84-5). I also believed that this process contributed well to the professional doctorate nature of the degree course, as well as contributing to the 'research management' and 'personal effectiveness' facets, which are highlighted as important to such degree courses (Scott *et al*, 2004, pp.17-18).

### **The Research Question and Objectives**

Given that I wanted to develop an understanding of parent abuse from a practitioner perspective, I therefore decided that the research question would be:

**“What key themes are shaping parent abuse in Greater Manchester and offer opportunities to develop collaborative and preventative interventions?”**

Developing this understanding was important, in order to gauge the ability of those services to help families affected by abuse (Astall *et al*, 2010, p.46 and Acheson, 2012, p.8). Furthermore, the importance of collaboration between agencies has been highlighted as important to developing more efficient and effective responses (Potito, *et al*, 2009, p.374, Astall *et al*, 2010, p.25 and Lowndes & McCaughie, 2012, p.9). Consequently, I formulated the following objectives to this research question:



**1). To gather data on parent abuse from practitioners who are dealing with such abuse and gain an understanding of the key themes in Greater Manchester.**

**2). To identify knowledge gaps and opportunities to develop better responses to parent abuse, which considers collaborative opportunities, in order to make recommendations on how services can be further developed.**

I believe these aims would be in keeping with the notion of such research building a greater knowledge base of the chosen subject, as well as allowing the development of a theoretical perspective to both social theory as well as policy development (Fox *et al*, 2011, pp.114-5, Lewis, 2011, p.48, and Kothari, 2013, pp.29-30).

### **The Research Strategy and qualitative paradigm**

I then began to consider the specific research strategy, acknowledging the belief that there is significant under-reporting of parent abuse. I was also acutely aware of the methodological problems pertaining to parent abuse research, which has been highlighted in Chapter one. Accordingly, I was anxious to avoid similar issues in the research planning and process. Certainly, my own previous research strongly suggested that under-reporting of abuse was a problem. I therefore believed that developing a qualitative strategy offered the best opportunities to address the research question, given the lack of available data, and because I was seeking to explore new areas of research and develop potential policy outcomes (McKie, 2003, p.263, Bachman & Schutt, 2008, pp.16-17, and Noaks & Wincup, 2006, pp.6-7). I also believed that the often rigid and 'controlled' approach of quantitative research may not suit, what was likely to be a flexible and 'dynamic' research journey, into a little known subject (Snape & Spencer, 2011, pp.8-9, and Fox *et al*, 2011, p.11).

Yet it is important to remember that despite there being under-reporting of cases of parent abuse, this should not be seen as undermining of research which has sought to quantitatively gauge the prevalence of parent abuse. Indeed, as outlined later, I believe there are opportunities to seek to quantitatively measure the scale of parent abuse. This, however, can, I believe, only effectively occur where certain factors are addressed. Such factors must include an ability to identify cases of parent abuse, which fulfil a consistently defined threshold of what parent abuse is.

A key issue which will be explored in Chapter three involves the absence of a clear definition of what parent abuse is. Furthermore, agencies do not currently have the means of recognising nor recording instances of parent abuse. Such problems will significantly impact on any attempts to quantitatively identify and measure cases of parent abuse, and these factors will need to be overcome if a stronger picture of parent abuse is drawn from existing data. Police crime statistics will undoubtedly contain many cases of parent abuse, when parents or others have reported incidents to the police, and where the criteria have been met for cases to be recorded as crimes according to the National Crime Recording Standards. However, identifying such cases from within the police statistics have been highlighted as being particularly difficult to achieve (Condry & Miles, 2012, pp.242-3). British Crime Survey data will also contain similar cases, however, again in the absence of consistent criteria, the establishing of accurate data is extremely difficult to achieve. The reporting of such incidents would need to consistently record the abusive action by 'child' against 'parent' or 'guardian', as well as the nature of the incident. With my own experience as a senior Detective, overseeing for a number of years, crime management and analysis, I am well aware of the disparate nature on which crime recording and analysis takes place. Without having specific definitions, key-words, and parameters, the potential for missing data and not developing a clear or accurate picture of the problem being researched is, I believe, significant.

Furthermore, as highlighted in Chapter one, the under-reporting of parent abuse is believed to be significant. This itself, is likely to have an impact on

the efficacy of both police crime statistics and the British Crime Survey data. Whilst there are also data available from leading charities, such as Women's Aid, the NSPCC and Barnardo's, again, such data is also reliant on victims contacting these agencies to seek help and report problems. Therefore, in developing my own research strategy, I do not believe the accessing of data on the basis of either crime reporting or either incident or 'problem' reporting (to charities) offers a viable option for this research.

I believe that this research programme should firstly seek to contextually assess and develop a qualitative picture of parent abuse, in accordance with my research question and objectives. This can be seen as a first step towards the developing of a better understanding of what parent abuse 'is' in Greater Manchester, so that consideration can then take place as to 'how' a better understanding of the scale of parent abuse can take place. This will be explored further in Chapter six and the Thesis Conclusion.

Having decided on this paradigm, I wanted to pursue a constructivist approach which would enable me to develop potential links with key social issues. This would seek to understand the nature of parent abuse, whilst seeking collaborative responding opportunities (Bryman, 2012, p.33, Davies *et al*, 2011, p.38, and Snape & Spencer, 2011, p.11). I also believed the nature of the research design would need to be flexible in approach, in a manner which would develop and emerge over the course of the research process (Robson, 2011, p.72, Davies *et al*, 2011, p.58, and Lewis, 2011, p.47). This was because of the lack of understanding of such abuse in a Greater Manchester context.

### **The Research method using Interviews as a research tool**

I decided that a primary data collection process was needed, in order to find out information on issues where little existing data was available (Davies *et al*, 2011, pp.22-3, Robson, 2011, pp.280-1, and Kothari, 2013, p.95). My intention was to interview key professionals, involved in dealing with families affected by parent abuse, as this would also enable the in-depth approach to

build a better understanding of perspectives. It would also seek to construct greater knowledge around the topics under investigation, by making use of the interaction in ideas and issues discussed by participants and myself (Lewis, 2011, p.58, Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2011, p.141, Bryman, 2012, p.471, and Mason, 2003, p.227).

Interviewing is said to offer significant opportunities to researchers in gathering data (Gerson & Horowitz, 2003, p.204 and Kothari, 2013, pp.97-8). Interviews can be unstructured, structured or semi-structured, to suit the methodology of the researcher (Legard *et al*, 2011, p.139-40 and Robson, 2011, pp.280-1). They are also said to result in a higher degree of participation, than other methods, and enable the researcher to observe participants, and if necessary respond to non-verbal 'cues' within the interview process (Hagan, 2008, p.185, Noaks & Wincup, 2006, p.80, and Kothari, 2013, p.98). Interviewing is commonly chosen as a research method for qualitative research, to enable the gathering of detailed data (Robson, 2012, p.279, Legard, *et al*, 2011, pp.139-40, and Robson, 2011, pp.279-80).

In-depth interviewing is said to be semi-structured in design, in a manner which combines a degree of structure with the flexibility to probe key issues, when necessary (Legard, *et al*, 2011, p.141, Noaks & Wincup, 2006, p.79, Robson, 2011, p.280, and Bryman, 2012, p.470). However, there is still a degree of structure which is required for these interviews, in keeping with the research question and objectives (Bachmann & Schutt, 2008, p.194 & Noaks & Wincup, 2006, p.79). Accordingly, that this style of interviewing offers advantages over the more structured or less structured interviews, as a degree of control for the researcher is maintained, whilst allowing some dynamic flexibility, to gather richer data to a greater depth (Bryman, 2012, p.470, Hagan, 2008, p.184, and Mason, 2003, pp.231-2).

### **Research methodology and related ethical considerations**

My interviews were conducted using qualitative in-depth methods with a pre-determined sample of professionals who encounter cases of family abuse.

The lack of existing secondary data on the nature of parent abuse in Greater Manchester limits the research opportunities available, leaving primary research as the favourable option. The research was conducted across public and third sector agencies throughout central Greater Manchester, seeking to develop greater awareness of causations, characteristics and responding practices. The in-depth method followed a checklist of topics to be discussed in interview, to ensure consistency in the interviews, but which did not limit the flexibility of participants or myself (Lewis, 2011, p.58, Noaks & Wincup, 2006, p.79, Robson, 2011, p.280 and Gerson & Horowitz, 2003, p.205).

The participants chosen, it was felt, could give an informed input to the research thus complimenting the research aims and objectives. Using professionals as research participants could also contribute towards the ethical considerations, which are set out below, particularly given my role as a police officer. The participants chosen for the sample all gave explicit consent to participate and were chosen in order to provide an organisationally representative group of individuals who could provide data, which taken together, would provide a diverse set of responses, from agencies at the forefront of responding to parent abuse.

This sampling strategy would also be in keeping with my wishes to contextualise parent abuse in Greater Manchester, adopting a 'non-probability' sampling approach in seeking to reflect the professional and organisational characteristics of those dealing with such abuse (Robson, 2011, p.152, Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2011, p.78, and Williams, 2003, p.132). The specific non-probability sampling method chosen, was that of 'purposive' sampling, which is said to specifically select participants who are likely to provide a wide array of data responses, usually because of the roles played by the participants (Bryman, 2012, p.418, Hagan, 2008, p.147, Bachman & Schutt, 2008, pp.99-100, and Ritchie *et al*, 2011, p.79). A sample of 20 participants was chosen, not necessarily too small, because of the purposive nature of the sample, who were likely to be able to provide a great degree of qualitative depth of data (Bryman, 2012, p.418, Hagan, 2008, p.147, Bachman & Schutt, 2008, pp.99-100, and Ritchie *et al*, 2011, p.79).

I sought to develop a rich and 'three dimensional' research sample, which could give the greatest opportunities for delivering a broad and intensive depth of data. In order to do this I chose to recruit participants from across three neighbouring boroughs of central Greater Manchester, these being Trafford, Salford and the City of Manchester. These boroughs all held a wide range of communities, with a broad range of social, demographic and cultural backgrounds. They also included the biggest concentration of residents in Greater Manchester, this being within the City of Manchester. Choosing more than one borough was also felt important, as it would potentially enable the exploring of differing structures and responses across different agencies responding to parent abuse.

Having selected the boroughs, I then developed a spreadsheet and populated this with those key agencies that are involved in safeguarding delivery to communities. I ensured that there was an equal distribution of the agencies across the three boroughs, and also ensured there was wide hierarchical representation from front-line practitioners through to senior managers. This ensured that I had a variety of agencies spread evenly across the three boroughs which consisted of a range of professions and a consistent 'spread' of hierarchy. I believed that this would enable to gather a range of data from key agencies, roles and positions which would enable me to seek the triangulation of data, within the interviews which I would conduct. This was felt to offer strong opportunities to identify both tactical and strategic viewpoints, across the agencies and boroughs.

In approaching the agencies concerned I enquired with the points of contact as to who held the most suitable roles, and who would be best placed to be interviewed. This enquiry was not carried out so as to identify individuals with a strong knowledge of parent abuse, but rather that they held a role which was likely to have a sound knowledge of multi-agency working in relation to families, parents or children. In speaking initially to several individuals they claimed to have little experience or knowledge of cases of parent abuse, however when interviewed, despite not having a strong knowledge of particular cases, they made significant contributions towards the discourse

around effective multi-agency working in a problem solving and family-focussed setting.

It was felt that choosing a broad range of agencies would allow the greatest opportunity to develop a 360 degree view of collaborative and multi-agency working, whilst considering the competing demands and priorities of these agencies. Furthermore, given the Coalition Government's austerity programme, it was felt that including such a broad range of agencies would offer good opportunities to explore collaborative responses to parent abuse. This was particularly important given that parent abuse-focused programmes were ongoing in two of the three boroughs.

As a result of the sample design, the following participants were interviewed:

- Children's Services Manager: Multi-Agency Safeguarding and Stronger Families Team.
- Youth Offending Service Team Leader.
- Youth Offending Service Parent Abuse Worker: Child focussed.
- Youth Offending Service Parent Abuse Worker: Parent focussed.
- Intensive Supervision Team Youth Worker.
- Intensive Supervision Team-embedded Third Sector worker (Third Sector agency dealing with families of offenders).
- Police Officer (Detective Inspector: Public Protection Team).
- Police Officer (Sergeant): Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub.
- Manager of Third Sector agency working with victims of domestic abuse.
- Lead Manager of Third Sector agency working with children and families.
- Team Leader: Third Sector agency working with children and families.
- Family support worker of Third Sector agency dealing with families of offenders: embedded with Multi-Agency Safeguarding Team.
- Family support worker of Third Sector agency working with victims of domestic abuse embedded with Local Authority care team.

- Social Worker based in Third Sector agency working with children and families.
- Mental Health Lead Psychiatric Nurse.
- Doctor / General Practitioner and Clinical Director of Borough Clinical Commissioning Group.
- Forensic Psychologist working with Third and Public Sector agencies supporting children and families.
- Domestic Abuse support worker and Young Persons Violence Advocate (YPVA) embedded with Multi-Agency Safeguarding Team.
- Head Teacher.
- Magistrate with Youth Court and Specialist Domestic Violence Court training and experience.

Having identified the sample participants, I then made formal approaches to them and their organisations, making use of the documents which had been sanctioned by the University of Portsmouth Research and Ethics Committee, which sought to gain consent, whilst setting out key research and ethical issues to my research project. I was cognisant of the need to maintain ethical standards in academic research, not only for the credibility and validity of the data, but also to sustain the integrity of social sciences as a field of academic study (Noaks & Wincup, 2006, pp.38-9 and Davies *et al*, 2011, pp.283-4).

Any piece of research raises ethical considerations, which must be met to not only strengthen the research findings, but also to protect the interests of those involved, be it the researchers, participants, or institutions (Bachman & Schutt, 2008, pp.48-9, Hagan, 2006, pp.45-6, and Robson, 2011, p.197). Those practitioners who engage in academic research also have further ethical considerations, in order to satisfy the needs of managers and organisations (Fox *et al*, 2011, p.95). However, all researchers must consider ethical requirements, if their research is to be supported. (Silverman, 2010b, p.317, Lewis, 2011, pp.67-70, Bryman, 2012, p.135, and Code of Ethics, 2013, para.4). A further important factor for my choosing to interview practitioners rather than families was because of my role as a police officer.



If family members had disclosed previously unreported abuse, I would have been duty bound to act on this information. This could have undermined both the integrity of my position as a researcher, but also the trust of those that I was interviewing. This could also have presented harmful implications to parents, if their children believed that they were speaking to 'the police'.

In a personal context, as a student researcher, and police officer, I agree that ethical considerations are directly linked to morals and values (Robson, 2012, p.219). In also considering my professional context, ethical standards must be maintained in order that the research process can maintain its integrity, and ensure that all involved are protected from risk of harm or repercussions (Fox *et al*, 2011, p.102). As a police officer, this issue is also important given the introduction of the police Code of Ethics in 2014, in order to set the standards and improve the professionalism of policing (Code of Ethics, 2014, paras1-2). I felt this essential in maintaining the confidence of those involved in my research.

### **Data protection considerations and access**

Over recent years, legislation has also brought ethics into the spotlight, particularly where the privacy of individuals is now protected by the Data Protection Act 1998 and Human Rights Act 1998 (Noaks & Wincup, 2006, p.38). Therefore, having satisfied the ethical requirements of my research plan and those of the University, and having obtained the consent of participants, I also sought the permission of the participant's organisations, for them to take part. Those individuals from third sector organisations were made available for interview very quickly, with their organisations very keen to participate in research. Conversely, my dialogue with public sector organisations was slower, resulting in my having to follow processes, which sought to meet these agencies' information governance processes. This data access with information 'gatekeepers' centred on the 'Data Protection Act 1998'. That said, all those I dealt with, who subsequently granted access were supportive of my research and went to great lengths to facilitate my research objectives. Sadly, one statutory agency, with responsibility for Child

Protection turned down my request to interview a member of staff, stating they were too busy to assist.

The Data Protection issues placed obligations on organisations holding personal data, to protect the privacy of individuals (Bryman, 2012, p.137). That said, as part of the research planning, I specifically stated an intention to avoid obtaining any personal data, which could identify any person, as this could present me with ethical dilemmas.

### **Reliability and external validity**

The above ethical processes will, I believe, assist in maintaining the reliability and credibility of my research, because data was obtained with the full support of both the research participants and organisations concerned. These issues would also contribute towards maintaining the validity of my data and research. This is also because validity is said to have important facets, including the maintaining of credibility of findings, and whether they stand up to scrutiny (Davies *et al*, 2011, p.12, Hagan, 2006, p.294 and Robson, 2011, p.87).

It is highlighted how an on-going reflexive process is essential to effective qualitative research and its validation, by maintaining a realism and awareness to one's research programme (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983 cited by Davies *et al*, 2011, pp.172-3, and Noaks & Wincup, 2006, p.75). By maintaining cognisance to my own values and interaction with the research process, it is suggested this will not only provide greater depth to the research outcomes, but will also strengthen the credibility of the research process (Bachman & Schutt, 2008, p.202, Spencer, Ritchie & O'Connor, 2011, p.205, and Bryman, 2011, p.393).

### **Respondent bias**

A key feature of ensuring the reliability and integrity of any research process is to consider the risks or implications from participant bias. In qualitative

research ensuring the reliability of data is also important when seeking to generalise data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2011, p.269). This was important in seeking to ensure not only the integrity of the research process, but also the credibility and validity of the research outcomes (Ritchie & Lewis, 2011, p.271 and Bryman, 2012, p.49). Sceptics could argue that the research participants had a vested interest in contributing to the debate around parent abuse, particularly given the qualitative and anonymised research paradigm chosen.

Indeed, some highlight how research itself is not 'value-free'. As such the researcher must be alive to the need for ongoing awareness and reflexivity when seeking to gather data sufficient for contribution to the research objectives (Bryman, 2012, p.39). Furthermore, this is said to be particularly important when dealing with research in a practitioner setting (Fox *et al*, 2011, pp.85-6). It is with this in mind that within the analysis phase of the research I was able to triangulate a significant amount of data across the research participants, and thus corroborate the key themes which emerged and, I believe an effective means of validating data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2011, p.43 and Bryman, 2012, p.392).

### **The Research Instrument**

Having gained access to the research participants I then formulated the specific research instrument, in line with the qualitative in-depth paradigm chosen. I drew up a list of key topics pertaining to parent abuse, which would assist me in maintaining a research focus throughout the interviews (Robson, 2011, p.280, Davies *et al*, 2011, p.170, and Legard, *et al*, 2011, p.141), but in a manner which would allow some flexibility and deviation in questioning for specific and critical topics (Noaks & Wincup, 2006, p.79, Hagan, 2008, p.184, Bryman, 2012, p.471, and Lewis, 2011, p.58). The topics I chose were pre-determined against key academic themes which were revealed during my writing of the literature review.

These issues were intended as prompts to maintain an element of control in the interview, in keeping with the research question and objectives. I also

ensured within the instrument that there were further 'ethics' based prompts, which included the interview introduction, and included issues of consent to interview and audio record, aims of the research, and my intentions around subsequent analysis of data. I also stressed within the document the need to re-iterate that no personal data, which could identify persons, should be revealed within interviews. With regard to the audio recording of interviews I felt this was in keeping with the notion that such recording would allow me to concentrate on the participants' answers, in order to probe further when necessary, and achieve best data capture, both accurately and ethically (Legard, *et al*, 2011, p.166-7, Bryman, 2012, p.482, and Robson, 2011, p.300). I believed this would also contribute towards the credibility and validity of data as well (Davies *et al*, 2011, p.172 and Bryman, 2012, p.482).

### **The Interviews and Data gathering**

The process of data gathering involved me arranging the interviews with participants at a time and place of their choosing. This gave cognisance to their busy workloads, and that they were putting themselves out in contributing to the research (Davies *et al*, 2011, p.65, Bryman, 2012, p.473 and Legard, *et al*, 2011, p.143). Interviewees were provided with a list of topics to be discussed, several days before the interviews. This was intended to allow the participants to pre-construct the key issues to be discussed, which would likely ensure productive and more detailed interviews, whilst assisting the participants through a smoother research process (Gerson & Horowitz, 2003, p.205). I believed this pre-disclosure of information would get better responses from participants, rather than if I went 'in cold' and asked questions without having given participants the benefit to consider key issues beforehand.

I subsequently carried out the interviews which were conducted over the course of several weeks. Some suggest that the structure of research instruments change during the course of the data gathering phase, to improve the quality of the interview process, and I found this to be the case as the interviews were conducted (Arthur & Nazroo, 2011, p.135, Gerson &

Horowitz, 2011, p.210, and Bryman, 2012, p.263). Reflexively, within interview, I was able to not just re-structure the logistics of the interview process, but also consider the nature of my questions when constructing participants' comments and definitions (Etherington, 2004, pp.54-5, Trafford & Leshem, 2008, pp.96-7, and Davies *et al*, 2011, p.80).

This process was greatly assisted by my decision to digitally audio record the interviews, as I was able to focus on the participants and their answers, ensuring the interviews were more a conversational dialogue (Dingwall, 1997, Gubrium & Holstein, 1998, and Silverman, 1993, cited by Etherington, 2004, pp.54-5, Robson, 2011, p.300 and Bryman, 2012, p.482). The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and just over one hour, which is said to be realistic time frames in which to gather sufficient data, without taking up too much time on the part of participants (Bryman, 2012, p.483, Robson, 2011, p.281 and Legard, *et al*, 2011, pp.65-6). Having completed all interviews, key themes were revealed which corroborated themes highlighted within existing academic research. However, my breadth of sample choice resulted in new and important issues being highlighted by participants. I felt that this positively contributed to the research process, not least the need to 'contribute to knowledge' at the doctoral level. Following interviews I undertook to keep all participants updated on progress, again in keeping with suggested 'post-interview' etiquette, and giving cognisance to the participants willingness in assisting me with future research (Hagan, 2008, p.192, Noaks & Wincup, 2006, pp.84-5, and Legard, *et al*, 2011, pp.146-7). Furthermore, I also reiterated my obligations to maintaining confidentiality of the participants.

After each interview, I conducted an evaluative process to review the data obtained and ensured that new or important issues were incorporated into the follow-on interviews. This sought to ensure that key issues were discussed, particularly those that were new. This greatly assisted in my planning the further interviews and allowed me to begin the categorisation of key themes, in anticipation of my analysis phase. I also began the transcribing process after each interview, to further assist the remaining interviews, and initiate my coding phase of analysis. All digitally recorded data was

individually downloaded from the recording device onto computer, and password protected. Data was also backed up on a separate encrypted storage device.

### **Coding and analysis**

Once all the data was transcribed I then began the analysis. I undertook a process of coding the complete set of data and identified the key themes that I felt had been highlighted by participants. This first cycle of coding sought to highlight the data pertaining to these themes, to assist the ensuing analytical phase and facilitate the coding and retrieval of data (Saldaña, 2012, p.45, Spencer *et al*, 2011, p.203 and Gerson & Horowitz, 2003, p.217). When designing the research strategy, I considered the importance of developing an understanding of what was, a little understood topic which affected many families in Greater Manchester. I therefore believed that following a 'grounded theory' approach would be suitable to the research objectives.

Grounded theory is said to be applicable to a wide range of issues, and is commonly used for interview-based research, being an extensively used framework within qualitative data analysis (Robson, 2012, p.79 and Bryman, 2012, p.567). Furthermore, this theory is said to follow an approach which deals with gathered data and identifies analytical categories and new perspectives, based on the experiences of others (Davies *et al*, 2011, p.81, Snape & Spencer, 2011, p.12, and Fox *et al*, 2011, p.14). I felt that this was particularly important, given the nature of my research strategy. This approach was developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 (Fox *et al*, 2011, p.14 and Bryman, 2012, p.567).

Coding forms an integral part of the grounded theory, enabling the categorising of data into key themes, and is useful as it can begin when data collection begins. A further important part of grounded theory involves the frequent comparing of data and key themes, to enable the researcher to develop an 'evolving' theoretical process within the research programme (Bryman, 2012, pp.567-8, Robson, 2012, pp.489-90 and Noaks & Wincup,

2006, pp.122-3). This process also allowed me to contextualise the data, whilst enabling further reflection on my part, in order that I could remain alert to emerging themes or issues within the data (Noaks & Wincup, 2006, pp.130-31, Charmaz, 1983 cited by Bryman, 2012, p.569, Davies *et al*, 2011, p.81, and Robson, 2011, p.147).

Having coded data and drawn out the key themes, which are set out in the following Chapters, this enabled me to present data in a form which complemented the research objectives (Gillham, 2009, pp.134-5 and Hayden and Shawyer, 2010, p.158). From the coding exercise the following themes were identified:

- Defining parent abuse
- Identifying parent abuse cases within agency caseloads
- Prevalence of parent abuse
- Under-reporting by victims
- Raising awareness
- Causes of parent abuse
- Profiles of victims and perpetrators
- Substance abuse
- Mental health and behavioural issues
- Learnt behaviours and domestic violence
- Parenting
- Existing responses
- Opportunities to respond and collaborate
- Challenges of austerity

I systematically reviewed each of the twenty participant interview transcripts and grouped together the data from each participant into the above categories. Each participant was allocated a reference number (i.e. P1, P2, P3 etc.), to ensure consistency in analysis, and to enable the managing of the use of data across all of the interviews. This resulted in twenty sets of answers for each above category, which allowed me to synthesise the data

and begin the process of conducting qualitative analysis. This analysis was then compared against previous research, gathered within the literature review phase, in order that a process of discussion could be developed.

