

**Bournemouth University**

Family Narratives of  
Child-to-Parent Violence and Abuse:  
Lifting the Veil of Secrecy

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# **I. Introduction**

## **A. Background**

This thesis aims to enhance understanding of family functioning and communication patterns, and to explore how this can be used to work more effectively with families experiencing CPVA. The focus of which is to provide a deeper understanding of whether 'secrets' have an influence on Child-to-Parent Violence and Abuse (CPVA) to add to the cumulative knowledge of CPVA and its causes and effects.

My motivation to explore the influence that secrets may have on the incidence of CPVA grew out of ten years' experience of working with children and families in Children's Social Care (CSC) who experienced CPVA as well as completing a Masters about Child-to-Parent Violence and Abuse.

My initial interest in CPVA began in 2004, when I became a Family Support Worker within Children's Social Care and then a qualified Social Worker in 2017. During these initial years it was unusual to encounter CPVA. Then, slowly, the number of families that CSC noted to be experiencing CPVA was seen to increase, to the point that a large number of families the team I was working in were experiencing some form of CPVA. At that time however, there were no government-led policies or guidelines on CPVA. Eventually in 2015 some guidance was published (Home Office 2015) but no training or tailored support on how to work with families experiencing CPVA was offered to social workers or family support practitioners.

It should be noted that whilst working as a Family Support Worker, I undertook a Master's degree in Practice Development in 2008, which was the significant turning point in my interest in CPVA both academically and practically. In particular I was motivated to make a difference to my own and other professional's practice in order to be more effective in the help being offered to the families dealing with CPVA.

Due to the frustrations of wanting to support families experiencing CPVA in the best possible way, and yet recognising the gap in knowledge and understanding of this form of family abuse, I made the decision to investigate this for a MA dissertation titled, *'An investigation of what can be done to provide further support for those experiencing child-to-parent violence'*, which was completed in 2010.

The literature review included publications on CPVA as well as fictional works. This line of enquiry showed that in fiction, CPVA and parricide were both presented with family secrets as a key plot. Family secrets, linked with CPVA and parricide, have been used in fiction for a long time, for example, Shakespeare's 'King Lear'. This play was first performed in 1606, and has been played regularly since then, as well as being variously adapted, including for television and cinema (Shakespeare 1619). Other forms of fiction that deal with this subject are, for example, 'We need to talk about Kevin' (Shriver 2003), 'The Omen' (1976), 'The Good Son' (1993), 'Carrie' (2013), 'The Boy Who Cried Bitch' (1992), and 'Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi' (1983). As CPVA is expressed in various forms of fiction it is not unimaginable as a topic to members of the general public. Family secrets are integral to the storyline of many of these stories and therefore establish a link between family secrets, CPVA and parricide.

Although fiction has made the link between family secrets and CPVA, no academic research has addressed the question of whether the former directly influenced the latter, and there is a '*veil of secrecy*' (Kennair and Mellor 2007, p.2003) surrounding this issue. When shifting the focus to family secrets, more information comes to light showing that secrets within families are detrimental to both the health and well-being of the individuals involved and their relationships (Bok 1982; Imber-Black 1998; Frijns et al. 2005; Frijns et al. 2013; Laird et al. 2013a).

The method used for the Master's dissertation on CPVA was an adapted biographic interpretative one, and the results indicated that there may be a link between secrets and CPVA (Oliver 2010). Due to the small scale and narrow scope of this Master's dissertation no firm conclusion was reached, except that this was worthy of further investigation. What did occur was that the literature review and the results of the



small-scale study, showed a clear need for further research, to provide a deeper understanding of CPVA, including the influence that decision-making, communication patterns, and secrets may have on the incidence of CPVA. This has lead to the research question underpinning this thesis.

## **B. The researcher's ontological and epistemological positioning**

“A life unlike your own can be your teacher” (St Columban Circa 543-615 in O'Reilly 2014)

The connections between notions of selfhood and professionalism in a context laden with uncertainty and injustice can make those of us who work with families feel as if we have little control over what happens. Legislation and government-led procedures rightfully guide social work practice, keeping children and vulnerable adults safe. However, as professionals who are a part of this system, it needs to be acknowledged that as much as social workers work 'with' families, the processes can be powerfully negative for both service users and professionals alike (Munro 2011).

It is the service user's voice, particularly the child's voice, that tells us about their experience of our support, and it is our responsibility to listen and make appropriate changes. One such group of young people who are not often given the opportunity to be heard are children who are controlling, aggressive, violent and/or abusive toward their parent/s. This relationship is often known as Child-to-Parent Violence and Abuse (Home Office 2015). There is a dearth of academic studies that explore the realities of those affected by Child-to-Parent Violence and Abuse (CPVA), and of these, only a few conducted research with the whole family (Micucci 1995; Robinson et al. 1994; Patuleia et al. 2013), and no one has yet considered whether secrets can influence CPVA.

This lack of knowledge and understanding leads to problems in social work practice, such as limited bespoke training, and inadequate policies, procedures, and support for families affected by CPVA. This is exacerbated by families feeling ashamed of

what is happening to them and fearful that they will not be believed (Home Office 2015), or fearful of being punished for their actions and failings. An anecdotal message often shared with the researcher by parents who are afraid of their children, is that they feel that they are considered responsible for what was happening to them by family, friends and professionals, and the child feels isolated and misunderstood, and are therefore socially stigmatised.

The researcher's experience of working with people who feel stigmatised and misunderstood, led her to seek a research position which reflects her approach to social work practice, taking the time to 'listen to' and 'giving voice' to each individual within the family, as central to working out how best to support them individually and systemically as promoted by Munro (Munro 2011) in her report and recommendations when working with children and families. This approach enables participants to voice the 'unvoicable' by listening to these unedited voices from different family member roles, using an analytical process and sustaining a systemic approach, that is fair to those who are often found in a less powerful position. This research provided a way of giving voice to families who felt un-listened to and therefore vulnerable, which in turn allowed me to learn from others about the lived experience of CPVA and the influence of secrets.

### **C. Defining Child-to-Parent Violence and Abuse**

As set out above, the research question is based on children (under 18 years of age) who do not have a severe or profound disability and have acted abusively towards their biological parent/s. It has been argued that there should be an age restriction for very young children, as they do not have the developmental capacity to understand the consequences of their actions or fully developed moral reasoning (Simmons et al 2018), but due to the dearth of literature about CPVA, this thesis did not place any such lower age limit on the literature search.

A definition which fits the purpose of this study is required. However, there is an issue with this, as there is no legal definition specifically relating to CPVA. There are in fact, several definitions, all of which have slightly different meanings.

In 2013, in the UK, adolescent-to-parent violence and abuse was incorporated within the Government definition of domestic violence and abuse, by lowering the age of a perpetrator to 16 years of age. Yet CPVA is acknowledged by the UK Government to occur in children younger than 10 years of age (Home Office 2015). In 2015, the types of domestic violence and abuse behaviours, 'controlling' and 'coercive' were added to the definition (Home Office 2015). Then in 2018, the definition was updated again, to include victims or perpetrators of any gender or sexuality, highlighting that domestic violence and abuse can happen between anyone, and step away from the stereotypical notions of a male perpetrator and a female victim. The definitions used by the UK Government for domestic violence and abuse (Home Office 2018) are as follows:

“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 regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

**Controlling behaviour**

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape, and regulating their everyday behaviour.

**Coercive behaviour**

Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.” (Home Office 2018)

For the purpose of this study, these definitions are not appropriate, in part due to the age limitations. Also, it could be considered that labelling a child as a perpetrator of domestic violence and abuse is inappropriate, even though the behaviours may mirror that of domestic violence and abuse, other factors need to be considered. For example, the complex relationship between child and parent when compared to a

couple in a relationship (this will be discussed in more detail later in the literature review). This notion of the domestic violence and abuse from the age of 16 years upwards does not completely fit with UK law which states that a child is criminally responsible from the age of 10 years upwards, and can therefore be arrested for assaulting a parent or damaging property (Miles and Condry 2016) but cannot be given the label of a perpetrator of domestic violence and abuse.

Turning to the academic literature, a commonly used definition was created by Cottrell (2003) who stated that “parent abuse is any harmful act by a teenage child intended to gain power and control over a parent” (2003, p.1). This, again, is not suitable for use in this thesis because it excludes children under the age of 13 years and suggests that the main purpose of the teenager is to achieve power and control. In reality there may be more complex reasons and this definition is too simplistic for the purposes of this research.

An alternative definition developed by Holt (2013) explains that parent abuse is “...a pattern of behaviour that uses verbal, financial, physical or emotional means to practice power and exert control over a parent” (2013, p.1). This definition incorporates the domestic violence and abuse definitions of abusive behaviours, an understanding that the behaviours are more complex than ‘an act’, and that they tend to be on-going as ‘a pattern’ of behaviours. Holt (2013) does not place an age limit on the perpetrator of abuse and again supports the notion of power and control. For all these reasons, Holt’s definition is preferred for this study. However, even Holt’s definition does not comprehensively include all aspects of CPVA, such as sexualised behaviours. However, in the UK Home Office (2015) guidelines on adolescent-to-parent violence and abuse, the use of “heightened sexualised behaviours” was added to their description (2015, p.3), although it must be noted that this was not then discussed further within the report.

Literature on CPVA rarely addresses sexualised behaviours, and this literature review only found one mention of it (Cottrell 2004). It could therefore be argued that the notion of sexual abuse by a child of their parent has been inadequately considered by researchers and governments, but there is little evidence to take this

further. Overall, it seems that this issue is surrounded by silence, or a taboo that prevents discussion or even naming its occurrence. This societal barrier to recognising and talking about sexualised behaviours as a form of abuse towards parents needs further recognition and investigation.

A working definition of CPVA needed to be created for the purposes of this research. This has been achieved by adapting previous definitions to create a new one. The definition used is 'a pattern of coercive, controlling, sexualised, aggressive and/or violent behaviours, from a child, under the age of 18 years, towards their parent, regardless of gender'. This definition helps to illuminate the actions of young person's towards their parents, but excludes adult children's abusive behaviour towards their parent/s and promotes taking this form of family abuse away from a restricted gendered discourse.

#### **D. Research Problem**

The prevalence of CPVA is such that it affects many families. A longitudinal study of over 2000 Canadian young people found, 10% of children hit or shoved a parent, 7% struck a parent with an object, 1% severely beat a parent, and 1% used lethal weapons (Pagani et al. 2004). These findings concur with the rarity of lethal violence shown in Holt's (2017) study but also shows the wide scale of CPVA.

The UK Home Office (2015) reported the prevalence rates of CPVA by perpetrators aged between 13-19 year olds on parents and carers from data gathered by Condry and Miles (2014) suggesting that "in a one year period, the study found 1,892 incidents of violence, threats of violence, or criminal damage in the home" (Miles and Condry 2015, p.4).

The above results are likely to be only the 'tip of the iceberg', as is often the case with family violence. CPVA remains hidden due to under-reporting, and is very likely to affect many more families than the figures suggest (Home Office 2015; Hoyo-Bilbao et al. 2018). The significance of this is that, although the UK government have acknowledged that CPVA occurs, only broad guidelines have been offered to direct

practice when working with it. It remains under-discussed and under-researched, and as a result, families experiencing CPVA face inconsistent responses to their problems by professionals (Miles and Condry 2016). What adds to the difficulties in working with CPVA are the limitations of the body of published literature. The majority of research undertaken so far reports and discusses the causes and effects of CPVA, such as children experiencing family violence and abuse. Very few researchers consider the experiences of those living with CPVA, let alone the private functioning of the family, such as family dynamics and communication patterns.

### **E. Research Question**

How do family secrets influence children and adolescents who are controlling, aggressive or violent towards their parents?

### **F. Aims and objectives of the research**

1. To analyse the experiences of the family as a system when experiencing Child-to-Parent Violence and Abuse.
2. To enhance understanding of family functioning and communication patterns, and to explore how this can be used to work more effectively with families experiencing CPVA.
3. To analyse the effects that family secrets have on individuals within a family.
4. To garner information from individuals in families in which Child-to-Parent Violence and Abuse is taking place, in order to maintain a systemic approach to the research.
5. To identify ways of improving current practice with families based on the evidence collected
6. To inform future policy and codes of practice, in relation to supporting families experiencing CPVA.

## **F. Theoretical Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study draws together four complimentary methodological approaches, these are Ecological Systems Theory, Social Constructionism, Gestalt Theory and Hermeneutics.

Ecological systems theory allows the researcher to consider how each person within the family impacts and influences one another, much like the individual cogs in a mechanical system. As with ecological systems theory, social constructionism incorporates how identity, relationships and behaviours are formed through social norms and traditions, from the micro to the macro levels of society. These two theories therefore, allow the researcher to consider the larger picture for each person and each family participating within this research.

Hermeneutics however, allows the researcher to take a more in-depth look at the use of language, what each participant is trying to express, their meaning-making and decision-making and how this influences the life-path taken by each individual. Therefore, bringing these three frameworks together allows the research to explore the participants uniqueness (subjective perspectives) and their wholeness (the Gestalt, please see the section titled Gestalt in the Methodology Chapter for more detail).

## **G. Method**

There is a gap in the research literature regarding family secrets and their possible influence on CPVA. The importance of how the researcher uncovers family secrets in order to ascertain whether there is an influence upon behaviours within the family is essential to this study. When considering the methodological approach to research, it is therefore important to consider how people interact with one another and the world around them, and how this affects their decision-making and behaviours.

An interpretative approach was selected as being the most likely to be effective in achieving the aims of this thesis, garnering an in-depth knowledge of the person's experiences and the influence different situations and events may have on behaviours. The most logical approach is a method that involves all family members, so as to reveal and understand the different 'realities' of each person in the system across time. The reason for this is that family abuse is usually a secretive activity, and therefore trying to expose it, without causing fear or guilt, requires one-to-one dialogue.

This study employed a method incorporating the whole life story (Shoderu et al. 2012), that is the uniqueness and wholeness of personal narrative accounts. Such an approach allows the participant to construct their own lived experience, exploring the reasoning and sense-making of these personal experiences, without the researcher placing any prior assumptions upon them by directing the interview (Shoderu et al. 2012). The method emphasises the need to reduce research bias at every step of the research process, whilst acknowledging that totally unbiased work is impossible. The study was completed using a unique method of interpretation of the results, drawing together conclusions that answer the research question.

The decision was made to use the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) (Wengraf 2001; Jones 2003) to investigate individual family members who are part of the same two-generation family, in order to consider the systemic influences (Bronfenbrenner 1979) family members have on one another. This method was chosen as the best way of answering the research question and addressing all the research aims and objectives.

## **H. Justification for the research**

The justification for undertaking this study is to provide insight into the lived experiences of CPVA by exploring it systemically (Bronfenbrenner 1979). The Home Office (2015) guidelines for CPVA argue that:



“If an intervention is undertaken which aims to halt the violence without reflecting on the wider family issues then the situation can be significantly exacerbated. Practitioners need to consider the family as a system and how its members operate together and consider the use of whole family approaches. Adolescent violence and abuse should not be seen as independent of these dynamics” (2015, p.3).

If CPVA should be considered systemically in practice, it should also be considered systematically for research purposes. Systemic thinking is about how systems interact. For example, the family system (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Minuchin 1974) is a subsystem within larger systems, such as the community in which it lives. The family sub-system is interactive: each family member affects and is affected by others. These interactions are based on communications which in turn generate family behaviour patterns.

Systemic thinking gives explanations about family functioning and behaviours, whilst acknowledging that each person is connected to others and influenced by external factors also, such as politics (Bronfenbrenner 1979). As Linblad-Goldberg and Northey (2013) state: “Adaptive functioning is determined by the fit of a family’s structure to the functional demands made upon it from within and beyond the system” (2013, p.148).

Hong et al. (2012), in their literature review, provided a social ecological framework for understanding CPVA, using Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theory (see Methodology Chapter Section C). They examined the risk factors according to the micro system (family violence and abuse, parenting), mesosystem (peer influence), exosystem (media and political influence), macrosystem (society and cultural influence) and chronosystem (changes in the family system). This approach to the literature review gave a new and informative perspective upon CPVA and therefore, this study will weave Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Systems Theory as well as his later developed concept of ‘proximal processes’ (human development) throughout this study so that the approach to this study remains systemic (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994).

The systemic knowledge gathered from this research will be used to develop a new non-blaming context with regard to CPVA, as a starting point for the development of clear objectives for its effective management and prevention.

## **I. Delimitations**

The focus of this research is based upon CPVA. It is important to note, however, that within this study the topic of secrets also has its own body of research and literature. Both distinct bodies of research literature will be systematically explored to find out if any links are made between the two.

## **J. Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrates that there is a gap in the research regarding family secrets and their influence on children and adolescents who are controlling, aggressive or violent towards their parents. It also highlights the importance of developing a systemic understanding of the real experiences of those affected by CPVA. From this study new knowledge and understanding will hopefully emerge, opening up possibilities for more effective ways of working with people experiencing CPVA.

## **K. Organisation of the Remaining Chapters**

Chapter Two offers a detailed and critical analysis of the literature on children who are violent toward their parents and on the literature focused upon secrets. The third Chapter, on methodology and method, will discuss the research philosophy underpinning the chosen method, and how it will be applied, including practical procedures, and how data will be collected and analysed. Chapter Four will present the interview results, and Chapter Five will present the interpretations made from these. Chapter Six, the discussion chapter, will make the link between the results, the interpretations and literature on CPVA and on secrets. Chapter Seven will present the conclusion and implications for further research and for practice.

## II. Literature Review

### A. Introduction

When compared to other forms of family abuse, such as child abuse and domestic violence and abuse, Child-to-Parent Violence and Abuse (CPVA) is under-researched, under-discussed and underestimated as a problem (Beckmann et al. 2017; Simmons et al. 2018). What makes working with families experiencing CPVA difficult is the extremely limited insight into the experience of those affected by it, its causes, and the effects on individuals, families and communities. Additionally, there are few policies and very limited training on this topic, and consequently not enough targeted support for families is provided (Home Office 2015). Yet, it is recognised as a significant problem within our society. The UK Home Office (2015) identified the prevalence of CPVA as significantly under reported, but gave the following information:

“The national charity *Family Lives* runs a helpline for parents, which receives substantial numbers of phone calls from parents experiencing violence from their children...In 2010 it was reported that between June 2008 and June 2010, the helpline received 22,537 phone calls from parents reporting aggression from their children, 7,000 of which involved physical aggression” (2015, p.4).

It is estimated that in the United States of America, Canada and Spain, the rates of children physically assaulting their parents are between 4.7% and 12.3%. For example, the most recent statistics for the USA are found in Ulman and Straus (2003) which is also in line with Agnew and Huguley (1989) who used data from the 1972 who both found that about 10% of parents in the USA are physically assaulted by their children. In Canada, Pagani et al. (2009) conducted longitudinal studies using a large scale sample of over 2000 young people and their families, from Kindergarten to 16 years of age. They found that 12.3% of boys and 9.5% of girls have been physically violent towards their parents. In Spain, Calvete et al. (2012) reported 4.7% of children are physically abusive toward their parents.

The statistics show the prevalence of CPVA as an issue that affects many families worldwide, not just in the UK. The significance of this is the impact that CPVA has,

not only on individuals and families, but also upon the wider community. Research has shown that CPVA causes significant and immediate, as well as long term, harm to individuals and families (Holt 2016; Williams et al. 2017). Clarke et al. (2017), argue that for parents, this harm can include physical and mental health problems, the breakdown of family relationships, as well as problems arising within the community, and all of this can impact upon work and the family's financial stability.

For the violent and/or abusive child there is risk of isolation and a higher risk of offending behaviours as well as an increased risk of violence towards boyfriends and girlfriends as they get older (Clarke et al. 2017). Yet, even with the understanding of the impact upon individuals, families and communities, CPVA has remained hidden within our wider society for decades. It has only started to be acknowledged and understood on a wider scale in the past 15 years, more so in the health and social care sectors (Walsh and Kreinert 2009; Hoyo-Bilbao et al. 2018). Even with this increase in attention, Miles and Condry (2016) argue that the issue of adolescents' who are abusive towards their parents, remains "a form of family violence that is currently unrecognised in official discourse and statistics, despite increasing evidence that it is a significant problem" (2016 p.804). It therefore remains, under-discussed, under-researched and hidden, creating a secret that is hidden behind a "veil of silence" (Hunter and Nixon 2012 p.211). The lack of policy and procedures for professionals dealing with the issues of CPVA, coupled with limited training, has the knock-on effect of creating inconsistent responses to families experiencing CPVA (Miles and Condry 2016).

## **B. Method Used For Literature Search**

This literature search primarily covers a general overview of CPVA in order to gain a better understanding of the issue. The second focus will be on research about family secrets and their influence or association with children and adolescents who are controlling, aggressive or violent towards their parents. Layering this literature search relating to abusive and violent children, with research on secrets within families, adds another dimension to this study, enabling a comprehensive review of relevant literature currently available.

## **The Literature Search**

For this thesis, published literature was identified through systematic searches using electronic bibliographic databases and manual searches. Non-academic literature, such as grey literature (e.g. government reports, conference proceedings and doctoral theses) was manually conducted (Adams et al. 2016). The purpose of this inclusion was to consider CPVA from different sources and perspectives, allowing not only depth but breadth of understanding, creating a bigger picture of CPVA.

The main database used was Bournemouth University mySearch, a database which includes (but not exhaustively) the following databases: PsycINFO, SocINDEX, ebscohost, MEDLINE Complete, OAlster, ScienceDirect, Scopus®, PsycARTICLES, PsycBOOKS, PsycCRITIQUES, JSTOR Arts & Sciences IV, JSTOR Life Sciences, HeinOnline, Oxford Handbooks Online, GreenFILE, and Bournemouth University Research Online (BURO).

Key subject terms and phrases using the symbol '\*' as a truncation device for search terms (e.g. child\*) enabled the Boolean operators (connecting or defining search terms using the words, AND, OR, NOT) to find literature on CPVA (see Table One for key words, phrases and results). There was no set name, label or definition for CPVA, so various terms were used: adolescent-parent violence and abuse, CPVA, youth-to-parent violence and abuse, adolescent violence in the home, child-to-parent abuse, and battered parent syndrome (Home Office 2015). An attempt was made to link CPVA and secrets within the search, but this yielded results that did not focus on CPVA, so a new search was conducted, with the specific target of studies investigating secrets, and, the effect secrets have on individuals, and how secrets affect family functioning, and violent and/or abusive children.

Once these searches were conducted, the results were manually, systematically sorted up to the first 500 references, according to relevance of the title and/or abstract. These references were then manually checked again, and any relevant literature was sourced, using either the search engine Google or the inter-library loan service. For the search on secrets, it was hard to narrow down the search terms, so

a manual search was conducted using both mySearch and Google, and any relevant up to date references were then followed up.

## **Selection Criteria**

Due to the paucity of research conducted on CPVA and secrets, no time limit was put on the search. Further exclusion criteria limited published material written in the English language, due to difficulties with translation and the time limits imposed on completion of this thesis. As the study was based within the United Kingdom (UK), where possible UK literature was used to underpin this study, and literature from other countries was included to provide a wider, culturally diverse overview of the subject.

Research involving profound and severely disabled people was also excluded because it was decided that this particular avenue of CPVA has already been developed within prior research and has been linked to a communication strategy, when the child has limited speech and language skills (Kalgotra and Warwal 2017). A further exclusion was literature about professional fostering and adoptive families, because of the growing body of research, with this focus, which has started to be developed, also the researcher wanted to investigate blood relatives, rather than adoptive parents and professional foster carers, because working with blood relatives and kinship care, was her main area of practice when working with CPVA.

Literature concerning adult children (18 years and older) who are abusive or violent towards their parents was also excluded, because this study focuses on children who are defined as under the age of 18 (the UK legal definition of a child, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). Parricide is only mentioned when appropriate, because it is seen as distinctly different from CPVA (Holt 2017).

The following table illustrates the number of references the search revealed and how the searches were refined. (See Appendix One and Two for a comprehensive table of studies used for the body of literature accessed for this study).

