

Childcare, violence and fathering – Are violent fathers who look after their children, likely to be less abusive?

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Introduction

This paper is based on exploratory qualitative research with 20 fathers who had been identified as domestically violent and were separated or divorced from their partners. Most of these fathers had contact with their children in the post-separation context. This is the first UK study with violent men specifically focussing on their fathering practices. The sample was drawn from men who volunteered to be interviewed and were attending perpetrator programmes in different geographical areas of England.ⁱ The main method used was semi-structured depth interviews and these were supplemented with violence and abuse indexes to assess the extent of the men's violence.ⁱⁱ Almost half of those interviewed identified themselves as 'serial' abusers in that they had also been violent towards partners and children in second families. All the interviews took place between the years 1998-2000. A separate sample of ten mothersⁱⁱⁱ who had experienced domestic violence from partners and whose children were having ongoing contact post-separation were also interviewed about their ex-partner's fathering practices to provide comparative perspectives.

Background

The policy context

The research has taken place in a family law policy context, where there is the general legal presumption that children will benefit from having contact with fathers post-divorce or separation, even where they have been domestically violent and/or have directly abused the children. In these cases the courts have assumed that children will suffer greater harm in the long term if they do not have an 'enduring relationship' with both natural parents (Re:M [1995] 1FLR 274). A defining judgement in the mid-1990s, where there had been severe domestic violence towards the mother, stated that "contact is almost always in the best interests of children," and argued that even though the two year old child in question, was "distressed" by having to have contact with the violent father,

“the court should take the long term view of the child's development and not accord too much weight to what appear to be short term and transitory problems.” (Re O (Contact: Imposition of Conditions)[1995] 2 FLR 124).

This policy also needs to be seen in the context of general social policy in the UK where as Williams (1998) has pointed out, lone motherhood and father absence from families has come to be seen as the cause of all problematic masculinities and where it is argued fathers have been deprived of their role as providers for families (see for example, Murray, 1990; Dennis and Erdos, 1992). However as Scourfield and Drakeford (2001) have noted there has been a shift in New Labour policy which has stressed the importance of involving fathers in *the care* of their children (see for example Home Office) 1998a,b) and the removal of perceived “institutional barriers to men spending more time with children,” as a “solution to social problems.” (Scourfield and Drakeford, 2001: 4-5) They indicate that there has been an increasing emphasis in policy rhetoric on the notion of the ‘unequal’ treatment of fathers by mothers who are viewed as blocking fathers’ access to participating in children’s care (see for example Burgess and Ruxton, 1996; Burgess, 1997) and an ignoring of the ‘dangers some men can pose in families,’ (Scourfield and Drakeford, 2001:5 see also Featherstone, 2000). Within such discourses, biological fathers have come to be constructed as the ‘prime victims of the gender order,’ and this is a perspective that has also been taken up by some New Labour feminists (Scourfield and Drakeford, 2001:4, see also Williams, 1998). Such ideas have also been promoted by the increasingly militant Fathers Rights Movement in family law policy (see for example, Parton, 1998; Guardian, 30.10.01) and have influenced practice in this area (Children Act Sub-Committee, 2001,2002). Thus in family law practice, mothers who have blocked a father’s contact with his children post-separation in order to protect children’s safety in the context of domestic violence, have come to be defined as ‘irrationally’ hostile (Smart and Neale, 1997) and are regarded as being unable to separate their own needs from those of the child (Children Act Sub-Committee 2001, 2002).

In this context, mothers’ concerns about child abuse, are frequently viewed as false allegations by the family courts and mothers can be viewed as having ‘parentally alienated’ children who are reluctant to have contact with violent and abusive fathers (Humphreys, 1997; Radford et al; 1999; Brown et al; 2000). Moreover there has been an increasing emphasis on using punitive powers against mothers to enforce such contact, which include the threat of imprisonment to ensure compliance (Radford et al; 1999).

