



# Country report England

Responding to Child to Parent Violence:  
European Perspectives

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## Country Reports on Child to Parent Violence- England

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Source of map: BBC News Online [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country\\_profiles/7327029.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/7327029.stm)

### Introduction

In England, like most European countries, people have only recently started to publicly recognise and talk about child to parent violence (CPV) although there have been other earlier attempts to raise this issue.

There is no official policy relating to CPV specifically or legal definition of CPV however there are new developments on this front (see Legislation and Policies below). The definition most used to describe child to parent violence in England is the one introduced by the Canadian researcher Barbara Cottrell according to which child to parent violence is

“...any harmful act by a child intended to gain power and control over a parent. The abuse can be physical, psychological, or financial” (Cottrell 2001, 3)

An additional definition used is Paterson *et al.*, (2002, 90), which states that “behaviour (is) considered to be violent if others in the family feel threatened, intimidated or controlled by it and if they believe that they must adjust their own behaviour to accommodate threats or anticipation of violence”. In spite of a consensus among English researchers and academics in the definition of child to parent violence there is disagreement on the terminology used to describe CPV (Wilcox, 2012) and the terms child to parent violence, parent abuse and adolescent to parent violence are often used interchangeably.

In relation to academic research and knowledge there is a developing literature on CPV in England since Hunter and Nixon and Parr’s (2010) seminal article ‘Mother Abuse: A Matter of Youth Justice, Child Welfare or Domestic Violence?’ published in the *Journal of Law and Society*. Their analysis of the policy and practice gap was particularly interesting and this was the first European publication to highlight gendered issues embedded within CPV. Following this Holt’s book *Adolescent to parent abuse: Current understandings in research, policy and practice* which reviewed the international literature on CPV was published in 2012. A special issue of the academic journal *Social Policy and Society* on parent abuse was another significant milestone (2012). Condry and Miles picked up the research baton and published the first paper on CPV based on empirical research (2013). Their latest work in 2014 looks at police responses to parents reporting adolescent to parent violence and suggests a way forward that offers support and restorative action for families. Wilcox and Pooley have written a chapter: ‘Children who are violent to their parents need protection too’ which will be published in Nicky Stanley and Cathy Humphreys forthcoming book entitled, *Domestic Violence and Protecting Children: New Thinking and Approaches*.

The 'Holes in the Wall' blog set up by Helen Bonnick in 2011 <http://holesinthewall.co.uk/> has been important in raising public and professional awareness of this issue. Indeed there has been huge media interest over the last eighteen months on this topic. The RCPV project has been instrumental in promoting media activity through its launch, the RCPV logo and website [www.rcpv.eu](http://www.rcpv.eu). CPV has featured in news print, radio documentaries and phone-ins, magazine spreads and, television programmes, many of these due to the work of the RCPV project. This coverage has brought the issue to the public attention, with a predictable range of responses on the internet, some less than positive, but as Helen Bonnick says "perhaps the main outcome has been that it now feels safer to acknowledge living in fear of your child – an important step on the road to seeking help" (Bonnick 2014). It should also be noted that professional awareness has grown due to the training provided during the RCPV project over the last two years on the intervention models Break4Change and Non Violent Resistance.

## Political, Social and Cultural Contexts

With over 53 million inhabitants, England is the most populous country of the United Kingdom, accounting for 84% of the combined total and the fourth largest population in the EU. The breakdown for ethnic groups in England is 85.4% white, 7.8 % Asian, 3.5% black, 2.3% mixed, 0.4% Arab, 0.6% other. According to the 2011 census, 59.4% of the population is Christian, 24.7% non-religious, 5% is Muslim while 3.7% of the population belongs to other religions and 7.2 did not give an answer.

England is a wealthy capitalist country with some remaining aspects of the welfare state established after WWII. However, the thrust of policy since 2010 has been to move towards the privatisation of public sector services. As a result of this policy, state welfare provision has been undermined and there have been cuts in funding for many services, perhaps especially relevant to CPV are cuts in children's, youth and domestic violence services. In a society where young people tend to be seen as consumers and/or as dangerous cuts to central services like these are extremely worrying for work on responding to CPV as this is never going to be a profit making business.