<b>How do family secrets influence children and adolescents who are controlling, aggressive or violent towards their parents?</b>			
<b>Search</b>	<b>Data Base</b>	<b>Key search terms and Boolean Operators</b>	<b>Results</b>
1	mySearch Google	Parent Abuse	21,251, many of which were about domestic violence and abuse, child abuse, and generalised violent behaviour in children
2	mySearch	Parent abuse AND abusive children	351, many of which were about parent-child directed issues.
3	mySearch Google	Child to parent Violent*	6,588, many of which were about parent-child directed issues.
4	mySearch	child to parent violent* AND abusive children	132, many on CPVA and domestic violence and abuse.
5	mySearch	Parent battering	162, many on CPVA and domestic violence and abuse.
6	mySearch	Parent battering AND child to parent violent*	7 (2 of which were on CPVA)
7	mySearch	Teenage violent*towards parent*	8 (3 of which were about CPVA)
8	mySearch	Domestic Violent*	325,058, many of which were parent-child directed violence
9	mySearch	Domestic Violent* AND child to parent violent*	1542, although many of these were not focused on CPVA
10	mySearch	Domestic Violent* AND child to parent violent* AND abusive children	48, many on CPVA and domestic violence and abuse.
11	mySearch	Youth to parent* violent*	1341, many of which were about domestic violence and abuse, child abuse, and generalised violent behaviour in children

12	My Search	Youth to parent* violen* AND abusive children	1 on American sports
13	mySearch Google	adolescen* to parent violen*	1,041, many of which were about domestic violence and abuse, child abuse, and generalised violent behaviour in children
14	mySearch	adolescen* to parent violen* AND abusive children	6 (5 were on CPVA)
15	mySearch	adolescent violence in the home	289, many of which were about domestic violence and abuse and generalised violent behaviour in children
16	mySearch	Battered parent syndrome	33, many of which were about domestic violence and abuse and generalised violent behaviour in children
17	mySearch Google	secret* AND child* AND Adolescen* AND Teen* AND youth	501, none focused on CPVA
18	mySearch	Secret*	6,991,473, many of these were focused on marital secrets (affairs), reproductive secrets (adoption) and historical pieces.
19	mySearch Google	family secrets	40,199 as above
20	mySearch Google	secrets and relationships	104,838 as above

Table 1: Search Strategy

### C. Discourse Surrounding Child-to-Parent Violence and Abuse

The terminology used when discussing CPVA often places blame on individual family members, rather than considering it as a systemic issue and contextualising CPVA by considering the influence upon individuals and families stemming from the different levels of systems impacting them. For example, within the exosystem the media is shown to have an influence upon individuals, or the macrosystem which shows the often unseen influence of gender roles and socialisation upon others (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Hong et al. 2012). This can be seen in the discourse surrounding CPVA which often draws on gendered and adult terminology to describe



it, such as the child being the perpetrator of abuse and the parent as the victim similar to the terminology used to describe domestic violence and abuse. Such terminology is unhelpful when it comes to investigating CPVA: what is apparent from practice experience is that CPVA is more nuanced and the child and parent may be both victim and perpetrator (Gabriel et al 2018).

Baker (2012) addresses the same issue by using a “simplistic gendered script” (2012, p.269) for understanding CPVA. She argues that society views males as violent, because it is considered a masculine trait. This notion of the violent male and the female victim is sustained by society through the media. Baker (2012) argued that this construct of the violent child is following constructs of domestic violence and abuse, rather than considering the complex nature of how children experience and use violence. The UK Government (Home Office 2018) has recently updated their definition to clearly state that domestic violence and abuse should not be considered in terms of gender or sexuality, thereby promoting a non-gendered approach to domestic violence and abuse in people aged 16 years and over.

For the purposes of this study, and due to the lack of alternative systemic terms, words such as perpetrator and victim will have to be used, in order to show the direction of violence and abuse. However, it has to be understood that it is not possible to consider or discuss CPVA within these simple lineal terms, so attempts will also be made to avoid employing gendered discourse when describing it.

#### **D. Defining the Categories of Child-to-Parent Violence and Abuse**

The different types of violence and abuse within CPVA can be separated into combinations of verbal, financial or economic, physical, sexual or emotional. Holt (2013) and Gallagher (2004a; 2004b) explain that many parents discuss verbal abuse as separate from emotional abuse. It is a frequent form of abuse and is often the first signs of CPVA. Verbally abusive behaviours include screaming, swearing, and using derogatory language towards the parent.

Emotional/psychological abuse is when the parent's sense of self-worth or self-esteem and confidence are diminished by their child. These behaviours include name calling, the use of derogatory or belittling language, threatening harm to others or the self, threatening to run away from home, and undermining the parent's authority (Clarke et al. 2017).

Physical violence or abuse is any act that injures, hurts or wounds the parent. This is the easier form of abuse to evidence due to the physical results being visible, such as bruising and cuts to the body. Physical violence includes, but is not limited to, hitting, kicking, slapping, punching, throwing objects at or near the victim, burning, pushing, grabbing, and hair pulling (Holt 2013).

Heightened sexualised behaviours are seen as a predictor of CPVA within the UK Government Guidelines (Home Office 2015), however, the behaviours have not been described. It has also been addressed that literature on CPVA rarely addresses sexualised behaviours (See Section C) except for one count of rape (Cottrell 2004). Guidelines on heightened sexualised behaviours in young people explain that heightened sexualised behaviours victimise others through coercion or force, and could include displays of physical and sexual violence (NSPCC 2018). Some examples of such behaviours are; persistent masturbation in private or in front of others, touching other people's genital and private parts, chronic peeping behaviours, and using sexually aggressive obscenities.

Economic or financial abuse includes damaging property, stealing money or belongings, forcing the parent to buy the child things, demands for money or the use of the parents' debit/credit card (Tew and Nixon 2010).

CPVA comes under the umbrella of family abuse, and many of the above categories of abuse are the same as the categories used in other types of family abuse. However, a child being violent towards their parent is a more complex issue. It is therefore important to understand where CPVA 'sits' within the umbrella of family abuse in order to give it context and broaden our understanding of CPVA and the impact upon individuals and the family.

## **E. Contextualising Child-to-Parent Violence and Abuse within the History of Family Abuse**

Research on family abuse has gained momentum in the last fifty years, but this has mainly been concerned with domestic and child abuse (Agnew and Huguley 1989; Holt 2013). These forms of family abuse are about the *powerful* harming the *less powerful* (Finkelhor 1983), normally the adult male dominating and controlling the family, which was seen as acceptable until relatively recently and was considered a part of 'private' family life (Browne and Herbert 1997). Until the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such abuse was ignored. These tolerant and accepting attitudes towards family abuse were ideologically dominant within society, with the authority figure expected to use his/her power to control other family members (Browne and Herbert 1997). Bala (2008) explains that husbands were allowed to use 'reasonable' force to control their wives and children.

In western countries, the catalyst for the shift in attitude to such activities being regarded as family violence occurred in the 1970's. Domestic violence and abuse was recognised as a problem affecting many families and taking a toll on society (Browne and Herbert 1997). Shortly afterwards it was realised that child abuse and domestic violence and abuse was not being reported, with professionals unwittingly colluding in the secretive nature of abuse by ignoring it. Laws were changed, making it mandatory for professionals to report suspicions of abuse to the police, in order to protect vulnerable people (Bala 2008). Women started to come forward and report the abuse they had been or were experiencing. Women's refuges were opened and help lines created (Finley 2013). Since then, domestic violence and abuse and child abuse have remained in the political and media spotlight.

CPVA is frequently compared to domestic violence and abuse, because parents who are experiencing it often state that the abuse is similar to that experienced from their partner (Gallagher 2007). There are many similarities in behaviours when comparing CPVA and domestic violence and abuse, although the relationship

between parent and child is much more complicated emotionally and legally. Even if a parent feels emotionally able to stop contact with their child, they are not legally able to terminate this relationship, in the way they can with an abusive partner/spouse. This aspect adds intricacy to understanding and working with the issue of CPVA.

## **F. Cultural Considerations**

Within the historical context of how society views family abuse, the dominant ideologies within western cultures are structured around the parent having more power (such as physically, mentally, socially, economically) than the child, and this hegemonic patriarchal ideology is still dominant today. In this context, the notion of a child being abusive toward their parent is unfathomable to many due to the reversal of power in the relationship (Cottrell 2001, Bailey 2002; Tew and Nixon 2010).

There are inconsistencies in defining what is considered to be abusive behaviour, due to the subjective nature of abuse and how it is perceived by others. These ontological and epistemological positions generate debates surrounding the issue of abuse and how to define it. For example, when considering child abuse, which is well researched and widely understood within both academia and practice, the importance of safeguarding children is now well established within many countries, yet, the ways in which children are treated and protected varies across cultures and systems. For example, in the UK, the use of physical chastisement of a child is not unlawful as long as it can be proven that the punishment was 'reasonable' and has not left a visible mark (Children Act 2004). The law does not state what is considered 'reasonable', leaving this open to interpretation, thus generating great debate about what is morally acceptable. A more active shift to banishing physical chastisement recently came from the Scottish Parliament, who, in 2017, started the process of attempting to make physical punishment of children unlawful (The Scottish Parliament 2017), which if made law, would be the first legal ban on smacking children within the UK. This demonstrates split attitudes towards such issues and the way they should be responded to, even between the regions of one relatively small country.

The European Union, however, follows article 12 of the UN Convention on the rights of the child, as well as the Human Rights Act (1989), which states that it is unlawful to smack a child. Over recent years, the political pressure to change the law across the whole of the UK, such that no form of physical chastisement can be used, has been strong. One impact of joining the EU was that the use of physical chastisement within the education system was made illegal under the Children Act 1989. It is currently unclear what the impact of leaving the EU will be upon the rights of the child.

The United States of America has not ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, because it is seen by some, including some American Presidents, as taking away the rights of the parent in favour of the child. This leaves child welfare dependent upon the adults involved in caring for the child, potentially, leading to a less autonomous life for the child (Hagues 2013). It is interesting to compare the different ways children's rights are established in law in the UK and the USA, the ways in which it depicts the role of corporal punishment in sustaining acceptable behaviour in their children.

Cultural differences relating to the rights of the child, childhood, and the responsibilities and rights of the parent, vary and affect legal definitions of family abuse, as well as how professionals can work with families. Similar debates occur around CPVA, with the added issue of people not understanding how a child can be the perpetrator of abusive behaviours toward a parent, and the parent being unable to manage this. This is, in part, due to the myth of the loving and obedient child living in the heart of a loving and supportive family (Agnew and Huguley 1989). For many, the notion of a child as a victim and perpetrator of abuse are almost impossible to conceive.

When considering CPVA and the relationship between victim/perpetrator and parent/child, the power dynamics seem skewed. Even when the rights of the child are upheld, many in society feel that the parent should assert their power as the adult and make the child adhere to their rules (Cottrell 2001; Bailey 2002; Bobic

2002; Kennair & Mellor 2007; Gibson 2007). This, however, is not the case for all families, and can lead to CPVA. Research on CPVA will therefore often have been conducted with varying degrees of cultural bias, such as in the context of the USA criminalising CPVA.

CPVA has, however, remained relatively 'under the radar' in the UK, with its recognition only starting to gather momentum in the past few years. For example Condry and Miles (2014) state that they conducted the first large scale UK study of 'adolescent-to-parent violence and abuse, with the focus on adolescents being the perpetrators of abuse. They used 1892 case records over a one year period (2009-2010), as well as conducting interviews with police and other expert practitioners, parents and adolescents. They found that adolescent to parent violence is a gendered phenomenon. 87% of the perpetrators were male and 77% of the victims were female. 86% of the incidents were from the son to their mother. When considering research from outside the UK, the main bodies of published research on CPVA are from Canada, Australia, America and Spain.

## **G. Sociological theories of violence**

There are different sociological theories as to why family violence occurs. These theories focus upon the interactions within relationships; this could be between two or more people (Cavanaugh 2012; Lawson 2012). The sociological theories which are going to be considered for this study are; Social Control Theory (Nye 1958), Resource Theory (Goode 1971; Straus, 1979), Systems Theory (Bertalanffy 1972), and Nested Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979); which will offer a broader theoretical understanding to the issue of family violence.

### **Social Control Theory**

Social Control Theory (Nye 1958) is based upon the notion that an individual within a family is trying to gain power or control within the family. This is done so that the person seeking the power (the abuser) can gain control and compliance from others

(the victims), to the extent that the abuser may want to control or stop certain behaviours and maintain or gain what they perceive as desirable behaviours. The abuser may want to control their victim's thoughts and feelings, and could isolate their victim from her/his support networks. The victim may alter their behaviours in turn, fearing an aggressive or violent response if they stand up to the abusive person, so the victim may start to do what is expected of them, to avoid harm to themselves or anyone they also seek to protect, e.g. any children (Brown and Herbert 1997; Hyde-Nolan and Juliaio 2012).

Definitions of CPVA have already been discussed within the Introduction Chapter. Yet, it needs to be highlighted that they appear to be based upon Social Control Theory. For example, Cottrell's(2003) definition is that "parent abuse is any harmful act by a teenage child intended *to gain power and control over a parent*" (2003, p.1), and Holt's (2013) definition is that, "...a pattern of behaviour that uses verbal, financial, physical or emotional *means to practice power and exert control over a parent*" (2013, p.1). This could suggest that this theory is not only popular but also a dominant one within CPVA literature.

## **Resource Theory**

Resource Theory (Goode 1971; Straus1979).makes a link between resources (such as money, prestige and contacts) and family violence. It is argued that these resources are more likely to be utilised by the abusive person to control the victim before the use of violence is employed as a further form of control. It is suggested that, those with more resources are less likely to employ violence than those who have fewer resources, e.g. unemployed and/or negative social networks. This would suggest that family violence maybe more of a class issue, but only in terms of actual violence, not in terms of abusive controlling behaviours (Brown and Herbert 1997; Hyde-Nolan and Juliaio 2012).

## **Systems Theory**

Systems Theory (Bertalanffy 1972) was originally developed to explain the mechanisms of self-regulating systems. It was then adapted by Parsons (1951) to explain the way in which social systems develop. Families, communities, and individuals form parts of a self-regulating system, and their functions and behaviours can be explained by using a systemic theory, when considered within the totality of all the “characteristics of the environment that they inhabit” (Stepney and Ford 2012, p.94).

Systems Theory radically departs from the more traditional developmental psychological approaches (Neal and Neal 2013). Criticism of systemic thinking is that it is founded upon traditional ideology of the family as a patriarchal system, conforming to the normalisation of marginality (Payne 2005). Nested Ecological Systems Theory, however, takes into consideration social/cultural differences (Jack and Jack 2000) and thus exposes patriarchy and other inequalities.

## **Nested Ecological Systems Theory**

Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979) is based on biological ecological theories to understand how people fit into their milieu, the ‘person-in-environment’ perspective (Pardeck 1988), thus helping understanding of “individuals in context” (Neal and Neal 2013, p.722). In order to comprehend the development of an individual, different systems must be understood as a whole in order to understand how they affect the life trajectory of that person (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994; Neal and Neal 2013). As Jack and Jack (2000) state “the ecological model is a holistic, dynamic-interactional systems approach, based on human ecology” (2000, p.94).

Ecological Systems Theory proposes that conflict or stress within a family may lead to family violence. The theory argues that when one or more parts of the family system are not working properly, they will in effect cause a breakdown in the family system. The stress may be generated through poverty, poor living conditions,



unemployment and so on. These factors can place stress on the family system as a whole. When this is combined with the understanding that family dynamics and norms are often intergenerational, with systems influencing behaviour, including violence (Lawson 2012). This theory is used within this thesis because it considers influences upon individuals caused by different factors and systems and therefore fits within the conceptual framework required to answer the research question.

## **H. What are the Reoccurring Themes in Child-to-Parent Violence and Abuse Literature**

There are several reoccurring themes in the literature on CPVA, including who are the victims and perpetrators, and what are the causal links which can be classified within the different levels of the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Within the microsystem these include domestic violence and abuse, child abuse, and parenting styles. Within the mesosystem these factors include anti-social behaviours, substance misuse and educational difficulties, as discussed in Section C above, there is also the media influence within the exosystem or socialisation within the macrosystem.

For the purposes of this thesis, the victim/perpetrator demographics will be presented next, in order to give a deeper understanding of CPVA. Following this, a selection of the causal links, also known as risk factors, which are associated with CPVA, and deemed relevant to family secrets will be discussed.

## **I. Victim/Perpetrator Characteristics**

### **Victim**

The research literature on victim characteristics is contradictory. For example, many quantitative studies show that mothers are predominantly victims of CPVA (Browne and Hamilton 1998; Ulman and Straus 2003; Gebo 2007; Walsh and Kreinert 2009; Fawzi et al. 2013; Condry and Miles 2014; Contreras and Cano 2014). However, a study by Peek et al. (1985), which used a Youth in Transition survey with young

male high school adolescents with the mean age of 15 years who attended school in the USA, found that fathers were more likely to be hit than mothers. Furthermore, Walsh and Krienert's (2007) study used statistical information extracted from the National Incident-Based Report System developed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the USA of young offenders between the ages of 7-21 years, who have committed CPVA or parricide. They compared victims, offences and incident characteristics. They argued that the predominance of studies showing that women are mainly the victims may, at least in part, be because mothers report abuse more often than fathers. The mother's role in a family is also important to reflect upon in relation to this as they are often the primary carer of their children, and therefore spend more time with them so that they are more likely to be attacked than the father. This is supported by other clinical studies highlighting proximity to the perpetrator being a risk factor such as Cornell and Gelles (1981); Heide (1992); Laurent and Derry (1999); Cottrell (2001); Nock and Kazdin (2002) and Kethineni (2004); Biehal (2012).

## **Perpetrator**

Contradictions are also found in the literature describing perpetrator characteristics. Laurent and Derry (1999), Kethineni (2004), Routt and Anderson (2011), and Hunter et al. (2010) all found that males were more likely to be perpetrators of violence towards their parents. However, Hotelling et al.'s (1989) quantitative study found that there was no difference between the number of boys or girls who assault their parents. Gallagher (2009), who used practice examples, stated that there was no difference in the number of female or male adolescents using such violence, as did Izaguirre and Calvete's (2017) quantitative study conducted on 845 randomly selected adolescents from schools, who found that girls and boys were equally likely to be violent towards their parents.

Baker's (2012) literature review, argues that the assumptions and/or theories of the causes of CPVA should not be based upon these gendered constructs (as discussion in Section D) or the deterministic view that a teenage boy will go on to use violence because they have witnessed violence, as suggested by social learning

theory (Bandura 1973). Opposing this view, some researchers remain clearly convinced that the causes or theories of CPVA are a gendered issue. For example, Holt and Schon's (2016) literature review argues that "violence against parents should be nestled in the broader context of family violence (i.e. sensitive to the gendered and generational contexts of victims, offenders, and whole families as they move through the life cycle)" (2016, p.14). Condry and Miles (2014) also argue that adolescent-to-parent violence and abuse is a gendered phenomenon. It would seem then that Baker's (2012) notion that such violence is genderless is going against years of research and possibly research normalization. Baker's (2012) notions do however highlight the possible issue of research on violence being conducted within the confines of this dominant hegemonic ideology, creating bias in research methods and findings.

In conclusion, although perpetrator-victim characteristics form a dominant part of child-to-parent violence literature, it remains only one aspect of understanding the complexities which lead to CPVA. What is called into question is: why are the results so contradictory? This appears to be due to the methodological issues applied to various studies, the different methods used, the era the research was conducted in, the prevailing hegemonic ideology, and the location of the studies, for example, the USA is culturally different from the UK.

Complexities in research reflect the various debates within CPVA literature, and indicate that CPVA is a multi-causal issue (Home Office 2015), that incorporates not only gender related factors but also physiological, psychological and social ones (Gordon and Wallace 2015).

## **J. Risk Factors**

Research into the different risk factors affecting CPVA reveals further complexities surrounding this issue (Home Office 2015; Hoyo-Bilbao 2018). The main contributory factors discussed within CPVA literature, include exposure to family violence (Ibabe et al. 2009; Mahoney et al. 2003; Biehal 2012), substance misuse, (Ellickson et al. 1997; Cottrell & Monk 2004; Kethineni 2004), negative peer influence

(Ellickson et al. 1997; Kennair and Mellor 2007), educational difficulties (Paulson et al. 1990; Ellickson et al. 1997; Hampton 1999; Eckstein 2004; Kennair and Mellor 2007), and poor-parenting (Laurent and Derry 1999; Kennair and Mellor 2007).

Three of these risk factors will be drawn upon in more detail to illustrate the importance of understanding how they impact on individuals and the family system.

The three chosen are substance misuse, domestic violence and abuse, and parenting, because these allowed a clear overview of the multi-causal factors associated with CPVA and are considered to be the most relevant to this practitioner focused research, the section will start with the risk factor substance misuse.

## **Substance Misuse**

The research linking CPVA and substance misuse is often unclear about the directionality of the issue, is it the substance misuse within the family which led to the child becoming violent or did the violence start first and then substance misuse followed (Bobic and Robinson 2002; Kethineni 2004).

Kethineni (2004) conducted research which calls the issue of what came first, the drugs, alcohol or the violence, into question. Kethineni's study based in the USA found a link between CPVA, the child's alcohol and drug misuse and gang culture. Kethineni conducted quantitative research using court services data on 83 juveniles (mean age of 15.2) that were charged with family violence, including youth-to-parent abuse. Kethineni (2004) questioned whether it is the dysfunctional family which draws the adolescent into the gang lifestyle (including alcohol and drug misuse) or if the gang teaches its members that violence is acceptable (including CPVA), but no conclusion could be reached and further research is therefore required.

A further example of the various factors interlinked with substance misuse, was demonstrated by Ibabe et al. (2014a). Their quantitative study was conducted in Spain, and included 231 adolescents between the ages of 14-18 years, 106 of whom were young offenders and the rest selected from a community sample. They found that children who were violent toward their parents were at higher risk of "illegal substance use, hyperactivity, infringement of rules, and social self-adjustment

[difficulties adjusting to personal situations, such as a distorted view of oneself and/or a maladjustment in social situations, for example, aggression or difficulties accepting authority figures]" (2014a, p.380) as well as mental health issues. Another quantitative study by Contreras and Cano (2015) was conducted with 90 adolescents, recruited from the juvenile justice system. They also found that the multiple risk factors of substance misuse, conduct disorders, mental ill health and poor parental relationships were all linked to CPVA. It could be said that these studies, given that they were on young offenders, were not a representative sample or 'typical' adolescents, and their life experiences may be different from other young people more representative of the community where the research was conducted.

The risk factors, including substance abuse, demonstrate that there are multiple factors playing a part in the child's violence towards their parent/s, and that it is not a simple cause and effect issue. The risk factors of substance misuse, mental health issues, family violence, peer influence and gang culture need to be considered together rather than in isolation. This would suggest that when researching whether secrets influence CPVA, other risk factors are likely to be present and will therefore have a multi-morbidity impact.

### **Domestic violence and abuse**

When a child experiences domestic violence and abuse, it can affect their physiological, neurological and psychological well-being across their life span and become an intergenerational problem. This can lead to the child presenting as aggressive towards others, not just their parents, originally deriving from bad childhood experiences but extending into adulthood (Gordon and Wallace 2015). Several quantitative studies focusing on CPVA support the link to domestic violence and abuse, such as those of Biehal (2012), Ibabe et al. (2009) and Mahoney et al. (2003).

To give a more in-depth example, an American qualitative study conducted by Routt and Anderson (2011), used three sources of data: 1) those reported by the juvenile prosecutor's office, comprising 1139 adolescent offenders aged between 12 and 17

years. 2) Interviews with 238 youths and parents who attended an intervention programme. 3) Observations made of the 238 youth-parent dyads interviewed in 2) above. Routt and Anderson (2011) discussed the various risk factors associated with CPVA, and found that 53% of youths had been exposed to domestic violence and abuse, and a further 38% had been victims of physical abuse from their father or caregiver in the family. Notably, they found that the adolescent was not violent toward the parent who was physically aggressive towards them, but were violent toward the parent who was the victim of domestic violence and abuse from their intimate partner. Similarly, Ibabe et al.'s (2013) quantitative study, found that mothers were more likely to experience parent abuse if they had also been a victim of domestic violence and abuse.

From Routt and Anderson's (2011) results, it is important to note that not all children exposed to violence then become violent themselves, and this study clearly shows that 47% did not. This would suggest that other factors affecting the child and/or family may have contributed to the violent response in the child, such as child directed abuse (Browne and Hamilton 1998; Ulman and Straus 2003; Boxer et al. 2009; Calvete et al. 2015b) or substance misuse (Ibabe et al. 2009; Mahoney et al. 2003; Biehal 2012), or possibly some children are more resilient than others. A resilient child is able to hold a more positive mind-set in which they believe and understand that they can make situations better and that they have the support of others should they need it (Alayarian 2015).

A more recently identified risk factor associated with CPVA is that it can start *in utero*, when a mother is experiencing domestic violence and abuse whilst pregnant. This can lead to heightened levels of cortisol affecting the management of stress in the brain and traumatising the unborn child. The impact of toxic environments upon the foetus or unborn child can impair the child's neurological, psychological and physiological development, which can lead to later aggression in children (Gordon and Wallace 2015). There are other possible causes of trauma affecting the unborn child, for example, traumatic birth, ill-health, parental substance misuse, parental mental health problems and/or abuse and neglect (Gordon and Wallace 2015). These examples show that CPVA is affected by multiple negative factors that can

overwhelm individuals and families. Therefore a simplified causality based on single factors such as witnessing or experiencing abuse as a predictor for CPVA is unlikely to be true.

## **Parenting**

The one reoccurring theme among the risk factors associated with CPVA that is particularly worthy of consideration in more detail is that of parenting styles. The quality of family relationship and communication patterns have been considered in relation to parenting styles, but not as a standalone theme. The way families communicate and the quality of their relationship is, however, an important aspect of understanding how secrets are sustained or communicated within families (Goodall 2005).

Factors negatively affecting parenting capacity are mental health, learning disabilities, domestic violence and abuse and childhood trauma, such as experiencing abuse and substance misuse (Aldgate 2006). The impact of these factors depends upon the severity of the cause. The reason these factors influence parenting capacity is because they affect the parent's ability to respond to the child's developmental needs. As examples, the parent may have difficulty in creating a stable and consistent environment for the child; the parent may struggle with putting their child's needs before their own; or they may struggle managing their own emotions, leading to a negative parenting style, such as lax or over-reactive authority. If the child, in turn, responds negatively to the parent, the parent may not be able to cope with this stress and develop a sense of rejection, and may also begin to feel guilty, and may consequently, react in anger or become over critical of, or unresponsive to the child (Aldgate 2006). For example, Pagani et al's (2004), longitudinal study which used a large scale (over 2000 children) Canadian sample of young people and their families from Kindergarten to 16 years of age, found that a life-course of violence and harsh parental punishment seems to culminate in verbal and physical aggression toward mothers during adolescence. All this demonstrates that parenting style is closely linked to relationship quality and communication.

