

Adolescent Violence in the Home: CAN

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Agenda

Definition
Prevalence
Impacts
Adolescent family violence, AOD use & trauma
Doing the work – what helps?



Adolescent Violence in the Home – definition

- A **pattern** of behaviours by an adolescent that intimidates and coerces family members in order to gain power and control. Behaviours include emotional, physical, verbal and financial abuse and violence
- Threat of violence becomes a tool to gain power and control
- On going – not a one off incident
- Parents commonly adjust their own behaviour to accommodate threats or anticipation of violence (Patterson et al 2002)
- Mutually reinforcing/recursive – parent backs down, adolescent gains power
- Terminology – adolescent violence in the home, adolescent family violence, child to parent violence, teen violence to parents etc etc

Myths

- He can't help it; it just explodes
- It's just acting out behaviour
- She's violent because of the drug use
- Her mum drives her to it
- The parents can't parent; it's their fault
- It's the ADHD.

Behaviours

- Physical – hitting, punching, slapping, kicking, hair pulling, spitting, property damage, pet cruelty
- Psychological – manipulation, intimidation, sarcasm, criticism, threats to harm self and others
- Financial – property damage, theft, disruption of parent’s work, incurring debts and fines
- Social – embarrassment, isolation, denigrating family and friends, controlling social contact, undermining attempts to form new friendships/relationships



Complexity

- Frequently accompanied by other issues – ie school behaviour/drop out, alcohol and drug use, mental health (diagnosis ADHD, ODD, CD), child protection, youth justice
- Trauma – intergenerational AND family violence, war etc
- Mix of emotional manipulation and real safety concerns eg ‘at risk’ behaviours
- Intersect of punitive parenting/child abuse and adolescent’s use of violence
- Vulnerability of adolescent



Prevalence

- 10% of all family violence incidents
- LGAs with high family violence incidents have high AVITH incidents
- Two thirds of offenders are male (64%) and most victims are mothers (80%)
- High co-occurrence in YJ clients
- Largest cohort is sole mothers of adolescent males



Determinants

- Parenting – detached, distant & disengaged (Robinson, Wright, and Watson 1994), parent/child boundaries, child as friend, entitled child
- Under control vrs over control/emotionally engaged vrs disengaged
- Trauma (parental and child intergenerational), especially family violence (60% have experienced family violence)
- Child abuse (see trauma)
- Societal ie consumerism, gendered attitudes, changes in family life, social media etc



Impacts

- Victim - guilt, shame, embarrassment, isolation, blame, grief and loss, mental health, financial, physical
- Adolescent – power, guilt, shame, grief and loss, at risk behaviours, mental health
- Other family – sibling abuse, extended family, family loyalty/splitting



Trauma – what is it?

- Frozen stress – a pattern of neurological distress that doesn't go away by returning to a state of equilibrium
- Events – war, family violence and/or cumulative ie neglect
- Early childhood development– even before birth
- Relates to attachment & nurturing (developmental or relational trauma)
- Consider – parents impacted by trauma trying to parent children impacted by trauma – intergenerational trauma



Violence, AOD use & trauma

Bruce Perry, 'Incubated in Terror – the neurobiology of violence'

- Violence as compulsive/reactive vrs instrumental/controlling
- Brain develops in a sequential and hierarchical manner – as the more complex areas organize, they begin to moderate the most reactive functions; brainstem, midbrain to frontal cortex
- Neurological pathways as 'use dependent', neuro plasticity
- Frontal cortex plays a major role in inhibiting, modulating and regulating the functioning of the lower parts of the central nervous system; involves the capacity to control frustration, impulsivity and aggression
- Any factors which increase the activity or reactivity of the brainstem (e.g., chronic traumatic stress) or decrease the moderating capacity of the limbic or cortical areas (e.g. neglect) will increase an individual's aggressivity, impulsivity and capacity to be violent

Impacts

- Attachment – survival, empathy, social awareness
- Numbing, emotional disconnection
- Strength of the sub-cortical and cortical impulse-modulating capacity is reduced with trauma/attachment issues
- Adrenaline and cortisol – impaired short term memory
- Hyper-vigilance, low impulse control, reduced capability to problem solve, startle response, difficulty with affect regulation & sleep
- Flight, freeze or fight

Trauma & AOD use

- Emotional emptiness (boredom) filled by the temporary pleasure of substance use
- Escape from the distress and pain caused by the anxiety of a persisting fear response
- Chemical changes – lower level serotonin
- Feeling invincible – an antidote to feeling powerlessness
- Substance use permits (but doesn't cause) expression of the neuro-developmentally- determined pre-disposition for violence (Perry).



AOD use & violence

- Some substances more than others support the use of violence eg ice, alcohol
- Disinhibit the moral barriers to the use of violence eg low level empathy, poor impulse control
- Increase perception of threat
- Violence may be more frequent & severe
- Family arguments may relate to an adolescent's substance use



Enablers of violence in the context of trauma

- A child's belief systems eg gender, conflict resolution, entitlement
- Role modeling – family violence, the media, social media, peers
- Brain's executive functions (decision making, problem solving & reasoning) impacted by trauma plus substance use = violence



Goals of intervention

- Family safety & stability/calm
- Address impacts of trauma – whole of family
- Insight – parental and adolescent
- Empathy – parental and adolescent
- Change family patterns and dynamics eg dealing with conflict
- Rebuild family connection
- Support healthy adolescent development ie emotional regulation, conflict resolution
- Address co-occurring issues – mental health, AOD, education etc
- Offending ceases



