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# **Children and Adolescent's Experiences of Violence and Abuse at Home**

Current Theory, Research and Practitioner Insights

Edited by Julie C. Taylor and Elizabeth A. Bates



# Children and Adolescent's Experiences of Violence and Abuse at Home

*Children and Adolescent's Experiences of Violence and Abuse at Home* is a unique book that explores some of the main controversies and challenges within the field. The book is organised into three sections, the first covering work that has focused on the experiences of living in DV settings as a child or young person, the second offers overviews of the impact of child victimisation and the final section is about working with children in practice and service-based settings.

It includes extensive reviews of the literature, empirical research and practice observations, all of which provide compelling evidence of a need to change how we construct victims and design services. It provides evidence for the need to work sensitively, inclusively and responsively around issues of victim identification, support and prevention. Moreover, the evidence urges us to include children's and adult victim/survivor's experiences and contributions in the creation of services.

Concluding with a series of recommendations for both future research, and ways in which we can help use the research findings to inform practice, it is a must-read for researchers, practitioners and educators working with children and young people within the field of domestic violence and abuse. It will also be of interest and value to policy makers who are reviewing legislation and those involved in commissioning psychological services, and victim services that work with child and adolescent victims.

**Dr Julie C. Taylor** is Head of Learning, Teaching and Student Experience for the Institute of Health at the University of Cumbria, UK. A chartered psychologist by background, Julie's passion is research that is participatory and collaborative. In recent years the focus has been children's experience of domestic violence, an interest that burgeoned following a 3-year study of sentenced women in the criminal justice system, all of whom related accounts of their victimisation as children and the impact this had on their schooling, relationships and subsequent opportunities.

**Dr Elizabeth A. Bates** is Principal Lecturer in Psychology and Psychological Therapies at the University of Cumbria, UK. Her research focus is on working with male victims of domestic violence including their experiences of physical and psychological abuse, the impact on them and the ways the abuse can continue and change post separation.



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**Edited by Julie C. Taylor and  
Elizabeth A. Bates**

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# Contributor Biographies

**Dr Elizabeth A. Bates** is a Principal Lecturer in Psychology and Psychological Therapies at the University of Cumbria, UK. Her research focus is on working with male victims of domestic violence including their experiences of physical and psychological abuse, the impact on them, and the ways the abuse can continue and change post separation.

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**Professor Jane E.M. Callaghan** is the Director of the Centre for Child Wellbeing and Protection. She is a Psychologist and Interdisciplinary Researcher, with an established record of research in areas related to childhood, violence, family life, relationships, discrimination and exclusion, and mental health and identity. Two clear strands are in evidence in her research – research focused on violence, health, children’s mental health, social vulnerability, and family life, and a related strand focused on gender, professional identities, and ethnicity. She has been the Principal Investigator on the four-nation European Commission funded project “Understanding Agency and Resistance Strategies – Children’s Experiences of Domestic Violence”, the largest qualitative study of children who live with domestic violence conducted to date.

**Dr Bethan Carter** is a Post-doctoral Researcher at the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. Her research interests include investigating the impact of domestic violence on the mental health of children and young people using cohort studies and routinely collected administrative data. Bethan’s PhD explored the effects of family violence (domestic violence and direct child abuse) on child and adolescent internalising symptoms, and the causal

pathways between child abuse and internalising symptoms within the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC).

**Dr Grace Carter** is a Chartered Psychologist and Research Fellow at the Institute of Health and Wellbeing. Grace conducts research in the fields of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and health. Her research broadly focuses on the development and robust evaluation of interventions for young people and adults who have experienced domestic abuse and/or sexual violence, and ensuring that the voices of victims/survivors are central to intervention design and evaluation. Grace's PhD thesis examined the development of the evidence base of interventions for children and young people who have experienced domestic violence and abuse.

