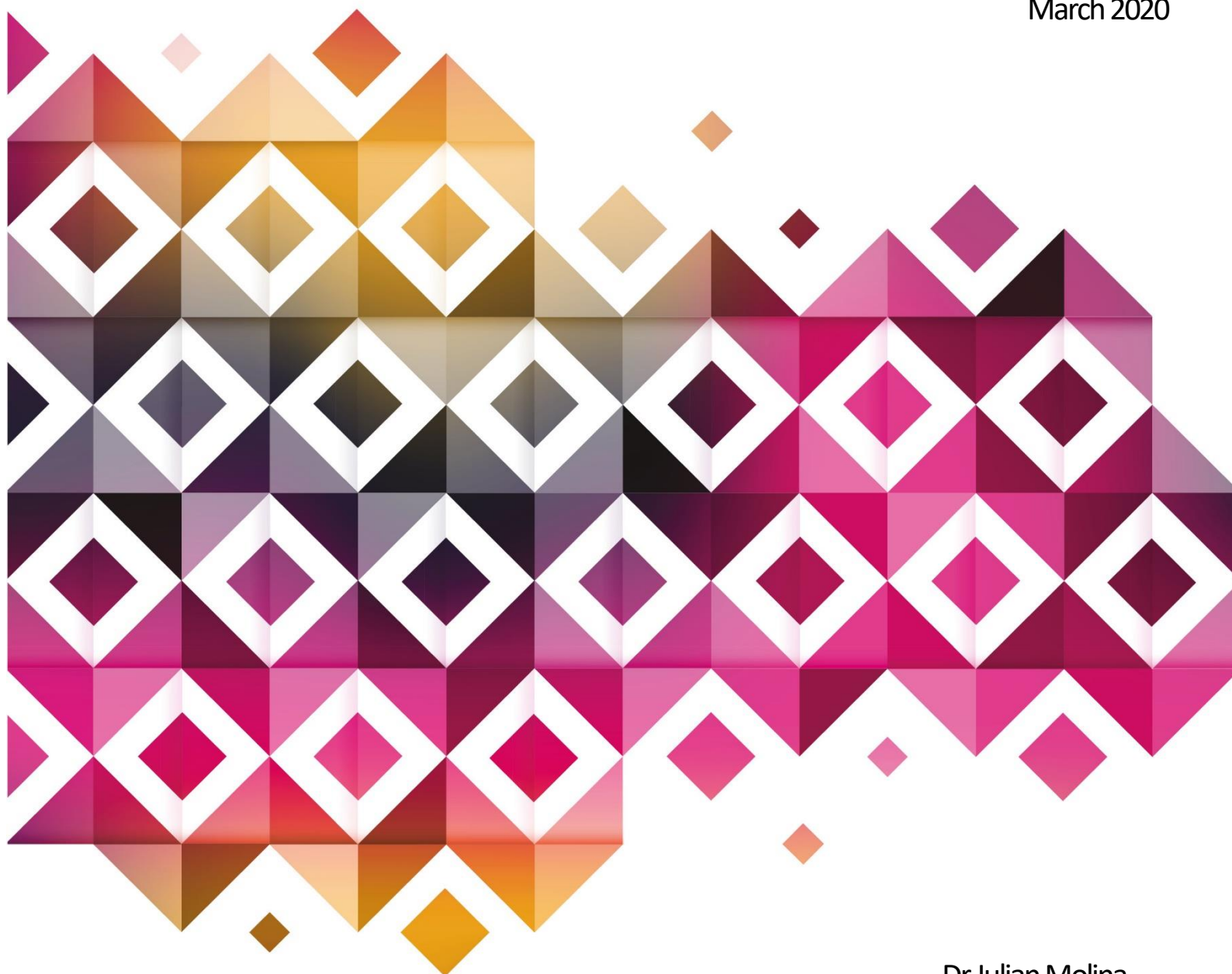


# Children's experience of domestic abuse and criminality: A literature review

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Dr Julian Molina

Jade Levell

## Foreword

The recent surge in gang related crime has shocked and affected all parts of society. We have seen appalling violence inflicted by children onto other children through knife crime. The so called 'county lines' dealing in drugs has seen children pulled into dangerous criminal activity, blighting their lives, as well as the lives of the victims of the drug trade.

The question we are all asking ourselves is how has this come about? Only by understanding the many causes can we find effective solutions.

This report is the first in a series of two in which I will concentrate on children's experiences of domestic abuse and criminality, including childhood criminal exploitation, serious youth violence and offending behaviour.

This report sets the scene for my in-depth review into children's experience of domestic abuse and criminality (to be published on 1 April) by gathering academic literature and data to compile an account of the prevalence of children's experience of domestic abuse and the overlap between this and their offending behaviour. It also reviews literature on interventions to support children and young people who have lived with domestic abuse.

The research challenges the notion that children are merely witnesses to domestic abuse and acknowledges children are directly affected by living in households with domestic abuse. This is something I will examine further in my upcoming review into children's experience of domestic abuse and criminality. I will be asking key stakeholders and practitioners who work directly with children and young people, just what are the impacts that living with domestic abuse has on children and young people?

This report looks at the overlap between children and young people's experience of domestic abuse and criminality, for example the Children's Commissioner found that nearly a quarter of young offenders are known to have witnessed domestic abuse. However, while some children and young people experience both domestic abuse and offending behaviour, it doesn't mean that one experience will automatically follow the other. If a child experiences domestic abuse it doesn't mean they will go on to offend. There are a number of protective factors which can build resilience in children and there are support programmes and interventions that are known to help children to cope and recover from experiencing domestic abuse. This report collates information about some of those intervention. In my in-depth review, I will be asking how well these work in practice and whether children and young people are receiving the care and support they so desperately need to cope and recover from the harrowing experiences of living with abuse.