Ibabe and Bentler (2016) conducted a quantitative study with a sample of 585 children from schools in Spain, and they argue that the quality of the relationships within the family is the most important aspect of parenting in terms of preventing CPVA. They found that family relationships had a direct effect upon CPVA, and unconditional feelings of love were negatively affected, when the parent (more often the mother) became fearful of their child. They also found that assertive parental discipline was a preventative factor in CPVA. This could be because the child knows and accepts the family boundaries or because the parent remains in a position of power, inhibiting violent behaviours from the child to the parent. Contreras and Cano (2014) also found that negative relationships are associated with CPVA, as does Kennedy et al's (2010) quantitative research.

The quantitative longitudinal study by Calvete et al. (2015b) conducted in Spain on 591 adolescents and their parents, found that poor parenting in terms of a lack of emotional warmth led to the child becoming more narcissistic, a predictor for CPVA. This links well with Gallagher's (2009) notion of the entitled child, who feels that they should have reduced responsibility and at the same time, have their demands met by others. It also raises the possibility that parent-child relationship and communication are an important aspect of whether a family experiences CPVA or not. Paulson et al.'s (1990) longitudinal quantitative study, is a part of a larger study on the use of drugs and alcohol "amongst 445 adolescents and an equal number of parents" (Paulson et al.1990 p.12). They found a significant link with communicating personal problems and CPVA. In cases where children hit their parents, the parents were significantly less likely to discuss their child's personal problems with their child, than where no such violence occurred. However, the paper does not discuss this in any further detail such as what strategies were used by the parents experiencing the violence to avoid discussing personal problems, such as the use of secrets.

Any combination of the risk factors is likely to negatively impact on the quality of relationships and communications within families. Contreras and Cano (2014), in their Spanish comparative study of young offenders and non-offenders, asked participants about their quality of communication. The results showed that the communication and support aspect of parenting style were more negative in families



in which CPVA took place than those in which their child was a young offender (for another reason/crime) but there was no CPVA. They reported that adolescents who assault their parents reported a lower quality of communication with both parents. This could be because CPVA is a crime against a parent, whereas other offences may actually be condoned or more easily forgiven by a parent.

There is one case study, by Patuleia et al. (2013) that used a systemic approach uncovering the family dynamics. They made the link between quality of relationship, communication and keeping the secret of their daughter's violence towards them. The participants were a family unit comprising a mother, father and their 15 year old daughter Maria. The family were accessing family therapy as an intervention to ameliorate several risk factors, including CPVA, which led to Maria being accommodated. This study was based upon a family therapy intervention. They found three dysfunctional areas in the family: hierarchy (parents relinquishing their role and Maria using aggressive behaviour to control family dynamics); protection/secret (the family denying the severity of Maria's aggression, which then developed rules for keeping this a secret, thereby refusing to address the aggressive behaviours); and separation/fusion (a lack of parental authority, which forced Maria into an independent role, such that aggression created distance in relationships).

The usefulness of the systemic approach by Patuleia et al. (2013) is that they were able to investigate the family dynamics and communication processes between family members. This enabled the researchers to reveal how the family maintained the secret of Maria's aggression within the family, such as not talking about it and denying the level of aggression from Maria towards the mother. This case study confirms existing evidence that CPVA remains hidden and under-reported by families (Hunter and Nixon 2012; Home Office 2015; Hoyo-Bilbao et al 2018). This case study approach offers an in-depth study illuminating communication patterns and helping to reveal this family secret, although it did not discuss whether other family secrets, other than the family experiencing CPVA, were problematic for the family. This unique account revealed how the secret of the violence was sustained.

Bartle-Haring et al (2015) did not use families for their study but conducted a quantitative longitudinal study based on 161 adolescents who had substance misuse issues. They used measuring instruments such as scaling questions to gather their data, and were interested in the reciprocity in adolescent and caregiver violence. They found that the behaviours of younger children are not predictors of future violent behaviours in adolescence. They argued that this may be because the family have developed ways of reducing conflict, such as avoiding one another (running away or not allowing the child to live with them). They also discussed the possibility that there may be an emotional distancing, which is a very subtle process, but may be done to avoid future conflict. It could be considered that secrets are a part of this distancing process, although this requires further study.

It can be concluded that none of the studies found in the body of literature that focused on CPVA, considered the influence family secrets may have upon CPVA. The literature does, however, consider the link between communication and quality of relationship and how the family violence is kept secret. How the family sustain secrets, as well as the quality of relationships, is therefore little considered in the literature and worthy of further study.

## **K. The Secret of Child-to-Parent Violence and Abuse**

There are no studies which have focused upon CPVA and family secrets, other than that of keeping the act of violence and abuse a secret. According to Cottrell and Monk (2004), CPVA is shrouded in secrecy, with the secret of family abuse and violence often maintained by the victim, the perpetrator, and those who are aware of the abuse but fail to protect the victim or intervene. Victims may not disclose the abuse through shame and/or guilt, due to overwhelming fear of how the perpetrator will react, or fear that professionals will become involved and in some way sustain the victim-blaming culture pervasive within our society (Hunter et al. 2010; Holt 2016). Another reason for keeping such secrets is that the victim may not have the ability to communicate their experiences (Varma 1997). The perpetrator may not disclose what is happening for similar reasons: shame, guilt and fear of punitive action or losing the person they are violent towards, or if the violent person is a

parent, fear of social services intervention and having their children (including the siblings of the violent child) removed from their care (Clarke et al. 2017). This, however, is as far as the CPVA literature takes the connection between CPVA and family secrets.

Two qualitative studies are worthy of mentioning, as these address the secrecy of violence in a more focused way. The first of these is by Patuleia et al. (2013) which has already been discussed. The other is by Cottrell and Monk (2004), who combined two separate studies to develop a qualitative overview of common themes in CPVA. They used a mixture of semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 39 adolescents, 45 parents and 34 service providers. Their data comes from the years 1996/7 for one study and 1999 for the other. The findings revealed a number of factors that interacted with one another to contribute to adolescent-to-parent abuse, broadly spanning psychological, interfamilial, social and political disciplines. These factors were socialisation of male power, youth response to victimisation, parenting styles, family dynamics, poverty and related stressors, mental health issues, effects of substance misuse, peer influence, and the role of schools maintaining secrecy and lack of information, and community supports (Cottrell and Monk 2004).

Cottrell and Monk found that the maintenance of family secrecy was through parents denying the child's aggressive behaviours due to self-blame, keeping it secret due to a sense of family loyalty, and fear of inciting a violent incident after disclosure (Cottrell and Monk 2004). Although their study showed that CPVA is associated with multi-causal, systemic factors, it did not consider whether secrets, other than hiding the child directed aggression, are associated with CPVA.

This literature review will now turn to literature focusing on studies specifically about secrets, to fill in the gaps in CPVA literature.

## **L. Defining Secrets**

Researching secrets is challenging by its very nature, as is defining a secret. A commonly used definition of secrecy is taken from Bok (1982), and provides the best fit for the purposes of this study. Bok (1982) stated that “to keep a secret from someone, is to block information about it or evidence of it from reaching that person, and to do so intentionally: to prevent him [sic] from learning it”. (1982, pp.5-6).

Although, this definition does not encapsulate the various nuances of sustaining a secret, it provides a useful working definition.

With any secret there are two sides: the person/s keeping the secret (secret holder) and the ‘unknowing person/s’ (the unaware). Vangelisti and Caughlin (1997) argued that secrets can be considered as a form of ‘information control’ (1997, p.530). They argued that when researching family secrets it is essential to consider who knows about the secret and who does not. Of course, this would presuppose that someone suspects that there is a secret being kept from them.

The position of the unaware can be categorised into varying levels of consciousness: completely unaware a secret is being kept from them; aware that there is a secret but unaware of the facts; and aware there is a secret with knowledge of only some of the facts. What seems to be important is the perception of a secret being withheld. For example, a number of quantitative studies have found that the perception that someone is keeping a secret from them causes relational dissatisfaction (Finkenauer et al. 2009a; Frijns et al. 2013).

Families sustain secrets as part of private life, ranging from low level secrets to highly damaging toxic secrets (Frijns et al. 2013). For example, Vangelisti’s (1994) study on family secrets undertaken with 214 undergraduate students at a university in the USA found three different categories of secret including “...taboos (family aggression/alcoholism), rule violations (breaking the law) and conventional secrets (affairs)” (1994, p.131). Depending on the category of secret, the person most likely to be the secret keeper changed. Vangelisti (1994) found that the whole family, rather

than individuals, are more likely to hold taboo secrets, whilst rule breaking and conventional secrets were more often held by individuals.

### **M. What are the Reoccurring Themes of Secrets?**

Reoccurring themes in the literature on secrets seem to be predominantly about adoption, surrogacy, ill-health and disability, or about partner/spouse relationships. However there is a dearth of literature on the influence of secrets on individuals and their families. The themes used for the purposes of this review are centred on the literature available. These themes relate to why a secret may be kept or revealed, and the influence secrets may have on an individual or the family.

#### **Positives of Keeping a Secret**

A degree of secrecy in families is healthy, such shared family low level secrets held for positive reasons, for instance as a fun surprise, or birthday present. This has been linked to having better quality relationships within the family (Frijns and Finkenauer 2009; Frijns et al. 2013; Laird et al. 2013a).

Finkenauer et al. (2002) conducted research on the advantages and disadvantages of keeping secrets from parents. They used questionnaires and scaling questions to question 227 adolescents from two schools in the Netherlands. In one school they accessed pupils between the ages of 12-13 years, and in the other 16-18 years. They found that keeping secrets helped adolescents individuate from parents as part of their normal human development, thus supporting the development of their emotional autonomy. However, they also found that as part of this process the adolescent may experience depressive moods, so that although this is a normal aspect of development, it can have its negative consequences. They argued that the degree to which secrets impact negatively on the child may relate to how supported they are by their family and friends in the act of individuation, and/or other factors associated with the child and family, such as living with adversities like domestic violence and abuse and/or substance misuse

Research has shown that there are positives of sharing a secret, because of the psychological and physiological damage keeping a secret can create (Kelly and McKillop 1996; Imber-Black 1998). Kelly and McKillop (1996) conducted a review of existing literature on the consequences of revealing personal secrets, and argued that there are times when keeping a secret is better than disclosing it, such as when the information shared may cause deep emotional harm to the person to whom it is revealed. However, this kind of protectionism may cause continued harm to the secret holder in the effort to keep the secret, and may affect the functioning of the relationship because of the measures taken to conceal it. Expanding on this theory, in the book by Imber-Black (1998) called '*The secret life of families*', it was reasoned that secrets maintain family privacy, but adolescents should not be expected to maintain those which involve deception or evasion or isolate them from their family and friends. In other words, there may be times when children keep secrets for others to protect them from what they perceive as harm, but this in turn may affect their well-being. An example of this is a parent committing criminal acts and the child having to keep this secret from others, either within the family or external to it. A real life instance of this was when Matthew Moseley was found guilty of murder, when initially he had persuaded his son to take the blame for it (BBC 2018).

### **Negatives of Keeping a Secret**

A number of authors suggest that keeping secrets can be detrimental to familial well-being, including Vangelisti (1994); Frijns et al. (2005); Frijns and Finkenauer (2009); Laird (2013b) and Uysal et al. (2012). The effect on the 'unknowing' or 'unaware' person can be severe, as it can lead to lower relational well-being and mistrust (Cauglin and Golish 2002; Finkenauer et. al. 2009a; 2009b; Frijns et al. 2013). Jacobs (1980) used two case studies, which showed that whether a child knows there is a secret or not within the family, they will be affected emotionally and this may increase aggression and internal conflict

Imber-Black (1998) explained that children will often 'act out' a family secret like a 'distorted mirror', whether they know the secret in full or not. The secret can also transfer down through generations: Imber-Black (1998) highlighted research

conducted on Latino girls who attempted suicide, and found that every girl's mother had also attempted suicide as an adolescent, but had kept it a secret from their children.

The consequences on the secret holder can also be severe. The quantitative study by Frijns et al. (2005), based on Dutch families (adolescents and their mothers and fathers) using self-report measures about adolescents who keep secrets from their parents, found that maintaining a secret, "...was associated with psychological disadvantages in adolescence, contributing to low self-esteem, depressive mood, and stress..." (2005, p.144).

Frijns et al. (2013) conducted a longitudinal survey study with 1173 adolescents accessed from six schools in the Netherlands, between the ages of 10 to 14 years old. Tilton-Weaver (2014) also conducted quantitative research, only the sample was slightly smaller, with 874 Northern European adolescents. Both found that delinquency and secrecy were interlinked. Maintaining a secret led to anti-social behaviours, which made the children more secretive about what they were doing, in a positive feedback loop that led to increasing family dysfunction and a breakdown in communication. However, it needs to be noted that there are perceived different levels of importance of the nature of the secret, for example, smoking cigarettes or shop lifting is not the same as assaulting someone.

The study by Frijns et al. (2005) of adolescents, who kept secrets from their parents, showed that keeping secrets was associated with experiencing stress and increased aggressive behaviours. The study used scaling surveys to investigate aggression and delinquency, but they did not investigate whether the aggression was aimed at anyone in particular, just that the adolescent had become more aggressive in general. When considering how the well-being of adolescents continues across their life-span, Jahn (1995) conducted research on how family secrets and the family environment related to later adult functioning, using self-reporting and scaling questions. Jahn used a sample of 108 adult participants with a mean age of 41.85 years. Jahn found that a number of secretive events and negative family environments were associated with poorer psychological functioning as the child grows into an adult. These results are not surprising, because a negative and

unstable upbringing is well evidenced to be a predictive factor of psychological difficulties across the life span (Aldgate 2006). However, these results are complicated by the fact that teenagers often experience periods of moodiness and stress which is perfectly normal. The question is: when does it get out of hand and become a problem?

Berger and Paul (2008) and Finkenauer et al. (2002) suggested that the reason for the negative symptoms associated with keeping secrets is that it takes a toll because topic avoidance strategies and lying have to be used. The individual is unable to talk through her/his secret with someone else as a cathartic exercise or with any possibility of resolving the issue. These strategies require effort to maintain, and prevent an open and honest relationship from developing (Palomares and Derman 2016). Afifi and Caughlin (2006) conducted quantitative research using surveys to gather data from a sample of 373 students from universities in the USA. They wanted to explain the difficulties and consequences of keeping a secret. They found that keeping a secret causes mental rumination. The secret holder tries to suppress the secret from their thinking, the thoughts then come to the fore (a bit like asking someone not to picture an elephant and straight away they imagine one), so they work harder at suppressing the information so as not to leak any details, with the result that the thoughts become more intrusive in their conscious thinking, and so on. The effort to keep a secret thus becomes a destructive process.

### **Positives of Disclosing a Secret**

Some research has indicated that the advantages of maintaining secrets are that they protect the secret holder or family from the shame of the secret being disclosed, thereby maintaining the appearance of a functional family, thus avoiding social stigma (Smart 2011). Paradoxically, Finkenauer and Righetti (2011), in their review of understanding close relationships, in terms of understanding one another, explained that to disclose information about yourself, allows others to understand you as a person. In turn this allows others to help meet your needs and creates an environment for healthy and positive relationships.



Research has found that when young people disclose a secret to their parents there is better family functioning (Finkenauer et al. 2002; Frijns and Finkenauer 2009; Frijns et al. 2013). This could be because sharing a secret develops inter-personal skills and offers the parent the opportunity to steer their child in a more positive direction (Frijns et al. 2013; Tilton-Weaver 2014). This suggests that the sharing of secrets requires a fully functioning and respectful family relationship as a prerequisite. If there is no mutual respect within the family, then secrets are unlikely to be shared in an autonomous way. It also presupposes that the parent is capable of directing or redirecting the child, which in turn indicates positive intergenerational family legacies.

### **Negatives of Disclosing a Secret**

Research by Afifi and Steuber (2010), conducted research on a 'cycle of concealment model' in which they investigated why secrets are sustained. Two surveys were used, two months apart with 594 USA college students with a mean age of 19.65 years. The first was about a secret the participant was keeping, and the second was about whether the secret was revealed or not. The results showed that people keep secrets from others because they feel that the latter would either not understand or would respond inappropriately to a disclosure, so they keep secrets out of shame and/or fear. For example, Finkenauer and Righetti (2011) explained that victims of child abuse often keep this a secret through fear of punishment, and Cottrell and Monk (2004) say that this is also true of CPVA, but they do not address the influence of secrets upon CPVA.

A Study by Afifi and Steuber (2009) and Caughlin and Golish (2002) found topic avoidance was used to keep a secret because disclosure posed too high a risk to the self or to the relationship. Afifi and Steuber (2009) conducted research on 171 families (629 family members) who had children 18 years and older. It found that people not only use topic avoidance to sustain a secret but the secret holder was more likely to reveal the secret if they felt they had the ability to positively communicate this secret with others. This suggests that the negatives of disclosing a secret might be found if the secret holder perceived themselves to be deficient in

their ability to manage a disclosure, therefore keeping the secret is a form of protection to the self and/or relationship. Especially, if disclosure has the potential to lead to a sense of vulnerability if the disclosure was not able to be managed in the way they wished. Caughlin and Golish (2002) conducted quantitative research using questionnaires with 100 heterosexual dating couples and 114 parent-child dyads. They found that topic avoidance was linked to dissatisfaction in relationships, to the point that if the 'unaware' was perceived to be sustaining a secret, it would cause relationship issues. This appears to be less about the secret itself and more about how the secret holder perceives the quality of relationship with the unaware, or how they predict the other person will react if they share their secret.

Afifi and Olson (2005) conducted research on the pressure to conceal secrets within families. They used surveys and scaling questions to gather their data on 171 families (629 family members) consisting of single or co-parents with children 18 years and older. They found that in family systems, if someone has too much power and is aggressive, then the secret holder is less likely to disclose for fear of how the other will react once the secret is revealed. They explained that the power differentials cause a rift in family closeness, which decreased their commitment to each other. They found that this did not depend on the need to keep secrets, but conceded that "family members may refrain from revealing sensitive information that prompts conflict because they have become accustomed to avoiding conflict and fear the rather harsh rebukes that might result from such revelation" (2005, p.211).

Afifi and Olson's (2005) findings concur with those of Cottrell and Monk's (2004) study, as previously discussed. Afifi and Olson (2005) argued that little research was available which explored how communication patterns change when different people with different levels of power are interlinked, and that this needs further investigation. This fits well when considering the nature of CPVA, because it creates a breakdown in relationships, as well as, a shift in the 'normal' power dynamics between parent and child (Agnew and Huguley 1989; Coogan 2011).

## **N. Secrets, Communication and Quality of Relationship**

Dailey (2006) used a combination of self-reports and observational data to conduct research on 59 parents with a mean age of 49.1 and adolescents with a mean age of 15.7. Dailey explained that children disclose more to parents who are accepting and responsive to their needs. Afifi and Steuber's (2010) study concluded that the quality of the communication (not content) between parent and child can effect development of self-worth and identity. Good quality parental communication enabled the child to develop the skills to communicate effectively as well as explore their emotions, supporting the child's development of autonomy.

Conversely, if information is concealed from others within a family it is likely to have a negative impact upon the child's well-being, as well as upon their relationships with those they are keeping secrets from. Frijns et al. (2005), also found that when a child keeps a secret from their parents it is associated with poor communication and trust issues. This could be inherent to relationship difficulties: the child does not trust the parent as they already have communication issues and therefore choose to withhold information, rather than the secrecy causing the trust and communication issues. More research is needed to establish which the cause is, and what the effect is.

When considering the concealing of information from the parents point of view, Finkenauer et al. (2005) conducted quantitative research on perceiving concealment in relationships between parents and adolescents. They found that if a parent perceived their child to be concealing information from them, regardless of whether concealment is occurring, this is associated with poorer parenting, such as being unresponsive to the child's needs, less accepting of them, and taking less interest in their social activities. They argued that the consequence of perceiving their child as concealing information or lying is that they feel in some way rejected and this impacts upon their parenting capacity. They also argued that poor parenting, such as not trusting the child, could lead to a perception of concealment in the first place. They suggested that as the parent withdraws from the child due to their sense of rejection, the child, feeling rejected themselves, may withdraw arguing that this could

lead to parental conflict, directed towards the child. These findings and conclusions suggest that concealment may lead to a cycle of concealment, rejection and isolation within families, depicting the complexity of interacting family dynamics stemming from interpersonal perceptions and how these impact upon meaning-making and behaviours. It should be noted that this paper focuses upon parental behaviours and is about parental perception of concealment, it does not address actual concealment, parental concealment or why a child may conceal information in the first place.

Hawk (2012) however, addressed this in a study using longitudinal data on child development. Hawk used questionnaires to gather the data from 497 Dutch adolescents with a mean age of 13.0 years, and both their parents. It was found that adolescents are more likely to conceal information from their parents if they feel that their parents are using tactics to pry and intrude into their private lives.

Afifi and Steuber's (2010) research undertook a quantitative study on secret revelation within families, specifically one family member concealing a secret from others, the child concealing information from the parent, which showed that individuals can reinforce a 'cycle of concealment'. In a family, a cycle of concealment involves verbally aggressive responses from the parent to an initial revelation of a secret by the child, which in turn will increase the likelihood of further concealment in order to avoid future conflict, stemming from the anticipation of an aggressive response to a disclosure, as a form of self-protection. They found that as the cycle of concealment increases, due to continued negative reactions to disclosures over time, it will negatively affect the relationship, and if the cycle of concealment is reinforced in this way, it is likely to affect family bonds. They argued that in order to sustain self-protection, the secret holder (child) will try to sustain control over the secret being disclosed. They do not, however, discuss the impact of frequent aggression within the home and the influence of keeping secrets, and they do not address CPVA. In fact Afifi and Steuber (2010) state that, "children for example, may be more likely to engage in the cycle of concealment rather than parents because children typically have no dependence power over parents. Parents also are less likely to fear an aggressive response from children" (2010, p.1030).

The impact of topic avoidance on the unaware may also have a negative effect. Karpel (1980) reached the conclusion that the 'unaware' are likely to feel tensions when discussing areas around the secret with the secret holder/s, due to topic avoidance. Orgad (2015), who wrote about the culture of family secrets from a more systemic perspective, also explained that secrets generate 'holes' in the secret holder's narrative, such that the unaware may feel anxiety and negative emotions about the discussions but not understand why. This could affect both personal well-being as well as quality of relationship.

Communication difficulties are, therefore, an important component within secrecy. This concept can be linked to Minuchin's (1974) systemic theories about family functioning. Minuchin developed structural family therapy, he argued that transactional patterns within families are an invisible web which regulate family functioning. This is done through each person responding to previous behaviours or sequences of behaviours. When making a link to this study, it could be argued that these transactional patterns of secrets and concealment negatively affect family functioning. For example, it has been shown that a lot of effort has to be made to conceal information and a lot of distress caused to the unaware. Turning this argument around demonstrates the importance of, mutual accommodation (Minuchin 1974) in regards to the transactional patterns generated within families, such as, open communication which means that the strategies needed to conceal information do not form a part of these transactional patterns and therefore, do not have an impact upon family functioning.

## **O. Family Secrets as Constructed Across the Life-Course**

This whole literature review shows that the risk factors associated with parent abuse appear to develop across the life-course (Bronfenbrenner's 1979 chronosystem), and the degree to which they are expressed depends primarily on interactions with others within the family as well as external societal factors found within the different systemic layers (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Looking only at the crisis point, when a family acknowledges that they have a problem, does not give an in-depth

understanding of why CPVA occurs. In fact, Holt and Schon (2016) argue that it is important to consider the reason for the conflict between parent and child across the whole life cycle, rather than focusing on the adolescent as the perpetrators and the parent as the victim. Pagani et al. (2004) also agreed that it is important to look at a child's life-course exposure to violence and harsh punishment as a possible predictive factor of parent-directed aggression. Holt and Schon (2016) argued that it is important to stop focusing on the abuse as the causal factor and instead analyse violence in a more "contextualized, developmental, and intersectional way, [then] other conflicts between parents and offspring will be illuminated" (2016, p.14). To support this methodological thinking, Murphy-Edwards and Heugten (2015), in their phenomenological study that focused on domestic property violence within the 'umbrella' of parent abuse, found that parents did not talk about this issue in isolation. This happens in the context of issues within the family system such as mental health problems, parenting, and societal changes such as changes to children's rights.

It is also clear from the previous research on CPVA that very few studies discuss communication and interpersonal relationships within families. Some studies state that CPVA is associated with negative relationships, and discuss communication issues, but they do this in terms of parenting style and support. The gap in research on this topic is especially evident when considering how these relationships and communication patterns have developed over time and across generations. This fits in well with Goodall (2005), Smart (2011), and Orgad's (2014; 2015) notions of intergenerational narratives associated with secrets having been constructed and passed down through generations, affecting identity, relationships and well-being. Therefore, this raises the question of whether sustained secrets within families are a risk factor to CPVA?