By the end of the 1990s English family law policy recognised that very severe domestic violence could be a ‘cogent’ factor where the courts could deny or limit contact and that some attention needed to be paid to a father’s conduct in relation to this (Children Act Sub-Committee, 2000; Re:L,V,M,H [2000] 2 FLR: 334) However the main concern about a father’s parenting in the context of domestic violence has been in recognising that such behaviour can have a negative impact on children witnessing it and fears that some children might imitate such behaviour as adults (see for example, Re M [1999] 2FCR:56) and there has been little questioning of violent fathers’ ‘fitness’ to look after children, per se (see also Smart and Neale, 1997)

The limited recognition given to domestic violence has usually meant that the courts may order some form of supported or supervised contact rather than deny such fathers’ direct contact altogether.^{iv} In addition some research has indicated that such arrangements may progress to ‘unsupervised’ contact within six months for over half the children concerned (Radford et al: 1999). Some fathers may also be directed by the courts to attend a perpetrator programme or anger management course to address their domestic violence (Children Act Subcommittee, 2000, 2001). In general however there has been far less attention paid to violent men’s fathering practices and how they look after children in their care, and in this respect it is assumed that they are ‘good enough’ fathers, despite their domestic violence.

The aims of the research

One of the aims of this research was to explore the way violent fathers conceptualised their relationships with their children when they were still living with them and their experiences and views about contact in the post separation context. Moreover, since there is now substantial feminist research that indicates inter-connections between physical child abuse and domestic violence from the same perpetrator (Stark and Flitcraft, 1988; Bowker et al; 1988; O’Hara, 1994; Farmer and Owen, 1995) fathers were also questioned about their understandings of child abuse and whether they perceived these relationships as abusive. For example, whilst recognising that mothers may also physically abuse children, Stark and Flitcraft (1988) have indicated that men are three times more likely to be the prime offenders in the context of domestic violence.

Other research with children and mothers, as well as studies of child protection case records has suggested that a majority of children living with a domestically violent father experience multiple forms of abuse which includes, not only physical abuse but direct emotional abuse and psychological terrorisation from their fathers, in addition to the negative impact of witnessing violence towards their mothers and that a substantial minority also experience sexual abuse (see for example, Abrahams, 1994; Farmer and Owen, 1995; Hester and Radford, 1996; Hester and Pearson, 1998; McGee, 2000; Brown et al; 2000). Research with mothers post-separation also indicates that such children continue to be abused in the post-separation context (Hilton, 1992; Abrahams, 1994; Forman, 1995; Hester and Radford, 1996; Hester and Pearson, 1998; Radford et al: 1999).

Another salient area in the interviews was to explore men's perceptions of their roles and responsibilities as fathers and to find out how much they were involved in childcare when living with partners. This was significant because of some earlier US research with mothers which had indicated that domestically violent fathers were less involved in child rearing than non-violent men in a comparison group (Holden and Ritchie, 1991). Some later UK survey research on domestic violence and child contact focussing on mothers' perceptions of violent fathers' childcaring activities before separation has also suggested that,

'a low level of involvement in childcare appeared to be matched by a low level of emotional commitment to children and a high level of abuse and neglect which persisted in many cases on contact visits.' (Radford et al; 1999: 22).

In addition, some psychological perspectives, drawing on psycho-analytic arguments (see for example, Chodorow, 1978) have argued that men's familial abuse of children is directly related to the sexual division of labour in heterosexual nuclear families and that if fathers are more involved in the care of children, abuse is less likely to occur (Sternberg, 1996). Burgess, arguing from a New Labour policy perspective of increasing fathers' involvement in the care of their children, has suggested in relation to physical abuse, 'it may be that increased time with the children would lead to reduced violence in some cases,' (Burgess, 1997: 213)

Anti-sexist approaches to fatherhood have also suggested that men's greater participation in childcare can serve as a means of recreating more positive and 'nurturant' masculinities (see for example, Segal, 1990; Campbell, 1993; Pringle, 1995; 1998). However Pringle has also highlighted how the anti-sexist approach has failed to sufficiently take account of the 'down-side of men's presence in childcare,' (Pringle, 1998: 319) and suggested that men's involvement can 'bring into stark personal relief the destructive potential of dominant forms of masculinity,' (Pringle, 1998: 325).

The findings

The findings in this study, although exploratory, suggest that the relationship between violent fathers' participation in childcare and their direct abuse of children were far more complex and contradictory than indicated in the previous research highlighted above. Moreover they suggest that there was no simple relation between the level of men's involvement in childcare activities and less abusive practices towards children. There were also indications that such assumptions could be dangerous when considering questions of risk to children in relation to issues of contact post-separation. Alternately they raise issues about the meaning of men's parenting in the context of domestic violence and the need to recognise that where such parenting is based on assumptions and practices of power and dominance, abuse can continue to occur.