Intervention

- Crucial – don't just focus on stopping the violence, need to change family relationships, dynamics and patterns
- Worker as positive role model/container, stability & predictability
- Work with AOD use and trauma and violence at the same time
- Family systems work – important to work with parent and adolescent (separately and conjointly); consider safety
- Case management plus therapeutic work
- Skills development - impulse control, self soothing, conflict resolution
- Build rapport with adolescent, empathise with parent
- Support empathy, build strengths
- Restorative practice



Intervention - theory

- Motivational interviewing – explore ambivalence about use of violence/AOD use and the rewards/losses it brings
- Psycho-education – trauma, child development (adolescence), AOD use, family violence
- Family systems eg circular questions – appreciation of the experience of the other, building empathy
- Solution focused – building self efficacy
- Restorative practice – making amends for harms done



Assessment

- Separate adolescent and parent assessment – Behavioral Checklists
- Assists in the development of a safety plan
- May assist in developing empathy
- Identifies immediate needs (including safety)
- Begins to identify motivation to change and possibility of family work
- Assessment is not static/one off but ongoing
- Identifies co –occurring issues



Assessment

- Be aware of what you're looking for ie use of violence may not be disclosed or may be minimised
- Don't assume the adolescent may be the only offender ie siblings, parent



Assessment questions to disclose violence

- It's common for parents and adolescents to disagree or argue. What happens when you and your adolescent/parent disagree? Do fights ever become physical?
- How are disagreements resolved or ended?
- Have there been situations in your relationship with your adolescent/parent where you have felt afraid?
- Does your adolescent/parent ever criticise you, put you down or blame you when things go wrong?
- Have you been physically hurt or threatened by your adolescent/parent?
- (Parent) Have you ever experienced abuse or violence from a partner? Does your adolescent's behaviour remind you of that?
- (Parent) Have you done something for your adolescent that you didn't want to do, but did out of fear of the consequences eg gave them money?
- (Parent) Do you feel controlled by your adolescent?
- (Parent) Do you feel you are 'walking on eggshells' to keep the calm at home?
- (Parent) Rate on scale 0-10 - where is the power balance between adolescent and parent?



Behavioural checklist

- Frequency/severity and type of violence/control
- Important to consider non physical violence
- Important to recognize impacts – physical, emotional, financial etc and how these impacts compromise taking action



Engaging adolescents

- Go with self interest
- Motivational interviewing
- Alan Jenkins, “Invitations to Responsibility” – Do you want your little sister to see you as someone she can trust, like her best friend or someone to avoid at all costs?
- Externalise the violence initially in order to engage – eg conflict, ‘fighting’
- Positives and negatives of using violence
- Motivation for change – future projection questions, relationship questions
- Explore future goals and how AVITH may be a barrier
- Parent as coach to attend
- Avoid blaming, focus on responsibility



Safety Planning

- Adolescent & parent
- Helps identify patterns



Intervention - Parents

Aim of intervention:

- Help make sense of the violence
- Relieve distress - blame, shame, isolation
- Promote safety
- Provide information – why it is happening, patterns
- Provide hope of change
- Gain commitment and motivation
- Regain control



Intervention – core elements

Parent:

- Safety planning
- Address guilt, shame & blame, isolation
- Psycho-education – What is abuse & violence?, family violence, youth development, trauma
- Patterns to the violence – when does it most often happen? Is there a cycle eg honeymoon period? Explore violence as expressive (losing it) vrs controlling
- Function of the violence – challenge myths about why the violence is occurring
- Responsibility vrs entitlement
- Skill development – assertive parenting & consequences, communication & conflict resolution
- Parental/family relationships
- Strengthening parent/child relationship
- Self care & support
- Self soothing & time out



Intervention - Adolescents

Aim of intervention:

- Promote safety (own and others)
- Provide information – violence as an instrumental act
- Invitation to take responsibility
- Address co-occurring issues (case coordination)
- Developing new skills



Intervention – core elements

Adolescent:

- Motivational interviewing (exploring ambivalence), solution & goal focused
- Psycho-education – What is abuse & violence?, family violence, youth development, trauma
- Understanding their violence as ‘instrumental’ - function of the violence
- CBT – understanding thoughts, feelings, emotions
- Exploring exceptions to the use of violence
- Self talk (winding up/winding down), identifying early warning signs
- Exploring contradictions – ‘So you hated your dad hitting your mum but ...’
- Identifying emotions & differentiating anger and violence
- Address co-occurring issues (care team)
- Communication & conflict resolution
- Self soothing & time out
- Building empathy
- Community linkage ie school



Questions which highlight personal agency/self control - adolescents

- Why did you throw the cup at the wall? Why not at her?
- What did you want your mum to do/stop doing?
- Why did you decide to go to your mum's china cabinet and take out the vase her mum gave her and smash it? What were you thinking during that time?

(From Ester McGeeney et al, in Hold, A, Working with Adolescent Violence & Abuse Towards Parents, Routledge Press, UK 2015)



Questions which highlight personal agency/self control - parents

- Why do you think he threw the cup at the wall rather than you?
- What do you think he was thinking at the time?
- Why do you think she chose to smash the thing that had such sentimental value to you?

(From Ester McGeeney et al, in Hold, A, Working with Adolescent Violence & Abuse Towards Parents, Routledge Press, UK 2015)



Be aware of ...

- Inadvertent collusion with the adolescent
- Cognitive distortion/victimhood without responsibility
- Blaming - “She wouldn’t get out of my face ...”
- Minimising - “It wasn’t that bad. I punched the wall not her”
- Justifying – “I cant help it. I just lose it”



Royal Commission on Family Violence Recommendations

- AVITH as a form of family violence in its own right
- Need for clearly articulated response including involving criminal justice/therapeutic
- Interface with AVITH programs & YJ Group conferencing
- Yay!!!



Articles

- Perry, B 1997, Incubated in Terror: Neurodevelopmental Factors in the 'Cycle of Violence' (google)
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