

Summary: Adolescent violence towards parents

Moulds, Day, Mayshak, Mildred and Miller (2019) propose that adolescent violence toward parents (AVTP) is a unique form of family violence about which there has been little research in Australia to date. Because knowledge about both prevalence rates and the characteristics of offenders and victims remains limited, this exploratory study used data from four Australian States (New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and Queensland) to document prevalence rates of reported offences to police, and the characteristics of adolescent violence toward parents in Australia.

The study found that between 1% and 7% of family violence reported to the police is adolescent violence toward parents, and that “the ‘typical’ perpetrator is a 15- to 17-year-old Caucasian young man who is generally violent toward his mother” (Moulds et al., 2019, p. 231).

Whilst the findings from this research are limited (including by the differing police practices and policy variations between States, such as the use of police discretion), it does provide an overview of the characteristics of the perpetrators, victims and the incidents themselves.

As is the case for the term ‘family violence’ in Australia, there are various definitions and practices used in different contexts, jurisdictions, and legislations regarding AVTP, and there are no specific police policy or guidelines in place to guide responses. The authors also point out that it is “important to consider the perspectives of perpetrators and victims” (Moulds et al., 2019, p. 234) and note previous research identifying parents’ “shame, stigma and guilt, feeling that they should be able to manage the problem themselves, and not wanting the child to have a permanent record or to be permanently removed” which has contributed to the under-reporting of the experience (Moulds et al., 2019, p. 234).

In this study, demographic data identified that most cases of AVTP reported to police were perpetrated by males (68%) who were non-Indigenous (87%). The victim of reported cases was most often female (72%) and aged between 35 and 49 years (62%). The mean age for a suspected AVTP offender was 15 years old with the mean age for suspected victim of AVTP 41 years old. At least half (51%) of perpetrators were repeat offenders, with 54% of victims being repeat victims.

Of the reported cases, police noted drugs and alcohol to be involved in between 4% and 17% of cases. Offenders were most often arrested for assault (84%), and only a small percentage of offences (18%) were in breach of an intervention order. Males were more likely to be repeat offenders than female perpetrators. Slightly more Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander young people were identified as repeat offenders than non-Indigenous young people.

Female perpetrators of AVTP were slightly more likely to offend against women than male perpetrators of AVTP. The relation between perpetrator sex and perpetrator cultural background was not significant but Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were more likely to be arrested with non-Indigenous young people more likely to be cautioned (the authors suggest this could be due to Indigenous young people being more likely to be repeat offenders) (Moulds et al., 2019, p. 241).

This study found that more young Aboriginal women perpetrate AVTP than young Aboriginal men, and, more young Caucasian men perpetrate AVTP than young Caucasian women. Female offenders were slightly younger (10–14 years of age) than their male counterparts, however in both cases over 60% were over 15.

Where there were data available, 70% of cases occurred in metropolitan areas, which the authors suggest is “perhaps reflective of population rates, or possibly suggesting that it is less likely to be impacting on rural families or perhaps suggesting lower levels of acknowledgment and higher levels of tolerance and/or shame within rural communities (Moulds et al., 2019, p. 244)

Reference

Moulds, L., Day, A., Mayshak, R., Mildred, H., & Miller, P. (2019). Adolescent violence towards parents—Prevalence and characteristics using Australian Police Data. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 52(2), 231–249.