

## **VIOLENCE TOWARD PARENTS**

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Violence toward parents has received an increased attention from society, public institutions and scientific community in recent years. Meanwhile violence against children or women have not only received a higher attention but also have generated a higher social awareness and in consequence promoted the creation of numerous resources and approaches, including legislation changes, aimed to solve these problems. However there is another kind of violence that has not received much attention, this is: the violence toward parents. This form of domestic violence may seem an unusual and rare phenomenon, however, the data put us on the right track of social relevance that this phenomenon is taking in recent years. In fact there are numerous studies made in different countries that have shown that it is a widespread and serious problem with very negative consequences for all family members (Boxer, Gullan & Mahoney 2009; Calvete et al., 2013; Kennair & Mellor, 2007; Routt & Anderson, 2011). Therefore this form of domestic violence is starting to be considered as a public health problem.

However this problem not always leaves the private sphere; many parents do not seek help from professional services, do not tell the problem to other relatives and friends, and do not take legal actions. This is because making publicly and visible that they are victims of abuse by their children makes them feel guilt, shame and humiliation, and they rather not to tell it. And this is usual due to the high emotionality caused by family problems. Very often these parents wonder what they did wrong, how they have failed as parents and why they are now victims of those who loves more, their children. Moreover, the society attitude has not always been the best with these parents. Often relatives, friends and even public and social institutions have sent them a message of guilt and labeled them as "bad parents".

That is why psychologists who work with this kind of families need to know in depth this problem, its consequences and the steps needed to treat it. First of all, when we asked about how these adolescents are, we have to consider the following descriptive characteristics: we know that the presence of difficulties like the lack of self-control, low empathy, communication problems or thoughts that lead them to justify their behavior conceive violence as a legitimate way to resolve conflicts. These characteristics help us to know a profile and it must be considered in any intervention. However, being accountable only to a part of the problem leads us to fall into a reductionism that does not conform to reality. In fact nowadays many studies have shown the influence that parents have on the appearance of this type of family violence. Of course while analyzing and recognizing parents' contribution to the problem we must not fall into blaming them, because it is obvious that parents never seek to generate such reactions in their children. However, we know that violent behaviours used by the parents as a response to their children's violence, poor communication skills or a higher criticism are related to violence toward parents and on the same direction, negative parental discipline characterized by the lack of educational standards limits or on the other hand a too rigid educational standard can explain the abuse perpetrated by the children. And even the presence of hostile thoughts toward their children and justifying violence in interpersonal relationships can promote the development and maintenance or exacerbation of the problem.

Nevertheless, we can not forget the role of society in this type of problem and, more specifically, the role of social justification and normalization of aggressive behaviours and violence. In fact we are surrounded by violence, so we can see a lot of different aggressive acts on social and mass media, at the school or in the family. And this exposure makes that behaviours such as yelling, insult or swear at somebody are considered normal, and frequently are not included on the concept of violence. However, we know that slaps or beatings do not appear spontaneously and the social attitudes of normalization of violence play an important role in the learning of these behaviours by any child. Moreover this family violence usually appears after a prolonged process that finally ends resulting in what is known as the phenomenon of escalation. But before punching or slapping a parent, any child and their parents during a conflict had shouted, insulted, threatened or even slammed the door. And if the society and parents consider this shouts or insults also as an aggression we are helping children

and parents to act when these behaviours begin to appear, rather than wait for a chronic situation, turning family life untenable.

Whether due to the presence of verbal or physical aggression, it is clear that this family situation has consequences for all members. Sadness, anxiety, anger or fear, several emotions that can be present on both parents and children, making difficult to get out of this situation without professional help. Good news is that treatments exist to help these families, so it is important to encourage parents to seek help at the first time when they detect the conflicts are arising and becoming violent, trying to leave behind guilt or shame. Any intervention needs to increase the motivation to change in adolescents and their parents, control the thoughts that promote anger and hostility, anger management, improve and recover the affective relationship between parents and children.



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