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Violence against grandparents: Towards a life course approach

By Amanda Holt

It is curious that while the term ‘granny’ has often been used as a catchy synonym for ‘older people’ in research that investigates elder abuse¹, very little research has ever actually explored the specific dynamic of violence against grandparents. To address this gap, this chapter explores the phenomenon of violence against grandparents, and argues that a life course approach is necessary to enable a full understanding not only of this particular form of violence, but all forms of interpersonal violence. The chapter begins with an overview of existing research on the problem, before discussing how it is marginalised from both ‘elder abuse’ and ‘domestic abuse’ policy discourse. Introducing the life course approach, this chapter then explains why it is essential to conceptualise violence against grandparents within a critical developmental framework which takes account of intersecting dimensions of power. While highlighting the important role of gender and age, such an approach must also include an examination of other important dimensions such as ‘race’ and ethnicity, social class and culture as well as personal biography, generational position and historical change. This chapter then explores two specific contexts that are important in understanding the experience, management and response to violence against grandparents: i) when the grandchild is 17 years or younger, and ii) when the relationship involves kinship care. The chapter concludes by returning to the issue of gender and examines the extent to which violence against grandparents can be understood as a form of gender-based violence while keeping hold of the other important contextual elements that shape its experience and management.

Violence against grandparents: Identifying the problem

Elder abuse is a global social problem and the past fifty years have seen researchers, policymakers and practitioners focus on this issue. In the UK, the most recent comprehensive survey of reported experiences of abuse or neglect in the past 12 months (of adults aged 66 years or over) identified a prevalence rate of 2.6 percent (Biggs *et al.*, 2009). This study defined ‘elder abuse’ as mistreatment, encompassing neglect and/or abusive behaviour by someone from whom there is an *expectation of trust* (that is, family members, close friends and care workers). The impacts of elder abuse are well-documented: poor physical health (including bodily pain and digestive problems), poor mental health (including depression, anxiety and psychological distress) and premature mortality (Yunus *et al.*, 2017).

However, research into elder abuse rarely explores specific relationship dyads. For example, while the Biggs *et al* (2009) study found that a family member perpetrated the abuse in 49 percent of cases, it did not explore *which* family members were involved. Similarly, victim

¹ See, for example, *Granny-battering* (Burston, 1975); *Granny Abuse* (Eastman, 1988); *Saving Granny from the Wolf: Elder Abuse and Neglect* (Moskowitz, 1998).

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surveys that focus on family violence do not explore specific relationship dyads. For example, the annual *Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)* does not identify the relationship dyad between perpetrator and victim in its Intimate Violence module, only distinguishing 'violence between intimate partners (or ex-partners)' and 'other family members'. Furthermore, like elder abuse surveys, the CSEW applies age-related cut-off points in its victim sample which excludes the oldest members of the population (until April 2017 the cut-off point was 59 years; it is currently 74 years – see Chapter 1 for a discussion).

Despite these methodological limitations, there is emerging evidence that one particular relationship dyad is frequently implicated in the perpetration of family violence: grandchildren's use of violence against grandparents. A survey from the United States found that nine percent of perpetrators in reported cases of elder abuse were grandchildren, with *financial abuse, physical abuse, psychological/emotional abuse* and *neglect* all featuring highly amongst this group of perpetrators (Administration of Aging, 1998). A later field experiment reported that 16 percent of cases of elder abuse reported to the New York police involved abuse perpetrated by grandchildren (Davis and Medina-Ariza, 2001). Studies from the United States have also documented violence against 'custodial grandparents', that is, resident grandparents who are performing a care-giving role to their grandchildren. This has been documented qualitatively through interviews and focus groups (e.g. Brownell *et al.*, 2003; Bullock and Thomas, 2007) and quantitatively through analysing domestic violence charges in juvenile justice data (e.g. Day and Bazemore, 2011). It is also documented in the emerging literature on child-to-parent violence (CPV), which has sometimes included grandparents as well as parents in its research samples (e.g. Williams *et al.*, 2017; Armstrong *et al.*, 2018). In the UK, there is very little research on this. An analysis of 123 elder abuse case management records produced by police, health and adult social care practitioners in Wales over a 10-month period found that grandchildren were perpetrators of elder abuse in 17 percent of cases (Clarke *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, violence against grandparents has been identified as a growing problem in discussions about family violence, from both researchers (e.g. Gadd, 2012) and practitioners who work with families in conflict (e.g. McGeeney *et al.*, 2016). Grandparents also constitute a small but significant number of victims in domestic homicides (Bows, 2018).

