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## Defining child to parent abuse consultation response

### About Welsh Women's Aid

Welsh Women's Aid is the umbrella organisation in Wales that supports and provides national representation for independent third sector violence against women, domestic abuse, and sexual violence (VAWDASV) specialist services in Wales. Our membership comprises of 20 specialist support services. These services deliver lifesaving and life-changing support and preventative work in response to violence against women, including domestic abuse and sexual violence against children and young people, men and boys, trans and non-binary people, as part of a network of UK provision. As an umbrella organisation, our primary purpose is to prevent domestic abuse, sexual violence, and all forms of violence against women and ensure high quality services for survivors that are needs-led, gender responsive and holistic. We collaborate nationally to integrate and improve community responses and practice in Wales. We also award the Wales National Quality Service Standards (NQSS), a national accreditation framework for domestic abuse specialist services in Wales (supported by the Welsh Government) as part of a UK suite of integrated accreditation systems and frameworks. (More information on the NQSS can be found [here](#)).

### Part 2: Headline Terminology

#### **Should the definition describe Group 1 as:**

Children

**Children and adolescents**

Something else

#### **Please explain your reasons:**

Welsh Women's Aid will be using the term 'CAPVA' which stands for child and adolescent to parent violence and abuse throughout this response, whereas the Home Office have stated they will use 'CPA', which stands for child to parent abuse, until terminology has been agreed.

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We believe that the definition must include both children and adolescents to ensure that it reflects the wide age range of young people involved. This is particularly important to allow there to be scope for further understanding of the importance of age, child development, and the specific and distinct needs of each group.

Under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the definition<sup>1</sup> includes those who are aged 16 or over. The Home Office consultation states that in order to not duplicate the definition of domestic abuse, the CPA definition will apply to those under 16. We do not believe that this allows for the exploration of the complexities of CAPVA or ensures that adolescents will receive the specialist support they require. Many specialist agencies are funded to support children and young people until the age of 18.

We strongly believe that the definition for CAPVA must include both children and adolescents as there are important differences that must be acknowledged between the power dynamics between parents/adults and children and that the solution to the issue should not be criminalising; and the recognition that not all abusive behaviours are as entrenched as with adults<sup>2</sup>.

### **Should the definition describe Group 2 as:**

**Parents**

Parents and caregivers

Something else

### **Please explain your reasons:**

Welsh Women's Aid believe that Group 2 should be defined as parents. When we use the term 'parents' we are inclusive of all adults with a caregiving role. This is not limited to biological parents, and includes stepparents, adoptive and foster parents and other family members who are providing care, such as

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<sup>1</sup> Domestic Abuse Act 2021, Part 1, 1(2).

<sup>2</sup> <https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CAPVA-Rapid-Literature-Review-Exec-Summary-November-2021-Baker-and-Bonnick.pdf>, page 3.





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grandparents, uncles, and aunts. CAPVA can involve families of all backgrounds, ethnicities, and cultures<sup>3</sup> and therefore we believe it is important to recognise all care givers under the term 'parent'. As highlighted in a report commissioned by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office, we believe it is important for the UK Government to be proactive in ensuring that both policy and practise anticipate the potential for CAPVA to develop in any scenario, whilst also recognising those families who are at risk, such as adoptive, foster and kinship families, those experiencing domestic abuse, and those who have neurodivergent children or adolescents<sup>4</sup>.

**Should the definition reference:**

Abuse

**Violence and abuse**

Something else

**Please explain your reasons:**

We believe that the definition must include both violence and abuse to ensure it covers the wide range of behaviours that can be involved. It is important that both non-physical and physical forms of abuse and violence are included to ensure behaviours such as causing psychological, emotional, and financial harm are included.

**Do you have any further comments you wish to share on the headline terminology?**

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/comprehensive\\_needs\\_assessment\\_of\\_child-adolescent\\_to\\_parent\\_violence\\_and\\_abuse\\_in\\_london.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/comprehensive_needs_assessment_of_child-adolescent_to_parent_violence_and_abuse_in_london.pdf), page 30.

