



Sixty years of child-to-parent abuse research: What we know and where to go

Melanie Simmons^{a,*}, Troy E. McEwan^a, Rosemary Purcell^b, James R.P. Ogloff^a

^a Centre for Forensic Behavioural Science, Swinburne University of Technology and Forensicare, Australia

^b Orygen: The National Centre for Excellence in Youth Mental Health, Australia

1. Sixty years of child-to-parent abuse research: What we know and where to go

This paper seeks to integrate 60 years of diffuse research on children who abuse their parents. Variation in samples, definitions, and measurement approaches have contributed to a complex literature on child-to-parent abuse (CPA), marked by variance in prevalence estimates and research findings. This review is structured according to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) nested ecological model of development (adapted by Dutton, 1995). This model provides a useful multifactor framework to interpret and synthesize findings and has been applied to similar areas of research—including intimate partner violence (Dutton, 1995) and general antisocial behavior (Borduin, 1999). This review also considers how various risk markers associated with CPA may interact with each other to produce aggressive behavior. This allows for hypothesis generation drawing upon the tenets of the general aggression model (Anderson & Bushman, 2002), which posits that aggression is a by-product of an interaction between specific kinds of individual, situational, and biological factors. As there is increasing attention on the connections between interpersonal aggression in different contexts (Hamby, 2011; Hamby & Grych, 2013), this review also provides suggestions for how CPA research may be integrated with existing bodies of research into interpersonal violence (e.g., intimate partner violence, general aggression, and adolescent antisocial behavior) and considers the potentially unique characteristics of CPA. Based on the results of the narrative review, this paper concludes with recommendations for future research that can advance understandings of CPA and guide effective prevention and intervention efforts.

1.1. What is CPA?

Although prevalent, CPA is one of the most understudied types of family violence. The first known mention of the phenomenon in scientific literature was in a 1957 study of child-rearing that included an examination of how childhood aggression was learned (Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957). In the context of the women's rights movement and increased recognition of domestic or intimate partner violence, Harbin

and Madden (1979) coined the term “battered parent syndrome” to describe the effects of children abusing their parents. However, this form of family violence failed to attract much attention throughout the closing decades of the 20th century, despite other kinds of family violence receiving increased research and policy interest (Appel & Holden, 1998; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000).

The lack of attention to CPA research reflects a lack of recognition of this behavior as a phenomenon, let alone as a social problem. In the 60 years since CPA was first described in scientific literature, there have been very few literary or cultural references to it. While accounts of parricide (i.e., the killing of one's parents) are easily identified—such as *Oedipus Rex* (Sophocles, 2012, 429 BCE), *The Good Son* (Ruben, 1993), and *We Need to Talk about Kevin* (Shriver, 2003)—there are few references to children who abuse their parents without it resulting in murder. What is prevalent from the mid-20th century onwards are references to sullen and moody teenagers who may be disrespectful to, or critical of, their parents, especially in an attempt to assert their own independence. This stereotype has become an accepted, if not defining, aspect of adolescence in industrialized societies (Lesko, 2001). As all behavior exists on a continuum, it is surprising that so little consideration has been given to whether this archetype of disrespectful or critical behavior could escalate to the point of abuse that causes harm to parents.

1.2. Defining CPA

One of the primary challenges in developing scientific knowledge of CPA is the inconsistency with which the phenomenon has been defined. Generally, CPA research has operationalized the term “child” by using age of the perpetrator rather than their relationship to the target. Little research extends beyond the age of 18 years, which is when perpetrators would legally be considered adults rather than children. However, national data from Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States (US) reveals that at least half of children over the age of 18–24 years continue to live with their parents (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2009; Eurostat, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2017; Vespa, Lewis, & Krieder, 2013). Such high rates of

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: msimmons@swin.edu.au (M. Simmons).

cohabitation warrant a focus on the relationship between perpetrator and target when defining CPA, rather than using an arbitrary age-based limit on possible perpetration. Conversely, there is a good argument for excluding very young children from the definition of CPA—given the developmental differences between older children who have the capacity to form intent to act in an abusive way, and children as young as two who have been included in some research (e.g., Nock & Kazdin, 2002). While early childhood aggression is an important topic, generalizing between this and violence or abuse by older children is likely to be inappropriate due to differences in developmental stage and the roles of parents.

The operationalization of violence and abuse in CPA research has also been flawed. Recent literature has popularized the term “child-to-parent violence,” which is broadly defined to include acts of psychological, emotional, or financial abuse (Cottrell, 2001; Holt, 2013). This leads to something of a disconnect from the broader literature in which such behavior would be described as aggression or abuse rather than violence. Aggression is commonly defined as any behavior that is intended to harm a target or that the target is motivated to avoid; violence is a specific subtype of severe physical aggression, such as acts resulting in injury (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Berkowitz, 1993; Bushman & Huesmann, 2010). Abuse is defined by a pattern of cruelty or violence (Abuse [Def. 2], 2017) that results in one party having power or control over another (Cottrell, 2001; Holt, 2013). Abuse may involve physical aggression, but is also characterized by other behaviors. To ensure definitional consistency with the broader literature, in this review we have adopted the term ‘child-to-parent abuse’ to capture the full range of physical, emotional, and psychological aggression that may be enacted by a child towards their parent.

