# 'I knew exactly how to break her': accounting for child-to-parent abuse in the context of men's violence in the home*

CRISTINA TAMBASCO The University of Melbourne

*Purpose*: Child-to-parent abuse (CPA) is an under-recognized form of family violence that, a number of scholars note, occurs in the context of experiences of adult-perpetrated family violence (APFV). This article examines how those with intimate experiences of CPA attribute its manifestation to fathers' violence towards children and mothers. *Methods* Through a feminist philosophical lens combined with attribution theory, this article analyses two types of qualitative data. The first is interviews with family members who have experienced CPA ($n$ = 12), and interviews and focus groups with practitioners who work in this field ($n$ = 20). The second type of data collected was online anonymous message board narratives from young people, siblings, and mothers with experiences of CPA ($n$ = 144). *Results* Participants attribute CPA's manifestation to APFV in several distinct ways. In two-parent households, young people's violence towards fathers was 1) often constructed as a protective response to fathers' physical violence towards the family and 2) was exercised towards mothers when young people displaced blame onto them. Among separated parents, 3) fathers' continued degradation of mothers to their children was construed as an underlying cause of CPA. Separately, 4) participants attributed increased CPA, around the time of contact with fathers, to fathers' ongoing abusive behavior and unreliability, which resulted in distressed and anxious children. *Conclusions* The findings suggest that early and meaningful intervention for fathers' violence towards mothers and children may present an opportunity to reduce the likelihood of CPA emerging.

*Keywords*: domestic and family violence, child-to-parent abuse, intimate partner violence, child abuse

Abuse of parents by their dependent children is a form of domestic and family violence (DFV) that encompasses a range of behaviors also seen in other forms of DFV. Child-to-parent abuse (CPA) can include a variety of harmful behaviors such as assaults that break bones, threats to harm oneself, verbal insults, theft of money and possessions from parents, control of parents' movements, and damage to the home (e.g., Cottrell & Monk, 2004; Edenborough et al., 2008; Holt, 2011b; Stewart, Burns, & Leonard, 2007). As with other forms of gendered and family violence, power and control dynamics form a central theme. CPA typically involves an inverted power structure, whereby children exert physical and psychological power over their parents, resulting in parents experiencing an acute sense of vulnerability, fear, and powerless (Condry & Miles, 2021; Holt, 2011a; Jackson, 2003; McKenna et al., 2010; Tew & Nixon, 2010).

This article focuses on the specific form of CPA that emerges against the backdrop of historic and/or current adult perpetrated family violence (APFV), which includes intimate partner violence (IPV) and child abuse. Given the frequent identification of APFV in CPA research, combined with strong similarities between these two forms of DFV, it is crucial to examine the relationship between experiences of APFV and the subsequent manifestation of CPA. Researchers speculate that CPA functions as retributive violence for past or ongoing abuse by a parent, and/or that it is a learned behavior modelled in the context of IPV (e.g., Cottrell & Monk, 2004; Ibabe, Jaureguizar, & Bentler, 2013; Nixon, 2012;

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O'Toole et al., 2022). Beyond this, theorization regarding the nature of this relationship is minimal, despite evidence that consistently suggests a connection between the two forms of DFV.

The aim of this article is to better understand the role of APFV in the lives of young people who have subsequently used violence towards one or both parents. Drawing on data from doctoral research – which was conducted from Victoria, Australia – examining the CPA experiences of parents, young people, non-offending siblings, and supplemented with practitioner insights, this article contends 1) that there is a specific sub-type of CPA involving a cohort of young people who have experienced APFV, and 2) that in biographical narratives and accounts, young people, parents, and practitioners construct this sub-type of CPA as a consequence of APFV. Due to their experiences, family members who have experienced CPA are uniquely positioned to offer insights into this phenomenon. Similarly, practitioners who work directly within this field or who regularly encounter this issue are particularly well-placed to identify common patterns of experience between the families they work with. By considering explanations and constructions of CPA among those with intimate experience of it, an enriched understanding can be obtained, which can then direct research, practice, and policy improvements to improve the responses to families coming into contact with the service sector.

Despite formal recognition as "parent battering" in scholarship since the 1970s (Harbin & Madden, 1979), the phenomenon of CPA received minimal scholarly attention until the late 1990s and early 2000s. While IPV and child abuse (formerly referred to as *wife battering* and *battered child syndrome* respectively) were identified as significant public issues during the second wave of feminism in the late 1960s and 1970s (Bumiller, 2008; Wilcox, 2012), CPA remains comparatively under-explored in academic research and there is a lack of community awareness about this issue. In Victoria, Australia the state-level Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016) recognized "adolescent violence in the home [as] a distinct form of family violence" and observed that "[r]eporting of use of violence in the home by young people has increased in recent years" (p. 149). The report's inclusion of adolescents using violence in the home, along with a subsection on child-to-parent abuse (p. 152), suggests a growing recognition within the community that the abuse of parents by their children is a discrete and serious problem; however, the report also acknowledged the absence of systemic responses to CPA. Elsewhere, CPA is receiving increased recognition. For example, the London mayor's Violence Reduction Unit in the UK recently commissioned a research report into CPA which aims to develop "a Pan-London strategic approach to CAPVA in the coming years" (Brennan et al., 2022, p.4). This suggests a growing understanding among state officials of the need for coordinated service system responses.

As with other forms of DFV, the terminology employed to capture the phenomenon is significant (Holt, 2016). In this article, the terminology of child-to-parent abuse (CPA)[1] is employed for two main reasons. Firstly, the child-parent relationship is central to the experience of CPA and a main source of complexity. CPA stands in contrast to other forms of family violence because the "perpetrator" is understood to be a *child*—legally, socially, and in relation to their parents. In a contemporary society that defines children as a vulnerable population requiring extra support (Meyer, 2007), layered by a

[1]This phenomenon has many different labels including parent abuse, child-to-parent violence, adolescent-to-parent violence, mother abuse, son-to-mother abuse, and more. Further, CPA is a subset of what is referred to in Australia as *adolescent family violence* or *adolescent/youth violence in the home*, which also includes sibling abuse and teen dating violence.

prevailing understanding that family violence is perpetrated by *adults*, CPA is a contradictory phenomenon. Due to the age and relational status of the child, parents are legally and socially obligated to continue providing care, even when confronted with violence (Wilcox & Pooley, 2015), which in some cases may become life-threatening. The second reason for utilizing the term CPA is that it resists the dominant contemporary research focus on "adolescence". CPA is appropriate for research whose age range includes childhood years and early adulthood (when children are still in a dependent relationship with parents). Focusing exclusively on *adolescence* risks promoting the false assumption that CPA is a phenomenon that occurs *only* in adolescence. Conversely, families often report that troubling and abusive behaviors emerge during childhood, intensify during adolescence, and continue into early adulthood (Author, 2023). Finally, to capture the "violent" behavior that constitutes CPA, this article is grounded in Paterson et al.'s (2002) definition, which states that any behavior is:

> considered to be violent if others in the family feel threatened, intimidated or controlled by it and believe that they must adjust their own behaviour to accommodate threats or anticipated violence (p.92)

Before moving on, it is important to recognize there is a broad spectrum of CPA experiences and that often there are multiple relevant factors present in cases of CPA which fall outside the scope of this paper. This is to say that while this paper presents evidence on the connection between APFV and CPA to better understand the nature of this relationship, it should be borne in mind that CPA can also arise in situations where APFV is not present. For example, Sporer and Radatz's (2017) research examines CPA in the specific context of mental illness among children; Usher, Jackson, & O'Brien's research (2007) research reports on violence towards parents in the context of children's substance use; and Holt's (2024) research discusses CPA in the context of neurodevelopmental difference. Overall, this article examines how those with intimate experiences of CPA attribute its manifestation.