## **P. Family Secrets as Constructed Intergenerational Narratives**

Family secrets seem to be even more complex than the understanding outlined in previous sections would suggest. The communication patterns in either disclosing or concealing a secret has been suggested as being intergenerational. Smart (2011)

used written narratives from the Mass Observation Project, with data from 168 women and 50 men. The results showed that all forms of family secrets effect relationships, with risks associated with both revelation and concealment. Smart (2011) found these narratives revealed some of the workings of everyday family life and how people manage and control knowledge inside the family, and “Family secrets may be seen as a key to unlock otherwise obscure practices and invisible mechanisms; they are not simple lies or mere historical curiosities, rather they are part of the fabric of everyday life” (Smart 2011, p.551).

Smart (2011) explained that family secrets are embedded within family stories, which are made up of memories that are refreshed, rehearsed and altered over time. The function of these stories is to construct both individual and familial identities. These secrets are therefore sustained, not through concealment but through rumours, murmurings, palpable silences and evasions. Goodall (2005) used ethnography to investigate family narrative and secrets, and discussed the term “narrative inheritance” (2005, p.497), which is a story that is passed on to us from previous generations. Goodall (2005) argued that these inherited narratives provide a framework to help us understand our own identity through past generational identities. He further explained that it is these stories that allow us to explain to others who we are, our upbringing, and put our lives in an intergenerational context, arguing that humans are storytellers.

Goodall (2005) used his own personal inherited narrative to discuss the impact of an unfinished narrative. He wrote about not knowing that his father was a spy or how he had died, and that his mother had given him an incomplete and evasive account of his father’s life and death. Goodall argued that by passing this incomplete narrative on to others, he was sustaining familial secrets and lies. He explained that his parents talked within a boundaried, protective dialectic to protect him from his father’s toxic secrets, leading him to grow up with negative feelings and alienation towards his father. This feeling of exclusion is also supported by Finkenauer and Righetti’s (2011) research, in which they argue that keeping a secret from someone creates social exclusion.

Orgad's (2014) paper, used Bion's Concept of –K (knowledge) (Bion 1967; 1989; 1994) to interpret the film 'Secrets and Lies' (1996), and takes this notion of inter-generational and intersubjective narratives further. Orgad explained that in order to understand secrets, intersubjectivity needs to be understood, and in order to understand the processes of family secrets, the family relationships and meaning-makings between them need to be explored. Secrets prevent authentic communication by negatively affecting intersubjective experience and secrecy takes away enriching experiences and leaves an individual in a coercive environment (Orgad 2014).

Building on this earlier work Orgad (2015) argued that secrecy is multi-layered between the micro and macro systems of society, from the individual and their family to the wider societal domains such as politics. The secret holder's dialogue is culturally mediated, and it is this that affects identity, due to secrets from the past affecting the person now and in the future. In other words, what is considered as a secretive matter due to the consequences of revealing this information, is not only constructed by the individual and through relationships with others, but also by society. This notion fits well with Afifi and Caughlin's (2006) study (discussed above), in which identity, both personal and public, are factors associated with whether or not someone will reveal a secret. This idea lends itself to biographic research in order to understand the intergenerational legacy of family secrets across the lifecycle and associated narratives.

In conclusion, the body of literature on secrets and on CPVA shows that many family secrets have a negative impact upon individuals, couples and families and can lead to psycho-social problems. One study in particular by Frijns et al. (2005) makes a link between secrets and the possible consequence of increased aggressive behaviours, but none make a direct link to CPVA. In fact some of the studies argue that by keeping a secret, the person is actively preventing further aggressive outbursts (Afifi and Steuber 2010). This review of the literature suggests that this is an area worthy of further investigation, in particular to see if family secrets, other than that of family violence and abuse, do have an influence on CPVA.



## **Q. Review of the Methods Used To Specifically Study Child-to-Parent Violence and Abuse**

For the purposes of this study, the methods used in the main bodies of literature on CPVA were reviewed. The most notable aspect of these was the predominance of quantitative research methods.

### **Quantitative Studies**

The quantitative studies focused on CPVA (discussed throughout the literature review) were, in varying degrees, useful in terms of understanding prevalence, victim, perpetrator and incident characteristics and risk factors (exposure to violence, substance misuse, negative peer influence, poor parenting), associated with CPVA. Another positive aspect of quantitative research is that much of the data from the large scale studies results were generalisable to larger populations.

Many of the quantitative studies, however, used targeted samples that might not be considered as representative of the general population, such as accessing participants from mental health clinics, e.g. Mahoney et al. (2003); Fawzi et al. (2013); and Kuay et al. (2016). Due to adolescents meeting the thresholds for clinical help, these samples would have been skewed in terms of a representativeness, but all had a sample size which could produce significant results.

Other target sample groups that could be considered non-representative of the general population are those that have used data from the police, the juvenile offender system, and the courts. Such studies include, Evans and Warren-Scholberg (1988); Kethineni (2004); Gebo (2007); Kennedy et al. (2010); Contreras and Cano (2014); Ibabe et al. (2014b); Miles and Condry (2014); and Holt (2017). These samples again show skewed data due to not being representative of the population in general. Each study had a different focus, ranging from parricide, the judicial system, and mental health/clinical services. What these studies show was that CPVA is multi-causal and has many different risk factors associated with it.

Research that may have presented more representative data were those that accessed participants from educational settings, such as Kratcoski (1984); Browne and Hamilton (1998); Ibabe et al (2013); Ibabe (2016); Izaguirre and Calvete (2017); and Hoyo-Bilbao et al. (2018). These studies were heavily reliant on self-report data from adolescents, rather than using whole families as participants. Although, these studies show that family environment and functioning affect individual behaviours and actions, such as those leading to parent directed violence and abuse.

Studies that used nationally representative samples were by; Walsh and Krienert (2007); Cornell and Gelles (1981) study which gathered data from part of a comprehensive study in 1975. Ulman and Straus (2003) used the 1975 USA national family violence survey. Peek et al. (1985) and Brezina (2000) both used the same Youth in Transition survey with young male high school adolescents. Agnew and Huguley (1989) used the 1972 USA National Survey of Youth with the focus of adolescents. Hotelling et al. (1989) used three different surveys, the first in 1972, focused only on students for the survey. They then used data from a national survey conducted in 1975 and a national resurvey conducted in 1985 from the USA which used families as their participants. Although, they excluded single-parent families so it could be argued that this was not representative of all families in the USA.

An issue with all these quantitative studies is that, although they answer the question posed by the researchers, for obvious methodological reasons they cannot look beyond the variables chosen, thereby missing information that could contribute to the body of knowledge and a deeper understanding of CPVA. In addition, none of the quantitative studies on CPVA consider the lived experiences of CPVA, nor do they help reveal whether secrets are associated with it, or address secrets within the family and how they are sustained, except that they all acknowledge that CPVA remains under-reported (Hunter and Nixon 2012).

## **Qualitative Studies**

### **What range of methods were used and with whom?**

When it comes to qualitative studies that focus on CPVA and secrets, not many relevant articles were found. Within the CPVA literature, many of these studies only used the parents as participants, focusing on their perspective on the issue, and therefore did not include the 'voice' of the child at all, thus creating a methodological bias and seriously limiting the depth of understanding of this form of family abuse.

There is a body of research with only parent participants, and therefore, the perspectives on the issue of CPVA do not include the voice of the child, thus creating a methodological bias and limiting the depth of understanding of this form of family abuse. Despite this limitation the methods used have gathered in-depth data, allowing the study to reveal complex and rich information about the topic. For instance, Jackson (2003) used conversational style interviews and was able to make links to a broader context of family violence, drugs and alcohol misuse and feelings of fear and anxiety which led the mothers in the study to alter their behaviours to manage these fears.

Eckstein (2004) used in-depth interviews and was able to identify perceived parental roles and family relationships. Stewart et al. (2007) conducted a five year longitudinal biographic study with 60 mothers and was able to investigate family functioning, social and cultural influences as well as power dynamics. Murphy-Edwards and van Heugten (2015) used questionnaires and semi-structured interviews and an interpretative phenomenological analysis and argued although they were investigating property violence other themes were uncovered such as the impact of the violence and emotional well-being. Clarke et al. (2017) used semi-structured interviews also using interactive phenomenological analysis and their method revealed the tensions and ambiguities of living with violence. The study by Williams et al. (2017) explored cross generational research with six mothers and 2 grandmothers using a phenomenological interpretive analysis to understand lived experiences of CPVA.

All the above studies gave rich and complex information about the parents (mainly mothers) experiences of CPVA. They were able to present the emotional and psychological aspects of CPVA as well as consider the complexities of the relationship of the parent with the violent child. For example, Williams et al. (2017) found that the participants talked about how emotionally driven the experience was, and how mothers blame themselves and feel blame from their community regarding their parenting skills. Such psychological experiences of CPVA can silence individuals in owning and communicating experiences. By adding the voice of the child and its perspectives on CPVA, a more detailed and complex understanding of CPVA can be unveiled.

In six other studies, the parents and adolescents were both included, as well as professionals involved with the families. Two of these have already been discussed, these being by Cottrell and Monk (2004) who used semi-structured interviews and focus groups; and Routt and Anderson (2011) who used 3 sources of information, including interviews and observations. The qualitative study by Calvete et al. (2014) investigated the perspectives of parents, children and professionals using focus groups. 21 people were involved, with separate focus groups of adolescents, mothers, fathers and professionals. Gabriel et al (2018), who used research conversations with 2 young people, 3 mothers and 5 practitioners, addressed, amongst other issues, the victim/perpetrator confusion and the impact of witnessing domestic violence and abuse.

The six studies outlined above revealed more in-depth information and understanding about CPVA, and how violence is used and made sense of within the family, as well as exploring family communication patterns. For example, Calvete et al's. (2014) focus groups helped to uncover family dynamics and relationships from different perspectives within a family, as well as from the practitioners' positioning. The usefulness of this study is that, by involving different family members, a more detailed understanding of family functioning was revealed. Also, as discussed previously, Cottrell and Monk's (2004) study was able to relate family functioning and show how violence is kept secret, due to parent's denying the violence and abuse

and also the parents would blame themselves for the violence. A sense of loyalty would prevent the parent from disclosing to others to protect the child from negative consequences, and they were fearful that by disclosing the abuse, this would insight further incidents of violence, based upon past experiences of having made a disclosure leading to further incidents of violence.

Three other studies used a whole family systemic approach, based on a single case method. These were by, Micucci (1995), Robinson et al. (1994), and Patuleia et al. (2013). They all reviewed a systemic intervention of a family. Micucci (1995) used a whole family case study (a 15 year old boy who was violent, his brother, mother and father) to consider the interactions within the family, as well as family dynamics, and how family therapy could make positive changes. Robinson et al. (1994) used a family of three (a single mother and her two children), and discussed both the parent-child dyads and the sibling relationships. Patuleia et al. (2013) also used a family unit, consisting of a mother, father and their 15 year old daughter Maria.

The three studies outlined above, added yet a further layer of information on the topic, due to having used a whole family approach. For example, the study by Robinson et al. (1994) was able to show some of the family belief systems and how aggression was sustained, thus adding a different understanding of CPVA. However, this study focused more on promoting the intervention than contributing to the body of knowledge on CPVA, and although it included siblings, it did not incorporate the 'voice' of the father, thereby, missing a vital perspective on family dynamics. In addition, as discussed previously, the study by Patuleia et al. (2013) revealed different dysfunctional areas of the family: one of which was, protection/secret being about the protection of the secret that the family was experiencing family violence.

### **What Have These Qualitative Methods Shown?**

Qualitative studies tend to consider the experiential aspect under study. These, especially the ones which included the voice of the child, allowed for a more detailed and in-depth understanding of the experience of CPVA and the family dynamics and

communication patterns. Such in-depth methods may have the potential to reveal the communications and family functioning as well as the tensions and ambiguities associated with secret keeping, especially if the whole family were to be involved in the study.

None of these studies addressed whether family secrets influence CPVA, but those that used a more flexible and open line of questioning seemed to uncover more about family dynamics and the secretive nature of CPVA. There is therefore a gap in the literature of studies that use this method to investigate CPVA, especially when considering whether secrets have a serious influence on family dynamics. Regardless of the methods used, many of the research outlined above has contributed to a greater understanding of CPVA, not just the overall demographics, but also the possible reasons for its occurrences within families.

## **R. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Methods Used to Study Secrets**

### **Quantitative Studies**

Most of the research conducted on family secrets has been quantitative, and as a result has shown the widespread nature of maintaining or disclosing family secrets, and the negative consequences associated with this. Surveys (see Caughlin et al (2005), Frijns et al. (2005), Afifi and Caughlin (2006), Afifi and Steuber (2010) and Frijns et al. (2013) have quantified these issues, and although findings may be statistically significant, they have not contributed much to the deeper understanding of the link between family secrets and CPVA. A further limitation to the quantitative research reviewed was the limitation of gathering children's experiences directly. Adult perceptions about family secrets are of course relevant and easily gathered, but can only show one part of the family dynamic.

Whilst acknowledging the contribution of quantitative studies to research on family secrets, we must turn to qualitative studies in order to find rich data that leads towards a far deeper understanding of the issue.

## Qualitative Studies

The qualitative studies most relevant to this research were by Goodall (2005) who used a personal ethnographic account to demonstrate that lives that are shaped by secrecy lead to familial issues, such as communication problems and poor relationships. Goodall's (2005) ethnographic method was of particular value to this thesis, because it addressed the complexities of family life, and of how secrecy impacts upon communications and personal and family narratives. This highlights that an approach that delves into the personal accounts of people experiencing CPVA may help uncover a rich tapestry of information including, secrets, communication, and the impact upon the individual and their family, as well as considering intergenerational secrets.

Jacobs (1980) who used, psychoanalytic observations from clinical work, found that whether a child knows there is a secret or not, they will be affected emotionally and this may increase aggression and internal conflict. The reason this study was useful is that it considers both intersubjectivity and family systems and the reciprocal relationship between the two, affecting personality and relationships with others. This study, however is heavily situated within psychoanalytic theory and therefore, although relationships and family were considered, the main focus was upon repressed secrets and individual psychology effecting the ego and superego. This does however, show that by investigating individual case studies, individual meaning-making and family functioning can both be revealed.

Smart (2011) used narratives from the Mass Observation Project, and addressed the significance of how secrets are managed within families, such as narrative avoidance. She accessed written accounts of family life and experiences, with a focus upon family secrets. Smart argued that these accounts revealed the mechanisms of "everyday memory-making, identity constructions, bondings and mothering, and also the wider governance of family life. Each story can be taken as a starting point to disentangle how families work, how they present themselves to the world, how they manage their weaker members, how they control knowledge, and how they construct their heritage and aura" (2011, p.551). This study, using written

storied accounts, was able to show a deeper and more complex understanding of the impact of secrets on individuals and families, linking both the personal construction of the self and complex family practices (Smart 2011).

It can be seen from these studies, which by gathering in-depth accounts of people's lives and family experiences, that it is possible to reveal, meaning-making, identity and family dynamics and will allow for how secrets are managed within families. It would seem essential therefore, to use a method which accessed life stories.

## **S. Conclusion**

Many of the discussions in the body of literature on CPVA concern cause and effect, such as exposure to violence or substance misuse, but few discuss how this impacts upon the more private facets of family functioning, perhaps because this is taken for granted. One particular aspect of communications within families and interpersonal relationships that is not discussed in this body of literature is that of hidden information and secrets.

The limited number of studies that discuss secrets and concealment suggests that secrets are associated with negative psychological and physiological well-being, and also with an increase in aggression, but this has not been linked directly to CPVA. It has, however, been linked to poor parenting, relationship difficulties and communication problems, as has CPVA. The literature also shows that it is not only the secret that is the issue, but how the secret holder feels about themselves, their identity, and how they perceive the quality of their relationships with others. This includes the perceived consequences of revealing the secret, the ability to manage a disclosure, and how parental perceptions of concealment can lead to a sense of rejection. It also shows that if a child is behaving abusively toward their parent/s, then this can lead to a poor quality relationship.

This review has shown that in order to understand CPVA, and the factors that influence or are associated with parent abuse, such as secrets. The researcher needs to understand the individual's and family's identity and social milieu, including



the quality of relationships and communication patterns across generations. More research needs to be conducted to improve the understanding of why CPVA occurs and how it is experienced within families in order to support them, or even prevent it. A method which considers not only the whole life of an individual, their experiences and identity, but a whole family, intergenerational approach should therefore help answer the research question. This gap in knowledge regarding whether secrets influence CPVA therefore, not only requires an approach which can be used with different family members, of different ages, but is also linked to the understanding of the lifecycle and internal and external systemic influences, through the exploration of biographic narratives.

The following section aims to build a theoretical framework based on the findings from this literature review'. It will review relevant literature to identify a research methodology and method that will reveal whether family secrets influence children and adolescents who are controlling, aggressive or violent towards their parents.

### **III. Methodology and Method**

#### **A. Introduction.**

The previous chapter explored a range of key concepts regarding Child-to-Parent Violence and Abuse (CPVA) and family secrets. It highlighted the importance of developing an intergenerational systemic understanding (Bronfenbrenner 1979) of the reality and complexities lived by those affected by CPVA and how people's interaction influence behaviours, not only at the point of crisis but across their life course (this will be further addressed in section C). Conducting research that only focuses on the crisis point, will not investigate the cumulative effect of family dynamics or events in someone's life, or contextualise the current familial conflict (Holt and Schon 2016).

Prior to addressing the chosen research method, this Chapter will draw on methodology taken from philosophy, sociology and psychology. This will give context to methods discussed and how the research question can be answered. Which is: how do family secrets influence children and adolescents who are controlling, aggressive or violent towards their parents?

The critical analysis of the development of biographic research will shift its focus from the life-history method to the use of biography within research. In order to give context to these interpretative methods, the research will also draw on the use of language, culture, power relationships and the construction of knowledge. It will also be necessary to consider how an individual is shaped by society and how they in turn can influence it. It can then be argued that the shaping process of a life is enacted, lived and only later on can it be researched.

This Chapter will start by clarifying the meanings of the research ontology and epistemology. Then methodological issues will be explored, describing the philosophy that underpins the rationale for the method chosen in this study. Finally a

consideration of validity, reliability and the generalisability of this method will be examined.

## **B. Methodology**

### **Methodology and method**

Methodology is the philosophy underpinning the procedures in research: it is about making sure that the research fits the ontology and epistemology, so that the evidence gathered is 'believable' (Rawnsley 1998, p.3). The method is the tool used to answer the research question, it is how the information or data are gathered and interpreted or analysed. Therefore, methodology is essential to give the rationale behind the method, so that the conclusions drawn are authentic, reliable and valid. Before, the methodology and method are considered, a clear understanding of the terms and importance of ontology, epistemology are required in order to understand the intertwining nature of these concepts.

### **The Definition of Ontology**

*Ontology* can be *defined* as "the theory of being" (Greener 2011, p.6) as it deals with the nature of reality. *Ontology* is a system of belief that reflects an interpretation by an individual about what constitutes their reality, or a fact. Ontology refers to the world 'we' live in and how it is organised around us, our beliefs and perceptions of the world, such as whether the world exists independently or whether our perceptions of the world shape it. In other words, "ontologies are theories of what exists" (Rawnsley 1998, p.2), and ontological positions can differ from one person to the next.

### **Defining Epistemology**

The primary focus of epistemology is the theory of knowledge, the structure of knowledge, whether it is possible to justify belief and refute scepticism, and what is considered to be good knowledge (Rawnsley 1998; Greener 2011). Epistemology considers what can be considered 'truth'. Greener (2011) explained that different

methods create different kinds of knowledge or truth. The examples given are that scientific or positivistic methods, which favour experimental methods as a method of discovery, ascertain facts that are both verifiable and generalisable. However, this is not the only way of developing knowledge. Greener (2011) explained that conducting qualitative interviews will develop knowledge and reveal 'truths', or multiple truths (Denzin 1989). The knowledge produced from qualitative interviews may show contradictions and anomalies, but it will also show different ontological positioning and a deeper understanding of the participants lived lives. Such findings are authentic truths, usually verifiable, but not necessarily generalisable. However, because of the contextualisation inherent in these methods, they are high in ecological validity, rather than the statistical validity used by scientists.

This thesis will assume that the real world does exist independently of our perceptions, but our perceptions of it will differ according to culture, time, cognitive ability and identity. The word limits of this thesis, and the time available to do the research, make a complete analysis of reality impossible, but a brief overview will be given in the following section. The epistemology underpinning this study is that there are multiple truths, and to answer this research question, the research is not looking for one particular truth, it is looking for authenticity and validity (these concepts will be discussed in Section G).

## **Methodology Explained**

The importance of understanding how factual reality is formed, and how individuals interact with the world, helps us understand how people are motivated and make decisions, and how these processes affect their actions (taken or not taken) as well as their identities. The philosophy of how people relate to the world has long been debated, and can be divided into various theoretical schools. Only the key theoretical schools relevant to this study will be considered, these are; theory of mind, the psychology of identity, social constructionism, discourse, hermeneutics and systems theory.

A consideration of any of these key ideas can be challenged by questions relating to reality. The first is about how, 'we' come to know reality: is this all in the mind as epitomised by the Cartesian tradition 'I think therefore I am', (Descartes 1641. p.6) or do our interactions with the world and others shape our social reality? "I am linked, therefore I am" (Gergen 2003, p.8). These diametrically opposed stances are the result of opposing philosophies applied to understanding the world. Each will be considered in turn.

## **C. Psycho-social theories**

### **Theory of Mind**

Theory of Mind (for example, Descartes 1641) can be defined theoretically as the ability to recognise and attribute mental states, beliefs, intentions, desires, emotions and knowledge, of oneself, and others, and to understand that other people may have beliefs, desires, intentions, and perspectives that are different from your own. Theory of Mind is now known to develop in early childhood and is considered important for the development of positive social relationships and interactions with others, as well as providing an understanding of why people behave in certain ways (Nolaker et al. 2018).

In this research study, Theory of Mind (Sartre 1943; 1989; Hume 1975) has been used to explore participant's understandings of themselves and other family members in relation to CPVA. Theories of Mind suggest that there is a deep connection between the subjective (consciousness) and the object (nature / reality), or between the individual and their experiences: between mind, body, language and the world. For example, the rationalist tradition, as by Descartes (1596-1650), uses reason and logic to question or doubt our fundamental assumptions about the world. Using this 'method' Descartes strips away the world until he is left with one undeniable truth; in this case that he is a thinking being: his 'Cogito' is all that really exists. Hume (1975), on the other hand, looked to empirical evidence in order to understand the world. His conclusion was that the mind is only made real because of what is known in relation to impressions made upon it by the external world (Rustin

2000). Some theorists, therefore, believed that the sense of self is intrinsically developed, having a priori knowledge, (such as Descartes). This idea of being born with a sense of self already formed was contradicted by other philosophers who argued that it is by our interactions with the world that ideas are able to be generated, such as; Locke (1632-1704); Hume (1711-1776), Kant (1724-1804), Hegel (1770-1831).

Sartre (1905-1980), however, turned this theory around, and claimed that people unconsciously experience the world first and then consciously reason what it means to them afterwards (Sartre 1943; 1989). This activity of bringing the 'I' into consciousness when reflecting upon an experience will generate qualities of character, physical actions, emotional states and mental acts that transcend consciousness, and affect identity. These transcendent psychological states are seen as dominating our mental life (Hatzimoysis 2014).

The notion that people justify and moralise their actions after the fact, sustaining their notions of identity, would therefore fit in with this study. The activity of bringing consciousness into experience is important when gathering information from participants about their actions, their justifications and their moralising. Developing an understanding about why CPVA occurs could therefore be achieved through understanding the individual's mental state, their decision making and thus revealing why certain actions were taken or not taken.

## **The Psychology of Identity**

Psychological identity theory suggests that identity is influenced by an individual's social interactions and experiences. This idea was developed by Mead using the concept of 'symbolic interactionism' (Mead 1934). This idea was formulated from Cooley's (1902), 'looking glass self' and James' (1890) 'I/me distinction'. Symbolic interactionism is based on the notion that people interact with social objects according to their meaning. For example, when someone interacts with another person, it is the meaning derived from this interaction that is important, not the interaction itself. This leads to a sense of shared symbols and meanings, and the

ability, through the use of language, to form symbolic interactions. People therefore live in both a linguistically symbolic and physical environment (Aldgate 2006).

Mead also conceptualised the notion of the 'generalised other', by which he meant that individuals try different roles and behaviours with different people; and, according to the responses of these others, the individual will choose how to behave. For example, when a parent is at home with their children, they are likely to behave and respond to them in a different way from that which they use at work with colleagues. They will have different roles and expectations, portraying different facets of their identities and generating different meanings from the different interactions they engage in, and in turn each interaction will reinforce and further shape their identity.

The influence of other people's responses can be very powerful, and this is particularly common among children (Aldgate 2006). Much like a self-fulfilling prophecy, children develop behaviours according to what people repeatedly say about them e.g. using negative language, such as calling a child 'lazy', unsurprisingly results in a 'lazy' adolescent developing (Parrish 2014).

The usefulness to this study of considering the psychology of identity is that it enables a consideration of the influence that other people have upon the individual, in terms of shared meanings and multiple roles or identities. It also allows an exploration of the different ways people can draw meaning from interactions and in turn influence other people's behaviours. For example, familial interactions affect meaning making, especially when the interactions are associated with secrets. For example, family violence is often kept secret, shaping not only interactions within the family, but also interactions external to the family in order to sustain the secret.

