

Prioritising the agency and voices of children who have experienced domestic violence and abuse:
Implications for developing the intervention evidence base



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Overview

- Background
- The study
- Findings
- Implications
- Conclusion



Domestic violence and abuse (DVA)

'Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members¹ regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

DVA and children

- In the UK approximately 29.5% of children have lived with DVA during their lifetime (Radford et al., 2013)
- An extensive body of evidence demonstrates the multitude of ways that DVA can impact children (Potter & Feder, 2017)



- ❖ Largely adult informed literature where children are presented as **'inevitably damaged'** by DVA- underestimates children's capacity for agency and resilience (Callaghan et al., 2016; Katz, 2015; Mullender, 2003)
- ❖ An increasing body of research involves children directly-recognises them as **'experiencing'** DVA, rather than passively 'witnessing' or being 'exposed' to it (Callaghan & Alexander, 2015; Øverlien, 2014; Øverlien & Hydén, 2009)

Interventions

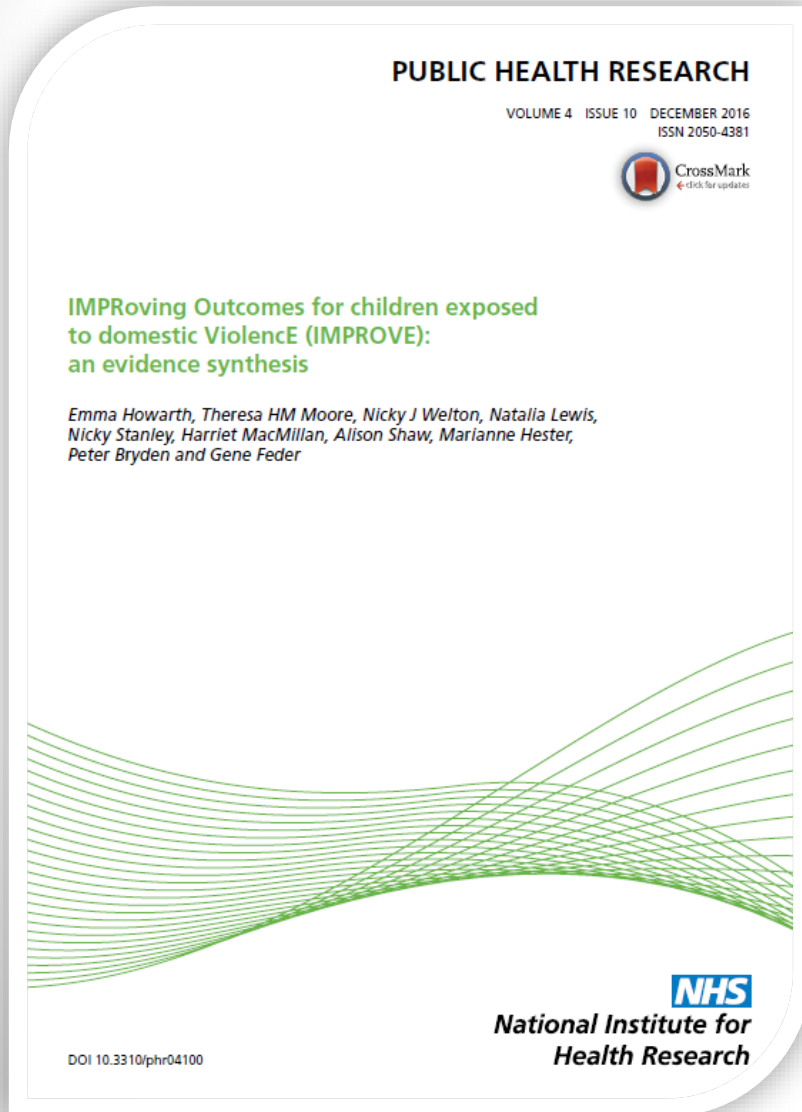
- In the UK, interventions for children who have experienced DVA are often delivered by statutory services and non-governmental organisations
- A wide range of interventions target children only and for both children and their non-abusive parent (Arai et al., 2019)



Increasing demand for rigorous evidence base to demonstrate effectiveness and fund interventions

Interventions are often delivered by organisations with limited resources for evaluation

How effective are interventions for children?



- ‘Symptom reduction’ is the main currency of intervention effectiveness (largely reported by mothers)
 - Inconsistent measures- no Core Outcome Set
 - Outcomes do not reflect what is meaningful to those using interventions
- Few qualitative studies and little widespread service evaluation
- The UK evidence base is currently underdeveloped

Children's voices in intervention research

- Traditionally the voices of children are seldom prioritised in DVA intervention evaluation research (Callaghan, 2015)
- The studies identified by Howarth et al. (2016) predominantly focused on mother's reported outcomes of interventions
- There are few qualitative studies that explore children's experiences of services (Beetham et al., 2019; Houghton, 2015; Pernebo & Almqvist, 2016)



Children's rights to protection and participation



- *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*
 - Right to participation **and** right to protection
 - Conducting **ethical** research with children to ensure their protection without preventing their right to participation
 - Re-traumatisation of children?
 - Are children's accounts 'reliable'?
 - Practical challenges of interviewing children in 'hard to reach' populations

(Akerlund & Gottzen, 2017; Evang & Øverlien, 2015; Øverlien & Holt, 2017)