**Literature Review**

As this article posits that there is a distinct form of CPA that emerges in relation to APFV, the literature review begins by outlining what is currently known about the relationship between young people's use of violence towards parents, and past or present experiences of APFV (i.e., child abuse, IPV). Next, I discuss how IPV is identified as a common theme in CPA research. However, like child abuse histories, the relationship between young people's exposure to IPV and their subsequent use of violence is not well understood. Then I survey research that establishes a connection between experiences of child abuse among young people engaging in CPA. Despite child abuse histories being a persistent theme in CPA research, there is little qualitative understanding of this overlap. Finally, I draw on the field of child maltreatment research, which shows that child abuse has a range of adverse impacts on young people's development, with child maltreatment studies reporting the same problematic behaviors that the field of CPA research is concerned with.

## Locating CPA within the field of DFV

Within academic scholarship, there are diverging views on what behaviors constitute CPA, how it is labelled, and whether it should be conceptualized as a form of DFV at all. Due to its proximity, simi-

larity, and overlap with other forms of family violence, existing literature shows that there is utility in situating CPA within the domain of DFV (Jackson, 2003; Wilcox, 2012). Similarities include a distinct gendered experience, wherein females are more often the victims, and males are disproportionately the aggressor (Condry & Miles, 2014); the use of a broad spectrum of harmful behaviors which result in isolation, powerlessness, the entrapment of women (Boxall & Morgan, 2021; Holt, 2016; Miles & Condry, 2016); and gendered attitudes of blame and "responsibilization" (Edenborough et al., 2008; Miles & Condry, 2015).

Researchers have identified a range of similarities between CPA and IPV, most notably in their distinctly gendered nature. This has resulted in calls for CPA to be recognized as, and located within, the sphere of "domestic violence" (Jackson, 2003; Wilcox, 2012). Strong evidence that CPA is a form of gender-based violence is found in mothers' disproportionate victimization, which occurs more often by a son than by a daughter (Daly & Wade, 2015; Ibabe & Jaureguizar, 2010; Howard & Rottem, 2008; McKenna et al., 2010, Author, 2023). In their UK-based study, Condry and Miles (2014) report that son-to-mother abuse accounted for 67% of cases, followed by son-to-father abuse (20%), daughter-to-mother abuse (11%) and, lastly, daughter-to-father abuse (2%). This gender breakdown is also reflected in Routh and Anderson's (2011) study of case files for 1,339 incidents of CPA in the United States. Of these, 65% of youth were male and 34% were female, while mothers were victimized at higher rates (72%) than fathers (28%). Similar results were also found in a study conducted in Spain, which examined 413 case files from the juvenile prosecution office between 1999 and 2006, involving 103 youth offenders (Ibabe et al. 2009). Of the cases involving violence towards the family, mothers were most often identified as the victim (95%), and in 80% of cases the perpetrator was a son. In this study sample, only heterosexual nuclear households were included, due to the recognition that fathers are unlikely to be victimized in single-mother households given their absence. Thus, the authors were able to conclude that "although children may live with both parents, their aggression is directed against the mother" (p. 9). This finding from Ibabe et al., (2009) is important as it challenges the idea that mothers are abused simply because they are present, and draws attention to the need to understand the contexts in which mothers find themselves single (for a detailed list of studies which reported on family structure, see Simmons et al., 2018). One context of relevance can be seen in IPV literature, which indicates a positive association between IPV and the breakdown of the spousal relationship (including dissolution of marriage) for heterosexual couples (Kingston-Riechers, 2001). Overall, consistent gendered trends are seen across international jurisdictions, supporting the contention that CPA is a gendered form of family violence.

In addition to the gender asymmetry seen in perpetration and victimization, scholars have highlighted parallels between the types of behaviors young people engage in and those used by perpetrators of coercive control (Stark, 2007). Young people not only enact physically violent behaviors to assault victims, but also engage in a diverse range of non-physical, and often "invisible", forms of violence, such as gaslighting, psychological manipulation, humiliating or degrading comments/actions, intimidation, threats to harm others or oneself, property damage, and financial abuse (Boxall & Morgan, 2021; Holt, 2011b, 2016; Miles & Condry, 2016; Ryan & Wilson, 2011). Further, IPV research has highlighted perpetrators' use of behaviors that isolate partners from extended family, friends, neighbors, and work colleagues, limiting victims' opportunities to obtain support, and further increasing

the abuser's control over them (Boxall & Morgan, 2021). Similarly, CPA research has found isolation to be a common experience for families living with CPA. Typically, this is seen in parents' reluctance to invite people to their homes, inability to take their child out with them, being physically trapped by their child, or feeling the need to stay home and supervise their child (Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2021; Selwyn & Meakings, 2016; Stewart, Burns, & Leonard, 2007). Overall, similar impacts of abuse have been observed for victims of both CPA and IPV, including feeling fearful, as if one is "walking on eggshells", and victims changing their behavior to prevent prospective violence (Condry & Miles, 2021). Lastly, dominant responses to both forms of violence have been known to involve the responsibilization of women for male violence. This often appears through victim-blaming attitudes when women disclose violence from a partner (Crowe & Murray, 2015; Coy & Kelly, 2019) and/or child (Edenborough et al., 2008; Miles & Condry, 2015).

*Intergenerational family violence – the overlap between APFV and CPA*

Despite existing research highlighting a connection between CPA and APFV, exploration and theorization of the relationship is limited. Some evidence indicates that exposure to APFV may be related to young people's later use of violence towards their parents (Howard & Rottem, 2008; Ibabe et al., 2009), and some researchers suggest that this forms part of the intergenerational "cycle of violence" (Peek, Fischer, & Kidwell, 1985).