Responding to violence against grandparents: The policy context

There are some fundamental ambiguities in terms of the policy context in relation to violence against grandparents. In large part this is because of how responsibilities for responding to family violence are statutorily organised. For example, violence against grandparents is implicitly included in the cross-Government definition of domestic abuse, defined as '...any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members...' (my emphasis) (Home Office, 2013). Incidents that are included within this definition allows a range of strategies and resources to be implemented, such as the use of DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment) risk assessments, the organisation of Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs), the allocation of Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) and the application of civil

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injunctions such as Restraining Orders. However, many of these tools were developed on an understanding of domestic abuse as *intimate partner violence* between adults, and are not always appropriate in cases of violence between family members². Violence against grandparents is further marginalised by its absence from the UK Government's current overarching framework used to outline its plan for reducing domestic abuse, the *Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2016-2020* (Home Office, 2016). Similar problems also apply to cases of child-to-parent violence, but this form of family violence has at least achieved Government recognition through the UK Home Office (2015) document *Information Guide: Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse*. Despite there being some similarities between violence against parents and violence against grandparents in some cases³, violence against grandparents is not mentioned in the document. Thus, the 'systematic invisibility' (Safelives, 2016: 11) of older people within a context of *domestic abuse* appears to be particularly pronounced for those experiencing more hidden forms of family abuse, such as violence against grandparents.

Of course, the UK Government has a statutory responsibility to ensure that adults receive a safeguarding response if they experience (or are at risk of) abuse or neglect. In England and Wales, the specific legal framework that relates to safeguarding adults is the *Care Act* (2014) and such protections operate through adult social care departments within local authorities. However, although this legislation recognises a requirement for local authorities to provide 'protection from abuse and neglect', the Act specifies that the local authority has a legal duty to act where there is 'reasonable cause to suspect an adult *with care and support needs* is being abused or neglected or is at risk of being abused or neglected' (my emphasis) (s. 42 of the Act). There is strict eligibility criteria relating to what those 'care and support needs' are, in terms of a physical and/or mental impairment or illness preventing two or more specific outcomes (from a list of ten) that ultimately impacts on the adult's wellbeing. For adults, including grandparents, who do not have care and support needs that fit these criteria, there is seemingly no statutory safeguarding protection.

Conceptualising violence against grandparents: Towards a life course approach

Of course, there are many shared assumptions that underpin both *elder abuse* and *domestic abuse*, not least the notion that there is an existing relationship between perpetrator and victim and, within this, an 'expectation of trust'. However, each is constructed as a social problem in ways that exclude violence against grandparents. For example, *domestic abuse* is commonly understood as involving adult male violence against women and girls (which is why both the UK Home Office and the United Nations frames the strategy for its elimination in these terms). As such, *domestic abuse* is most commonly constructed as a problem within intimate partner relationships (which are normatively constructed as heterosexual) rather