**Dr Daniela Di Babilio** is a Post-doctoral Research Associate in Digital Mental Health, an HCPC Registered Clinical Psychologist, and a CBT therapist with extensive clinical experience in both the public and private sector. Her clinical work encompasses a wide range of disorders and conditions, including trauma-related ones. She has worked with victims of domestic abuse and people who have experienced direct or indirect violence in the household. This sparked her interest in meaningful ways in which practitioners can support people whose development has been affected by violence to live a fuller life, producing in-depth changes in their psychological functioning. Her publications on the themes of trauma and abuse call for a combination of individual-level and systemic ways to address trauma and promote post-traumatic growth.

**Dr Joshua Eldridge** is a Clinical Psychologist and Service Lead for a CAMHS Education Wellbeing Service in Southwest London and St George's NHS trust. His background experiences including working in CAMHS getting help, getting more help and within specialist Children's Services settings. His specialist interests include attachment-based interventions and working systemically to strengthen networks around young people who have experienced adversity and developmental trauma.

**Dr Tanya Frances** is a Lecturer in Psychology and Counselling based at The Open University in the UK. Tanya has an interest in gender-based violence, domestic abuse, social inequalities, and broadly, critical approaches to exploring eating disorders/eating distress. Tanya is interested in feminist and narrative approaches to research that centres victim-survivor voices and that attends to personal-socio-political intersections. Tanya is also a Counsellor and Psychotherapist. She integrates an intersectional, relational, and power-sensitive approach to working in practice.

**Professor Nicola Graham-Kevan** conducts research on vulnerable populations particularly within the Criminal Justice System. She is interested in trauma-informed approaches and is an internationally recognised expert in domestic

abuse. Nicola has published widely in intimate partner violence perpetration and victimisation, and the psychological impact of adversity and trauma. She was one of the first researchers to explore typologies of coercive control within intimate relationships. She has led research projects and evaluations for a range of clients including the European Union, the Home Office, Police and Crime Commissioners. Nicola is the Director of the Centre for Criminal Justice Research and Partnership and a Lead for research on violence and aggression.

**Elizabeth Harper** is a Lecturer in Psychology and Health and Social Care at the University of Cumbria. Liz is currently studying for a PhD in how gender normative views influence the experienced victimisation of intimate partner violence (IPV).

**Professor Susan Heward-Belle** is a Professor of Social Work at the University of Sydney and is a recognised leader in domestic and family violence research. Sue has almost 30 years' experience in the domestic violence and child protection fields and has conducted many studies in these areas. Her PhD research examined the fathering experiences and practices of domestically violent men. She has a particular interest in advancing gender equitable and socially just approaches to practice that counter mother blaming.

**Dr Stephanie Holt** background is in social work practice across a variety of settings including residential child care, child protection, and family support. Since 2000 Stephanie has been lecturing in social work at Trinity College, Dublin. Stephanie's teaching and research expertise is on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence, with a particular emphasis on the impact of Domestic Violence on children and young people. Stephanie's research in this field is internationally renowned. In addition, Stephanie is an Associate Editor for the *Journal of Family Violence (JoFV)*.

**Dr Niamh Ingram** is a Senior Clinical Psychologist and CBT Lead within NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. Her specialist areas of interests are supporting young people and their carers to heal from traumatic experiences, parent-child attachment, introducing yoga and movement into therapy, and creating sustainable and compassionate work environments for health staff.

**Dr Nassra Khan** is a Registered Counselling Therapist in the province of Alberta, Canada. She works with individuals struggling with different mental health issues and traumatic life events to improve their mental and emotional wellbeing. She also provides counselling to individuals and families affected by domestic violence. Nassra adopts a culturally responsive framework in her counselling practice. Nassra's research interests are in the areas of

acculturation, refugee issues, and experiences of people fleeing war-torn countries. She would also like to further explore how these issues may contribute to incidents of domestic violence in the home.