As one stakeholder in my in-depth review said: *'By not dealing with things at the outset for children of domestic abuse, you are sowing the seeds for the end result of violence amongst children that we are getting.'* It is vital that we do all we can for children and young people who live with violence and abuse in their home. Only then can we ensure that those 'seeds of violence' do not fall on fertile ground.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'V Baird', written in a cursive style.

**Dame Vera Baird QC**

**Victims' Commissioner – England and Wales**

## Acknowledgements

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## Research questions

This literature review presents available academic evidence on the impacts on children of living with domestic violence and abuse (DVA) and explores any associations with children's offending behaviour. The available academic literature and research evidence were reviewed to answer three questions:

1. What are the known effects for children living in households with domestic abuse in terms of psychological, physical, educational, life outcomes, cycles of abuse and offending behaviour?
2. What evidence is there for the association between children living with domestic violence and abuse, and subsequent offending behaviour?
3. What are the costs of domestic abuse to the public purse and what are the additional costs for the effects on children? And, what are the estimated costs of childhood criminal exploitation?

## Methodology

Academic databases were searched for published literature in the UK and US, starting with publications between 2009 and 2019. The initial search used several keywords associated with domestic violence and abuse, the impacts on children and its links with criminality and offending behaviour. These keywords were '*adverse childhood experiences*', '*impacts*', '*domestic abuse*', '*child abuse*', '*exposure to domestic violence*', '*criminal activity*', '*offending behaviour*', '*knife crime*', '*gang*', '*violence*', '*mental health*', '*childhood criminality*'. Further searches were made for evidence of domestic abuse interventions for children and young people between the years 2010 and 2020. Additional literature was identified through suggestions by academic experts and stakeholders, and through a snowball method to identify relevant published research.

## Domestic abuse

### The prevalence of domestic violence and abuse

According to most recent ONS estimates, 2.4 million adults aged 16-59 experienced domestic abuse in England and Wales for the year ending March 2019. This included 1.6 million women, 786,000 men. As domestic abuse is often a hidden crime and not reported to criminal justice agencies, the number of police reported incidents underestimates prevalence. There were 746,219 domestic abuse related crimes recorded by the police in 2018-19. Violence against the person offences were the most likely to be domestic abuse related, comprising over one third of those offences.

Domestic abuse is more likely to occur in some types of households than others. Due to the underreporting of DVA, victims with fewer resources could come to the attention of authorities more often as they do not have the resources to leave their partners. Analysis of the 2012 UK Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey has shown that

vulnerability to DVA is associated with low income, economic strain and benefit receipt (Fahmy, Williamson, and Pantazis 2016).

Women who separate from their partners after DVA are more likely to report ongoing financial abuse from former partners. Charities, such as Surviving Economic Abuse, have been raising awareness of economic abuse and the system changes that are needed to respond to it. Researchers have presented a typology of financial strategies used by women to deal with economic abuse (Chowby 2016).

The ONS also found that single parents were more likely to be victims of domestic abuse. They were more likely to be victimised through domestic abuse than persons living in a household with no children and persons living in a household with other adults and children. Over 40% of victims of partner abuse have at least one child under the age of 16 years old living in the household.

Pregnancy is a risk factor for DVA beginning or worsening. There is a correlation between women having children and an increased risk of experiencing DVA. When women are pregnant the risk of experiencing DVA increases, with 30% of DVA starting or intensifying during pregnancy (Lewis and Drife 2001; Lewis and Drife 2005; McWilliams and McKiernan 1993).

In terms of the economic costs of domestic violence and abuse, the Home Office (2019a) estimated the economic and social costs of domestic abuse as £66 billion in the year ending 31 March 2017. This is greater than the total estimated economic and social costs of crime, which was estimated at £50 billion for crime against individuals in 2015/16. The cost to the economy is estimated at £14 billion arising from lost output due to time off work and reduced productivity. The estimated cost to a single victim of domestic abuse is £34,015, whilst each domestic homicide has an estimated cost of £2.2 million. There is limited data on either financial or emotional abuse linked to coercive and controlling behaviour.

Estimates of the costs of domestic abuse related to the effects on children and young people are limited. The Home Office analysis did not include estimates of the costs of the impacts of domestic abuse on children and the wider family. The Home Office (2019a:9) found the 'available evidence is not clear about the specific impacts' of witnessing domestic abuse and the associated costs of the impact of witnessing domestic violence and abuse on children were not calculated.

Research from the US provides an indication of one method for producing estimates of the effects of DVA on children. Holmes *et al.* (2018) estimated the average lifetime costs from childhood exposure to intimate partner violence at \$50,000 (approx. £38,500). Further evidence is needed about the estimated costs of the impact on children and young people who experience domestic violence and abuse, including health and other costs.

### **The prevalence of children living in households with domestic abuse**

Researchers have challenged the notion that children are merely witnesses or exposed to incidents of violence or abuse. They claim that this framework does not

account for the nature of domestic DVA or the varied effects of children's experience of violence and abuse. This research has challenged the notion that children and young people are bystanders to the violence and abuse.