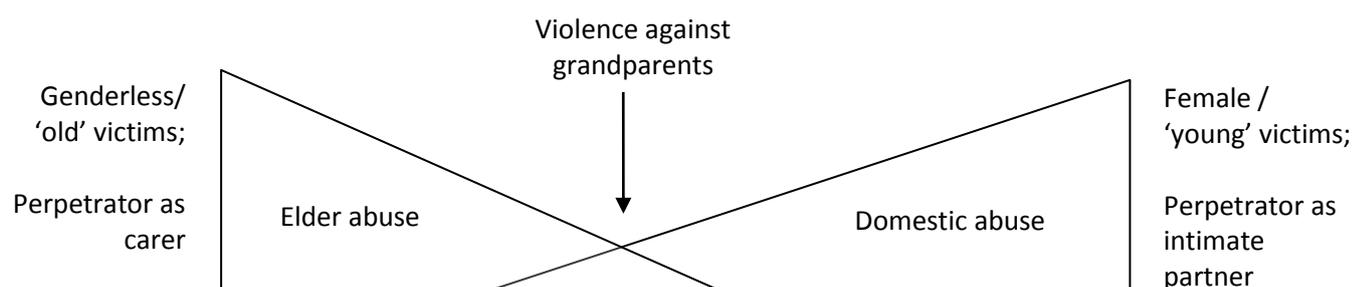
² For example, see McManus et al (2017) on the problematic application of the DASH risk assessment tool in cases of family violence, including violence towards grandparents, where many of the risk indicators are not used by police because they are felt to be irrelevant to such contexts.

³ For example, in cases that involve a child who is behaving violently towards an adult family member with whom they share the same household and who has parental responsibility towards them.

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than within broader family relationships⁴. Furthermore, while gender is at the forefront of such constructions, age is also implicitly embedded such that *domestic abuse* is constructed as a 'younger women's issue' through institutional practices such as media campaigns, service provision and academic research (SafeLives, 2016). On the other hand, the problem of *elder abuse* tends to be framed in the context of institutional care and/or in the context of a care-giving relationship, with the perpetrator in the role of caregiver. *Elder abuse* tends to get overlooked when it is against older adults who do not conform to normative constructions of 'vulnerability' or when they themselves are performing the role of caregiver. The gendered dynamics of *elder abuse* are also often marginalised, with its characteristics tending to be attributed to the advancing age and associated support needs of the older person, rather than to other dimensions of power that intersect across the life course. Such frameworks, premised on our ideas about what a 'life course' should constitute, means that the problem of violence against grandparents falls through the cracks in our broader understanding of interpersonal violence (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Falling through the cracks: Normative constructions of interpersonal violence



What is evident is that while both gender and age do shape violence against grandparents, using the lens of *either* elder abuse *or* domestic abuse to frame this problem risks missing some of its important and unique contours. We know from research evidence that the risk, the management and the impact of interpersonal victimisation change across one's life course: for example, older people may be at greater risk of financial exploitation, while religiosity (which increases with age) may serve to mediate some of its effects (see Hamby *et al* 2016 for a review). Not only that, but these risks and impacts are cumulative, with earlier risks and impacts mediating later ones. Furthermore, we know that intersecting dimensions of power (such as gender, age, 'race' and ethnicity, dis/ability and sexuality) continually shift throughout the life course, producing distinct vulnerabilities to harm, and opportunities for healing. Personal biographies, generational positions and broader

⁴ Indeed, the term 'domestic violence' (which preceded the more contemporary term 'domestic abuse') first emerged in the 1970s in recognition of men's physical aggression against women. Debate continues as to whether its more recent broadening out is appropriate for other kinds of abusive relationships (for example, see Kelly and Westmarland, 2014) including those that involve children's use of violence (for example, see Holt, 2015).

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historical changes intersect and shape both family relationships and the experiences of victimisation that can operate within them. Given this complexity, a life course approach that attends to how power operates as one ambulates through life is essential for understanding *any* kind of family violence. This is particularly the case when that violence operates towards the end of one's life and across the generations, from grandchild to grandparent.