The theoretical underpinning of the "intergenerational transmission of violence" (IGT) concept draws on social learning theory (Bandura, 1978), which asserts that children's exposure to violence in their family of origin increases the likelihood they will perpetrate violence as adults against intimate partners and/or children. According to this logic, children learn through observing their parents' behavior that it is normal to victimize, and/or be victimized by, others. Despite criticisms, this theory has become accepted as common wisdom (see Cappell & Heiner, 1990). A significant criticism of the IGT theory is that evidence indicates that most children who are exposed to violence *do not* go on to perpetrate violence as adults, and that many violent adults were not exposed to violence in their childhood (Maxfield & Widom, 1996). Further, while there is a strong body of evidence that establishes a *link* between childhood exposure to violence and later perpetration, and draws on social learning to explain this, much less is known about the *mechanisms* (Widom & Wilson, 2014). Additionally, a meta-analysis of research investigating the connection between exposure to violence during childhood (whether as a witness of victim) and experiencing IPV (as either a perpetrator or victim), found only a weak-to-moderate relationship could be empirically substantiated, and that there is limited accounting for other variables (such as genetics, age, gender, ethnicity, level of exposure to violence, type of violence experienced, and more) (Stith et al., 2000). Nonetheless, it is still necessary to briefly discuss the cycle of violence approach as it continues to be a dominant framework for explaining DFV research broadly, and makes regular appearances in CPA research.

The existence of CPA specifically has been deployed as evidence for the IGT explanation of adult-perpetrated violence. Specifically, Peek, Fischer, and Kidwell (1985) drew attention long ago to a glaring hole in this theory, which is that it does not account for what happens during adolescence – the bridging stage between childhood and adulthood – nor does it account for the time-delay between experiencing or witnessing abuse as a child, and then perpetrating abuse as an adult. Consequently,

these authors contend that the phenomenon of CPA may provide the missing piece of the puzzle to understand how experiences of family violence during childhood are transformative in shaping the young person who goes on to commit family violence during adulthood. For the authors:

> The transmission of family violence involves a continuous learning process. Violence is practiced by these youths while growing up in their families of orientation, rather than appearing only after grown children form their families of procreation (p. 1056)

Despite these authors' call to examine CPA more closely in order to understand the role of CPA in the intergenerational transmission of family violence, very little research explores this specific overlap. Moreover, other evidence suggests that there is indeed a connection between exposure to IPV (as a form of APFV) and children's use of violence towards parents.

*Exposure to intimate partner violence in CPA research*

A persistent finding in CPA research is that IPV between parents – generally from fathers/father-figures towards mothers – is a common adverse experience in young people's. For example, Ibabe et al.'s (2009) quantitative case file review of Spanish criminal justice data found that of young people who had used violence towards a parent, 80% were either exposed to or a direct victim of APFV. A later study by Ibabe, Jauregizar, and Bentler (2013), using a sample of 485 school-attending youth, found that those who had witnessed IPV were more physically violent to a parent than those who had not been exposed to IPV, and this was especially the case for *sons* exposed to IPV, who displayed "much higher levels of violence against their parents than daughters" (p. 529). In Howard and Rottem's (2008) Australian research, the authors interviewed 10 sole-mothers of abusive teen sons (13-18 years old) and found that all women in this sample also experienced abuse from their ex-partner, which was witnessed by sons. Some participants explained that while "ex-partners did not actively seek their sons' participation in abusing or being violent", fathers nonetheless spoke to sons about mothers in a "negative, derogatory and disrespectful manner" (p. 28). Most mothers drew a direct connection between their son's abusive behavior, and that displayed by their fathers, and understood sons' abuse as a "learnt behavior" (p. 48). Likewise, in Meyer et al.'s (2021) research, four out of nine mothers reported being victims of both AFV and IPV, and all experienced violence from a son, not a daughter. Moreover, the research found that in several cases participants reported fathers *actively* encouraging the child to verbally abuse or assault the mother. Similarly, Douglas and Walsh's (2018) study with practitioners reported that children were used by fathers in the perpetration of IPV towards mothers. Lastly, Papamichail and Bates (2022) interviewed participants in a British CPA intervention program (one female and seven male adolescents aged between 14-16 years old) and found that six adolescents had been exposed to IPV and had "adopted the role of 'protector' of their mothers from an early age" in order to "stop the violence" from their father (p. 6142).

*Child abuse experiences and impacts on young people's development*

Since its inception, CPA research has identified child abuse experiences (especially physical abuse of children) as a recurring theme. In recent years, exposure to IPV has also come to be recognized as a form of child abuse (Wolbers, Boxall, & Morgan, 2023). Some evidence indicates that children's

use of violence towards parents is connected to *their own experience of abuse by a parent* (Cottrell & Monk, 2004; Ibabe, Jaureguizar & Bentler, 2013; Miles & Condry, 2015; Papamichail & Bates, 2022; Purcell, Baksheev, & Mullen, 2014). In Ibabe, Jauregizar, and Bentler's (2013) quantitative study, youth who had experienced physical violence from a parent were more violent towards a parent than those who had not previously been victimized by a parent. Additionally, research by Routt and Anderson (2011) in the United States used interview data from youth being screened for a court-related CPA diversion program between 2001-2004, and found that 38% of youth interviewed had experienced physical violence from a parent. In a similarly large-scale research project, conducted between 2010 to 2013, Miles and Condry (2015) analyzed 100 UK Metropolitan police casefiles of adolescent to parent violence, and interviewed a combined 117 practitioners, parents, and youth. A key qualitative theme to emerge across all interview samples was a "clear overlap" (p. 1083) between young people's violence and exposure to APFV (including both IPV and child abuse). Some youth in this study contextualized their violence as a response "to a variety of direct and indirect forms of victimization" (p. 1087). Within this context of children's victimization, it has been theorized that young people's violence towards parents serves a retaliatory/retributive purpose (Cottrell & Monk, 2004; Purcell, Baksheev, & Mullen, 2014). Notably, Cottrell and Monk's (2004) foundational research explicates this by asserting that the physical maturation adolescents go through during puberty increases young people's opportunity and self-efficacy to engage in violence towards parents, with the express purpose of defending themselves or enacting retribution for their suffering.

To establish links with child abuse, the manifestation of CPA requires understanding how the harms involved in child abuse impact young people's development – something relatively absent in the study of CPA. The field of child maltreatment studies contains a wealth of evidence examining the impacts of child abuse on children's development, establishing a connection between histories of maltreatment and the subsequent development of "aggressive" and "delinquent" behavior in youth (Maas, Herrenkohl, & Sousa, 2008; Smith & Thornbury, 1995). Despite what appears to be a strong overlap, there is little overlap between CPA research and child maltreatment studies. The inclusion of child maltreatment studies in this discussion is important, as it may provide another component for understanding the connection between APFV and CPA.

The field of child maltreatment research is extensive (especially with regard to quantitative studies), having been recognized as a social problem since the early twentieth century, followed by the "discovery" of "battered child syndrome" occurring in the late 1960s (Behl, Conyngham, & May, 2003). It has been found that children who experience maltreatment, which includes "physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and neglect inflicted upon a child by a person responsible for their care and wellbeing" (AIHW, 2022, p. 237), are at an elevated risk of engaging in a range of problematic behaviors and encountering other adverse life experiences, especially if experiencing multiple forms of victimisation (Pires & Almeida, 2024). This includes a heightened risk of developing (what are often referred to as) "externalizing" behaviors, most notably aggression, violence, vandalism, and running away (among others), and "internalizing" behaviors such as self-harm, suicidality, eating disorders, and problematic substance use (Gomis-Pomares & Villanueva, 2013; Leeb, Lewis & Zolotor, 2011; Moylan et al., 2010).