**Dr Samuel Larner** is a Senior Lecturer in Forensic Linguistics at Manchester Metropolitan University. His research explores children's disclosures of serious crimes perpetrated against them – particularly sexual abuse – and the role that trusted adults play in facilitating and scaffolding such disclosures. Samuel is a Member of the Manchester Centre for Youth Studies: an interdisciplinary youth-informed and youth-led research centre (<https://www.mmu.ac.uk/mcys/>).

**Kirsty Martin** is a Lecturer in Psychology and Health and Social Care at the University of Cumbria. Kirsty's main research focus to date has been with offender/perpetrator populations.

**Professor Katherine Maurer** is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at McGill University. Kathryn practiced in New York City as a Clinical Social Worker and a Trauma Therapist. Her interdisciplinary research focuses on adolescent mental and behavioural health during the transition to adulthood. Particularly, Dr Maurer studies the physiological impact of exposure to extreme stressors, such as interpersonal violence and poverty, on the development of self-regulation capacities in adolescence and adults. Dr Maurer is the recipient of a 2016 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Insight Development Grant to conduct a phenomenological study of affect regulation with adolescents who have experienced violence in their family as part of her research agenda focusing on the intergenerational transmission of family violence.

**Dr Lucy Maynard** works with people and organisations with social purpose to have an even greater impact. Lucy's approach to research and impact consultancy is underpinned by the ACA framework for development: enabling Awareness–Choice–Action personally and collectively, in leadership and practice. Lucy's research and practice are founded in the area of children, young people and family wellbeing and social justice. She strives to influence from practice and has held research and leadership roles across the social sector and as a visiting Research Fellow at University of Cumbria.

**Dr Mark McGlashan** is a Senior Lecturer in English Language in the Birmingham Institute of Media and English at Birmingham City University. His research interests predominantly centre on Corpus-based (Critical) Discourse Studies and the analysis of a wide range of social issues typically relating to extremist ideologies and behaviours (e.g. nationalism, extremism, racism, sexism, homophobia).

**Professor Carolina Øverlien** has conducted research in the field of domestic violence and abuse (children and young people) for a number of years, and has published extensively on this topic. Her expertise includes children experiencing/exposed to domestic violence, Youth intimate partner violence, children's rights, and research ethics. Carolina is currently a Professor of Social Work at Stockholm University, and a Research Leader at the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS) in Oslo, Norway. Carolina is also an Associate Editor for the *Journal of Family Violence (JoFV)*.

**Dr Alexandra Papamichail** is a Clinical Psychologist. Prior to this role, she worked as a Post-doctoral Research Associate at the IoPPN, King's College, and at the University of Nottingham. Her research specialises in interpersonal, family violence, and mental health (e.g. IPV, child-to-parent violence, modern slavery and mental health, sexual violence, and mental health among others). She completed her PhD in developmental psychology and psychopathology at the University of Brighton investigating child to parent violence.

**Dr Sabreen Selvik** is an associate Professor at the Faculty of Teacher Education and International Studies at Oslo Metropolitan University (OsloMet), Norway. Her educational background is in the field of psychology and special needs education. She has several years prior work experience with children at refuges for abused women and at other institutions. She has written articles concerning children's experiences of living at refuges and their schooling. Her research interests are in the fields of educational psychology, domestic violence and children, refuges for abused women, teacher-pupils' interactions, and children with special needs.

**Dr Ali Shnyien** is a Clinical Psychologist and Professional Lead for Youth Justice and Pupil Referral Unit CAMH services at South West London and St George's NHS trust. His specialist interests lie in utilising AMBIT (Adaptive Mentalization Based Integrative Treatment), community psychology, systemic practice and neurosequential approaches to support adolescents and families who have experienced traumatic developmental histories. Ali is also interested in the use of self and the application of somatic approaches in helping make meaning from our lived experiences.