### **A process of reflexivity and reflection**

In reflecting on the research process I believed that I had set the right research question and objectives, and felt that these had been addressed as part of the research process. I believe that I had designed the right research methodology and selected the most suitable research method, in keeping with my qualitative constructivist intentions. Whilst there were some initial concerns over data access, I believe this was successful, because of the significant learning which I achieved in negotiating access to the participants. This had previously been developed within the taught Advanced Research Techniques Unit of my course, and greatly assisted the efficiency of conducting a broad research phase involving the twenty participants. I also believe this effectiveness is reflected in only being declined access by one solitary agency. If I were to repeat the process, I would consider using more focus groups, such was the benefit of simultaneously interviewing two participants on two occasions, because they were otherwise unavailable for interview. These interviews proved extremely worthwhile, as the participants were able to develop ideas and responses off each other, and mutually contribute to the dialogue taking place.

I believe that the data, and the manner in which it has been gathered is likely to stand up to scrutiny, given the way in which participants corroborated and validated each other's data, and in that these data mirrored published research. Again, this was supported by arguments of such qualitative validation and triangulation of data (Shipman, 1997, pp.105-6, Davies *et al*, 2011, p.60, and Noaks and Wincup, 2006, pp.8-9). Lastly, I believe that the research design and method worked well, and functioned smoothly, as the interviews were conducted without any problems.



## **Conclusion**

This Chapter has set out the key research considerations in identifying a suitable research subject, devising a relevant and important research question and objectives, and designing a 'fit for purpose' research strategy that stretched my pedagogic development, in keeping with the academic attainment of a Doctoral award. The qualitative paradigm was discussed and how this was relevant and important to the subject which was being researched. Important philosophical principles formed a thread throughout the methodological process, which maintained an awareness of how one's standpoint on key issues could impact on the research process. Being cognisant to these views was important in maintaining the objectivity of the research process, whilst maintaining one's own values and ethical parameters. The seeing through of the research design, implementation and data gathering was outlined, and how this was able to gather data which allowed a detailed and thorough process of research. Important grounded theoretical issues were explored and an understanding of an open coding concept were discussed, and how these were able to contribute to the identification and analysis of a number of key themes, pertaining to parent abuse. Importantly, these issues were, it is felt, able to develop greater understanding of parent abuse, and develop a means of contributing to knowledge and make recommendations for how the research could positively contribute to professional practice as well.

### **Chapter 3:**

### **Developing an understanding of Parent Abuse and raising awareness**

#### **Introduction**

This Chapter will present the findings obtained from those interviewed and will define parent abuse and set out the understanding and awareness of the problem and how practitioners commonly experience under-reporting of incidents. The Chapter will then set out implications for developing and raising awareness of the problem. These issues will be outlined against the challenges facing organisations from both the public and third sector, in the current and ongoing economic climate.

#### **Defining Parent Abuse**

Successive government publications and reviews have specifically identified and defined domestic abuse, including the stipulating of those involved, the ages and the manner of abuse perpetrated against victims. However, the case is very different for parent abuse. Indeed, the very title of this category of abuse is widely debated: 'parent abuse', 'teenage violence against parents', 'child against parent violence' are just some of the terms for highlighting abuse perpetrated by young people against their parents. This very issue was also the subject of debate across the research sample.

A police officer suggested that parent abuse is:

*'Perpetrating abuse, physical, emotional, financial, basically the same categories as adults'. (P15)*

Other participants similarly suggested that parent abuse was a kind of domestic abuse, albeit perpetrated by children against parents. Another participant, who worked in the youth justice field gave a very detailed view of how parent abuse manifested itself in families, suggesting:

*'I don't think we have a concrete definition as such, but for me it's young people displaying violence towards their parents in any shape or form. So physical threats, verbal threats up to actually committing the violence and then what follows. A lot of them start with demands for things, money normally and then it follows through to the physical, the physical side of it and the verbal, bullying them, calling them names and things like that'. (P5)*

These views were mirrored by other participants, with a multi-agency safeguarding officer also drawing similarities to domestic violence, stating:

*'it's basically the same as domestic abuse, it's you know, physical violence, emotional abuse, financial abuse, everything that goes on for a victim, it's just that the perpetrator of it is someone different, it's the nature of the relationship that's really changed'. (P10)*

This in itself was a significant observation, as it highlighted the key difference to other categories of abuse within the home, in that the child was the one abusing the parent. Similarly, and equally significantly, many participants also alluded to issues of power and control, within abusive relationships between the children and parents. A youth justice worker made similar observations stating:

*'I see it as controlling behaviours that attract financial matters, fine after fine, to the parent and no matter what they do, bringing trouble to the door, school refusers, smashing property in the home. It's really wide, I can even look at young people that can really manipulate what is going on around them. Not just manipulating families and the parents, they start manipulating services. They mirror controlling behaviours'. (P20)*

Such strong statements raise further questions as to how young people have the psychological skills to manipulate those around them, for their own benefits. Whilst some of this will be covered later, with regards parenting issues and suggested learnt behaviours, such comments demonstrate the complexities of parent abuse as a problem, but more importantly highlights

the challenges in effectively responding to parent abuse, and disrupting such sophisticated abusive behaviour.

These views pose important questions to all those who are responding to parent abuse and touch on some challenges highlighted in Chapter one, with regards what objectives are important to responding to parent abuse. Is it important to respond specifically to abuse being perpetrated by young people to their parents, in order to stop the abuse occurring now, or is it equally important to look longer term, and seek to prevent abuse perpetrated by those young people as they reach adulthood and enter intimate relationships?

There was wide agreement amongst those interviewed of what parent abuse was and how it manifested itself within families. Interestingly, similar views and experiences were held across the professional 'spectrum' of those interviewed. This tended to triangulate the responses given, because of the wide variety of organisations, roles and hierarchical positions held. The comments made by those interviewed also widely demonstrated the challenges faced by those working with families affected by such abuse. Furthermore, whilst there was some disparity regarding how parent abuse should be seen, particularly in relation to domestic abuse, there was similarly strong agreement with regards what constituted parent abuse and how this affected those involved. Again, these issues tended to triangulate the findings, and I believe, put forward a strong argument which supports the developing of a definition of what parent abuse is.

## **Prevalence**

The quantifying of parent abuse is problematic, and has been widely reported in research, however few have attempted to address this difficult area of understanding. There is no doubt that such quantification is frustrated by a lack of a definition of what parent abuse is. This issue itself is further complicated by a widely held belief of significant under-reporting by victims, an issue which is explored later.

Of those interviewed most agreed that parent abuse incidents were prevalent in the areas in which they worked. A statutory agency officer working with young offenders observed:

*'It is prevalent if you look at the types of behaviours, it is on that scale from controlling behaviours to schooling refusers, to physical aggression and shouting and screaming'. (P20)*

This was echoed by another youth justice worker who stated:

*'it's always been there, it's just may be not been labelled... It's always been consistent, boys, girls, all ages, looked after children, children at home... It's usually quite shocking the level of violence what's been used. But there is so much more what goes on. It's not been put under this sort of title'. (P12)*

Such comments categorically recognise parent abuse as a problem that tangibly exists within families. Furthermore, most of those interviewed also recognised important issues pertaining to the awareness of parent abuse. Importantly, from a perception of effectively dealing with the problem of parent abuse, particularly within statutory agencies, it is important to recognise the problems presented by not being able to establish the scale of the problem, nor the demand placed on agencies, if a cost effective means of responding to parent abuse is to be delivered, a better way of quantifying the problem is essential. A senior practitioner within the NHS environment put this problem very clearly into context, observing:

*'I have no idea [of the scale of parent abuse]. I haven't even read any quoted statistics and unfortunately as with most [family violence], there is massive under-reporting, so even if we had statistics they'd probably not be particularly reliable'. (P17)*

Therefore, if agencies are to commit resources to responding to parent abuse, this issue presents a complex, yet important dilemma. How are agencies able to establish the demand from those caught up in parent abuse,

in a landscape where delivering value for money and efficient services is 'all important'?

Furthermore, there was a common belief that the scale of parent abuse, as a problem, was potentially significant. A youth justice worker engaged on a specific parent abuse pilot programme observed:

*'[Colleagues] have realised that even though it's not a [statutory case] it's absolutely rife within the young people that they are working with... [We are] struggling to keep up with it to be honest and it's been highlighted. So we are getting another member of staff to help out'. (P4)*

Firstly, it is unclear how big the case loads are of the practitioners concerned, and this is important when trying to understand the scale of parent abuse. However, it is deemed prevalent enough for practitioners to highlight resilience pressures, in responding to cases. This, therefore, would suggest a need for further research examining the statistical scale of cases, and assessing the ability of agencies to respond to demand. These comments presented an indication of the opportunities of developing parent abuse-specific programmes, along with a means of raising awareness amongst staff of the benefits of such programmes. However, these comments were at odds with other participants working on the same borough. A third-sector worker embedded in a multi-agency safeguarding team who said:

*'I would hazard a guess that [parent abuse] is just not something we're having reported'. (P7)*

Such observations were mirrored by a police officer based in the same multi-agency team who stated:

*'There aren't many, we are talking on average two cases per week. I would imagine going forward as the message gets out amongst partners that we have the opportunity to discuss [parent abuse] cases, it will probably increase significantly'. (P13)*

These disparate reports raise potential problems with the interaction between agencies, in managing and sharing information on cases. When asked whether parent abuse cases were increasing, there was a common belief amongst those interviewed that there was a rise in cases. A safeguarding lead within a family support environment stated that:

*'[Parent abuse] is very prevalent and it's becoming more [so], it's definitely increasing in numbers in terms of people disclosing. I'm not sure about the reporting [to agencies], but disclosures [by victims] we do get'. (P8)*

However, when this participant was asked whether she believed there were more cases being reported, she stated:

*'it is a really hard question because I am coming across it more myself, which would lead me to think it's becoming an increasing problem. However, because I work in this area [of safeguarding], I'm going to be more exposed to disclosures anyway. So I find it really, really hard to say if it's because it's increased or because it's just what I'm exposed to on a daily basis'. (P8)*

I believe this comment contextualises the challenges faced in this research, in seeking to establish the prevalence of parent abuse. This is so difficult to measure in quantitative terms, because of the issues already highlighted regarding definition, awareness and recording of parent abuse incidents. Furthermore, I believe this brings a degree of coherence to the difficulty of the issue. As will be set out below, raising awareness of parent abuse may make it easier to establish the prevalence of parent abuse, as more people recognise and report the problem.

Research into domestic abuse has attributed the raising of awareness of the problem, as a catalyst for increased reporting. Similar increased reporting has been seen in recent years, in the aftermath of the Savile case and notable cases of child sexual exploitation. Given these issues, it is therefore not inconceivable to draw inferences that similar increased reporting of parent abuse cases may be seen.

Such improved responding is being highlighted for increases in the reporting of rape crimes (Minkin & Wright, 2005, p.374), and again positive inferences can potentially be drawn with regards increased parent abuse reporting through better and more joined up responding by agencies. The comments also highlight the importance of developing a specific definition for parent abuse, in order to better identify cases of parent abuse. Otherwise, how can managers quantify the scale of the parent abuse problem, when seeking to commit finite resources, in an age of austerity? Furthermore, can these managers call on the support of senior executives, in committing such resources to, what is, a problem which is almost impossible to quantify?

### **Awareness**

Gauging the prevalence of parent abuse has been described above as being intrinsically linked to developing effective solutions to the problem. However, the issue of raising awareness is itself an equally important issue. Without an awareness of the problem, in the minds of victims and practitioners, then the issue will remain hidden.

A manager overseeing a safeguarding response to parent abuse through work with both victims and perpetrators summed this up when she said:

*'I think some parents see it as a thing... I think other parents know they have got a problem but wouldn't label it in any particular way... I suppose I think parents know there is an issue but they don't have the awareness of what it should be called or how it's caused really'. (P2)*

Similarly, a manager of a team working with young people added to this suggesting

*'I think, quite often, until they talk about it, they think it's them. They don't like the embarrassment when their kid screams in the street, they are embarrassed when neighbours complain about the noise in the house'. (P1)*



These comments demonstrated the lack of awareness in many parents, when facing parent abuse from their children. There was wide agreement across those interviewed that parents on a day-to-day basis were facing problems from their children, and did not realise the extent of the issue nor the behaviour they were facing is categorised as abuse. A family support worker gave similar comments, suggesting parents were almost in denial over the significance of the problem, stating:

*'It's the kind of way it's perceived by the victim... they will make up loads of excuses... They seem to have a whole myriad of reasons why this child is behaving that way and that there's nothing that they can really do about it. So they've got a much bigger sense of hopelessness from a child to parents, than an intimate relationship [abuse problem]'. (P8)*

These issues highlight the difficulties which victims face when not knowing where to turn for help, and reinforce the importance of safeguarding agencies recognising parent abuse. However, simply raising awareness of the problem, in families, is not an easy solution, particularly where parents with poor social or parenting skills are difficult to engage with. A practitioner working solely with families affected by parent abuse highlighted this when stating:

*'We have to sell [our response programme] to people in order to engage them. Because at any given moment they could just say "I'm not interested in this, it's not going to help". So we try to sell it along improving relationships, because they can normally ascertain that it isn't particularly great the relationship that they are having and it could be better'. (P4)*

Similar issues have been encountered by other research participants, with a third-sector manager outlining some of the challenges faced:

*'[Some parents] don't see it as their problem. It's their child's behaviour, so they need to fix it... If we're not getting an engagement from a parent, especially when you've got young people, you know, 16, 17 and you don't*

*necessarily need consent from parents to do [the parent abuse programme]... But they are saying, well if the parents aren't going to change, what's the point in doing it?' (P3)*

This highlights the implications of parents not recognising the behaviour they face, and the consequences it can cause with the perpetrators. If the parents, who do not recognise the abuse, fail to engage, this can have detrimental effects on getting the young people to engage, and thus potentially disrupt the responding opportunities available to agencies.

Similar problems were highlighted by those interviewed, regarding practitioners who are dealing with families facing abuse. A safeguarding team manager suggested:

*'I think [amongst practitioners] there is a low level of awareness generally. It's not the top of anybody's agenda. Social care is about protecting children and supporting families rather than protecting parents. When a young person is referred to a mental health service it is perceived that they have some emotional or mental health problem... we are not there with parental welfare as our primary goal'. (P18)*

This is a key contributor to the argument that parent abuse is a unique problem. It also supports concerns that the lack of awareness of what parent abuse is adversely contributes to the understanding that practitioners have of the problem, which in turn inhibits the ability of agencies to develop 'parent abuse-specific' responses. It is as if a vicious circle has developed, whereby the lack of awareness limits the development of understanding and knowledge, which in turn minimises the ability of practitioners and researchers to develop greater awareness. Furthermore, as has been shown in Chapter one, parent abuse has unique challenges and complicating factors which sets it apart from other categories of domestic abuse, not least the relationship between victim and abuser. This, it could be argued, adds weight to the notion that parent abuse needs specific responding strategies to deal with it, in its own right.

A practitioner manager from a social work and Children's Services background further contextualised this issue stating:

*'Something we don't recognise as Children's Services is what is the impact of parent abuse on the adult and what support do they get? We are very much focussed on the child'. (P14)*

This is a very strong statement which highlights the challenges faced by agencies in defining what parent abuse is, in a multi-agency setting. Agencies do have differing and, as seen here, competing priorities, which must themselves be understood, if the problem is to be better understood and tackled in a multi-agency context. Consequently, not recognising this issue will only contribute to a silo-type response. Furthermore, if practitioners, unaware of what parent abuse is, are dealing with victimised parents, who are themselves unaware that they are the victims of parent abuse how can an effective resolution or safeguarding response be delivered to families, by those who do not recognise or acknowledge the problem and its complexities?

Yet despite these concerns, there were many positive examples highlighted because of greater awareness of parent abuse. A third-sector worker embedded with statutory agencies stated:

*'[Raising awareness] is essential because [colleagues] are going to refer [cases] in. If they don't identify what's going on and that we might be able to intervene, we are not going to get off the ground... So I think there's a lot of work to be done around spreading the message, and getting that filtered down to [those] that are dealing with [cases]'. (P10)*

A safeguarding manager echoed these sentiments when highlighting:

*'I think if people have the awareness in the schools and in the children's centres, and in those non-statutory environments, I think there would be more referrals in that way. But it's about who knows about it at the time'. (P3)*

Whilst practitioners will always try to respond to and deal with the cases put before them, if they do not have the specific knowledge of what they are facing, then they may not respond in the right way. Such responses are unlikely to deal with matters in the best interests of those involved and are less likely to lead to successful outcomes. Reassuringly, most of those interviewed commented how there was an increasing awareness of parent abuse, amongst practitioners, with one safeguarding manager stating:

*‘Everybody is talking about it, everybody is sort of aware that somebody was appearing to do something about [it]. Nobody knew what it was, particularly, but I think there is a big awareness through professionals because they are seeing it all the time. But what they were dealing with, they didn’t have an outlet, they didn’t know what to do with it, so they didn’t have a place to refer to... So that’s great now because there is a pilot and there’s a tangible thing there, you can refer to and that’s why we need a plan for the future’.* (P3)

Therefore, it seems that practitioners are recognising that there are now significant opportunities to respond to and also cascade greater awareness of the programme, so that specific parent abuse referrals can be made and parent abuse-focussed responses can be targeted at cases involving families. The programme concerned involved the local authority commissioning a leading charity to develop and implement a parent abuse programme which worked with young people and parents, in developing and delivering interventions through a cognitive behavioural approach. This is covered further in Chapter five. The opportunities set out above were further demonstrated by the above manager’s colleague who outlined the benefits of delivering awareness training to practitioners:

*‘The referrals are coming in from those people who have been trained, who have the awareness, and social workers who have been fed through the information. So recently we’ve managed to get hold of the right people, who are at the right level to then disseminate the information... Then some people have picked up on it and they are passing [knowledge of the programme]*

*around to colleagues. So people from all over the area teams have been in touch with me, Stronger Families are making referrals as well'. (P2)*

The benefits of cascading awareness training to the 'right people', or rather key practitioners is essential because these key practitioners have then informed and updated colleagues. This has resulted in a swift and wide scale dissemination of the new programme to a wide range of practitioners across several agencies. This presents significant opportunities for delivering more effective solutions to families and could very well see effective problem solving delivered, thus reducing demand on agencies, as well as increasing reporting of parent abuse cases, as similar messages are cascaded across groups of parents.

Consequently, a key message coming out of the interviews conducted raised real importance with regards raising awareness of parent abuse, with those facing it, those perpetrating it, and those responding to it. Furthermore, similar awareness raising has been successful, with other 'hidden crimes' such as 'honour' based violence, child sexual exploitation, and domestic abuse, in that greater reporting and responding has resulted from awareness campaigns. There would seem to be strong arguments put forward, that similar opportunities exist, with regards greater reporting and better responding to parent abuse.

But how to cascade such messages? There were strong views put forward as to how best do this. A police officer engaged in safeguarding coordination and management suggested:

*'we had a marketing strategy where we informed those partners who are likely to come across young people in more domestic abuse, like schools, children's services etc and are key partners, but this hasn't continued, we've stopped doing that. But it's going to be the case that people just become more and more familiar'. (P13)*

The officer acknowledged that the marketing approach had lapsed, and needed re-invigoration to continue the raising of awareness. He conceded, however, the pressures of managing competing demands, particularly given the pressures of shrinking resources, and this demonstrates the importance of sustaining the momentum of these programmes to drive success.

Accordingly, another practitioner engaged on coordinating responses to parent abuse cases linked this to the importance of support from senior practitioners:

*'we have done a lot of marketing on what we are doing... and how to make referrals and what type of referrals we want. So the commitment has to come from the top, from all the main agencies and then their responsibility has been cascading that down to staff, so that they understand'. (P10)*

Therefore, the importance of 'buy in' from managerial level was very much put into context, as without such support new and innovative programmes will simply lose momentum as new and emerging problems are encountered. Of equal importance is having a service delivery mechanism in place, to cater for the anticipated increased demand brought about by such awareness raising. A third-sector manager in charge of services which support victims of domestic abuse, and who also regularly encounters parent abuse cases highlighted this:

*'We can raise awareness, but then we need the services that address that. It's no good saying we've no services for the women and their child because often women will want something more for their child. They won't just want to get safe, they'll ask "well what's going to happen to him?"' (P16)*

Again, such comments put into sharp contrast the importance of agencies working together, to raise awareness with their practitioners in a way that sets out the complexities involved, but which also enables the delivery of cohesive responses which work in the same direction. These considerations are essential, to ensure the sustainability of responding to parent abuse.

Of equal importance is the issue of practitioners recognising what parent abuse is, how it can manifest itself, and why it may be occurring. If practitioners are aware of such key issues they can identify cases and seek the help needed for the families involved. The importance of possessing a wide breadth of knowledge across agencies has also been highlighted, not least given the competing demands and priorities across the agencies involved. This breadth of knowledge will assist practitioners, particularly managers, to develop strategies which complement multi-agency priorities for the benefit of families, and in a manner which does not adversely impact on the families involved. Through developing such knowledge, the ensuing responses will positively complement the needs of delivering effective services which are also efficient and cost-effective.

### **Identifying Parent Abuse**

The identification of parent abuse cases is widely reported as a difficult issue to tackle and is heavily influenced by a lack of clear definition, as well as the problems associated with the lack of awareness of what parent abuse is, by both practitioners and victims. Furthermore, the issue of under-reporting is also thought to influence the difficulties of identifying such cases. Of course, all these issues then impact on the building of knowledge pertaining to the scale of parent abuse cases in the community.

Such issues were identified by those interviewed when asked about cases which were highlighted as parent abuse. Very few cases reported to agencies were identified as parent abuse and then passed to agencies for responses. However, a multi-agency safeguarding manager also highlighted how the parent abuse cases that were reported were incorrectly characterised, stating:

*'It's difficult [to identify cases] because a lot of referrals don't have parent abuse as the presenting issue and that's how we log our referrals. It might be logged as family breakdown or abuse or neglect or domestic incident. It would*

*certainly be possible to add another reason as parent abuse and at the very least that would capture ones referred'. (P14)*

It is likely that a lack of awareness of parent abuse is directly impacting on the ability of agencies to identify parent abuse cases. This again adversely influences knowledge around the scale of the problem and thus will result in an under-estimation of the scale of demand, when senior managers are making decisions as to where to commit resources. This is particularly important for public sector agencies, who are under immense pressure to commit resources where they are most needed. With regards identifying cases, when relationships with agencies already existed, many acknowledged the importance of building trust with families. A youth justice worker who engaged specifically with young people perpetrating parent abuse contextualised the importance of this when stating:

*'[Cases] might [come] through triage referrals at the beginning, they have just been picked up for minor, minor offences. It could be violence related, it could be shoplifting or something like that and we do [an] assessment and it's just through conversations with parents and doing the assessment that we uncover [parent abuse]'. (P4)*

Another support worker, in a neighbouring borough made very similar observations, when highlighting:

*'we do an assessment and it covers everything... and the first one is living arrangements, the second one is family personal relationships and they are the two sections where you will be trying to dig out any sort of abnormal or concerning behaviours or attitudes or values which have born from home. But getting that information isn't easy because it's a very much a closed book when things go on at home'. (P12)*

Therefore, it is extremely important to engage with families, making best use of the knowledge gained through both training and experience. Only then will parents begin to disclose the issues that they are facing, so that referrals can



then be made to the right agencies to get families the support they need. This again also demonstrates how agencies working together, making best use of suitably empowered practitioners can make responding opportunities work. The consequences of not adopting the right approach was very much contextualised by a youth justice practitioner when they said:

*'[Parent abuse] is a hard thing to admit and for us as professionals going in and saying "we've come to talk to you because you've failed". That's not going to build relationships. We want to talk to them about the situation that they are in now and improving it, and not dwelling on it... The barriers would be up straight away with them and they would probably think "who are these people, sort of like criticising my relationship?" So we try and sort of gently, kind of lead them in to [it]'. (P4)*

This highlights the importance of slowly building trust by means of an empathetic and staged approach with parents, that maintained a non-judgemental attitude, and that did not seek to castigate the young people involved. It is important to respond to families with the right level of training. To do otherwise, could very well see the opposite effect, driving victims away and causing a reluctance to report further abusive incidents.

Yet disclosures do not only come from victims, as was highlighted by a third-sector practitioner, who works for a charity supporting children and families:

*'It will often be parents that disclose [parent abuse]... [but] we often get mum's friends or mum's family, that are concerned about mum... What we will tend to find is they will ring because they want to make a report because daddy is being abusive to mum, via the child'. (P7)*

If the issue of parent abuse can be raised across communities, this is likely to lead to further 'third party' reporting by concerned friends or family. Such reporting can only be positive on a number of levels. The number of cases reported will increase, thus improving the level of understanding of parent abuse, and the scale of the problem. More importantly, however, this will

enable agencies to engage with those affected earlier, and present better opportunities to disrupt and prevent further abuse. What is also interesting in this comment is the assertion that abuse is being perpetrated 'by proxy' through children, by abusive partners or ex-partners. The problem was common across those interviewed, in that examples were frequently reported which saw children mirroring absent fathers in perpetrating psychological and emotional abuse against mothers. In effect the children, it was believed, were acting as the 'mouthpiece' for the absent partner, who was sustaining a degree of abusive behaviour 'in absentia'. Such issues themselves, are likely to significantly contribute to the psychological and emotional harm caused to victims.

Research participants stated that getting the young people perpetrating abuse to admit their behaviour was as difficult as getting victims to highlight the problem. A practitioner based in a team working with young people outlined how young people allude to such problems:

*'[They] wouldn't say if they are assaulting their mum, they wouldn't come and tell us that, not often, but if they've smashed up something they might do'.*  
(P12)

If professionals can successfully engage with such young people, leading to them admitting that they have perpetrated abuse against their parents, this will positively contribute towards the difficult process of engaging with agencies, and thus accept the need to change the behaviours for the benefit of their parents, their family and as importantly, themselves. The practitioner who made the above comments also added:

*'So we [would] ask a lot of questions that were seemingly not directed towards the immediate cause for concern. We might be asked to see a young person because they'd been violent towards others... The reasons that violence towards parents came up would have been in the context of doing assessments like this. We wouldn't directly think of asking about child to*

*parent abuse, but it would often become clear during the context of interviews'. (P18)*

This approach could offer good opportunities to identify cases of parent abuse, where young people are coming to the attention of agencies outside the home environment. This is particularly important given the hidden nature of parent abuse, and the extent of under-reporting by victims. If practitioners, with a level of awareness of what parent abuse is, are engaging with young people, they may be best placed to identify those young people most at risk of perpetrating abuse. Clearly, this may not be present in every case that they deal with, but if they are aware of potential 'triggers' of possible abuse, they could ask the necessary questions or make the relevant referrals, highlighting cases.