Child maltreatment literature also contends that adverse mental health outcomes disproportionately

affect individuals who have experienced child maltreatment. Specifically, youth in this cohort are more likely to develop mood disorders (primarily depression and anxiety), post-traumatic stress disorder, conduct disorders, attachments disorders, and issues with emotional regulation (Leeb, Lewis, & Zolotor, 2011; Mohammad, Shapiro, Wainwright, & Carter, 2015). Furthermore, it is well established that child maltreatment can have lasting physiological impacts on children's brain development, with hyper-arousal and increased vulnerability to stress being highlighted (Tuscic, Buljan-Flander, & Mateskovic, 2013). This means children who have been abused are more likely to have a stress response to otherwise benign situations. Notably, the comorbidity of mental health issues alongside CPA has been highlighted in CPA literature (Calvete, Orue, & Gámez-Guadix, 2013; Ibabe, Arnoso, & Elgorriaga, 2014; Sporer & Radatz, 2017).

When considering evidence of the overlap between IPV, child abuse, and violence by young people, CPA can be understood as part of a broader pattern of violence within a home and across generations. Holt and Shon (2018) have argued that due to the interconnection of these phenomena, CPA should be "repositioned" from the "margins of family violence literature to a position that enables a contextualized and balanced examination of its significance to, and relationship with, other forms of family violence" (p. 3). The remainder of this article presents findings and elucidates several dynamics in which young people's violence is attributed to the experience of APFV.

*Theoretical Framework*

The literature review suggests that there is strong evidence to conceptualize and locate CPA within the realm of DFV. In CPA, it is typically mothers who are disproportionately victimized, and this is more often by a son than by a daughter. Because of the strongly gendered character of the phenomenon, this research is guided by a feminist criminological commitment to examining gendered violence, and centering the voices of women and children, whose experiences of violence have, historically, been obscured in criminological research (Renzetti, 2018). This article aims therefore to counteract this obscurity and produce knowledge that can be used to address the problem, thereby aligning with Miller's (2011) idea of "purpose-driven research":

> [T]his is research that raises awareness, in this case, of gendered inequalities, and that produces useable knowledge that contributes to the social reconstruction of gender and gender relations that are more equitable (Miller, 2011, cited in Renzetti, 2018, p. 75)

In this article, the feminist approach, which takes women's and children's testimony seriously, is combined with attribution theory to form the overarching theoretical framework. Attribution theory emerged in the field of social psychology and is concerned with how individuals perceive and account for the causes of other people's behavior, and in turn how these perceptions and accounts then shape responses (Kelley & Michela, 1980, p.457). In this paper I attend to participants' constructions and conceptualizations of the phenomenon, which are grounded in their first-hand experiences of CPA.

Attribution theory has long been used in IPV and child abuse research to better understand how those who experience violence, as well as practitioners and the wider community, construct their causes and allocate responsibility (e.g., Flynn & Graham, 2010; Landsman & Hartley, 2007; McGaha, 1997). A feminist orientation lends itself well to the inclusion of attribution theory, as feminist theory em-

phasizes the value of including and prioritizing the perspective of those who have experienced the phenomenon in question (Renzetti, 2018). Inherently complementing this, attribution theory asserts that there is much to gain by examining individuals' perceptions of others' behavior. For this paper, I argue that we gain insight by examining individuals' attributions of young people's abuse of parents, as those who have direct experience of this phenomenon are granted privileged access to its inner workings that may not be observable otherwise.

## Methodology

Two types of qualitative data were collected: interviews and focus groups with families and practitioners, and anonymous online message board posts by individuals with lived experience of CPA. Data was collected between 2019 and 2020 and includes 156 individual narratives of CPA, comprised of 12 in-depth interviews with family members from multiple Australian states (5 mothers, 2 fathers, 1 sibling, and 4 young people) and 144 accounts drawn from anonymous online forums. Complementing these are interviews and focus groups with 20 practitioners working in this field across multiple Australian states. Ethics approval for this project was granted from [University redacted].

*Recruitment and data collection*

A number of recruitment strategies for interview participants was necessary due to a range of barriers. Tied to a potent combination of shame, stigma, and isolation that prevents families' from engaging in services, locating entry points was challenging. Further complicating this were limited available specialist CPA services, compounded by gatekeeping and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, a convenience sampling strategy was utilized for "family member" participants, who were recruited through community organizations, word-of-mouth, or a direct approach to journalists.[2]

Inspired by Holt's (2011b) research into teenagers' violence towards parents, I used a purposive sampling strategy to locate experiences of CPA in anonymous online message boards forums between January 2011 to October 2020. In addition to searching for parent experiences shared online, as was done in Holt's study, I expanded this strategy to include narrative accounts posted by young people who had used violence, and siblings exposed to CPA. The "recruitment strategy" involved using Google to search key phrases related to CPA (e.g. "my child hurts me", "I punched my mum/dad", "I'm afraid of my brother/sister") to identify relevant forums. Once forums had been selected, key words entered to search engines within the forums were used to sample relevant posts. As I became more familiar with the language used by individuals to describe CPA, this informed the key phrases searched. Exclusion criteria were retroactively applied to this sample given the large number of written accounts that were identified (\250). Accounts written by extended family were excluded, as were posts that contained insufficient detail.

[2]Two mothers were recruited for interviews through journalistic media. These women were anonymously involved in two separate media articles aimed at spreading awareness of CPA. I contacted the two respective journalists and requested that my details be passed on to the women involved with information about my research. This approach proved successful.

*The sample*

Testimony from mothers who had experienced abuse by at least one child provided the vast majority of data collected: five in-depth interviews and 56 individual message board narratives. These 61 mother narratives pertained to relationships with 64 children (22 female, 42 male) in total. It is worth noting that lone-mothers were overrepresented in the message board sample at 42%. In contrast, data from the Australian Bureau of Statics for example, reports that in June 2023 single-parent households comprise only 14.7% of families. Narratives from fathers form the smallest part of the data. Two fathers gave in-depth interviews, both of which were invaluable considering their general obscurity in CPA research. Their interviews related to three sons in total.

It is necessary to discuss briefly the starkly disproportionate number of mother participants compared to fathers. Though this is not unusual in CPA research, several factors may explain the low rates of father inclusion: 1) mothers are disproportionately victimized and are disproportionately responsible for child-rearing, 2) lone-mother households were over-represented, and 3) DFV perpetrated by fathers was a dominant theme (as this paper will show), reducing the likelihood of fathers being appropriate, or willing, to take part in the research. The absence of anonymous message board posts by fathers may indicate a lack of need on their part to seek the type of support provided in these settings, which again may be evidence of CPA disproportionately affecting mothers.

A total of 61 narratives from young people were included in the research. Four were from interviews conducted with adolescents (two sets of brothers all aged between 12-14). The remaining 57 narratives were identified through anonymous message boards. Of the 57 message board individuals, 25 were female, 25 were male, and the gender of 7 was unknown. Interestingly, this gender symmetry does not align with mothers' accounts of CPA, or existing CPA research; however, this may be indicative of gendered patterns of reflection on one's own behavior and/or levels of guilt or remorse (Bybee, 1998). In addition, non-offending siblings were included in the research through interviews with one sibling, and message board accounts written by 31 siblings. Their experiences pertained to violence directed at parents by an abusive child.