"As councils face a fourth consecutive year of cuts to central government funding and rising demand for care, our analysis of 2014-15 budgets from 55 of 152 local authorities in England found that spending on children's services dropped by an average of 2% (or 4% in real terms once inflation is factored in)" (McNicoll 2014).

"Over 1.2m women are estimated to have experienced domestic violence last year and two women a week are killed by perpetrators, according to the national domestic violence charity. But that death toll is likely to rise as a result of specialist domestic violence services in the UK reaching a "breaking point", with funding cuts threatening the entire network of providers in England, according to Polly Neate, chief executive of Women's Aid" (Peacock 2014).

"The amount of money spent on services for teenagers in England has fallen by 36% in the past two years, according to figures released to the BBC. Former children's minister, Tory MP Tim Loughton, said the £438m reduction in spending was "disproportionate". Youth workers warned that the long-term cost of the cuts would be "enormous" (Barton and Edgington 2014)

The typical family in England remains a nuclear family with heterosexual father and mother although there are now far more diverse forms of families and it is important to bear this in mind when working on CPV. More women are working than ever before and gender inequalities are shifting but there remain serious issues to be tackled such as gender pay imbalance and low representation of women in decision making bodies (e.g. only 20% of MPs are women). The more powerful male role in the nuclear family tends to be hidden and is not discussed in the wider public sphere. Child poverty remains relatively high in England. There are 3.5 million children living in poverty in the UK today. That's 27 per cent of children, or more than one in four (DWP 2013) and work does not provide a guaranteed route out of poverty in the UK. Two-thirds (66 per cent) of children growing up in poverty live in a family where at least one member works (DWP 2013). Poverty increases levels of stress in families and may contribute towards CPV although research is not conclusive on this point. Many families and individuals raising children in England today are therefore quite isolated and the African notion that 'it takes a village to raise a child' highlights one reason why families face difficulties in child rearing.

When we turn to look at teenagers in England, there is a large group of over one million teenagers who have little or no stake in society as they are Not in Employment Education or Training NEETs (Burns 2012). Culturally there is a prevalence of violent PC games and films aimed mainly at boys and whilst there is no direct correlation between viewing and playing of such games they underpin the relative approval for certain forms of male violence.

There is a notion among a number of researchers that child to parent violence is related to the culture of materialism and capitalism in the sense that young people are using a range of means (including violence) to acquire material goods. In addition the individualistic culture of westernised societies may also act as negative contributor. The lack of gender equality education and the blaming of mothers are also identified as negative cultural and social factors.

## Statistics on Child to Parent Violence

On 23 January 2014 the BBC reported that teenagers abusing their parents is a 'serious and often hidden issue'. Within this press coverage the NGO Family Lives (formerly Parentline Plus) says that over a two year period, 31% of over 85,000 calls to its helpline 'concerned physical aggression' by children. In May 2014 television Channel 5 ran a programme about CPV focusing on the experiences of three families in England who face this problem.

In England research on patients reporting domestic violence in an emergency department at a local hospital reported that 6% of the cases were cases of young people's violence against their parents (Smith *et al.*, 1992).

Parentline Plus reported that they receive approximately 95 calls per month from parents worried about the aggressive behaviour of their child towards them (Parentline Plus, 2009).

A report by Hunter *et al.*, (2010) in family intervention projects found that 11% of 256 families experience this phenomenon.

Condry and Miles (2013, 7), found that of all cases reported to Metropolitan Police over one year (April 2009 – March 2010) 1,892 were cases of violence from adolescents (aged 13 – 19 years) to a parent - most involved violence against the person or criminal damage in the home-.

## Legislation and Policies

As with domestic violence there is a general move in England towards legislating on violence; eg gun crime, stalking, rather than looking at alternative options. Legislation can of course be helpful and is necessary in some cases but there is often a dislocation between legislation and what happens in real life; for example the DV legislation assumes adults acting rather than children. This may increase the tendency to respond to CPV using the CJS which may only be appropriate in some cases

The legal system in England and Wales is a common law one. In England, there is no official and specific legislation or legal definition regarding CPV. The domestic violence legislation framework is the closest framework to CPV in the absence of specific CPV legislation. It is important to note that on March 2013 the legal definition of domestic violence was altered to include 16 and 17 years old people. This change to the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2003 also includes controlling and coercive behaviour. The new definition states:

*"Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but it is limited to the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional (Home Office, 2012).*

As far as policies are concerned, in England CPV is mainly held by the Youth Justice Board and the local Youth Offending Services although the Home Office has picked this up in an action point in the VAWG Action Plan (see Home Office below).