<sup>4</sup> <https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CAPVA-Rapid-Literature-Review-Exec-Summary-November-2021-Baker-and-Bonnick.pdf>, page 18.

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There is currently no universally agreed definition for CAPVA and this means there is not one uniformed understanding of what CAPVA is, what comes under CAPVA, or what support is available. Despite receiving increased media and academic attention over the past decade, this area remains underacknowledged and unresearched – therefore creating a postcode lottery of specialist support provision. Case studies from the Live Fear Free Helpline, delivered by Welsh Women's Aid, highlight that there has been an increase in callers experiencing CAPVA, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Welsh Women's Aid membership data between April-June 2023, reflects that in the community, 4% of all survivors who reported abuse types experienced CAPVA<sup>5</sup>. However, this is just the tip of the iceberg as CAPVA remains hidden and under-reported due to the lack of awareness, fear of the consequences of disclosing, and the shame and stigma attached to it<sup>6</sup>.

We welcome the commitment under the Home Office's Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan<sup>7</sup> to ensure that there is an agreed definition of this type of behaviour. We strongly believe that an agreed definition is vital in ensuring awareness is raised, earlier intervention, and adequate specialist support is available for children and adolescents displaying this behaviour. A uniform definition will allow for agencies to have a deeper understanding of their role and responsibilities within CAPVA. Having a universal definition will then, in theory, aid to improve data collection to create a wider picture of the prevalence of CAPVA within the UK. However, it is important that the UK Government continue to ensure that there is a whole-system approach to CAPVA, to ensure specialist support provision is available, and that it is trauma-informed, strengths-based, and needs-led. In order to create long-lasting change, it is essential that the formalisation of a definition is not in silo, it must be supported with in-depth guidance, training, and evaluation.

### Part 3: Description

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<sup>5</sup> Welsh Women's Aid (2023). Quarter 1 Membership Data. (Unpublished). Accessed 02/01/2024.

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/comprehensive\\_needs\\_assessment\\_of\\_child-adolescent\\_to\\_parent\\_violence\\_and\\_abuse\\_in\\_london.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/comprehensive_needs_assessment_of_child-adolescent_to_parent_violence_and_abuse_in_london.pdf), page 5.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-domestic-abuse-plan/tackling-domestic-abuse-plan-command-paper-639-accessible-version>.

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**Do you think the definition of CPA should include the stipulation for a 'pattern of behaviour' or align with the statutory definition of domestic abuse?**

**The description should include the stipulation for a 'pattern of behaviour'**

The description should align with the Domestic Abuse Act and include both single incidents and course of conduct

The description should not specify either but accompanying guidance should draw out the nuances

**Please explain your reasons:**

We strongly believe that the description should include a 'pattern of behaviour'. We believe it's crucial to distinguish between patterns of behaviour and one-off incidents, such as tantrums when a young child is learning what is good or bad behaviour, which is part of a child's development<sup>8</sup>. Whilst not minimising these incidents, such incidents are unlikely to form part of a wider pattern of power and control, as defined by Holts's 2016 definition of child to parent abuse<sup>9</sup>.

We believe that there must be ongoing cause of concern, which would not be present if the incident was a one off, and therefore a need for ongoing specialist support to support both the child or adolescent and their family.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/cope-with-tantrums/>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2022/08/Academic-Insights-Child-to-Parent-Abuse-Dr-Amanda-Holt.pdf>, page 4.





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**Do you think this definition should include parents adapting their behaviour as a marker of abusive behaviour?**

Yes, the description should include parents or caregivers adapting their own behaviour to accommodate a child's behaviour

No, the description should not include parents or caregivers adapting their own behaviour to accommodate a child's behaviour

**The description should not explicitly refer to this issue but it should be discussed in the accompanying guidance**

**Please explain your reasons:**

We believe that the description should not explicitly refer to this issue and that it should be fully explored in the accompanying guidance. Whilst we recognise that parents will adapt their own behaviour to accommodate a child's behaviour, such as changing their routine and lifestyle<sup>10</sup>, we do not want those parents who have not adapted their behaviour to be excluded from the description. Not adapting their behaviour could be for many reasons, for example, the behaviour may have been only recently identified as a 'pattern of behaviour' and if adaption of behaviour is part of the description, it may make early intervention harder. We believe that just because a parent is not at the stage of adapting their behaviour, it does not make the behaviour any less serious.

