

New research: Child-parent domestic violence a serious issue for drug and alcohol family support agencies
Children of drug users: treatment alone doesn't fix relationship problems

Child to parent domestic violence is a major concern for family support agencies, according to the new report ***Supporting families affected by substance use and domestic violence*** by Dr. Sarah Galvani, in partnership with Adfam and the Stella Project. This issue is particularly serious with adult drug users acting violently towards their mothers, according to the research.

Family support providers, who had also experienced drug use in their own families, noted the **high levels of tolerance from parents experiencing domestic abuse:**

"Parents would rather put up with what's happening...they are resigned to it"

"They just take it that that's what's happening and they don't understand that it's not acceptable behaviour for them"

And also the levels of **stigma and fear surrounding child to parent abuse:**

"It's the shame of it, as though they've instigated it or it's something they've done wrong"

"Apart from the stigma, there's the fear the child will find out or that it will get worse...and it's shameful, isn't it, that you've been hit or abused by your own child"

On child to parent domestic violence, Dr. Galvani said:

"The predominance of child to parent abuse in this study highlights an area of domestic violence and abuse which is far less researched and recognised than its adult counterpart, partner violence. While there is some recognition of child to parent abuse as part of teenage tantrums and struggles for independence, there is almost no recognition of domestic violence and abuse towards parents"

And Karen Bailey from the Stella project says: *"There are particular challenges for working with mothers experiencing abuse from their children. Mothers feel additional shame and guilt because they blame themselves for bringing up a child who acts in this way. We know that all survivors of domestic violence experience many difficulties when attempting to leave abusive relationships, and for mothers there is the additional burden of not being able to walk away from their own child"*

As well as consulting with adult family support providers, **young people (aged 10-15) with drug using parents** were also interviewed and expressed the view that **getting help for substance use problems does not necessarily improve relationships:**

"The person who's still using drugs might get quite annoyed, saying that they don't need help"

"If they get help then they'll build a stronger relationship, but they would still have time to bring back the past"

"[a couple] might both be taking drugs at the same time, and they might be comfortable with that...if someone came to help, they might destroy the relationship by taking something away"

On young people's attitudes to treatment, Dr. Galvani says:

"Practitioners must understand that addressing the parental substance use does not automatically result in an improvement in family dynamics or parenting behaviour. This is crucial to ensuring that children and young people do not remain in harmful situations or are returned to them. There is clearly scope for better joint working between domestic violence services and drug, alcohol and family services."

Responding to the findings of the research, **Vivienne Evans OBE, Chief Executive of Adfam**, says:

"Too many people have a restricted idea of domestic abuse as only occurring between partners, and this research rightly shows this is not the case as many parents encounter abusive behaviour when trying to support older and adult children addicted to drugs."

"The report also shows young people's underrated perceptiveness and knowledge when it comes to drugs, alcohol and relationships. Treatment is only one part of full recovery from drug problems, and repairing relationships is often extremely difficult. The family support workforce needs to be properly tuned in to domestic violence issues, and effective collaboration with specialist domestic violence agencies is particularly important if we are to keep families safe."

ENDS

Notes

1. A full copy of the report *Supporting families affected by substance use and domestic violence* is attached to this message and also available at [Adfam's website](#).

2. The research was conducted by Dr. Sarah Galvani (University of Bedfordshire), as part of a 2 year Comic Relief-funded project run by [Adfam](#), the national umbrella organisation working with and for families affected by drugs and alcohol, in partnership with the [Stella Project](#), the leading agency addressing drug and alcohol related domestic violence and abuse. The project was set up to look at issues of domestic violence or abuse for family members affected by a loved one's use of drugs or alcohol. Research took place across the country with adult family members (those who have experience of addiction in the family) and children affected by their parents' drug or alcohol use.

3. Adfam's Domestic Violence, Substance Use and Families Project is currently working with groups of young people to build new resources around the issues of drugs, alcohol and domestic violence.

Contact

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