Research about children living in households with DVA tends to refer to children as witnesses, rather than experiencing or being victimised. The status of witness suggests that the child is not directly victimised by the violence or abuse. Throughout this chapter we refer to experiencing, as encompassing witnessing or exposure, in order to emphasise children's experiences of domestic violence and abuse. There is evidence that children are acutely aware of the controlling behaviour of adult perpetrators of abuse, and themselves attempt to manage the effects of this abusive behaviour (Callaghan et al. 2018). Research on children living with domestic violence and abuse has increasingly acknowledged that children are directly affected by domestic violence and abuse.

The Home Office (2019a) estimate that between three to four million children are exposed to domestic abuse at some point in their lives. The ONS estimates that one in five children saw or heard what happened during domestic abuse incidents: 64.9% of children did not witness the abuse, the rest of the respondents did not know if the child witnesses the abuse.

SafeLives (2019) estimate that two in five children (41%) live in families where they have been living with domestic abuse since they were born. Other estimates suggest that around 3 million children aged 0-17 live in a household where an adult has ever experience domestic violence and abuse. Of those adults, 773,000 had experienced domestic violence and abuse within the last year (Children's Commissioner 2018).

## Domestic abuse and Adverse childhood experiences

There has been considerable research on DVA and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). The Centre of Disease Control-Kaiser Adverse Childhood Experiences study (1998) indicated that adults exposed to ACEs were more likely to have worse outcomes across a range of measures, including violence and criminal behaviour. The original ACEs study identified ten types of adverse childhood experiences:

*Abuse:* physical, sexual, verbal

*Neglect:* emotional, physical

*Growing up in a household where:*

- there are adults with alcohol and drug use problems
- there are adults with mental health problems
- there is domestic violence
- there are adults who have spent time in prison
- parents have separated

The original ACEs study asked respondents about their experiences of domestic abuse to estimate the frequency of: whether their mother was treated violently, i.e. pushed, grabbed, slapped, had something thrown at her, kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, hit with something hard, repeatedly hit for over at least a few minutes, or threatened



or hurt by a knife or gun by a father (or stepfather) or mother's boyfriend. The focus of these questions was on domestic abuse towards women.

From the most recent ONS estimates for the year ending March 2019, over 3% of married or civil partnered women were victims of domestic abuse, compared with 2.1% of married or civil partnered men. In contrast 11.6% of single women were victims compared with 5.3% of single men.

Public Health England (2019) identified three ways in which exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences impacts childhood development:

1. neurobiological effects altering brain development. These effects include brain abnormalities, stress hormone, dysregulation;
2. psychological effects, such as poor attachment, poor socialization, poor self-efficacy;
3. increases the likelihood of adopting health harming behaviours, such as smoking, obesity, substance misuse, promiscuity.

Each of these impacts highlights the importance of mitigating the effects of adverse experiences through early intervention. As well as growing interest in ACEs in relation to offending behaviour and criminal justice agencies, the following sections will present evidence that offending populations are more likely to have experienced one or more adverse experiences than their counterparts.

### **The impacts of domestic abuse on children and young people**

Much of the academic research supports the claim that childhood experiences of domestic abuse are not benign but have harmful consequences for children. There is strong evidence of the impacts of domestic violence and abuse on emotional, psychological, health, educational and other outcomes. McGee (2000:69) summarises the range of impacts on children who experience domestic violence.

*[F]ear, powerlessness, depression or sadness, impaired social relations, impacts on the child's identity, impacts on extended family relationships and their relationship with their mother, effects on educational achievement and anger, very often displayed as aggressive behaviour.*

Research highlights the negative emotional and behaviour impacts of exposure to domestic violence on children (Wolfe et al. 2003). This research indicates that the impacts can be both short and long-term, can vary according to when the abuse occurred, as well as the duration, nature and frequency of the domestic violence and abuse.

Empirical findings have supported the conclusion that children and young people who grow up in 'violent and aggressive families' are at an elevated risk for a wide range of psychological and behavioural problems (Chan and Yeung 2009:314). The prognoses for children from the perspective of statutory child protection guidance are bleak:

*Children who witness domestic violence suffer emotional and psychological maltreatment. They tend to have low self-esteem and experience increased levels of anxiety, depression, anger and fear, aggressive and violent behaviours, including bullying, lack of conflict resolution skills, lack of empathy for others and poor peer relationships, poor school performance, anti-social behaviour, pregnancy, alcohol and substance misuse, self-blame, hopelessness, shame and apathy, post-traumatic stress disorder - symptoms such as hyper-vigilance, nightmares and intrusive thoughts - images of violence, insomnia, enuresis and over protectiveness of their mother and/or siblings (LSCB 2016:1.28.4.2).*

Childhood exposure to complex trauma has been associated with the development of aggressive behaviour and oppositional defiant disorder (Cook et al. 2005). A meta-analytic review of the psychosocial outcomes of children exposed to interparental violence found witnesses to domestic abuse had significantly worse outcomes relative to both non-witnesses and children from verbally aggressive homes (Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt and Kenny 2003). This study found children exposed to interparental violence were more likely to report that they would intervene or show aggression in response to conflict (ibid: 346).

The Home Office (2019a) published a literature review on the impacts of witnessing domestic abuse on children. Although it concluded that 'there is still insufficient evidence on the impacts of domestic abuse on children for this to be included in the estimates in the cost of domestic abuse', the review summarised recent evidence on emotional harms, physical harms, social harms, relationships and future domestic abuse, bullying, education, economic status and criminal behaviour. The Home Office (2019a) did not estimate for the effects of domestic abuse on children as the outcomes become manifest after many years and could be influenced by other factors.

