

Domestic Violence, Children's Agency and Mother–Child Relationships: Towards a More Advanced Model

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Although domestic violence research increasingly recognises children's agency, this awareness has not extended to our understanding of children's relationships with their abused mothers. Findings suggesting that some children actively support their mother, and encourage her to leave the perpetrator, have been consistently under-discussed. This article argues that the model of parent–child relationships used by most domestic violence research sees children as passive and contributes to mother-blaming discourses. Analysing key quantitative and qualitative research, I suggest that a more sophisticated model of parent–child relationships is needed to understand how children's agency affects them, their mothers and the domestic violence situation. © 2013 The Author(s) Children & Society © 2013 National Children's Bureau and Blackwell Publishing Limited.

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Introduction

Mother–child relationships are increasingly seen as important to the resilience and well-being of children experiencing domestic violence (Sturge-Apple and others, 2010). A positive relationship with their non-abusing parent (usually their mother) is thought to help protect these children from negative outcomes (Letourneau and others, 2007). However, there has been little scrutiny of the underlying model of mother–child relationships used in the domestic violence research field. Recent work has critiqued this field's tendency to view children as passive victims and ignore their coping strategies and agency (Overlien and Hyden, 2009). However, this work is relatively new and has focused on calling for more recognition of children's agency as individual survivors of domestic violence, not as family members. Here, I extend this work by providing an original analysis of the extent to which domestic violence research recognises children's agency in its model of parent–child relationships.

In the first section, I discuss the small amount of domestic violence research that focuses on children's agency and actions. I review this work's innovative findings, which suggest that some children actively support their mother and siblings and wish to play direct roles in decision-making about the domestic violence. This understanding of children's agency has featured prominently *outside* domestic violence research, and the second section explores the recommendation of Kuczynski and others (1999) and Kuczynski (2003) that unilateral models of parent–child relationships (i.e. those focusing on parents' actions and seeing children as passive) be replaced with a bilateral model that sees both parents and children as active. Returning to the domestic violence research field, the third section reviews key studies on domestic violence and mother–child relationships. It argues that much of this work, influenced by unilateral models, ignores or minimises children's agency in relation to their parents. In the fourth section, I contend that this influence contributes

to mother/victim-blaming and inhibits understanding of cases that show children actively supporting their abused mother. Here, effects on practice will be considered. Finally, I conclude that to enhance our understandings of how positive mother–child relationships help children survive domestic violence, we must begin to recognise children’s agency and the bilateral nature of parent–child relationships.

The use of childhood studies in domestic violence research

Theoretical developments

According to Prout and James (1997), children are conventionally seen as incomplete, vulnerable beings who are acted upon by adults and society. This view has been questioned in the last three decades by scholars working within ‘childhood studies’ (Qvortrup and others, 2009). These scholars emphasise that children not only accept circumstances but influence and modify them. At the core of this argument is a reconceptualisation of children as active beings with the capacity to use agency. It is rare for contributors to this field to define the concept of agency they are using (Valentine, 2011). However, many appear to view agency as something that does not necessarily require rationality and freedom, and may be exercised by people with mixed feelings and under constrained circumstances.

It is only in the last ten years that a small number of scholars working in the domestic violence research field have begun to incorporate innovations from childhood studies into their work (Eriksson and Nasman, 2008; Mullender and others, 2002; Overlien and Hyden, 2009). These researchers are critical of how children are framed in the majority of domestic violence research, which tends to focus on the damage they have sustained (Holt and others, 2008). Arguing that children are often seen as passive witnesses who ‘suffer in silence’ (Overlien and Hyden, 2009, p. 479), and are ‘marginalized as a source of information about their own lives’ (Mullender and others, 2002, p. 3), these researchers have emphasised that children who experience domestic violence are capable of making decisions, taking actions and influencing their surroundings.

Empirical results and implications

The emerging domestic violence research inspired by childhood studies is yielding surprising results. Although children experience serious negative impacts from living with domestic violence, many children in this situation (a) wish to be treated as agentic and take active roles in decision-making, and (b) are more active in supporting themselves and others than was previously thought. These points are best illustrated in a study by Mullender and others (2002), based on in-depth interviews with 24 mothers and 54 children (aged 8–17). Their results suggest that it is important for children to ‘[be] listened to and taken seriously as participants in the domestic violence situation’ (p. 121). Child participants in their study emphasised a wish to be informed and active in finding solutions:

Grown-ups think they should hide it and shouldn’t tell us but we want to know. We want to be involved and we want our mums to talk with us about what they are going to do – we could help make decisions. (p. 129)

Furthermore, many children in the study discussed coping strategies that included taking agentic roles, and encouraged other children experiencing domestic violence to be active in supporting their mother and siblings:

Help your mother be strong; Give your mum advice because sometimes she can’t think straight; Have lots of cuddles with your mum and your brothers and sisters; Talk to your brothers and sisters;

Get lots of reassurance and love from your mother; If you are a child, think what your mum is going through; Stick to your mum. (p. 234)

This concept of children as agentic subjects is opening up space in domestic violence research. In a field that continues to be dominated by the question of how children are *damaged by* domestic violence, it has raised questions of what children *do* and how they *take action* when living with domestic violence. Perhaps most important, it has begun to suggest that children's agency may be more extensive than previously thought. Children may not only protect themselves but also play a role in supporting the other survivor(s) of domestic violence in their family, including their mother.