**Are there other categories specific to this type of abuse which should be included in the definition?**

Yes

<sup>10</sup> <https://irp.cdn-website.com/fa6ebd65/files/uploaded/Child+to+Parent+Abuse+Parent+Survey.pdf>, page 6.





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**No**

If Yes, please specify

Not applicable

**Do you feel that any of the above categories (physical or sexual, threatening, controlling or coercive, psychological or emotional, or economic) should be removed from a definition of CPA?**

Yes

**No**

If Yes, please specify:

Not applicable

**Do you have any further comments you wish to share on the description?**

Welsh Women's Aid believe that the above categories should be included in the description of CAPVA. Notwithstanding this, we strongly believe that referring to or saying a child or adolescent is a perpetrator is a potentially harmful statement. As previously mentioned in our response, we strongly believe that all children and adolescents displaying CAPVA must come under this definition, to ensure they are not criminalised and are able to receive the support they require. Labelling children and adolescents as 'perpetrators' can impact how they are viewed, they may end up entering the criminal justice system, and not receiving the correct specialist intervention that they need.

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CAPVA is complex. Many children and young people that are involved in this form of abuse are more likely to have a diagnosis of ASD, ADHD, or another form of learning disability, a mental health diagnosis, or to have experienced a form of abuse themselves, such as domestic abuse<sup>11</sup>. Further, some research also suggests that adolescent-to-parent violence is prevalent among adoptive families, particularly those who had experienced an adoption disruption<sup>12</sup>. Some children and adolescents may find it difficult to regulate their emotions and may want to control their environment, without wanting to exert power and control over their parents. What constitutes abuse is still up for debate as there is still mixed consensus regarding intentionality and choice, especially for those who are neurodiverse or for young children. It raises questions on whether those who have less developed brain function, such as young children, know what controlling or coercive behaviour is and how it can be deemed that they have done this intentionally or with choice.

Exposure to domestic abuse in the home has been frequently mentioned as a potential driver of CAPVA, with multiple parents stating that they had experienced intimate partner violence<sup>13</sup>. It can be understood that some children and adolescents' behaviour can be due to the impact of trauma and learnt behaviour.

We strongly believe that CAPVA does not fall under the current definition of domestic abuse. There have been instances where children have been responded to as though they are adult perpetrators of domestic abuse<sup>14</sup>. In these cases, the complex nature of CAPVA has not been considered or appropriate specialist support has not been provided. Children can be criminalised at a young age with convictions such as grievous bodily harm, and do not have the opportunity to change their life course due to the stigma that is attached to criminal convictions.

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<sup>11</sup> Simmons, M., McEwan, T. E., Purcell, R. & Ogloff, J. R. P. Sixty years of child-to-parent abuse research: What we know and where to go. *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 38, 31-52 (2018).

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4985723/>

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/comprehensive\\_needs\\_assessment\\_of\\_child-adolescent\\_to\\_parent\\_violence\\_and\\_abuse\\_in\\_london.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/comprehensive_needs_assessment_of_child-adolescent_to_parent_violence_and_abuse_in_london.pdf), page 27.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, page 5.

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There must be adequate long-term funding to ensure the postcode lottery of service provision does not continue. Families must be met with a non-judgmental approach to prevent them feeling shame or guilt when accessing support. Interventions must be trauma informed and consider the specific needs of each child or adolescent and their family. There must also be an onus on early intervention and prevention, with all agencies being aware of CAPVA, how to identify this behaviour and where to signpost for specialist support.

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