

Title

Adolescent to Parent Violence: Framing and Mapping a Hidden Problem

Abstract

Adolescent to parent violence is virtually absent from policing, youth justice and domestic violence policy, despite being widely recognised by practitioners in those fields. It is under-researched and rarely appears in criminological discussions of family or youth violence. This article presents the first UK analysis of cases of adolescent to parent violence reported to the police. We analyse victim, offender and incident characteristics from 1,892 cases reported to the Metropolitan Police in 2009-2010, most of which involved violence against the person or criminal damage in the home. Our findings reveal that adolescent to parent violence is a gendered phenomenon: 87% of suspects were male and 77% of victims were female. We argue that the absence of adolescent to parent violence from criminological discourse must be addressed if criminology is to have a thorough understanding of family violence in all its forms.

Key words: adolescent to parent violence, parent abuse, youth violence, domestic violence, police data.

Word Count: 8,586

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ADOLESCENT TO PARENT VIOLENCE: FRAMING AND MAPPING A HIDDEN PROBLEM

INTRODUCTION

This article addresses a form of family violence which has remained largely invisible in policing, youth justice and domestic violence policy, despite being widely recognised by practitioners. It is also a form of family violence that has been overlooked by criminologists, despite its presence in the criminal justice realm. The aim of this article is two-fold: to frame the problem of adolescent to parent violence, considering its relationship to criminal justice policy and criminology, and to map the contours of the problem of adolescent to parent violence, considering evidence from other studies and presenting statistical data from an ESRC-funded research project. This article presents the first UK based analysis of police recorded cases. We conclude that the absence of adolescent to parent violence from criminological discourse is a significant omission which needs to be addressed if we are to have a thorough understanding of the broad tapestry of violence in the home.

FRAMING THE PROBLEM OF ADOLESCENT TO PARENT VIOLENCE

An official recognition of and response to adolescent to parent violence is curiously lacking in the UK. It is mostly absent from the policy sphere, not appearing in youth justice or police policy documents, nor in government policies about family violence (see for example, Home Office, 2012). There are no official figures regarding the prevalence of the problem and there is a lack of appropriate legislation, policy, and support for families experiencing violence from adolescents.

Until recently, adolescent to parent violence was not officially defined as domestic violence if the adolescent was under the age of 18. The definition referred to any incidence of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between adults aged 18 or over who are, or who have been, intimate partners or family members (Home Office, 2012). In September 2012 it was announced that the definition would be expanded to include young people aged 16 and 17. The new definition is wide ranging, also now including coercive control:

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

Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour. Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim. (Home Office, 2012).

This came in to force in 2013 and for the first time makes 16 and 17 year old victims and perpetrators visible, though if a young person under the age of 16 assaults a family member this remains outside the definition.

As a consequence of being excluded from the official definition, assaults upon parents by under eighteen year olds have not been 'flagged' as domestic violence cases in police databases and therefore have not appeared in domestic violence statistics. Adolescent to parent violence is not included in the current British Crime Survey; no data is collected about the regularity with which it appears in youth justice, and little is known about the frequency with which domestic violence services work with parents experiencing violence from adolescents. As one domestic violence expert who holds regular training courses for practitioners from a range of fields commented to us:

[practitioners] say that they get so many calls every day, about child to parent violence. And loads of social workers are reporting that's the big issue that they're working on. But no-one really knows how to respond to it, because it doesn't neatly fall into the definition of domestic violence. So I think there's a real gap still in the knowledge around how to deal with it.

As things stand, adolescent to parent violence cannot be located within existing policy and legal frameworks and it does not fit with the ways in which these frameworks construct the child, parents, victims, and perpetrators (Hunter et al., 2010: 274). This is particularly so within youth justice, which in recent years has been constructed around notions of parental responsibility for young offenders' actions (Goldson and Jamieson, 2002; Hunter and Piper, 2012). This reflects a widely held belief - in both the public and policy realms - that parents are able to assert power and control over their children, and that they have a duty to do so, which does not allow for a conceptualisation of mothers or fathers as victims of their own children's actions. There is what might be described as a dominant paradigm of parental accountability and responsibility which allows little room for recognition or concern that young people who are offending outside the home might also be doing so inside the home and could be beyond the control of their parents (Henricson and Bainham, 2005; XXXX, 2012).

There has been little academic research on adolescent to parent violence and the problem has remained largely unexplored within criminology, particularly in the UK, despite an ever-expanding literature on family violence and lively debates about how it should be understood. Criminology

firmly constructs adolescents as potential offenders in the public sphere, but not within the home. Adolescent to parent violence does not appear in any of the key UK criminological, youth justice or policing journals and until now, has not been the subject of thorough criminological investigation. If research is triggered by policy concerns and governmental priorities then we should not be surprised at the absence of adolescent to parent violence in UK criminology. However, if criminological research is stimulated by interaction with those ‘on the ground’ we might expect criminologists to have encountered adolescent to parent violence and criminology to have engaged with the phenomenon to some degree. There are some very recent examples of work on this form of family violence being stimulated by encounters in the field. One author of this article began to develop research on adolescent to parent violence after being incidentally told in interviews with parents in youth offending teams in an earlier research study. Similar inadvertent encounters have been reported in a study of parents in Family Intervention Projects (Hunter et al., 2010) and parents in receipt of parenting orders in a youth offending team (Holt, 2009). However, given that child to parent violence was first identified in an academic journal over thirty years ago (Harbin and Madden, 1979), it is somewhat surprising that it has been so little studied.