With the right cascading of information to the public and practitioners alike, the level of awareness of what parent abuse is, can be increased. This in itself will present far greater opportunities to identify cases and bring the right level of support and engagement needed, to deal with the problem. Cases can then be brought to the attention of agencies and therefore effective support can be delivered to the families involved. The potential alternatives may lead to abuse going unreported.

### **Under-reporting of Parent Abuse**

The under-reporting of parent abuse has been widely reported in research, and it is believed there are many reasons for this, not least the fear of blame by parents. Suffice to say that all those interviewed believed that under-reporting of parent abuse incidents was both significant and widespread, and affected many families.

Several practitioners suggested that there was a general reluctance on the part of some families to report abuse, with a multi-agency family support worker stating:

*'I just think, if it's your son or daughter, and especially we've got some really young ones, and I think they just think "I don't want to go down that route with my own child" and I think for some it's a real last resort where they are really, really struggling to cope'. (P10)*

A more extreme set of circumstances were outlined by a third-sector supervisor, who worked closely with families highlighting:

*'When there's an injury, because the challenge is people don't report it, until that point. People don't let people know that it's happening up until that point, because they will put up with a lot... So obviously there is different levels of reporting. But parents are very reluctant to report to the police, because they see it as "in the family"'. (P2)*

This presents challenges for agencies responding to parent abuse, firstly because those agencies will not be aware of such incidents or families, due to the non-reporting. Secondly, the agencies are likely to encounter either denial or a lack of awareness from victims as to the possible implications of suffering such abuse. These issues were contextualised by another interviewee, a youth justice practitioner, who worked closely with victims of parent abuse, when stating:

*'Mum will say "oh yeah, I've had a really good week this week", and then I will go and speak to dad he will say "he's stabbed a door this week and he's gone missing from home three times". That's not a good week. So it's about mum minimising the behaviour a little bit and getting them to be confident enough [with] what we're going to do, to tell us what happened'. (P5)*

There are inherent risks for agencies supporting families, particularly statutory agencies, given the positive obligation which they have to families they are working with. It is therefore essential that agencies make every effort to engage with families that are suffering abuse and deliver the right support, making best use of available resources, from across existing multi-agency partnerships. This is particularly relevant with the police, who would also have

a mandatory duty to report any adverse incidents to the Independent Police Complaints Commission. Others who were interviewed highlighted a lethargy amongst some parents, and an almost resignation that nothing would be done to help them. Another youth justice worker said:

*'I think there's a belief that not a lot will be done about it, if it's, if you've got someone on an order and then they are kicking off at home, smashing stuff up and that and a lot of families have the sort of [attitude] "we don't phone the police, we deal with the stuff" and they will tell you and say things have gone on, but the belief is that not much can be done'. (P12)*

Bad experiences by parents with agencies were also a common reason for not reporting incidents, as outlined by a manager working with children with behavioural issues:

*'[parents] wouldn't acknowledge [incidents] anymore, because they'd tried the official route and that somehow didn't work... the parents to a point learn to let things go'. (P1)*

These issues present quite significant risks for families, because, in effect, parents are giving in to the behaviour of their children. Such attitudes will do nothing to address the abusive behaviour by children and are likely to have an exacerbating effect on the behaviours of the children. Such behaviour could also contribute to the behaviour of these children as they grow up and enter adult relationships, and may also provide 'learning' opportunities should they have younger siblings.

One of the most common reasons put forward, by those interviewed, for parents not reporting incidents was that of a sense of shame on their part, or a fear of being blamed by practitioners, friends, family and broader society. Whilst bad experiences have already briefly been highlighted above, this was contextualised by a third sector manager, working on a parent abuse programme who stated:

*'[Fear of stigmatising] becomes a barrier to those families coming forward early as well and saying they need help, and also if you are being told that you are rubbish, it's very difficult to have a positive outlook and be motivated to engage and to change things... I just think if we were actually positive about people and encourage them to see their strengths instead of telling them that they are a bunch of scroungers and that, you know, we are going to cut their benefits, then we might be able to work with them more effectively'. (P2)*

The comments highlighted the concerns held by some practitioners, that their job was potentially being made more difficult given the stance and attitudes of certain parts of the media and many in society. Such concerns within families are more likely to deter them from coming forward to report incidents, and thus make it harder for agencies to identify cases of parent abuse, and the families involved. Furthermore, these issues would seem to highlight a common concern amongst practitioners that recognise how parents frequently see themselves as bad parents and are ashamed by the behaviour of their children. Examples were also provided by practitioners of the competing issues which face parents who do take the decision to report parent abuse incidents committed by their children. A practitioner working with young people estimated that only half of the parents she knew, who faced parent abuse, were reporting incidents. She outlined the difficulties concerned:

*'At the time [parents] want something done to the child, then they withdraw the charges again, [they] don't want anything doing to them and it kept going up and down. They said "well you want us to report it", but then I remember a parent going to court and I think, sort of, the solicitor for the boy asked her to speak up on his behalf that he had been so much better and she said "How can I deal with that? You know and I'm supposed to give evidence against my own son, then his solicitor asks me to speak up on his behalf"'. (P1)*

Whilst this tends to demonstrate, at an extreme, the dilemmas which parents face, if pursuing action against their children, it also demonstrates the

problems of dealing with the young people through the criminal justice system. There are many who criticise the manner of dealing with parent abuse perpetrators via the criminal justice system, arguing that it is in neither the best interests of the child nor the parents. Many parents would seem to share this view, as there were many of the participants interviewed who raised examples of parents not wishing to report abusive incidents by their children to the police or other agencies. The common reason put forward is that they are fearful of seeing their children arrested and taken through the courts, because of the longer term implications. The alternative for these parents is continuing to face abusive children and not knowing where to turn for help. Such poor experiences can also have a knock-on effect on other parents. Furthermore, the issue of not wishing to criminalise one's child may be a significant issue, given the comments of one third-sector worker, embedded within a youth justice setting who said:

*'I'd say about 80% [of the families I deal with] don't want to criminalise their own children and there's no other avenue. They [also] know people in their own peer group that has tried to do something about it and it's gone pear-shaped... Those that have gone down the road of phoning the police and the correct way of reporting it have been really disappointed with how they were treated'. (P19)*

Such issue would seem to demonstrate the poor experiences of families, and this puts in to context the difficulties which families must face, when wanting help to deal with an abusive child. Furthermore, it would appear to reinforce the belief that criminalising one's child is not the right thing to do, and there is also the potential that taking such action will further break down, possibly irreparably, the relationship between parent and child. Therefore, if agencies are to develop better ways to help families which put victims and perpetrators at the heart of the solutions, this again highlights the importance of developing joined-up strategies which seek mutually beneficial solutions to all involved, and which explores other opportunities for resolution, such as mediation and restorative options.

Furthermore, there would seem to be immense hurdles which agencies have to overcome if they are to encourage parents to come forward to report incidents. The above issues covered have explored reluctance or ignorance on the part of parents, a fear of being blamed, and a sense of shame at the abuse faced, and that they are bad parents. Practitioners have talked about the need to remove the stigma of parent abuse, and develop effective responses. These issues very much add to the challenges which agencies face, if they are to encourage more victims to come forward. What is reassuring, however, is that such issues have been overcome in other areas of abuse, and it may be that there is much to learn from such improvements elsewhere.

## **Conclusion**

In failing to set a specific documented definition of what parent abuse is, there are said to be key and complex problems which emanate from this. This Chapter has outlined how, because of not knowing specifically what parent abuse is, agencies face significant challenges because of an array of competing demands. This 'definition' issue thus inhibits the ability of all concerned to gauge how extensive or prevalent the problem is. This, in turn, adversely affects the ability to raise awareness of parent abuse, amongst those caught up in it, as well as those responding to it, and the wider community. Important learning can, it is claimed, be drawn from past responding to domestic violence and abuse, as well as more recently, with regards child sexual exploitation. All of these factors are, it is believed, detrimental to developing an effective means of identifying parent abuse cases, which in turn, is said to be a hindrance to reducing the problem of under-reporting by parents. These issues also contribute to examples of poor service to families, and missed opportunities in disrupting such abuse. In considering the contribution to knowledge, it is claimed that these issues are inter-linked in a potentially problematic 'vicious circle', whereby each issue is detrimental to each other factor. This, in turn inhibits the opportunities to engage with and support families, and also hinders agencies from recognising the problem and thus investing resources to tackle the problem.



## **Chapter 4:**

### **Typology, causation and aggravating factors**

#### **Introduction**

The following data will explore important victimological and perpetrator characteristics and profiles, and will set these out whilst considering existing research. The types of abusive behaviour and violence perpetrated against parents will be discussed, and those interviewed will give accounts of the effects of abuse on all concerned. Suggested causes of abuse will be highlighted, and these will also be set against key aggravating factors that are believed to result in the deterioration of the relationships within the families concerned. Examples of learnt behaviours will be outlined and these will include the complex needs of parents, young people and frequently the problems which affect the behaviours of both victims and perpetrators.

To suggest that all abused parents are responsible for the behaviour of their abusive children is vastly unfair, however there are cases included in this Chapter where deficient parenting is given as a potential contributor to parent abuse cases. Mental health and behavioural problems are also explored and, this is seen as a worrying problem within many young male perpetrators, who are already known to criminal justice agencies. Further data raises concern over the endemic use of cannabis by young people, and how this creates further problems, for victims, by way of related financial abuse.

#### **Victims**

Much has been written within previous parent abuse research about the victims of abuse, with a significant part of such research suggesting that mothers tend to form the biggest proportion of victims. Various arguments have been put forward as to why this is, including the fact that mothers tend to take on the leading role of carer in families. Other research outlined in Chapter one has suggested that the reasons for the victimisation could also be because mothers tend to act as 'peace makers' within households. The

research conducted for this thesis mirrored that of wider research, in suggesting mothers were again frequent victims of parent abuse by children.

Of those interviewed, all suggested that mothers bore the brunt of parent abuse, and particularly those who were single parents. A practitioner from a third sector agency who worked with families suggested:

*'We tend to find that it is more mothers that are lashed out at or harmed through this kind of [abuse]. I haven't known of any fathers at all actually, not in [my current] role and not in [my] previous roles'. (P7)*

A youth justice worker who supported parents within families affected by parent abuse built on this suggesting:

*'A lot of people that I do support do come from single parent families and it tends to be mums that I support... and as long as I've worked here the main person accessing support is mum'. (P9)*

The practitioner went on to outline other characteristics about the parents that she dealt with, highlighting:

*'I'd guess [parents are in their] mid-thirties to I guess, early forties... it tends to be from low economic backgrounds... there's not a certain ethnic group [involved]'. (P9)*

However, in seeking to contextualise these comments, regarding socio-economic status and ethnicity, the practitioner worked with mainly deprived and white communities, in the borough of Greater Manchester concerned. In considering such issues, past research has suggested that parents from more middle-class backgrounds may be less likely to report parent abuse, and that parents from deprived backgrounds may be more likely to report, because of a potential greater engagement with services. Therefore, despite the complications of engaging with families who are already known to services, if those families are known, then there is likely to be important information already available to agencies, in engaging with the families

concerned. Whilst this may be particularly challenging, if the families concerned have complex needs of issues, this is likely to present responding opportunities, if more is known about them and their history.

This therefore poses two issues, firstly this reinforces the importance of involving experienced practitioners in parent abuse responding, who are more likely to have experience of dealing with families already known to services. Secondly, this raises potential difficulties in engaging families who are not known to services. That said, there are still likely to be opportunities for successful engagement, because of the involvement of specialist and experienced practitioners in the parent abuse strategies in place. Of course, in order to respond effectively this again brings us to the important issue of having in place specific responding strategies to deal with parent abuse across all agencies. Practitioners interviewed did suggest that parent abuse was a problem across communities, including those of black and ethnic minority communities. A senior practitioner supporting parent abuse responding in one borough noted:

*'We've probably got about 30% of our referrals are of minority ethnic [parents] and the rest are white'. (P6).*

In contextualising further, a third sector worker, supporting families affected by abuse stated:

*'I'd say proportionately it was equal to the [demographics] of that area, so the families I worked with predominantly were single white mothers. But there were black single parents, Somali, Polish, [and] Romanian. I'd say it was equally dispersed'. (P19)*

There was significant agreement amongst those interviewed that the problem of parent abuse was proportionately represented across all communities, and this poses further important considerations. Any reluctance on the part of ethnic minority communities to engage with agencies responding to parent abuse presents a key risk to all involved. This is because there are likely to

be significant numbers of families spread across our conurbations that are, effectively, 'out of reach' to services, and this will do little to solve the problems caused by parent abuse across society.

Of course, all of the victim characteristics outlined above have, to a greater degree, been tangible. Gender, age, ethnicity, social status: these are all visible factors which have influenced the lives and the lifestyles of those victims, who are facing abuse from their children. But there is one intangible, yet extremely important victimological factor that maintains a constant challenge to the development of any effective intervention and supporting mechanisms to assist parents in dealing with the abuse that they face. This important factor was summed up by two practitioners who outlined the common denominator to all of the demographical issues involved. A practitioner supporting a parent abuse programme observed:

*'[Victims] still have a parental responsibility, they might need support and they might even need protective measures, but they still carry that responsibility, that it is their child, and that is... the difference'. (P6)*

A third sector support practitioner noted:

*'[Victims] are responsible for the child whose abusing them. We can do a lot of work with women in intimate partner violence to talk about responsibility... and [we] quickly identify that they are not responsible for their partners' behaviour. However, when they are the responsible person for this child who's behaving in a violent manner. Trying to get them to draw the line between their responsibility and the child's responsibility and their choice of behaviour. It's very, very difficult because they have got parental responsibility'. (P8)*

Therefore, this intangible factor is probably the one key issue that sets victims apart from victims caught up in many other categories of abuse. They have a strong bond between themselves and their perpetrators, which causes immense challenges to developing any effective solutions. But in the eyes of

the law and many agencies dealing with families, they also have parental responsibility, which again, it can be argued, raises unique and complex challenges when seeking to resolve the abuse.

### **Perpetrators**

One of the key advantages of selecting the research sample for this thesis has been the broad range of experience held by these individuals, who have worked in their fields of expertise for some considerable time. This depth of experience across the group of practitioners was very apparent when they were interviewed. Furthermore, it was very clear that there had been a great deal of interaction with children and young people who had perpetrated abuse against their parents. The challenges involved in attempting to engage with and intervene in the abusive relationships concerned were outlined by a third sector practitioner, delivering parent abuse responses in one of the boroughs concerned:

*'[Of the referrals], the males, the youngest I think is 13 that's come through, right the way through to 17 [years of age]. Backgrounds are mixed, either white or mixed race, with different backgrounds within that. There is a lot of family breakdown, a lot of cases of domestic abuse'. (P3)*

This comment tended to typify the responses of those interviewed, in that many of the young people identified came from problematic backgrounds. The participants held different views with regards the gender of those perpetrating abuse, with a youth justice practitioner, engaging with parent abuse perpetrators suggesting:

*'Most of the referrals we got were boys, [however] as with the justice system 90% were boys and perhaps 10% were girls. What I would say, [regarding girls] is that generally they, at any given age, they are often a little bit more advanced developmentally than boys, they often have better communication skills and I would think that the girls might use more relational violence than physical violence... that would allow them to achieve their goals... possibly*

*coercion or intimidation or kind of conditioning of parents who find it difficult to stand up to them'. (P18)*

It is important to also link this to the gender of abusers, as this re-iterates the subtle differences in perpetrating typology, and the ensuing necessity for different approaches in engaging with and intervening in abuse. Whilst previous published research very much highlights boys as the main perpetrators, what was significant in this research is that those practitioners dealing 'face-to-face' with families voiced wide agreement that there was a high proportion of girls perpetrating abuse as well. Concerning comments were also put forward by a youth justice practitioner, working with young people:

*'[I'm] trying to recall the past eight years, when it comes to violence and criminal damage, [perpetrating] is the boys. But when it comes to just like aggression and violence, but with, you know, I can't say it's less harmful, but less sort of, less like really kicking in faces or stamping on, you know, females, young females can be just as... I'd say if you broke it [down], it doesn't have to be actually physically assaulted, like I say, it could be 50/50'. (P12)*

These comments are significant, as they suggest that rates of perpetrating by young females in Greater Manchester is a common issue faced by practitioners. This is particularly the case where those participants talk of '50/50' ratios of perpetrating. Whilst such comments are important to note, within this Greater Manchester research process, statistical data is difficult to come by. This is directly related to my choosing a qualitative paradigm for the research, because of the difficulties presented by under-reporting, a lack of parent abuse definition, poor awareness and the ensuing effects on understanding the prevalence of parent abuse in Greater Manchester. Those interviewed could not specifically identify one small age range for young people who were perpetrating abuse, with a varied range of ages highlighted. However, a common theme involved the perpetrating of abuse by teenage

boys, where the abuse seemed to get worse with the onset of the teenage years. A youth justice practitioner stated:

*‘They tend to be teenage boys. It could be a reflection on your data, just because it tends to be teenage boys that are subject of [court] orders’.* (P9)

A social services manager, involved in multi-agency safeguarding similarly commented:

*‘They’re under 18, the vast majority will be 15, 16, 17 years of age. Most male’.* (P14)

Such comments tend to mirror much research which has previously highlighted worsening behaviour by those young people in their mid-teens. This was certainly the case with many of those interviewed. However, several of those interviewed also alluded to a worrying trend involving younger children of primary school age, coming to the attention of agencies because of abusive behaviour which they were displaying towards parents. This was summarised by a third sector manager overseeing the development of parent abuse intervention, who said:

*‘[We saw] some community workers coming forward and saying “where are seeing this pattern where primary school age children are becoming violent or aggressive to their parents and we don’t know where to refer to’.* (P2)

Similarly, a family support worker, from a third sector team highlighted:

*‘We’ve recognised that some of them are as young as ten [years old] that are coming through to this project, [and] we need to get into primary schools before they are going into year seven’.* (P10)

What is important is that practitioners are aware of such issues, when engaging with families, so that the necessary support and assistance can be sought, to deliver greater and more effective engagement with families.

These comments also highlight the importance of including schools in the developing of responses. Schools may be best placed to highlight those children who appear at risk of perpetrating parent abuse, and are best placed to enable swift and early intervention to engage with these children and their families.

### **Parent Abuse through Violence, Threats and Damage**

The nature of the abuse exhibited by young people towards their parents varied in type, and mirrored categories of abuse seen elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Similarly, the levels at which abuse was perpetrated ranged across a spectrum of severity from verbal abuse to serious violence, with a range of issues in between. Verbal abuse towards parents was a common factor, as highlighted by a practitioner working in support of a dedicated parent abuse programme:

*'I would say that the vast majority of behaviour we encounter are verbal abuse and damage to property, and that cuts across gender, so both boys and girls are being verbally abusive and trashing property around the home... the boy's behaviours are more overt and more transparent. But you know we still have a reasonable number of girls who are smashing things and beating up'.*  
(P6)

Causing damage was also a common occurrence, with a manager working in support of young people with behavioural problems highlighting:

*'A lot of damage of property. We have a lot of parents who say they haven't got any doors anymore. [They've] got holes in the wall, [they] are threatened with eviction, [they] won't have anything replaced by the council, because once it's replaced the child kicks it through again'.* (P1)

Repairing damage, only to see further damage added to the indirect financial abuse faced by parents, creating further problems, particularly for those from a poorer social background. This also added to the pressures faced by those



families living in rented accommodation, when threats of eviction were made against them. Such issues also add to the emotional and psychological pressures faced by parents, in that they are more likely to be fearful of becoming homeless and also losing their other children, if deemed unsuitable parents. Such pressures are also likely to lead to under-reporting of incidents, for fear of further repercussions. The levels of violence, once this threshold had been crossed, some suggested, seemed to increase. A senior practitioner supporting parents and young people outlined this when saying:

*'[There] might be the occasional shove, threats to throw [things]. [The] push down the stairs. It might be the occasional black eye... the number of children or young boys who will call their mum whores and prostitutes and you know "go and do this to yourself", I would say is pretty high'. (P1)*

These issues tended to mirror behaviour seen within adult abusive relationships, and in terms of the young people developing learnt behaviours, this was said to be the case. The issue of learnt behaviours will be explored in more detail later. Again, such issues raise serious concerns for the emotional welfare and general well-being of the victims, but also for others living in the household. Such behaviour raises the risk of younger siblings learning such behaviour, and instances of 'repeat' victimisation at the hands of several children was mentioned by some practitioners. Controlling behaviour and coercion is something frequently raised as an issue affecting adult domestic abuse. The same issues were raised by those interviewed when highlighting how young people were frequently exhibiting demeaning and controlling behaviours towards parents, particularly mothers. A practitioner who worked in a multi-agency safeguarding coordinating role exemplified this:

*'[children] would try and convince parents that... "you're paid money for me and that's my money", "you're a bad parent", normal everyday things and that they were wasting money on themselves, say it so often, anything that they did. Trying to make them believe that they are bad parents. Quite often, one of the responses was "you're not going out" and "you're not bringing another*

*man in here". They weren't allowed to meet another partner. The mothers would try and argue "this is my home" but... the children were trying to take over'. (P19)*

To think that these were the words used by children towards their parents raise significant concerns, not least for the longer term well-being of the children themselves. This also contextualises the challenges to be faced in disrupting such behaviour and thoughts in the minds of the children concerned. If they have such thoughts engrained in their minds, this itself presents real challenges to the responding practitioners. As has already been alluded to, another frequent issue inflicted on victimised parents was that of violence. A senior practitioner working with young people affected by behavioural issues stated:

*'The children don't want to hear the word "no", and as soon as they hear [it] it sounds very trivial, but that's what it comes down to. They use physical violence as a way to get their own way, and very often. I mean, we've got little ones here and they can be very aggressive'. (P1)*

Further examples of quite serious violence were outlined by a youth justice practitioner who stated:

*'I find that they are quite extreme, [well] not extreme, but are like, punched his mum and then booted her twice, and like, wow that's sustained... But there has been quite a few where it's like, full on punching your mum in the face, you know getting her, wrestling her down and kicking, kicking her and it's throwing, throwing things like, smashing the house up, completely smashing the house up in a tantrum. But you know, beyond a tantrum'. (P12)*

In considering the level of violence used against parents, usually mothers, and the frequency with which mothers refuse to seek help, there are serious safeguarding implications to consider here. In the above example, safeguarding agencies had become involved, but if one considers earlier comments regarding under-reporting and a fear of getting their children in to

trouble, how many victims are currently facing such levels of quite serious violence in their own homes? Furthermore, what effect is this having on the young perpetrators, and how will this affect them as they grow up and engage in intimate relationships, if unchecked?

Situationally, it was clear from many of those interviewed that frequently, incidents were triggered within households when disagreements occurred between children and their parents. As highlighted above, these were frequently as a result of parents saying 'no' to their children, or seeking to instil some kinds of boundaries in behaviour. All too often this resulted in the children perpetrating forms of abuse against the parents. Such instances also demonstrate how theoretical conceptualisation of these incidents may offer better understanding of what underpins parent abuse, as with stress theory or strain theory; both of which could relate to some of the behaviours outlined above.

The array of abusive behaviours set out above have demonstrated how practitioners become aware of the range of problems which some children cause to parents. Verbal abuse and damage was seen as a common issue faced by many abused parents. Financial abuse was also a common problem, and this will be highlighted further later in the Chapter. Of concern, these issues were frequently seen as precursors to more serious and violent behaviour towards parents. In some cases, very serious violence was meted out by children towards their parents, with some quite serious injuries inflicted. Worryingly, all too often parents refused to either seek help or report matters to the police. It was felt difficult to predict the nature of abuse that would be perpetrated by children, with some never inflicting violence, and instead behaving noisily or aggressively. Others, however, frequently used violence towards parents. Such issues themselves make the developing of family-specific responses all the more important, if the problem is to be effectively tackled.

