

'Talking to My Mum': developing communication between children and mothers affected by domestic violence

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Introduction

- Extensive research showing impact of abuse on women & children
- Recent research showing impact on mother-child relationship
- 'Talking to My Mum'

Tactics of Abuse

- Abuse in pregnancy
- Unable to protect themselves – ‘bad’ and ‘naughty’
- Sexually assaulted in front of children
- Called names and belittled
- Undermines authority and respect

Tactics of Abuse.....

- Participation in and modelling of abusive behaviour
- Weak or culpable
- Impact on mental health – emotionally unavailable
- Children's emotional and behavioural disturbance

Tactics of Abuse.....

- Children subjected to direct physical or sexual abuse
- Reversal of roles
- Child abduction & child contact arrangements

BUT...draw support and develop protective strategies

Research Collaboration

- Centre for the Study of Safety and Well-being, University of Warwick
 - Cathy Humphreys, Ravi Thiara, Agnes Skamballis, Audrey Mullender
- Colchester and Tendring Women's Refuge

Talking to My Mum – Starting Points

- ‘Conspiracy of silence’ and communication gap
- DV as an attack on mother-child relationship

'Talking to My Mum'

- 3 year project
- Action research methodology – 3 cycles of planning, action, reflection
 - 10 refuges and 2 NSPCC teams
 - 45 families, 52 cyp (12 Asian families)
- 2 workbooks

What we found - impact on mother-child relationship

- **Range of abuse strategies**

- Undermining mothers and their parenting
- *It was so slow I didn't even notice it was happening. Because I just thought maybe that my decision was wrong. ...And from there I suppose I started picking up on everything that he said because it was every time I said something....*

Abuse strategies...

Insults and accusations of infidelity

- *He did totally slag me down completely to the children all the time. He'd just tell 'em things that I was opening me legs to other men and I was taking drugs and I was doing this and I was doing that. And he constantly told them.*

Excluding mothers from their children

- *He hit me in front of him. He used to tell him things in English in front of me. And he kept me busy all the time in the house and working part time so that I wouldn't spend any time with my son. He used to tell my son wrong things.*

Abuse strategies...

Threats, inconsistent fathering and absence of co-parenting

- *My husband had planned with his family to abduct my son and take him to Pakistan and that was why I left. If he takes him then what is left for me in this country, all my family is in Pakistan...He is still trying to get my son to go and stay with him.*

Child abuse

Consequences for mother-child relationship – ‘Absent Presence’

- Lack of responsibility taken
- Curtailing mother’s capacity
- Child contact/abduction
- Continuing issues for mothers and children
 - ‘symptoms of abuse’ – anger and behavioural issues separated from DV
 - Reduced capacity to parent – depression – couched as ‘mother blaming’

What prevented mothers and children from talking

- Hard to talk about past

I do block a lot of my feelings...so I don't find it easy to talk about how I'm feeling and things...I think me and (son) are pretty much the same where he holds things up. He blocks things up.

What prevented mothers and children from talking....

- Suffering from depression and protecting children or in denial about impact

I said to (son) look Mummy's got to get away from (abuser) and mummy's got to be strong. And he said 'what like that or like this' (pointed to arms and head). He knew it was my head. Now for 10 year old to say that I've got to sort my head out...

I can't remember what (son) used to actually ask me but whatever I'd say no. Daddy isn't being horrible. If he'd say to me why is daddy being horrible or nasty or why is daddy shouting and I'd try and turn it around so that it wasn't anything he could actually think about...

What prevented mothers and children from talking....

- Raised bad memories

It just brings back too much memory. Maybe other people do like talking to their mum and do like seeing what their bad memories were but I'm not a person who likes talking about my bad memories.

What prevented mothers and children from talking....

- Protecting mum

I was a young age, at first I was always talking about it but then because my mum was like 'oh don't say anything, don't say anything' I think I got used to like not talking about it. I just blanked it out as if it weren't happening, so didn't really talk about it.

Well we didn't talk...because my mum like started crying and things.

What prevented mothers and children from talking.....

- Communication prevented by abuser

I never used to get to talk to my mum. Only when (abuser) left.... Because he was like Dumbo because he could hear everything. ..So I could never like get to talk to mum unless we were out or anything.

BUT being away from abuse facilitated communication.....

Workbooks

- Mothers and children (5-16) who have lived with domestic abuse
 - Quality time together
 - Build CYP's self-esteem
 - Learning to talk about feelings
 - Developing communication/understanding between mothers and their children
- Further guidance and tips included!

Impact of the workbooks

- Making a positive difference
 - 78% positive difference; 41% major difference
- Fun & enjoyable way to talk
 - 43% very positive; 33% positive
- Different / changed perception of ‘talking’ with children

Issues raised for mothers and children by workbooks

- Difficult but manageable & strengthening
 - Hard to hear
 - Guilt
- Feelings about 'dad'
- Role of worker support

Also made difference to workers.....

Engaging mothers and children - 'Readiness'

- **Mothers 'readiness'**

- Talking about the past

Because I didn't admit to myself that we had a problem. I think I knew that there were...my son was getting out of control. And so I think I knew there was a problem but I wasn't letting anybody in.

And I said well yeah anything to start getting talking to the children about things. Because it is hard. Doing it this way it was a lot easier.

Engaging mothers and children - 'Readiness'...

– Crisis/timing

If you'd have asked me eight months ago I might not have done it. Because I didn't want to accept myself what was going on I didn't even want to mention his name at that point in time. I wasn't strong enough myself to deal with it.

Engaging mothers and children - 'Readiness'...

- Physical/mental health
- Attitude towards relationship
- Children's 'readiness'/reasons

I wanted to help other children. I wanted to do it because it would help me to understand my mum's feelings and my feelings. And it did help.

Engaging mothers and children - 'Readiness'...

- Wanting to change things

...he lied his way through it (CJS) and eventually they threw him out. So you know anything we can really do. .well to help you know change things...Judges aren't my favourite people. Magistrates. Is it judges or magistrates? One of them anyway.

- Not a blunt instrument

Organisational 'Readiness'

- Organisational context
 - Remit for mother-child work
 - Manager support and leadership
 - Workers' skills and commitment to building relationship

Changes over time

- Survival and resilience
- Addressing separation of services
- Beyond mother-blaming

Workbooks

- Available from:

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