

**WORKING WITH ADOLESCENTS
VIOLENCE AND ABUSE
TOWARDS PARENTS**

Approaches and Contexts for Intervention

**Edited by
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ROUTLEDGE

Adolescent to Parent Abuse: A Criminological Perspective

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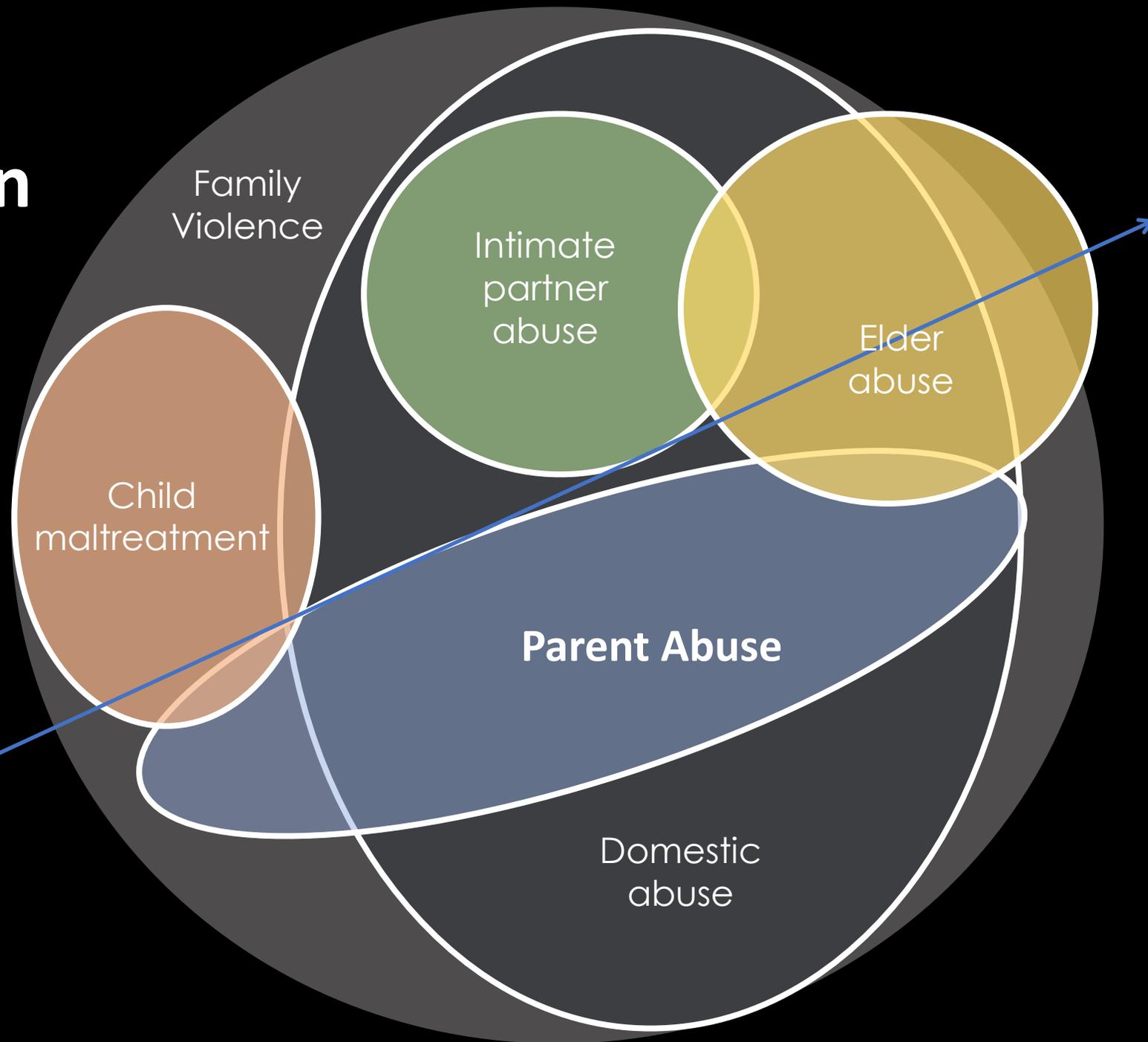
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Today

- 1) Adolescent to parent abuse in the context of family violence
- 2) Prevalence of adolescent to parent abuse
- 3) Pathways into adolescent to parent abuse
- 4) Marginalised issues
 - a) Parricide
 - b) Adoptive parents and kinship carers
 - c) Neurodiversity

