

NUI Galway's School of Political Science & Sociology awarded an EU Commission/DAPHNE research grant.

A multi-agency 5 nation research initiative entitled the Responding to Child to Parent Violence (RCPV) has been awarded European funding and the Irish aspect of this project is based at NUI Galway. The project aims to examine how a range of organisations in different countries across Europe are responding to Child to Parent Violence (CPV). CPV is defined as “any act of a child that is intended to cause physical psychological financial damage to gain power and control over a parent and/or carer” (Cottrell, 2001) and is an emerging social problem. The RCPV project has been designed to address practice intervention for the problem of child to parent violence. This project also aims to provide a toolkit for practitioners and to increase public awareness about the nature and extent of Child to Parent Violence. The project additionally involves assessing two existing intervention models (Break4Change and Nonviolent Resistance) from a gendered perspective across 5 European countries (Bulgaria, Ireland, Spain, Sweden and the UK). Break 4Change is a specialist intervention programme for CPV with parallel groups for parents and young people; Nonviolent Resistance (NVR) is an approach for practitioners and parents who are trying to respond to CPV (Omer 2004).

Declan Coogan, lecturer in social work in the School of Political Science & Sociology at NUI Galway is the Project Leader for the contribution from Ireland to this trans-national research project. Waterside House COPE Galway, the Domestic Violence Refuge and Centre in Galway also joins the project as a local community partner. The transnational teams and agencies were assembled by Dr Paula Wilcox at the University of Brighton to reflect a wide range of expertise on intervening with CPV as well as geographical and cultural diversity across Europe.

Declan Coogan said: “Child to Parent Violence is a hidden but growing social problem in Ireland which needs to be directly addressed in policy and practice. Practitioners working with families in Ireland are increasingly hearing parents describing their experiences of child to parent violence. Social workers, Psychologists, Psychotherapists, Juvenile Justice Practitioners and others working with children and families across a range of services have pointed to the need for greater awareness and for skills development when faced with Child to Parent Violence. The Responding to Child to Parent Violence Project is a direct response to these needs”. Dr Paula Wilcox said: “In the UK this social problem is rarely articulated in government policy, remaining a taboo subject that parents and carers find difficult to disclose. We know that more work on this issue has been conducted in Spain and as a result seen an increase in reports by parents and carers.”

Declan Coogan added “Child to Parent Violence is a very complex issue and the Responding to Child to Parent Violence project aims to increase our understanding of this problem as well as providing effective ways of intervening. Although existing literature identifies that it is mainly mothers who experience it and mainly adolescent boys who use child to parent violence (CPV), fathers can also experience CPV and girls can also use CPV”. Dr. Wilcox stated “There can also be links to/with domestic violence, but these areas are under researched and due to the lack of evidence-based guidance, practitioners are often unsure how to respond to this issue. As a result many young people who use CPV are not identified until they come into contact with the criminal justice system entailing severe social costs for families and high financial costs for public services and governments.”

Along with the National University of Ireland Galway and COPE Galway, the multi-agency research group includes the University of Brighton, Brighton and Hove City Council, Instituto de Investigacion Polibienestar – Universitat de Valencia (UVEG) in Spain, the National Association

XXI Century Rhodopa Mountain Initiative in Bulgaria and Amal Municipality in Sweden. Wendy Heuston from Waterside House, COPE Galway Domestic Violence service said “child to parent violence can emerge in the context of domestic violence where the child has witnessed abuse or experienced abuse themselves. Without early intervention, children’s acting out behaviour, which can initially be a response to the distress and trauma they experienced, can continue to deteriorate to the point where they become abusive to their mothers. We are delighted to be a community partner in this project, which has exciting potential to support mothers struggling with these issues”.

The funding has been provided by the European Commission, Directorate-General Justice, under the Daphne III funding programme which aims to contribute to the protection of children, young people and women against all forms of violence and attain a high level of health protection, well-being and social cohesion.

Dr Wilcox, added: “We hope to build on previous learning in this area to enable a better pan-European understanding of Child to Parent Violence, and further develop innovative change models, identifying and publicising a range of good practice actions that can be used to safeguard and improve future outcomes for children and their families who are affected by Child to Parent Violence.”

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