

## **Access to help for parents feeling victimised or experiencing abuse at the hands of their teenage children.**

### **ABSTRACT**

There has been only limited consideration of parent abuse in the literature since “battered parent syndrome” was first described by Harbin and Madden in 1979; and it remains largely unspoken and unknown by the general public. As a result, parents who may be experiencing extreme forms of violence on a daily basis, to an extent that the behaviour would attract a label of domestic violence or criminal activity in another setting, believe that they are alone in their suffering and that they are to blame. When they do eventually come forward for help they may be rebuffed or misunderstood in a policy and practice environment which conceives of parents as feckless and children as victims.

This study interviewed a small group of parents, all mothers, experiencing abuse, and sought to discover the types of help which they had tried or which might be available to them. The women, recruited through the researcher’s work place and through talking about the study, were different in many ways, but shared a strong sense of fear, of shame, and of exhaustion. Their teenage sons had been violent within the home for a number of years, but different explanations were offered for each. The support of a trusted friend was overwhelmingly important in dealing with the trauma; and each parent had then eventually accessed further help, though from a variety of sources.

The awareness of frontline staff is crucial in determining access to help, and while not all agencies offer support to parent or teenager themselves, there was found to be a knowledge of appropriate agencies for referral and a limited amount of highly specialised and successful work. Most of this is directed towards the parents, in recognition of the need to raise their self esteem and restore their status in the home, in their long-term role in supporting change and of the difficulties in engaging abusive youngsters in work.

Parent abuse has been believed to be more prevalent in the white community and possibly among higher socio-economic groups. It is tentatively suggested here that this may rather reflect the predominantly chosen source of help for different groups and the way their behaviour is interpreted in society; and that the problem is more widespread than has been thought.

Further avenues for research are highlighted; but the main conclusion is of a need to raise public and professional awareness of the issue of parent abuse so that parents do not continue too suffer in silence.

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