**Professor Kaz Stuart** is the Director of Strategy and Learning at the YMCA George Williams College and Professor Emerita at the University of Cumbria. Kaz is passionate about enabling all people to have a voice in society so we can build a better world for everyone. Kaz achieves this by researching issues of inequality, researching in equitable ways and in supporting people's development through awareness, choice, and action at ACA Development.

**Dr Julie C. Taylor** is Head of Learning, Teaching and Student Experience for the Institute of Health at the University of Cumbria. A Chartered Psychologist by background Julie's passion is research that is participatory and collaborative. In recent years, the focus has been children's experience of domestic violence, an interest that burgeoned following a 3-year study of sentenced women in the criminal justice system, all of whom related accounts of their victimisation as children and the impact this had on their schooling, relationships, and subsequent opportunities.

**David Wright** is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology and Counselling, at the University of Cumbria. Dave is a chartered psychologist and an HCPC registered person-centred counsellor with more than 15 years' experience working with child and adult clients who self-harm.



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# Introduction

## The importance of this volume

*Julie C. Taylor and Elizabeth A. Bates*

In the last 30 years researchers and practitioners have gathered a wealth of evidence relating to children's experiences of growing up in families with domestic violence and abuse. In the UK, children growing up in homes where there was domestic violence were, until recently, defined as witnesses or observers as opposed to victims of abuse. The use of this nomenclature to describe their status was challenged primarily because of its influence on the construction and treatment of children within services (Callaghan et al., 2018). Being considered a witness to the abuse as opposed to being a victim of it had the potential to minimise the perceived impact and therefore reduce the requirements for intervention (Callaghan et al., 2017). One of the consequences being the lack of priority given to children's trauma and the potential impact this may have on their lives (e.g., Øverlien, 2011; Øverlien & Holt, 2019). To collapse all children into a bystander position minimises their distress and privileges that of the adult victim. Many children living in homes where there is violence and abuse between parents are not only victims of these trauma inducing living conditions but also of direct abuse and violence within the home and other areas of their ecosystems (e.g., Bacchini & Esposito, 2020).

The UK Domestic Abuse Act (2021) now makes explicit reference to children as **victims** if "*they see, hear, or experience the effects of the abuse ...*," and many researchers in the field see this change as long overdue (e.g., Callaghan et al., 2016). The move from the label witness or observer to victim in the context of a legal system enables the children to move from the periphery to centre stage. To identify children as key victims prioritises their experiences and directs attention to their needs. This new legal position is therefore to be applauded as a significant move in a positive direction. However, this change is UK-based and by no means universal, moreover, it is yet to be accompanied by a radical change in the way we identify needs and construct services.

This text explores some of the main controversies and challenges within the field. There are five main themes: 1. The importance of accessing the child victim/survivor's voices as opposed to relying on the voices and assumptions of others. 2. The methodological challenges of working with child/adult victim

populations. 3. The gendered assumptions around children's experiences of domestic abuse. 4. The adult sequelae of child victimisation, strengths and challenges. 5. What the evidence tells us about ways of working in practice with children and young people affected by child victimisation. It is hoped that this collection will serve as a useful tool for scholars and practitioners.

### **Outline of the chapters**

This book consists of 16 chapters, each covering an important area of research or practice. These chapters include extensive reviews of the literature, empirical research and practice observations, all of which provide compelling evidence of a need to change how we construct victims and design services. It provides evidence for the need to work sensitively, inclusively and responsively around issues of victim identification, support and prevention. Moreover, the evidence urges us to include children's and adult victim/survivor's experiences and contributions in the creation of services. The book is organised into three parts, the first covering work that has focused on the experiences of living in DV settings as a child or young person, the second offers overviews of the impact of child victimisation and the final section is about working with children in practice and service-based settings.