There is also no direct, causal relation between exposure to DVA and specific short- or long-term outcomes (Holt et al 2008:807). Experiencing domestic violence and abuse have complex interactions with other factors. There is some evidence that gender differences, cognitive mechanisms, and perception of support mediate the impacts of trauma related to witnessing domestic violence (Ardino et al 2013; Calvete and Orue 2013; González et al. 2016). There is evidence that children in families where domestic violence occurs are also more likely to be victims of child abuse (Jouriles et al. 2008).

### **Protective factors for children and young people impacted by domestic abuse**

The fact that there is so much diversity in how children recover from DVA exposure counts partly because children will all have been exposed to DVA in individual ways. Both the length of time that children are exposed to DVA, and how severe it was, which will have an impact on their recovery (Hague et al. 2012: 105). In addition, the presence of different 'protective factors' within a child's life can positively affect that amount of trauma that occurs.

Central to the notion of protective factors is that of 'resilience' (Hague et al. 2012:105). Resilience is 'the idea that people have different capacities that allow them to

overcome (or not) the negative effects of trauma or adversity' such as DVA (Hague et al. 2012:105). 'Protective factors' can help build resilience, whereas 'risk factors' can reduce it (Hester et al. 2007; Kashani and Allan 1998). Resilience is thought to develop as a child 'draws on techniques which have been successful in coping with stress in the past, and then repeats them' (Hague et al. 2012:105).

The protective factors identified in the literature that may help children cope with the distress of living with DVA are precisely those that tend to have been destroyed or damaged by the abuse: 'self-esteem the presence of social and community support structures and of access to supportive family and friends' (Mullender et al. 2002, p.130). Self-esteem especially can be a factor which can serve to be a 'double obstacle' for children who have witnessed DVA by the 'shame and the undermining attitudes of the abusive man' which can undermine this quality (Mullender et al. 2002).

Children who live with DVA develop coping strategies in response to violence within the household, many of which are carried over into adult relationships (Överlien and Hydén 2009; Taylor 2017). Debates in this field have focused on different coping styles used by children exposed to DVA, and how these styles are mediated by gender: boys were more associated with externalising strategies and girls were more associated with internalising strategies (ibid).

Some researchers found there is a need to 'dispel the myths that domestic violence between adults does not affect children, and that unless children have witnessed physical violence between their parents, then they have not been impacted by domestic violence' (Katz 2016:56). Researchers have also talked about the way children actively resist the abuse and support their parents, effectively becoming 'recovery promoters' for their non-abusing parents (Katz 2015b).

Despite the negative impacts of living with DVA, Katz found many children; '(a) wish to be treated as agentic and take active roles in decision-making, and (b) are more active in supporting themselves and others than was previously thought' (Katz 2015a:70). Katz notes that, far from being passive victims, children use their agency to support their mothers in an active way post DVA which is positive for their recovery process (Katz 2015a).

Indeed, the non-abusing women's mothering is a central determining factor in how affected children are by DVA (Holden 1998; Edleson 1999; Bogat et al. 2006; Wolfe et al. 2003). In fact, 'the quality of the mother-child relationship has been identified as one of the most important predictor in the development of children who have been exposed to domestic violence' (Lapierre 2008:456). This again is difficult in the context of DVA, where a mother's capacity to positively parent can be affected by the presence of DVA itself.

## The victim-offender overlap

Most children who experience DVA don't go on to perpetrate it in adult life. Even given this, there is a well-documented correlation between various experiences of victimisation and offending behaviour (not solely in terms of experiences of domestic abuse). This correlation is generally referred to as a 'victim-offender overlap' in criminology and victimology.

There seems to be consensus in the field of criminology that the victimisation and offending overlap is 'definitely on the list' as a top predictor of both crime and victimisation (Daigle and Muftic 2017). Research has shown that offenders are 1.5 to 7 times more likely than non-offenders to be victims, and victims are 2 to 7 times more likely than non-victims to be offenders (Entorf 2013). The link between victimisation increasing the likelihood that a person will engage in crime later in life has been found 'especially in individuals who are abused during childhood' (*ibid*:50). These authors note that this overlap is observed in a majority, but not all, victims or offenders.

In relation to domestic violence and abuse, there is a prevailing view that experiencing victimisation leads to a 'cycle of violence' (Widom 1989). According to this social learning theory, individuals victimised through violence are themselves at an increased risk of perpetrating violence. This view holds that violence is a learned behaviour, that there is an intergenerational transmission of violence which makes children who experience domestic violence at an increased risk of perpetuating violence. This hypothesis claims that childhood exposure to violence increases an individual's risk of subsequently engaging in violent abuse and aggressive behaviours, and increases the risk that individuals become perpetrators and abusers in violent and abusive relationships (Royal College of Psychiatrists 2017).

Proponents of this theory have presented evidence about the 'intergenerational transmission of violence' through the family and that children who have witnessed domestic violence will themselves engage in violent relationships, either as victims or perpetrators (Jaffe, Wolfe, and Wilson 1990; Peled, Jaffe, and Edleson 1995; Cummings 1998). This evidence is often associated with gender dynamics and suggests that girls are more likely to become victims, with boys more likely to become perpetrators. Further evidence of intergenerational transmission of violence comes from longitudinal and ethnographic research that observes the relationships between childhood influences and later adult behaviour (Jewkes 2002; Ehrensaft *et al.* 2003). Witnessing domestic violence as a child emerges as one of the strongest predictors of later perpetration (Hotelling and Sugarman 1986; Saunders 2002).