A life course approach conceptualises family violence as a *process*, rather than as an event, and recognises the dynamic nature of family relationships and their inherent difficulties, the impact of which shifts over time and place (see Elder and Giele, 2009). This also involves a recognition that family violence can be both unilateral and reciprocal, and the direction of violence may change. Unfortunately, the dominant approach to understanding family violence thus far has been a rather static approach. This is evident in how abusive 'incidents' are counted in victim surveys (see Walby *et al.*, 2016) and in the way that research is constrained by disciplinary boundaries that require age-based parameters to be applied to victims (as in the case of elder abuse research, dominated by gerontologists) and to perpetrators (as in the case of child-to-parent violence research, dominated by youth justice researchers) (see Holt and Shon, 2018). This produces research that is framed by assumptions about incident-related and age-related vulnerabilities, while other important contexts get overlooked. More broadly, the 'packaging up' of different forms of interpersonal violence (see Figure 2) contributes to a theoretical deficit in our wider understandings of family violence. There is an important and well-developed empirical literature on some particular relationship dyads in family violence (e.g. intimate partner violence, child abuse and neglect), and an emerging research base on others (e.g. CPV). Furthermore, we know that there are patterns and relationships between different forms of family violence (Williams, 2003). In contrast, knowledge about violence against grandparents is relatively sparse, yet it is essential for understanding the ways in which violence in families takes shape at different stages in the life course, and of the patterns across generations therein. Furthermore, adopting a life course approach may help orientate violence against grandparents from the margins in our understandings of family violence to a position that enables a contextualised and developmental examination of its significance to, and relationship with, other forms of interpersonal violence.

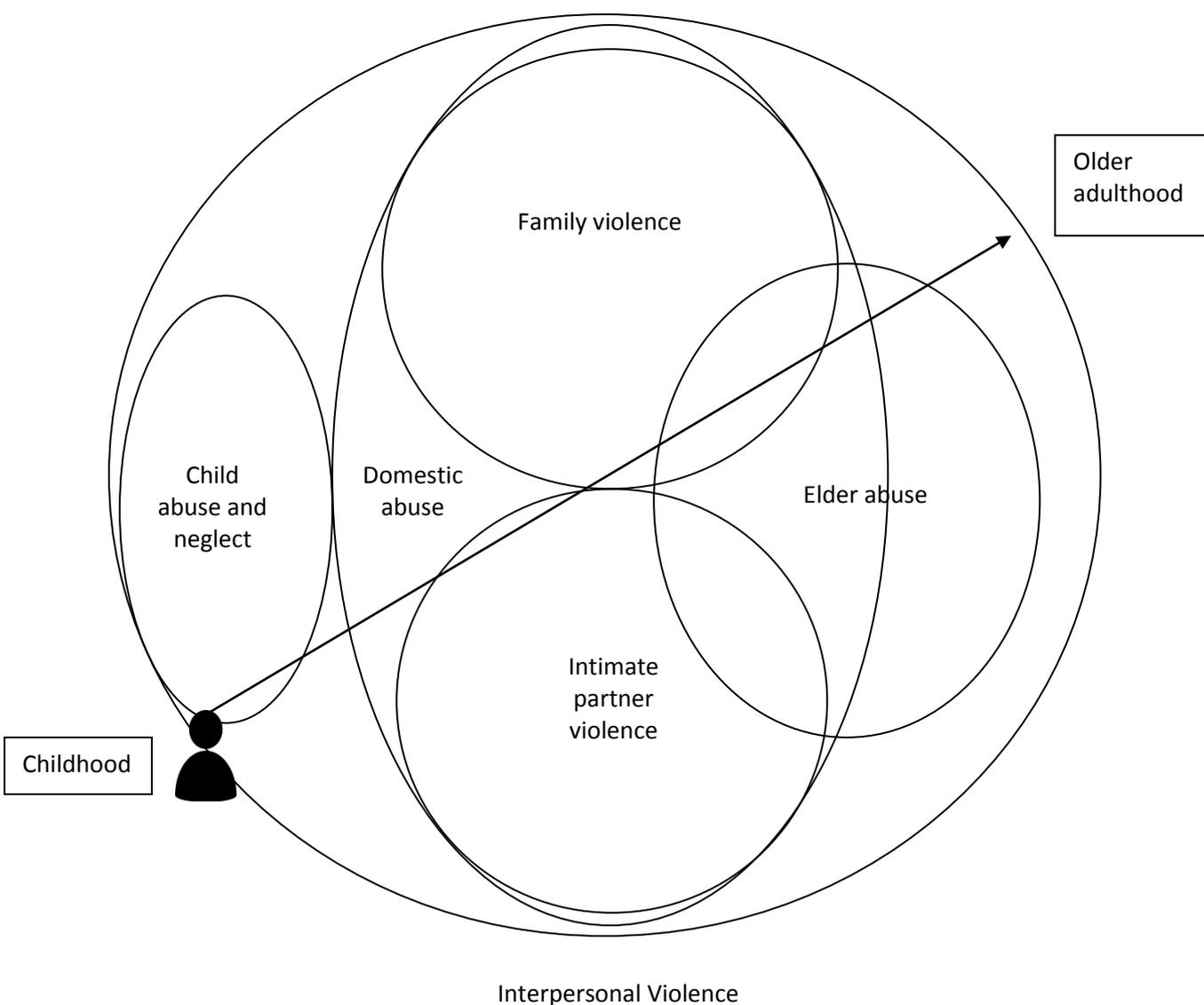
Understanding the specific nature of violence against grandparents