Family victimisation through the life course



Developmental trajectory of APA

“shut up” → “shut your fucking mouth”
→ “bitch” → “I wish you were dead” → “fucking whore”

Verbal abuse

Threats/
demands for
money or
items; theft

Economic abuse

get in parent’s space → throw something → push/shove/spit at parent → slam parent against wall/floor/window → wrestle with parent → punch parent in arm → punch parent in head/face

Physical abuse

use parent’s emotional weakness to hurt them → accusations of being a bad mother → threats to parent → making accusations of abuse → silent treatment

Psychological abuse

Self-directed violence
Harmful sexual behaviours

Prevalence

Community data

UK school survey (McCloud, 2018)

- 4.3% - 'any physical aggression'
- 64.4% - 'psychological aggression'
- International comparison: Varies from 4.6% (Spain) to 20% (Chile)
- **Victims:** Mothers (80:20)
- **Children:** Sons/Daughters (50:50)

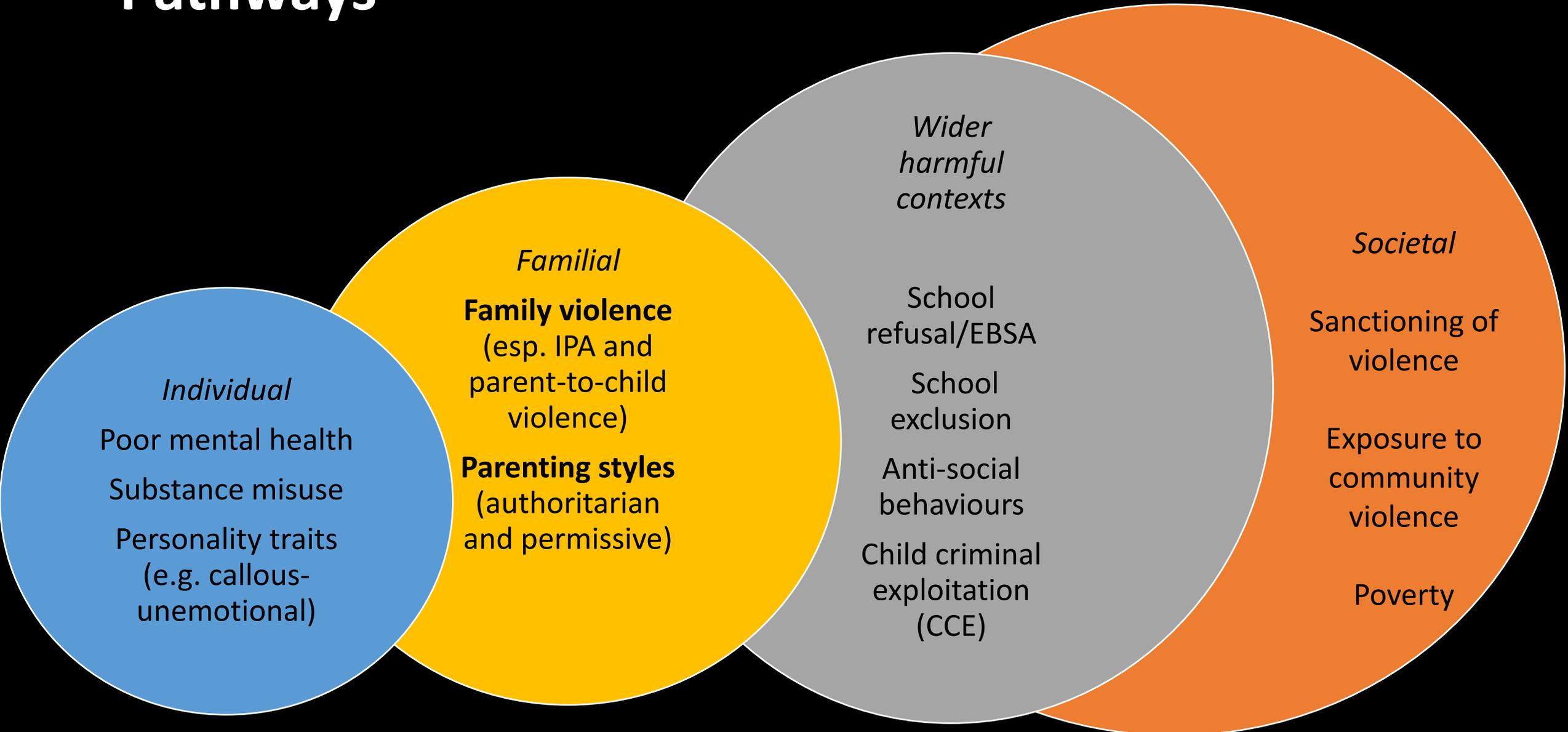
Criminal Justice Data

MPS data (Brennan et al, 2022)