This theory has been criticised for the fact that it does not account for a large proportion of children who are exposed to violence and who do not follow this pattern (Lapierre 2008:455). This limitation has also been rejected by the majority of front-line agencies as it does not explain why most children who have been exposed to DVA do not go on to perpetrate abuse, as well as the fact that many DVA perpetrators have not witnessed it in childhood (Mullender 1996; Cunningham *et al.* 1998; Dutton 1999). The theory also gives a sense that exposure to violence, or becoming victimhood is determinate, which gives a limiting prognosis for these children.

Although there is evidence for this overlap in the literature, some authors have cautioned against assuming a direct, causal relationship. There is a need for better theoretical models to explain the relationship between victimisation and offending. This would require identifying the role of individual and situational characteristics across different crime and victimisation types which increases the risk of both victimisation and offending (Jennings *et al.* 2012). Qualitative research with domestic violence practitioners has also highlighted the risk of labelling victims as potential perpetrators (Wagner *et al.* 2019). This can also be ‘unhelpful to boys who are experiencing the violence to be constructed as potential future abusers’ (Taylor 2017:166).

### **Childhood experiences of domestic abuse amongst offending populations**

There is evidence that people in custody are more likely to have been victimised than other populations and that experience of DVA and ACEs is a risk factor for offending behaviour. The *Taylor Review of the Youth Justice System in England and Wales* identified this overlap as:

*The children with whom YOTs now work are, in general, those whose offending is a manifestation of a number of things that are going wrong in their lives. These children are often victims of crime as well as perpetrators, and many are in care or known to social services (2016:7)*

The Vulnerable Adolescence Thematic Review, conducted by Croydon Safeguarding Children Board (2019), identified a clear overlap between children and young people who had experiences of domestic violence and abuse, and subsequently had contact with criminal justice agencies. From the 25 children who were exposed to or suffered violence in the home, 21 had been subject to criminal convictions and the remaining four had received out of court disposals.

Research on offending populations has examined their history of adverse childhood experiences, including exposure to traumatic experiences, such as domestic violence, child neglect and abuse, and child molestation. There is evidence that offending populations are highly likely to have been exposed to complex histories of trauma (Ardino 2012). Findings from the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime, a longitudinal study with 4,300 young people in the City of Edinburgh, found that serious offending is associated with victimisation (McAra and McVie 2013). The study found those involved in violence were significantly more likely than non-violent counterparts to be victims of crime and adult harassment.

There is evidence that child maltreatment and neglect is positively associated with recidivism, and problems within a family are key predictors for future offending (Baglivio 2016; Ryan, Williams and Courtney 2013). Building on the ACEs literature, Baglivio *et al.* (2014) analysed the prevalence of ACEs in a sample of 64,000 juvenile offenders in Florida, US. They found that both female and male juvenile offenders have significantly more ACEs than the sample described in the original ACE study. Recent research by Public Health Wales (2019) and Bangor University found nearly half of prisoners (46%) had experienced four or more ACEs, again higher than the wider population. The same study found that prisoners with four or more ACEs were four

times more likely to have served a sentence in a young offending institution than those with no ACEs.

Home Office (2019b) analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study and the Environmental Risk Longitudinal Twin Study found that domestic violence in households was a key predictor for serious youth violence. Domestic violence and parental substance abuse are two of the 'toxic trio' of factors which predict negative outcomes for children. The analysis looked at whether 18-year olds who are exposed to domestic violence in the household also engaged in serious violence-linked behaviours, i.e. ever being in a gang fight, using a weapon such as a knife or baseball bat, carrying a hidden weapon, or 'threatening someone to get money or stuff off them (i.e. robbery). They found that

- 14% of 18-year olds who had domestic violence (that they had been exposed to) had engaged in serious violence (86% had not engaged in serious violence)
- 9.5% of 18-year olds who had domestic violence (that they had not been exposed to) had engaged in serious violence (90.5% had not engaged in serious violence)
- 7.4% of 18-year olds who had no domestic violence had engaged in serious violence (92.6% had not engaged in serious violence) (Home Office 2019b:48)

MoJ (2017) analysis of family court records and the Police National Computer found a positive relationship between adverse family experiences and youth offending. There were varying likelihoods that individuals would have a proven record of youth offending depending on whether children were named in private law cases (relating to parent disputes concerning the upbringing of children), public law cases (where a local authority uses a legal intervention to protect the welfare of a child), divorce, adoption, or domestic violence orders. Children who appear in family courts – where there was an application for a care order placing a child in the care of a designated local authority – had an increased likelihood of proven offending. This group were more likely to offend than children named in domestic violence orders.

### **The relation between childhood experiences of domestic abuse and gang-related offending behaviours**

There is evidence of a high prevalence of adverse childhood experiences, such as domestic abuse, amongst gang associated young people. The Children's Commissioner (2019) found that 24% of young offenders flagged as gang associated were known to have witnessed domestic abuse. This is 37% more common in gang associated children and young people than other young offenders. The Centre for Social Justice's report, *Dying to Belong: An In-depth Review of Street Gangs in Britain* (2009) found that domestic violence and abuse which lead to a 'breakdown of the family unit' was a significant push factors for gang involvement. Other research has found high levels of abuse and violence in the histories of gang involved girls (Miller 1998).