A total of 20 practitioners whose work intersected with CPA participated in this research. Interviews were conducted with 14 practitioners, while 6 participated in a focus group. These practitioners worked primarily in community social services, while several were involved in legal services or the education system. Participants were recruited through a convenience sample involving direct contact with organizations and through adolescent family violence networks.

## Data analysis

The dataset from which the findings of this paper are drawn underwent an inductive thematic analysis. This involved an iterative process of analyzing the material to identify key themes related to the experience of CPA (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane. 2006; Given, 2008). Data was coded and refined to identify the prominence of themes, and its relation to the overarching research questions. Each sample was coded individuals and underwent multiple rounds of coding to distill key themes. To support triangulation of the data, each sample was then reviewed against one another, to identify

which themes emerged across multiple data sets – indicating a degree to which themes reflect universal experiences of CPA (for example, fear and shame were central to parents experiences), while also identifying what themes were unique to particular data sets (for example, suicidality among mothers was only expressed in mothers message board data). It was during the coding phase that experiences of fathers' past or ongoing perpetration of DFV emerged as a significant theme across all data sets. For the purposes of this paper, this data was then reviewed through the lens of attribution theory by extracting family members' and practitioners' explanations of CPA. This led to a further specification of *fathers'* violence as an explanation, which required further treatment of the data. This involved asking questions of data including: *how is fathers' violence explained in connection to CPA by practitioners and family members, does this occur in specific situations*, and *are these explanations and perceptions shared across different participant cohorts?* Using an inductive coding method again, several distinct subthemes emerged which form the basis of the findings presented in this article.

### *Ethical considerations*

#### *Message board data*

The approach to consent when collecting message board data is necessarily different from that of obtaining informed consent regarding traditional forms of qualitative data such as interviews and focus groups. Individual consent was not sought for the collection of message board data; instead, following Holt's (2011b, pp. 455-456) lead, only accounts posted to "open" or "public" message boards were included. Thus, forums requiring registration and login were excluded, based on ethical concerns over privacy. Holt (2011b) justifies this with a distinction between private/closed message boards that "might be intended for a specific audience", and public/open message boards that "are by their very nature a public act for a public audience" (p. 456). This public-private distinction as a guiding ethical principle for research using online forums is generally accepted, and has been used in other sensitive research (British Psychological Society, 2021; Coulson, Malik, & Mo, 2007; Langer & Beckman, 2005).

All participants (interviews or message board) have been de-identified in this research; however, de-identification of message board data required a different process. Removing identifying details is not sufficient when using message board data, given the ease of a "reverse search" – searching the exact quote through google, or site-specific search engines to identify the origins. To mitigate this risk, I adopted the process outlined by Johnson, Black, and Hayes (2020, p.127), whereby I "changed terminology and typos that were unique to posters in ways that do not change the meaning but do affect the searchability". After de-identifying the data, a reverse search was conducted to confirm that the original quote, username, and profile of the poster cannot be located. The specific message boards will also remain anonymous to further ensure anonymity of participants.

#### *Interviews*

To reduce the researcher-participant power imbalance, and to minimize risk of discomfort or distress, decisions about when, where, and how participation took place was guided by the participant. Some participants requested home interviews. Of concern was participant safety, and specifically the

possibility that others in the home may overhear the conversation, possibly resulting in violence. To mitigate this, I asked beforehand whether anyone else would be home (or was expected to come home), who was aware of the interview participation, whether electronic documents rather than hardcopy were preferable, and if they have a private and safe place to store a hardcopy document.

*Limitations and strengths*

As this paper is drawn from data collected and analysed for my doctoral thesis, the data was collected, coded, and analysed solely by the researcher (as opposed to research conducted in teams). Consequently, a potential limitation of this research is a lack of inter-coder reliability. Nonetheless, multiple rounds of coding that eventually converged on settled themes suggest reliability in the findings, irreducible to the interpreter's preconceptions or biases. Additionally, the study's triangulation – its use of divergent methodologies (i.e., interviews versus message board data) – has meant that a number of inconsistencies appear between data sets. One example of this is the gender symmetry of young people posting to message boards, compared to the asymmetry children's gender within mother message board posts (22 daughters, 42 sons). When looking exclusively at the interview sample, all young people reported to be engaging in CPA were identified as sons, which reflects a more extreme asymmetry). While this limits the extent to which generalizations about CPA can be made, it also highlights the multiplicity of experience and the difficulty in researching this phenomenon, while demonstrating that different strategies of data collection result in the inclusion/exclusion of different experiences. Moreover, this research is limited by the lack of fathers in this sample, whose first-hand experiences of CPA remain obscured in this paper and the broader body of CPA literature.

Finally, regarding anonymous message boards data specifically there are limitations and strengths when including this kind of qualitative data. A limitation is that demographic information is very limited, and further questions cannot be asked. The poster's location, cultural background, and specific age were often unavailable; however, gender was often – but not always – identifiable. What can be reasonably surmised about this sample is that most posters likely reside in English-speaking countries (as only English-language accounts were included), and some identifying information indicated that these countries included Australia, the UK, the US, and Canada. Despite these limitations, there are several methodological strengths of online message board data which include: 1) the ease of access and lack of intrusion compared to traditional interviewing, 2) the data provided from multiple points in the life course, 3) the ability to capture longer-term outcomes,[3] 4) the inclusion of the experience of families who do not come into contact with services,[4] and 5) the anonymity that permits the emergence of themes not captured through traditional interviews.

[3] Some posts were written by older mothers who provided insights into whether the violence ceased or continued after young people transitioned into adulthood, and what helped or hindered this.

[4] As interview participants are often recruited through services and organisations it means that in CPA research the experiences of families who have not entered a service are typically unaccounted.

## Findings and discussion

To establish that a specific sub-type of CPA involves a cohort of young people who have experienced APFV, the remainder of this article presents and examines through the lens of feminist and attribution theory those elements of CPA which young people, parents, and practitioners attribute to historic or ongoing experiences of APFV. In participant accounts, CPA emerges in response to fathers' abuse in the home—as a form of self-defense, as an expression of anger and frustration, as a behavior "learned" through observation and then replicated, or as a response to stress. In the narratives that form this study's data, it can be observed that APFV is most often perpetrated by an adult male – usually a father or father figure – over an extensive period. Curiously, despite fathers' violence being implicated, mothers were the primary recipients of children's abuse. From a feminist perspective, the findings and discussion present some explanations to account for this gendered experience.

The first set of CPA dynamics to be discussed pertains to two-parent heterosexual households[5] where violence by fathers was present, and two distinct dynamics were observed. In one, young people's violence was directed towards the father, with young people constructing their own violence as a form of self-defense and/or protection of their mothers and siblings. The second dynamic involved young people directing their violence towards mothers, despite fathers being the offending parent. Young peoples' explanations reflect complicated feelings of blame towards mothers for fathers' ongoing abuse.