- Year-on-year increase until 2018, then decrease
- Most common outcome (66%): NFA due to 'evidential difficulties'
- 40% incidents go unreported (cf CSEW)
- **Victims:** Mothers (70:30)
- **Children:** Sons (75:25)



Pathways



Tricky questions

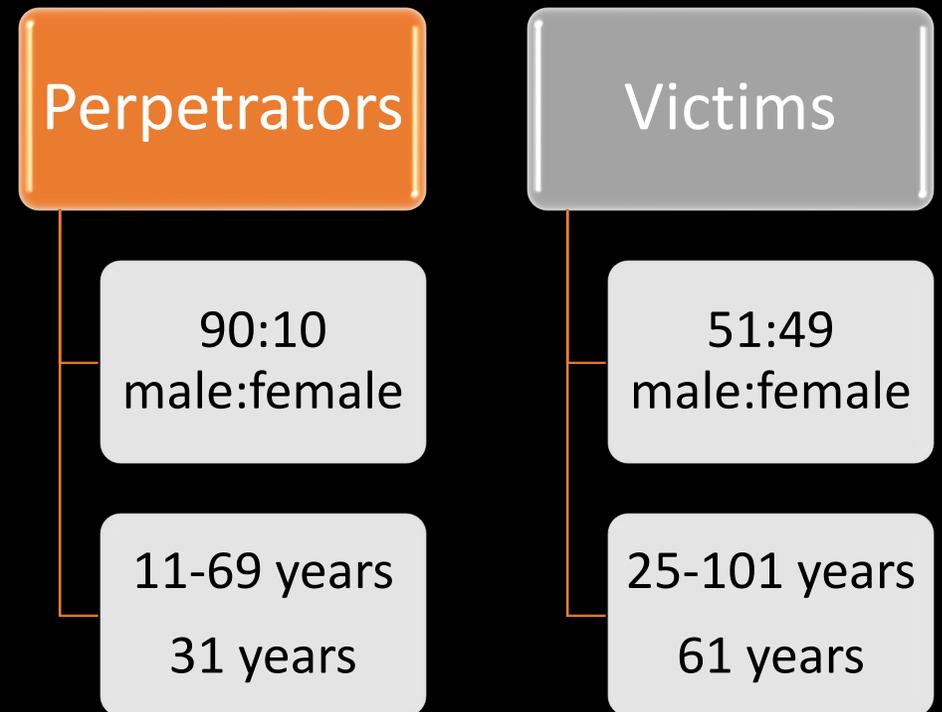
- Are there sub-types of APA?
- Are there differences between early-onset and late-onset APA?
- To what extent is APA distinct from adult-instigated violence towards parents?
- What is the relationship between APA and parricide?

- **Reactive APA** = an aggressive or defensive response to conflict, threat and punishment
- **Affective APA** = aggression that is primarily due to internal frustration, anxiety or conflicting emotion
- **Proactive APA** = strategic, instrumental and callous acts of aggression
- (Harries et al, 2022)

Parricide

IPA and child maltreatment often discussed in conjunction with fatal abuse – less so with violence against parents

- 3% of all homicides
- 60% sharp/blunt objects (few involve the culmination of abuse/neglect)
- 3% involve 'double victims'
- 4% involve other offenders
- Role mental disorders & intoxication
- 9% involve perps under 18 years



Adoptive parents and kinship carers

“I was scared. I was intimidated. I think my heart was breaking for him. Because you can see the damage that’s there, but you can't put a plaster on it [...] you feel you're a failure, you feel absolutely failed, and it's a mixture of emotional turmoil. Even when he was abusive, the mothering, maternal instinct comes over the top, the need to protect them. They didn't ask to be born, their mum messed it up and Gran can't afford to.”