Understanding how normative understandings of interpersonal violence might operate across the life course is not merely an intellectual exercise – it can help us to make sense of how people's lives can be impacted by the violence. For example, normative constructions of both *elder abuse* and *domestic abuse* mean that healthy, active and relatively young grandparents who are experiencing abuse from their grandchildren are likely to be overlooked by practitioners, particularly if it is the grandparent performing the care-giving role (rather than being *the cared for*). This is compounded by research practices and policy frameworks that are configured in ways that hide the problem. In addition, there are other barriers to its recognition. In terms of disclosure, the assumption of vulnerability means that grandparents may be fearful about what will be assumed about their own capabilities if they

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disclose, and of the potential consequences of such assumptions (such as being institutionalised, or having contact with their grandchildren limited). Gender, age, 'race', dis/ability and a host of other dimensions of power all intersect to shape such fears, and this includes a grandparent's own personal history of previous experiences of help-seeking, particularly within a domestic abuse context. Biographical histories will also shape whether grandparents even recognise their grandchild's behaviour as abusive, as will the attitudes, perceptions and experiences of other family members (including the child's own parent) who may contribute to enabling and/or resisting the abuse.

Figure 2: The 'packaging up' of interpersonal violence through the life course



Two specific research findings related to grandparents' conceptualisations of violence from their grandchildren illustrates how these intersecting dimensions of power might operate

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across the life course. First, in their interviews with 26 racially-diverse custodial grandfathers in rural North Carolina, US, Bullock and Thomas (2007) found a consensus in grandfathers' reports of 'persistent belittling, complete disregard, ridicule or put-down situations that created anxiety' (p. 140). However, all of the grandfathers accepted this behaviour as 'part of their care-giving experience' (p. 141) and often self-medicated with alcohol to cope with it rather than seek any kind of formal or informal support. Furthermore, experiences of psychological abuse were particularly profound amongst Latino and Black grandfathers, as was an acceptance of what, in other culturally-bound definitions, might be described as financial exploitation (Bullock and Thomas, 2007). While these are important findings, a life course approach can offer further insights into our understanding of family violence. For example, Bullock and Thomas (2007) cite a conversation with a 78 year-old Black custodial grandfather, who said:

Children of today don't know how to talk to adults. They are disrespectful and I don't know how to get them to treat me the way I think an old man ought to be treated. When I ask them to do something and they don't do it, it's the worst thing they do to me . . . not listening to what I tell them to do. Yes, I don't feel good about how they treat me. (from Bullock and Thomas, 2007: 141)

Bullock and Thomas did not analyse their data from a life course perspective, but it telling how the grandfather very explicitly positions himself *within his own life course* ('an old man') and uses it as an interpretive resource. The grandfather's advancing age enables him to credibly reflect on broader generational changes, which he interprets as central in explaining his grandchild's behaviour towards him. The way in which experience is schematised in relation to biography, generation and social change serves to normalise his grandchild's behaviour and re-position it as a problem of his own incapacity ('I don't know how...'). It also raises further questions in terms of past experiences of childhood, of child-rearing, and of victimisation. Such insights may go some way to explaining the acceptance of psychological abuse that Bullock and Thomas identified in some of their participants.