The Findings then presents data pertaining to CPA in single-parent households, which were overwhelmingly characterized by single mothers who are victim-survivors of DFV. In the context of spousal separation, CPA occurred in two main ways. First, mothers and practitioners suggested that fathers' continued denigration of mothers to their children during custody visits led to increased violence by children towards mothers. In these circumstances, mothers and practitioners understood children to be re-enacting "learned" abusive behavior displayed by fathers. Secondly, mothers and practitioners also identified and constructed children's violence as a response to distress experienced by young people in the lead up to visit fathers.

### *Fathers' ongoing violence towards the family in two-parent households*

#### *Young people's violence towards fathers – violent resistance*

Through the application of attribution theory, it was found that many young people constructed their own use of violence as a response to violence perpetrated by an adult male in the home. This finding emerged in data collected from young people and practitioners; where it arose as a theme it was described in depth. This theme rarely emerged in sibling narratives, and was not present in parent narratives. Young people explained being either directly abused, or exposed to fathers' violence towards the mothers and siblings, often over many years, as reflected in the following examples:

[5]Despite there being no exclusion criteria related to narratives from same-sex two-parent households, not a single example emerged. That is, no young people, siblings, parents, nor practitioners made mention of CPA affecting same-sex couples. Research with the LGBTQIA+ community is needed to determine if this is an issue that affects same-sex parents and what the implications may be.

> One of my earliest memories is seeing my mum trying to get free, while my dad was holding her by the hair and beating her. When I was 11, I hit my dad over the head with a hammer while trying to get him off her. My home was extremely violent and it was very unavoidable. The house regularly got smashed and things were always broken. I remember when my older sister would pick glass out of my feet. (Lottie, Young Person, MB [Message Board]) My father has had a long history of bullying my older sister, younger brother and I… [On this day] I just completely lost control of my emotions… I charged at my father and began punching the sheer life out of him. I even went to his sports bag and grabbed the bat and was actually going to kill him with it… (Logan, Young Person, MB)

These examples are typical of narratives from young people – both sons and daughters – who explain their use of violence as a response to their fathers' behavior. That is, they attribute their own behavior to experiences of violence from their childhood. We can see Lottie explaining that her use of violence towards her father directly emerges in response to her father's violence towards her mother (and the broader family). Similarly, Logan recounts his violence towards his father, which he described as a "fit of white-hot rage", as a response to his father's "long history of bullying" behavior towards his siblings. For both Lottie and Logan, their experiences of APFV were present throughout childhood, like other young people in this research. Against this backdrop, young people explained their use of violence as a means of protecting themselves and/or a family member from fathers' abuse. Parental violence towards siblings is not commonly discussed in CPA research; however, Tucker, Finkelhor, and Turner's (2021) research found that when children are exposed to sibling abuse by a parent, it resulted in distress symptoms for the exposed child, with the vast majority of the sample (83%) having reported experiencing fear as a result. Moreover, children experienced greater fear when the violence towards the sibling was perpetrated by fathers, than mothers. In addition, the findings of this study – that CPA is constructed as a response to fathers' violence towards mothers and children – align with Papamichail and Bates' (2022) research, which is one of few that involve interviews with youth participants about their violence. These authors reported from their interviews with seven adolescents who had engaged in CPA – and been exposed to IPV – that these young people explained their use of violence as arising from a need to "protect and care for their mothers" (p. 6143). Moreover, Cottrell and Monk (2004) highlighted this same dynamic in their research, where young people were violent "against an abusive man in an effort to protect the mother" (p. 1082). However, the authors note that this was less common than CPA that was attributed to role modelling/learned behavior, or anger at mothers' "failure" to protect children.

Young people were not the only people to explain their use of violence as a form of self-defense (or protection of others in the home), as practitioners in this study also perceived it to be common:

> The other like dynamic [we see in court]… is where young people end up trying to become, trying to basically be a body block between parents perpetrating family violence… trying to be sort of a protector, because they got big enough… [including for] younger siblings. I think it's happening reasonably commonly, but it doesn't get talked about or you don't, young people don't get the opportunity to say that's what they're doing. (Practitioner H, Interview)

Practitioners' construction of CPA as mirrors the narratives of young people who conceptualize their violence as *self-defense,* although practitioners often used the term 'violent resistance', which was not language ever used in young people narratives. This is perhaps unsurprising and suggests that practitioners draw on dominant frameworks seen in the broader DFV field, and are observing similarities in cases of CPA they encounter in their work. Violent resistance emerged as a term and concept to explain the gender symmetry and female perpetration seen in some IPV research samples (Bouffard et al., 2008). It was argued that female perpetration of IPV is often *qualitatively* different to male perpetration, and specifically, women's violence emerges most often as a pattern of self-defense (Johnson and Ferraro, 2000). It has been found that self-defense is the primary driver identified by women who have used violence (Henning et al., 2006), and that needing to protect and defend children is also a form of violent resistance by women using violence in an IPV relationship (Swan & Snow, 2006). As the findings here show, some forms of youth violence towards parents may be misattributed to 'CPA', when it may actually be better explained through the concept of 'violent resistance'. While many practitioners in this research were alert to the dynamic of violent resistance, identifying it is a fraught process as young people may not be forthcoming in disclosing APFV in the home. Practitioner H gives an example seen commonly in her work, in which young people have come into contact with the youth justice system as "perpetrators of DFV" after parents have applied for an intervention order against them. Of concern to the Practitioner H – and an unanticipated finding of this research – was a pattern observed of abusive fathers' being "really manipulative" and leveraging the criminal justice system to exert control over the young person, while they continue evading authorities for their own use of violence. A similar observation was made by Campbell, Richter, Howard and Cockburn (2020), who reviewed criminal justice data and conducted interviews with practitioners across three Australian states. They briefly note that in focus group discussions, practitioners working within the criminal justice system "saw parents using legal responses to punish or discipline their child in the context of previous family violence" (p. 106). However, it is unclear whether this pattern is seen among both male and female parents, and whether it is in the context of parents' *maliciously* leveraging the system to exert control – as the current paper found – or whether parents are relying on criminal justice intervention because of genuine safety concerns, because they do not know where else to turn for assistance, or because they are re-directed to police by other services (Holt 2011b). Nonetheless, the implication of these findings is that children are being misidentified by the criminal justice system as "perpetrators" of family violence, and the underlying reason for children's violence – which is a response to fathers' violence – remains obscured. Further, this places young people at a heightened risk of criminalization, which can have many adverse consequences for their futures. Overall, the findings in this section demonstrate how young people (and practitioners) attributed CPA as a direct and necessary response to fathers' ongoing abuse. From a feminist perspective, we can see that even through daughters and sons draw upon a 'self-defense/violent resistance' explanation, it becomes clearer that male violence from fathers (as opposed to children's violence) is actually at the heart of this issue, but their behaviour is obscured as young people are constructed as the 'problem' when they intersect with the criminal justice system.