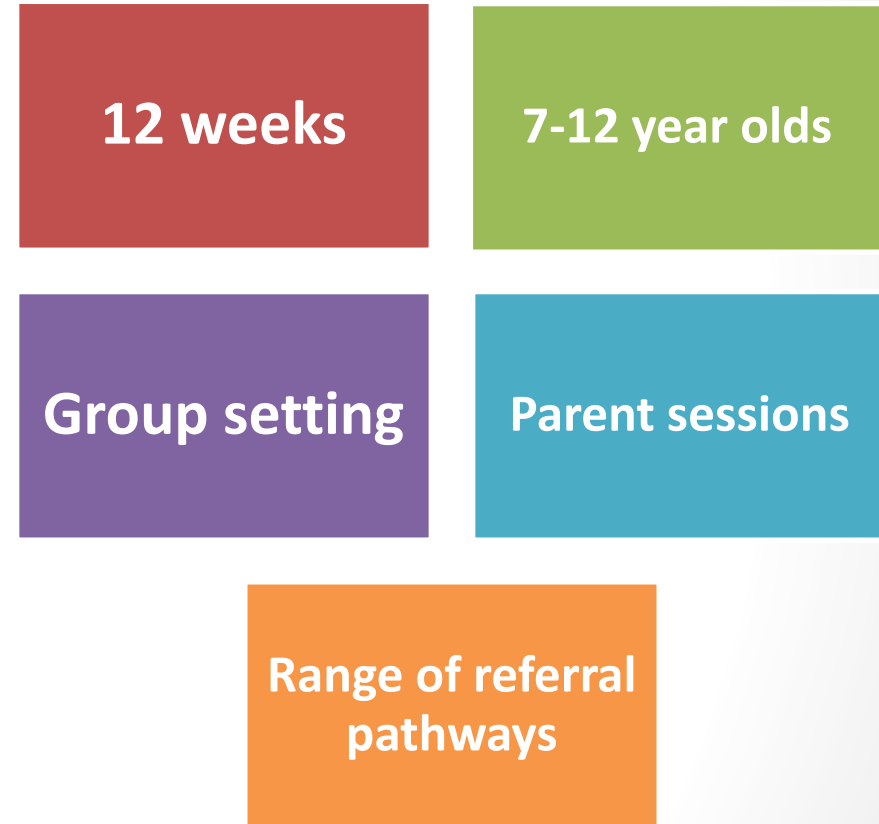
The study

- Qualitative-preserving the perspectives of intervention stakeholders and to inform the development of future trial-based studies
- DVA organisation in North of England (UK) provided interventions for children who had experienced DVA
- *DVA organisation and intervention will not be named in order to ensure anonymity*

- 1) How do intervention recipients and providers experience a community psychotherapeutic intervention?**
- 2) How can the intervention evidence base be developed and strengthened?**

The study

- **‘Psychotherapeutic’** intervention
- Provided children with the opportunity to work towards a better understanding of themselves, their relationships and their established patterns of behaviour, based on therapeutic relationships developed through talking or play (Howarth et al.,2016)

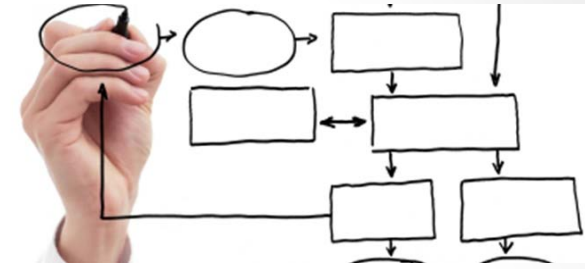


The study

- Comparison of pre and post intervention outcomes:
 - **Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire** (Goodman, 1997; completed by parent and teacher)
 - Emotional symptoms
 - Conduct problems
 - Hyperactivity/inattention
 - Peer relationships problem
 - Prosocial behaviour
 - **Service evaluation questionnaire** (completed by child)
 - “Can you draw a face or write about how you felt when you first came to the group?”
 - “Has the group helped you to talk to your mum about what has happened?”



Methods



- 35 in depth semi-structured interviews
 - 3 children
 - 6 parents
 - 12 intervention providers

- Interviews conducted during and 6-12 months post intervention

- Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Key findings

- Children's views about interventions contrasted to adults, and children were agentic in ways that are not easily captured through quantitative outcomes
- The **voice of the child** is paramount for informing the development of an intervention and for understanding how an intervention is effective
- Children demonstrate their **agency and creativity** in how they have experienced an intervention- an intervention is not something that is done to them

Implications



Children's views about intervention and service participation need to be taken seriously

Prioritising the voice of the child in:

- Developing a Core Outcome Set (work is currently being undertaken by Howarth at al)
- Identifying, developing and providing feedback on outcome measures and evaluation methods
- Designing and developing interventions that acknowledge children's agency rather than viewing them as damaged and needing to be fixed

Implications



- What opportunities do we create in research and practice to explore intervention stakeholders' perceptions of:
 - The purpose and role of an intervention and communicating clear messages amongst key stakeholders
 - Experiencing an intervention
 - What intervention effectiveness looks like and engaging with intervention evaluations

Conclusion



- How we perceive children in DVA has implications on their involvement in research, service development and how interventions for children are evaluated
- A range of stakeholders' experiences of interventions can provide helpful insights for understanding engagement, intervention development and evaluation
- The voice of the child is fundamental to the design, implementation, and evaluation of any intervention for CYP across the UK and globally
- Prioritising children's agency and voice has methodological implications for the involvement of children in understanding intervention effectiveness and for developing intervention evaluation methods in the UK and internationally and across disciplines

Thank you for listening

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