MAPPING THE PROBLEM OF ADOLESCENT TO PARENT VIOLENCE

(A) EXISTING EVIDENCE

What do we know about adolescent to parent violence?

The literature on adolescent to parent violence has emerged primarily from countries other than the UK and from disciplines such as psychiatry, psychology and family studies (See Cottrell and Monk, 2004 and Kennair and Mellor, 2007). The research for some of these studies is rather limited, often involves participants from therapeutic support groups, and mainly focuses on identifying familial causes and characteristics. Not surprisingly, there is little connection with criminological concerns about how this specific kind of violence might be defined, how it fits with what we know about intimate partner violence and other forms of violence, and how it is policed and managed within the criminal justice system.

There are only a few books worldwide specifically on adolescent to parent violence, and these books are often therapeutic in origin (e.g. Cottrell, 2004; Price, 1999), in contrast to thousands of books on other forms of family violence. Most work on adolescent to parent violence derives from the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Spain. Most studies that specifically focus on adolescent to parent violence are small-scale and qualitative and based upon interviews or focus groups with parents (e.g. Howard and Rottem, 2008; Bobic, 2004; Gallagher, 2004; Cottrell and Monk, 2004).

Although these provide interesting and often rich data, it can be problematic to generalise from smaller localised studies which often draw upon samples derived from clinical settings. There are some broader self-report surveys of adolescent youth provide data on adolescent to parent violence (e.g. Peek et al., 1985; Kratcoski, 1985; Agnew and Huguley, 1989; Pagani et al., 2004) and make attempts to estimate the proportion of families that experience it. However, estimates vary depending upon the definition and research methods, ranging from 7 to 18 per cent of two parent families and 29 per cent of single parent families (Kennair and Mellor, 2007).

Criminal justice data on reported cases provide larger samples from which observations may be drawn about the prevalence of adolescent to parent violence and the socio-demographic characteristics of families in contact with the police. In an Australian report on adolescent violence in the home (Howard, 2011), police data from the state of Victoria are presented, revealing that nine per cent of all family violence incidents recorded in 2009/10 involved adolescent to parent violence. The peak age of offending was 15-17 years. Two-thirds of the perpetrators were male and 74% of victims seeking an intervention order were female. In the US, three studies have analysed large datasets of police recorded cases to determine the victim, offender and incident characteristics of child to parent violence. These studies analyse the National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) which holds data about all recorded offences across a large number of US states. Walsh and Kreinert (2007) analysed the NIBRS data across 23 states for 2002 and found that in that year, 17,957 children aged 21 or younger were reported for assaulting a parent or step-parent – 2,096 of which were recorded as aggravated assaults (use or threat of weapon). In a later study Walsh and Krienert (2009) examined victim, offender and incident characteristics in NIBRS data for an eleven year period (1995-2005). They again adopted a wide age range (7-21 years) which drew a sample of 102,231 child-to-parent violent offenders. They found that males committed approximately sixty three per cent of reported incidents and females thirty seven per cent. Most offenders were white (76%) as were most victims (78%); fifty five per cent of victims were aged 35-44 years, and forty eight per cent of offenders were aged between 14 and 16 years of age. Twenty eight per cent of victims were male and seventy two per cent were female.

In a report for the US Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Snyder and McCurley (2008) also analyse NIBRS data on all reported cases of assault occurring in 2004 across 30 US states. . They reported that nine per cent (one in twelve) of domestic assault offenders were juveniles (under the age of eighteen); that fifty one per cent of these juvenile domestic assault offenders victimised a parent; and that almost eight out of every ten domestic assault victims of juvenile offenders were parents or siblings. White juvenile assault offenders were more likely than Black juvenile assault offenders to have victimised their parents (54% compared to 44%). One third of domestic assault offenders were female (31%). Almost half (49%) of assault offenders who

victimised their parents were juveniles (aged 7-17) and the assault rate was found to peak between 15-17 and to then decrease with age (Snyder and McCurley, 2008).

Analyses of police data have thus consistently found that boys are more likely than girls to be reported for violence towards their parents and mothers are more likely than fathers to report victimisation, suggesting the majority of reported cases of child to parent violence occur between sons and mothers. The peak age for offenders in reported cases is somewhere between 14 and 17 years and parents tend to be in their late thirties/early forties. These studies also further suggest that child to parent violence is more common in white families than in other ethnic groups. We should note that these studies are based on cases reported to the police and some of the significant differences found might reflect reporting tendencies. We might note that some studies using clinical and self-report data report no gender differences in the perpetration of adolescent to parent violence (for example, Pagani et al., 2004; Calvete et al., 2013). Looking at reported cases alone may therefore provide a skewed profile of the type of individuals and families that experience child to parent violence, but currently these are the only available large-scale data sets.