## Referral pathways when CPV is reported

When CPV cases are reported (which is rare) they are reported to the police. If the young person is above 16 years old under the recently introduced domestic violence definition is held responsible for criminal offence. If the young person is under 16 years old the police make a referral to the local youth offending teams. According to the research, police very often advice parents to contact social services and family support (Nixon and Hunter, 2012).

## Participation in previous Daphne Projects

The University of Canterbury in England was involved in a previous Daphne II project on CPV. Partly as a response to this participation, an academic research network called the Parent Abuse Research Network (PARN) was set up by Nixon and Hunter after a seminar that took place in March 2009 at Sheffield Hallam University. Much subsequent research activity in England developed as a result of this innovative event (see e.g. Condry and Miles 2013, Holt 2012, 2013, Nixon and Hunter 2012, Wilcox 2012).

## Institutional Stakeholders

### The Home Office

With the inclusion of policy on CPV at government level identified as a key target, intense campaigning brought about important developments such as the inclusion by the Home Office of an action point on adolescent to parent violence in the 2014 *A call to end violence against women and girls: Action plan*, Action Point 63

'Develop and disseminate information for practitioners working with children and families on how to identify and address the risks posed by adolescent to parent violence'.

<http://socialwelfare.bl.uk/subject-areas/services-client-groups/families/homeoffice/145320vawg-action-plan-2013.pdf>

### Youth Justice

The Youth Justice Board has been leading development on CPV in England ensuring that professionals are aware of models of intervention which show promise on their Effective Practice Library <https://www.justice.gov.uk/youth-justice/effective-practice-library> which includes the Break4Change model focused on in the RCPV project.

### Health

The Department of Health is the state agency that is required to provide services to adults and children needing health and social care through the National Health Service and specifically for mental health services for children through CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services). There do not seem to be any health policies or strategies on how to refer and/or intervene in relation to CPV cases.

### Municipality

Across the country, and in the face of huge financial constraints, some municipalities have sought to build an approach to CPV into already overstretched budgets, with many administrations now owning, at the very least, a commitment to the cause. Examples include Brighton and Hove City Council and Kent County Council with Break4Change.

*Reflecting the success of the Daphne funded pilot, Brighton & Hove City Council has mainstreamed a requirement to deliver interventions around Child to Parent Violence, through a direct investment and an in-kind commitment of staff resource, as part of its commissioning strategy for specialist domestic and sexual violence & abuse services from 2015-2018.*

# England

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## The Police

There is no policy or legislation for CPV and the police service. Under criminal law, a child/young person who is 16 or 17 years old is dealt with under an amendment to the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act of 2004. Victims of domestic violence and abuse aged 16 and 17 will be recognised under a new cross-government definition.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-definition-of-domestic-violence-and-abuse-to-include-16-and-17-year-olds--2>

## Youth Offending Services:

Again in the face of huge financial constraints the Youth Offending Service in Brighton and Hove have been partners in the multi-agency CPV intervention model Break4Change.

## NGOs:

In general relevant NGOs do not have policies or strategies on CPV. However, there are a relatively small number of specialised services providing intervention for CPV, for example:

Break4Change, Brighton and Hove, Kent

Non Violent Resistance, Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust, London

YUVA, Domestic Violence Intervention Project, London

PAARS, Enfield

Respect Young People's Programme RYPP

Step Up, Hull

Who's In Charge Programme, South Suffolk

## Education:

There were no specific policies found in the education services and schools.

## Social Services

The Local Safeguarding Children Boards direct and guide the responses of health and education practitioners when they recognise troubled and anti-social behaviour by young people. In general, Local Children's Safeguarding Board recognise that young people can be violent towards other young people, parents, siblings or other adults (London CSB, 2009; London CSB, 2010).

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