A second study by Williams *et al* (2017) spoke to one grandmother who was experiencing abusive behaviour from her grandson. She explained:

I would like a good role model for him. Ya know to take him fishing or do whatever males do and talk male talk. He has never had that! He has all women in his life. He needs a man. (from Williams *et al.*, 2017: 603)

Williams *et al* (2017) also did not analyse their data from a life course perspective. Yet here, the grandmother's understanding of her grandson's behaviour is entirely framed in terms of how she understands the development of *his* life course. The grandmother identifies a specific and critical absence from her grandson's life as the explanation (and possible remedy) for his aggressive behaviour. Of course, her construction of the archetypal life course draws on rather 'traditional' gendered ideals of what is necessary for male development (i.e. a paternal figure) and this acts as a standard for comparison to her grandson's own life course, which is perceived as deficient. Thus, a life course approach may offer insights into the ways that these ideals might be transmitted and, potentially, transformed – personally, institutionally and structurally – through the generations.

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Contexts for violence against grandparents: Child-aged perpetrators and kinship care

One of the complexities of understanding violence against grandparents is in recognising the wide range of contexts in which it takes place. The next section will focus on two significant contexts that have specific implications for the experience of the abuse, its management and risk, and the potential support available. These two contexts are related but distinct: (i) the case of grandchildren aged 17 years or younger (ii) the case of grandparents as kinship carers. Each of these contexts will be discussed in turn.

i) The case of grandchildren aged 17 years or younger

In cases where the grandchild is legally a child (i.e. aged 17 years or younger), there are a number of implications that need consideration. First, it is likely that there is greater reluctance to disclose the violence if it is coming from a child. Particularly during the teenage years, a period when 'challenging behaviour' is normalised, it may be difficult to identify what is and what is not acceptable behaviour, and/or to recognise the point at which challenging behaviour becomes abusive. Attributions of responsibility are more ambiguous for children and there is understandably a reluctance to alert police or statutory services to a situation that, historically, was always 'dealt with in private' (an assumption that may have particular currency within specific generations). Second, it is important to recognise that the UK Government definition of domestic abuse only applies to cases where both perpetrator and victim are aged 16 years or over, thus excluding the option of implementing many of the possible strategies and resources that are available in cases which involve adult grandchildren perpetrating violence. Some support services may tweak their processes to make it more 'child-friendly' (for example, some Youth Offending Services operate a 'Junior MARAC') but many of the tools would simply not be appropriate for use in cases that involve children⁵. Instead, grandparents experiencing violence from children may be invited to participate in a child-to-parent violence (CPV) support programme. A number of these have emerged across England and Wales over the past decade and they are usually voluntarily-attended and involve a series of psycho-educational intervention sessions to provide support to parents and offer strategies and techniques to help reduce the violence. However, these programmes often use material that is based on parent-child contexts. For example, many programmes use exercises that ask parents to reflect on their child's (and on their own) early upbringing to help make sense of the violence, including their role in the development of the parent-child 'attachment bond' (see Holt, 2015). Such exercises may feel exclusionary to grandparents. There is also likely to be a different emotional and conceptual landscape for grandparents managing a child's abusive behaviour, not least in terms of their own complicated feelings towards the child's parents. This may be difficult for practitioners to attend to in a support group largely populated by parents. Difficulties have

⁵ For example, see Hunter and Piper's (2012) discussion on the use of injunctions in cases where the perpetrator is legally a child, which the authors argue cannot be used because the needs of the child, and the potential harm produce by the injunction, must take priority in judicial considerations.

