

Teenagers attacking parents: New study maps 'hidden problem'

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(Medical Xpress)—Oxford University researchers have conducted the first academic study into the hidden problem of adolescent to parent violence in the UK.

Adolescent to parent [violence](#) is not a category currently flagged in police databases. Researchers analysed raw data from the London Metropolitan Police area, revealing that in one year (2009-2010) alone, there were 1,892 reported cases of 13-19-year-olds committing violent assaults against their own [parents](#) or other carers.

The study is part of a three-year research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The first report, published in the online version of the journal *Criminology and Criminal Justice* concludes that there needs to be a greater public awareness of the problem and a coordinated policy response for dealing with it.

Earlier this year, the Home Office ruled that for the first time, 16 and 17-year-olds could be included in its official definition of domestic violence. The Oxford study points out that still leaves [children](#) who are under the age of 16 outside the official definition. In interviews with the researchers, parents who had been abused by their children reported feelings of shame and blame and said they feared the consequences for their children if they reported the problem. The study argues that this apparent reluctance of parents to go to the police means that such violence is likely to occur far more frequently than reported cases would suggest.

The researchers from Oxford University's Centre for Criminology defined adolescent to parent violence as 'physical violence, threats of violence and criminal damage towards parents or carers by children aged 13-19 years'. Through combing the data for the London Metropolitan Police area, they found son to mother violence was most common, with 87% of suspects being male and 77% of victims being female. However, the researchers note these findings should be approached with caution as they might represent reporting patterns; for example, mothers might be more likely to report than fathers.

In interviews with the researchers, practitioners and parents described the violence as often involving a pattern of aggressive and violent acts across a prolonged period of time. As well as physically assaulting their parents, those interviewed said their teenage children had smashed up property, kicked holes in doors, broken windows, thrown things at their parents and made threats. Parents said this had resulted in them living in fear of their own children.

The researchers say there is no single explanation for this problem within families. Families described a range of reasons for this explosive behaviour, including substance abuse, mental health problems, learning difficulties, or a family history of [domestic violence](#) or self-harm. Some families were at a loss to explain why their child was so aggressive towards them, having raised others who did not display such behaviour, says the study. The researchers also found this type of violence affected all levels of society: some victims were from families struggling on benefits and living in overcrowded housing, while others had professional jobs and high incomes.

The study suggests that the problem of adolescent to parent violence has started to emerge on the public agenda in a similar way to other forms of family violence, such as partner to partner violence or child abuse, did in the past. The study notes the lack of practical support for families

dealing with this problem, saying there is only a handful of localised programmes across the country working specifically with the problem of adolescent to parent violence.

Lead researcher Dr Rachel Condry said: 'We provide some of the first evidence from the UK that this hidden and complex form of [family violence](#) exists, and as such needs to be properly recognised with a coordinated policy response. Our research shows that police forces, the youth justice or other agencies working with these families currently do not have the specific guidance they need to support these families.

'This is a complex issue: society does not want to over-criminalise young people, yet we cannot continue to have a blank page on this issue. From our own research, policing and youth justice services recognise the problem and are poised to begin to develop guidance for those working in the field. We are therefore at a crucial point to start to push the problem of [adolescent](#) to parent violence on to the public agenda.'

Last month researchers Dr Rachel Condry and Dr Caroline Miles presented their first findings at a conference for practitioners at the University of Oxford to raise awareness and develop recommendations for more informed and effective policy making.

More information: [crj.sagepub.com/content/early/ ...
500155.full.pdf+html](http://crj.sagepub.com/content/early/.../500155.full.pdf+html)

Provided by Oxford University

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