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Training to help parents cope with abusive children

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by Ellie O'Byrne

There has been a surge in demand for training to help parents deal with their violent or abusive children.



(Photo caption) *Rita O'Reilly: Violence on the rise.*

Experts said increasing numbers of professionals are seeking advice on how to advise parents struggling to cope with their children being physically abusive or threatening to them.

A non-violent resistance programme has been developed by a team headed up by Declan Coogan, a lecturer in social work at NUI Galway, to meet the growing demand from social and community workers, and counselling practitioners for training to combat child-to-parent violence.

Mr Coogan will present his training programme, 'Tackling child-to-parent violence: The non-violent resistance programme', in Cork City Hall today. Organised by the Cork Family Support Network at Cork City Partnership, the seminar is for practitioners working with families experiencing child-to-parent violence rather than for parents themselves.

"There's a significant increase in the demand for training," Mr Coogan said.

"More and more practitioners are reporting an increase in instances of child to parent violence and they require training to deal with what is a very difficult family struggle."

Child-to-parent violence is when children and teenagers use violence, abuse, and threatening behaviour to gain a position of power in their family.

Parents have difficulties reporting their children to authorities, making it hard to measure how widespread such violence is, Mr Coogan said.

"Parents will often live with it for a very long time," Mr Coogan said.

"The overwhelming barrier is shame or embarrassment, with parents feeling that it's their fault."

"We need to raise awareness of the problem and we need practitioners to be alert to evidence of child to parent violence in the families they are working with."

Rita O'Reilly, chief executive of Parentline, a national helpline for parents, said reporting of child-to-parent violence is on the rise.

"We began to see an increase in child-to-parent violence about three or four years ago," Ms Reilly said, adding that reports of such violence have made up 32% of the top 10 calls to its helpline so far this year.

Parentline handles more than 3,000 calls each year, and last year one in seven of its calls were about child-to-parent violence.

Parentline volunteers have received training in the non-violent resistance programme.

According to Parentline's records, 93% of children using violence to control their parents are male, 64% are aged 13, and 86% of the callers are female.

"The most important commitment from the parent is not to escalate the situation by responding with violence," Ms Reilly said.