### **Part I**

Our first chapter is written by Professor Jane Callaghan who opens the volume with reference to her pioneering work, within this chapter Jane explains why working directly with the children and acknowledging their victim status is so important. In Chapter 2, Professor Nicola Graham-Kevan examines the literature to explore two key questions: 1. Is it only fathers/stepfathers who expose children to parental intimate violence, as you might assume based on many ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) survey questions? and 2. What does the evidence suggest the impact of exposure is? These questions are asked in response to the pervasive gendered narrative that infers that exposed boys become perpetrators and girls victims in the future.

In Chapters 3–5, children's experiences of growing up in homes where there has been domestic abuse and violence is explored, from a UK, European and a South Asian perspective. In Chapter 3, Dr Julie Taylor and colleagues draw upon data from adults in the United Kingdom who, as children, lived in homes where there was domestic abuse. Much of what we know about childhood experiences of domestic abuse comes from mothers or professionals working with children, often in refuge scenarios. Such studies provide invaluable insight and give the children a voice. However, many children who have grown up in a home where there is violence and abuse are never brought to the attention of services and so their voices remain unheard. The data drawn upon for this chapter comes from a retrospective study where adults were invited to reflect on their childhood experiences and their perception of how these experiences have

influenced their adult lives. The experiences shared by participants show that growing up in homes where there is domestic abuse has had a long-lasting impact on their lives. In Chapter 4, Professors Holt and Øverlien offer a wider European perspective on children's experiences of domestic abuse. Positioned against the backdrop of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Istanbul Convention, and grounded in a rights-based approach, their chapter celebrates the critical and burgeoning empirical knowledge base on children's experiences of living with domestic violence in Europe. Respecting and upholding children's right to participate in research and have a say in all matters affecting them, this chapter further positions children not only as victims in need but also as subjects and rights holders. In Chapter 5, Dr Nassra Khan provides a unique insight into the construction of domestic violence and abuse in rural Pakistan and the impact of this on the children. The chapter reports on Dr Khan's doctoral studies which sought to examine the cultural and structural factors that supported the perpetration of domestic violence in the home. The observations reported were made within the social environment that shaped the views and perceptions of the villagers towards domestic violence. Her detailed conversations with the villagers revealed that they did not recognise exposure to domestic violence at home as having a negative impact on children; nor did they consider these children as victims of domestic violence. Dr Khan's account concludes the first part of the book.

## **Part II**

In Part II, the impact of childhood and adolescent domestic violence and abuse victimisation becomes the focus. In the first chapter of this section Dr Bethan Carter discusses the impact of domestic violence and abuse (DVA) on children and young people's (CYP) mental health. The focus being the development of internalising symptoms (e.g., anxiety and somatic complaints). The evidence base for the effect of DVA on internalising symptoms is discussed followed by presentation of recent research which aimed to overcome some of the previous limitations observed within the field. This chapter is followed by Professor Kathryn Maurer who discusses the effects of exposure to violence in the home on adolescents and emerging adults. Professor Maurer introduces a summary of current research on the psychophysiological consequences of high stress environments, such as the impact of exposure to family violence on the development of the capacity to self-regulate during adolescence and the transition to adulthood. Professor Maurer includes reference to findings from a recent study to illustrate her points using the lived experiences of family violence-exposed youths self-regulation capacities and reactions to situations of high stress. In Chapter 8, Dr Sabreen Selvik and Professor Carolina Øverlien discuss the role of school for children experiencing domestic violence (DV). School has repeatedly been recognised as important, yet despite the recognition of the importance of school for children experiencing DV, little research has been conducted in this field. Dr Selvik and Professor Øverlien begin by

reviewing the existing research on the impact of DV on children's schooling and school experiences. They then share their participants perspectives on school attendance and absence, their experiences of 'coming and being' at school, and their experiences of teacher recognition and school strategies. In Chapter 9, Dr Elizabeth Bates and colleagues discuss some of the barriers and opportunities associated with help-seeking for children who live in homes where there is domestic abuse. The chapter begins by exploring the literature relating to barriers to help-seeking, drawing specifically on Overstreet and Quinn's (2013) theory of the Stigmatised Identity. The theory and evidence are then discussed in the context of data provided by adults who were victims of domestic abuse as children. The final chapter in this section comes from Angie Boyle whose doctoral research explores the concept of recovery in an adult population who were victims of domestic violence and abuse as children. Angie shares some of her findings and introduces her recovery framework. The framework has been designed in response to the contributions of her participants and offers potential insight into the process of victimisation recovery.