CPA literature faces further problems stemming from inconsistent definitions and the operationalization of different kinds of abusive behavior. For instance, depending on the measure used, shouting may be defined as verbal aggression (Straus & Fauchier, 2008) or psychological aggression (Calvete, Gamez-Guadix, et al., 2013). Likewise, financial abuse has been measured as a construct on its own (Ibabe, 2014), as a part of psychological abuse (Calvete, Gamez-Guadix, et al., 2013), and as a factor combined with physical abuse (Ghanizadeh & Jafari, 2010). This can make it difficult to generalize findings across studies and to build a cohesive body of research. There is also a lack of consistency in the nature of behaviors that are thought to constitute CPA across studies, from yelling at a parent to incarceration for assaulting a parent. Given the differences in the kinds of behaviors included in definitions of CPA (e.g., verbal vs. physical aggression), there is, understandably, variation in the individual and social characteristics that have been associated with CPA. Generalizing results across studies using different definitions of abuse has led some previous literature reviews (Hong, Kral, Espelage, & Allen-Mearns, 2012; Kennair & Mellor, 2007) to conclude, inaccurately, that the field is rife with contradictory findings.

1.3. Frequency estimates of CPA

Taking the limitations of CPA definitions into account, the 12-month incidence of adolescent-perpetrated physical CPA in the community has been estimated to be between 5 and 21% (Browne & Hamilton, 1998; Calvete, Gamez-Guadix, & Garcia-Salvador, 2015; Calvete et al., 2013; Calvete, Orue, & Gámez-Guadix, 2013; Calvete, Orue, Gamez-Guadix, & Bushman, 2015; Cornell & Gelles, 1982; Elliott, Cunningham, Colangelo, & Gelles, 2011; Ibabe, 2014; Ibabe, 2016; Ibabe & Bentler, 2016; Ibabe, Jaureguizar, & Bentler, 2013a; Lyons, Bell, Fréchette, & Romano, 2015; McCloskey & Lichter, 2003; Ulman & Straus, 2003). Estimates for the prevalence of verbal, psychological, and emotional CPA in the community vary from 33 to 93% depending on the definition used (Calvete, Gamez-Guadix, et al., 2013; Calvete, Orue, and Gámez-Guadix, 2013; Calvete, Orue, & Gámez-Guadix, 2015; Ibabe et al., 2013a; Ibabe, Jaureguizar, & Bentler, 2013b; Jaureguizar, Ibabe, & Straus, 2013; Pagani et al., 2009). With regard to financial

abuse, a Spanish study found that 53% of identified CPA offenders, as well as 21% of non-CPA juvenile offenders and non-offending youth in the community, perpetrated financial abuse against their parents (Ibabe, Arnos, & Elgorriaga, 2014).

CPA appears to be particularly prevalent among young people involved with the criminal justice system. In Australian and American jurisdictions, CPA is implicated in 85% of adolescent restraining orders (Purcell, Baksheev, & Mullen, 2014), 40–60% of juvenile domestic violence charges (Routt & Anderson, 2011; Snyder & McCurley, 2008), and 13% of domestic violence reports (Buzawa & Hotaling, 2006; Royal Commission into Family Violence, 2016). Although the majority of CPA perpetrators in the justice system are male (Condry & Miles, 2014; Routt & Anderson, 2011; Snyder & McCurley, 2008; Walsh & Krienert, 2009), CPA perpetration is relatively common among female offenders. One study of incarcerated females found that 57% of offenders' first encounters with the criminal justice system was a CPA-related charge (Davis, 2007). These figures—while difficult to generalize and extrapolate from—suggest that CPA is prevalent in industrialized societies whether it is a recognized phenomenon or not.

1.4. Shortcomings of existing reviews of CPA research

Several reviews have attempted to explain CPA in existing single-theory theoretical frameworks; these include feminist, evolutionary, social learning, and family systems theories (e.g., Archer, 2013; Baker, 2012a; Baker, 2012b; Downey, 1997; Holt, 2016; Hunter & Nixon, 2012; Hunter, Nixon, & Parr, 2010; Tew & Nixon, 2010; Wilcox, 2012). Single-factor theories help to explain increases or decreases in the likelihood of behavior by describing a specific mechanism or process related to the behavior. For example, feminist perspectives emphasize gender inequality as the primary causal factor in relationship aggression (Hamby, 2011). These reviews provide some insight into CPA. However, as behavior is determined by a complex interaction between multiple factors—such as biological, genetic, cognitive, behavioral, personality, social, and cultural—rather than a single isolated process (Ward, Polaschek, & Beech, 2006), reviews that only address a single factor offer limited utility for generating research hypotheses or developing case formulations in clinical practice (Gannon, Collie, Ward, & Thakker, 2008). Ward et al. (2006) suggested that understanding complex behaviors requires integrating single-factor theories into a multifactor theoretical framework that not only describes multiple mechanisms of effect, but also integrates research across a variety of domains that are essential to understanding and predicting behavior (Hamby, 2011; Hamby & Grych, 2013).

Only one review to date has attempted to integrate existing CPA literature into a multifactor framework in this way. Hong et al. (2012) used Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model to review 30 studies of CPA published between 1980 and 2010. While approaching the literature with a similar intent to the current paper, Hong et al.'s (2012) review suffers from some significant limitations, such as missing 20 articles on CPA that were published during the relevant period; these were identified for this paper by searching reference lists and articles that had cited those featured in Hong and colleagues' review. Despite providing a concise summary of the literature, the authors did not integrate the findings into the broader context of adolescent offending or general aggression to promote theory development. Further, Hong and colleagues' review failed to consider the findings in the context of varying samples—community, offender, or clinical—and only reviewed studies of perpetrators aged 19 years and younger. As such, the review provided an overly simplistic conclusion that White males aged 14–17 were the typical perpetrators of CPA and White females were the typical victims. Yet, males were only more likely than females to be perpetrators in samples in which the offenders had been legally sanctioned for CPA (Strom, Warner, Tichavsky, & Zahn, 2014); representative community samples have overwhelmingly found gender parity among perpetrators (Ibabe & Bentler, 2016). Further, while mothers were

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6550077>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6550077>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)