Although to date there have been no analyses of cases of adolescent to parent violence reported to the police in the UK, there is some limited research evidence that points to the problem. The 1996 British Crime Survey (BCS) found that around 3% of domestic violence cases were child-to-parent violence (although this was based on a very small sample) (Mirlees-Black et al., 1996: 30-31). BCS reports since 1996 have not included data on child-to-parent violence. A study of patients reporting domestic violence at an Accident and Emergency department in a UK hospital found that 6% of these cases were child to parent (Smith et al., 1992). In a UK self-report study, 3% of young offenders identified their parents as victims of their assaults (Wilson et al., 2006). More recently, 11% of 256 families (primarily single mothers) in Family Intervention Projects have reported experiencing violence from their adolescents (Hunter et al. 2010).

Two surveys by the UK charity Parentline Plus¹ suggest that a significant number of families could be experiencing violence from children. The first survey in 2008 found that 8% of 30,000 calls to its helpline were about physical aggression from children, most of which took place at home, was usually targeted at mothers, and peaked with teenagers aged 13-15 years (Parentline Plus, 2008). The chief executive of Parentline Plus described child-to-parent aggression as 'the last taboo about violence in the home' (Families First for Health website 2008). This was followed by a report which revealed that over the two year period from June 2008 to June 2010, the Parentline Plus helpline received 22,537 calls from parents who were struggling to cope with aggressive behaviour from their children, 7,000 of which concerned incidents of physical aggression (Parentline Plus, 2010).

There is clearly a growing body of evidence that some parents in the UK experience violence from their children, and a number of practitioners and academics are concerned with breaking the silence

surrounding the issue. The first UK based book on adolescent to parent abuse was recently published (Holt, 2012), drawing together literature from across the globe with some small-scale qualitative research (on parents' and practitioners' experiences of adolescent-to-parent abuse) and making a number of recommendations for future research, policy and practice. However, at the time of writing, the issue remains absent from official discourse in this country and there is still little official recognition of this form of family violence. In presenting the first large-scale analysis of police data on adolescent to parent violence in the UK, this paper provides evidence that might aid the emergence of the issue onto the policy agenda.

(B) OUR FINDINGS

In this section we present data on victim, offender and incident characteristics for all cases of adolescent to parent violence reported to the Metropolitan Police over a one year period (April 2009-March 2010) and defined as constituting a criminal offence. We analyse 1,892 cases of violence from adolescents (13 – 19 years) towards a parent, most of which involved violence against the person or criminal damage in the homeⁱⁱ. This analysis forms part of an ESRC-funded three year project which explores the extent and nature of adolescent to parent violence in the UK, parents' and adolescents' experiences, and how cases are responded to within the criminal justice system. It is the first large-scale study of adolescent to parent violence in UK and utilises a range of methods to try to understand this complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. Our aim in analysing police recorded cases is to describe offender, victim and incident characteristics and to provide some of the first evidence from the UK that this hidden and complex form of family violence exists and as such is in need of formal recognition and response.

Data and Methods

We begin by outlining all reported offences committed by adolescents aged 13 – 19 years against a parent or step-parent and then develop our analysis to focus specifically on adolescent to parent violence. We have taken a broad definition of 'violence' to include threat, use of force, and criminal damage, reflecting behaviour defined as violent in contemporary research on the issue (see for example, Howard, 2011, Holt, 2012) and by participants in our broader study. Practitioner and parent interviewees described numerous cases of adolescent to parent violence which involved a pattern of aggressive and violent acts across a prolonged period of time. In addition to assaults, this has often included smashing up property, kicking holes in doors, breaking windows, throwing items at parents, and making (often serious) threats which can generate an environment where a parent lives in fear of their own child and curtails their own behaviour to try to contain or minimise violence. Our aim is to encompass this wide range of reported instances of aggressive or threatening acts towards a parent or

a parent's property rather than restrict our analysis to direct assaults. We therefore include the offence category of 'criminal damage' (which in the majority of cases was damage to a dwelling, see **Table 1**) where the parent is the victim but exclude offences such as 'theft and handling' where a parent is the victim of their adolescent child's offence, but not of a threat of force.

The data were extracted from the Crime Reporting Information System (CRIS) database, which records all crimes reported to the 33 London Metropolitan Police Borough Operational Command Units. These anonymous data were provided in an Excel spreadsheet, which was converted into an SPSS database for the purposes of data analysis. The database consisted of 27 variablesⁱⁱⁱ, for example suspect and victim demographics, suspect/victim occupation, relationship of suspect to victim, broad offence category, specific offence type, extent of injury, and instrument (documenting any use of weapons, methods and other circumstances such as alcohol and/or drug consumption).

In order to deal with duplicate data and construct a database that could be used to count offences and perform meaningful analyses, a data reduction process was undertaken whereby only the primary case entry for each incident was included in the analysis and all duplicate case entries were filtered out. The disadvantage of this process was the inevitable loss of some data. For example, if one case involved a primary offence of violence against the person and a duplicate entry listing a criminal damage offence, only the violence against the person offence would be counted in the analysis. A further 22 cases had substantial missing or anomalous data (e.g. impossible ages for parents of adolescents) and were therefore removed from the analysis.