*Young people's violence directed towards mothers in two-parent households*

While young people very directly attribute their use of violence towards abusive fathers *to* the violence of their fathers, the most common dynamic, peculiar to CPA, involves young people directing their aggression towards mothers, for which the explanation of violent resistance is insufficient. Violence towards non-offending parents in the context of APFV appears paradoxical: why harm the non-offending parent rather than the abusive parent? The following extract from Jean, who is an adult reflecting on her behavior as a teenager, provides us with an opening into unpacking this dynamic:

> It took me a very long time to finally forgive my mother [for staying with my abusive father]; I called her weak, and when I became a teenager I also grew into verbally abusing her. I was much better than him at finding the right words that would deconstruct her the most; I knew exactly how to break her. I told my mum I wished he'd killed her. (Jean, Young Person, MB)

Daughters' violence towards parents, especially mothers, is one of the least understood dynamics of CPA, with little qualitative data existing to elucidate it. The findings presented here emerged only in young people's narratives (and no other data sets), and with less detail provided than other findings in this paper; however, Jean's experience was reflective of several participants' statements regarding daughter-to-mother abuse and does provide insight into one of the least understood gendered dynamics of CPA. Jean's abusive behavior towards her mother was explained as being modelled by her father, evident in her statement that she was "much better than him" at it. Yet a closer reading of Jean's account reveals complex feelings of anger and resentment towards her mother for her perceived failings. For Jean, the source of anger stems from her mother's inaction in leaving the abusive father, which is why it took "a very long time to finally forgive" her. Previous CPA research has suggested that such anger and resentment expressed by young people and directed towards mothers' derives from a perceived "failure to protect". For example, a strikingly similar sentiment to Jean is shared by a mother interviewed by Cottrell and Monk (2004), who states that "I think sometimes in her own mind she blames me because of some of the men I've had in my life. And she don't say it, but I feel like she's blamed me" (p. 1083). The authors explain that "aggression was sometimes directed at the non-offending parent – usually the mother – in a symbolic attempt to 'tell' her about the abuse, or *as a means to express the intense anger and resentment that was felt for not having been protected"* (p. 1083, emphasis added). As we can see, Jean explained her abusive behaviour to her mother both by learning from male violence in the home and by anger related to the "failure to protect". Through a feminist theoretical perspective, we see that underpinning what at first appears to be female-to-female violence in this current research and that of Cottrell and Monk (2004), is actually male violence towards women. This finding of young people blaming mothers for the "failure to protect" children from fathers' abusive behavior may indicate that children internalize broader societal norms holding mothers responsible for men's behavior – including their violence (Landsman & Hartley, 2007; Scourfield, 2018; Strega et al., 2008). Further research would benefit from exploring the gendered impacts of cultural discourses of mothers' "failure to protect" and the implicit expectations of mothering on the relationship between children and mothers in the context of men's violence in the home.

*Fathers' role in the manifestation and continuation of CPA towards lone-mothers*

Lone mothers were over-represented in this research, which is partly explained by many mothers experiencing IPV that they identified as contributing to their separation. The findings that follow focus specifically on CPA towards single mothers post-separation, in the context of past or ongoing abusive behavior from fathers. These findings emerged across the mother narratives and practitioner sample, and were provided with a great degree of detail.

*Fathers' denigration of mothers post-separation*

Mothers and practitioners in this research described fathers' ongoing manipulation of children as a way to continue perpetrating IPV against mothers post-separation. These mothers, along with practitioners, drew a direct connection between their ex-partner's behavior and their child's current use of violence:

> I'm a single mum and my children's dad was verbally abusive and very cruel to me – in fact, he is still easily angered and continues to say very cruel things to my boys about me… Today, my son punched me in the face, then repeatedly stabbed me with a pencil and said he wanted me dead. Recently, he punched me in the abdomen with hurt for a few days. He said he did this on purpose. (Lidia, Mother, MB)

Mothers' descriptions construed young people as "imitating" the abusive behaviors displayed by fathers towards them, "from witnessing particular incidents" of IPV in the past (Beth, Mother, MB). In such accounts, mothers account for CPA as a behavior *learned* by observing fathers' ongoing display of abusive behavior towards mothers themselves. Young people's behavior is then attributed to it, since it is said to replicate "the same gestures, same cutting and hurtful remarks, basically everything" (Beth, Mother, MB). The *assumption* here is that men's abusive behavior is interpreted by young people as permissible. However, as discussed in the literature review, explanations that draw on social learning theory tell us little about the *mechanism* that underpin this "learning" (Widom & Wilson, 2014); and without this appearing in young people's narratives, it is unclear if children do in fact perceive the abusive behaviour witnessed by fathers as being *permissible*. Further, given that there are other siblings present in the home who are exposed to the same behaviour, but do not engage in CPA, it raises questions as to what *exactly* abusive children are learning in comparison to their siblings. While mothers noted that fathers' abusive behavior was present prior to separation, in the context of separated parents they reported that young people's violence would increase following contact with fathers, due to fathers' active denigration of mothers (with some children being encouraged to do the same)—a connection expressed by parents in other CPA research (Daly & Nancarrow, 2009; Howard & Rottem, 2008; Meyer et al., 2021; Rutter, 2021).

Practitioners echoed mothers' attributions of young people's violence to the abusive behavior modelled, and at times encouraged, by fathers:

> So we've got a lot of single mums where there is parenting orders in place and where we can say that there's ongoing misuse and entitlement and you know, really quite narcissistic fathers that have weekend access and the mums will be saying when the kids come

> back they're even more disrespectful and more abusive or they're becoming abusive in their fights to not go to their weekend… [they have] also nicely been indoctrinated into a lot of messages around how hopeless and useless mum is… [FG1]

The quotes from Lidia and FG1 express the same explanation of CPA – that fathers use custody visits to "indoctrinate" young people, through "messages around how hopeless and useless mum is", encouraging young people to perceive their mothers as *deserving* of the abusive behavior. The connection between custody visitations, where it is reported that fathers actively degrade mothers, and young people's subsequent violence when returning home provides one explanation for why mothers are disproportionately victimized by their children. In this way, young people's violence is attributed to fathers normalizing the control, domination, and degradation of mothers through their ongoing in IPV. Cottrell and Monk's (2004) work is again elucidating, with their data showing the pattern that "an abusive youth would begin to abuse his mother shortly after the violent father/partner left the family home". The authors attributed this to direct role-modelling by fathers, and to sons' "idealization of the abuser" (p. 1082). In addition, Tew and Nixon (2010) have speculated that CPA which occurs following parental separation may be connected to the position of "man of the house" becoming "vacant… which a teenage son may seek to insert himself" (p. 584). They argue that mothers' parental authority and control over children "may start to evaporate as they find themselves implicitly blamed for the absence of a father figure" (p. 584). Still, the findings of the present article suggest that how young people feel about their own use of violence in this context remains unclear. The data collected from young people did not pertain strongly to this dynamic, despite being common in mothers' narratives. Notwithstanding this, mothers and practitioners drew on the same explanations of CPA, in which young people's violence was directly attributed to fathers' continued perpetration of IPV, creating a situation where the abuse of mothers is depicted as permissible. It is also unclear the extent to which this dynamic affects daughters and sons, and what the gender dynamics at play here are.