In discussing some of these findings, I have focussed mainly on fathers' accounts of physical and emotional abuse when they had specific responsibility for caring for children; although they also described situations where children were clearly being abused when they were 'caught up with' or being deliberately used in the abuse of their mothers, and when children's own safety and the impact of such abuse was disregarded by these fathers.

Fathers' involvement in childcare when still living with families

Although most of the fathers in this study did not have the main responsibility for looking after the children when still living with families, their level of involvement was greater than has been indicated from previous research and frequently occurred on a regular basis when mothers were working either full-time or part-time. These circumstances may to some extent, reflect general economic shifts in women's participation in the labour market, even where they have very young children (see for example, Walby, 1997)

Two thirds of the fathers from this sample described themselves as having been regularly involved in looking after young children (under six) on their own for a few hours a day whilst mothers worked part-time and in two cases, fathers described themselves as having been more involved in childcaring activities and tasks associated with childcare than partners, because of partners' work commitments. In addition most fathers described having some regular involvement in childcare at meal-times and bedtimes and only three men in this sample subscribed to the view of the 'traditional' father, who regards childcare as totally the mothers' responsibility. Moreover whilst some of these fathers may have exaggerated their childcaring involvement, almost half of the women from the smaller mothers' sample, described partners undertaking some regular childcare, and in three cases this was where mothers were out at work. In another case the father had prevented the mother from participating at all in the care of their baby, because, according to this mother's account, he wanted total control over the child.

Childcare and household tasks associated with childcare could however be a source of contradiction, conflict and resentment for some fathers and used as a form of violent and abusive control over the whole family (see also Dobash and Dobash, 1998). For example, whilst some fathers stated that they believed in equality in childcaring roles they could also be resentful if they felt they were doing too much and this itself could lead to more violence towards mothers. Other fathers stated that they had chosen to do childcare whilst mothers worked, but they could also use violence against mothers if they were not getting what they wanted from the childcare context. For example, one father in 'explaining' some of his controlling violence towards his partner who worked part-time, stated,

"I've always felt that my wife, didn't help on the household chores that needed to be done, like dishes, washing – things like that. I did it all - so I didn't have a lot of time to play with my son – I would be cooking tea, bathing X, or getting him ready for bed, so I didn't have a lot of time for the love side of things."

This example highlights the discursive strategies that violent men may employ to account for their domestic violence which frequently draw on socially acceptable discourses of woman-blame to shift responsibility for their violence onto their victims (see for example Ptaceck, 1998; Hearn, 1998; Cavanagh et al; 2001). What is interesting here is that this father is drawing on family policy discourses of woman blame to deny his own responsibility for the violence and justify it by arguing that his partner is preventing him spending more quality time with his son and implying that she was not a good parent.

Abusive child caring practices

Of considerable concern was the kind of care that most fathers described as giving to young children when they were responsible for looking after them on their own and the rationalisations they used to justify any physically and emotionally abusive behaviour towards them. In this context several violent fathers described children as 'provoking' their 'bad tempers', or 'short fuses' when they were looking after them, including the two fathers who indicated that they were the main carers of children.

For example, one father in describing looking after his two young daughters, aged three and four whilst his partner worked part-time, argued that these two children could provoke his violent temper by their own behaviour.

"Basically what it is I'm frightened of my temper – the two of them are little sods together and I'm frightened of doing damage to them when I'm on my own with them and they are misbehaving and I can feel my temper and it does frighten me in case I hit them."

Interestingly, there were parallels in this father's justifications for the abuse of his children with his explanations for abuse towards his partner, since he described her as provoking his physical violence towards her because she would not 'shut up,' when he was in a bad mood.

This father also described how he frequently smashed objects in the home which included the children's toys and cups. Moreover although he recognised some of the negative impacts of this violence he appeared to believe that if he played with them this would cancel out its effects.

For example he said,

“ the youngest seems to cry all the time which I think is through the violence and eldest will just cry when I tell her to do anything which I think is due to all the shouting and violence and I'll say I'm not telling you off, I'm not saying you can't do it – wait until tomorrow – we'll play a game of when the police were chasing me – Oh I love them to bits.”