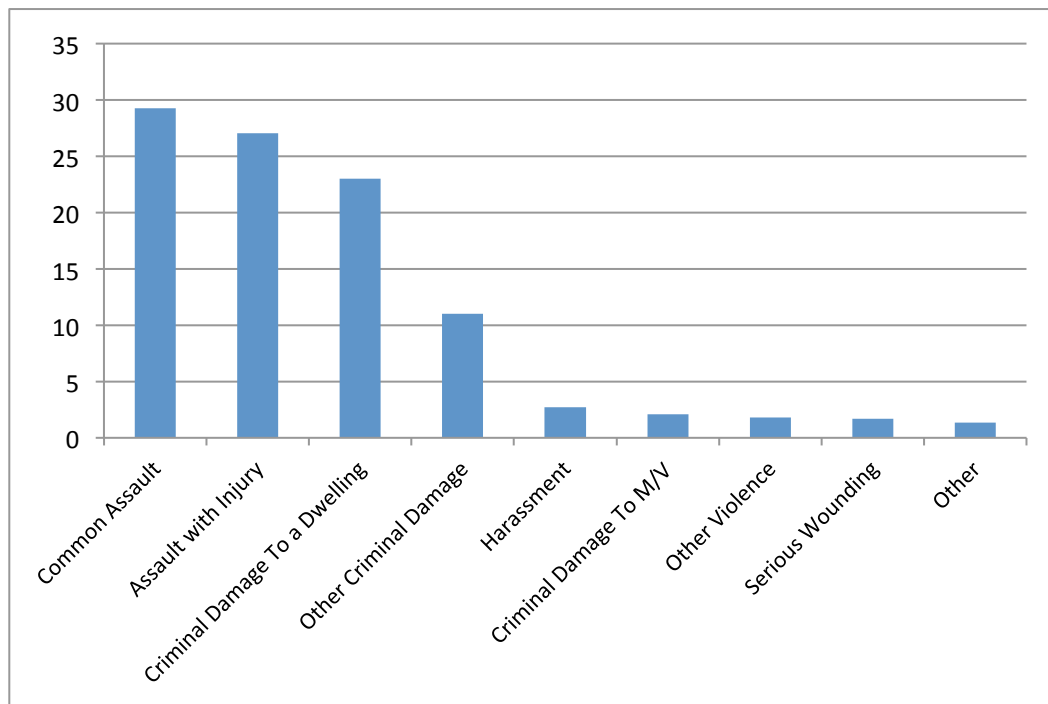
Research Findings

Following the data reduction process there were 2,336 cases of adolescent to parent crime (see **Table 1**), the majority of which involved offences classified as 'violence against the person' (n=1,184). In order to refine the analysis within the parameters of the research objectives, the remainder of the analysis focused on offence categories that involve violence, use of force, threat of violence, or other aggressive behaviour: violence against the person, criminal damage, robbery, and sexual offences. The other offence categories were filtered out of the analysis, providing a sample of 1,892 cases for analysis. **Figure 1** displays the breakdown of broad offence categories into specific types of offence. Over half (56.3%) of the offences reported by parents involved common assault or assault with injury, with criminal damage to a dwelling accounting for almost a quarter of offences (23%).

Table 1: All cases of adolescent to parent crime reported in London, 1st April 2009 – 31st March 2010 (n=2,336)

	Frequency	%
Violence Against the Person	1184	50.7
Criminal Damage	696	29.8
Theft and Handling	313	13.4
Burglary	47	2.0
Robbery	10	.4
Fraud or Forgery	14	.6
Drugs	1	.0
Sexual Offences	2	.1
Other Notifiable Offences	69	3.0
Total	2336	100.0

Figure 1: Breakdown of offence category by offence type (n=1,892)



Offender and Victim Characteristics

Preliminary data analysis revealed that adolescents aged 13-19 years who were reported to the police for violent offences against their parents were overwhelmingly male (87.3%), with a mean age of 16.4, a median age of 17 and a modal age of 18 years. **Figure 2** illustrates that suspects were most likely to be classified as White European, although a substantial proportion were classified as Afro-Caribbean^{iv}.

Figure 2: Suspect Ethnicity (n=1,830)