*Young people's distress and anxiety related to visits with fathers and irregular contact*

Parents and practitioners also described another set of circumstances wherein children's violence was interpreted as a manifestation of distress that cyclically occurred in the lead up to, or return from, visiting their abusive fathers—a situation that has not received adequate attention in current research. The excerpt presented below, from an interview with a mother, Lillian, interprets a pattern of violence from her son, Henry, before and after visiting his father:

> Whenever he has anything to do with his dad, his anxiety will be really high… Although things are now better with Henry's behavior, his anxiety from contact with his dad used to escalate into violence with me… (Lillian, Mother, Interview)

Lillian's experience was similar to other mothers co-parenting in the context of historic and ongoing DFV. Lillian described her ex-partner as "controlling and petrifying", "narcissistic", and "relentless", and stated that she has "been frightened of him *for years*" (original emphasis). Despite Henry's father being reported to Child Protection by multiple mandated professionals, at the time of the interview Henry was still required to routinely spend time in his father's care despite not wanting to go. Mothers like Lillian are confronted with a distressed and violent child in the lead up to, and return from, contact

with fathers – and are expected to manage and calm their distressed child, whilst simultaneously being abuse by them. As documented in other research, requirements to send children to visitation with their fathers in the context of past and/or ongoing DFV foster a highly tense situation for both children and mothers (Harrison, 2016). Building on this, this current study finds that some children directly blame their mothers for "forcing" them to go to their father's house – despite mothers facing legal ramifications if they do not comply with the parenting arrangement – which mothers attributed to the manifestation of CPA.

Many fathers' lack of commitment to parenting amplified young people's feelings of stress and instability. Often in combination with APFV, it was reported that many fathers were highly unreliable in maintaining connection with their children,[6] as the following example relates:

> My daughter's father… goes out of his way to make co-parenting a living hell. He only sees her when it's convenient for him and then he tells her all sorts of inappropriate things mainly about why I left him and it's mostly lies, lies, lies… because of this she blames me for everything that goes wrong which includes him not bothering to turn up for her when he is supposed to, and this is a regular occurrence. (Diedre, Mother, MB)

Mothers gave examples of fathers not meeting obligations, in both abusive and non-violent parenting relationships; however, when it occurred in combination with APFV this compounded the stress experienced by mothers and children. As we can see in Deidre's excerpt, she attributes her child's violence to her ex-partner repeatedly "not bothering to turn up" for their child when he is scheduled to. Deidre is then left to manage a hurt, confused, and angry child. Present in this dynamic and in earlier instances discussed is the temporal experience of instability, as children wait for a father who only shows up when it is "convenient" for him, despite making commitments. As Deidre constructs it, the father's unreliability and lack of care towards their child, in tandem with "inappropriate" comments, creates a situation where the daughter perceives the mother as the problem and blames her for the father's behavior. Earlier research, such as Zeoli et al. (2014), anticipates such findings. They found that fathers *tactically manipulate* custody schedules to exert control over mothers (and children's) time. This can include fathers not showing up for scheduled visits, returning children unannounced, and demanding flexibility in rescheduling, while also denying flexibility for mothers. In Holt's (2015) research on children's experiences of domestic abuse and post-separation fathering, participants described fathers as unreliable, unpredictable, and having a "lack of interest in them and unwillingness to spend time with them" (p. 216). Moreover, children in Holt's study reported experiencing distress and a sense of powerlessness due to continued exposure to fathers' abuse and degradation of mothers post-separation. Overall, we can see how mothers attributed CPA to a distinct pattern of children becoming highly distressed and then violent due to irregular contact with abusive and unreliable fathers.

[6] While these two things often went hand-in-hand, there were examples collected during the research that pertained to fathers who were not described as abusive, but rather, absent or unreliable.

## Conclusion

The findings outlined in this article show that when APFV is a prominent presence in families' lives, young people, parents, and practitioners attribute CPA to APFV in several distinct ways. Participants explained violence towards fathers as a direct response to fathers' ongoing abuse towards them and/or other family members, casting their violence as "self-defense" or "violent resistance". In two-parent households, CPA that was directed towards mothers by daughters was attributed by the latter to blame of mothers for "failing" to leave the relationship and/or to stop fathers' abusive behavior. Conversely, in single-parent households, mothers and practitioners drew a direct connection between fathers' ongoing degradation of mothers and increased CPA before and after children's contact with fathers. Lastly, mothers and practitioners also attributed young people's violence to distress, arising from upcoming custody visits with fathers and/or fathers' unreliability in showing up. By applying attribution theory, the paper elevates the first-hand experiences of CPA, and elucidates the various ways that participants construct the causes of behaviour identified as CPA, and where they locate responsibility. Presented through a gendered lens, the findings show that while fathers' violence is frequently constructed as the underlying cause of CPA, in everyday life it is mothers who are burdened with the responsibility for managing the violence – including their own victimisation.

By drawing on participants' attributions of CPA, this paper further elucidates the relationship between CPA and APFV. The findings of this paper serve as further evidence of the continued problem of men's violence against women and children, and highlight the need to develop effective interventions into APFV to reduce the likelihood of young people developing abusive behaviors in response. By meaningfully addressing DFV perpetrated by fathers (which includes holding them accountable for their violence), it may facilitate an early intervention or even preventative approach for CPA. Additionally, these findings underscore the importance of practitioners being attuned to APFV when engaging with young people reported to be violent in the home. This is particularly critical for young people who have come into contact with the youth justice system, given the risk of criminalization and adverse outcomes associated with this contact. Where cases of CPA emerge in practitioner caseloads, consideration should be given to the possibility of historic or ongoing APFV, given young people's apprehension in disclosing this information. Furthermore, this paper is also relevant to the broader family violence sector, especially to practitioners working with victim-survivors and male adult-perpetrators. In light of the findings, practitioners working with adults involved in DFV should consider whether there is scope in their role to apply a whole-of-family lens (where safe and appropriate), which would allow for recognition of, and early intervention to, address the impacts of DFV for affected children and mothers. There is also an urgent need to further research and fund effective models of intervention that support children's healing and recovery post-DFV, as this paper shows that the harmful effects of men's violence in the home can have long-lasting ramifications for families. Exit of fathers from the family home is in itself is not sufficient to mitigate the harm that has occurred, or to ensure that their abusive behaviour will cease, as the findings of this paper demonstrate. If meaningful support and intervention is not accessible to women and children following the separation of parents where there has been DFV, fertile grounds for the development of harmful behaviours among young people will remain. Greater awareness of CPA among practitioners working in the field of DFV, investment in resourcing effective models of intervention, and efforts to hold men accountable for their behaviour,

may contribute to potentially lowering the risk of children and young people prospectively engaging in abusive behaviours in the home. While this research was able to draw on a variety of perspectives, including from young people, siblings, mothers, and practitioners, further research with young people is still needed to understand the diversity of their experiences, and how they feel about and make sense of their behavior.

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