## **Causes of Parent Abuse**

There is wide agreement that parent abuse is not caused by one simple issue. Throughout Chapter one the complex issues affecting parent abuse have been outlined in detail. Furthermore, many similarities have been highlighted to wider domestic abuse, particularly that affecting adult relationships. In contextualising these varied issues, a manager from a children's charity, working with partners to deliver a parent abuse programme observed:

*'I think there [are] four main groups that I've seen of young people who are violent to their parents. Group 1 is where there has been domestic abuse between the parents and it's either learnt behaviour or kind of stepping into the roles of an abuser who's left. Group 2 is very lax parenting from throughout their life, the child is aggressive and violent to the parent from toddler age, but it only gets picked up normally when they get to junior school or high school age, when it starts becoming a practical problem for the parent. Group 3 is kind of the worm that's turned category, it's very, very harsh strict parenting and when the young person gets big enough to tell the parents what they think of it, they become violent and that's the one that I've seen most of in parenting work, where dad's the victim, rather than mum. The others tend to be mum and group 4 is substance misuse and often a cannabis habit has been built up... I kind of floated that kind of four group theory [with] a group made up of YOS staff and social services staff and people seemed to think it ran true with their case work experience as well'. (P1)*

Of those interviewed, all suggested that the most difficult and complex families to deal with are those where both the parent or parents and young person have their own needs and problems. These comments also very much demonstrate the fact that parent abuse tends not to 'just happen', there is usually some causational or contributory factor behind it all. If such problems are already known or diagnosed to or by agencies, then responders have a start point. However, with families who are first coming to attention as a result of parent abuse issues, this is likely to add to the challenges involved, for practitioners, namely that they must seek to ascertain the issues behind the

abusive behaviour. This is essential if the agencies involved hope to find solutions to the abuse and develop preventative strategies within the families concerned. Similar issues were highlighted by a member of a multi-agency safeguarding unit who stated:

*'I feel sometimes that it's kind of frustrations that a young person might have around their own kind of inadequacies and that they can't do anything about it. Sometimes when the abusive partner's left, this kind of backlash to the victim, because they are kind of "I can now because there's no consequences. That person is not here, I am not scared", it's safe to do that. So you can get that coming out'. (P10)*

It is hard to understand why the young person may exhibit such backlash to the victimised parent of adult domestic abuse, in such circumstances, particularly if that young person has seen the parent abused and vulnerable. To then perpetrate similar behaviour towards their own parent tends to demonstrate the frustrations and difficult mental state that the young person themselves must be facing. This would also likely demonstrate the difficulties which practitioners will face, when seeking to engage with the young person, and turn around their behaviour towards the parent. The difficulties facing parents were similarly highlighted by a youth justice worker who observed:

*'If you've got boundaries and you've got good morals and values, and discipline comes in naturally doesn't it? But as a parent myself it's really hard. You can have ideas about eating your five veg a day. In practice it's really, really hard to do... it's hard to turn to friends, family, definitely hard to, because you get criticised... Definitely, I think [the abuse] does spawn from there, but I wouldn't necessarily blame the parents... If you've got a parent that's struggling, other than call children's services, it's hard to get support'. (P12)*

This highlights the difficulties facing parents, who themselves are finding things hard to cope with. This is likely to be exacerbated by trying to deal with a difficult and abusive child, particularly if one does not know where to turn,

is fearful of contacting services for support, and is ashamed of the predicament in which they find themselves.

### **Learnt Behaviours**

A key issue highlighted throughout research into parent abuse is that of the effects that witnessing domestic abuse between adults has on children. Many publications have previously raised the implications for children living within abusive households, with regards learning abusive behaviours. The learnt behaviours discussed in this research, as with the very nature of the abuse inflicted on parents, varied in nature and severity. This ranged from threats, intimidation and damage to outright violence. Some practitioners suggested that aggravating factors amongst some parents, such as substance and alcohol abuse, also impacted on the abuse perpetrated. A practitioner working in a team supporting young people stated:

*‘Parental substance misuse in my experience contributes to sort of parent on parent domestic violence massively. And then you don’t usher the kids out of the room before you grab your wife by the throat, it’s quite often your heat of the moment thing. Or, you know, if it’s done in front of the kids, it just completely messes up their perception of right and wrong morals and values, and a lot of the time the parents wake up the next day and don’t really remember. You know, they have a row, but they don’t realise that the kids were screaming at the bottom of the stairs saying “no mummy!” I find that worse, because of their intoxication they don’t realise the impact it’s had on the people’. (P12)*

This example put into context the risks involved for children and raises important considerations for responding to adult domestic abuse, if children reside in the family. There are likely to be opportunities when responding to parent abuse to consider adult domestic abusing history, as a potential trigger, and also the need to consider mitigating situational risk factors in those concerned, which can be addressed within responding and coping strategies. This could point towards predictors, to highlight cases where the

risk of parent abuse developing in families is heightened. This was a common theme raised by those interviewed, with a third-sector supervisor observing:

*‘One that we see quite a lot is where... there has been intimate partner violence between mum and dad. Mum’s been the victim, dad’s been very controlling. Dad then leaves mum or mum leaves dad and then the young person becomes violent. So in those kind of situations, obviously the parental influence that’s led to the violence has come from the absent parent’.* (P2)

Such examples may also lend support to the introduction of social skills education into schools, whereby children and young people are taught how to behave in relationships. Such plans have been deemed particularly important with regards to intimate relationships in young people, seeking to prevent domestic abuse between teenagers, in relationships. Are such programmes likely to disrupt parent abuse? One could argue that any response is better than none, but such responding should be instigated in a controlled manner, so that lessons are learned and intervention programmes of this nature stand the best chances of success.

However, the challenges faced when engaging with families with particularly difficult problems was highlighted by a youth worker, working in a parent abuse team, who stated:

*‘One family in particular, the woman had been a victim of domestic violence for like 37 years at the hands of her husband. She had three older sons who had all beaten her up and now her youngest one is beating her up, who’s about 15. So for us to come in and do [several programme] sessions is going to make very little impact on her life and as much as we can try, that lifelong abuse, she’s literally been a victim longer than I’ve been alive. That’s not something we can fix in ten sessions’.* (P5)

Issues surrounding longer term abuse and a ‘cycle of behaviour’ which passes down through generations was highlighted as a common concern that was particularly difficult to deal with. Again, the question must be posed: can

such systemic abuse ever be solved within families with 'engrained' behaviours? How can agencies engage with such families and begin to negotiate changes in behaviours, not just in the adult perpetrators involved, but in older children who have quite literally witnessed regular and sustained abuse all of their lives? This raises serious implications for agencies, when developing responding strategies to parent abuse. What will success look like in such circumstances and will there be occasions when families are deemed beyond help?

Again, such cases raise important predictive opportunities, to be able to highlight high-risk families. A senior practitioner supporting a young perpetrator programme raised this:

*'You can see the mirroring of patterns we see in adult perpetrator populations, within populations of children and young people that we are working with... So it is predictable you know, you can actually identify it in terms of causes... We do have a number of children and adolescents who are growing up in homes where there is domestic abuse and they are then replicating and mirroring what they are seeing. So that's where they're learning those abusive patterns of behaviour'. (P6)*

Therefore, the key issues coming out of such learnt behaviour ask how are agencies able to change the complex problems to opportunities for better responding? If agencies can identify high-risk cases, where parents caught up in adult domestic abuse, with children in the household, this could reduce and disrupt younger children from going on to perpetrate abuse against parents. It is essential that all agencies are involved, forming a network of resources who are better placed to identify such cases and thus deliver more holistic and problem focussed responses, which balance any competing demands of those agencies, and which put the families' interests at the centre of the responses.



## **Parenting**

Parenting skills were frequently discussed within the interviews, by the practitioners. Of course, as has been highlighted above, not all parents caught up in cases of parent abuse are abject 'bad parents', and they are frequently individuals who are trying the very best to bring up their children. A youth justice practitioner working closely with parents facing abuse from their children put this into context when stating:

*'It's a hard subject for parents to talk about... [At] a lot of my first sessions with parents... they just cry for an hour or two hours, telling me everything that has gone on. They are feeling like a failed parent, a person they created and brought into the world and loved, is now punching them in the face or [is] bouncing their head off the bed, or whatever it might be'. (P5)*

However, despite these comments, other practitioners painted a different picture of other parents who seemed oblivious or were in denial of the predicament which they were facing. A practitioner supporting a parent abuse programme highlighted:

*'I've seen... a reluctance to accept responsibility which is more like "well it's their problem that they have behaved like this, so I'm going to send them to you and you fix them", or even situations where we've had [children] come who are being told on a regular basis by mum or dad "if you don't sort yourself out then I'm going to have you put in care". So they are actually using that abrogation of responsibility as a threat against the child'. (P6)*

Being a parent involves taking responsibility for the welfare, behaviour and actions of one's children, and demonstrates the difficulties that can be faced by agencies, when seeking to work with parents. This is likely to be made all the more difficult when dealing with parents who will not engage. Similar concerns were raised by many of those interviewed with regards 'boundary setting' by parents and setting standards of behaviour. A youth justice worker raised similar observations:

*'Not really knowing how to parent your child properly and letting them, from a young age, get away with things that maybe you think you shouldn't have done. But because the boundaries have already been set. You know, they are reaching the teenage years, they are going to push [the boundaries] even more and if they are not there to be pushed, you are going to become unstuck'. (P5)*

Practitioners frequently talked about the setting of boundaries, and the fact that parenting was not a skill that was taught to parents. Practitioners also highlighted poor communication skills on the part of some parents, with a manager supporting young people with behavioural issues stating:

*'Boundaries are important but that's what I'm saying, it's hard to teach. We talk very much [about] the relationship with the parent and the abuse... [Communicating with] the child is totally negative. It's based on threat, violence and dishing out money. Parents find it very difficult to say positives and very often we talk about trying to find something positive'. (P1)*

These comments highlighted another common issue raised by those interviewed regarding social skills. Again, this is something not taught in a classroom, and as children develop social skills predominantly from their parents, this is a crucial issue to address, if acceptable standards of behaviour are to be developed in young people. Furthermore, such issues may offer particular opportunities to better support relevant families. If agencies can develop a better understanding of the needs of families, when first engaging and rapport building, then they are likely to develop opportunities for how best to intervene in those families for the benefit of parents and children.

Whilst much has been written in parent abuse-related publications about the need to avoid judging parents, and avoiding any potential blame-based attitudes, many of those interviewed did voice concerns regarding the poor standards of many parents which they dealt with. This was a common theme across the agencies concerned, and it is important not to ignore 'the elephant

in the room' in such circumstances. This is because, if the problems within families are to be fully explored and addressed, then all the related problems should be considered. Only then can effective responses be implemented, which take account of all the issues highlighted. The vulnerabilities of parents were also frequently cited by those interviewed, which were likely to influence the parenting skills which they exhibited. A third-sector practitioner based within a local authority safeguarding team highlighted one case, stating:

*'[The woman's] son was ten at the time, lots of violence going on. She could not control him... his best friend was another boy I know. This other particular boy also had big learning difficulties, really big challenging behaviour. This boy and the boy are best friends... One day she discloses that when she is struggling with her son's behaviour she asks the other ten-year-old to have a word with him and he has a word with him and he calms it down. She has got no control whatsoever and she's then asking a ten-year-old who has a whole heap of issues and problems going on, to parent her child, and couldn't see the problem with that'. (P8)*

The vulnerabilities of such parents in such circumstances starkly highlight the implications of raising children without the necessary parental skills nor support from agencies or indeed a wider family. Indeed, these parents may never have been, themselves, subjected to such boundaries. Without such support, the circumstances in which young people and their parents find themselves in are unlikely to get any better. Sadly, such cases were deemed common amongst the practitioners, and highlight the challenges faced by agencies. This again raises the importance of agencies effectively developing joint-agency strategies to make best use of available resources and which avoids duplication of effort and inefficient service delivery.

Therefore, the importance of properly supporting those parents deemed in need of support to care for their children must be uppermost in any supportive strategy. This will present opportunities for disrupting the cyclical problems where vulnerable parents are failing to effectively parent their children and risks them potentially passing on problematic behaviours to their children,

which may lead to those children themselves growing up with similar problems. These issues are also important to consider when training staff and raising awareness of the issues created by parent abuse.

### **Mental Health and Behavioural Issues**

Frequently within the problems highlighted, there were related mental health issues of the parents and children involved, which were identified as contributory factors. When conducting the interviews, I was surprised at the frequency with which those interviewed raised concerns around mental health and behavioural issues, in the young people that they dealt with, who were perpetrating parent abuse. Of further interest was that the mental health issues raised were known to practitioners from a wide range of agencies, and not just those from a child safeguarding or health background.

Of those interviewed, a police officer highlighted how a large number of the young people coming to attention for parent abuse were already known to health services for mental health problems:

*'I'd say the vast majority [of cases] come from socially deprived backgrounds, chaotic lifestyle. I would say they are known to the health professionals, largely from a mental health perspective. They are probably known to schools, in that the schools will often give us an input in relation to their poor behaviour'. (P13)*

What was surprising here was the high rates of young people said to be experiencing mental health issues. Of equal significance was the links to school problems in the young people, which will likely offer significant opportunities to identify young people who may present enhanced risks of perpetrating parent abuse. The opportunities of involving schools have already been highlighted, however the comments from the police officer further demonstrate the importance of effective networking across boroughs to deliver joined-up processes and responses to parent abuse cases.

Close links were also frequently raised by practitioners between mental health problems in young people and substance misuse. Whilst substance misuse will be covered in greater detail below, it was a common aggravating factor which practitioners believed adversely impacted on the mental well-being of the children involved. A senior practitioner working with young people in a health setting highlighted this and the frequency of mental health issues faced:

*'I've got a number of people [with] limited mental capacity. They are abusive, they are physically difficult, but there is no intent there, it is because of their lack of understanding. So the physical abuse of parents from that age group has been mainly about people with educational difficulties, and the financial and emotional abuse within that age group is usually around drug taking'.*  
(P17)

These issues again raise real opportunities to respond effectively to such cases, as the young people concerned are already known to health professionals and are receiving support. Given the parent abuse programmes across the boroughs concerned, it may be that there are increased support opportunities to these cases, where the health agencies concerned can work with other support agencies to better respond to the families concerned.

In light of these issues, a senior practitioner who worked supporting third sector teams, delivering parent abuse activity, also highlighted referral opportunities between agencies. However, in doing so, she also highlighted the common frequency of mental health issues across parent abuse perpetrators.

*'A third to a half [of parent abuse perpetrators] have grown up in homes where there is domestic abuse... But that still leaves 50%, sometimes two-thirds that didn't grow up in [such] homes. So there are other fundamental causes and the other fundamental causes we are identifying in the kids and young people we are working with are often other learning difficulties or mental health issues. So we have a large number of children and young people on our population who are on the autism spectrum... We also have a large*

*number who have been referred to CAMHS for a multitude of issues, often ADHD'. (P6)*

Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) was a common factor highlighted amongst the young people known to be perpetrating abuse. This condition is a behavioural issue which causes restlessness, lack of attention and hyperactivity in children (ADHD: Information for Parents, 2015, para 1). Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) provide support and treatment to children and young people with mental health, behavioural and emotional problems (What are CAMHS? 2015, para 1). Therefore, the practitioner alluded in her statement that many of these problems seen in young perpetrators were attributable to mental health and behavioural problems. This strongly suggests that the level of such problems on young people perpetrating abuse is quite significant, and clearly places existing pressures on many agencies, not least the health sector. However, judging from the statement made, and those from other practitioners, further pressures are placed, indirectly, on other agencies, such as schools, local authorities, and in certain cases, the police.

Other practitioners gave even higher rates of potential mental health and behavioural problems faced by young people caught up in parent abuse. A youth justice practitioner working with parent abuse perpetrators highlighted:

*'we have monthly feedback with the clinical psychologist because we've found that about 80% are under CAMHS, or have been under CAMHS'. (P4)*

This again painted a very clear picture of the rates of those perpetrating parent abuse, with mental health and behavioural issues. The issues are well responded to, given there is a clinical psychologist embedded within the team supporting the young people involved. However, this also highlights extremely high rates of perpetrators who have such problems and suggests far higher rates of problems than have been reported in other research. Not all of the young people working with the practitioners and their colleagues are within the justice system through perpetrating parent abuse, but have been

identified as perpetrators of this problem, once engagement has commenced. Despite this, it strongly indicates that if any effective response to engaging with perpetrators of parent abuse is to be developed, then a significant part of that response should consider the implications of mental health and behavioural issues.

The level of referrals to CAMHS has increased dramatically over the last ten years, and there is wide reporting that the instances of child mental health and behavioural problems have increased significantly (Children's and adolescent's mental health and CAMHS, 2015, pp.13-14). Such increased demand is likely to place even greater challenges on agencies to effectively respond to requests for help from families affected by parent abuse. This is likely to further increase, as awareness of parent abuse grows. Of concern, is that third sector practitioners, when interviewed, frequently voiced concerns over increased demand because of shrinkages on state-owned agencies and resources. This again presents greater opportunities for all agencies to work together, in supporting families collaboratively.

All of those interviewed recognised that there would be times when young perpetrators would have to be dealt with by the criminal justice process, for more serious incidents. That said, they also highlighted the importance of avoiding the criminalising of young people. This proved difficult for those young people already being supported by youth justice teams, as they had already entered the 'system'. There was a recognition, however, that it was important to seek alternative resolution for the young people, particularly those with recognised behavioural and mental health problems. Again, problems from ADHD related problems were highlighted as a common concern. A practitioner working with young offenders, highlighted:

*'We get a lot of ADHD... coming through. You do get a lot of Asperger's but it's not as much as ADHD. In my mind... my worry is that cannabis becomes a massive sort of, it assists in the medication of ADHD and I've experienced the parents sort of permitting the cannabis use for children because it chills them out... The key is [dealing] with the ADHD'. (P12)*

Substance misuse was also seen as a significant concern by the practitioners interviewed, and there were worrying overlaps between such substance misuses, particularly cannabis, with mental health and behavioural issues. It was therefore significant that another practitioner mirrored the comments above with regards cannabis and ADHD:

*'What I've found [is that] kids that suffer from ADHD don't want to take their medication [and] kind of default to self-medicating with cannabis, because they like that relaxed feeling... when in essence they should actually engage with CAMHS and get the medication that should make them feel in a similar way, but be legal'. (P9)*

These comments raise alarming concerns not only about the use of illegal drugs by young people, but also that there are said to be frequent instances where the parents condone the use of such substances by the children, in order to pacify them and allow them to feel more relaxed. Whilst this may result in a reduction of tensions within the home, this does highlight the dilemmas which parents face. Furthermore, this is likely to do little to reduce the instances of parent abuse in the long-term, as allowing such activity is avoiding the setting of acceptable boundaries of behaviour in the children. This is also likely to present significant challenges to practitioners engaging with families, who cannot allow such behaviour, if they are seeking to begin the difficult process of disrupting the abusive relationships within the families concerned.

### **Substance Abuse and related issues**

Key themes coming out of the interviews with regards substance abuse involved the proliferation of cannabis use amongst young people, the financial implications of funding substance abuse, and also the behavioural aggravators that were encountered by parents as a result of the young people's changed behaviour. These issues raise serious questions regarding the prevalence of drugs use amongst young people, but also raise important



considerations when responding to parent abuse, and also when seeking responding opportunities.

Of significance to the research process, cannabis was raised as a common problem, for families facing parent abuse. Its use was common across the three boroughs concerned, and was widely used amongst many perpetrators, according to most of those interviewed. Furthermore, its use was believed to trigger behavioural problems amongst the young people perpetrating abuse, and also triggered widespread financial abuse of parents. There were also concerns raised regarding the effects of stronger 'skunk' cannabis on the mental health of the young people concerned. The worrying issues within the research was that cannabis use, although recognised within substance misuse by previous researchers, does not appear to have featured as prominently in other research programmes.

Furthermore, all of those interviewed who raised concerns about the use of cannabis, frequently commented how this further contributed to abusive incidents, in the form of financial abuse. Whilst such drugs misuse is seen widely across society, it will be highlighted later that the number of young people said to be using cannabis and perpetrating parent abuse is, at the very least, worthy of further research. The use of drugs over recent years has, it is believed, significantly increased, particularly with regards so-called recreational drugs. A youth justice worker contextualised this issue commenting on, what she believed, was the widespread use of cannabis:

*'Most kids, I'd say, smoke weed, as opposed to get drunk now. It's cheaper, from what I can tell'. She went on to say: 'I guess, when I was younger, you drank in the park. You didn't go and buy a "20 bag" from whoever is selling it'. (P9)*

Whilst such comments may account for more common use of recreational drugs, it is uncertain if this supports the frequency of comments by those interviewed, with regards the use of drugs by young people perpetrating parent abuse. In considering the above comments regarding parents allowing

their children to smoke cannabis in the home, similar concerns were also raised by several other interviewees. A practitioner supporting a parent abuse programme observed:

*'In those cases where substance misuse is an issue that is often a serious trigger for conflict in the home. So through financial abuse of stealing property, stealing money, but also just conflict around the use of substances and you know, destabilising any kind of house rules, or you know, it really affecting the relationships'. (P6)*

Such issues were often raised by those interviewed, where situational factors, and the attempts of parents to instil a degree of better behaviour in their children erupted in aggressive or violent situations within homes. As will be seen later, such instances frequently feature, when perpetrators are engaging in parent abuse programmes, where practitioners attempt to highlight how such behaviour can be prevented through cognitive and behavioural self-control. In addition to the earlier problems facing parents, through such misuse, calls for help to children's services and the police also risk potentially punitive action against parents, given the child safeguarding issues and criminal use of controlled drugs involved. It is therefore essential that suitably proportionate and supportive multi-agency strategies are developed, where agencies are responding to parent abuse when substance misuse is a known aggravating factor. These factors and the manner in which such intervention is complicated by such aggravators was contextualised by a multi-agency safeguarding team leader who stated:

*'The key [to all this] is changing the young person's behaviour... That's difficult where you've got more complex families where the young person has a whole range of issues that haven't been addressed. Where the young person hasn't gone to school for years and he has mental health issues, and he's been drinking since he's 13 and he's used cannabis since he was 14... That's a lot of issues to address. How do you go about doing that? The obvious answer is you can't do it on your own. There's a huge range of agencies to involve'. (P14)*

The frequency of cannabis as a potentially contributory factor was a common concern. A third sector manager, overseeing a parent abuse programme highlighted a common issue:

*‘Substance misuse and often a cannabis habit has been built up, financed by mum or dad giving money and the violence begins when the habit outstrips the parents’ ability to supply the cash or the parents become aware of what the cash is going on and say no’. (P2)*

Therefore, these examples demonstrate not only the parent abuse and how this is aggravated by the cannabis misuse and ensuing behaviour, but the secondary and consequential effects of demanding money from the parents. Additionally, the effects of the financial abuse, the debts and frequent demands for money are likely to lead to further consequential problems for parents, no doubt leading to lifestyle changes for them. Such issues are also likely to bring about more complex situations for the responding agencies to deal with, and could lead to further implications for parents, with regards other children, and ensuring that they are well cared for.

Therefore, it is important to remember that the young perpetrators themselves are vulnerable to aggravating issues, particularly controlled drugs. There are likely to be a myriad of issues that drive these young people to drugs, but the above examples raise significant concerns that the young people place themselves at further risk of harm by such use. This in turn has, it would appear, greatly affected the gravity of the situations faced by the parents. Furthermore, these issues again, I believe, demonstrate the advantages and opportunities for designing such responses with the involvement of a wide array of agencies that are able to initiate and implement a diverse collaborative and cost effective response, making best use of the resources at their disposal.

## **Conclusion**

The characteristics of victims and perpetrators have been seen to broadly match those seen elsewhere in existing research. Types of violent and psychologically damaging behaviour have been outlined above, which sets out the predicaments of many of those caught up in abusive relationships within families. Potential causes of abuse have also been set out, and contextualised against the relationships and circumstances that exist within families. Many of these circumstances are significantly complex and create greater challenges for those whose job it is to engage with and support families. Concerns were also raised from the apparent regularity of learnt behaviours, many of these of which are said to have been passed on by errant and absent male role models. These issues, in turn, raise concerns over the cyclical manner of abusive relationships and raise the threats of young male perpetrators growing up into adult abusers, within intimate relationships. Examples of poor parenting were seen, many of which were aggravated by mental health and behavioural problems in parents. This was, by no means, common across all parents however. From an organisational and strategic perspective, the above issues significantly contribute to the demands placed on agencies, and raise the very important priority of agencies needing to plan to intervene in the abuse, to prevent longer term problems. Economically, there are also potential cost savings to be made by successfully engaging with families, recognising and addressing the problems highlighted, and ultimately disrupting ongoing problematic behaviour. This also raises the importance of agencies working closely together, and building on existing frameworks to support and safeguard those caught up in the abuse, which will also positively address the duties of care requirements on the statutory agencies involved.

## **Chapter 5:**

### **Responding, austerity and collaboration**

#### **Introduction**

Developing responses to parent abuse which are cognisant of existing good practice, and are intended to be fit for the future are essential, if the growing scale of reported incidents is to be tackled effectively. The following Chapter will consider existing responses which include two programmes currently in place within Greater Manchester. One programme is led and coordinated by a leading children's charity, in partnership and with significant support from the local authority and partner agencies. Similarly, a second programme in a neighbouring borough is making good use of existing collaborative relationships to identify, profile and target cases of parent abuse. This programme is also making excellent use of parent abuse specific practitioners who are working with the most challenging of young perpetrators. A third borough, whilst not having a specific parent abuse programme demonstrated the advantages of having key people in the right roles with the right skills. This programme of working with young people made exceptionally good use of third sector resources embedded within teams working with families experiencing parent abuse incidents. These and other examples of responding will be set out below.

Austerity will also be highlighted and explored, in light of the sustained financial cut-backs which have been thrust on the public sector. The positive and negative implications of these cuts will be explored on both the agencies concerned, but more importantly, the families at the centre of abusive behaviour. These issues will then be set against identifying opportunities for greater collaboration, and multi-agency engagement. Again, this sought to learn from existing good practice and outlines some of the benefits of getting such collaboration right.

## **Responses**

Currently, within the United Kingdom, there are several programmes, highlighted at Chapter one, which respond to parent abuse cases. Some of these are unique in their design, whilst others utilise existing and well recognised programmes, designed and used in other countries. As will be seen below, these programmes frequently involve cognitive and behavioural engagement with both young people and parents, to begin the process of building understanding and behavioural boundaries into the relationships. These involve quite intensive and detailed involvement and commitment, not just by the young people, but also the parents. The programmes also place heavy demands on the practitioners who work tirelessly to deliver successful outcomes.

Responding to parent abuse is itself a challenging process to undertake, not least because of the many varied issues affecting the many families involved. There were a wide range of responses which were highlighted across the three boroughs. Within two of the boroughs there were relatively new and emerging programmes which were specifically responding to parent abuse incidents. This did not, however, mean that parent abuse cases in the third borough were not responded to. Quite the opposite was occurring, with evidence of innovative responding which was very similar in context to the other two boroughs.