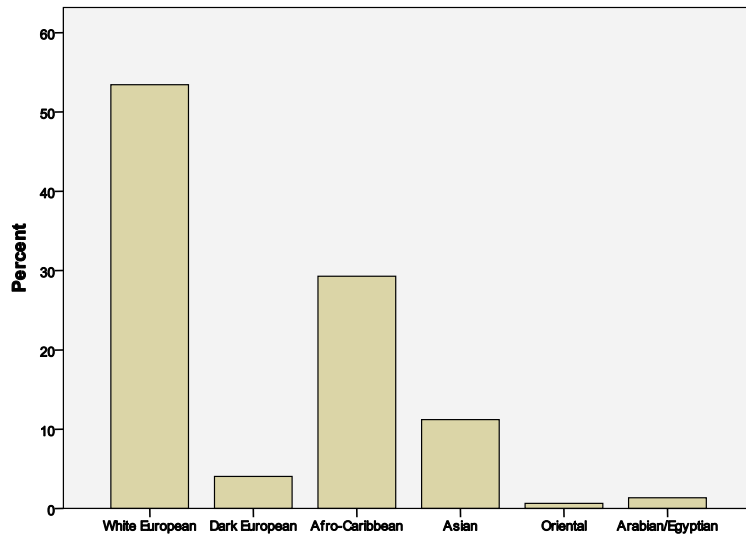
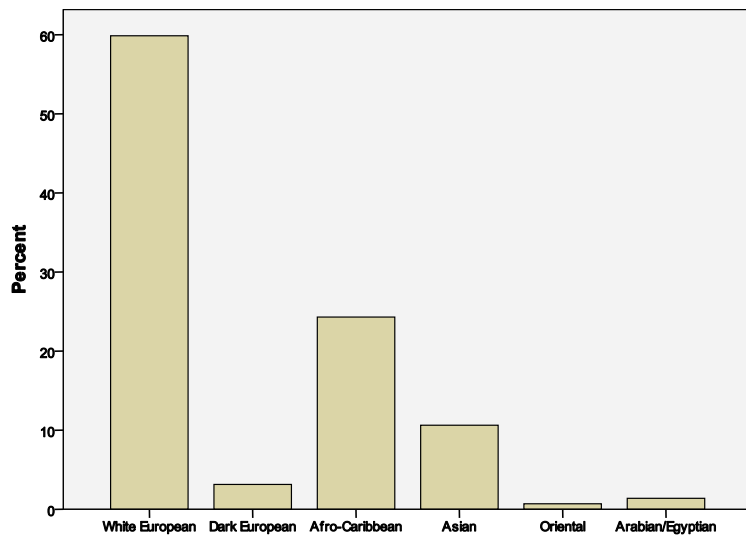


Figure 3: Victim Ethnicity (n=1,881)



The analysis of victim demographics revealed that three-quarters of reporting parents were female (77.5%). These parents had a modal age of 40, a mean age of 43.6 and a median age of 43. The breakdown of victim ethnicity was similar to that for suspects, with 59.9% of victims classified as 'White European' and 24.3% recorded as 'Afro-Caribbean' (see **figure 3**). These findings illustrate an over-representation of female victims and male perpetrators in reported cases of adolescent to parent

violence, and also suggest an over-representation of Afro-Caribbean families and under-representation of White families in the reporting and / or recording of this problem^v.

In order to examine the socio-economic characteristics of families who report adolescent to parent violence, a variable documenting 'victim occupation' was analysed. This variable listed over 100 victim occupations, with the majority of occupations each accounting for less than 2% of the overall sample (n=1,105 due to substantial missing data). Of those parents for whom a work status was recorded, 46.7 per cent were unemployed; 'housewife' was recorded for 11.6 per cent, 'teacher' for 3.4 per cent and 'nurse' for 2.9 per cent^{vi}.

Incident Characteristics

We were interested to examine the gender dynamics of incidents and **Table 2** presents the results of the analysis. Of the male suspects, 23.6 per cent attacked a male victim compared to 14.6 per cent of female suspects ($X^2 = 9.8$; $p=0.002$). 86 per cent of offences reported against mothers were perpetrated by their son and just 14.1 per cent were perpetrated by their daughter. For fathers, 91.8 per cent of reported offences were perpetrated by their son and 8.2 per cent were perpetrated by their daughter. Overall, son-to-mother offences accounted for 66.7 per cent of all reported cases (1261 out of 1,892 cases) which suggests that son-to-mother violence is most common. Son-to-father accounted for 20.6 per cent of reported incidents; daughter-to-mother 10.8 per cent; and daughter-to-father just 1.9 per cent.

Table 2: Victim sex by suspect sex (n=1,891*)

Victim Sex			Suspect Sex		Total
			Male	Female	
Male	Count		390	35	425
		% within victim sex	91.8%	8.2%	100.0%
		% within suspect sex	23.6%	14.6%	22.5%
	Female	Count	1261	205	1466
		% within victim sex	86.0%	14.0%	100.0%
		% within suspect sex	76.4%	85.4%	77.5%
Total	Count	1651	240	1891	
	% within victim sex	87.3%	12.7%	100.0%	
	% within suspect sex	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

*N varies due to missing data

An examination of the extent of injuries sustained in reported cases of adolescent to parent violence revealed that in the majority of cases (69.6%) there was a recording of 'no injury' or a 'threat of injury' only. In 25.4 per cent of cases a minor injury was sustained and in the remainder of cases a moderate (4.5%) or serious (0.5%) injury was sustained by the victim. It is worth noting however, that in many cases, 'no injury' was recorded despite the 'instrument' variable documenting that the victim was (for example) punched, kicked, and/or strangled. This suggests that the seriousness of an offence should not be under-estimated on the basis of a 'no injury' recording. Given that the data recorded under the injury variable derive from information provided by 33 Borough Operational Command Units which make up the Metropolitan Police, it is difficult to ascertain what may be perceived to constitute and subsequently be recorded as a minor, moderate or serious injury.

In order to examine any gender differences amongst reported incidents of adolescent to parent violence, a series of cross-tabulations with chi-square tests were performed. When the perpetrator's gender was compared against the type of crime reported, we found no significant differences between the types of crime recorded for male adolescent perpetrators compared to female adolescent

perpetrators. When the victim's gender was compared, however, statistically significant differences were found in relation to the type of offence recorded ($X^2=12.9$; $p= 0.005$) dependent upon whether the victim was male or female. For example, it appeared that fathers were more likely than mothers to report their child for violence against the person (69.9% compared to 60.4%) whereas mothers appeared to be more likely than fathers to report their child for criminal damage (38.9% compared to 29.6%). When broken down into specific offence type, there were significant differences between men and women in the crimes reported ($X^2=72.0$; $p=<0.0005$). For example, the analysis revealed that common assault was more likely to be reported by a mother than a father (30.7% compared to 24.5%) whereas assault with injury was more likely to be reported by a father compared to a mother (33.9% compared to 25%).