(Grandmother kinship carer)

- Children often have additional and complex needs
- Parents/carers often don't know the child's history
- ‘Fighting fires they didn't start’
- Sense of being child's ‘last resort’
- Professional assumptions that its ‘to be expected’

Neurodiversity

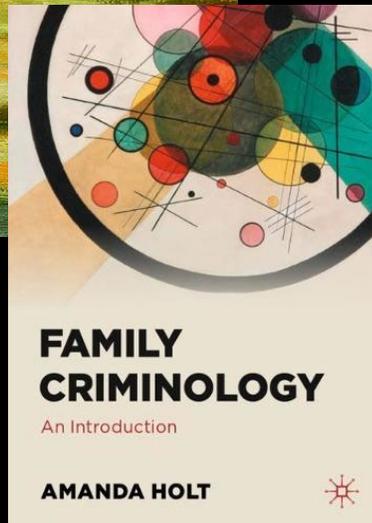
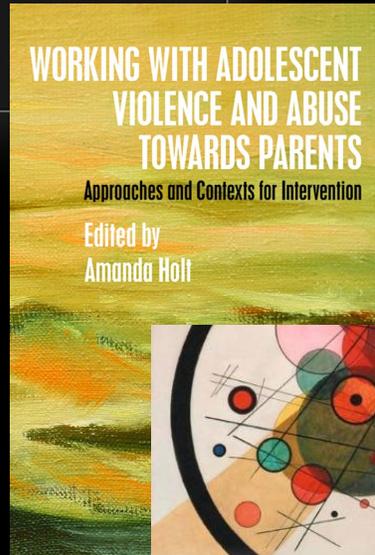
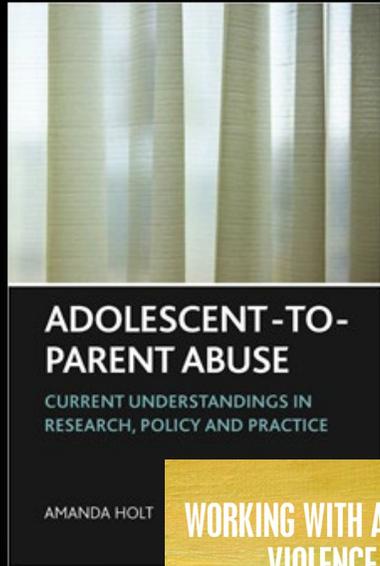


“His behaviour a lot of the time is anxiety-driven, big time. He gets so anxious, and once he’s gone past a certain point, you’ve just got to let it play out, whether that’s him headbutting the door or kicking doors or coming at you, it just has to play out and that’s the way it is”.

(Mother of autistic son, 11)

- Policy, practice and research discourse often ignores neurodivergent young people
- Families experience blame, discrimination, stigma & lack of support
- Neurodivergent young people often experience high levels of trauma
- Parental strategies differ from those used with neurotypical children

Relevant Publications



- Holt, A. (2023). **“I’m his safe space”**: Mothers’ experiences of physical violence from their neurodivergent children: Gender, conflict and the ethics of care. *British Journal of Criminology*.
- Cortina, H. and Holt, A. (2024). **‘This is what happens to people who don’t spank their kids’**: An analysis of YouTube comments to news reports of child to parent violence. *Child and Family Social Work*, 29(3), 749-758.
- Holt, A. (2023). **“I don’t know what is autism, what is normal teenage behaviour, and what is naughtiness”**: Conceptualising child to parent violence in the context of neurodevelopmental difference. *Children and Society*.
- Brennan, I., Burnley, N., Cutmore, M., Holt, A., Lillis, J., Llewellyn, J., MacLeod, S., Shah, M., Van Zanten, R. and Vicentini, L. (2022). **Comprehensive needs assessment of Child/Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse in London**. Mayor of London Office for Policing and Crime / Violence Reduction Unit.
- Holt, A. and Birchall, J. (2022). **“Their Mum messed up and Gran can’t afford to”**: Violence towards grandparent kinship carers and the implications for social work. *British Journal of Social Work*. 52 (3), 1231-1248.
- Holt, A. and Lewis, S. (2021). **Constituting Child-to-Parent Violence: Lessons from England and Wales**. *British Journal of Criminology*, 61(3), 792-811.
- Holt, A. (2017) **Parricide in England and Wales (1977–2012): An exploration of offenders, victims, incidents and outcomes**, *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 17(5), 568-587.