Other research has indicated that young women are motivated to become involved with gangs due to a need to 'escape trauma', and 'searching for protection or a sense of belonging and because of the promise of a romantic relationship' (Auyong *et al.*

2018; Khan *et al.* 2013). Young women and girls find themselves exploited, exposed to physical or sexual violence and drawn into county lines activities (Whittaker *et al.* 2018). Younger children can become drawn into working in drugs markets both inside and outside of their neighbourhood areas. Whittaker *et al.* (2019) has recently identified that criminal gangs have introduced a 'highly exploitative operating model' and that younger people are particularly vulnerable to being drawn into gangs. As they write: 'through financial and status incentives or debt bondage, or both, children and young people are at risk of being drawn into working in drug markets' (also see Whittaker *et al.* 2018).

Research on county lines drug dealing has indicated that many young people have a background with one or more adverse childhood experiences, including domestic violence and abuse. Children with multiple vulnerabilities, including poverty, family breakdown and intervention by social services, are known to be targeted by members of county lines (NCA 2019). The Children's Society (2019) found that age, gender, ethnicity, young people with special educational needs (SEN) and learning difficulties, and other societal factors, put children at increased risk of criminal exploitation.

The same Children's Society report also identified that family relationships can expose children to the risk of exploitation, such as through drug dependent parents, older siblings who being criminally exploited and extended family networks who are involved in criminal behaviour. Other research has indicated that, for children involved in county lines, they may initially find that an unsafe home setting leads them to become engaged with activities outside of the home, making them more vulnerable to grooming and exploitation by criminal gangs (Harding, Forthcoming).

### **Family structures and membership of criminal gangs**

A contested area in existing research is the extent to which family make-up constitutes a risk factor. In particular, whether being part of a single parent family enhances an individual's risk of later gang membership. Research has shown that adolescents who are most at risk of becoming involved in antisocial activities are those from 'low-income, female-headed families and who are failing in school and associate with peers of similar characteristics' (Gibbs and Merighi 1994:77). Isolating the extent to which the single-parent element or the gender of the remaining parent makes an impact is highly disputed in the academic community.

Existing research does indicate that gang members and their families do identify father-absence as a contributing factor for gang involvement. In a study by Young *et al.* (2013) they interviewed fifty-eight current and former gang members and they highlighted father-absence as a recurring theme. A participant, Christopher, noted that 'being without a father led him to seek validation from his peers' (Young *et al.* 2013:3). Another young man, Kai, directly related his gang involvement to not having a 'male influence' at home: 'Boys need a man at home to show them how to be a man' (Young, Fitzgibbon and Silverstone 2013:3). The relation between father-absence and gang membership also was raised by mothers in the study, who noted that they 'lost control' of their sons in adolescence and would not have if the father had been present (Young *et al.* 2013a:3).

Much of the research into familial risk factors for gang membership entwines with the father-absence paradigm. Present in a large amount of gang research is the assertion that young people often join a gang in order to satisfy a craving for a replacement family, or to find substitute father figures that have not been available in the nuclear family (Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Adams and Coltrane 2005). Due to the gender segregated nature of the gang it has been said that gang membership constitutes an attempt to create a 'family', 'with tools honed to incorporate ideals of manhood' (Adams and Coltrane 2005:237).

In one study by the Youth Justice Trust, which reviewed the case files of 1,027 children and young people under the supervision of youth offending teams, identified that more than 90 per cent of the young people had 'significant experience' of loss or rejection (Yates 2010:14). This usually meant they had lost contact with a parent because of family breakdown, bereavement, or the onset of parental mental illness or physical disability (Yates 2010:14).

The effect of a loss of a parent on young boys has also been theorized through the lens of masculinity. Kaufman (1993) theorizes about the 'psychic armour' of masculinity which can be partly explained by a father's absence in the early years of his son's life (Seidler 2006:56). This armour protects the young people from the pain of their father's absence and through this experience they learn to be self-sufficient and independent. Kaufman noted that this armour makes it difficult for men to empathise with the suffering of others and in particular they may not then feel the consequence of any suffering they produce through violence (Seidler 2006:56).

However, this theory has been critiqued for being over simplistic and based on an essentialised view of the nuclear family. One longitudinal study explored risk factors for 808 young people involved in gangs and found no significant difference in the prevalence of gang members who had a strong or weak attachment to their parents (Hill *et al.* 1999:309). This led the authors to conclude that: 'It does not appear from these data that gangs provide new families for children who have failed to bond to their own families' (Hill *et al.* 1999:314).

This perspective has been echoed by Jankowski (1991) who found in his ten-year ethnographic research that gang members were as likely to come from two-parent households as single families (Jankowski 1991:39). An exception to this is when the effects of family structure in relation to gender were examined, 'such that the effect of single-parent households on subsequent gang membership was stronger for girls than it was for boys' (Hill *et al.* 1999:301).

Aside from the gendered commentary on single parents as noted above, the practical issues that single parents face has been highlighted as a contributory factor to gang involvement for young people. Research by the Centre for Social Justice noted that, since a large proportion of single parents are in employment, financial insecurity brings challenges to parenting: 'Lone parents are desperately trying to make ends meet, often with multiple jobs, and are therefore unable to be around at the end of the school day, or able to supervise their child's weekend activities' (The Centre for Social Justice 2009: 96). One young person interviewed as part of this research noted that, 'If you come from a single parent home and your mum or dad is working all hours to provide for you, then your family will become whoever's in your area' (The Centre for Social Justice 2009:96).



## Evaluation of interventions for children who experience domestic abuse

The academic literature indicates that domestic abuse and intimate partner violence interventions tend to focus on four types of persons: perpetrators, victims, couples, or child witnesses (Stover, Meadows and Kaufman 2009). A recent systematic review of the clinical effectiveness of interventions with children exposed to domestic violence, focused on the following intervention types for children: advocacy, psychoeducation, psychotherapy, play therapy, and parenting skills training (Howarth et al. 2016).