Thus, although this father gave indications that he sometimes he played with the children and that he had affection for them, the childcare context itself could be a means of providing opportunities for his abuse. This issue was also raised by the mothers who were interviewed about their ex-partners' fathering practices particularly in relation to violent fathers 'play'. For example one mother described how at times her ex-partner would play with her two young daughters but then would just stop and lose his temper and shout and swear at them. Another mother described how her ex-partner 'would play and cuddle' her four year old son and six year old daughter, 'when he felt like it,' but at other times would 'kick and throw things at them.' Both these mothers felt that such behaviour made the children more fearful of their fathers because they could never be sure how they were going to behave towards them. These mothers' views about the negative impact of such behaviour have been supported by McGee in her research with 54 children living with domestic violence. For example McGee has indicated that such unpredictability can result in extreme anxiety in children and can control children's behaviour to such an extent when they are with their fathers, that they are frightened to show any reaction in case it provokes an outburst of violence or hostility.

Fathers also talked about being provoked into abusive behaviour when children failed to conform to their own expectations in the childcare context and this kind of explanation similarly paralleled some rationalisations for abusive control of mothers when they failed to live up to their partners' expectations of being good wives and mothers (see also Hearn, 1998)

For example, one father talked about being regularly involved in looking after his three children after school and 'helping' them with their homework, because he was concerned about their educational achievement. However at the same time he described how he would shout and hit them if they did not do it properly, as is illustrated in the following extract where he is talking about a five year old girl.

“If they came home late from school... and I'd get a bit annoyed if they wouldn't sit and concentrate on their homework, because I thought this was important – and if I actually sat say with P and she was trying to read to me and sometimes I would get a bit annoyed if I thought she wasn't trying –

Q. So you would hit her?

A. Yes but it was also more shouting

Q. So what effect do think that had on her

A. She would just get terrified and curl up in a corner and wouldn't sit on my knee anymore.”

It should be noted that this father had a number of convictions against him for child abuse and was registered as a Schedule One Offender under the Children and Young Persons Act (1933) for cruelty to children. In addition, two other fathers who had convictions for assault on their children, described these as being related to hitting them 'too hard,' when they were responsible for putting them to bed, 'because they would not go to sleep.' .

Abuse could also occur when children were perceived as making unreasonable demands and where these conflicted with fathers' own interests. This was illustrated by another father who was responsible for looking after two young daughters (both under five) full-time when his partner had to go into hospital for two weeks, although the children went to a nursery during the day. He stated,

“ I would be getting frustrated with them – they wanted to talk to dad and they were continually badgering me for attention. There was awful shouting and verbal and aggressive abuse to get them to do what I wanted them to do – if they dropped their spoon that would be enough for me to slam my fist down on the table and that would shock them rigid.”

Deliberate cruelty

Some fathers talked about being deliberately cruel to children when they failed to meet their own expectations in various childcare contexts, as is illustrated in the following extract,

“ Just being in the same room was enough in the end – it was mental abuse – they were terrified of me – all I had to do was look – I was quite cruel to be honest with you, for example at meal-times I used to sit there and make them eat things they really did not like and they used to cry. I wanted to make them too perfect – I wanted to make them what I should be like.”

This deliberate cruelty to children was also illustrated in the mothers' accounts of their ex-partners' fathering practices, although mothers indicated that they were not always aware that such abuse was occurring at the time. For example one mother described how her partner was regularly emotionally and physically abusing one of her three children, a boy, when he was looking after the children after school, before she came home from work. She said,

“It started when X was about four – his father would get angry at him and call him thick and stupid and hit him around the head and degrade him and when he got glasses he called him four eyes. When he was about six or seven years old he was still wetting himself at school, so I took him to the doctor and I got some medication to stop it. It was only by sheer chance that X let something slip and I realised why he was wetting himself, because his father was hitting him and shouting at him when he was looking after him.”

These accounts contradict previous understandings of domestically violent fathers as having little involvement in childcare and point to the need to recognise that some violent fathers at least can be the prime abusers of children in child care contexts. Moreover, although several fathers who participated in this study described regularly undertaking child caring activities, this was not an indication that they were prepared to prioritise the needs of children or understand the child's point of view. For example, only one out of the twenty fathers interviewed, indicated that children's own needs should be addressed when he was looking after the children. In addition most fathers accounts illustrated that they regarded very young children as being responsible at least in part, for provoking the abuse through their own behaviour. Thus far from becoming more 'nurturing' or 'caring' these fathers appeared to carry their own assumptions and practices of dominant and violent masculinity which they used to oppress and control women, into the parenting context.