The designing of programmes to fit commissioning requirements or specific cases was a common theme highlighted by those interviewed. This was also the case even where the onset of austerity-driven cuts was posing challenges to local statutory agency managers. A third sector manager who had been commissioned to deliver a parent abuse programme highlighted this:

*'We were working with... a clinical psychologist [on a] programme running already around adolescent parent violence, which are 16 week long programmes. When we were working with the [commissioning agency] their concern was that 16 weeks was too long for their young people for*

*engagement. So they wanted a shorter programme... looking at around six weeks. We managed to stretch in what has been developed as an eight-week group work programme... In itself, that's slightly challenging because it's behaviour change work and eight weeks is quite limiting. But in terms of what we've developed it's a good programme that should meet the need'. (P2)*

This level of flexibility demonstrated an intention on the part of those agencies involved in these responses, to develop the most suitable means of responding to parent abuse cases, based on the available time constraints and resources. Such strategic designing of responding was mirrored at a tactical level, by those engaging with the families involved. Two youth justice practitioners working on a parent abuse programme highlighted similar flexibility in the delivery of their services to parents and young people caught up in parent abuse:

*'I will work with the young people and [my colleague] will work with the [parent], and we run alongside [each other]. So we get to meet them and I can talk about what [the programme] is, then we do our separate work and then towards the end we will bring [the parent and young person] both together to kind of round it off'. (P4)*

*'Yeah, it's normally about four [sessions] with parents... But you will find your first two weeks are just listening to them... And then we will do a few more structured sessions looking at listening to your child, how you respond to them, what to do when there is a violent situation... So whichever applies to their situation is the ones that I will do'. (P5)*

The 'bespoke' nature of these comments were mirrored by another youth justice worker who raised the importance of developing a unique process for dealing with the individual needs of the families involved:

*'To build a bespoke plan to wrap services around the young person and the families... To me it's essential because a generic approach to doing an intervention for a young person... has to start in a journey through the*

*offending. A lot of it becomes a paper exercise, you see them once a week, once a fortnight, [and] you do some work sheets... It's more about "this is the young person", "this is the assessment" and "this is how we are going to try and wrap services around the young person" at an earlier stage'. (P12)*

The alternatives to such bespoke and individualised plans are likely to be overly generic and rigid processes, which fail to take account of the multi-complex needs of the young people, many of which come from troubled backgrounds. Although such individualised plans are likely to be more complex to develop, and resource intensive, those interviewed believed that they are also likely to achieve greater preventative outcomes. In effect, if practitioners effectively engage with and build proportionate and detailed plans around families, which 'wrap' the right support around them, there was a widely held belief that this will offer both efficient and inter-agency opportunities to the agencies involved, and will deliver empathetic and well-received support to families. Such issues, at a strategic level, are also likely to lead to efficiency savings and greater collaborative ventures between agencies, by disrupting parent abuse and preventing longer-term problems, as the young people get older.

Examples were also highlighted of the work done to cascade knowledge of parent abuse programmes across agencies, to increase awareness of the training opportunities available. A family support worker, engaged in multi-agency risk coordinating highlighted the extent to which a multi-agency safeguarding team had gone to, to deliver such messages:

*'We have done a lot of marketing on what we are doing with the [parent abuse programme], how to make referrals and what type of referrals we want... and then their responsibility has been cascading that down to their staff, so that they understand'. (P10)*

This is an important principle, in that, if a new programme of multi-agency intervention is to be successful on an equal level across agencies, then it must involve a wide degree of marketing, in order to raise awareness and



secure the referring in of cases from within all the agencies concerned. As a result of parent abuse cases coming to the attention of agencies greater and more 'informed' signposting of families to the support they need can ensue. This takes account of the specific and individual needs of the families concerned. A multi-agency safeguarding manager highlighted the signposting opportunities that could arise from parent abuse referrals:

*'We could signpost the young person to Youth Offending Service prevention services, sometimes they're statutorily involved if the parent wants to pursue a prosecution and has given a statement. But more commonly parents are very reluctant to do that. We can refer to anger management, outreach, one-to-one work with the young person and give parents support. If there's mental health issues or drug and alcohol issues there's agencies which we could refer on to. That can be a challenge because these angry young men usually don't say they've got an issue with drugs or alcohol and those agencies need buy-in from the young person'. (P14)*

Therefore, despite the opportunities offered where specific parent abuse programmes are in place, problems still can be encountered where the young people concerned do not want to engage with services. In this regard, practitioners interviewed outlined the importance of having and demonstrating the right skills and abilities when dealing with vulnerable young people. One youth worker who was working with parent abuse perpetrators highlighted the challenges involved:

*'I've had some really, really challenging young people, where I've delivered three sessions and I've gone to managers and just said "you know, they are not prepared to acknowledge errors in their behaviour". So how do you move somebody on from this and basically the managers have said "you are going to have to use your soft skills and you are going to have to kind of work them round" and actually some of the more challenging cases have been coming towards the end... but some of them have led right through all the different stages and they are still kind of [involved]'. (P4)*

Such successes are testament to the skills and experience of those interviewed, and highlight the intervention opportunities available if the right practitioners and skills can become involved with the families concerned. Accordingly, it is essential that practitioners develop realistic plans to fit the needs of the people that they are trying to engage with. It is also important, in such circumstances, that the practitioners' line managers have a realistic awareness of the challenges involved and are supportive of the engagement activity, this is because of the potential difficulties involved in securing the buy-in from families. Furthermore, from a strategic performance perspective, such challenges should be factored in to governance frameworks, so that realistic timeframes can be built around the activities, in order that every opportunity is allowed to successfully see through the engagement. This will place additional pressures on agencies, from a financial perspective, given the need to commit greater investment of resources, but is likely to offer opportunities to reduce costs in the long term, through successful intervention.

The nature of engagement activity with perpetrators across the agencies involved tended to focus on a cognitive behavioural approach. This approach is said to correct perpetrators' dysfunctional thinking away from the problematic behaviour through a process of cognitive self-reflective analysis, so that they can divert their behaviour to more socially acceptable outcomes in certain situations. The approach also seeks to establish a means whereby perpetrators can actively avoid situations which heightens the risk of problematic behaviour (Lipsey, Chapman & Landenberger, 2001, p.145). However, those interviewed suggested that such cognitive behavioural work was also being successfully implemented with parents. One family support worker outlined how she went about setting the scene and supporting parents:

*'I put [parents] on one-to-one support, if they want [it]. Do things like safety planning, talking about rights and responsibilities, you know, when they think "I can't do this because I'm the parent", actually you can'. (P8)*

Another support worker, who worked closely with abused parents went further, stating:

*'It's about up-skilling the parents so they know when your child is screaming like a lunatic, you shouldn't be screaming back at them, because you both then, you are just escalating the situation. It's more about removing yourself from the situation, making sure that your younger children are safe'. (P5)*

Working with parents in this manner is likely to have far more positive outcomes, in the eyes of those interviewed. Situationally, those interviewed believed such instances are likely to be triggered by the inability of young people to deal with behaviour on the part of the parent. Whilst the specific situation behind such incidents was not relayed in the above example, this demonstrates the importance of engaging with parents and perpetrators, if parent abuse incidents are to be disrupted and prevented. By adopting a supportive approach, rather than reprimanding parents for perceived failings may also instil greater confidence in the minds of parents, thus developing a more informed approach to their children in the longer term.

Therefore, this approach seeks to assist parents not only to understand what the young people are doing within their therapy, but also to begin to understand why they are doing this, and how it is likely to impact on them as parents. Furthermore, this approach is similar, in delivery, to the parent sessions, in that both parents and young people are asked to consciously dissect their behaviour and build a better understanding of how and why it impacts on others in the household. The importance of avoiding confrontation is also important to the sessions, to that parents and their children can consciously avoid catalytic situations that are likely to lead to confrontation.

Throughout the interviews, the issue of safeguarding was also a common theme raised by participants. Safeguarding was seen as important both to parents and the young people, given the vulnerability on both sides. A family support worker, from a third sector background outlined the importance of this, particularly with regards the young people not known to the youth justice

sector, who could have greater problems in securing support and intervention opportunities:

*'[The youth justice process] doesn't cover a whole host of other people... Then we've got a big gap where we aren't getting anyone any one-to-one [support]. So that's where the youth service are trying to pick up that and offer one-to-one support and using their [staff] who know about domestic abuse. They can kind of work around some of those specific issues'. (P10)*

There was an acknowledgement of the increased risk of young perpetrators growing in to adult domestic abuse perpetrators or presenting an increased risk of being drawn in to wider criminality. Another issue raised the importance of treating the young perpetrators as vulnerable people themselves, because of the longer term harm that perpetrating parent abuse could cause to them. Whilst this approach may raise the risk of longer term demand on services it does identify the opportunities from preventing long-term harm. More importantly, however, is the risk presented to the families of such individuals currently and in the longer term. Such continued delinquency and criminality will only add to the longer term harm to family members and future partners and children, if effective intervention does not take place.

In managing and coordinating the responses to parent abuse cases, governance was seen as an important process to develop. This was highlighted by a multi-agency support worker who outlined the governance process for dealing with cases of parent abuse:

*'There are meetings now that people can be referred to. So anything that's high risk, 16, 17 [years' old] goes to MARAC, with the adult stuff... Anyone that doesn't fit that criteria, we have another meeting... after MARAC. It's a multi-agency meeting that has all the services that work with young people. So it has Youth Offending Service, Youth Service, Children's Services, health, colleges, [we are] trying to get someone from schools to come, CAMHS, the police, a whole host of different people... We are looking at a case and saying "right, what can we do to intervene? Who wants to take an*

*action away?” So it’s official, it’s there, you update it and everyone can see you’ve done your targets for that week... It’s a young person’s domestic abuse meeting... of which parent abuse is a massive part of that’. (P10)*

Such governance processes can ensure timely and effective management of finite resources, and also deliver thorough multi-agency responses to the families involved. These structures are also seen to be of benefit to senior managers across the agencies involved, who are able to ensure value for money and hold the agencies involved to account, ensuring everyone is playing their part. More importantly, however, is that the effectiveness and efficiencies of the agencies involved can be scrutinised to maintain sustained service delivery to the families involved, in order to deliver the much needed support and to safeguard all concerned, as a result.

### **Austerity**

The banking crisis of 2008 and the ensuing global recession had a significant impact on the economies of countries across the world. This was no different in the United Kingdom, and the election of 2010 saw a Coalition government reducing public spending by 20%. This saw thousands of public sector employees losing their jobs, and significant changes made to the welfare state and other important areas of support, particularly which helped those most vulnerable in society (Richardson, 2010, p.505). The general election of 2015 brought a Conservative party victory, with them winning a majority stake in the House of Commons. With government deficits still running into billions of pounds, the government stated an intention to continue further challenging cuts to public sector spending.

Such issues have presented challenges to most public sector organisations, and this was something that generated many concerns from those interviewed, both from a public and third sector background. A key concern of those interviewed, was the threat of job cuts. This was an important and notable issue, because this equally impacted on third sector practitioners as well as those from public sector agencies. When asked about the implications

of austerity, a third sector practitioner based in a multi-agency safeguarding setting commented:

*'Well there will probably be half of those people that are trained to do the job, might not be in a job, and then we are back to square one. If we know it's a problem, but what can we do about it?.. So the staple kind of referrers to this project might not necessarily be working on the ground anyway. And the people at a higher level [as well], because I think [in this borough], the cuts are going to be across management level again. But some of those managers are heavily involved in this [parent abuse] process... and if we don't have them... we will lose some of the key components really and that whole cog that is currently turning and gathering some emphasis is going to stop'. (P10)*

With the commissioning out of services to third sector agencies, such commissioning involves public sector funding. Therefore, cut backs can have an equally detrimental effect on third sector organisations that rely on the public sector for funding, particularly where they are supplying services to the public sector in support of vulnerable families. In the above example, if such cuts were to occur, it is likely that there would be risks to staff, but also to the future prospects for success of parent abuse activity. This would be further hindered if indeed managers who are supportive of current activity were to lose their jobs, as it is likely that the momentum of such programmes would be adversely affected by job losses. This, of course, would have a significantly detrimental effect on the families involved.

Other threats presented by cut backs could also directly hit the successes seen on existing parent abuse activity and programmes. A youth worker, who supports parent abuse perpetrators outlined concerns of the knock on effects that cuts would have to the scale of work to be dealt with:

*'I think we've been quite fortunate at the moment, because managers are aware of this kind of snowballing [of parent abuse cases]. It's getting bigger and bigger and bigger and they are allowing us our [non parent abuse] caseloads to get smaller and smaller, to take into account these are the young*

*people we are working with, as part of this [programme]. But I think at some point if [staff numbers] are diminishing and we are getting smaller, it's just going to be the pressure... [and the programme] is going to be rushed, it's not going to be completed as good as it possibly can'. (P4)*

Therefore, reductions in staff numbers are likely to impact on partner agencies, as the remaining staff take on added responsibilities, thus reducing their capabilities to do their primary roles. The pressure of having to sustain service delivery and quality are likely to place additional burdens on agencies and particularly managerial staff, as they strive to meet demands. Furthermore, staff taking on such extra work are potentially less likely to be as experienced in carrying out such roles, which could also reduce the quality of the work carried out. Such issues are also complicated where agencies are subjected to inspection regimes, such as the police, with HMIC and the IPCC, schools facing OFSTED inspections, and other agencies facing similar inspections. The implications of such poor inspections could also very well have a detrimental effect on public confidence in these agencies, and thus adversely reduce the reporting of parent abuse cases.

Furthermore, the knock-on effects of cut backs to other services was also outlined by an interviewee from a health background who identified pressures of increased demand to 'agencies of last resort':

*'I've got a lot of anxieties about what is likely to happen over the next few years. The council and funding cuts to youth services that are proposed locally and other things. Unfortunately, it's the police and [health] that can't turn people away when they turn up. We are services that have no limit to what we do if they turn up and we've got to deal with it. And with health services... it's A+E as well. And often it's because society has let them down in other areas that they end up with us. So unfortunately the pressures on health services and the police who can't say no are going to increase because obviously fewer other services are being provided by society. So yes, I've got major worries, about the impact on services that are also getting an additional*

*decrease in funding but have no way of controlling the workload that actually comes to them'. (P17)*

If demand therefore is passed on to other agencies, as a result of cut-backs this potentially risks undermining existing collaborative arrangements, as agencies could resume a defensive 'silo' mentality, in order to ensure longer-term resilience of their own resources. If this were to be the case this could break down existing partnerships and, in effect, encourage a short termism attitude amongst agencies.

Again, such developments would hardly play out in the interests of the families at the centre of the cases involved. However, health and police resources do not have the luxury of being able to refuse to deal with people seeking help. This potentially presents double pressures on such agencies, particularly the police, who are likely to encounter greater demand, whilst facing their own increased budget cuts. Furthermore, get things wrong and the implications presented by failings in duties of care could lead to bigger strategic problems, and increased risks of litigation.

Over recent years, a great deal of collaboration has taken place, across agencies, in the face of drastic reductions in public spending and ever-increasing public expectations. This has certainly been the case in Greater Manchester, particularly with regards the tackling of organised crime by a wide variety of agencies (Greater Manchester Police: report to the Police and Crime Commissioner on the Force Delivery Plan, 2013, p.7). It was therefore reassuring that several participants when asked about austerity raised positive opportunities for greater collaborative working. A multi-agency safeguarding practitioner raised the importance of agencies working together:

*'I think there's a lot of committed services. There may be waiting lists for some services, but we get good service... We can refer to CAMHS, but they may have a waiting list to see the young person. Our outreach team are excellent and we can prioritise and get them in, to prevent a family break-up... With*



*austerity there [are] some challenges out there, but I think we've done quite a good job'. (P14)*

This was built on by a police officer in a safeguarding coordinating role who stated:

*'I think we can still provide an appropriate service around safeguarding, I really do. I think [there's] a significant amount of waste and I think that if we work in a more joined up way we can provide an appropriate service and probably a better one. I don't see it as concerning, we just need to function differently... I'm more positive that [austerity] can drive us into working more efficiently and in collaboration, and prevent a lot of duplication and unnecessary waste'. (P13)*

The practitioner then went on to discuss reviewing existing services to assess the efficiency of individual services:

*'Also the service provision that we provide here, we need to look at which services we are providing, which are successful, which are unsuccessful, which can be decommissioned, which needs greater funding etc. So one of the things we are looking at building into this is [looking at] which services are used on a regular basis and which ones are successful, and then contributing towards that with cost benefit analysis from the new economy, so you understand where your money is going'. (P13)*

It is reassuring that despite the threat of further significant cuts to services, practitioners remain focussed on seeking out innovative and multi-agency development in order to sustain service delivery to those most in need. This can only be of benefit to the organisations themselves, as they continue to address further spending cuts. However, such innovation is also of significant benefit to the wider public, as agencies look to work more closely together in developing better joint-agency working practices, and thus delivering better efficiencies and value for money. Of greatest importance, however, are the opportunities afforded to those families at the centre of the drive to develop

better responses to parent abuse. Such successes can only bring about better understanding of the problem, greater awareness amongst the public and practitioners, and better services as a result.

### **Priorities and opportunities to collaborate**

The practitioners interviewed were asked at the conclusion of the interviews to highlight what they believed their key priorities were in order for agencies to successfully address parent abuse. A key issue highlighted was that of joined-up collaboration between agencies. Collaboration between organisations has been presented as an effective means of pooling dwindling resources to tackle increasing problems, under the spotlight of high public expectations. Such collaboration has been successful in countering serious crime in Greater Manchester. The current push towards Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) across Greater Manchester has brought together agencies working hard to safeguard the most vulnerable in society. A common theme of the analysis has been the securing of effective and efficient service delivery by agencies, bringing value for money to the public purse, and in a manner which puts those needing support at the centre of the activity. Other key themes highlighted, included the raising of awareness of parent abuse with practitioners, parents and perpetrators, developing strategic responses, and above all, developing joined-up processes for delivering support to families.

In raising awareness, a senior third sector practitioner raised the importance of training:

*'I think the number one [priority] for me would be to ensure that the whole workforce understand about why people are violent, and about attachment and trauma. To avoid and understand that it's not about some inherent badness in individuals'. (P2)*

These comments were followed up by a colleague who added:

*'I think [this borough] is part way there. They have acknowledged [parent abuse], they want a service, they want a programme, they want something to deliver. So that's a positive because there [are] other areas where [parent abuse] is acknowledged, it's not on the agenda. But the big priority for me is that we train the right people and once they're trained and supported in the right way that it can continue'.. (P3)*

Therefore, it is not only important to ensure that practitioners have the right skills and awareness of the problem, so that considerate and proportionate support and responses are given to families and particularly parents seeking help, but on a strategic level, that this awareness stretches to senior managers and executives with the power to sustain service delivery. Another practitioner highlighted the importance of strong engagement with the young people involved. This practitioner from a health background stated:

*'I think what's needed is to offer an intervention that helps the child to understand themselves and their own thoughts and feelings and such, in a different way and to understand the way they behave will have consequences for them in future going forwards. But it will possibly need to work to also be undertaken with the parent to get them to understand aspects of the child's emotional needs and development that perhaps they haven't been able to address when the child was younger... Because that would set them up in the longer term because those young people are likely to going to become parents themselves'. (P18)*

This falls within the cognitive behavioural approach already highlighted, but does so in a way that will likely contextualise, in the minds of the young people, the implications of their behaviour. Similarly, parallel engagement with parents is likely to build mutual empathy and could very well contribute towards both parties developing a greater and more empathetic understanding, and avoid confrontational scenarios developing. What is very clear is that there are many gaps in knowledge with regards parent abuse, not just in Greater Manchester, but across the country. This was highlighted

by a third-sector practitioner working within a multi-agency safeguarding team:

*'We want to keep the [parent abuse programme] going... And kind of building on that really and looking at what are the gaps and what are the ways in which we can plug those gaps? Getting the right people on board and identifying who they are, because there might be others out there that we don't know yet and what they are doing... there might already be some fantastic stuff there that we don't really know about yet. So I guess it's for us to explore that some more, explore what we are doing, create a model for us of good practice of what is working [here] and by what is working, looking at what's reducing repeat [incidents], what's reducing victimisation, you know increasing safety'.*  
(P10)

Developing greater knowledge of parent abuse will allow those responding to it to identify gaps in service delivery and also existing good practice, which can influence the evolution of responding practices. At a tactical and local level, this will benefit families and also the practitioners involved, in delivering better services. At a strategic level, again this will contribute towards implementing efficient and cost-effective services, and by doing so, may very well contribute towards the sustaining and support of such services by organisational decision makers. Furthermore, in pooling ideas and resources, this will contribute towards the collaborative activity, which is seen as so important in current public sector and political debate.

An important aspect of learning from current responses in other similar areas was the potential to align parent abuse responding to existing domestic abuse responses. A practitioner supporting a parent abuse programme suggested:

*'I think [parent abuse] should be part of the domestic abuse strategies that agencies are putting out... I think it's got to sit with children's and family services. It's got to sit with social care as a lead agency. Because of the safeguard child protection elements that's there. I think there [are] arguments*

*around vulnerable adults, around, you know, children's teams, so how that is structured, again varies by area'. (P6)*

This is a contentious issue, as there are contrasting views on whether parent abuse should be classed as domestic abuse, by both researchers and practitioners alike. There are also strong arguments from this research programme to suggest parent abuse is itself a unique problem. Whilst this may be the case it remains that the agencies responding to domestic abuse will also be best placed to become involved in the responding to parent abuse, because of their specialisms and existing skills. One could therefore argue that such parent abuse responding programmes should be closely associated. Furthermore, what is clear, from the current responding activity, many of the key parent abuse themes implemented are very similar in design and structure to those which deal with domestic abuse between adults. This is also the case with regards collaboration, and coordination of governance processes. What is also likely to be contentious, however, is the selection of one lead agency to deal with this problem. There are clearly strong arguments linking parent abuse to social care, given the links to family safeguarding and well-being, however as agencies, family services are already stretched and facing significant budget cuts in the longer term.

In support of the above arguments were further comments made by a senior practitioner from a youth justice setting:

*'I think that one of the difficulties that the families will have, if they are not careful, is that there are too many agencies involved. You know, there is schools, Social Services, the Youth Offending Service, maybe mental health agencies. Now you throw in [a charity] as well and let's think... who else might there be, a neighbourhood policeman calling round... and if we're not careful, it becomes too complicated, too confusing and nobody knows who's doing what to whom... [Research suggests] that the key worker [principle] is an important contributor to success and cost reduction... So if you are going to bring in multiple agencies who have got specialist skills, that's fine, but there needs to be a key lead agency who actually has the accountability and... in*

*the same way that the Youth Offending Service [use] Offender Managers’.*  
(P11)

There are therefore, real advantages of utilising the lead agency concept, as these can very well avoid repetition and duplication of responding and services. Such key workers are the single point of contact for families and facilitate contact or support from other agencies. Indeed, this very model is used by one of the parent abuse programmes discussed within this research. Such responding is also used within the Troubled Families programme, which supports and engages with families placing the biggest demand on agencies, because of specific needs or behaviours (The Benefits of the Troubled Families Programme to the Taxpayer, 2015, p.3). However, it is important to consider having sound governance around such processes, to ensure that all agencies are effectively supporting the key worker. Otherwise, any failings could reflect badly on the key worker concerned and undermine their credibility in the eyes of the family concerned.

The importance of effectively developing collaborative multi-agency responses through a joined-up approach was frequently raised by those interviewed, and was the most frequent priority raised within the interviews conducted. A key principle of this approach was, it was claimed, the ability to deliver a proportionate response to families. A practitioner from a health setting suggested:

*‘It needs to be a joined up approach, but it needs to be a proportionate approach and it needs to be not excessively intrusive... Maybe what’s needed in relation to this issue, as much as the evidence is there to support it, is to say what kind of signs there are to look for in the event that they are seen and what kind of actions might be proportionate to take next and what kind of other agencies to involve’.* (P18)

If one considers the need to make best use of the available resources in a measured way, such options would seem sensible, in allocating the required professionals to a family’s specific needs. Such actions will potentially be best

for the family concerned, and best for the agencies involved, so that the right responses are given, in order to deliver a proportionate and sufficient level of engagement, intervention and support. Such measures could compliment further arguments, put forward by a youth justice practitioner, who re-iterated the importance of providing intervention which wraps around those involved:

*'I think if you want anything to be successful, it has to come from a multi-agency setting. No one can do it all on their own... [We] are quite lucky in the sense that it's quite, it's a multi-agency team. You've got your drug services in here, you've got your case managers, you've got... education, family support, all in one building. So you've kind of got that holistic picture of service all in one building, so it makes it easier to access and then you are taking on that holistic intervention and helping everybody surrounding that young person'. (P9)*

This issue is important if effective intervention with families is to succeed. This is particularly important where families have very complex needs, which may draw on the skills of various agencies. But one must also consider the above concerns, regarding the avoidance of swamping families with too many points of contact. Such actions, are also likely to be of benefit to the agencies involved as well, as it will ensure an efficient use of the required resources, thus preventing duplication of effort. The importance of such inter-agency engagement was raised as a frequent positive, in existing responding to parent abuse in the three boroughs. Communication between practitioners must be an important factor in any intervention activity, as it will allow practitioners the opportunity to speak to each other, give opinions regarding intervention, but also allow the practitioners to draw on each other's skills, views and experience. Again, this can only be to the benefit of the families being supported. Furthermore, it will allow practitioners to learn from each other and build on the evolving work programmes.

The embedding of multi-agency professionals within safeguarding teams is a key development in generating collaboration in Greater Manchester. The MASH concept has proved successful in dealing with, managing and

coordinating safeguarding activity cross the county. This is likely to be one key area which can prove useful to developing an enhanced responding process for parent abuse, not least for utilising existing resources to tackle the problem. A further advantage of the MASH teams are the ability to swiftly address information sharing requirements. Several practitioners highlighted this as a further priority, with a multi-agency safeguarding manager stating:

*‘The huge advantage of here is the information sharing we’ve got at such an early stage, where we can get health and education and police information quicker than lots of other [local] authorities can, which helps us make better decisions on appropriate action’. (P14)*

A police officer holding a safeguarding coordination role stated similar views:

*‘Sharing information is important, so that you get that piece of the jigsaw that previously you wouldn’t have had when agencies were working in silo... and I think having the agencies here allows you to understand that story much quicker than staff speaking to agencies. They would often spend several hours trying to get a back story on a kid, but now you’ve got them in a room so you can immediately understand’. (P13)*

Safeguarding responding, including that addressing parent abuse, would certainly seem to be moving in the same direction. At a strategic level, a lot of work has gone in to developing MASH teams, including the signing of information sharing agreements. Such activity can therefore result in swift responding by multi-agency partners, in supporting families, which bring efficient and effective outcomes. Such responding also meets statutory agency safeguarding obligations, and would seem to offer significant opportunities for better engagement and intervention with families. Importantly, barriers have been brought down, it would seem, between agencies, so that families suffering parent abuse get more joined-up support, as practitioners are able to work more closely and cohesively together.