Taking this notion further, it would be useful to consider how these shared meanings play out within the family and even in the wider context of society, in terms of Gergen's concept of 'communal knowledge' of the world and the self (Gergen 2003).

The concept of 'communal knowledge' can be taken beyond individual subjectivity, and beyond the family system, to incorporate society as a whole. This takes into consideration, and develops, an understanding of the unique subjective perspective, and how this manifests itself within a broader social context. An example to illustrate this is taken from an article by Bar-On and Rottgardt (1998) on biographical research. In this, they discuss how one biography was able to show how 'silenced facts' shaped the language and discourse used by the Nazis both during and after the Second World War. They explained how the events of the war continued to shape discourse, which in turn affected the language, thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of individuals, families and society, for several generations afterwards. Individuals and families learnt what could and could not be discussed, such as hiding any past or present alliance to the Nazi regime. Fear, guilt and shame silenced individuals as well as society, altering the discourse and stories from the war, so that any allegiance to Hitler, either within the privacy of the family or out in society, was effectively silenced, generating gaps in knowledge and the need to generate lies to uphold certain secrets. Bar-On and Rottgardt (1998) state that:

"The hidden structures or silenced knowledge of facts have a paradoxical relationship to discourse. They are not framed in our mind in any meaningful way, yet they affect our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. We know something and we don't know it, simultaneously. The unknown is coherent, creates rules we follow, and even frames the legitimate ways through which we make sense of the relationships between events". (1998, p.64).

## **Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics is a methodology based on the interpretation of texts. Modern hermeneutics was developed from biblical exegesis, which is searching for the truth in a text. Hermeneutics is now used in research to take an in-depth look at narratives that have been transcribed into text. This form of analysis is based upon linguistic understanding and has a methodological footing in several human sciences.

There are two principles applied to the hermeneutic analysis of texts: the principle of reconstructive texts of the gathered data, and that of sequencing of events, such as



chronological order (Rosenthal 1993). To undertake hermeneutic analysis, the researcher closely considers the reconstructed texts using a technique of abductive reasoning (going back and forth between narrative and context, generating hypothesis about what the participant was trying to convey, until an understanding is reached on what is the most likely given explanation). In other words, it is theorised that in every choice that was made by an individual, there were potentially alternative choices available to them. The researcher considers all the possible alternatives to an action made by the participant within the situation as described in the text, the actions ignored and the consequences of the decision made. Abductive reasoning is employed to generate hypotheses about the sections of information presented, deducing possible outcomes and contrasting these to the actual outcomes.

Derrida (1968 in Pirovolakis 2010) opposed hermeneutics as a method and argued that deconstruction theory, finding the meaning behind language is limitless, and therefore interpretation is pointless because it is not possible to choose one interpretation over all possible others (Goldman 2013). Derrida (1968) argued that the researchers' needs will bias any interpretations made and he used Nietzsche's notion of the 'will to power' (1887) to prove his point. The issue with this is that it does not help the researcher reach a theoretical understanding of the phenomena under investigation: it is impractical (Goldman 2013). This is because hermeneutic understanding always goes backwards and forwards between narrative and context until an acceptable answer is derived, a best fit for now, as Betti (1890-1968) suggests. Alternatively, deconstruction puts narrative into so many possible contexts that a definitive understanding can never be achieved.

The purpose of using hermeneutic analysis is to understand why that person took certain actions and helps to eliminate other possible interpretations, finally arriving at what influenced that person's decision-making. However, this method must also take into account why the researcher tries to understand all the options available to that person and in what situations that person would not implement certain options (Rosenthal 1993). For example, Betti (1962) thought the hermeneutic method required that all avenues must be demystified in order to uncover new understandings, which is impossible. Therefore the researcher will need to find a

method that supports the hermeneutic process, thinking beyond the usual parameters, and being realistic about when to stop searching for a new answer (Wright 1987).

The use of hermeneutics, has developed into different methodological camps. Objective hermeneutics derived from the work of Oevermann et al. (1979) who developed an operational concept for the interpretation of data, whereas Heidegger (1927), Gadamer (1989) and Ricoeur's (1984) concepts are underpinned by the philosophy of phenomenology.

The basic tenant of hermeneutic phenomenology is that how we experience the world, is already meaningful through interactions with others and the culture that surrounds us. The use of hermeneutic phenomenology is used to consider and illuminate these lived experiences. The phenomena at hand needs to be described prior to any interpretation of the event/experience. This allows an existential understanding of the phenomenon.

Challenges to this method rest on the idea that when someone is experiencing something, the experience comes first and then the individual has to put this into language before they can share this experience with someone else, therefore, an interpretation of the experience has already occurred. This links clearly to Theory of Mind and how individuals ascribe meaning to events and experiences to make sense of them. Therefore, any phenomena being researched is being expressed with additional layers of the narrator's meaning-making, such as justifications, moralising and possibly self-protection (Thiselton 2009). Gadamer (1989) and Heidegger (1927) argue that the meanings given need to be interpreted, because consciousness is part of the self and to separate the experience from the re-telling of the experience would prevent understanding the meaning and self-reflective understanding of the phenomena, known as 'objective self-understanding'.

In pure phenomenology the process of investigation is done by suspending judgements and beliefs about the phenomenon, which allow it to be understood in a new light. This would be very challenging to do in terms of this study, where the

researcher already has preconceived ideas and judgements about the topic under investigation, due to prior research conducted and her professional career. Therefore a purely phenomenological approach would be very challenging and realistically inappropriate. Hermeneutic phenomenology however, does not require the notion of being able to suspend judgements and beliefs. It is argued that the researchers own beliefs and judgments should be acknowledged and made visible within research so that the researcher is able to use self-reflection to understand what has been uncovered and then diminish bias and prejudice (Allen and Jensen 1990; Lavery 2003; Schmidt 2014).

When considering the influence of the researcher upon the interpretation process, Objective Hermeneutics was developed by Oevermann et al. (1979). This is a rule-governing method of interpreting textual data (Oevermann et al. 1979). The method involves a team of researchers generating different hypotheses from the data presented, which can then be tested and, if necessary, refuted with the use of empirical data (Oevermann et al. 1979; Seale et al. 2004). This method promotes a more objective approach to the interpretation process, because it does not confine the interpretations to being conducted by one person (Thiselton 2009). This method aims to understand social reality in its lowest form, understanding that it is not about making a generalised or grand statement but understanding the important details of the experiences (Mann and Schweiger 2009).

Oevermann et al (1979) argued that describing an event or an experience is not meaningful. However, to reconstruct the experience and reveal the realities of that experience, by not looking for truth but revealing objective meaning within a text, creates meaningful research. Each section of a text is understood in terms of social norms and traditions, the meaning-making and the actions (or non-actions) taken. When this is considered using the objective hermeneutic process the path taken and the path not taken is revealed, highlighting social realities and norms, and the connections with others (Mann and Schweiger 2009).

The relevance of objective hermeneutics to this study is that the research does not want an experience merely described but wants to understand why children and

adolescents become controlling, aggressive and/or violent towards their parents. Why did the child/adolescent react in the way they did, what possibilities did the participant have in that moment in regards to actions taken or not taken, and what were the familial and societal influences upon the participant. Objective hermeneutics therefore, seems a strong fit for this study and certainly one that enables those questions to be answered.

## **Discourse**

Whereas hermeneutic methods reconstruct meanings from text, discourse studies focus upon social order and how this is constructed through language. It is argued that discourse and social reality are interlinked because social reality is made real through discourse. Discourse shows how power is used and sustained within and by society, and that meaning-making is derived from social practices, not just through the actual words spoken, but rather through how language is used and contextualised. It is argued, that there is no such thing as individual discourse, all language is a product of the wider society (Angermuller et al. 2014).

Foucault, for example, showed how governing institutions regulate and have power over subjects within society, e.g. prisons or schools (Foucault 1977; Goodson et al. 2016). Foucault argued that power is dispersed throughout society: it creates certain behaviours in every person while at the same time restricting them (Foucault 1967; 1977). An example is Foucault's 'Panoptican', a prison where the inmates perceive themselves to be under constant supervision. This is a metaphor for how people can be oppressed by social order. This has also been referenced to the modern day use of CCTV (Galic et al. 2016). A further example of such power can be seen within cultural norms such as the monotropic mother-child image of the mother as the primary caregiver. This notion is still dominant within Eurocentric society, and as a result of these cultural expectations, attention is focused on how mothers should act and behave (Earle 2003).

It is therefore argued that the construct of power is sustained through the generation of myths, a powerful, but unseen force that is subscribed to by everyone involved,

even if they are unaware of it. There is therefore no real power, only the power that is given or taken by people. As discussed earlier, Habermas (1988) explains how Nazi Germany created its power through the use of myths and lies. Therefore, when considering discourse within this study, it could be theorised that the formation of each participant's narrative will be heavily influenced by society.

## **Social Constructionism**

The theory of social constructionism is based on the idea that all knowledge of the world is developed through social interchange, which is different according to cultural and historical context. This theory therefore refutes the idea of the person as the knower, that is, the person who is able to use reason and have agency in their lives (Gergen 2003) because reality is made up of the prevailing dominant beliefs in society, and therefore, people are, without knowing it, being told how to think and act by this powerful unseen ideological force. Korobov (2010) explained social constructionism by stating that:

“through disparate insignificant ways, common to these concepts is an interest in both the active, dynamic, and constructive processes of human interaction and a view that what emerges in such interactions is to varying degrees shaped by what people bring to the interactions (mind) and/or by the norms, rules, and ideologies (world) that are thought to constrain such interactions.” (2010, p.263).

Habermas (1988) wrote about the power of ideology and social constructs, and gave an example of this when he discussed examples drawn from the Nazi regime. He explained that the Nazi regime set itself up as culturally superior and therefore separate from Europe, and this for many people was considered a truth. Even though this consciousness was later discredited by knowledge of the atrocities that took place in Auschwitz, it took a long time to alter this social construct. He argued that even if this view was not at first discredited, it could no longer be constructed as a truth (Habermas 1988).

The notion of hegemonic power can also be focused onto issues of gender power imbalances. Constructed around men, who are ideologically seen as superior, and

women as unequal, inferior and subordinate. This inevitably influences family functioning. De Beauvoir (1908 - 1986) challenged such masculine hegemonic ideology by arguing that women are not born women in terms of role but they become women through a process of socialisation, and what is considered to be 'woman' and 'femininity', are a social construct, instilled through society's values, norms and education (Stoller 2014).

It could be argued that as a female researcher working within a certain academic, masculine hegemonic paradigm, there is power as a 'knower', but simultaneously, as a woman disempowered, and quite possibly the knowledge produced by this research may be, in its turn, devalued, simply because society is constructed to privilege the male knower (Page 1997). This raises the question of how a female researcher can challenge masculine hegemony and how women can reduce the power differentials between themselves and male participants in their research. Katlila and Meriläinen (2002) argue that the female researcher identity is not fixed but is "negotiated and transformed in discourse" (2002, p.163). They argue that the role of female researchers is socially constructed, not only through the interactions with others, but through the discourses surrounding gender identities. Katlila and Meriläinen (2002) argue that some discourses hold more privilege than others.

Professional identity is affected by the use of language which privileges men and male authority. Women are portrayed as being led by their emotions and less authoritative. Although, Katlila and Meriläinen (2002) are addressing the difference between male and female researchers and professional identities, this argument could be extended to that of female researcher and male participant. The dominant discourses which construct identity will be present within the interviews and may impact upon how the male participant views the researcher's authority/professionalism and also, if not reflected upon the researcher herself could unconsciously be feeding into the notion of male authority. Whilst it is unlikely that these issues will be quickly or easily resolved, they must be recognised as unseen influential factors in this research.

The notion of gender imbalance is also addressed by Gergen (2001), a feminist interested in power imbalances, social construction, and the significance that gendered narratives have upon social constructs. Gergen (2001) explained that the use of discourse offers advantages to some and disadvantages to others. For example, patriarchy is sustained by a saturated discourse of power that maintains the masculine position in society. Telling the story of a family's life could also be seen as an expression of such power enacted in the traditional patriarchal family.

When considering the restrictions imposed by language on the participants, (children and adults), from a feminist perspective, it could be queried that such restrictions are due to patriarchal traditions. It could also be argued that it is not possible to get an 'authentic' female narrative, that is, one free from patriarchal discourse (Gergen 2001). What can be said about children as research participants, is that children only have the language and consequently the ideology and discourses of those around them. The younger the child, the more likely they are to be influenced by family and to use the words of their parents/carers, together with a limited vocabulary and lack of any alternative linguistic experiences. It is therefore the role of the researcher to reflect and interpret, if an authentic story has emerged (the narrative truth as expressed by the participant about their life experiences), a true voice of the child, free from the restrictive language of others, and consider what power, parents or other significant adults, hold over the child, and what influence or even silence is pressed upon the child's narrative.

When considering these questions in a more focused way, the language used to discuss family violence seems to be only in terms of victim and abuser, and the mental imagery of these words are often of a male (often adult) abuser and a female victim (Baker 2012) or sometimes a child victim. Thus, understanding the experiences and meaning-making processes of participants can only be done within the confines of the language parameters laid out by society as well as the added restrictions of only being able to share their story through their own linguistic abilities. To consider it from the obverse point of view, the researcher will only be able to understand the information shared by participants within the parameters of the researcher's own mind-set and language. Hence the participant's social constructs

will be reconstructed within the parameters of the researcher's own social constructs. Every effort will be made to diminish bias and distortion of such narratives, while acknowledging that the lived-truth may not be the same as the told-truth, which in turn may differ from the researchers understanding of that truth.

#### **D. Gestalt Theory and Theories of Learning**

Gestalt Theory was summarised as the "the whole is something else (greater) than the sum of its parts" (Koffka 1935, p.176), and implies that the whole takes on a reality of its own.

Gestalt Theory is significant in terms of understanding how memory, learning, thinking and motivation are interlinked (Köhler 1959). Gestalt psychology started out in the early twentieth Century in Berlin, with Wertheimer, Köhler and Köffka (Lobo et al 2018). They worked on visual perception and how certain images were organised by individuals. It is from this work that the concept of Gestalt was created. They conducted experiments on how individuals perceived certain images and found that it is when different parts of the image are brought together or interact with one another, that the whole image, the Gestalt, is revealed (Sabar 2013, p.8). Gestalt psychologists take this notion further and argue that the whole is different from or greater than the sum of its' parts. It is the relationship between the parts, how these are brought together and the processes and functions when interrelated, which construct our perceptions (Köhler 1959).

Gestalt psychology was developed with the phenomenological underpinning that:

"focused on how individuals subjectively experienced and organised their perceptions...we do not see the world objectively. Rather, what we see is interpreted and given meaning by the observer, based on memories, expectations, beliefs, values, fears, assumptions, emotional states, and more" (Sabar 2013, p. 8).

In other words, perceptions are not carbon copies of what is seen, but how the experience has been interpreted and constructed and then given meaning which is significant to our understanding. In order to understand how people engage with the



world, it is important to look at the whole picture, and not break it down into individual elements because those elements already have a structure and meaning to that person (Lobo et al. 2018).

In relation to this study, Gestalt Theory is significant, it promotes understanding the person as a whole, as well as providing a concept for understanding how people construct their meaning-making and motivations out of their subjective experiences. Therefore, to understand CPVA and the decision-making, meaning-making and subsequent behaviours, it would make sense to consider each person's perceptions of their interactions within their environment, understanding *their* whole picture and how they have made sense of this.

Piaget's theory of knowledge also known as constructivism addresses cognitive development (Parrish 2014). This theory is based upon the notion that people adapt to their environment through developing an understanding of their reality, and the more each individual interacts with the world their understanding will develop. Piaget in 1936 argued that there were three main stages a child will learn how to interact with the world, these are; assimilation, accommodation and equilibrium (Piaget 1936).

Assimilation is how a new experience is made sense and this is done through seeing how it fits with a pre-existing and basic understanding of the world, known as schema's, e.g. a baby sucking anything which goes into the mouth, whether it offers milk or not. Accommodation is when the child learns how to drink from a glass, the child will have to change the shape of her/his lips and suck in a different way to receive the drink, as the child learns how to do this competently a new schema will develop. As long as the child is able to develop these new schemas effectively then the child will be in a state of equilibrium. If the child does not have adequate schemas to cope with the new experiences then the child will experience disequilibrium and will need to assimilate to develop new schemas to cope with the experiences (Parrish 2014).

Assimilation of schemas can also be about understanding rules and moral development, arguing that as the child assimilates the understanding of the difference between right and wrong for instance, the child will be able to use these schemas to gain a sense of equilibrium within social situations (Shaffer 1996; Sudbery 2010; Parrish 2014).

A criticism of this theory is that it concentrates more on the cognitive development of knowledge about the physical world, rather than the influence of social interactions while promoting the concept that children are quite isolated from social support in their learning (Shaffer 1996; Sudbery 2010; Parrish 2014).

Vygotsky's (1978) Social Cognition Learning Model argued that children gained knowledge through interacting with their cultural environments, in other words children are taught what to think through the culture they are a part of. Vygotsky (1978) argued for the importance of language in a child's development because it is through the guidance of parents, carers, teachers, other children and so on, that children learn how to problem solve. As this skill develops, the child is better able to lead an autonomous life. This autonomous life is developed through a process known as scaffolding the social construction of learning (Shaffer 1996; Sudbery 2010; Parrish 2014).

Scaffolding is when a teacher (or a more experienced other person), offers support to the child who needs to problem-solve. As the individual child becomes more adept at problem-solving they will need less scaffolding because they will eventually reach what Vygotsky (1934) termed their zone of proximal development. Later in life, the individual will be able to think about how they were supported in problem solving and apply this learning to their own situation (Parrish 2014). Vygotsky argued that each person will learn how to problem-solve according to the culture they grow up in, this includes their family and how the family problem-solves. One family may be able to use positive communication to manage stresses or conflict, whilst other families may have a culture where violence is used to manage conflict (Shaffer 1996; Sudbery 2010; Parrish 2014).

Social Learning Theory was developed by Bandura (1986) who created the concept of reciprocal determinism, the idea that interpersonal factors such as thoughts, beliefs and self-perceptions are interlinked with the environment and affects behaviour. Bandura (1986) argued for the importance of environmental influences upon behaviour in terms of understanding why behaviours happen and how to change behaviours (Shaffer 1996; Sudbery 2010; Parrish 2014).

This theory proposes that people, especially children, learn through observing others. Bandura's most well-known experiment is that of the Bobo doll.(1961) In this experiment Bandura showed that children who watch an adult being aggressive towards the Bobo doll were more likely to be aggressive when they came to play with the doll themselves. This suggests that if a child grows up in a family observing violent behaviours, they are more likely to use violence themselves (Shaffer 1996; Sudbery 2010; Parrish 2014).

Bruner's Developmental Theory (1960) is in opposition to some of the works of Piaget and Vygotsky. He argued that from birth a child is intelligent and an active problem-solver, but it is the use of symbols and codes, such as language that increases the ability to learn and helps develop the ability for abstract thought. Therefore, a child is able to learn anything at any age, as long as the information to help them learn is structured according to the child's abilities (Schaffer 2010), whereas, Piaget's theory was fairly fixed on stages and ages of development.

Bruner et al. (1976) viewed structured learning as 'scaffolding', in the same way as Vygotsky did. Bruner argued that children learn a linguistic code to develop their cognitive skills as well as their general use of language, to facilitate communication with those who teach them e.g. the more able other. It is argued that language and logical thinking are inseparable, otherwise thought would be limited to enactive (active based) and iconic modes (image based) of thinking. Piaget (1936) argued that language is used for cognitive development and builds upon an already existing understanding of the environment, whilst Bruner would argue that by teaching language and symbols to children, their learning could be progressed more quickly (Bruner 1981).

Bruner thought that language and symbols are learnt through interactions with others, through the social world and culture, and it is through this sharing/teaching from inside and outside the classroom that shapes identity and teaches individuals how to behave. This can be achieved, for instance, through play when the child is younger and helps develop simple conversations and social interactions. As the child gets older the games become more sophisticated teaching not only how to talk to others but also cultural norms (Bruner 1977; Shaffer 1996).

Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories were about thinking and language and set the scene for social construction and Bandura and Bruner were behaviourists; these theories will not be specifically taken further but incorporated within the discussion regarding social construction which will be used within this thesis in more detail.

### **Ecological Systems Theory**

The ecological approach has been adapted by different people, such as Lewin's Life Model (1959) and therefore defined in slightly different ways, thus developing different definitions and procedures for conducting assessments and interventions (Pardeck 1988). For example, Lewin (1959) hypothesised that people's behaviours were affected by their self-perception and the environment they grew up in (their total field). His theory used all aspects of Gestalt Theory in understanding the significance of individual interactions with their environment and how this influenced behaviour. Lewin theorised that individual behaviour can alter according to different 'life spaces', such as family, work, church and school. Lewin considered these 'life spaces' to be constructed by other forces within the social system, such as people's motivation for problem solving, their desires and drives to have their needs met. In order to understand individual behaviour these 'life spaces' must be considered (Piedra and Engstrom 2009; Henriques and Tuckley 2012). The importance of these life-spaces is that they shed light on the inseparable link between environment, interactions with others and how all of these together (Gestalt) affect people's behaviours.

The ecological systems theory has eclectic qualities which allow other approaches or theories to be incorporated with it (Henriques and Tuckley 2012). Some limitations of the ecological approach are that it stresses the importance of interdependent systems on human development, yet the relationship between these systems is not clearly defined (Neal and Neal 2013). Therefore, this approach does not offer a “utopian solution to complex family structures” (Stepney and Ford 2012, p.178).

Arguably, one of the most dominant voices in the ecological approach is Bronfenbrenner (1979). His theory evolved over the period 1979 to 2006 (Rosa and Tudge 2013), and linked all aspects of a child’s development to their social environment (Henriques and Tuckley 2012). Bronfenbrenner theorised that there were different interacting, multi-levelled systems affecting human development and shaping the development of the individual, in terms of health, education and well-being (Jack and Jack 2000; Neal and Neal 2013). He likened these levels to a Babushka doll, with the model consisting of concentric circles depicting the different levels surrounding the individual who is at the centre (Neal and Neal 2013; Parrish 2014).

Bronfenbrenner’s levels were as follows, starting from the individual outwards. Firstly the ‘microsystem’ in which the individual has direct contact with, and develops and incorporates, family interaction patterns. Secondly the ‘mesosystem’, which has a direct impact upon the individual and is the immediate community the individual grows up in, incorporating schools and support services. Next the ‘exosystem’ includes the social structures which influence the individual, for example, educational or care policies. Finally the outer system, the ‘macrosystem’, which includes cultural values and belief systems, or the prevailing ideology (Neal and Neal 2013).

Later in his career, Bronfenbrenner added another system called the ‘chronosystem’, which describes how time (events or experiences) impact upon the individual, leading to transitions in life, normative and non-normative. These experiences or events which change the relationship between the person and their environment may create a shift in their development (Neal and Neal 2013). Examples are, puberty

which is usually a normative transition or an unexpected death in the family which unusually, but not always non-normative (Rosa and Tudge 2013).

Bronfenbrenner's last evolution of ecological systems theory was of 'proximal processes', which are seen as the "driving forces of human development" (Rosa and Tudge 2013, p.252). Proximal processes are the reciprocal interactions between the focal individual and other individuals, objects and symbols in their environment which occur frequently over an extended period of time affecting human development and identity. Proximal processes are described by Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) through which "genetic potentials for effective psychological functioning are actualised" (1994, p.568). The individual's genetic 'heritability' (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994, p.569) is defined by the context in which the person is situated, which in turn affects their future outcomes and trajectories (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994), for example, parental capacity. Pardeck (1988) gives an example of how proximal processes affect a child growing up in an environment seen as difficult due to the mother's severe mental health problems, whereby the child develops the identity of being difficult and their behaviour adjusts accordingly.

Bronfenbrenner's concept of genetic potentials and proximal processes appear to be an extension of Sameroff's (1991 cited by Oates 2001) transaction model, addressing gene-environment-development interactions. Sameroff explains that the gender someone is born with gives specific psychosocial ways of thinking and being which then are affected, and to some extent governed by, the culture they grow up in, thereby affecting identity development (Oates 2001). Much like De Beauvoir's notion that females become women through a process of socialisation.

### **The Methodologies relevant to this study**

Theory of Mind, the psychology of identity, hermeneutics, discourse, learning theories and systems theory are important in explaining how people make sense of the world, themselves, and their social interactions. All these methodologies are relevant to this study and to varying degrees will be incorporated with it. The most

applicable methodologies however are; Social Constructionism, Ecological Systems Theory, including Gestalt and the use of Objective Hermeneutics.

The choice to bring together the complementary methodologies to underpin this research was made due to the need to incorporate the key elements of each in order to answer the research question. Ecological Systems Theory for example, is a theory that underpins working with and researching families because of its conceptual framework, based on how different systems influence individual meaning-making and actions.

Social Constructionism has been included because it is founded on the notion that all knowledge is based upon social interchange. Theorising how the individual is shaped not only by the family but through a wider societal context therefore, complementing the Ecological Systems Theory in regards to interactions and identity. This theory also adds a further layer of understanding with the focus upon language and powerful yet hidden cultural norms affecting the way we think and behave. The relevance to this study is that communication patterns and the use of language will need to be considered and reconstructed in more detail to uncover the meaning-making processes that will inevitably lead to the use of Objective Hermeneutics.