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also been documented in grandparents' feelings of resentment about being told 'how to bring up children' when they have already raised their own (Brownell *et al.*, 2003). Finally, generational norms and values may also shape grandparents' experiences of such programmes. For example, Hayslip and Kaminski (2005) found that, compared with parents, custodial grandparents were less likely to be aware of, and responsive to, children's psycho-emotional needs, and be more likely to endorse values such as obedience in children. Thus, their own understandings of what constitutes 'good child-rearing practice' may differ from those understandings presented by the practitioners, potentially exacerbating already-existing feelings of isolation. Broader feelings of alienation from the contemporary social environment in which grandchildren live has also been documented in research with custodial grandparents (Brownell *et al.*, 2003) and this may also shape experiences of any parent support programme (and indeed, may alienate them from their grandchild's life more generally).

ii) The case of grandparents as kinship carers

In some cases, grandparents may be, or have been, involved in a kinship arrangement with their grandchild(ren). Kinship care refers to cases where children live with a family member and it is estimated that one in 74 children in England are living in kinship care. In an increasing majority of cases (51%), it is with the child's grandparent(s) (Wijedasa, 2015). There are many ways in which this kinship care could be arranged, including informal private arrangements, foster care, a Child Arrangements Order, Special Guardianship Order or an Adoption Order. Each of these arrangements differ in terms of their degree of permanence, legal authority and parental responsibility awarded.

There are many reasons why a child may come to live with their grandparent under such arrangements. Commonly-cited reasons include parental substance misuse problems, mental health problems, parental incarceration, parental abuse, neglect or abandonment of the child, intimate partner violence, parental illness or death, and/or problems with the parents' housing (Farmer *et al.*, 2013). While research suggests that kinship care produces better outcomes for children than for those who are placed outside of their extended family, there are still likely to be many structural challenges: children living in kinship care are twice as likely to have a long-term health problem or disability and there is a high prevalence of kinship care households living in poverty (Wijedasa, 2015). The challenges of caring for a grandchild may not have been anticipated, and some grandparents may feel conflicted about the obligation of full-time care and the restrictions it imposes on their lives (Shakya *et al.*, 2012). Further complications can arise from difficult relationships with the child's birth parents, which may be exacerbated by ongoing conflict over contact. For example, in their study of kinship placements in Australia, Breman (2014) found that the most common stressor for carers was conflict with the child's birth parent, reported in 78 percent of cases. Sometimes this conflict can develop into violence from the child's parent towards the grandparent carer, manifesting in physical, psychological and verbal abuse (Breman and MacRae, 2017).

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In such contexts, experiences of abusive or violent behaviour perpetrated by the grandchild towards the grandparent(s) needs to be understood in relation to two significant factors: the disruptive family context that gave rise to the placement, and the extent of the parental responsibility awarded to the grandparent(s). In the first instance, grandparents may be embarrassed or ashamed about the reasons why the kinship care is in place. Whatever the circumstances, the situation constitutes a non-normative and stigmatised family formation, and the assumed failure of the grandchild's parent(s), particularly if through substance misuse, mental health problems or incarceration, may be experienced by the grandparents (and others) as due to their own parenting failure. Furthermore, grandparents may be sympathetic towards the child if the abusive behaviour takes place after the child has had contact with their parent(s), an issue which has been documented (Brownell *et al.*, 2003). In the second instance, the imposition of parental responsibility, while making legal demands on carers (such as legal responsibility for the crimes of their kin if the child is below the age of 18), may at least provide grandparents with clear legal rights. However, ambiguity may continue in terms of role identity ("am I a mother or a grandmother?"). Grandparents may also feel 'out of sync' with both their peers' life trajectories and with other parents' life trajectories (such as those they meet at the school gate), potentially increasing feelings of isolation. In cases where more informal arrangements are in place, or where parental responsibility is shared with the child's parents (as in the case of Special Guardianship Orders), the ambiguity over rights and responsibilities may present an additional source of conflict.