## **Conclusion**

Having explored the current responses and set these against the threat from austerity, this Chapter has ultimately sought to identify key examples of good practice. There is much collaborative activity currently taking place in Greater Manchester, which is making good use of resources from various agencies in tackling problems which affect communities. The same processes for agencies engaging together to develop and implement holistic responding can, it is believed, be delivered to tackle parent abuse. The importance of developing effective and broad-ranging strategies is also essential to not only effectively engaging with families, but also delivering value for money to communities and making best use of a variety of agencies. By doing this, other opportunities to disrupt the potential for longer term harm to those caught up in abuse, is also an important consideration. Learning from existing structures, particularly the MASH programmes also presents significant responding opportunities, and is believed to offer swift and effective coordination and intervention opportunities to some of the most vulnerable in our communities.

## **Chapter 6:**

### **Discussion**

#### **Introduction**

Chapters three to five have sought to contextualise parent abuse in Greater Manchester and the current responses that are in place to deal with those cases that come to the attention of agencies. From the interviews conducted and the data provided certain key issues were highlighted, which were triangulated across the research sample, and the organisations that they represented. These issues will be explored in detail below in order to develop an understanding of key factors pertaining to parent abuse and, more importantly, present opportunities for how agencies can better respond to the problem.

#### **The need to raise awareness**

The lack of a definition of what parent abuse is was an issue frequently raised as problematic, across those interviewed. In defining abuse there was a range of responses, despite the practitioners concerned dealing with similar cases of parent abuse on a regular basis. A common definition for parent abuse, which has been published in research is that identified by Cottrell (2001, p.3, Bobic, 2004, p.2 and Calvete *et al*, 2012, p.2), which spoke of 'physical, psychological or financial' harm, in order to gain control against parents. The differences in definition raise important questions with regards understanding and responding to the problem from a cross-jurisdictional perspective (Adolescent Violence in the Home, 2012, p.18, Howard 2011, p.13 and Holt & Retford, 2012, p.4). Therefore, this could highlight the lack of a strategic understanding across agencies, resulting in difficulties in developing joined-up responses to parent abuse, given the variety of beliefs of what it is.

Similarly, if effective responses to parent abuse are to be sustained, a common concern drawn from the research interviews was that of delivering

value for money across agencies. Priority based budgets (PBB) are said to allow local government organisations to allocate resources where they are most needed in communities, based on evidenced priorities (Priority Based Budgeting: Seeing things differently, 2015, paras 1-2). This is further complicated by the lack of a clear definition of the problem. Indeed, how specifically can the concept of parent abuse be understood, when many practitioners do not know what parent abuse is, and given the fact that many parents refuse to report such abuse? Furthermore, if the parents do not recognise that they are being subjected to abuse by their children, it will be extremely difficult to develop effective responses, not least because of the complex factors that have already been identified. All these issues could adversely affect investment in responding to the problem, as the lack of understanding of parent abuse could lead to an under-estimation of its scale. Conversely, such PBB finance streams could offer better opportunities to fund responses to parent abuse, if the profile of the problem is improved, and if agencies can put it 'on the radar'.

All those interviewed stated how parent abuse was a common problem, with many suggesting that cases were increasing. This was in keeping with wider research which highlighted similar problems (Condry & Miles, 2012, p.248, Wilcox, 2012, p.277, Parentline, 2008, cited by Tew & Nixon, 2010, p.580 and McKenna, O'Connor & Verco, 2010, p.1). Yet despite these issues, such has been the success of one of the programmes discussed in the research, where a small team deal specifically with parent abuse cases, that their work-load has grown significantly and within a short time. However, the lack of understanding of parent abuse has meant that it is difficult to gauge whether cases are increasing or being more frequently reported, a phenomenon again recognised in wider research (Nixon, 2012, p.233, Adolescent Violence in the Home, 2012, p.5 and Peek *et al*, 1985, p.1052).

A common concern across the research sample, which was said to inhibit the developing of a clearer understanding of the problem, was that of awareness of what parent abuse is. The lack of awareness was said to be an issue that was common not only across the general public, but also across front-line

practitioners within the many agencies that deal with the public. Such concerns are said to cause particular consternation amongst parents who are suffering such abuse, who feel isolated when seeking help and support (Chamberlain, 2009, p.11, Vink & Pannebakker, 2013, p.3, McKenna, O'Connor & Verco, 2010, p.17 and Kennair & Mellor, 2007, p.218). However, more recently, the improving awareness across agencies has been highlighted, as participants talked of practitioners recognising parent abuse incidents, (Miles, 2014, p.2, Baker, 2012a, p.48, and Miles & Condry, 2014, p.3).

As with other issues in society, it is likely that an ignorance of the problem could very well lead to misunderstandings of it. Those interviewed suggested that parents possessed a fear of being blamed as 'failed' parents by the community and practitioners alike. There is also a belief that such a lack of awareness on the part of practitioners could also lead to poor responding and missed opportunities (Parentline, 2010, p.22, Furlong *et al*, 1991, cited by Howard & Rottem, 2008, p.18 and McKenna, O'Connor & Verco, 2010, p.13). However, in a positive context, what was seen was that better awareness of parent abuse brought about better prevention and disruption opportunities, when engaging with families. Furthermore, as was seen across all of the boroughs, such enhanced responding opportunities presented significant benefits from increased effectiveness by agencies, and with this, wider safeguarding successes and more efficient service delivery. Consequently, such opportunities can present real strategic cost benefits across agencies, where longer term prevention is enabled by agencies (The Benefits of the Troubled Families Programme to the Taxpayer, 2015, p.13 and Buckhurst, 2010, p.21).

If such successes are not seized upon, the alternatives may see parents who suffer abuse simply go 'underground'. Parents may fail to report incidents and not seek the help that they need, and instead opt to suffer in silence and fail to report incidents (Stewart, Burns and Leonard, 2007, p.190, Agnew & Huguley, 1989, p.699 and Hastie, 1998 cited by Jackson, 2003, p.327). Consequently, such under-reporting is likely to place added and longer-term

burdens on already shrinking public services, as a result of related problems affecting parents, perpetrators and other children. It was therefore said to be essential to develop and cascade effective messages to the public and practitioners alike, in seeking to create a greater and more empathetic awareness of parent abuse.

Across those interviewed, there was wide agreement that where investment was committed to the training of suitably skilled and experienced key practitioners, improved identification and referral of parent abuse cases resulted. Better training of those responding to parent abuse has frequently been highlighted as an important factor in delivering better responses to the problem (Haw, 2010, p.48, Adolescent Violence in the Home, 2012, p.19, Holt & Retford, 2012, p.8 and Howard & Rottem, 2008, p.69). Those interviewed suggested that better training of practitioners may also bring about more effective responding to families, and improvements in service, which may result in less under-reporting of incidents. Equally, all suggested that developing holistic and multi-agency responding is essential in supporting families and delivering 'joined up' services. Such successes have been seen in other categories of domestic abuse and have certainly been put forward as important to addressing parent abuse (Holt, 2013, pp.116-17, Wilcox, 2012, p.282 and Cottrell & Monk, 2004, p.1094).

When seeking to corroborate the opportunities of investing in training and improving the responding of key staff, it is important to be cognisant of the programmes which currently exist across the agencies whose staff participated in the research. The training delivered to a multitude of agencies by those providing specific parent abuse programmes was recognised as enabling real improvements in supporting families and increasing the awareness amongst practitioners. However, it is equally important to acknowledge the training and skills investment which has been brought to bear in other agencies which do not have specific parent abuse programmes, but whose staff face the same challenges. With the right skills and experience key staff can, it was claimed, play a leading part in engaging with families

caught up in such abuse and begin the process of providing better support to the families concerned.

There are strong indicators that demonstrate how current activity in Greater Manchester is successfully developing specific programmes to respond to parent abuse. Whilst such improvements are difficult to measure quantitatively, because of the problems in defining and identifying cases of parent abuse, those practitioners interviewed who are involved with or refer to the current parent abuse programmes, suggest a reassuring trend towards the take-up and engagement of families in the programmes concerned. Furthermore, practitioners talked of increasing demand. This can only be of benefit in the longer term. However, this does raise important implications of needing to effectively identify and measure successes in the future, in order that the efficacy of such parent abuse programmes can be demonstrated, not least for those commissioning future safeguarding services, and seeking PBB-based investment.

### **Parent Abuse: a unique problem?**

In seeking to respond to some of the issues above, can we not learn from earlier responding to domestic abuse and other problems, such as child sexual exploitation? Improvements in such areas start with agencies taking the difficult step of acknowledging that the problem exists, and then working closely together to develop and implement multi-agency strategies to deal with the problem concerned (Firmin & Beckett, 2014, p.139, Report to the Commissioner on the Force Delivery Plan, 2013, pp.7-8, and Multi-Agency Working and Information Sharing Project, 2013, p.7). Only then can agencies start to raise awareness and educate the public to the issue concerned, and begin to build integrated methods of responding. Therefore, if agencies are to address the complexities created by a 'non-definition' of parent abuse, and a lack of awareness of the problem, an integrated response should be developed which acknowledges and strategically addresses these problems.

There is a growing tide of academic research into parent abuse, which has significantly increased over the last five to ten years. Much of this research has sought to construct parent abuse and highlight it as a problem. Researchers have also frequently proposed areas worthy of further research. However, as a researching practitioner who has focused on parent abuse for the last five years, I strongly believe that the point is well overdue where we must act now to begin the process of responding to parent abuse, in a joined-up manner.

A significant fear that I have as a practitioner-researcher is that parent abuse will be seen as 'yet another' category of family violence or dysfunctional juvenile behaviour. I, and many other researchers and practitioners strongly believe that it is much more than that, and is a problem which can lead to longer-term harm for all involved, be they the parents, the young people perpetrating abuse, or other family members. Tragically, I have seen the implications of parent abuse, as a practitioner, first hand, and how it can lead to the serious injury or death of those involved. There have been several examples of such incidents in the North West of England over recent years, culminating in very serious injury or loss of life, through parent abuse incidents. Some of these incidents have occurred in the policing divisions where I have worked.

Accordingly, reference has been made throughout this Thesis suggesting that parent abuse is a unique problem, but how is it unique? There are similarities between parent abuse and domestic abuse, because of the violent and abusive incidents that occur in the home. However, parent abuse has significant factors which set it apart from other types of family violence. All too often, practitioners interviewed voiced concerns, which are mirrored in wider research, that parents when victimised by their children can find themselves, if reporting incidents, suffering punitive outcomes from the authorities, as if facing secondary victimisation (Robinson, 2010, p.8, Hunter & Piper, 2012, p.220, Holt, 2011, p.187 and Holt, 2008, cited by Baker, 2012b, p.268). Furthermore, such predicaments are compounded by the relationship between parents and their children, in that the parental 'bond' and onus of

responsibility makes it hard for parents to simply leave the home, to get away from their abuser (Coogan 2011, p.351, Miles & Condry, 2014, p.6, Haw, 2010, p.109 and O'Connor, 2007, p.45). The complex parent-child relationship issue is also complicated by the way that existing policy frameworks expect parents to exert control in the home over their children, rather than face violence and abuse from them. In effect, policy in the United Kingdom currently fails to acknowledge the phenomenon that is parent abuse (Condry & Miles, 2013, p.3, Tew & Nixon, 2010, p.580, Baker, 2012b, p.266, and Holt, 2009a, p.7).

A factor which further sets out parent abuse as a unique problem sees incidents involving parents and children sit only within child safeguarding, child protection, criminal justice or social care, and this fails to address parent abuse as a problem in its own right (Adolescent Violence in the Home, 2012, p.18, Coogan, 2011, p.352, Cottrell & Monk, 2004, p.1090, and Miles & Condry, 2014, p.3). There was widespread agreement both by those interviewed, and wider research that parent abuse incidents go unreported by parents, through a fear of being blamed. Parents are also fearful of criminalising or losing their children, if reporting incidents (Home Office Information Guide: adolescent to parent violence and abuse, 2015, p.22, Miles, 2014, p.12, Hunter & Piper, 2012, p.219 and Bobic, 2004, p.3). Concerns were also raised about punitive outcomes, because of the parental responsibility between the child and the parent. Examples were given where parents when seeking help for their children's behaviour were held responsible for the incidents resulting in them receiving Parenting Orders. Other examples, however, have also seen perverse incidents where parents have to pay the fines imposed on their children, despite being the victims involved. Such instances do nothing to maintain the public's confidence in the justice system, and is likely to deter parents from reporting further incidents of abuse by their children.



## **A Restorative approach**

Therefore, any responding must consider the need for 'softer' outcomes, which are less punitive towards both victims and abusers, and that follow restorative practices, such as those encountered in this research programme. Over recent years responding to crime through restorative justice has been seen as a better response to dealing with young people, in an attempt to avoid stigmatising them for the rest of their lives, as well as putting victims at the centre of the response (Kirton, 2013, pp.352-3, Hoyle & Zedner, 2007, p.485 and Newburn, 2013, p.768). The positives of restorative justice were seen to offer a number of advantages, as opposed to the previous 'tough on crime' rhetoric of the Labour government under Tony Blair. The opportunities from restorative justice offering rehabilitation, and preventative options, as opposed to custody appeared favourable to a new Coalition government keen to see savings in the criminal justice system (Kirton, 2013, pp.352-3 and Newburn, 2013, pp.770-71). It was seen as a means of focussing greater attention on the 'harm' of a criminal offence and how the impact of the harm could be addressed (Routt & Anderson, 2016, pp.21-22 and Ptacek, 2010, pp.7-8). As the notion of restorative justice grew, the advantages of this approach of putting a greater emphasis on the interests of victims was deemed an ideal response to domestic abuse against women and offences committed between family members (Frederick & Lizdas, 2010, p.49).

Current restorative practices are similar to many of the intervention programmes used when dealing with families caught up in parent abuse. Practitioners mediate and facilitate engagement with those involved, both perpetrators and victims, in a 'conference' where the implications and outcomes of abuse are discussed between the parties concerned (Routt & Anderson, 2015, pp.128-9 and Holt, 2013, pp.136-7). Whilst restorative justice in a wider crime setting is aimed at dealing with one-off cases, research has suggested in a small scale research case that such programmes can and do work with parent abuse cases (Doran, 2007 cited by Holt, 2013, p.136). It is also said to be beneficial in allowing those involved to

express their feelings with new found skills in a controlled and supervised environment (Routt & Anderson, 2016, p.24).

There have been some who have urged caution over the use of restorative practices with victims of violent crime, as it may 're-victimise' victims, when recounting their traumatic experiences (Stubbs, 2002 cited by Holt, 2016, p.24). Furthermore, some question whether the use of restorative justice, particularly in a family violence setting, and given the 'inverted' power dynamics involved in parent abuse can work (Daly & Nancarrow, 2010, cited by Condry & Miles, 2013, p.15). Similarly, others have suggested that the very nature of perpetrators and victims recounting cases of abuse may allow opportunities for further abuse of victims by those that have abused them (Daly & Stubbs, cited by Holt, 2016, p.6). The complexity of parent abuse has also been highlighted as potentially compounding the difficulties in successfully seeing through restorative justice processes. Victims, particularly mothers, are eager to self-blame, and the numerous incidents of abusive behaviour make the 'standard' mediated restorative conferences ill-equipped to cope with and resolve cases of parent abuse (Daly & Nancarrow, 2008, p.33).

Others, however have highlighted significant successes in reducing recidivism by violent offenders (Hoyle & Zedner, 2007, p.485 and Newburn, 2013, pp.785-6). Therefore, there may be opportunities to follow in using restorative practices within parent abuse. Indeed, the use of restorative justice by the police, in dealing with parent abuse is put forward by the Home Office, in its guidance document (Home Office Information Guide: Adolescent to parent violence and abuse, 2015, p.22). Routt and Anderson (2015, pp.134-5) however argue in favour of using restorative practices to 'break' repeating instances of parent abuse within families. Restorative justice is seen as an integral part of the 'Step-Up' parent abuse programme (Adolescent Violence in the Home, 2012, p.54). Indeed, the use of such intervention has been highlighted as advantageous in allowing parents to feel believed and offers a non-judgemental and interactive means of engaging

with their children (Doran, 2007 cited by Holt, 2015, pp.136-7, Routt & Anderson, 2015, pp.134-5, Daly & Nancarrow, 2010, pp.169-70 and Routt & Anderson, 2016, p.25).

Yet, surprisingly, the notion of restorative justice is not seen as conducive to the 'children first, offenders second' concept, because of the primary victim focus, and the secondary 'offender' label on those who have committed the incidents (Haines & case, 2015, pp.53-4). However, I believe such arguments are too simplistic, and that, if designed and implemented properly, restorative alternatives offer real opportunities to dealing with parent abuse. Arguments have been set out at Chapter one which suggest current policy is weighted very heavily in favour of children and are frequently to the detriment of the parent victims. At the same time, I believe in the notion of avoiding the criminalisation of the children, who are themselves vulnerable by way of their age and behaviour. Leading researchers and restorative practitioners have put forward softer options for dealing with parent abuse, and indeed such activity has been seen to work well within existing parent abuse activity captured within this research programme.

The successes of parent abuse programmes stem from addressing the cognitive and behavioural factors which influence the behaviours of those involved. Practitioners engage with parents and children in order to repair the relationships and behaviours, and do so in a manner which compliments ongoing and sustained harmony within families. I believe it is therefore essential that the learning from such programmes is encouraged and incorporated into wider multi-agency responding to cascade this good practice to a greater number of families.

### **Aggravating factors and the need for Risk Assessment**

Mothers, particularly those who were single parents, were described as the most common victims of parent abuse, and at particular risk were those mothers with a history of suffering domestic abuse at the hands of partners (Gallagher, 2004, p.2, Haw, 2010, p.77, and Hong *et al*, 2012, p.447). Such

known higher-risk groups could, however, offer significant opportunities in the 'profiling' and identification of individuals who were at particular risk of victimisation from parent abuse. Whilst some participants did offer the caveat that not all single parents were at risk of parent abuse, the increased risk factor of victimisation may offer agencies a means of enabling a more targeted approach to identifying and therefore engaging with potentially 'higher-risk' families.

Similarly, data on perpetrators tended to mirror wider research, but what was abundantly clear from those interviewed, was that there was no 'one size fits all' category of perpetrator. Many previous researchers have suggested perpetrators tended to be male of middle teenage years, and from single parent backgrounds (Agnew & Huguley, 1989, pp.706-7, Condry & Miles, 2013, p.4 and Parentline, 2010, p.5). Some research has also suggested that perpetrators had troubled backgrounds (Bobic, 2004, pp.4-5 and Howard & Rottem, 2008, pp.29-30). Whilst there was wide agreement across the research sample that most of the perpetrators were males from homes with a history of domestic abuse, there was also widespread agreement that most of the young males concerned had a range of problematic and behavioural issues which, it was believed, adversely affected their relationships with the parents involved. Again, there are opportunities to be drawn from this, with regards the potential for profiling and identifying 'at risk' young males who are likely to present an increased risk of perpetrating parent abuse. This, therefore, poses potential positive opportunities if screening such cases, and could support the notion of developing a means of consistently assessing the risks presented by such young people.

In domestic abuse cases involving intimate partners, the need to effectively assess and manage the risks faced by victims over recent years has resulted in the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk assessment tool. This has been used to deliver a consistent and measured assessment of risk facing victims, based on a set of standardised questions (Miles & Condry, 2014, p.5, Miles, 2014, p.4, Hester, 2011, p.844 and DASH (2009), 2015, paras1-4). Whilst the unique nature of parent abuse

would, I believe, preclude it from being fully suitable to the DASH risk assessment structure, because of the relationship between the parents and children, it does present good opportunities on which to draw learning, for the benefit of developing some form of risk assessment tool focussed specifically on parent abuse cases. This could better support those agencies dealing with the families involved, and allow a degree of consistency in risk assessment and thus intervention planning, particularly for the very complex families involved.

A distinct advantage of the DASH assessment has been the ability to assign levels of risk to the cases which are assessed. These fall into 'standard', 'medium' and 'high' risk categories, and will direct the level of resources allocated to cases. Throughout the research discussed in Chapters three to five, varying degrees of severity of behaviour were seen in the families concerned. These problems ranged across the mental health, behavioural and parenting spectrums, and presented a significant variety of complex issues which needed addressing. It is therefore essential that, with finite resources, managers are able to make their decisions based on the level of risk which families are deemed to face. Such risk assessments are also likely to build a detailed picture of the particular problems facing families, and these assessments will no doubt positively contribute towards the building of bespoke responding plans, and also allow decisions to be made on the most suitable resources to commit to the families' involved.

Causational and behavioural factors were frequently put forward by research participants, which they said aggravated the abusive behaviour by the young people involved. Three significant contributory factors were put forward, these being:

- Learnt behaviours
- Mental health and behavioural issues in young people
- Cannabis misuse and related financial abuse

These were particularly challenging where the families had a range of complex needs across the family members (Adolescent Violence in the Home, 2012, p.28, Biehal, 2012, p.257, and Edenborough, 2007, p.206). Poor boundary setting and parenting skills were frequently put forward as contributing towards the causes of parent abuse, which have themselves been said to exacerbate problems, in disinhibiting children from the demonstrating of bad behaviour towards parents (Bonnick, 2012a, p.27, Cottrell, 2001, p.27 and Routt & Anderson, 2015, p.64).

Significantly, learnt behaviours were highlighted as one of the most frequent contributory factors to young people perpetrating abuse against parents. This was particularly common in families with a history of domestic violence between the parents. Wider research has suggested that mothers have previously highlighted this as an 'inherited' personality trait in their children (Daly & Wade, 2015, p.4, and Howard & Rottem, 2008, p.48). The Greater Manchester research participants also strongly believed that young males had very much learnt their abusive characteristics from absent fathers or ex-partners.

Mental health and behavioural issues were said to be very common across the cohorts of parent abuse perpetrators. Such concerns are not uncommon amongst young people perpetrating parent abuse, with some statistics suggesting over 40% of perpetrators have mental health issues (Parentline: When Family Life Hurts, 2010, p.4, Routt & Anderson, 2011, p.9, Howard, 2011, p.11 and Haw, 2010, p.6). It was suggested as many as 80% of young offenders who were known to perpetrate parent abuse in one borough were known to have mental health problems, which I believe contributes significantly to the discourse around this apparent contributory factor. The Greater Manchester research is clearly at odds with earlier research of Cottrell (2001, pp.23-4), who suggests the 'rare' occurrences of serious mental health and 'some' examples of less-serious conditions are evident. It is unclear whether the findings in this thesis are symptomatic of the increase in awareness and prevalence of mental health issues in young people, or is itself something unique to Greater Manchester. It is, none the less worthy of

further exploration, not least for the benefit of those caught up in parent abuse, and is recommended for further research in the Thesis conclusions.

Across a broader spectrum, young people diagnosed with ADHD and autism featured frequently within the cohorts of parent abuse perpetrators, and this was particularly common amongst younger children. Such children were also frequently known as being troublesome or problematic within the school environment, which presented further behavioural and responding implications (Bonnick, 2012a, p.27). The current challenges facing CAMHS, with regards the volume of cases, is placing additional pressures on agencies. This in itself, is likely to place additional burdens across other agencies, most notably the police and social services, who frequently have to deal with the perpetrators' actions inside and outside the home (Biehal, 2012, p.255).

In considering the responding opportunities to young people with mental health issues, it is also essential that effective and diversional solutions are sought, which avoids the criminalisation of the young people concerned. It is absolutely clear in cases of parent abuse, where mental health is a factor that they, like their victims are vulnerable and in need of support. Punitive outcomes in such circumstances are not the answer. Furthermore, parents of such children may be more likely to report instances of parent abuse, because they are less shamed, if they believe their children have a causational 'condition' (Edenborough *et al*, 2008, p.469 and Hemphill, 1996, cited by Haw, 2010, p.22). Research has suggested that the recognition of mental health and behavioural problems in young perpetrators is unrecognised and understated (Fawzi *et al*, 2013, p.731, Gallagher, 2008, p.20 and Ibabe *et al*, 2014, p.54). If statistics are anything to go by, this is certainly the case, with Parentline (2010, p.12), suggesting only 3-6% of children have such behavioural issues. The case in Greater Manchester would seem to be very different, given the statements of those interviewed.

Closely linked to the problems associated with mental health in the young people were problems from substance misuse. Those interviewed suggested

that parents frequently condoned the use of controlled drugs at home. Whilst this may sound abhorrent and raise concerns over the social standards and parenting skills of those involved, research participants spoke of parents facing systemic abuse from their children, and frequently believed they had nowhere to turn for help. Participants highlighted how parents just wanted the abuse to stop and were faced with extremely difficult decisions in either allowing children to take drugs or face the consequences. One of the reasons given for this was that parents did not want to criminalise their children, by reporting such matters or the ensuing abuse to the authorities. This presents significant and complex challenges to parents, in dealing with the deterioration in the behaviour of the young people involved, and are likely to place further pressures on parents, in seeking help, through fear of being blamed (Monk, 1997, p.25, Kennair & Mellor, 2007, p.208, Jackson, 2003, p.325, and Cottrell & Monk, 2004, p.1087).