From the macro to the micro, Gestalt allows the researcher to understand the participants as a whole, in terms of their memories and experiences and how these are linked with meaning-making and motivations from each subjective perspective. This forms a valuable framework for understanding individual meaning-making.

In terms of an operational concept for this study, Objective Hermeneutics also helps to reveal the realities of an event or experience and uncovers the social realities behind them. The importance of using a team of people to interpret the data, supports a more thorough interpretation process, utilising the notion of Hermeneutic Circles of Enquiry, thus adding rigour and reliability to any conclusions drawn from the evidence.

## **The Social Class of Families**

Before this Section is concluded, a brief overview of social class will be discussed. “Social class encompasses hierarchical positions based on income, resources, and economic status in a group of similarly situated people” (Bloomquist et al. 2017, p. 191). Bloomquist et al. (2017) argue that social class also needs to be understood in terms of social environment and identity. For example, those who experience poverty are likely to experience class-based discrimination, lack of education and employment status, impoverished consumerism, and poor mental health. However, it must be noted that some individuals achieve success and make the shift out of poverty (Siraj and Mayo 2014).

In Western cultures class tends to be measured against education, work status and income, dividing people into lower, middle and upper classes and it is argued that those with more money, higher educational attainment and employment status have more power and influence within society (White et al. 2015). The class divides can create class discrimination, often with the lower classes experiencing inequality in education, health and housing.

Class stereotypes are also forged by society and the notion that violence is a working class issue is one such notions. It should be noted that family violence has recently been shown as impacting upon many individuals and families regardless of their employment status or income (Spencer 2011). For example, when considering CPVA, the UK Home Office (2015) guidelines for working with APVA explain that although many of the reports of APVA are from families who are not in full-time employment, others who report to the police are in professional jobs earning high wages, concluding that “APVA appears to affect all levels of society” (Home Office 2015, p.5) but most the reports tend to come from people already accessing statutory support e.g. children’s social care.

Class could be considered as another aspect or influence upon CPVA but from the evidence it is much more likely that class determines how people understand CPVA



and choose to report it. Social Class as a separate issue will therefore not be discussed further within this study.

## **E. Method**

This study's objective is to reveal subjective perspectives (including intersubjectivity and social milieu) in order to answer the research question and understand how lived experiences are constructed (Shoderu et al. 2012), and how meaning-making processes are made through relationships and culture (Schltheiss et al. 2011), that lead to certain actions (sustaining secrets, and violence) in a family context. The research question aims to discover if secrets are an influence on controlling, aggressive, sexualised or violent actions by a child towards their parent/s.

The methodology underpinning this study must uphold the aims and objectives delineated by the research question. The approach also needs to uncover the biopsychosocial layers of consciousness, identity, interaction, language/discourse and identity roles over time, in order to answer the research question. The best approach would be through a form of interpretive inquiry that focuses on the relationship between the self and social context. Narrative research, a form of interpretive inquiry, draws upon concepts of subjectivity, objectivity and interactionism and complements social construction theory, ecological systems theory and hermeneutics. As Polkinghorne (1988) argued that:

“Our encounter with reality produces a meaningful and understandable flow of existence. What we experience is a consequence of the action of our organising schemes on the components of our involvement with the world. Narrative is the fundamental scheme for linking individual human actions and events into interrelated aspects of an understandable composite” (1988, p.13).

### **What is narrative research?**

The use of narrative and storytelling is woven throughout history, to the point that it can be considered part of human nature. Narrative can be found in many spoken

forms, for example, folk legends, myths, film, art, poetry, history, and religion: the list is endless (Brockmeier and Harré 1997; Czarniawska 2004). The power of storytelling is immense and has been used as a medium for sharing knowledge for centuries. It is a way of sharing wisdom, passing down traditions, making sense of the world, developing expectations of behaviour, of sharing warnings of danger, and a way to build relationships, and a mechanism of acculturation (Tsitsani et al. 2012).

Sharing narratives is a strong part of an ancient tradition of storytelling (Bruner 1990). White (1980) argued that “to raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself. So, natural is the impulse to narrate...” (1980, p.5). People communicate, make sense of the world, and develop their identity through the use of narrative (Atkinson 1998). This research therefore embraces the opportunity to use narratives, both instinctively from the point of view of the researcher and from the philosophical point of view as a natural method of enquiry.

Bruner (1990) made the important link between meaning-making, experience and culture, and coins the term Folk Psychology. He argued that everyday human behaviour/nature is governed by cultural norms. In his view, people make sense of their experiences and choices through an innate knowledge of their social and cultural norms and rules. Bruner (1990) argued that folk psychology “deals with the nature, causes, and consequences of those intentional states – beliefs, desires, intentions, commitments” (1990, p.14, please see educational theory section for more information on Bruner). With Haaken and O’Neill (2014) explaining that it is how these stories are received that gives value to these stories.

If the meanings in stories are culturally specific (White 1980; Bruner 1990), it is the telling of these stories that helps people from other cultures understand each other’s worlds: it is transcultural. Therefore, although the notion of a ‘communal knowledge’ has to be culturally specific, White (1980) suggested that:

“...far from being one code among many that a culture may utilize for endowing experience with meaning, narrative is a metacode, a human

universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted” (1980, p.6).

The psycho-social constructs of personal narratives should now be carefully considered. Narratives have to be contextualised by the narrator; they should have a historical context, be culturally specific, and told in the language/discourse unique to that person’s culture. Brockmeier and Harré (1997) explained that: “narrative is the name for an ensemble of linguistic and psychological structures, transmitted culturally, historically, constrained by each individual’s level of mastery and by his or her mixture of social communicative techniques and linguistic skills” (1997, p.266).

The use of personal narratives helps us make sense of experiences. This is done through organising “memories, intentions, life histories, and ideas of our ‘selves’ or ‘personal identities” (Brockmeier and Harré 1997, p.264). It is argued that identities are not only contextualised in a specific culture, but are “jointly constructed” (McAdams et al. 1997, p.690) with narrative. McAdams et al. (1997) took this further; they stated that people internalise their stories of past, present and anticipated future in order to make sense of their experiences and give both purpose and unity to their lives.

This is a way of meaning-making, a way of understanding who we are and a method to portray our identity to others. In other words, McAdams et al. argued that “identities are themselves stories” (McAdams et al 1997, p.690). They stated that: “Identity, therefore, may itself be viewed as an internalised and evolving life story, a way of telling the self, to the self and others, through a story or set of stories complete with settings, scenes, characters, plots, and themes” (McAdams et al. 1997, p.678). It is then, the role of the research to interpret the shared narrative in order to gain an understanding of the everyday life and extraordinary experiences of the narrator.

The use of single narratives can generate powerful information. The sharing of narratives as part of a life story or biography (Rosenthal 1993) however, would generate stronger, more complex and rich results, showing the multiple roles and

meaning makings any one person will experience throughout their lifetime. Understanding how certain moments or single narratives are experienced in the context of a life-story, rather than looking at one aspect or one single moment in time, adds context, and will therefore help show how the past, present and future impacted upon events or moments in time, to uncover or reveal the Gestalt of each participant would help show the bigger picture of their life and social situation (Sabar 2013).

### **What is biography?**

Biography is the story of someone's life: past, present and anticipated future (Rosenthal 1993). The biography or life story is made up of contextual narratives or memories, and this is where narrative and biography can combine.

In order to obtain a biography for research purposes, the use of personal documents such as "letters, diaries, personal records, open interviews, and finally, autobiographies and tape recorded life stories are used" (Bertaux and Kohli 1984, p.216). Bertaux and Kohli (1984) argued that biographies/life stories should be understood as the 'totality' of a person's experience.

The purpose of biographical research is to "encompass the total life of an individual" (Rosenthal 1993, p.3). She explained that this does not mean that the whole of an individual's life is to be garnered, but what is selected to be shared by the narrator, is the "overall construction of his or her past and anticipated life, in which biographically relevant experiences are linked up in a temporally thematically consistent pattern" (1993, p.3). Biographic research allows participants to describe their lives, using their own words and attach meaning to these experiences (Curtin and Clarke 2005). As O'Neill and Perivolaris (2014), explained that it is important to listen to these shared memories and stories, because the past is shown in the 'here and now' and stories are able to show the way of the future.

Life experiences, identities and cultures can all be represented in biography. These life-stories shift from being internalised by the narrator in order to give meaning to

their life, to being externalised in the sharing of the story. In this sharing, others can learn about and understand not only the person's culture and history, but their identity, as well as detecting patterns or shifts in society (Denzin 1989; Roberts 2002). This enables a deeper understanding to develop than would otherwise be possible with more positivistic or scientific methods. As Roberts (2002) noted:

“...the appeal of biographical research is that it is exploring, in diverse methodological and interpretive ways, how individual accounts of life experiences can be understood within the contemporary cultural and structural settings and is thereby helping to chart the major societal changes that are underway, but not merely at some broad social level. Biographical research has the important merit of aiding the task of understanding major social shifts, by including how new experiences are interpreted by individuals within families, small groups and institutions” (2002, p.5).

Atkinson (1989) argued that life story interviews are unsurpassed for research purposes because they not only consider the person's life as a whole, but also their interactions with society. Gestalt is an important aspect of biographical research, individuals may have several stories to tell, of themselves and others, but when these stories are put together, the Gestalt (the whole life story structure) can create a bigger picture (Gabb 2009). This can move our understanding from the individual's story to that of the whole family (Hollway and Jefferson 2013). Gestalt is maintained by using the exact words of the participant from their main narrative, and the interviewer asking questions in the exact order, using the exact words that the participant used, (Wengraf 2001, Fenge and Jones 2011).

Considering the notion that no one person can tell their life story in isolation without including their interactions with others, systemic research will occur naturally. Bertaux and Delcroix (2000) however, took this point further by explaining that:

“Five life stories of individuals not connected to each other constitute five separate pieces, perhaps five gems but with no cumulative power unless they are taken from the same social world. But the life stories of five persons connected by close kinship ties...bring more information than five separated life stories: they illuminate and reflect upon each other like the gems of a necklace” (2000, p.74).

A method that involves considering the life-stories of all the family members in which CPVA takes place, so as to reveal and understand the different 'realities' of each person in the system, seems logical. The reason for this is that family abuse is usually a secretive activity, and therefore trying to expose the realities experienced by each individual could be difficult, so that a method which requires one-to-one dialogue with each family member may prove beneficial. Schulthesis et al. (2011) explain, that a "focus on relationships creates a space where knowledge, understanding, and multiple perspectives are created and transformed through dialog and social interaction" offering a systemic perspective to conduct this investigation with.

Due to the preceding exploration of the theoretical possibilities, this study will employ a method incorporating the whole-life story, the uniqueness and wholeness of personal narrative accounts, to obtain the Gestalt, as well as exploring decision-making and justification-making within these, as a method that will help uncover silenced facts (Bar-On and Rottgardt 1998), hidden information and secrets. A method that will help reduce research bias, by forcing the researcher to think beyond the usual parameters, and which will introduce a more robust process to the analysis, involves asking an interpretative team to consider the biographic narrative accounts, rather than just one researcher's analytical opinions, such as the use of objective hermeneutics.

The decision was made to use the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM), which was "developed in the context of interactionist and phenomenological research traditions by Rosenthal and Fischer-Rosenthal" Wengraf 2001, p.112) and is based upon Schütze (1976) narrative and text analysis and Oevermann et al's. (1979) theory of objective hermeneutics and case reconstruction and Fischer's thematic field analysis (Fischer 1982; Rosenthal and Bar-On 1992; Rosenthal 1993; Wengraf 2001; Jones 2003). As further described in the next section, this method will be used to individually investigate family members who are part of the same two-generation family, in order to consider the systemic influences they have on one another, to answer the research question.

## Understanding How Biographical Research and the BNIM developed

The evolution from life history or life course research to what is now known as biographical research has been influenced by different disciplines approaching it from varying perspectives. In order to understand the relevance of using the Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM), it is important to understand the context in which this complex method originated and has been further developed since its introduction in 1987. Wengraf (2001) explained that this method has elements of interactionist, phenomenological, linguistics, grounded theory, the sociology and construction of knowledge and hermeneutics. In explaining the history of BNIM, its development will be revealed, much like pieces of a puzzle, and thus better understood.

The story of research turning to biography begins in the late 1800's during a time of social unease. Durkheim in 1897 published *Le Suicide* (translated in 1952). This body of work was unique and very controversial in its time, because it considered the societal issues surrounding an increase in suicides. What was novel about Durkheim's work was that he placed his findings within the context of society, using the principles of social interpretation to explain why individuals took a social decision, rather than what seemed to be a very personal one, to kill themselves (Durkheim 1952). Durkheim used official documents and empirical methods to conduct his study. Most significant of all was that Durkheim showed there were patterns within society which could be uncovered, and that people did not have the free will that most people assume they have: people are bound to live their lives within invisible boundaries sustained by societal norms. Although, contradictory to the current understanding of the value of the single case study, Durkheim (1952) argued that understanding individual perspectives was not helpful in understanding a societal problem (Madge 1963).

There was then a gap in work on this topic until Thomas and Znanieckin (1958) considered the early pioneers of 'life history' research (Jones and Fenge 2017), published a single case study '*The Polish Peasant in Europe and America (1918-1920)*'. This research was about one migrant, but generated many volumes of

published academic work afterwards. Thomas and Znaniecki believed that in order to understand the issue of immigration, they needed to understand the personal perspectives of those directly affected. In order to do this they used life story documents, mainly letters sent from Poland to America. They used these to build a complete picture, not only of the participant, but of the social group of which they were a part (Miller 2005). Their aim was to capture historical context, social conditions and personality development of immigration. This is a very different approach to that of Durkheim, as they used life history to illuminate psychosocial theories (Madge 1963). Thus the use of life history became a *bona fide* research method, academically recognised as acceptable (Goodson et al. 2016).

Biographical research flourished in the 1920's, due in part to the enterprise of Park and Burgess (Miller 2005), who recognised the value of understanding the perspectives of individuals and the importance of the subjective perspectives of others in their various milieux (Rosenthal 2004a). Park supervised several urban studies in which the life history method was used: Anderson (1923), Wirth (1927), Thrasher (1928), Zorbaugh (1929).

Anderson (1923) wrote '*The Hobo*', in which he used life histories to research the inner city problems of homelessness. Anderson portrays the lived experiences of the homeless in cities, from the perspective of the homeless people. This was a new approach to understanding such issues as homelessness, which was usually investigated through the use of statistics and considered from the perspective of the researcher (Anderson 1923). Wirth (1927) wrote '*The Ghetto*', a case study to understand the formation and development of Jewish communities in cities, and found that through the life course, the personality changes, as the culture of the group adapts to the city environment (Wirth 1927). Thrasher (1928) studied the life experiences of city gangs, and revealed that it is the environment or the habitat of the city slums which creates gang-culture and determines people's actions and behaviours. Zorbaugh (1929) discovered that delinquency is not caused by some genetic predetermining factor in a person's life, but by their social geography and through the historical processes of the developing city, and as such was another study that overturned the accepted wisdom of his time.



In the late 1920's, Mannheim developed a new conceptualisation which changed sociological thinking in regard to the significance of genealogy upon individual biography. Mannheim (1928) addressed generational consciousness, "how one generation influences the next, through the process of socialisation and transferring their subjective perspectives, altering a collective world view, and thus changing epistemology (Apitzsch and Inowlocki 2000, p.7). Mannheim also questioned the impact historical events have upon subjectivity. Developing the notions of internal time (the individual's life span) and external time (the historical context of the society of which people are a part), he highlighted how people of a similar age can generate a common consciousness due to living through the same significant historical events, especially if they were adults at the time (Miller 2005). The use of the single case study in research is therefore adequately supported, because one person shares a collective world view with everyone else in similar cultural settings.

Running alongside the development of biographic research were key concepts such as those covered in Heidegger's (1927) project, *'Being and Time'*, a philosophical work that calls into question how people understand themselves. *'Being and Time'* greatly influenced philosophical thinking, especially hermeneutics, existentialism and deconstruction (Heidegger 2010) (as previously discussed in section C).

Existentialism was developed just after World War II by Sartre, who wrote the very influential book *'Being and Nothingness'* in 1943, translated into English in 1989. His work was influenced by that of Nietzsche who wrote about the *'death of God'* (1882) and *'will to power'* (1887). Existentialism is the philosophy of human existence (see section C). It seeks to understand the unique self-driven and self-conscious character of a human life incorporating the ups and downs of that 'lived life and it is described in the first person, rather than the objective third person. It is an attempt to make distinctions between human life/existence and that of other things, such as animals and plants. These distinctions, for instance, are about the ability of an autonomous human with the awareness of time and freedom of choice, to see the world through their own eyes, and the fundamental concerns of getting the best out of life (Stephen 2010).

Continuing the chronology of the development of life history and biography, the work of Dollard (1935) needs to be mentioned. Dollard published the *Criteria for the Life History* in 1935, when academic life history research was in decline. He is not, therefore, as well-known as perhaps he ought to be. Dollard focused on the significance of the tensions between the influence of cultural legacies, collective cultural traditions, specific cultural climates, the individuals own unique history and the subjectivity of interpreting events and actions. In other words, life history is an attempt to define the growth of a person in a cultural milieu and to make theoretical sense of it (Goodson et al. 2016). Goodson et al. (2016) stated that: "Dollard argued, the life history offers a way of exploring the relationship between the culture, the social structure, and individual lives" (2016, p.25). This fits well with previous findings, for instance Durkheim (1897) and Thomas and Znaniecki (1958).

Life course or life history research took a step backwards as statistical surveys and analysis took more prominent positions in social research during the 1930's (Goodson et al. 2016). Then, in the 1940's, the use of qualitative interpretive inquiry was developed (Miller 2005; Goodson et al. 2016). After World War II, sociologists Simmel, Schutz and Mannheim, conducted research to make sense of what had happened to them and many other Jewish people during the war (Miller 2005). They needed a method which would draw out personal experiences to help them understand the consequences and conditions of human interaction. They also investigated how that society was established and what conditions made it possible, in order to try to understand how the German Nazi regime came to have such power. The experiences from this time were collected, with the ultimate aim of preventing anything like the holocaust from happening again. It was this major interrogation of social history which lead to the use of qualitative-Interpretive inquiry in research. As Apitzsch and Inowlocki (2000) noted:

"it is not surprising, therefore, that much qualitative-interpretive research, and especially biographical analysis, does not presuppose social normality but rather asks about experiences during times of social transformation and in moments and times of crisis, and the emergence of needs for new social

practices to prevent further exclusion or the complete breakdown of individual or social life” (2000, p.7).

In 1959 the use of historical facts in life course or life history research was illuminated in the pivotal work of Mills', *'The Sociological Imagination'* (1959). Mills contended that biography, history and society cannot be understood in isolation but must be taken together. This influential idea has continued into contemporary research. In order to understand individual people, the historical context and meaning-making of society as a whole needs to be understood. He argued that historical disciplines are an essential part of social science, and that research needs to be 'cross-temporal', acknowledging the dimension of time as well as place (Mills 1959; Miller 2005). Mills explained that there are no social rules which fit across societies and across time, no “principles of historical change” (Miller 2005, p.11), we can only understand a specific social structure of a specific era if we understand the historical consciousness and how it evolved over time.

The flourishing traditions of sociological thinking were gaining impetus within academia. Works such as Berger and Luckman's (1966) *'The Social Construction of Reality'*, instigated a new debate in regard to subjectivity within society, stating that looking at language and its influences upon a person, are relevant to understanding society. Berger and Luckmann (1966), in fact, argue that this is not a new notion, and Durkheim had already promoted this way of thinking, but along the way this message had been lost. They theorised that knowledge is obtained, sustained and shared or transferred to others through social situations and, therefore, is a social construct. This theory is a phenomenological approach, involving looking at the everyday life of individuals within their *milieux*: both historic and cultural, thus addressing the intertwined structures of intentionality and inter-subjectivity, as also discussed in the philosophical work of Husserl (Costello 2012).

Intentionality is the intertwined subject's (individual's) interaction with an object (experience) but the object can be a person or a thing. Therefore, the 'self' and the 'other' have been together from the beginning (Miller 2005). Husserl (1970) postulated that a structure is developed from subjects being together with other

subjects, resulting in what he termed 'intersubjectivity', this being the foundation of how objects are experienced by people collectively. This intersubjectivity is simply another way of talking about 'common sense understandings' or what Habermas (1970) would call "mutual understanding" (Benjamin 1988, p.320.) This meant that the layered or stratified structure of subject and object underpin the individuals understanding of further experiences. Through stripping back the different layers, the human experience can therefore be revealed (Costello 2012).

Starting in the 1970s, discourse studies further illuminated the role of language in identity development and construction, as seen in such works as Foucault's 1967 '*Madness and Civilization*' and his 1977 '*Discipline and Punish*' (Foucault's notions of power and discourse are also discussed in section C). The incorporation of such sociological theories and their underpinning methodological philosophies added to the use and understanding of biographical research.

In the 1970s, there was another surge in the popularity of biographic research, and life history work became a political issue. The method allowed researchers to develop a deeper understanding of participants, from their unique perspectives as Becker (1970) argued, to understand the 'delinquent' through the eyes of the 'delinquent'. This caused some to reject the method as it threatened to give voice to the previously unheard people such as people who were considered to be 'delinquents', which in the view of some was unacceptable.

The biographic method challenged sociological perceptions, forcing researchers who had been using the objective positivistic methods (favoured by the scientific paradigm) into understanding other people's subjective experiences. This dichotomy in research methods highlighted the on-going tensions between nomothetic and ideographic methods, more commonly (but perhaps incorrectly) defined as the quantitative and qualitative paradigms, reflecting the on-going tensions within society at that time between scientific ways of understanding and humanist research methods. Regardless of these difficulties, biographical research continued to bloom as it revealed new ways of understanding societal issues. For example, it was commonly thought that 'delinquency' was caused by biological or psychological

degeneration of the individual, and driven by their own actions. This research showed that society actually created its delinquents, so that it could be argued that it was society's fault, not theirs: a very uncomfortable position for politicians in which to find themselves.

In 1976, Schütze showed the importance of data collection and analysis when attempting to understand sociological understanding. Schütze's theory of narrative and text analysis concerns understanding why the narrator chose a particular theme or particular words. As previously discussed, this can also be found in Derrida's theory of deconstruction as well as hermeneutics. Schütze's theory suggests that narratives are not random, but rather that the narrator chooses words to give particular meaning and emphasis, and narratives should be considered in their totality to understand their overall meaning. In the method developed by Schütze, text is broken down into text-sorts and studied in great detail to understand why the narrator chose to give their biography in their unique way (Seale et al. 2004). Schütze advocated that single case documents "are not only rigorously sequentially analysed with regard to their contents but also concerning their procedures of reference and accounting" (Apitzsch and Inowlocki 2000, p.11).

In 1977 Bourdieu introduced the idea of habitus (Bourdieu 1977; 1990). Miller et al. (2003) explained that there are several aspects to habitus, one being the implicit teachings of certain behaviours instilled in children by parents telling them how they are expected to behave, e.g., "boys don't cry". The young child will therefore be affected by their interactions and experiences with the world, all of which imprint 'messages' upon them, so that they will view their world (ontological perspective) through the lens of their social positioning. Bourdieu (1990) explained that habitus is embodied history, which is internalised and, therefore, forgotten as history (Bourdieu 1990). This understanding is significant when considering what can be learned from the research conducted by Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame (1981), who found that the best bakers married into the families of other bakers because these individuals emerged from the same habitus.

In 1978, Kohli published in Germany the first anthology of biographical research, in which he made the shift from life-course research to the concept of biographical research. Also in 1978, Bertaux started the 'International Sociological Association's ad hoc group', which in 1984, was recognised as a research committee. In 1979 the biographical research group '*Biographieforschung*' was started by Kohli, Eder and Rosenmayer, and was accepted by the German Sociological Association in 1986 as a Research Centre. This recognition of the importance of biographical research was important because it overturned, or tried to, the prevailing scientific way of discovery, and therefore legitimised subjective, ideographic enquiry.

In 1979, Oevermann et al. developed the theory of objective hermeneutics (discussed in Section C). Although, for many sociologists, a narrative text constitutes good empirical data, for others, especially those with a more scientific leaning, it is not acceptable because it is too subjective.

In the period 1980's to early 1990's, the use of biographical research gained momentum. For example, in 1983 Plummer published '*The Documents of Life*' (later revised in 2001) which was very influential in biographic research due to its persuasive, qualitative arguments. At the same time, a political and philosophical shift was occurring, from modernism to post-modernism (Lyotard 1979). Postmodernism allowed subjectivity rather than objectivity to be valued as a method of understanding and describing reality, whereas previously only empirical objectivity was valued, usually by scientists adhering to an 'enlightenment philosophy'. The re-emergence of biographic studies arose with the new emphasis on historical presence within research. Further examples are Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame (1981), Fischer (1982) and Habermas (1988).

The reason that the shift into post-modernism is important is because, when we look back, hermeneutics' was still trying to find the truth, as does science with its experimental hypothesis testing methods. Then deconstruction emerged as a philosophy, which gave up trying to find the truth because it recognised that the author of a narrative and the reader could very well have different contexts and, therefore different interpretations of what was true. From the position of

postmodernism all truth is relative to the individual, they do not compete, one is not better or more convincing than another: 'they just are'.

Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame (1981) used life history to understand the success of artisanal bakers in France. They collected one hundred life stories from bakery workers, their wives and apprentices. It took them some time to realise that the historical aspect of the research was found within the life stories themselves. Bertaux explained that what he learned from this study was that the past needs to be understood in order to understand the present (Bertaux (1983). Much like Mills (1959), Bertaux argued that, when considering the history of a phenomenon, it is the process of delving into the life history that illuminates past events and these cause or colour present ways of being. Even if they vary from official records, personal narratives, and telling the stories and experiences of people, uncovers new information. Rather than history through the eyes of the published and objective historian. Schütze (1976) theory of narrative text analysis would also fit well with this method.

Fischer (1982) introduced the separation of the 'narrated personal life story' from the 'life history' by separating the "Lived Life" (chronology) from the "told-story" (experience according to the narrator). He argued that the 'self' is developed and maintained through interaction and discourse, through the influence of biographical memory and culture and environment (situational impacts). It is then through the process of reconstructing the "Lived Life" from the life history that case analysis can be conducted (Fischer and Goblirsch 2006).

In 1987, the Biographic Case Reconstruction Method was developed by Rosenthal (Rosenthal 1993). This method was based upon Schütze (1976) narrative and text analysis and Oevermann et al's. (1979) theory of objective hermeneutics and case reconstruction and Fischer's thematic field analysis (Fisher 1982; Rosenthal and Bar-On 1992; Rosenthal 1993). Biographic case reconstructions pay particular attention to experience and the narrated story. It uses the reconstructive, sequential approaches and hermeneutic methods (Rosenthal 2004a). The reconstructive aspect involves interpreting the individual meaning of sections of text, analysed

within the context of the whole interview/biography, rather than approaching this in a set way with predefined categories.

Rosenthal's Biographic Case Reconstruction Method reconstructs the recorded narrative into smaller units which are then used to develop and test hypotheses using an abduction procedure. In considering each unit, all possible consequences of the action or thoughts described by the subject were hypothesised, and then considered in the light of what actually followed (Rosenthal 2004a). By this method, each hypothesis is subjected to criticism, rather than the researcher accepting the first hypothesis which appears to be the 'best fit'. As Rosenthal (2004a) stated "abduction imposes on you to give reasons for your suggestions and to prove them in the concrete individual case" (2004a, p.36). The reason why it is essential to investigate both the chronological and narrated life story is to understand the biographical meaning of past events and the meaning-making of self-representation in the present (Rosenthal 2004b), therefore, Gestalt is a key element in the biographic case reconstructions method.

In Habermas (1988) argued that the cultural milieu and societal consciousness is founded on historical context. The example Habermas used was Nazi Germany, arguing that self-determination, democracy and community are all situated within an historical and societal context which can be extremely powerful, and sometimes oppressive (Dews 1999).

In 1989 Denzin published '*Interpretive Biography*', a book whose subject was the use of biography in research (Denzin 1989). Although, it should be noted that this book was highly critical of traditional biographical research, its publication was still an important part of the history of biographic research.

Then in 1996 Chamberlayne popularised the technique of biographical interviewing and analysis based upon Rosenthal's Biographic Case Reconstruction Method in the United Kingdom (Chamberlayne and King 1996). The method was further developed by Wengraf, initially calling it the Biographic Interpretive Method (Jones 2003), later Wengraf called it the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (Wengraf 2001).



Around the same time, the concept of a narrative identity began to appear in other biographical research (see Ricoeur 1984; McAdams et al. 1997). Narrative identity argues that individuals internalise their life experiences into an evolving personal narrative, and that when an individual tells a story, they are reconstructing their past, present and future and thus portraying their identity.

Feminist perspective research introduced new and different concepts to strengthen this biographical approach, particularly where it gave voice to silenced and hidden lives, usually of women (Goodson 2016). Other researchers focused on hidden issues within society, such as sexuality, for instance, Plummer (1983, 2001), Sparkes (1994), and Jones and Fenge (2011) all used a life history/biographical approach in their research, and to explore immigration by, O'Neill (2008; 2011), Haaken and O'Neill (2014) and O'Neill and Perivolaris (2014). Biographical methods have also been promoted in educational studies. Due to the very nature of education, each pupil needs to be considered in their totality: a holistic approach. Academics as, Goodson and Hargreaves (1996), Erben (1998), Page (2004) and Holley (2008) have all embraced this philosophy.

Jones (2001) studied with Chamberlayne and Wengraf, and completed his PhD using the BNIM method. His thesis was entitled '*Narratives of Identity and the Informal Care Role*' (2001). This was the first PhD to use this research method for a thesis in the UK. Since then, many others have published studies using the BNIM method. Most recently, Fenge and Jones (2011; 2017) published research from a Research Councils UK funded study on older gay and lesbian people with a rural history: the 'Gay & Pleasant Land? Project'. Studies such as these have helped to cement the foundations of this relatively new method of investigating what were hitherto hidden lives.

Which brings this topic to the present day, where the biographic method is used across various disciplines and its value is understood by many, although it is still widely criticised in regard to its validity and ability to comprehensively represent cultural issues from a single case study, this will be further addressed in Section E. As discussed above, the incorporation of the BNIM is underpinned by the

methodological philosophies of social constructionism, hermeneutics and if used appropriately, ecological systems theory. Also, the BNIM has not been used before to research CPVA or secrets, and is therefore a new approach to these topic areas and will create a new understanding of these issues.

The following section will discuss the research procedure for the BNIM, including research participant selection, the information gathering procedures, and how the information was interpreted. Ethics and data protection are addressed in full, and finally the usefulness and limitations of this method are considered.

## **F. Using the Biographic Narrative Interpretative Method**

### **The research design**

The Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) is a non-directive research method, based on how the “Lived Life” (chronology of events) informs the “Told Story” (experience according to the narrator) (Wengraf 2001). Or as Hesketh (2014) explained, BNIM “attempts to provide a researcher with insight into how an individual has experiences growing up in the world around him or her, and the decisions and choices he or she has made that have shaped his or her life in that world so far” (2014, p. 8). This is done through the use of a completely unstructured interview using a single question interview technique (as described below) which helps reveal hidden themes to be portrayed through biographical narratives (Gabb 2009). This enables the researcher to hear the participants’ desires, wants, wishes and internal conflicts with the agenda set by the participant.

It is then the role of the researcher, through the use of Reflecting Teams, to interpret the information given to them by the participants (Holley 2018). As explained by Holley and Oliver (2009), “What is of interest to the researcher is what the interviewee selects to tell us, and the way in which the story is told” (2009, p.9). The use of Reflecting Teams enables a researcher to minimise bias by not imposing their own preconceived ideas onto the analysis (Wengraf 2001; Jones 2003; Fenge and Jones 2011).

Wengraf (2000) argues that the BNIM adds an extra layer in the generation of typologies. Wengraf (2000) reasons that social researchers are drawn to certain typologies, these being 'action-alternatives' and 'subjectivity-alternatives'. The BNIM, however, adds context-alternatives, which aid in understanding "the particular cases and all other cases" (2000, p.161). In other words, the researcher is trying to move from a consideration of the specific and individual participant lives, to a better understanding of such lives in general. Or as Denzin (1989) states:

"The research is triangulated; multiple perspectives on the same life experiences are sought. Each case is treated as a totality, as a universal singular. There is an attempt to extract multiple meanings from the stories. This involves a careful working back and forth between each element of this life to the broader, larger life picture" (1989, p.57).

The BNIM enables new information to be gathered and new hypotheses formed. Scientific method relies on testing a hypothesis that has been formulated prior to the testing process, whereas the BNIM formulates hypotheses after testing. In other words, the researcher is inducing the hypothesis from the research findings as they go along, which is the opposite of the deductive scientific method of hypothesis testing (Hollway & Jefferson 2013).

## **Choosing the Sample**

### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

The participation criteria involved looking for [redacted] families with children aged between eight and 18 years experiencing CPVA. In the [redacted] families who participated, the youngest child, at point of interview was aged 11 and the oldest aged 15. The decision to have the cut-off age of eight was due to the researchers practice experience, but was also based on child development theory and moral development (Kohlberg 1976; Piaget 1977). While the researcher has worked with children as young as seven years old who are violent toward their parent/s, it was deemed better to interview children old enough to be able to tell their family stories, and talk about their world reality, with a reasonable level of verbal fluency and cognitive ability.

Further participant selection criteria were based on the level of abuse within the family, and that the violence was perceived to be frequent by the parent (at least once a week). The reason for choosing families where a child was physically violent, rather than aggressive or controlling, was because aggressive and controlling behaviours can be missed or misinterpreted by others, and for the purposes of this research it was necessary to be able to categorically and empirically state that the family were experiencing CPVA. Violent behaviours are easily evidenced and therefore, easier to confirm when a family is experiencing CPVA.

It was also important that the families involved in the study were at the time allocated to a practitioner within Children's Social Care. This served two purposes. Firstly it gave access to the families through the practitioners working with them. Secondly, an ethical one, in that as the family was already receiving support from an external agency, if the interviews identified a safeguarding concern, waiting times for support would hopefully be reduced.

Exclusion criteria were based upon, the child living with a professional foster carer or who had been adopted. This also meant that adoptive parents or professional foster carers were not considered for this research (see Chapter One, Section H).

## **Sample Size**

[Redacted] families were selected (please see recruitment process outlined below) for interview. Although one family would have generated a wealth of rich information, studying [redacted] families enabled the researcher to see if the families were experiencing similar issues and whether the CPVA had been influenced by secrets (or not) within the families, bolstering the reliability and validity of this study. The reason that the research was limited to [redacted] families was that the quantity of information garnered would have been overwhelming, considering the time restraints and word limits involved in completing this study.

Each family consisted of at least one biological parent, the abusive child or young person, each participating family had a maximum of two children in total. Although,

only one of the families included a child who was younger than eight years old, that child was not interviewed as they did not meet the criterion for age outlined above. The reason for restricting the size of families chosen, was to limit the quantity of information gathered so that a reasonable analysis could be conducted in the time available.

### **Recruitment Process for Participants to be interviewed**

Written permission to contact families experiencing CPVA as potential participants for this research project was granted by the Local Authority which was helping them. Practitioners within Children's Social Care were in a good position to identify appropriate families through disclosures made by the families or through secondary accounts, such as those given by schools or the police. The researcher made contact with potential participants by emailing all the Local Authority Children's Social Care Teams and by visiting their team meetings, and asking the practitioners to speak to any families who were experiencing CPVA and who fitted the research parameters (age, child being physically violent towards the parent/s at least once a week etc.) and asking if they would consent to being contacted for this research. The families interviewed for this research were the only ones approached by practitioners in the Local Authority, so that there were no known refusals to participate in the research.

Having been given the contact details of the potential participants, the researcher telephoned the parent/s with parental responsibility to explain who she was and why she was contacting them. When they agreed to talk further, she explained the study in more detail. When they consented to meet to discuss the research further, a date, time and venue that was mutually convenient was agreed [redacted].

At the preliminary meeting with the parent(s), the researcher explained the project in much more detail, in particular issues of confidentiality, consent and assent, and any reasons why this might need to be broken, for example the disclosure of a serious crime or safeguarding concerns, and what procedures would then be followed. It was emphasised that participants could withdraw from the research up to the point of

being anonymised – as specified by the Bournemouth University Ethics Panel (ethics will be discussed in more detail in section F). It should be noted that if a family member had declined to be a part of the research, then that would have been the end of the matter.

Once the parent/s had agreed to the family being part of the project, at a subsequent meeting the researcher met the children with their mothers present. The researcher explained the project to them, using age appropriate language, clearly explaining what continued assent meant. The child and adolescent leaflet was given to them (See Appendix Three), and they had the opportunity to ask questions about the process. The parent information sheet (See Appendix Four) and consent and assent forms (See Appendices Five, Six and Seven) were left for all the family to read in their own time).

[Redacted] interviews were held in total, one interview per participant. The interviews were in the main, held in a neutral venue, although two of the parents were interviewed in the family home at their insistence, because they found it more convenient. The preference for holding the interviews in a neutral venue was because holding them in the participants' homes could be a risk of contextual contamination or affect (Tulving 1974). For example, certain emotions and cues could trigger reactions that would not necessarily be representative or helpful to the current study. It could also cause further difficulties if escalatory/inflammatory information were heard by others, and for this reason the first interview was held in the family home when the children were not present and the second was held with only the 2 year old present with the mother stating that her daughter would not understand what was being said. In addition, the participant's emotional states were closely monitored throughout.

The recruitment process for the families was challenging and took approximately six months to access the families who agreed to be involved. The original plan was to send a group email to all CSC practitioners within the agreed Local Authority asking for access to families, but no one replied. The request was then taken to five different team meetings and the research was described and discussed, which

generated the referrals. It was these [redacted] families who participated in this research. No other practitioners made contact to recommend any other potential families. This lack of response could be due to several reasons. One of these is that Children's Social Care is a very fast moving and time pressured environment, so that practitioners may not have felt able to promote the research due to work pressures, managing their own heavy workloads, and prioritising safeguarding.

Another possibility for the lack of response might be that practitioners did not feel that the families they worked with would be willing to participate and so did not approach them. They may have approached the family but have been declined, but no practitioner told me if this was the case. It could also be that the practitioners had not realised that their families were experiencing CPVA, perhaps thinking that the child was merely presenting with challenging behaviours or the family were keeping it a secret. This 'gate-keeping' of potential participants was frustrating and it took a lot of time to visit the different teams to promote the research, but it was worth the extra work involved.

Once contact was made with the families, the objectives and methods of the research were explained and the families agreed from the outset that they wanted to participate and the children were keen to talk. One of the children asked to be interviewed immediately, but it was explained that there would be a delay in order to allow her time to reflect fully whether she wished to take part in the study. Further research regarding gate-keeping in similar studies would be worth considering, especially if the reasons for the lack of referrals to participating families was due to limited understanding of the research topic.

### **Recruitment process for the Reflecting Teams**

The recruitment for the Reflecting Teams (see Section below for an explanation of Reflecting Teams) involved asking people to participate who were from different professional backgrounds, of different ages, and with different life experiences. In order to produce a multi-voiced analysis, and so reduce researcher bias and increasing the validity of the findings. The researcher contacted fellow students and

staff at Bournemouth University, as well as colleagues from Children's Social Care, plus family and friends, in order to get as many people with different life experiences as possible to comprise the Reflecting Teams.

The researcher met with all those who volunteered, to discuss the aims and objectives of the project, including explaining that being involved within a Team could bring to the fore personal issues and experiences which could create a personal and emotional response (Haaken and O'Neill 2014). This was done to prepare them for not only the process but how this could affect their well-being. When they agreed to participate, they were given the relevant written information regarding consent, and were asked to sign the confidentiality form. No potential participants declined to be a part of a Reflecting Team. It was also agreed, that the researcher would include a brief description of each member of the Reflecting Teams in the thesis, in order to evidence the diversity of the Teams, but no information would be included that enabled them to be identified (in line with the Data Protection Act 1989).

Each interview required two Reflecting Teams, one to interpret the "Lived Life" and the other the "Told Story". The minimum number required for a Reflecting Team was three people. Each team comprised people who knew each other, as friends, family or colleagues. Each Reflecting Team meeting was held in a private room, where no one could overhear what was being discussed.

The recruitment process for the Reflecting Teams, in comparison to that for the participating families, was simple. The researcher contacted family members, friends and colleagues and all agreed to be part of the Reflecting Teams. A limitation of this was that quite a few of the Team members had worked or were working with vulnerable children and families, and therefore might have generated similar thinking to the researcher. Upon reflection, to have created more diverse Reflecting Teams, a more random selection process could have been employed, such as accessing the general public, or street canvassing for volunteers. Time pressures for the completion of this work did not allow for such a strategy.



## **Research measures**

Each individual was interviewed once, using an open-ended single question technique. The interviews were recorded using an audio-recording device. Field notes were made immediately after the interviews. Each interview was transcribed in full (making sure that at this stage, names were changed and any obvious identifying markers were changed or redacted to anonymise the participants), as soon as possible, as suggested by Curtin and Clarke (2005). Then the information was systematically sorted into the “Lived Life” and “Told Story” prior to the interpretation stage by the Reflecting Teams (please see below for further details).

## **The Interview Technique**

BNIM can use up to three sub-sessions to interview each participant. Sub-session one and sub-session two are typically conducted on the same day. The first sub-session was carried out and, after a twenty-minute break, sub-session two completed. Sub-session three (see below) is rarely required and was not used in this study. Had it been undertaken, however, it should have been done on a separate day to sub-sessions one and two.

## **Sub-session One**

The first sub-session used a ‘Single-Question aimed at Inducing Narratives’ (SQUIN Wengraf 2014). This involved asking one open question:

“Please tell me the story of your life, all the experiences and the events which are important for you personally, start wherever you like, please take the time you need, I’ll listen first, I won’t interrupt. I’ll just take some notes in case I have any questions for after you’ve finished telling me about it all”.

The researcher then allowed the participant to talk about what was important to them, thereby minimising the influence of the researcher on the participant (Brooks and Dallos 2008). Notes were taken throughout the interviews, as well as being audio recorded. The notes were taken during the interviews, to help formulate the

questions in the way prescribed for the BNIM sub-session two interviews (Wengraf 2014).

It is important that the participants became immersed in telling their story, in order that spontaneous narratives arise. The researcher remained as silent as possible, allowing the participant to lead the interview (Schütze 1992; Hesketh 2014; Shoderu et al. 2012; Pokorny et al. 2017). If the participant could not think of what else to say, then nonverbal and paralinguistic expressions were used to encourage the participant to continue talking (Rosenthal 1993). If the participant said that they did not know what else to say, then the researcher would remain silent, because it is natural for people to want to fill in silences and continue their story. The use of silence is very powerful in persuading people to continue speaking. As Foucault (1967) writes “...a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself” (1967, pp.273-274). If neither silence nor signs cause the participant to carry on, the researcher would simply say, “Carry on” or “Tell me more” (Jones 2004).

## **Sub-session Two**

Sub-session two was held after a short break following sub-session One. This interview involved the researcher asking carefully constructed questions to the participant. The interviewer only asked questions on topics which were raised during the interview, asked in the participant’s exact words and in the same order originally spoken. This was to make sure that the ‘gestalt’, or the participant’s particular and individual ordering of her/his life, was not broken (Jones 2004).

The interviewer started, sub-session two, by following a line of enquiry about one of the topics raised during the interview, whereas the subsequent questions were asked on topics considered important to the production of a Particular Incident Narrative (PIN – a significant event in the individual’s life – often given in detail) which could further enhance the research (Pokorny et al. 2017).

### **Sub-session Three**

Had it been necessary to undertake sub-session three, this would have encompassed a more familiar semi-structured interview used to elicit more factual information related to the topic of research (Taylor 2008). This technique is sometimes used when participants had great difficulty narrating particular incidents in their biography or have a resistance to fully participating in the open-ended BNIM method in the earlier sessions. For this research, sub-session three proved unnecessary.

### **Post-Interview Process**

#### **Field Notes**

When the interview was completed, the researcher, as soon as possible, wrote field notes on immediate thoughts and feelings generated by the interview (Brooks and Dallos 2008). As suggested by Jones (2003), after the field notes were completed, the audio recording of the interview was listened to and further notes were added to the field notes. The interview was transcribed. A summary of the field notes is presented in the Appendices Section (see Appendix Eight).

#### **Preliminary Analysis of the Information**

Once the interviews were transcribed the researcher organised the transcripts using the BNIM Text Sort Method (Wengraf 2014). Breaking down the transcript into sections or 'text chunks' which could be considered as a, description, an argumentation, a report, narrative and an evaluation (Shoderu et al. 2012; Pokorny et al. 2017). Once this is completed, the researcher chose which sections to use for the reflecting teams, making sure that any biographical turning points were included.

## Reflecting Teams

It is the role of the Reflecting Team members to use their own experiences to interpret the information revealed to them by the narrative chunks, to provide different perspectives on the information, thus, helping generate 'multi-voiced' interpretations (Jones 2004). There were two different Reflecting Teams for each interview held, one considering the "Told Story", and the other the "Lived Life".

Schütze (1992) conducted biographic narrative interviews with German soldiers who had been involved in the Second World War. Schütze found that due to a collective consciousness the individual acts of soldiers during the war were not remembered or repented at that time, explaining the collective trajectory of "fading out" (Schütze 1992, p.350). It would seem that from the biographies of the soldiers interviewed, they could not face the seriousness of what they had done (Nazi atrocities) until later in their life when they began to feel guilt, remorse and regret. The significance of Schütze's (1992) research was that it highlighted not only how information can be faded out of consciousness, but also the question as to whether participants are able to fade their involvement as well. In other words, was it something that they just did because they had to or were they ideologically committed to doing it? The use of reflecting teams in deciphering the narratives of CPVA, help uncover any fade-outs or omissions from the participants, due to the objective hermeneutic process mapping the trajectory of each person's life experiences.

Each member of a Reflecting Team will have a pre-existing way of making sense of the world, as will the researcher. This variety of sense-making generated lots of hypotheses, forcing the researcher into considering new possibilities and generating new understandings (Wengraf 2000). As Wengraf (2000) argued, the researcher is "motivated not to understand" [the material] or 'motivated to understand [the material] only in a certain way, may be better understood through the discussion among peers in the interview-analysis panel" (2000, p.145). As a consequence of using these teams, analytical bias is minimised.

As covered below, one set of Reflecting Teams were given the “Lived Life” and the other the “Told Story”. Then the text chunks were presented chronologically as narrated by the interviewee and the teams asked to hypothesize what it meant and what happened next. The ‘what happened next’ was revealed in the next text chunk, and again the team was asked to hypothesize what it meant and what happened next, and so on through a series of iterations (Jones 2003).

The “Told Story” goes beyond the text material (Wengraf 2000; 2001; Jones 2003; Fenge and Jones 2011). It is about the way the interviewee makes connections between various events in her/his life. It is important to understand why the person shares or omits certain information (Wengraf 2000). In order to understand the “Told Story” the historical context of the “Lived Life” needs to be understood (Wengraf 2001; Jones 2003; Fenge and Jones 2011).

The “Lived Life” consists of a reworking of the narrative by the researcher in terms of a chronological ‘report’ of a person’s life. This information can be gathered through the interview material (Wengraf 2001; Jones 2003; Fenge and Jones 2011).

The “Told Story” and “Lived Life” were then systematically organised into manageable chunks to generate hypotheses or predictions of what the participant did next. These were written down for later confirmation or refutation. Denzin (1989) stated that:

“Lives and their experiences are represented in stories. They are like pictures that have been painted over, and, when paint is scraped off an old picture, something new becomes visible. What was new is what was previously covered up” (1989, p.81).

The researcher chose not to specifically identify who said what, because this was not considered essential to the study, and would not provide any more helpful information in answering the research question. The researcher also found that the members of the Teams, appeared more confident to speak freely if their identity was not attached to what they were saying.

## **G. Ethics**

This research project was granted ethical approval from the Local Authority from which the researcher accessed participants, and was approved by the Bournemouth University Ethics Panel (see Appendix Nine). A risk assessment and safeguarding procedures flowchart was developed specifically for this investigation (see Appendices Ten and Eleven). As the project concerned working with vulnerable adults and children, the research was conducted in line with Bournemouth University Research Ethics Guidelines (2015), the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Mental Capacity Act 2005.

### **Consent and Assent**

Age appropriate information was given to each participant. All participants were fully aware of the research aims, method, safety issues, confidentiality, and when this may need to be broken, anonymity, dissemination and the complaints procedure (the Participant Information sheet is included, see Young Person's Leaflet Appendix Three and Four).

Adult participants were given consent forms to complete and sign (see Appendix Five), and those with parental responsibility were also given consent forms specifically to request permission to interview their children and adolescents who were under the age of 18 years (see Appendix Six). Informed continued assent and the right to withdraw was discussed with each child, adolescent and their parents, and an assent form given to the child or adolescent to sign (see Appendix Seven).

This study did not involve participants unable to give informed consent due to a learning disability or having severe mental health problems (Mental Capacity Act 2005).

Considering the risks inherent in biographical work, matters relating to continued consent/assent were considered. The options considered whether to allow participants to see the draft of their own interviews or not. The decision was based

on consideration of the likely impact on the individual participants. In some cases it may have been beneficial for the interview transcript to be shown to them, so that further reflection on their reactions could be incorporated, thereby gaining continued assent. Such a process would also provide the participants with the opportunity to have a final say on the work, possibly creating a shared ownership of the study (Ellis 2004). However, it was decided that either all the members of the family were shown their transcripts or none, to ensure everyone was treated fairly. An assessment of the possible risks of causing emotional harm, by re-discussing an already emotive interview made revealing transcripts to participants impractical.

It might have been helpful or therapeutic for some participants to see the final draft of the dissertation, as a kind of closure or a way of connecting with the research to enable them to see it from a different, more helpful angle. In other cases it may have been damaging for them. In regard to the narratives told by all the participants, the risk appeared to outweigh the positives and, therefore, it was decided by the researcher and her supervisors not to show the final dissertation to the participants. This was because showing family members sections of the interviews by others in their family may create a high risk with the potential to cause further harm. This might lead to another violent incident, due to the understanding that there is already family violence within the home, so it was considered both too risky and unethical.

The Reflecting Team members were also given a Participation Information Sheets and Consent Form to sign (see Appendix Twelve and Thirteen).