Of considerable concern in this research was that fathers were frequently describing ongoing abuse when looking after very young children. Yet it is these children who are regarded within family law policy as 'needing' fathers most and whose own feelings and views may be disregarded in decisions made by professionals about contact, particularly where such children are fearful of their fathers and reluctant to go on contact visits (see for example Hester et al: 1994; Smart and Neale, 1999; Radford et al: 1999)

Violent fathers' 'emotional commitment' and care of children in the context of child contact

Views on contact – in the name of love

One of the arguments for children's continuing contact with fathers in psychological discourses is the idea that children need a father's love and that this is important to children's emotional development (see for example Sturge and Glaser, 2000)^v. Yet as has been seen in some of the accounts above, whilst these violent fathers often expressed their love for the children, it was apparent that such discourses of 'love' had very different meanings from what might be conventionally understood as an unselfish emotional commitment to children's wellbeing. For instance, whilst such fathers stated that they wanted contact because of their love for children, or, more frequently, because of children's love for them, it did not seem to occur to them that children might be reluctant to see them because of their violence and abuse.

Several fathers stated that they wanted contact because children could provide them with 'unconditional love.' As one father put it, 'its about love – you can't get love like that from anyone else.' Another father stated, 'Its because of the unconditional love they give you – its one of the most important things in life.' This also meant that within these constructs, children were viewed in a highly romanticised way, where they would always be the providers of unconditional love whatever happened in their lives and whatever fathers did. There was also implicit within these portrayals, a sense that as permanent providers of love, children would give the men the emotional support which they had expected from women as their partners, but which they could no longer be relied upon to provide. For some fathers it was also because 'they loved the children,' or as has been seen in one of the accounts of above, because he 'loved them to bits.' But in both these kinds of discourse there was a sense that children were perceived as some kind of 'emotional property' or 'investment' where they existed only for the benefit of fathers' own emotional 'needs' and where their love was a form of power over the children. Their perceptions of child's love, could also be used as a form of power against mothers and several fathers suggested in their accounts that their children loved them more than their mothers and implied that they were in competition for children's love.

Fathers' rights and the possession of children

Fathers' love could also be invested with rights of possession over children and in two cases was used to justify, the forcible abduction of children from mothers, when they had left because the family home because of a partner's violence. Most men viewed contact as *their* inviolable right as fathers which could not be interfered with, whatever the children's views and despite having at times acknowledged that their children were often terrified of them and that there had been other harmful impacts as a consequence of their abuse.

This was typically expressed by one father who had been convicted for assaulting his disabled child, when he stated 'no one is going to come between me and my children, because they are mine.' Another father acknowledged that both his children were frightened of him when they came for contact, and that his son, aged eight, would 'shout and scream,' when he was picked up for contact visits. But he explained this in terms of 'the insecurity,' of his wife and 'her jealousy,' and drawing on arguments that are frequently used in family law discourses, suggested that his ex-partner had manipulated the children into being fearful of him.

Fathers' abusive care of children in the contact context

Contact arrangements

At the time of interview, the fathers in this study had various forms of contact. Some fathers stated that because the children were at an age when they could choose whether they wanted to have contact (usually 11 or older) they now saw the children infrequently. For fathers of much younger children it was clear that initial contact had been limited to a few hours a week particularly where they had convictions for child abuse, and or there had been some involvement from child protection agencies; although only one of these fathers described having contact that was supervised by a social worker. Some of these fathers were still having limited contact which often took place either in the mother's home or at the home of paternal

grandparents, at the time of interview, although this did not necessarily mean that they were safe from abuse (see Forman, 1995). For a few of these fathers however, contact had progressed to having children to visit one day a week or to overnight staying contact and in these situations contact continued to be a context where children could be perceived as provoking the father's abuse.

For example one father who was just beginning to have weekly overnight staying contact, and who had earlier stated that he had been abusive towards the children, because they were constantly 'badgering him for attention,' when looking after them full time, described how he still found himself 'losing patience,' and 'the same patterns of abuse coming back,' when the children woke up to early and made demands on him.

This father's ongoing contact was of also particular concern, because he recognised that he had caused some considerable harm to one of his children. He said,

"M's four and she's not talking well compared with children half her age. She has these catatonic states – it alarms me – I've seen that when I've been aggressive and smacked her – that's one major effect that I've had on her."