For this review, we have focused on evidence related to: (a) children's resilience and coping strategies; (b) parent and family-based interventions; (c) treatment programmes for child witnesses; (d) interventions delivered by child safeguarding and protection services.

*Children's resilience and coping strategies:* Research on children's coping with domestic abuse and intimate partner violence have emphasized resilience, coping strategies and community-based resources to "pursue positive non-violent life trajectories" (van Heugten and Wilson, 2008:59). As mentioned earlier in this review, supporting the development of children's protective factors and coping strategies can take an instrumental role in enabling children to cope and recover from the adverse impacts of domestic abuse (Cf. Katz 2016). Researchers have likened the trauma experienced by adult survivors and children who witness domestic abuse to post-traumatic stress disorder (Arias and Pape 1999; Cascardi 2016).

*Parent and family-based interventions:* Parent and family-based interventions include various forms of programmes, services, treatments and support. For example, the Women's Aid (2019) Early Years Toolkit includes several approaches to supporting mothers and babies affected by domestic abuse, such as listening to mothers, helping mothers to build positive mental representations of their unborn babies, safety planning with mothers and babies, exploring termination of pregnancy or adoption, and helping mothers and babies to tune into each other.

A review of family interventions found that parenting intervention studies had positive outcomes but with different goals and diverse outcomes (Rizo *et al.* 2011). Systematic reviews have found that domestic violence and intimate partner violence interventions studies were limited due to (a) lack of experimental design or randomised controlled trials, (b) small sample sizes, (c) the use of convenience samples, and (d) failure to statistically account for nested and correlated data (Rizo *et al.* 2011; Van Parys *et al.* 2014).

Other research has demonstrated the challenges of evaluating the effectiveness of domestic support service programmes – i.e. survivors come to programmes with different needs, many clients are anonymous or engage in short-term services, and associated issues of survivors' safety and comfort. For these reasons, service evaluations should be done sensitively and appropriately to improve services for survivors (Sullivan 2011).

*Interventions for child witnesses:* The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) found strong to moderate evidence that interventions which involve both children and mothers

appear to more effective than child-only treatment or community-case management, on a range of outcomes for both child and mother (Molloy, Barton, and Brims, 2017:22).

A 2009 evidence review found four randomised case assignment trials which evaluated treatments for children exposed to intimate partner violence (Stover, Meadows and Kaufman 2009). This review found some evidence that child trauma treatments are effective with reducing the symptoms of children and young people's exposure to intimate partner violence. The review found evidence that a child-parent psychotherapy treatment for young children exposed to domestic violence resulted in reductions in a child's symptoms at posttreatment and at a 6-month follow up (Lieberman, Ghosh Ippen and Van Horn 2006).

A trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy treatment with sexually abused children (58% of whom had a history of witnessing domestic violence) was associated with significantly better outcomes than supportive child-centered therapy (Cohen, Deblinger, Mannarino, and Steer, 2004). Other intervention studies have reported positive outcomes for treatment groups across a range of measures, including child functioning, PTSD and depressive symptoms (Graham-Bermann *et al.* 2015; Howell *et al.* 2013; Overbeek *et al.* 2013).

The EIF found some evidence to support the use of psycho-educational interventions; multicomponent interventions (e.g. nurse care management, non-parental child care for disadvantaged families, and community-based service planning) with an advocacy focus; and mother-child therapeutic treatment (Molloy, Barton, and Brims, 2017:22).

*Interventions by social work professionals:* Child safeguarding and protection professionals in children's social services provide important support to children and young people impacted by domestic abuse through children's social services. It is beyond the scope of this review to provide a full examination of recent evaluation studies of child safeguarding practices and intervention. A recent literature review has synthesized evidence about 'what works' in child protection (see also Schrader-McMillan and Barlow 2017).

The EIF identified a "significant gap between 'what is known to be effective' from peer-reviewed studies and what is currently delivered in local child protection systems" (2017:34). The EIF report called for better communication of the nature of evidence for child protection and to better guide local decisions about which approaches are likely to be most effective. The review also called for funding to be directed towards "evaluating some of the widely used approaches that have not yet been well evaluated, such as multiagency safeguarding hubs (MASH) and multi-disciplinary delivery models" (2017:36) (see also Schrader-McMillan and Barlow 2017).

## Gaps in the literature

There are several evidence gaps related to children and young people's experiences of DVA and offending behaviour. In brief, there is a need for further research on the three following areas.

### *Children and young people's lived experience of DVA and responses by the criminal justice system and children's social services*

There is a lack of in-depth qualitative research with victims of domestic violence from the perspective of children who have experienced that abuse (Callahan *et al.* 2018). Though it is understandable that this group are not interviewed, due to ethical concerns and traumatisation, there is a gap in evidence about their contemporaneous experience of victimisation, response from criminal justice agencies, children's social services, and intervention programmes.

Further evidence is needed to understand the impact of children's experience of DVA when it is not reported to the police or children's services. Further research could explore demographic and geographic differences in the impact and response to DVA. We also note that there were a limited number of domestic abuse intervention evaluations that analysed the medium and long-term impacts on children and young people.

### *The overlap between experiencing domestic abuse and youth offending*

There is a gap in evidence about the overlaps between experiences of domestic violence and abuse and specific forms of criminality offending, namely serious youth violence and county lines (ADCS 2019; Robinson, McLean, and Densley 2019). There was also a lot of empirical evidence that tested the validity of different theoretical explanations for this overlap. Though several studies analyse the association between adverse experiences and offending behaviour, we also found few qualitative studies of former gang members' experiences of DVA and its relation to gang involvement (e.g. Levell 2020).

