

Experts demand policy reform on young male domestic abuse

November 1 2013



A new report published this week calls for the Government to support wholesale reform of how the authorities deal with young men who commit domestic abuse.

The report outlines the disturbing findings of a three-year study led by Professor David Gadd from The University of Manchester and Dr Claire Fox, from Keele University.

Over half of the 13 and 14-year-olds surveyed have already experienced domestic [abuse](#), whether as victims, witnesses or perpetrators.

A quarter carried out at least one abusive act – often [emotional abuse](#) or

controlling behaviour - against a boyfriend or girlfriend.

But according to the report, young people below the age of 18 rarely receive any specialist intervention, aside from 'anger management'.

It calls for a nationally coordinated service of professional mentoring, which continues into subsequent dating relationships and beyond the period of conventional criminal justice sanctions.

Help, it adds, needs to be made available to those who have not been arrested or prosecuted for offences involving [violence](#) towards a partner and should not be left until after alcohol or drug problems are resolved.

And social marketing campaigns through film and poster campaigns should be used in places such as schools and youth centres.

Professor Gadd said: "For these groups of young men, many of whom are already outside mainstream schooling, there are limits to what curriculum based learning can do. A more comprehensive programme of intervention is needed.

"The experience of living with fathers who have been cruel and sadistic, makes it harder for them to recognise what they see as less calculating forms of violence as abuse.

"And some of those who have behaved in controlling ways towards partners are, nevertheless, desperate not to become the kinds of abusive men their fathers were.

"While I have been conducting research in this area for 15 years, I would still struggle to know where best to refer a young man who was beginning to behave in an abusive way to a partner or other family members.

"While most young men will say domestic violence is wrong, few actually know how to challenge other people who are abusive without resorting to violence.

"For this reason, child protection services need to also anticipate the ongoing challenges fatherhood and intimate relationships present to young men who have grown up around abuse, neglect and addiction problems."

In-depth interviews with teenage boys who had committed physical assaults on partners, carried out by the team, revealed few describe their behaviour as '[domestic abuse](#)' or '[domestic violence](#)'.

Instead, they refer to 'fights' caused by peculiarly stressful circumstances, such as personal crises or the provocative behaviour of a difficult or uncaring partner.

Some [young men](#) have acute issues with trust and are ill-equipped to cope with the challenges of intimacy and parenthood.

Others are also afraid of losing face or a fight and are prone to responding with extreme violence to having been insulted or hit themselves.

Provided by University of Manchester

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