Despite recognising these extreme impacts however, he still went on to suggest that it was his right to have ongoing contact. In addition three other fathers whose contact had been extended to weekend overnight visits, indicated that they continued to use physical abuse and threats in order to control the children.

Emotional abuse

Several fathers indicated that they were emotionally abusing the children during contact visits, through insulting their mothers or through making threats against them, although there was not necessarily any acknowledgement that they were harming the children in this process. For example, one father who had contact for a few hours a week, described how he had told the children that he would have their mother sent to prison unless she agreed to overnight staying visits. In relating this, this father seemed totally unconcerned how such a threat might be perceived by the children and how anxious they might be for their own and their mother's safety. Another father dismissed any thought that his abusive comments about their mother could have any negative impact on the children, as is illustrated in the following extract.

Q. "Have you said things to the children about their mother?"

A. "Yeh – I've said she was no good – that she's got other boyfriends?"

Q. "How do you think they feel about that?"

A. "They don't know the truth do they? They're just listening to me spouting rubbish from their point of view – they're just thinking I'm not a nice person saying things about their mum – you see I'll say anything because I know I can get back at her."

Numerous examples of this kind of abuse during contact visits were also highlighted in the mothers' accounts (see also Hester and Radford, 1996). For example one mother stated that her five year old son had been diagnosed by a child psychologist as depressed and as having various behavioural and stress related problems including; constant bedwetting; attention deficit disorder and the daily kicking and hurting other children at school, as a direct consequence of what his father was telling him. She said,

"He was telling him, mummy's a liar and don't believe a thing she says – she's a thief and she stole your Christmas stocking and daddy's house is better than mummy's and you're going to live at daddy's soon anyway ...because when you lose a mummy its not so bad – because sometimes mummies die. And you can misbehave here and what you do here you can do at your mum's house and kick your friends."

Conclusion

This research has indicated that despite being regularly involved in childcare activities, violent fathers can continue to physically and emotionally abuse children. There were also indications that increased childrearing responsibilities could provide more opportunities for fathers to abuse and this was indicated

both prior to separation and when such fathers gained more contact in the post-separation context. In this context, fathers' deflection of responsibility onto very young children themselves for provoking the abuse and their inconsistent parenting behaviour was of considerable concern and could have grave implications of harm for the children themselves. In addition in the post-separation context, their motivations for wanting such contact and their parenting practices suggest that whilst they may express some 'emotional commitment' to children, this is bound up with self-interested motivations, and that they are rarely able to prioritise children's interests above their own (see also Sturge and Glaser, 2000)

Whilst these findings are exploratory and further research is required in this area, they indicate a need for an *assessment of risk* of domestically violent fathers' parenting, particularly in relation to considering their contact post-separation, which goes beyond looking at how much involvement they have had in 'caring' for the children or the different activities of childcare, since this is not necessarily an indication that children will not be harmed. They also suggest that the problem is not merely one of poor parenting 'skills', but that violent fathers' practices in relation to children are bound up with constructions of dominant masculinity that are integrally connected to their violence and control of women in familial relationships.

Endnotes

ⁱ These were programmes where fathers had either been court-mandated to attend as part of a probation order, or had volunteered to attend in order to address their domestic violence.

ⁱⁱ Such indexes or checklists are used in perpetrator programmes as means of eliciting violent and abusive behaviours that men are not willing to disclose verbally. They have also been used in previous research with violent men (see for example Dobash et al; 1996)

ⁱⁱⁱ The mothers' sample was found through two support groups for mothers who had experienced domestic violence and problems over their children's contact.

^{iv} Most contact centres do not offer direct supervision of the father's contact; rather they provide facilities where contact can take place in a neutral environment. The term supervised contact can cover a range of arrangements, but may mean the contact is overseen by social workers, although this does not mean that children are completely safe from abuse (Hester and Pearson, 1998)

^v Sturge and Glaser were called upon by the appeal court to provide an expert's opinion on children's contact in the context of domestic violence. Although they outlined a number of benefits to children in having contact, they also outlined several situations where children could be put at risk from a domestically violent father. These included the increased likelihood of direct physical and emotional abuse by a domestically violent perpetrator, and where the father is unable to 'consistently sustain the prioritisation of the child's needs.' (Sturge and Glaser, 2000: 618-620)

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