The use of drugs and alcohol amongst those perpetrating parent abuse was not uncommon, and is an issue already recognised (Walsh & Krienert, 2007, p.565, Stewart *et al*, 2005, p.202, and Calvete *et al*, 2012, p.3). However, the proliferation of cannabis was seen as a worrying and much more common issue in the Greater Manchester research. This was seen to be far more prevalent, when compared to existing research, which tends only to acknowledge cannabis use alongside other intoxicants or controlled drugs (Haw, 2010, p.93, and Cottrell, 2001, p.21). Despite the fact that cannabis is historically seen as a drug that is widely socially accepted, with a suggested relaxing effect on users, many of those interviewed voiced opposing views, suggesting cannabis use resulted in children becoming violent and alarmingly affected their behaviour towards parents. Of particular concern was the stronger derivative of cannabis, known as 'skunk', which is believed to present an increased risk of psychosis in users (Di Forti *et al*, 2015, p.4). Indeed, some participants stated that they were concerned by the cannabis use in young people, not least because of the mental health issues seen in many parent abuse perpetrators. Cannabis use is said to be common amongst young people, however the rate at which those interviewed raised



concerns about its use is, I believe, something that should be subject of further academic research in due course.

A further cause for concern among many of those interviewed was the frequency of financial abuse arising from cannabis use, where young people were intimidating parents to provide money to fund the cannabis use, or steal money and property to do so. The extensive use of cannabis and the impact of related financial abuse on parents is not something that has been widely reported in research. I believe these two issues are also important in developing greater knowledge about parent abuse, particularly in Greater Manchester. In needing to develop broader strategies in responding to parent abuse, and considering the above issues, it is therefore essential that agencies recognise the need to incorporate disruption of substance misuse, particularly cannabis into the recommended responding strategies. Furthermore, the need to address related mental health and financial abuse issues is also extremely important, if this problem and its related aggravating factors is to be properly addressed.

The findings on cannabis use and related financial abuse are, I believe, further evidence, which has built on existing knowledge. These results have shone a new perspective on the rates of drug use by those young people perpetrating parent abuse, as a result of in-depth research, and I believe have also contributed to knowledge, in a doctoral perspective (Scott *et al*, 2004, pp.23-4, Trafford & Leshem, 2008, pp.16-17 and Lee, 2009, p.33).

### **Developing collaboration in an era of shrinking Public Services**

Previous research has raised concerns about the manner in which agencies and policy makers deal with and develop responses to parent abuse (Tew & Nixon, 2010, p.580, Holt, 2013, p.145, Baker, 2012a, p.48, and Hunter & Nixon, 2012, p.213). However, the Greater Manchester research found a range of agencies and practitioners developing parent abuse responses which was bringing much needed support to families across central Greater Manchester. Even where specific parent abuse programmes were not

labelled as such, examples of innovative practice and service design were seen, delivering bespoke responses to the most challenging cases. The advantages seen where specific parent abuse programmes were in place, was that there was also a degree of strategic governance and support in place, as well as the ability to encourage 'buy in' from across the multi-agency partnerships involved. Indeed, such structures have been of benefit in other categories of family abuse, and can offer similar advantages, it is felt, in responding to parent abuse (Wilcox, 2012, p.282, Cottrell & Monk, 2004, cited by Nixon, 2012, p.238 and Edenborough *et al*, 2008, p.471).

As well as having in place specific responding plans for parent abuse cases, having recognised and structured 'signposting' and referral processes, is equally important, so that cases, when recognised, can be referred to the right agencies for action (Adolescent Violence in the Home, 2012, p.19, Parentline, 2010, p.7 and Miles, 2014, p.16). This has also worked well, according to those interviewed and, with the right training, has begun to see increased referrals of cases whereby practitioners can begin engaging and working with families to disrupt the parent abuse which is taking place. In this regard marketing has also been highlighted as important, as this can ensure that practitioners know what can be done and by whom, to help the families involved (Parentline, 2010, p.7 and Nixon, 2012, p.238).

The importance of developing such 'integrated' responses incorporating a range of joined-up processes across agencies cannot be understated (Adolescent Violence in the Home, 2012, p.17, Cottrell & Monk, 2004, p.1093, and Routt & Anderson, 2011, p.15). The development and delivery of such processes are likely to offer opportunities to provide more holistic responses to families and contribute to the need for greater efficiencies of service delivery, across agencies, and is set out in more detail below. Of the examples seen across the practitioners that participated in the research for this thesis, there were I believe, good examples of localised multi-agency service delivery, which sought to deliver cost effective and supportive responses, which were cognisant of the need to disrupt parent abuse and bring about longer-term benefits and prevention.

With further cuts predicted to the public sector, there are significant risks to continued service delivery, in dealing with parent abuse. The key concern amongst those interviewed, from austerity was regarding a loss of resources, to support the families facing abuse. As has already been highlighted, this also could impact on third sector service provision, because of any curtailment in service commissioning by public sector agencies. There are already in place effective collaborative relationships, in Greater Manchester, which are, I believe, assisted by the roll-out of the MASH concept. However, in the face of the further cuts, there is a belief that existing relationships between organisations in the public and third sectors could break down, as the cuts 'bite', and particularly so in less affluent areas (Clayton, Donovan & Merchant, 2015, pp.14-15 and Jones, Meegan, Kennett & Croft, 2015, pp.12-13). Furthermore, for public sector agencies, this also presents them with further challenges, given their duties of positive obligation, as legislated under the European Convention of Human Rights and Human Rights Act 2000.

Yet across all of those interviewed there was a strong belief that collaboration and the development of holistic and integrated responses was the way forward. This attitude is in keeping with current thinking (Astall *et al*, 2010, p.25 and Lowndes & McCaughie, 2012, p.9). The important factors raised earlier, regarding defining parent abuse and developing a greater understanding of its prevalence and other key issues must be an essential factor to consider (Nixon, 2012, p.237). Only with a better understanding of what the problem is can effective commitment be given to tackling it. This will enable agencies, as they enter the next phase of government-driven cuts, to begin the process of working in an integrated manner of developing and delivering innovative methods of supporting those most vulnerable in society. Home Office guidance has recognised the importance of collaboration and has also highlighted current structures in place across England and Wales, with regards collaboration, these must, therefore be used to best effect to develop responses (Home Office Information Guide: adolescent to parent violence and abuse, 2015, p.8).

### **An Integrated Toolkit to respond**

Given the issues that have been set out in Chapters three to five, I believe a 'toolkit' for responding to parent abuse is needed, but what should this look like? The unique status of parent abuse has been highlighted, and how it impacts on victims and perpetrators alike. The response must then, I believe, be enveloped in a holistic and integrated strategy to acknowledge the problem. It must enable agencies to collectively deal with the issue, and build bespoke plans to support those facing the abuse, in an efficient and timely manner, wrapping services around the families involved (Edenborough *et al*, 2008, pp.469-70, Wilcox, 2012, pp.282-3, Stewart *et al*, 2005, p.203 and McKenna *et al*, 2010, p.3). As has been seen across the research carried out, there are significant advantages to having strategic oversight and governance, not least to deliver value for money, but more importantly to ensure agencies play their part and are held accountable for the activity that they deliver. Furthermore, any integrated response must seek to overcome the 'policy vacuum' that is frequently talked about, and must strive for fully joined-up integrated activity, which avoids a 'silo' based approach (Baker, 2012a, p.49, Bobic, 2004, p.11, When Family Life Hurts, 2010, p.28, Nixon, 2012, p.236 and Hunter & Nixon, 2012, p.211).

The primary factor in developing an integrated strategy for responding to parent abuse must ensure that there is a better means of understanding and tackling the problem. This can only take place where the means of responding is set out in a multi-agency strategy that is developed to enable the bringing together of resources from a range of agencies (Wilcox, 2012, p.282, Nixon, 2012, p.238 and Cottrell & Monk, 2004, p.1093).

As has already been highlighted, firstly, the problem of parent abuse must be specifically defined, and, I would suggest, should include that proposed by Cottrell (2001, p.3) which suggested that parent abuse is '*any act of a child that is intended to cause physical, psychological or financial damage to gain power and control over a parent*'. However, I also believe any definition should include that put forward by Miles and Condry (2014, p.1) who

suggested, for their research, that *'adolescent to parent violence... [includes] the threat or use of violence and/or damage to property'*. I would therefore suggest that in order to identify and respond to parent abuse cases it should be defined as *'any act by a child that causes and is intended to cause physical, emotional, psychological or financial harm or damage, or the threat of such harm or damage to parents'*. I base this belief on the data provided by those interviewed, as they outlined incidents perpetrated by children against parents, which included all of these above issues. Only when the problem is specifically defined can agencies then begin to acknowledge and recognise parent abuse as a unique issue, and raise awareness of it.

The defining of parent abuse, understanding the problem, and raising awareness of it, is essential to the development of any integrated response (Adolescent Violence in the Home, 2012, p.14, Cottrell & Monk, 2004, p.1093, and Howard, 2011, pp.12-13). Consequently, this must form the first part of the 'toolkit' of responding to parent abuse, so that the ensuing development of a working strategy to design and implement multi-agency activity focuses on specific issues. This will also enable agencies to design and develop awareness raising campaigns, to target those at risk, and also enable the cascading of key information across agencies to practitioners, which is vital, if effective outcomes are to be achieved and cases begin to be reported (Haw, 2010, p.11, Vink & Pannebakker, 2013, p.3. and Howard & Rottem, 2008, p.68).

Furthermore, training of practitioners must also form a part of this toolkit, in order that they are best equipped to identify cases, and know how best to engage with families, and secure the right support for those involved (Holt & Retford, 2012, p.8 and Howard & Rottem, 2008, p.69). Current Home Office guidance on parent abuse rightly highlights the importance of practitioners recognising the wider implications and complexities of those involved, and raises the importance of delivering balanced and proportionate responding (Home Office Information Guide: adolescent to parent violence and abuse, 2015, p.22). Such guidance must form an integral part of the toolkit for practitioner responding.

The need to effectively assess and prioritise cases is also essential, in seeking to make best use of what are, likely to be, shrinking resources, as the implications of the Conservative Government's 2015 Comprehensive Spending Review become clear. Such risk assessment should learn from existing risk assessment tools, but given the unique factors presented by parent abuse, agencies must ensure that any specific risk assessment tool is properly developed to effectively give cognisance to key factors that see parent abuse occur in families.

But what else is needed? The advantages of developing greater use of restorative practices have been put forward, which encourage greater understanding between victims and their abusers. Yet if one considers the manner in which practitioners are already successfully engaging through cognitive behavioural practice with some young people, this compliments the approaches taken in restorative practice (Routt & Anderson, 2016, pp.16-17, Routt & Anderson, 2015, pp.154-5 and Holt, 2013, p.129). Such responding will also avoid perverse and punitive outcomes to parents and will not stigmatise young people in the longer term through criminalising them, via the criminal justice process.

Furthermore, the 'children first, offenders second' concept, as outlined at Chapter one also highlights opportunities for better engaging with young people, if we consider the reported successes that have been seen in that programme. Through adopting a more child-focused approach, which generates better engagement with and by young people, then this can only be conducive to and supportive of the application of restorative practices, when working with young perpetrators. Accordingly, this should also form, at the very least, a strong consideration for incorporating into the toolkit which is proposed. However, I believe care must be taken in ensuring that a balanced and proportionate response is given to both the young people concerned, but also victims. Any responding to parent abuse must not mirror what many claim is indicative of wider safeguarding, which focuses on the children and can be overly punitive towards parents facing abuse from their children. Such aims in balancing the responding to both victims and

perpetrators can be designed within the development of strategic planning as well as the necessary governance processes to deliver consistent and effective coordination of parent abuse responding programmes. Ultimately all involved in parent abuse cases have, I believe, vulnerabilities that need to be managed and supported. Only with the involvement of agencies which fit the needs of families, and skilled practitioners working to support families can the delivery of successful intervention be delivered.

The importance of developing bespoke planning and responding to families has been a constant theme throughout the summarising of the research findings listed in Chapters three to five, and is also supported throughout academic research (Edenborough *et al*, 2008, p.471, Tew & Nixon, 2010, cited by Horsburgh, 2012 p.5 and Downey, 1997, Sheehan, 1997 and Jackson, 2003, cited by Stewart *et al*, 2005, p.203). This will allow specific practitioners and resources to be targeted at families, in order that suitably skilled and trained practitioners from the agencies best placed to engage with families can be used to intervene in the abusive relationships that are occurring. These existing cases already place a hidden drain on services, because of the under-recognised impact of parent abuse.

Practitioners must therefore be suitably trained to recognise parent abuse and its complicating factors, and must be sufficiently skilled to work with families to disrupt the abuse. As is already the case across Greater Manchester, existing governance arrangements can be utilised to manage and coordinate the intervention responses across the agencies involved. Such governance will also allow opportunities to deploy agencies that offer particular skills to identify and intervene in abusive relationships, particularly those resources from the education and health sectors, and this can only be of benefit to families (Kennair & Mellor, 2007, p.217, Howard, 2011, p.13 and Haw, 2010, p.120).

Furthermore, the toolkit should also give cognisance to those aggravating factors that have been frequently highlighted by the practitioners that have

been interviewed. Issues stemming from mental health and behavioural problems in young people, and the frequent misuse of substances, particularly cannabis, must feature in the strategies that are developed by agencies. Such factors can also be seen as opportunities to identify potential 'triggers' of parent abuse and should be considered for inclusion in the toolkit, to enable early intervention to identify 'at risk' families.

The importance of developing and maintaining healthy relationships must also play a part in order to prevent longer term perpetrating by young people as they begin to engage in intimate relationships (Stewart *et al*, 2005, p.209, Holt & Retford, 2012, p.8, and Haw, 2010, p.119). The consideration of such aggravating factors is essential if practitioners are to properly assess the risks present in families, and must be aware of the need to dynamically formulate and document an awareness of key threats that are present in individual cases. This will allow specific responding to evolve which 'wraps around' and successfully supports families. Only where such action takes place, can agencies confidently achieve successful outcomes.

Sadly, parent abuse can continue to affect families as children grow into adult-hood. In considering the continued responding to incidents of abuse within families, as perpetrators pass the adult age threshold, there are existing programmes to deal with such cases. The Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) is already in place and deals with incidents of abuse within families, as these fall within the statutory definition of domestic abuse (Brookes, Lumley & Paterson, 2010, p.6). Such structured and widespread MARAC coordination demonstrates the disparity between domestic abuse and parent abuse.

In measuring the effectiveness of any multi-agency activity, and seeking to deliver value for money to the public, there is also a need to review and study the response. There should therefore be a process of monitoring and reviewing the interventions and successes, which should consider a means of longitudinally monitoring those involved, to gain a better understanding of and learning from the engagement with families. This could take place in the



form of further research, which will seek to improve parent abuse responding and cascade learning to others. All these issues, if incorporated into the integrated activity set out above, may well begin the process of delivering wider intervention to families so in need of support.

## **Conclusion**

This Chapter has identified and explored the key findings from this research programme. The identification of knowledge gaps to suggest better responding opportunities through collaboration was also considered, to what is a unique problem affecting many families. As has been highlighted, Greater Manchester has developed leading examples of collaboration, to tackle the most challenging of social problems. Parent abuse was set out as a unique problem, in need of its own specific and integrated programme of responding. The importance of effectively assessing the risks presented by parent abuse cases is essential in any multi-agency response to the problem. The importance of restorative practices was set out and how these could benefit any parent abuse response, to avoid being punitive to both victims and perpetrators alike. Consequently, the importance of collaboration across agencies was also highlighted as essential to any successful outcomes. Furthermore, the developing of a toolkit to define, assess, develop and deliver responding to families was also highlighted. It is felt that despite the current and on-going economic situation, Greater Manchester has the ability and innovative experience to again develop key responses to an emerging and wide-scale problem. The organisations supporting families do not have the option to 'do nothing' and must continue to tackle emerging issues. Judging by past developments, Greater Manchester's agencies are well prepared to develop creative responses, which are cognisant of existing work, and which tackle head on the threat from austerity.

## **Conclusion and future opportunities**

### **Introduction**

A yearning to follow a journey of self-development and awareness triggered the first steps to my commencing this Professional Doctorate course with the University of Portsmouth. However, I also wanted to pursue and continue a subject which was first researched as part of my Master's Degree. That research was completed, yet the research and academic journey felt unfinished. What was also unfinished was the journey in revealing key issues relating to parent abuse, at a time when austerity and significant cutbacks in public services were first beginning to take effect. Sadly, these cut-backs continue, and this Doctoral research programme has, I believe, further developed the knowledge around parent abuse, in Greater Manchester.

Accordingly, below I will reflect on the research aims and objectives and consider how the research and data gathered has contributed to these. The key findings and issues will be reviewed against these objectives, and the specific areas where I believe the research has contributed to knowledge will be set out. Given the nature of this Professional Doctorate programme, I am also anxious to set out how the research has and can contribute to professional practice, and in a manner which fits the challenging circumstances in which agencies providing services and support to communities finds themselves. As a 'researching professional', I will then set out some reflective issues, which have occurred throughout my Doctoral programme, over the last few years. Lastly, areas suitable for further research will be set out.

### **Achieving the Research Objectives**

The original research question posed at Chapter two was:

"What key themes are shaping parent abuse in Greater Manchester and offer opportunities to develop collaborative and preventative interventions?"

The research objectives were:

1. To gather data on parent abuse from practitioners who are dealing with such abuse and gain an understanding of the key themes in Greater Manchester
2. To identify knowledge gaps and opportunities to develop better responses to parent abuse, which considers collaborative opportunities, in order to make recommendations on how services can be further developed.

Chapters three to five have set out the data gathered and analysed this, in order to develop an understanding of the key issues of parent abuse in Greater Manchester. I believe that as a result of this research, the first part of the research question has been answered, in that a great deal of knowledge has been developed with regards 'what is known about parent abuse in Greater Manchester'. Many characteristics of victims and perpetrators have been shown to be very similar to those characteristics seen elsewhere in other research. Other characteristics have, I believe, been found to be significant when compared against other research, and have set out key findings in a Greater Manchester context. These will be highlighted below.

The second part of the research question sought to answer 'how can practitioner responses be developed?' Existing responses to parent abuse were explored in detail across central Greater Manchester, which included specific and non-specific parent abuse responding. Accordingly, the data obtained from very experienced practitioners sought to highlight opportunities to acknowledge the existing work to address parent abuse, whilst seeking to learn and identify new opportunities for improving such responding. Furthermore, these issues were frequently set against the current austere landscape, in which organisations, both public and charitable, find themselves. Examples of potentially better responding was set out, and collaborative opportunities were highlighted, which, I believe, addressed the

second part of the research question. Consequently, I believe that both research objectives were also met, as a result of the research programme.

### **Contribution to Knowledge: What have we learned that we did not know before?**

A number of key issues were revealed as a result of the research, and I believe these are significant and also meet the doctoral requirement regarding 'contribution to knowledge'.

Parent abuse is a unique problem with its own unique challenges. The bonds between parents and their abusive children make responding to cases of abuse extremely challenging, not least because of the parental responsibility which exists between 'victim' and 'abuser'. Parents are frequently held responsible for the abusive actions of their children, and this contributes to parents failing to report abusive incidents. Parents state they fear criminalising or losing their abusive children, and frequently voice bad experiences, from practitioners, where they have reported incidents. The absence of parent abuse policy means that responding is currently via criminal justice processes, child protection or social care avenues, and fails to specifically acknowledge the complexities involved, resulting in frequently 'fudged' responding outcomes. Good examples of responding to parent abuse in Greater Manchester have been evidenced, by many of those interviewed, and there is much that can be learned from existing programmes that deal with young perpetrators and victims. Furthermore, the experience of Greater Manchester in managing and coordinating collaboration between agencies offers significant opportunities to respond to parent abuse.

The developing of an integrated strategy, in the form of a 'toolkit' of issues is long overdue, which should firstly acknowledge parent abuse as a unique issue, rather than 'yet another' category of family violence. A specific definition of what parent abuse is, is also required so that practitioners and the families involved can recognise the problem, and begin to better understand and respond to it. A means of consistently and effectively

assessing and prioritising the risk posed by parent abuse is needed, so cases can be triaged and finite resources can be deployed to engage with and intervene in cases of abuse within families.

Agencies should learn from existing cognitive behavioural and restorative practices, when engaging with families, and such integrated activity should involve all relevant agencies, particularly those from the education and health sectors, who offer key opportunities to support those caught up in the abuse. Furthermore, such restorative practice is essential, if perverse punitive outcomes against parents are to be avoided, and young people are helped and supported, rather than criminalised. Again, good examples of this have been voiced by many of those interviewed.

Furthermore, an effective process of developing specific responding plans which cater for the complex needs of the families involved is needed, making best use of the skills and resources available. Effective training of staff is also essential to practitioners to ensure that they deliver the right response to complex problems, and that a process of governance is implemented to ensure timely and effective support to those involved, in a manner which designates responsibility to the agencies best placed to deliver the right support. Furthermore, such responding should be cognisant of key aggravating factors, particularly those involving mental health and behavioural problems in the young people, and problems caused by substance misuse, particularly cannabis.

Early intervention with young people is likely to present longer-term cost benefits, by disrupting the abusive behaviour of the young people, which could prevent them committing further abuse as they get older, particularly within intimate relationships. Such opportunities are particularly important with young children of primary school age, and it is essential that education and health agencies are involved in such activity. Significant opportunities are also felt to be present from agencies working closely and screening higher-risk individuals, who may pose a greater risk of either suffering or perpetrating parent abuse. Furthermore, through targeted investment in training of key

resources, there are likely to be additional benefits to agencies in effectively tackling parent abuse.

In considering how these issues are suitable for contributing to knowledge, I have considered how, at a doctoral level, research should seek to create and interpret new knowledge, and do so from gaining an understanding of a significant amount of data. Furthermore, I have considered the need to apply conventional research in new areas of investigation, and create a new and specific understanding of existing issues (Lee, 2009, p.33, Trafford & Leshem, 2008, pp.16-17, and Scott *et al*, 2004, p.23). I believe that the above findings meet such criteria, and particularly so, when placed in a Greater Manchester context.

Lastly, in taking this research and its outcomes forward, the above findings and outcomes should be 'packaged' into a 'toolkit' of recommendations and marketed to key decision makers in Greater Manchester, including those who have commissioning responsibility for key services. The toolkit will seek to develop a multi-agency strategy that enables joint working across the range of available agencies who are best placed to intervene and support the families blighted by parent abuse.

### **Contribution to Professional Practice**

What is also important to me, in a professional doctorate context, is that my research can also contribute to professional practice. This is particularly so, not least because of the nature of my studies (Neumann, 2005, p.179 and Tennant, 2004, p.437), as the research has focussed on some of the most vulnerable people in society, be they victims or perpetrators. To act in the interests of these families is essential, when considering the need to protect the public and safeguard the vulnerable through a means of positive obligation (Williams, 2002, p.305, Guidance on Investigating Domestic Abuse, 2008, p.26 and Brown, 2011a, p.8). I believe that I have achieved a detailed level of contribution to professional practice, with regards the discourse around collaboration between agencies, and the need to work

closely to better integrate services and maximise the opportunities to reduce expenditure through the development of collaborative and holistic strategies in responding to parent abuse.

### **Personal reflections on my research journey**

Having commenced my academic studies with the University of Portsmouth and the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies some eleven years ago, when studying a Foundation Degree, I have always tried to reflect on my development and identify how my development and attainment have assisted me as an individual, but also in the workplace. I continued this process through my undergraduate and postgraduate studies, and therefore it is only sensible that I should continue this process through my professional doctorate studies. I have used a reflective journal on my doctoral journey, which I have found to be extremely useful in situating my progress 'then' and 'now'.

Having started my police career in 1991, reflective practice was widely used as in other professions, and it was something that I have frequently used since then (Clarke, James & Kelly, 1996, p.172 and Watson & Wilcox, 2000, p.58). I have always used Kolb's experiential learning cycle, to consider my experiences, conceptualising these, identifying areas to improve and putting these into effect (Bolton, 2010, p.74 and Hinett & Varnava, 2002, p.2). I have found this process particularly helpful throughout my doctoral studies, as this has complemented the advanced level of study, in assisting me to recognise how my development has progressed. Furthermore, the need to consider philosophical aspects of my learning has also enabled me to position my own beliefs, values and understanding within both my studies and my research activity.

At the conclusion of my Master's degree, my research position felt unfinished, and this was enhanced by the future challenges facing the police and other services. Further awareness raising and research was taking place with regards parent abuse, and I felt that I wanted to contribute to this discourse

through further academic research. I also felt that I could achieve further academic attainment, and I was assisted in reaching these decisions by Dr Amanda Holt. I also believed that in achieving doctoral qualifications this would greatly assist me in the workplace, because of the advanced level of skills that I would develop. It was for these reasons that I applied for and was successful in gaining entry to the Professional Doctorate in Criminal Justice course.

I believed that the structure of my previous research had worked well, and successfully achieved my research aims, and made the decision to follow a similar methodology for my doctoral research. I chose a qualitative paradigm, given the lack of specific knowledge on parent abuse, particularly in Greater Manchester. I believe the research sample was sound, and am happy with the way in which I chose a range of agencies, roles and hierarchical positions. I believe in structuring the research sample in this way I was able to obtain a wide catchment of data, which was useful in drawing out key issues and data which contributed to knowledge. I am also satisfied with the way in which I have been able to develop philosophical findings, regarding epistemological and ontological factors which may influence the responding to parent abuse.

In again reflecting on my doctoral studies, one of the key areas in which I have developed is with regards to such philosophical considerations. I am far more aware how epistemological and ontological factors can shape and influence one's behaviour and output, and have grown acutely aware of the need to be reflexive and reflective in this regard, in order to seek objectivity in one's activities. I have also enjoyed working with the ICJS academic staff, and have grown in confidence, academically, as a result of the ability to maintain a mutually respectful, and not necessarily hierarchical relationship with them (Malfroy, 2005, p.176). Therefore, I believe that my research and my own development have complemented me as an individual, and I can benefit significantly both in and outside the workplace.



