The effects of exposure to domestic abuse on adolescents’ relationship attitudes and reasoning of abusive behaviour, and an evaluation of an intervention programme for those who are displaying perpetrator behaviours

Submitted by Bryony Curtis, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Educational, Child & Community Psychology, May 2010

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from this thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I declare that the contents are the sole and original work of the author. References to existing research are cited where appropriate.

Signature: .................................
Contents

Paper 1: The attitudes and reasoning of abusive behaviour in adolescents who have been exposed to domestic abuse

Abstract 6
Introduction 7
Selected Literature 10
Theoretical Aspects 15
Research Aims 18
Design and Methods 19
Measures 21
Procedures 22
Data Analysis 24
Results 26
Discussion 35
Conclusion 47
References 49

Paper 2: An evaluation of an intervention for adolescents who have been exposed to domestic abuse and are displaying perpetrator behaviours

Abstract 58
Introduction 59
Selected Literature and Theoretical Aspects 62
Research Aims 66
Design and Methods 68
Measures 70
Procedures 72
Data Analysis 75
Results 77
Discussion 89
Conclusion 101
References 103

Appendices 111
## Tables and Graphs

**Paper 1:**

| Table 1 Themes arising from thematic analysis of interview data | 26 |

**Paper 2:**

| Table 2 Themes arising from thematic analysis of interview data | 77 |
| Graph 1 Student Emotional Literacy Checklist data | 83 |
| Table 3 Student Emotional Literacy Checklist Score Descriptors and Percentages | 84 |
Abstract

Paper one: The attitudes and reasoning of abusive behaviour in adolescents who have been exposed to domestic abuse

Exposure to domestic abuse in childhood can go on to negatively affect every aspect of that individual’s life. During adolescence, the impact of exposure to domestic abuse may go beyond the borders of the family and the individual, and affect the development of intimate relationships. This study explores the attitudes and reasoning of eleven young people who have been exposed to domestic abuse and are displaying perpetrator behaviours. Results reveal a complex interaction between experiences and skill deficits at a crucial time of identity formation, resulting in the formation and maintenance of destructive attitudes and contradictory reasoning about abusive behaviour. The direct implications of this study, suggestions for further research, and for Educational Psychology Services are discussed.

Paper two: An evaluation of an intervention for adolescents who have been exposed to domestic abuse and are displaying perpetrator behaviours

Where domestic violence occurs, children and young people are likely to have been exposed to such abuse. Evidence suggests that this is likely to have a detrimental impact on them. There is an acute gap in provision for such individuals, despite evidence suggesting a link between exposure to domestic abuse in childhood, and involvement in abusive dating relationships in late adolescence and adulthood. There has been little research testing the effectiveness of intervention programmes which aim to reduce this risk. In this study a before and after design was used to evaluate a cognitive-behavioural intervention programme for young people who have been exposed to domestic abuse and are displaying abusive behaviours. This evaluation was based on the views of the young people on this programme. Results indicate that certain elements of the programme were more successful in achieving the programme aims. Considerations for the development of further programmes which target this client group are discussed.