Interpretation and Discussion

The analysis of offender and victim characteristics revealed that amongst cases reported to the police, adolescent to parent violence is a largely (although not exclusively) gendered phenomenon, with sons as the majority of perpetrators and mothers accounting for most victims. This corresponds to previous research from the US and Canada, and Australia, which consistently reports this form of family violence as predominantly a son-to-mother occurrence (Kethineni, 2004; Evans and Warren-Sohlberg, 1988; Walsh and Kreinert, 2007; Howard, 2011). There is however, a potential danger in conceptualising adolescent to parent violence as almost exclusively a son-to-mother phenomenon, or to go as far as some do in labelling the problem 'mother abuse' (see Hunter et al. 2010). It is crucial to recognise that a significant proportion of parents reporting violence from their children to the police are male, and that they tend to *report* more serious levels of violence than mother victims. The mean age for suspects in our analysis was 16.4 years. This concurs with much of the international research which reports the peak age of offending to be between 14 and 17 years (Evans and Warren-Sohlberg, 1988; Kethineni, 2004; Pagani et al., 2004; Walsh and Kreinert, 2007; Snyder and McCurley, 2008; Howard, 2011). The age of victims of adolescent to parent violence is not reported in many studies, although Walsh and Kreinert's (2007) research reported that the majority of victims were aged 41-50 years. In our analysis, victims had a mean age of 43.6 which is broadly comparable to Walsh and Kreinert's findings^{vii}.

The findings regarding ethnicity were inconsistent with most previous research which suggests that adolescent to parent violence is more common amongst White families than Black families, although recent research by Routt and Anderson (2011) reported an over-representation of African –American families in their sample of cases reported to the King's County Prosecutor's Office in Seattle, US. Our analysis indicated an over-representation of 'Afro-Caribbean' offenders and victims in comparison to the breakdown of ethnic groups across London: 24 per cent of victims and 29 per cent of suspects,

compared to 13 per cent of the London population (GLA, 2010). This may be reflective of the more general over-representation of young Black offenders across the Criminal Justice System as a consequence of possible bias at various stages of the criminal justice process (Phillips and Bowling, 2012). Alternatively, it may be that families who are already involved in the criminal justice system are more likely to report adolescent to parent violence or that it is more likely to be detected amongst families who are in contact with police and social support agencies. Domestic violence research has found that despite historically poor relations with the police, ethnic minority families may be more likely to report violence perpetrated by family members due to a greater perception of the police as 'community care-takers' (Felson and Pare, 2005; Akers and Kaukinen, 2009).

The analysis of socio-economic status here was limited to examining the victim's occupation, as no measure of income was available. This revealed that almost half of the victims were unemployed, indicating that families reporting adolescent to parent violence are likely to be at the lower end of the socio-economic scale. There were also notably high numbers of housewives, teachers and nurses, which may reflect the gendered nature of this phenomenon. There are mixed reports about socio-economic status in the literature with some studies reporting that it occurs across all social classes with others reporting low socio-economic status to be a risk factor and still others finding affluence to be a risk factor (Agnew and Huguley, 1989; Paulson et al., 1990; Pagani et al., 2004). This may well be dependent upon the nature of the sample, with police figures being more likely to reflect the experiences of families from lower socio-economic groups and samples based on private, therapeutic practice more likely to include affluent families.

The data regarding incident severity revealed that 56.3 per cent of reported cases involved common assault or assault with injury. In 69.6 per cent of cases no injury was recorded as sustained by the victim and a minor injury was recorded in 25.4 per cent of cases (although questions were raised over what criteria are used to determine a recording of injury versus no injury). There is very little detail about incident characteristics in the literature on this topic, and inconsistent findings concerning the severity of incidents. In their analysis of data from the US, Evans and Warren-Sohlberg (1988) found that 56 per cent of cases involved a physical assault against parents and an additional 16 per cent involved a threat to use a weapon, while Kethineni (2004) found that 76 per cent of violent adolescents had physically assaulted their parents. Physical assaults do not necessarily result in injury or in the recording of an injury in police records. Walsh and Kreinert (2007) reported that 66.5 per cent of cases in their US analysis involved weapons; however, they also found that injury was recorded in less than 50 per cent of cases, with females more likely than male adolescents to inflict minor injury. This concurs with the findings in this research, in which females were more likely to be reported for assault with injury and males were more likely to be reported for criminal damage to a dwelling.