Gender and violence against grandparents

As this chapter has emphasised, it is not helpful to frame violence against grandparents within a single dimension of power such as gender or age. That is not to suggest that violence against grandparents does not represent a form of gender-based violence: the evidence suggests that it does. For example, from Clarke *et al's* (2016) analysis of cases of elder abuse in Wales (see earlier), of those 21 grandchildren (17 percent) identified as the perpetrator, 20 of them (i.e. 95%) were grandsons. The gender distribution in other relationship dyads was much less skewed, with Clarke *et al* (2016) finding an overall perpetrator male-to-female ratio of 71:29 across their sample. As Clarke *et al* noted, the perpetrator ratio identified for grandchildren=> grandparent abuse instead reflects the highly gendered ratio of domestic abuse perpetrator populations more generally. We also know that, despite the way it is 'packaged up' (both conceptually and in policy discourse), family violence is inter-connected. While there is a research deficit on the links between violence against grandparents and other forms of family violence, there is a significant body of evidence that has found links between child abuse, intimate partner violence and CPV, and also links between past family violence and elder abuse (see Anderson 2010 for a review). We know that each of these forms of family violence is gendered, as is the structure and organisation of family life more generally. And while it is the case that the structure and organisation of family life is continually shifting and re-configuring through the generations, there are nevertheless consistent patterns in how (grand)parenting is understood, organised and practised. This will inevitably shape a grandparent's experience of, and response to, a grandchild's behaviour that feels targeted and harmful.

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But gender does not operate in isolation, and a grandmother's experience of violence from her grandchild will also be shaped by her *age* (there is at least a 60-year age spectrum covering the role identity known as 'grandparent'); her *health, wellbeing and dis/ability* (which is related to age, but is over-assumed in older people and is under-assumed in younger people); her *generational values* (which are related to age, but are also related to social class, 'race' and ethnicity, and cultural background); and her *past experiences of privilege and discrimination* (including violence). Furthermore, violence is a *transaction* that is not only shaped by the social location of the grandchild (which is likely to be even more heterogeneous than the social location of their grandparent) but also by the dynamic between grandparent and grandchild: their history, their relationship, and their circumstances. This is why a critical life course approach, that attends to gender and age within a broader intersectional analysis, is the most appropriate way of conceptualising and researching all forms of family violence. It is important to distinguish violence against grandparents from both *domestic abuse* and from *elder abuse* because otherwise, as has been shown in this chapter, the problem is marginalised (as it is in academic discourse) or rendered invisible (as it is in policy discourse). Instead we should focus on the personal, structural and institutional dimensions of family violence *as they are experienced through life* so we can identify personal, institutional and structural remedies that are tailored to both where people are *now* and where *they want to be*. This also requires an examination of how the social locations of others, including bystanders, other family members and practitioners, make attributions about the violence and engage in practices that serve to enable and/or resist it.

Summary

While there is very little research in this area, this chapter argues for the need to take the problem of violence against grandparents seriously, both in terms of academic research and in terms of policymaking and intervention work. As a form of family violence, the problem has been marginalised from both 'domestic abuse' and 'elder abuse' discourses. This chapter argues that a critical life course approach that takes account of gender, age and a whole host of other intersecting dimensions of power, is vital to enable understanding not only of violence against grandparents specifically, but of interpersonal violence more generally. There are specific contours to violence against grandparents, and particular contexts in which it occurs, that mean that it should not be considered as an appendage to existing frameworks of understanding, whether that is domestic abuse, elder abuse, or even child-to-parent violence. While recognising that it is a form of gender-based violence that causes serious personal and social harms, we must also recognise its importance to our broader understanding of interpersonal violence and the role that personal biography, generational position and historical change has on all forms of such violence.

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