## **Research limitations and areas for further research**

An important consideration in any process of research, particularly when presenting one's findings is to acknowledge any limitations in the research and suggest areas needing or suitable for further research (Bryman, 2012, p.690 and White, Woodfield & Ritchie, 2011, p.296). As I have said, I believe my research process has been successful, by way of the scale of the data obtained, the areas of key issues that could be drawn from the research, and notably, the data that has, I believe, contributed to knowledge. However, I have had to rely on the views and comments of practitioners, and draw on their dealings with families affected by parent abuse. One could argue that stronger data could have been obtained if I had interviewed those directly affected by the abuse, or indeed who has perpetrated abuse.

Whilst I am cognisant that I may have not secured first-hand experiences from my research participants, the main issue for me not dealing with those directly involved in parent abuse incidents was because of my position as a police officer. If parents or young people had disclosed criminal offences to me, particularly if they had not wished to report incidents, I would have been duty-bound to act on this information. Such actions could very well have undermined my research plan and led to family members not speaking to me. I therefore believe that, even though this is a limiting factor to my research, I have made the right decision in dealing with practitioners. However, such research by other researchers offers, I believe, significant opportunities, to learn first-hand from families, the complexities of parent abuse.

I am fearful that a further potential limitation of my research is one beyond my control, and as a result of timing. Much has been written in the above pages about the effects of austerity and the government's drive for a smaller public sector. This presents significant challenges for the agencies involved, and I believe, presents risks for the families caught up in parent abuse. They potentially face smaller organisations dealing with increasing workloads and areas of risk. This presents the possibility of those families experiencing something which is not fully understood, and not receiving the full support

that they need. I am therefore fearful that my research may go un-noticed by agencies with already significant demands. That said, I believe that I have a duty in seeking to raise the profile of parent abuse, as a result of my research, and do my very best to generate interest and activity in helping those caught up in abuse.

Therefore, if I am to seek positive outcomes from this research, it is essential that I set about 'marketing' my findings, as set out above, across agencies in Greater Manchester, in the hope that the data contained there-in will be put to good use.

In Chapter two I raised the issue of establishing a quantitative understanding of parent abuse. Whilst I believe that I have successfully conducted qualitative analysis, in meeting my research objectives, I also believe there are opportunities to consider the conducting of quantitative research. I do, however believe that in order to do this, the research must be cognisant of those methodological factors that have tended to undermine the credibility of previous research, as outlined in Chapter one. Any new research should seek to mitigate such factors and be developed in a manner which seeks to gather data on known parent abuse cases. In considering my recommendations above, I believe such quantitative analysis is likely to stand scrutiny where parent abuse is a defined problem, and where the public are better aware of this type of abuse, as a result of the recommended awareness raising. Such data will be more effective if capturing cases which are easily identifiable by agencies and are recorded in a consistent format, subject to the necessary governance processes as outlined above. Currently, the infrastructures do not exist to define, identify and capture such data.

Having reflected on the production of my research, and in writing it, I also now believe that a further objective of my research is to encourage others to continue this research, for the benefit of those suffering parent abuse. This itself, should be an important consideration of any practitioner researcher (Fox *et al*, 2011, p.151). I believe the following areas are worthy of further

research, to generate a greater understanding of these key areas relating to parent abuse:

- **Parent abuse affecting minority groups:** Greater Manchester is known to be one of the most diverse communities in the United Kingdom, with many recognised hard-to-reach groups. The cultural spectrum across Greater Manchester is immense, and within the thesis research is recognition by practitioners that there are many families within minority ethnic groups that suffer parent abuse. Sadly, many of the families within these communities are reluctant to come forward and seek help. It is therefore essential, that if parent abuse research in Greater Manchester is to be developed further, that research should focus on the communities that culturally or otherwise are reluctant to engage with services and reveal the problems that exist.
- **The effects of persistent cannabis use on the mental health and behaviour of young people perpetrating parent abuse:** Much has been written in the above research findings about young people using cannabis, and the suspected effects of this on the perpetrating of parent abuse. These findings are likely to contribute to knowledge, but such is the significance of these findings, that I believe they merit further investigation. Concerns over the use of cannabis and the potential links to psychosis already exist, and data exists in my research to suggest cannabis use does impact on the behaviours of young people. It is therefore essential that further research is pursued to seek greater understanding, and to develop knowledge which helps those involved.

As has been seen with other problems facing the vulnerable in society, notably historic sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation and domestic abuse, the first steps to better responding involved the difficult decision to openly acknowledge the problem and raise awareness of it. Only then can victims

feel confident enough to come forward and seek the help that they are entitled to. I and many other researchers and professionals, feel that the time is right to acknowledge parent abuse as a problem. In submitting this thesis, I hope that I am able to contribute to further discourse regarding parent abuse, and bring much needed help to those who face it day-in and day-out.

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## Appendix A: Favourable Ethical Opinion Letter



Mr Simon Retford  
Professional Doctorate Student  
Institute of Criminal Justice Studies  
University of Portsmouth

**REC reference number: 14/15:14**  
**Please quote this number on all correspondence.**

27<sup>th</sup> November 2014

Dear Simon,

**Full Title of Study:** Child-against-Parent abuse in Greater Manchester: Key themes, collaboration, & opportunities in an age of austerity

**Documents reviewed:**

Consent Form  
Ethics self-assessment  
Interview Schedule  
Invitation Letter  
Narrative  
Participant Information Sheet  
Protocol

Further to our recent correspondence, this proposal was reviewed by The Research Ethics Committee of The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

I am pleased to tell you that the proposal was awarded a favourable ethical opinion by the committee.

Kind regards,

FHSS FREC Chair  
Dr Jane Winstone

**Members participating in the review:**

- David Carpenter
- Richard Hitchcock
- Geoff Wade
- Jane Winstone

## Appendix B: UPR16 Research Ethics Review Checklist

### FORM UPR16

#### Research Ethics Review Checklist



Please include this completed form as an appendix to your thesis (see the Postgraduate Research Student Handbook for more information)

Postgraduate Research Student (PGRS) Information		Student ID:	ICJ50654 / 353945
PGRS Name:	Simon Retford		
Department:	ICJS	First Supervisor:	Dr Nathan Hall
Start Date: (or progression date for Prof Doc students)	Oct 2012		
Study Mode and Route:	Part-time <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Full-time <input type="checkbox"/>	MPhil <input type="checkbox"/> PhD <input type="checkbox"/>	MD <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Doctorate <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Title of Thesis:	Child-against-Parent abuse in Greater Manchester. Key themes, collaboration, & opportunities		
Thesis Word Count: (excluding ancillary data)	XXXXXX		
<p>If you are unsure about any of the following, please contact the local representative on your Faculty Ethics Committee for advice. Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the University's Ethics Policy and any relevant University, academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study</p> <p>Although the Ethics Committee may have given your study a favourable opinion, the final responsibility for the ethical conduct of this work lies with the researcher(s).</p>			
<b>UKRIO Finished Research Checklist:</b> (If you would like to know more about the checklist, please see your Faculty or Departmental Ethics Committee rep or see the online version of the full checklist at: <a href="http://www.ukrio.org/what-we-do/code-of-practice-for-research/">http://www.ukrio.org/what-we-do/code-of-practice-for-research/</a> )			
a) Have all of your research and findings been reported accurately, honestly and within a reasonable time frame?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>		
b) Have all contributions to knowledge been acknowledged?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>		
c) Have you complied with all agreements relating to intellectual property, publication and authorship?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>		
d) Has your research data been retained in a secure and accessible form and will it remain so for the required duration?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>		
e) Does your research comply with all legal, ethical, and contractual requirements?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>		
<b>Candidate Statement:</b> I have considered the ethical dimensions of the above named research project, and have successfully obtained the necessary ethical approval(s)			
Ethical review number(s) from Faculty Ethics Committee (or from NRES/SCREC):		14/14:14	
If you have <i>not</i> submitted your work for ethical review, and/or you have answered 'No' to one or more of questions a) to e), please explain below why this is so:			
<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div>			

## Appendix C: Research Letter to Organisations

**Researcher:** Simon Retford  
**Supervisor:** Dr. Nathan Hall  
**Head of Studies:** Dr. Francis Pakes



Simon Retford,  
c/o Institute of Criminal  
Justice Studies  
University of Portsmouth  
Ravelin House  
Museum Road  
Portsmouth  
Hampshire  
PO1 2QQ

Email:  
[Simon.retford@myport.ac.uk](mailto:Simon.retford@myport.ac.uk)

Dear .....  
2014.

1<sup>st</sup> August

**Re: request for permission to seek interview participants to assist in academic research.**

**Research Subject: Child-against-Parent abuse in Greater Manchester: Key themes, collaboration, & opportunities in an age of austerity.**

I am contacting you to ask your permission in identifying a research participant from amongst your staff. Their participation will be in a confidential research project, which I am conducting across a number of local agencies and organisations within Greater Manchester.

I am currently a Detective Superintendent with Greater Manchester Police and also a part-time student with the University of Portsmouth; studying for a Professional Doctorate qualification in Criminal Justice.

I must conduct academic research into a chosen area of professional interest and intend researching the problem of '**child-against-parent violence**'. This

little known and under-researched area of domestic abuse affects many families across the social spectrum, and places quite significant demands on yours and other public and third sector organisations. My intention is to identify improvement opportunities for better responding to such abuse; and considering current collaborative thinking across agencies.

Consequently, I would like to conduct interviews with multi-agency practitioners across Greater Manchester, who deal with perpetrators and victims of such abuse.

As part of the research design I am approaching a number of local agencies and organisations, to identify research participants. There is absolutely no obligation on your organisation or staff to participate in this research; which is purely voluntary. Furthermore, participation on the part of staff will be confidential, and I will not be reporting on the extent of involvement to anyone.

All interviews will adhere to stringent ethical standards, which will include maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. Interviews should take no longer than one hour and will take place at a time and place to suit participants; therefore causing minimal impact on your business.

I am **not** looking to gather any personal data of subjects, and will be looking instead at how parent abuse is defined, and what existing arrangements are in place to respond to such abuse. Furthermore, given the current increase in collaboration between agencies; I am looking to identify new and effective opportunities to better respond to perpetrators and victims alike.

I would ask that if my request is approved, that you act, in effect, as 'gatekeeper' to facilitate my adhering to any 'data guardian' requirements that you wish me to fulfil, and put me in touch with the relevant person who manages data protection matters in your organisation. I would also ask that you forward the other attached documents, on my behalf, to the member of staff who is most suitable to be interviewed.

Data gathered will be securely stored and retained within accordance of the Data Protection Act 1998. Data will be retained for 5 years, in order to enable the completion of my Research Thesis, and also to meet any obligations for review or quality assurance checks of the Thesis. After this time, the data stored electronically will be deleted, and any 'hard copy' data shredded.

Please contact me on the below email address or telephone number, should you wish to discuss this request or need more information. I have attached several documents to this correspondence; which will be sent to participants. These answer any question in more detail, and deal with issues of consent.



Should you wish to allow me access to your staff, for the research could you kindly email your agreement to the following email address: **simon.retford@myport.ac.uk**

Should you have any complaints regarding this request or (if agreed) future research activity, you should contact: Mr David carpenter at the University of Portsmouth (david.carpenter@port.ac.uk).

If you need to speak to my University Supervisor his details are as follows:

Dr. Nathan Hall

Address: As at the top of the first page.

Email: Nathan.hall@port.ac.uk

Kind regards

Simon Retford

## Appendix D: Research Letter to Participants

**Researcher:** Simon Retford  
**Supervisor:** Dr. Nathan Hall  
**Head of Studies:** Dr. Francis Pakes



Simon Retford,  
c/o Institute of Criminal  
Justice Studies  
University of Portsmouth  
Ravelin House  
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PO1 2QQ

Email:  
[Simon.retford@myport.ac.uk](mailto:Simon.retford@myport.ac.uk)

2014.

3<sup>rd</sup> October

**Study Title:** Child-against-Parent abuse in Greater Manchester: Key themes, collaboration, & opportunities in an age of austerity.

**REC Ref No:** .....

Dear .....

I am contacting you to seek your participation in a confidential research project, which I am conducting across local agencies within Greater Manchester.

I am a currently police officer with Greater Manchester Police and also a part-time student with the University of Portsmouth, studying for a Professional Doctorate qualification in Criminal Justice.

As part of my studies I must conduct academic research into a chosen area of professional interest and intend researching the problem of '**child-against-**

**parent violence**'. This little known and under-researched area of domestic abuse affects many families across the social spectrum, and I intend to conduct interviews with multi-agency practitioners across Greater Manchester, who deal with perpetrators and victims of such abuse.

As part of the research design I have selected a number of local agencies and organisations, and made contact with them, in order to choose the most suitable person to communicate with, given the research subject. Accordingly, you have been recommended as a prospective research participant. There is absolutely no obligation on you to participate in this research; which is purely voluntary. Furthermore, your decision to participate will be confidential, and I will not be reporting on the extent of involvement to anyone.

All interviews will adhere to stringent ethical standards, which will include maintaining your confidentiality and anonymity. The explicit consent of all participants is needed before any interviews take place. The interview should take no longer than one hour.

I am **not** looking to gather any personal data of subjects, and will be looking instead at how parent abuse is defined, and what existing arrangements are in place to respond to such abuse. Furthermore, given the current increase in collaboration between agencies; I am looking to identify new and effective opportunities to better respond to perpetrators and victims alike.

I must point out that if any unreported specific incidents of abuse are disclosed; I may be duty bound to respond to these, given my occupation. Furthermore, should any potential duty of care issues arise, concerning clients who you deal with; these may need to be addressed by yourself, and the interview stopped, In order that this can take place..

Data gathered will be securely stored and retained within accordance of the Data Protection Act 1998. Data will be retained for 5 years, in order to enable the completion of my Research Thesis, and also to meet any obligations for review or quality assurance checks of the Thesis. After this time, the data stored electronically will be deleted, and any 'hard copy' data shredded.

Please contact me on the below email address or telephone number, should you wish to discuss this request or need more information. I have attached a more detailed information sheet for your perusal; and a consent form, which you would need to complete before any interview takes place.

Should you wish to participate in the research please email your agreement to the following email address: **[simon.retford@myport.ac.uk](mailto:simon.retford@myport.ac.uk)**

Should you have any complaints regarding this request or (if agreed) future research activity, you should contact: Mr David carpenter at the University of Portsmouth ([david.carpenter@port.ac.uk](mailto:david.carpenter@port.ac.uk)).

If you need to speak to my University Supervisor his details are as follows:

Dr. Nathan Hall

Address: As at the top of the first page.

Email: [Nathan.hall@port.ac.uk](mailto:Nathan.hall@port.ac.uk)

Kind regards

Simon Retford

## Appendix E: Participant Information Sheet

**Researcher:** Simon Retford  
**Supervisor:** Dr. Nathan Hall  
**Head of Studies:** Dr. Francis Pakes



Simon Retford,  
c/o Institute of Criminal  
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Hampshire  
PO1 2QQ

Email:  
[Simon.retford@myport.ac.uk](mailto:Simon.retford@myport.ac.uk)

3<sup>rd</sup> October

2014.

**Study Title:** Child-against-Parent abuse in Greater Manchester: Key themes, collaboration, & opportunities in an age of austerity.

I would like to invite you to take part in my research study; but before you decide I would like you to understand why this research is being done and what it would involve for you. I have provided a short summary of the problem which I am researching, along with my research aims:

### **Background information**

Family violence, or as it is more commonly known in the United Kingdom 'domestic violence', has been recognised and researched for decades, in an academic context. However one particular area of domestic abuse which has avoided extensive academic research is that of 'child-to-parent' abuse; that is, abuse where parents are the victims and their children the offenders.

Locally to Manchester, certain organisations, including the police (when asked) acknowledge that parent abuse is a very real issue, faced on a daily basis. Sadly, these organisations recognise that little is being done to stem such abuse.

### **What is the purpose of the study?**

To develop an improved local understanding of PA in Greater Manchester, to assist practitioners in delivering more effective responses and support for

victims, perpetrators, and others affected by such abuse. Data will be gathered by carrying out in-depth interviews with key practitioners who deal with PA, and those affected by it, on a day-to-day basis.

### **Why have you been invited?**

You have been recommended as a practitioner who potentially has valuable information to give, and experience which may contribute to the research aims. I am selecting a variety of professionals and organisations, in order to give multi-agency clarity to this problem, and potential solutions.

### **Do you have to take part?**

As mentioned in the attached letter, your participation is purely voluntary; as well as anonymous and confidential. I will not be providing any details whatsoever to employers or organisations, of those that agree or decline involvement in my research.

### **What will happen to you if you take part and what will you have to do?**

In short, I will brief you on my interview plan and make arrangements to see you, at your own convenience. We will meet at a location of your choosing; and we will spend about an hour in the interview. I will be asking you questions on a range of issues relating to Parent Abuse; and will send you a short list of topics for discussion before the interview; so that you can consider in advance your knowledge and experience of this problem.

Following the interview, I will then be transcribing your interview; and those of others, in order to analyse the data gathered. I will send you a copy of your transcribed interview and give you the opportunity to make any observations or amendments.

I would like to audio tape the interview, but again, this is dependent on your consent. If you agree to the recording I can assure you that the recordings will be securely stored. No one else will have access to your interview. You can also retain an electronic copy should you wish.

This interview and others is going to be a precursor to a bigger piece of research over the next 2-3 years; and it may be that you are amenable to assisting me in further research interviews, as my understanding of this problem develops. Again, any future involvement is purely consensual on your part.

### **Expenses and payments**

As I am conducting this research at my own expense, I am afraid no payments or fees can be made. I am happy to discuss any travel or meal costs incurred.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There may be a slight inconvenience to your work schedule in agreeing to meet me for interview; however the interview should take no longer than one hour and will be at a time and venue of your choosing.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

The main benefit in participation is that you are likely to increase the chances of making a difference to local responses to Parent Abuse. A key aim from my research is that it will influence future multi-agency responses to this area of family violence and abuse.

**Will your taking part in the study be kept confidential and who will review the Research?**

Your involvement is confidential and any reference to your comments is anonymised. You will not be directly named or referred to. In my follow up reporting I will merely refer to “a professional from [the police / YOS/ Social Services] etc”.

Furthermore, should your comments directly refer to your Team or area of work, I will ensure this is reported in such a way that you cannot be identified. Data may be accessed by University staff to assess the quality and validity of my data collection. Data gathered will be securely stored and retained within accordance of the Data Protection Act 1998.

All research for the University of Portsmouth is looked at by independent group of individuals, called a Research Ethics Committee, to protect your interests. This study has been reviewed and given a favourable opinion by the University of Portsmouth Research Ethics Committee.

The data will be retained for the 5 years, given the length of my ultimate research intentions.

**What will happen if you don't want to carry on with the study?**

Should you wish to withdraw from the research project in the future, you may of course do so. I will ensure that your data is excluded from my research analysis; however if the analysis has already started, then this may not be possible.

**What if there is a problem?**

Should you have any concerns about any aspects of this study, you should firstly to speak to myself; or if your concerns are about my conduct, you should bring the matter to the attention of my Research Supervisor; who will do their best to answer your questions. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this by contacting Dr. Francis Pakes at the University of Portsmouth. Full contact details are below.

Simon Retford,  
c/o Institute of Criminal Justice Studies  
University of Portsmouth  
Ravelin House  
Museum Road  
Portsmouth  
Hampshire  
PO1 2QQ

Email: [Simon.retford@myport.ac.uk](mailto:Simon.retford@myport.ac.uk)

Dr. Nathan Hall

Address: As above.

Email: [Nathan.hall@port.ac.uk](mailto:Nathan.hall@port.ac.uk)

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

All interview data will be transcribed and analysed to identify key themes, problems and opportunities, relating to Parent Abuse. Data will be used to identify key information which will assist the research project.

Ultimately, the research will be outlined in my future academic work, and may be suitable for publication; thus assisting other professionals and academics involved in Parent Abuse responding or research. Again, you will not be identified in any report/publication.

**Who is organising and funding the research?**

I am organising and funding the research; which itself is supported by the University of Portsmouth. This 'support' is in purely academic format, and not financial. There are no commercial aims or benefits attached to my research project. The research is part of my own academic studies, in which I aim to attain academic qualifications.

More importantly, I would like this research to assist local professionals in better understanding and responding to Parent Abuse in Greater Manchester, and potentially elsewhere.



## **Appendix F: Parent Abuse Research Brief**

### **Research Brief**

#### **Child-to-Parent Abuse in England and Wales: understood or underestimated? A Local Perspective to Greater Manchester**

##### **Background information**

Family violence, or as it is more commonly known in the United Kingdom 'domestic violence', has been recognised and researched for decades, in an academic context. However, one particular area of domestic abuse which has avoided extensive academic research is that of 'child-to-parent' abuse; that is, abuse where parents are the victims and their children the offenders.

Parent abuse (PA), in the UK, is reported to be significantly under-reported, with an estimated 9-15% of parents suffering some form of abuse.

Locally to Manchester, certain organisations, including the police (when asked) acknowledge that parent abuse is a very real issue, faced on a daily basis. Sadly, these organisations recognise that little is being done to stem such abuse.

##### **Aims & Objectives**

The research will seek to meet the following priorities:

- To develop an improved local understanding of PA in Greater Manchester, to assist practitioners in delivering more effective responses and support for victims, offenders, and others affected by such abuse.
- Accordingly, the research objectives will seek to:
  - Gather data, by carrying out in-depth interviews with key practitioners who dealing with PA on a day-to-day basis.
  - Identify key knowledge gaps and examples of good practice, which can contribute towards developing better support to both victims and offenders.

##### **Interview Strategy**

An important part of the research project will seek to gather data from local professionals, which will enable a 'local' perspective to be built, which can assist such professionals in their work.

This data will be gathered by way of in-depth interviews with a small group of representatives from different organisations. There is no set time for the duration of interviews, and participants will be encouraged to take as long as they feel is necessary; however interviews are anticipated to be in the region of 1 to 1 ½ hours.

The interviewer would like to audio record interviews, for purposes of capturing everything said, and also to ensure detailed analysis of all data. This, however, will be with the agreement of participants.

Matters for discussion will cover the following areas:

- The Practitioners' role?
- Why / how can *they* comment on PA? (**Provenance their understanding**)
- How do practitioners 'construct' / define "PA"?
- Causes of PA in Gtr Manchester?
- Prevalence in relation to other Family Violence?
- Is PA an emerging problem or is it being better reported?
- How is it responded to at present?
- How can we better respond to it?
- What are barriers to current effective responses?
- How can these be overcome?
- What would *their* priorities be to effectively responding to PA, or successful outcomes?

### **Ethical Considerations**

All participation in this research will be voluntary and carried out with the specific consent of those involved.

All participants will be assured anonymity and confidentiality and the potential for any role conflict will be minimised by the researcher informing participants at the start of interviews that any disclosure of previously unreported criminal offences may subsequently have to be acted upon, given the researcher's status.

Of equal importance, no access to personal or sensitive data will be made (particularly of clients of the participants) and the research will also be dealt with in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

### **Summary**

By taking the time to spend about 90 minutes talking to the researcher, you are likely to significantly contribute to an area of family violence which is vastly

under-researched. More importantly, this research will be 'locally' focused, with a primary aim of enabling better responses on a local level, to those who suffer or commit such abuse on a day-to-day basis.

I do hope you agree to help.

Thank you.

Simon Retford

## **Appendix G: Interview Plan**

### **Introduction:**

- Myself, my job and my subject
- The origin of my choosing this topic

### **Ethics:**

- Research will adhere to the ethical guidance and stipulations of the University of Portsmouth and the British Society of Criminology.
- Voluntary and Confidentiality
- Any disclosure of previously unreported criminal offences may subsequently have to be acted upon, given the researcher's status.
- No access to personal or sensitive data will be made and the research will also be dealt with in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

### **Aims & Objectives:**

The research will seek to meet the following priorities:

- To explore & contextualise PA across Greater Manchester through qualitative investigation, thus developing greater understanding of the problem.
- To identify key issues pertaining to PA through literature review.
- To identify Multi-agency collaborative responses.
- To develop conclusions and recommendations for Multi-agency responses, to the benefit of victims, perpetrators and families.

### **Interview Strategy:**

- I will also be writing certain important issues down, to assist my 'post-interview' analysis.
- If you don't understand any questions, please ask or let me know.
- If you do not want to answer any questions for any reason, please let me know.

- I re-iterate, this interview is purely voluntary; are you happy to be interviewed and begin?

**Topics:**

- Your role?
- Why / how can '*you*' comment on PA
- How do you define PA
- Prevalence in relation to other Family Violence
- Is PA an emerging problem or is it being better reported
- Under-reporting?
- Awareness of PA in victims & perpetrators
- Awareness in professionals
- Causes of PA?
- Power & control
- Alcohol / substance abuse
- Mental health
- Bad parenting & / or Victim blaming
- Wider youth violence
- Family violence / learnt behaviours
- Educational / behavioural
- Nature of incidents?
- Victimology
- Perpetrator characteristics
- Gender
- Social / demographics
- Cultural
- Impacts on victim / offender / family
- Do perpetrators evolve into adult abusers?
- How is it responded to at present
- Signposting

- How can we better respond to it
  - Is PA a recognised 'issue' within your local organisation or team?
  - Do you have PA specific strategy?
  - How can we better 'capture' the extent of local abuse?
  - Good practice?
  - What are barriers to current effective responses
  - How can these be overcome
- 
- Reduced funding / austerity measures & impacts
  - Collaboration opportunities?
  - Increased safeguarding demand on agencies
  - Future challenges
- 
- What would *your* priorities be to effectively responding to PA, (or successful outcomes)?

### **Summary & Closure**

- Further interviews
- Transcribe & Analysis
- Complete the write up
- Disseminate to participants and agencies in due course.