### *The characteristics of victims of childhood criminal exploitation*

There is limited evidence and data on the scale of criminal exploitation or on the background characteristics of victims of criminal exploitation, such as exposure to domestic abuse and other adverse childhood experiences. The Children's Society (2019) found that:

*'[T]here is a significant lack of available evidence on the scale of this problem or an exact oversight of which young people are at risk. If further information is recorded in the future, hopefully we will be able to gain a better understanding of this issue as more data emerges' (2019:35)*

This information is needed to identify risk and protective factors for exploitation and to improve the evidence base on the association between victimisation through experiencing domestic violence and abuse, and criminal exploitation.

## Future research

This literature review has focused on the impacts on children of experiencing domestic violence and abuse, the overlap between being victimised by violence and perpetrating violence, and interventions with children who have experienced domestic abuse.

It provides an overview of published research and identified several gaps in evidence. We found that further evaluation evidence is needed about interventions that help victims cope and recover from the impacts of living in households with domestic abuse. We also note that further evidence is needed on 'what works' in breaking cycles of violence.

This upcoming review will focus on children's experiences of domestic abuse and the response by the criminal justice system and other agencies. The review will also examine the overlaps between children's experiences of domestic abuse, childhood criminal exploitation and offending behaviour.

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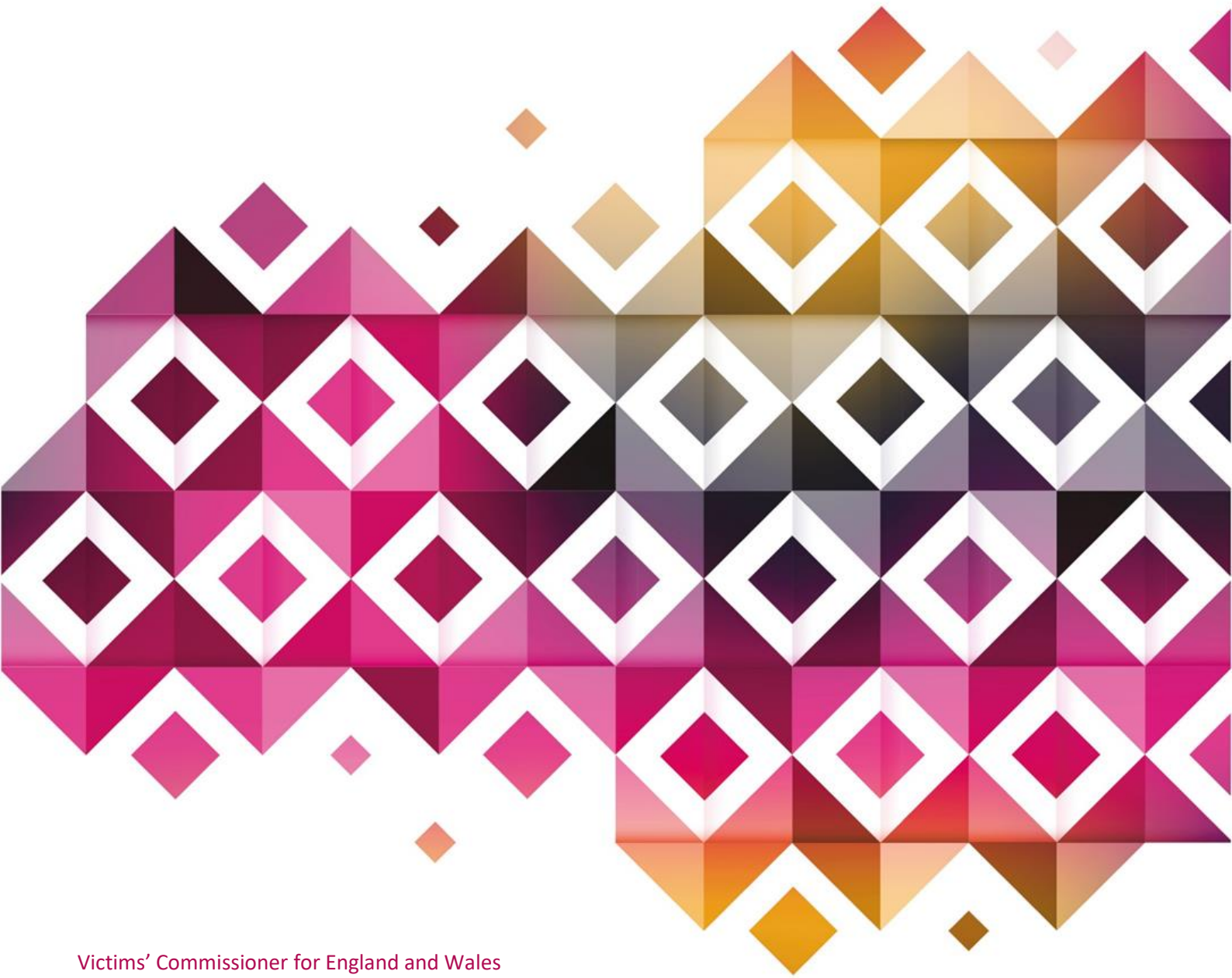
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Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales

Clive House

5<sup>th</sup> Floor

70 Petty France

London

SW1H 9EX

e: [victims.commissioner@victimscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:victims.commissioner@victimscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk)