The findings presented above illustrate that there are important gender differences in reported experiences of adolescent to parent violence. This could reflect differences in the actual occurrence of violence from male and female adolescents which would resonate with the gender dynamics of offences of youth violence outside the home. Male and female adolescents may also behave differently towards mothers and fathers. However, there may be a number of alternative or contributory explanations which need to be considered. There may be a lower threshold for reporting sons than daughters, indicated by the fact that sons are more likely than daughters to be reported for criminal damage and that daughters are more likely to be reported when they have committed an assault with injury against their parent. Parents might feel more physically threatened by sons than daughters, or perceive that it is more socially acceptable to report violence by a male child than a female child. Similarly, mothers appear to be more likely to report their child for lower level violence such as criminal damage and common assault whereas fathers appear more likely to report more serious incidents involving violence against the person in which an injury was sustained. Although this may reflect actual experiences, this finding could also be influenced by mothers feeling more threatened, fearful or vulnerable than fathers. It may also indicate that the sense of shame and stigma surrounding adolescent to parent violence interacts with gender norms and expectations about masculinity, strength and discipline, leading to reluctance on the part of fathers to report their child unless they sustain an injury. The potential effects of victim and perpetrator gender upon these decision-making processes are therefore crucial to our interpretation of the research findings.

Our findings provide initial evidence regarding the extent and nature of adolescent to parent violence in the UK. Like all administrative data, however, they must be interpreted with a degree of caution. The data are limited to the London Metropolitan area and despite the large sample size they may not be representative of reported cases of adolescent to parent violence across the UK. The data presented here provide information about incidents of adolescent to parent violence and while they may reflect real occurrences and experiences, they will also be influenced by reporting thresholds and we suspect they may represent the tip of the iceberg of this form of violence. In the absence of more in-depth research into adolescent to parent violence, it is not possible at this stage to gauge the extent of under-reporting; however, extensive research into other forms of family violence such as intimate partner violence and child abuse has revealed that the 'dark figure' of crime is particularly large for violence and abuse occurring in domestic settings and that certain sub-populations are under-represented in official figures (Maguire, 2007).

CHALLENGES FOR CRIMINOLOGY

Why should adolescent to parent violence be part of the criminological agenda? First, this article builds upon small scale UK studies and international evidence to begin to provide concrete evidence that the problem of adolescent to parent violence exists in the UK. The article presents the first analysis of police reported cases in the UK and contributes to a small emerging body of cross-disciplinary work (almost all produced since 2008). In light of this evidence, we suggest that criminology needs to begin to understand that parents can be victims of their own children's violence. Second, the problem of adolescent to parent violence is firmly entrenched in the criminal justice system and requires a response from police officers when cases are reported, or youth justice workers when it emerges in their work with young offenders and their families. As we have seen, there are currently few guidelines and no UK evidence base from which to develop targeted policy. The absence of policy and guidelines can have some perverse consequences, for example a number of the police cases we examined were not investigated by specialist domestic violence officers because they did not fit with the official definition of domestic violence and were instead processed by uniformed response officers with no domestic violence training.

However, this complex form of family violence presents a number of intellectual and practical challenges for criminology that need to be acknowledged. First, it is important to keep the problem of adolescent to parent violence in perspective and not inflate the extent of the problem or contribute to a new moral panic about youth violence in the home. Anxiety around the family is particularly strong in contemporary society (Salecl, 2002; Furedi, 2002; Stearns, 2004) and could be fuelled by a misinterpretation of our data. Furthermore, in some cases it may be difficult to differentiate adolescent to parent violence from what might be considered 'normal' teenage rebellion and conflict with parents. Adolescent-parent conflict is likely to be experienced as a continuum of behaviour with prolonged impact and this broad context needs to be understood.

Second, criminologists have long been concerned about the over-criminalisation of young people. There is a tension between the need to recognise parents as victims of violence and reluctance to define young people as violent criminal offenders within the home. England and Wales has a particularly young age of criminal responsibility and high rates of youth imprisonment (Muncie, 2008; Goldson, 2011). Although our analysis here has been concerned with cases reported to the police, careful consideration needs to be given to how we might best respond to adolescent to parent violence – is the criminal justice system the right place to deal with these cases, or might other social or support services be more appropriate? Where might these services be located? As we have seen, parents who are victims of violence from their own children are not the primary concern of any existing service, as currently organised, and there are only a handful of very small localised

programmes across the country that work specifically with the problem of adolescent to parent violence.

A further complexity is the blurring of boundaries of responsibility and blame in cases of adolescent to parent violence. With intimate partner violence, the categories of ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’ are very clear, and indeed it is the aim of domestic violence programmes to firmly locate full responsibility for the offence with the perpetrator and to challenge any attempt to minimise or neutralise blame or to shift responsibility to the victim in any way (XXXX, 2013). Parents and young offenders are already subject to competing conceptualisations of responsibility and blame as parents have been made increasingly accountable through measures such as parenting orders, while concurrently the criminal age of responsibility was effectively lowered to ten with the abolition of *doli incapax* in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Offenders have therefore been made responsible at a younger age at the same time as their parents have been held ultimately responsible for their acts. This might further be compounded by potentially complex dynamics within families and by other experience of violence. It is possible (although by no means certain) that adolescents could be both offenders and primary or secondary victims of family violence, examples which might shift our understandings of responsibility for the offence. (See Daly and Nancarrow, 2010: 153-4). The stark picture in the police data and a victimological discourse of doer/done to does not reflect this complexity.