### **Part III**

In Part III of the volume, the emphasis is placed on insights, experience and research from professionals working with child victims across a range of services. Drs Tanya Frances and Grace Carter introduce Part III by exploring how professionals can negotiate power, ethics and agency when working with children and young people to centralise their voice in the design and evaluation of services. They draw upon recent qualitative research with children aged 7–12 years about their experiences of DVA interventions. The children's accounts reflect how they negotiate agency and power in adversity, in their recoveries and in research interviews. They also highlight that a reliance on limited outcome measures can constrain how children articulate their recovery. They conclude the chapter with a discussion of how academics, practitioners and intervention stakeholders can begin to prioritise centralising children's voices and inclusion in research, evaluation and service development. In the chapter that follows, Drs Samuel Lerner and Mark McGlashan offer an alternative way to gain insight into children's experiences, they analysed data from support network forums for children and young people and made some discoveries that may assist practitioners working in the field and those designing forums for children and young people in the future. In Chapter 13, Dr Daniela Di Bilio explores ways to help children and young people make positive changes to their sense of self and attachment styles. Di Bilio explains that one of the challenges faced by practitioners is that they tend to work at a cognitive or behavioural level with victims of domestic abuse which may yield some superficial positive development but may fail to access the individual's emotional core. According to Di Bilio, this deeper level work is required for longer term sustainable change. This focus on deeper emotional level needs is expanded on in the next chapter where Dr

Alexandra Papamichail and colleagues, offer guidance to practitioners on ways of responding to the mental health needs of children who have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV). They use the principles of trauma-informed practice as a guiding framework, informing potential mental health responses for young people, their families and the professional networks around them. They discuss ways to engage therapeutically with children and their parents/caregivers to build collaborative understandings of their current mental health needs. They also explore the ways in which mental health interventions can be sequenced to respond to children's most pressing needs within their wider contexts. In the penultimate chapter of this section Professor Susan Heward-Belle critically considers the way practitioners view the role of fathering when working with children from domestically violent homes. Professor Heward-Belle examines what she refers to as inherently sexist institutional practices which adopt an exonerated father/responsible mother paradigm. Heward-Belle presents research in this area and then shares findings from a research study conducted in Australia with men who were involved in a men's behaviour change programme regarding their accounts of exposing children to domestic violence. Heward-Belle findings provide important insights into how fathers' behaviours and attitudes may contribute to childhood development and the ecology of the family. She closes the chapter with recommendations for the professional assessment of domestically violent men's fathering. The final chapter of the volume is a contribution by Professor Kaz Stuart and Dr Lucy Maynard, whereby they present a model of wellbeing development for young people who have experienced violence and abuse. The model presented seeks to respond to the challenge for practitioners, the creation of an environment for young people to develop power and feel able to take some control over their sense of wellbeing and future.

The volume concludes with the editors looking across the insights and evidence provided by contributors and uses these to offer a series of recommendations for both future research, and ways in which we can help use the research findings to inform practice. We hope that it will prove to be a useful resource for scholars and practitioners working in the sector. This volume contributes to the wider body of literature by bringing together a detailed, rigorous critique of current research and practice, and by presenting both research and practice around child victimisation within the same text.

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## Introduction

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## **The impact of domestic violence and abuse on children and young people**

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## How children talk about domestic abuse in the home

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## **Psychological sequelae of witnessing intra-parental violence on children's development as individuals and (future) partners**

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## Mind the blind spot

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