### **Including Vulnerable Adults and Families in this Study**

The research for this thesis accessed participants who were considered vulnerable because of their experience of CPVA. It was therefore assumed that the well-being of individual family members could be compromised by this enquiry, as could family functioning. Thorough and detailed guidelines were developed in order to safeguard all participants, as well as safeguarding issues associated with lone-worker researcher (please see Appendices Three to Thirteen)

The interview technique, as discussed above, allowed each participant to talk about their life, in whatever way they wished. It was found that, to start with, each participant gave a brief summary of their life. As silence was used to encourage them to continue talking, they gave more detail and rich information was gathered, with many of the participants stating that they had not shared some of their information with anyone before. It could be argued that this was due to the use of silence as an effective data gathering technique.

Gestalt (Gabb 2009; Hollway and Jefferson 2013) was generated by repeating the exact words of the participant, in the exact order, back to them, but with a questioning tone. This method of questioning is very specific in its purpose. It is to guide the participant, to put themselves back into the particular narrative incident being discussed, and to draw up more vivid detail in order to elicit a better 'picture' of the incident (Hollway and Jefferson 2013, Wengraf 2001, Fenge and Jones 2011). This technique can bring to the fore deep emotions, so that using this technique, if not managed carefully, could have been harmful. Because of the inherent risks, it was necessary to adapt this method for the participating children. It was decided not to probe for a particular narrative incident. If, during the interview, it was assessed that it could cause possible emotional upset if more were found out about a particular story, then the matter was left there and no attempt made to probe for more information.

The interview technique, and maintaining Gestalt, can also be very therapeutic for some people. Following three of the participant interviews, each person explained that they felt emotionally much better. This interview technique showed that being listened to, without being interrupted, judged or corrected, was a cathartic experience for the participants, and seemed to help them make sense of their lives and particular experiences. Significantly, during contact with one of the mothers who participated, about two weeks after the interviews, she explained that the CPVA had stopped. It may be that the therapeutic nature of this interview technique allowed participants to talk, without negative repercussions. This may have given an emotional release, even if temporary, for the individuals within that family. This may,



therefore, be a helpful intervention to use when working with families experiencing CPVA and topic avoidance.

### **Including Children in this Study**

When proposing this study, intense consideration had to be given to the participant selection process. Biographic research is, or can be, a very sensitive way of undertaking research, in which people can re-experience traumatic events when asked to disclose their life history and re-open past traumas, thus potentially causing more harm than good. As Miller (2005) states, life history interviewing can have “psychological pitfalls” (Miller 2005, p.104) as much as people can be empowered through telling their story.

The question arose, could or should children be interviewed for the purpose of this study? Due to the sensitivity of the subject there are risks involved, such as ‘psychological pitfalls’ or further aggravating family violence, it seemed prudent to consider how to mitigate such harm. To exclude the child or adolescent however, seemed illogical, especially when previous research conducted on CPVA under-represents the experience of children and adolescents, especially that of the siblings, and the experiences of the family as a whole and the importance of the voice of the child in research.

Children and adolescents will have a unique insight into their experiences of CPVA, and when this is combined with the perspective of their parents, the research is able to capture the multi-voiced perspectives of their lived experiences as a whole. The reason to involve children in the research was to give them a voice on something which directly impacts upon their life experiences (Powell and Smith 2009; Kyronlampi and Maatta 2011; Trollvik et al. 2013). When considering how the voice of children is presented, Holley (2018), addressed the selection of the extracts for interpretation and explains that other, more detached methods would “disempower and silence people, thus impoverishing their narrative contribution and the understandings they could bring” (2018, p.2). Therefore, careful consideration was given to promoting the voice of the child within this study. Excluding family members

from research which directly affects everyone in the family would further silence an unheard voice.

When interviewing children, it must be understood that the child's interview may be much shorter and less coherent, but it is essential to give them space and 'voice'. A child-centred approach (Toros et al. 2013) was therefore taken with children and adolescents, sensitive to their age and stage of cognitive development. In-line with this, a wide range of research, using narrative interview methods including BNIM have been used with children and young people. For examples of research using specifically the BNIM method see; Curtin and Clarke (2005); Hirst et al. (2006); Froggett (2007); Gabb (2009); Zbarauskaitė and Čekuolienė (2009); Hill and Dallos (2011); Frankish and Bradbury (2012); Hesketh (2014). For examples of research using narrative methods see; Smart (2006); Froggett et al. (2007); Seaton (2007); Taylor (2008); Brooks and Dallos (2008); Haubl and Liebsch (2009); Schubotz and MacNamee (2009); De Groot (2013).

The time was taken to get to know the child or adolescent a little, and put them at their ease before starting the interviews, as well as using age appropriate language, so that they felt comfortable to talk. It also needs to be noted that the researcher did not probe for any narrative incidents, due to wanting to keep the interviews child centred and not generate any undue stress. For the 11 year old, the research had to use more specific prompts than for the older children after having asked the single question "tell me the story of your life". If the participant appeared to not know what else to say, the child was prompted with, "tell me more about your family", or "tell me more about your friends". This adaptation was suggested by Hesketh (2014), who also used the BNIM with adolescents and this adaptation worked well. This enables further exploration of the relationships in the child's life.

When assessing the cut-off point for the lower age limit of the children to be interviewed, child development theories were considered. According to Piaget's theory (1977) of children's moral development, most children below the age of eight do not have a capacity for logical, moral reasoning and are less empathetic, as well as having a narrower vocabulary. Also, children under the age of eight do not fully

comprehend the consequences of their own or other people's actions (Lee and Gupta 1995; Oates 2001). Above the age of eight, children are forming relationships outside the family, and are able to negotiate the school environment, as well as being able to develop strategies to protect themselves from harm in abusive family environments (Swanston et al. 2014). Swanston et al. (2014) state that eight-year-olds "show growing awareness and insight into themselves and others" (2014, p.185). The researcher chose this age rather than an older one, because children as young as eight have rarely been studied in regard to CPVA. There was therefore the potential to reveal new insights into CPVA by including slightly younger children. Although, as stated above, it transpired that the youngest participant who volunteered for this study was 11 years of age, the inclusion criteria were that any child above the age of eight years could be included.

## **Exploring Family Secrets**

Investigating family secrets is complex, and asking someone directly to disclose them could evoke a range of powerful emotions, such as, that keeping secrets, or prying into them is wrong (Smart 2011). If someone is directly asked to disclose personal and secret information to a stranger, face to face, which is often kept hidden for protection of the self or protection of others (Afifi and Steuber 2010), the researcher is less likely to find out how those secrets influence behaviours because of stimulating avoidant communication strategies (Finkenauer et al. 2002; Berger and Paul 2008).

This personal element adds a further layer to the complexity of researching secrets. To disclose a secret to someone is a personal act, which may confuse participant-researcher boundaries and lead the participant to feeling vulnerable or destabilised (Smart 2011). Helpfully, the research method, does not incorporate the opportunity to ask directly about any topics (Wengraf 2001), thus putting the participant in control over what they are willing to share. Although, the participants were all informed that the research was considering the different risk factors associated with CPVA and that this included communication and secrets, therefore, it was clearly explained that each interview would uphold confidentiality, as long as no safeguarding concerns

were raised. This was done to maintain complete transparency within the research process as well as to try and offer some reassurance regarding what will happen if secrets are disclosed.

### **Anti-Oppressive and Anti- Discriminatory Practice**

This research is based on the analysis of participants' narratives, and uses other people's personal and emotional history as part of the study. Even though the main aim is to help develop better practice, it was necessary to make sure that the participants were not exploited for selfish gain (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Freire's (1996) concept of people being 'de-humanised' through oppressive practices becomes relevant here. He writes about wanting people to stop oppressing others for their own gain, and explains that the more people enforce power over others the more 'de-humanised' they themselves become. It was essential to avoid this possibility and remain conscious of the severity of such consequences.

Hayward (1996) stated that "if you regard yourself as an expert, it may be reasonable to act wilfully and to try to impose your will on others" (1996, p.228). Taking Freire's (1996) words on 'de-humanisation' through oppressive practice as a cautionary tale, there is a risk of using authority or power without caution or awareness of what it could do to professionals, service users and participants in this study. The aim of this research was to practice within an anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory framework.

When anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practices were considered, questions arose about how the interviewer might appear to the participants. The researcher is a Caucasian, Middle Class, educated female and a Social Worker. The participants were all service users of a Local Authority, and the interviewer may therefore appear to them as the person with the power. The participants may fear the consequences of engaging in the study: for example, they may have been concerned about the support from Children's Social Care ceasing as a result of them taking part. As addressed in Holley and Oliver (2009), in order to prevent this, the researcher assured the participants that any service they were receiving would not be affected

in any way, whether they participated or not. The researcher also made sure that she remained polite and respectful at all times, and thanked each participant for their time. Also, it allows the participant to choose what to discuss and in the order they choose.

## **Data Protection**

This study had access to personal data, such as names and dates of birth, of the participants. This information was collected on the consent forms and will be locked in a cabinet. None of this information will be given to another agency or service unless a referral is required due to safeguarding concerns. All data files, whether on paper or held electronically, will be destroyed once the time limit for keeping such data is reached, usually three years after completion of the research.

During the process of transcribing the interviews, the information was anonymised (see Section E). This is in line with the Data Protection Act 1998, as well as in line with Safeguarding people considered at risk of harm (Children Act 1989 and Care Act 2014). Therefore the Reflecting Teams were given only anonymised biographies for their consideration.

The Reflecting Teams agreed to not discuss, or talk to anyone else about, any of the information shared during the Reflecting Team sessions, to prevent data breach. The team members were, however, advised that if they did want to talk to someone about any aspect of the Reflecting Team that caused them personal concern, then they could contact either the researcher or her supervisor, full contact details were given.

## **Health and safety of research participants and the Researcher**

This research involved participants who were considered vulnerable, due to experiencing family violence and other, at that time undisclosed, sensitive issues. The researcher interviewed children aged 11 to 14 years, without their parent/s or siblings being present. The parents were also interviewed separately. Psychological

and emotional distress was therefore monitored throughout the interviews, which would have been terminated if necessary. For every participant, time for de-briefing between the participant and researcher was made immediately after the interview.

In case the participant asked for on-going support, the researcher created an emergency and crisis contact sheet that detailed services and agencies, together with a short explanation of how these can offer support, advice and guidance (see Appendix Fourteen).

In regards to the safety of the researcher, it was made sure that her academic supervisor was aware of the meeting details, and when the meeting or interview was completed, she contacted her supervisor, thus adhering to a lone worker policy and keeping herself safe.

## **H. Reliability, validity and bias**

### **Research Bias**

It is important to acknowledge that there is always a significant interaction between the researcher and their participant. As discussed, any interaction with the world/others has the potential to shape our thoughts and behaviours, so the interview process is far more than a separation into the roles of narrator and listener. The interview will be affected not only by the immediate interactions of the interviewee and researcher, but also by their social constructs. For example, the interviewee will be telling their story, at least in part, with the intention of meeting the needs of the researcher. The participant will also respond to the verbal and non-verbal cues of the researcher as to whether what they are saying is of value, boring, shocking, funny, abhorrent and so on (Rosenthal 1993; Holley and Oliver 2009). The connection between the researcher and participant must therefore be 'made visible' because the interplay during the research interview is socially constructed, as are the results, and therefore becomes part of the research process (Age 2011).

It is important to note that the power and 'voice' of the researcher must not be ignored in research. The researcher is only able to interpret the information from their knowledge base, a position constructed through social interactions with others, and this is likely to be different from the experiences of those being researched, because the researcher's experiences of CPVA have only been professional, not personal. Researcher bias is therefore an issue within all qualitative research and must be acknowledged as such. This thinking is found within hermeneutics' (Jones 2003) and Interpretive Interactionism which follows a hermeneutic pattern of analysis (Denzin 2001; Adame and Knudson 2007), as well as ethnography (Atkinson et al 2007).

As discussed earlier, the researcher's life experiences both personal, professional (as a Social Worker who has worked extensively with families experiencing family violence and abuse) and as a researcher, will impact upon the understandings and interpretations made in this study. This bias in the way the information is interpreted, due to personal preconceived notions, and professional contributing factors such as the experience of working within Children's Social Care which is also known as an insider researcher. As Costley et al. (2013) explain:

"As an insider, you are in a unique position to study a particular issue in depth and with special knowledge about that issue. Not only do you have your own insider knowledge, but you have easy access to people and information that can further enhance that knowledge. You are in a prime position to investigate and make changes to a practice situation. You can make challenges to the status quo from an informed perspective" (2013, p. 3).

It is understood that when research is based within their own family, community or place of work, the influences, both social and cultural (including work culture) will shape the research more so than if a researcher as an outsider, as someone who is unfamiliar with the research or participants (Chavez 2008; Costley et al. 2013). The researcher is considered to be an insider-researcher because of her practice experience. To try and reduce the research bias, Wengraf (2000) therefore, recommends that the researcher finds ways to move beyond their restrictive mode of

thinking, to reduce bias within textual interpretation, by employing the process of hermeneutics and using Reflecting Teams.

The part of the method which used Reflecting Teams to interpret the information was extremely beneficial. It is not possible to prevent bias when using interpretative research methods, so it is therefore important to address bias early within the research process (Age 2011). As the researcher had met the families prior to the interview, the participants would have been influenced by what was discussed, and decided if they wished to be interviewed, whether they could trust in the process, and what would happen to their information. This meant that prior to the interviews a relationship between researcher and participant was developed. This relationship would also have had the effect of creating some biased thinking in the researcher, and potentially in the participants, who were informed that the researcher was also a social worker.

The influence upon the researcher's perceptions of the participants would have been based upon prior practice and the participants positioning towards the researcher would have been based upon their prior experiences or knowledge of researcher and social workers, positive and/or negative. This potential bias is a consequence of being an insider-researcher (Chavez 2008; Costley et al. 2013). For example, the first impressions of a participant, or seeing someone crying because of something another participant has said or done, or any resonance between the participant's life and personal or practice experiences, did have an emotional impact. This could have had the outcome of causing bias when analysing the biographies. This is why the Reflecting Teams became so useful to this research, because it added a multi-voiced approach that forced new and different interpretations upon the researcher, than would otherwise have been considered if one person had single-handedly interpreted the research findings. Thus, by limiting the researcher's role in interpreting the information, the conclusions drawn from the data can be considered robust.



## Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity have been extensively questioned when related to narrative and biographic research. Consideration of reliability traditionally focuses on whether the research measurement can be repeated with the same outcome. With narrative research this is impossible, the same question can be asked by the researcher, to the same person, but a different narrative will be given (Roberts 2002). This is because, people's thoughts change, or the interview or a recent event, may change their perspective. Such interviews cannot be repeated in the same way as quantitative research or scientific experiments, and in addition, narratives may be embellished or have aspects omitted from them, so that the narrative is a 'selective reconstruction' of how the narrator wants to be perceived (Denzin 1989).

Roberts (2002) argued that individuals make connections between events and experiences and attach meaning-making to this, which creates authenticity. Denzin (1989) noted that "truth is replaced by the concept of authenticity" (1989, p.5). It may therefore be said that authentic accounts will create valid and reliable conclusions, but the ability to garner an authentic narrative has been questioned (as discussed in section C). The researcher will need to remain aware of this throughout the interpretation process. In addition, the researcher will, in the search for authenticity, understand that gathering the biography of each person needs to be done in a way that limits direct influence, such as by holding the interviews individually and allowing time and space for the respondents thought processes.

Considering this issue from another angle, it may be possible to extrapolate from this study to other contexts. By studying the individual and their family members, from within the same social world, society's norms and functions are revealed. This is based on the key concept that each person is influenced by society, and to a lesser but still important degree, society is influenced by the individual (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

The researcher is not, however, claiming this study is generalisable to the whole population. Rather, she is arguing that it will generate an authentic understanding of

the families under study, and that these experiences, events, actions, and meaning-makings will be influenced by society's norms. As O'Neill and Perivolaris (2014) address within their arts-based biographical research, that individual memories can illuminate the wider social structures, connecting to the shared memories of society, by "focusing upon what is ordinarily overlooked – the small scale, the minutiae of lived experiences, we can often reach a better understanding of the bigger picture" (2014, pp. 329-330).

The validity of this study is enhanced by the fact that that each person in a family unit (over the age of eight) was interviewed. This research also has a high level of ecological validity, because it explored family contexts, inconsistencies and gaps in narratives, by using the different perspectives/biographies within a family unit. Rich data was collected from the families, strengthening the findings and moving from reliable, authentic individual accounts towards validity.

When considering validity of the interpretation of the biographical interviews, the "Told Story" used the exact wording of the participant, in order to help the Reflecting Teams consider the biography using the authentic narrative, although it must be noted that the researcher chose what information to include and discard. The "Lived Life", however, was created by the researcher, using her own wording to create a factual chronology, which therefore produced a more heavily influenced presentation of the biography, with more potential for researcher bias, than the "Told Story". However, this was avoided as far as possible by only using the facts, and as such does not mean that validity was compromised in any way. In order to generate better reliability in the findings, the narratives were subjected to the objective and systematic interpretation process recommended by Wengraf (2001) and thereby sustained validity.

The interpretation process and the use of Reflecting Teams to generate valid and reliable conclusions (Denzin 1989) provided rigorous interpretations. This was achieved through a process of narrative 'chunk' and text analysis (Schütze 1976), objective hermeneutics (Oevermann et al 1979) and thematic field analysis (Fisher 1982; Rosenthal 1993; Wengraf 2001).

The Reflecting Teams helped the researcher to move beyond her usual parameters of thinking, by generating new hypotheses and ideas about the text they were interpreting, giving a multi-voiced approach and coming up with notions which the researcher had not considered (Jones 2004). If it were not for this process, the researcher may not have found the depth and breadth of findings within this thesis.

The notion of socialisation is also important in terms of validity. It has been argued that society has a heavy influence on the thoughts and behaviours of individuals and families (Habermas 1988; Gergen 2003; Korobov 2010). It could then be argued that the participating family's experiences are not as unique as may be expected. Therefore, although this study is not strictly generalizable to other cultures, places and times, it is high in ecological validity and provides a sound, in-depth analysis on a hitherto hidden and difficult to delve into aspect of family life, which when related to other studies provides what Denzin and Lincoln would call a, 'Universal Particular' (2005).

## **I. Limitations**

This thesis presented some methodological limitations. Perhaps the most obvious is that the findings from this thesis cannot be considered generalizable to the wider population. The main limitation for this is the sample size. The use of narrative in research is rigorously debated by academics and one of the frequently raised criticisms is that of sample size. When using the BNIM logistically anything else other than [redacted] families, would be impossible, given the scale and scope of this thesis, because this method generates a huge amount of in-depth and complex information. Jones (2003) explains the necessity for a small sample size by stating:

"What may have been lost in not using a method with the potential for larger numbers of subjects, so producing large data sets, was more than compensated for by the method's capacity for deep and meaningful case studies. These are rich with potential for the discovery of new material and for the generation of further hypotheses, for effecting change in social policy and ultimately validating and illuminating participants' lives' (2003, p.63).

## **Family Types**

A further limitation regarding generalisability is that all the participants in this study were identified as White British and the parents as having heterosexual relationships (the children did not mention their sexuality), and therefore, the family experiences may be different to those from other ethnicities and cultures. The children who were violent towards their parent/s were also female, and the experiences of males might therefore, be different, especially when considering the notion of how male hegemonic power can influence family functioning. In regard to this, the literature on family violence often considers CPVA to be a gendered issue, with males as perpetrators and females as victims (Condry and Miles 2014; Holt and Schon 2016).

## **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

This study's participation criteria was to seek families with children between 8 and 18 years of age. The lower age limit was set based on child development theories and when a child has sufficient moral development, to be able to understand and contextualise violence, and is able to fluently express their world views in interview (Kohlberg 1976; Piaget 1977). The upper cut-off point was selected because, in the UK, a child is legally considered a child below the age of 18 years. There is no upper age limit set for adult participants, except their child must be between the age of 8 and 18 years

The participating children were aged, at point of interview, between 11 and 14 year's old. Due to the exclusion criteria, a sibling within the family who was only two years old, for obvious reasons was not considered for participation in the study. The research results were therefore only based on the accounts of adolescents and their parents. Most of the research on CPVA focuses upon adolescence, so this was not ideal, as the inclusion of younger children in the research may have given additional, useful information (because in practice the researcher has worked with many families experiencing CPVA below the age of 10). The ages of the participating children was simply a matter of chance, in that the families interviewed were the ones prepared to volunteer for interview. Further research on younger children is

therefore required in order to incorporate a larger spectrum of ages and give further context to CPVA and when it begins.

A further exclusion criterion that generated limitations was that one of the selection criteria was that one of the biological parents should be living with the child at point of interview. This was because there is already a basic understanding about why children who have been adopted may become violent and aggressive towards their adoptive parents or long-term foster carers. This may be due to their early life experiences of severe abuse and being permanently separated from their birth families (AdoptionUK 2017; Coates 2017). It is desirable that future research should include all different family types, including adoptive and long-term foster families [redacted] (Davey 2016).

[Redacted]. It would have been helpful to have included more fathers or people who had taken on a fathering role. This would allow for a better systemic understanding of the “Lived Life” of biological fathers and father figures in families, and might have exposed more information about communication patterns, secrets and secrecy. A future study with selection criteria extended to encompass broader family compositions, would enable the results of this study to be considered in relation to different family formations and for different roles within families.

A further exclusion criterion was of children with profound or severe disabilities, such as children with cognitive difficulties and learning disabilities. This was done because research has shown that behaviours such as aggression and violence may be a form of communication, in cases where children do not have the verbal skills required to express their needs and wants (Kalgotra and Warwal 2017). This understanding is quite similar to one of this study’s finding, in that the children were using aggression and violence because they did not seem to have a voice within the family, and were unable to express themselves effectively. Although excluding children with severe and profound disabilities was done due to this prior knowledge, further literature searches and research into the communication patterns within families could be extended to include all children, no matter what their cognitive abilities. If the problems with maintaining ethical codes of practice could be

managed, and finding a suitable method to 'hear' the 'voice' of all child participants, such as the use of a Picture Exchange Communication System, this could enable useful information to be gathered leading to new insights.

## **J. Conclusion**

The decision was made to use the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (Wengraf 2001; Jones 2003) to investigate family members who are part of the same two-generation family, in order to consider the multi-causal systemic influences upon the whole family, to answer the research question about CPVA. This method allowed the participants to set their own 'agenda' on what to talk about, helped reveal their own decision-making, meaning-making and justification of actions, as well as revealing perspectives on their relationships with others, family dynamics and functioning. Adding rigour to this study, each family member in the family unit (over the age of eight) was interviewed, allowing the research to consider the family from different ontological perspectives.

The next chapter will give the results from each interview. The Chapter will be set out presenting each individual family member's biography using their own words.

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**List of Statutes:**

Children Act 1989.

Human Rights Act 1989.

Data Protection Act 1989.

Children Act 2004.

Mental Capacity Act 2005.

Care Act 2014.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

# **Glossary**

## **Child-to-Parent Violence and Abuse**

This definition has been created by the researcher for the purposes of this study.

Child-to-Parent Violence and Abuse is: a pattern of coercive, controlling, sexualised, aggressive and/or violent behaviours, from a child, under the age of 18 years, towards their parent, regardless of gender.

## **Domestic violence and abuse**

Domestic violence and abuse is when an intimate partner or spouse is abusive toward their partner. This can be in the form of physical, emotional, sexual or financial abuse. Domestic violence and abuse does not just happen in adulthood, young people in relationships can experience domestic violence and abuse, often called dating violence or intimate partner abuse (Home Office 2015).

## **Parricide**

Parricide is when a child (adolescent or adult child) kills their parent/s. It is believed that children who kill their parents do this under extreme situations, where they believe that if they did not do so, they themselves will be killed (Mones 1991; Heide1992). The children are often living in extremely abusive environments and murder becomes a matter of survival.

## **Child Abuse**

Child abuse is when someone, but more frequently a family member such as a parent or guardian, abuses a child. The child can be abused physically, emotionally, sexually or through suffering neglect (Buchanan 1996). Some forms of neglect can be considered as either wilful or unwitting abuse by the perpetrator (Browne and Herbert 1997; Brandon et al. 2013).

## **Secrets and Secrecy**

A commonly used definition of secrecy is taken from Bok (1982) who stated that: “to keep a secret from someone, is to block information about it or evidence of it from reaching that person, and to do so intentionally: to prevent him [sic] from learning it”. (1982, pp.5-6).

## **Topic Avoidance**

Topic avoidance, for the purposes of this study, is defined as verbal avoidance of a topic that may cause conflict (Afifi and Steuber 2009).

## **Systemic**

General Systems Theory was a term originally used by Bertalanffy in 1949 (Bertalanffy 1972; Rogers 2016). Systems theory was further developed, for example, by Parsons (1951), Lewin (1959), and Bronfenbrenner (1979). Systems theory is used across a wide variety of disciplines, including physics and psychology. Around the 1960's, social workers started to incorporate systems theory into their practice by considering the influence of environmental factors upon individuals and families (Rogers 2016). It was Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory that became very popular and is still heavily used today. Systems theory reasons that individuals, families and communities all form parts of a self-regulating interactive system. Their functions and behaviours can be explained by using a systemic theory, when considered within the totality of all the “characteristics of the environment that they inhabit” (Stepney and Ford 2012, p.94).