It is important to understand family violence in all its forms and how these forms may be interconnected. Family violence is relational, and requires a different understanding to individual isolated incidents of violence between strangers. There is also a need to unravel the ways in which adolescent to parent violence might connect across the life trajectory of an individual – are adolescents who are violent towards parents also violent in their intimate partnerships? Are they violent outside the home? Do adolescent perpetrators of family violence go on to commit elder abuse or intimate partner violence in their adult lives? Is there a connection to childhood experiences of violence and abuse, from being a primary victim of child abuse to witnessing violence in the home between adults?

Why children are violent towards their parents needs to be understood in terms of psychological development, cultural acceptability, and the specifics of individual cases and range of pathways that lead to the problem. Some recorded cases will be those where a young person is involved in violent crime and brings it home. Others will be parents who are really struggling with a child with mental health or substance abuse problems, and simply cannot cope any longer and do not know who to turn to other than the police. Yet others will be families in which domestic abuse has traumatised children, some of whom now identify with the perpetrator – or may be arrested for taking the perpetrator on and protecting the abused parent. At the other end of the spectrum there will be families with a

multitude of problems where children themselves may have been mistreated. Furthermore, the incidents reflected in the police data are unlikely to be isolated – families might experience a prolonged history of abuse before calling the police. This wide range of pathways to adolescent to parent violence – the stories behind the statistical data and the reasons why parents see fit to involve the police – will better understood as a body of research on this problem develops.

There is a need for theoretical frameworks which directly address the complexities of adolescent to parent violence to develop. It is important to consider whether the conceptual frameworks that have been developed to understand other forms of family violence have utility for explaining adolescent to parent violence. A similar point has been raised by Daly and Nancarrow (2010) who consider the use of restorative justice in cases of youth violence towards parents in Australia. They question whether feminist conceptual frameworks for intimate partner violence can be applied to this form of family violence. Some authors suggest that they can, with strong similarities in terms of patterns of power and control (e.g. Eckstein, 2004), secrecy and self-isolation (Bobic, 2004; Cottrell and Monk, 2004). Although these conceptual frameworks may be useful, there may be limitations to their applicability in this context. Adolescent to parent violence inverts the ways in which we understand power in family violence and our expectation that a perpetrator will be physically and socially more resourced and a victim physically and socially more vulnerable (Downey, 1997). The character and causes of violence are likely to be different, and there are additional difficulties in reporting one's own child, securing protection, or severing contact. As Daly and Nancarrow (2010) state: 'youth [to parent] violence may reflect an even more complex set of family dynamics and pose more quandaries for justice than partner violence' (p.6). We suggest that these quandaries make a criminological analysis of the problem of adolescent to parent violence all the more important.

CONCLUSION

Our intention in this article has been to begin to frame the problem of adolescent to parent violence, considering its relationship to criminal justice policy and criminology, and to map the contours of the problem of adolescent to parent violence, presenting the first UK analysis of cases reported to the police. The analysis was based upon 1,892 reported cases of adolescent to parent violence that constituted criminal offences, most of which involved violence against the person or criminal damage in the home. The key findings broadly supported those of previous international research: 87 per cent of adolescent perpetrators were male; 77 per cent of victims were female; and 66 per cent of cases involved a son-to-mother relationship. Adolescent to parent violence is clearly a gendered phenomenon.

We contend that criminology needs to have a nuanced understanding of family violence in all its forms and cannot continue to have a blank page on violence from adolescents towards their parents.

We have raised a number of issues and questions that will need to be considered in future systematic research and have identified some of the challenges that adolescent to parent violence may pose for criminology, which currently only understands adolescents as offenders outside the home. Adolescent to parent violence might be starting to emerge onto the criminological and criminal justice policy agenda as other forms of family violence have done in recent decades – it was not until the 1970s that intimate partner violence began to be recognised, for example, or the 1980s that child sexual abuse was acknowledged. Adolescent to parent violence is a complex phenomenon and presents some very particular intellectual and practical challenges for criminology. Our hope is that this article and the data it presents will provide an ‘empirical benchmark’ and begin to open a criminological dialogue about the problem of adolescent to parent violence.

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XXXX (2012) Reference to be added

XXXX (2013) Reference to be added

ⁱ Parentline Plus has since been renamed Family Lives.

ⁱⁱ In the same one year period there were 51,677 domestic violence offences reported to the Metropolitan Police. These were reported incidents constituting a criminal offence and fitting the definition of domestic violence: “any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults, aged 18 and over, who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender and sexuality.” This is clearly a much broader range of kin relationships, ages, and offences and cannot

be directly compared - there might also be some overlap with the cases we analysed if the suspect was 18-19 years of age and the offence was 'flagged' as domestic violence on the police database.

ⁱⁱⁱ The raw dataset contained lists of entries for each variable with no values attached to them. A coding process was conducted in order to assign numerical values to every entry for each variable, for the purposes of conducting statistical analyses.

^{iv} Ethnic categories as defined in police reports.

^v According to the Greater London Authority, the population of London in 2006 was 67.53% White, 4.84% Black Caribbean, 6.04 Black African, and 2.59 'Black Other' (GLA 2010: 6)

^{vi} Females may be particularly over-represented in these occupations.

^{vii} Although as previously noted, Walsh and Krienert analysed reported offences for children as young as seven years of age.