Parent-child relationships: unilateral versus bilateral models

To integrate these new findings into the wider knowledge-base of domestic violence research, I believe it is important not only to continue recognising children's agency as individuals, but to engage with recent innovations outside the field that enhance understandings of parent-child relationships. For example, work in developmental psychology by Kuczynski and others (1999) and Kuczynski (2003), available for over a decade, has highlighted how traditional research into families has been prevented from fully understanding its findings by a unilateral model of parent-child relations.

According to Kuczynski and others (1999):

Research [in this area] has been constrained by [...] a *unilateral model of parent child-relationships* [...] where influence was assumed to flow in one direction, from parent to child [... Within this model] parents were considered to be active agents capable of meaning construction and intentional action. Children were considered to be either passive recipients or victims of parental practices whose capacities for meaning construction and intentional action was usually ignored. (p. 25, original emphasis)

To overcome the unilateral model's limitations, Kuczynski and others developed a bilateral model of parent-child relations. The bilateral model views causality in parent-child relationships as 'bi-directional': i.e. children influence parents and parents influence children. This model also assumes that parents and children have equal amounts of agency, although not necessarily equal amounts of power to exercise it. Using the bilateral model, a parent-child relationship may therefore be seen as two-directional. It contains both parent-to-child directions of influence and child-to-parent directions of influence. It is the dynamic interaction between these directions that creates the parent-child relationship.

The shift from a unilateral to bilateral model has opened up new areas of research into family dynamics, enabling scholars to address previously neglected questions such as how children 'deliberately intervene to change parental behaviours, beliefs and attitudes' (Kuczynski and others, 1999, p. 46). Outside the domestic violence research field, this is enabling scholars to develop fuller accounts of children's agency, their influence on their parents, and their dynamic contributions to family life. Studies using bilateral models outside this field are also suggesting that children often see mutual supportiveness and problem-sharing between themselves and their parents as healthy and normal (Arditti, 1999; Morrow, 2003).

The domestic violence research field cannot afford to ignore these advances in parent-child relationship theory. A bilateral model of parent-child relations seems particularly helpful to understand recent findings that some children act to support their abused mothers. We therefore need to examine the extent to which the unilateral model is still prevalent in domestic violence research.

The dominance of the unilateral model in domestic violence research

Focusing on mothers' parenting

The unilateral model appears to have a strong influence on domestic violence research, shaping scholars' approaches to mother–child relationships and often making mothers' actions appear as the only factor worth analysing. For example, Letourneau and others (2007) state that they conducted 'an analysis of the relationships between parents and children exposed to domestic violence' (p. 655), but, in practice, their study only analysed one half of this relationship: namely, the parenting practices of mothers. This approach does not account for children's contributions to the mother–child relationship. Rather, in accordance with the view of the unilateral model, it suggests that that mothers' parenting *is* the parent–child relationship.

This tendency to reduce explorations of mother–child relationships to examinations of mother's parenting may also be seen within the broader stream of research into domestic violence and mother–child relationships that has emerged in the last decade. This research, drawing on clinical psychology and using primarily quantitative methods, focuses almost exclusively on the parenting of abused mothers, and its links to the presence or absence of behaviour problems in their children (Hungerford and others, 2012). For example, studies have examined the effects on children of mothers' symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Johnson and Lieberman, 2007), mothers' mental health (Levendosky and others, 2006), their parenting behaviours/parenting stress (Huth-Bocks and Hughes, 2008) and their parenting effectiveness (Gewirtz and others, 2011). Most recently, research has begun to explore how mothers mediate the relationship between exposure to domestic violence and children's neurocognitive functioning (Samuelson and others, 2012). Overall, the usual conclusion in the field is that 'maternal parenting behaviours may play *key explanatory roles* in understanding associations between inter-parental violence and children's adjustment difficulties' (Sturge-Apple and others, 2010, p. 45, my emphasis).

Mothers as active, children as passive

In addition to affecting the way parent–child relationships are studied, the unilateral model appears to influence how mothers and children are conceptualised. According to Kuczynski and others (1999), this model views parents as powerful actors and children as 'passive recipients or victims' of the behaviour that is handed down by parents (p. 25). This may be seen in the domestic violence research discussed above, where mothers are imagined as either 'protecting' or further 'damaging' their children through the quality of their parenting (Letourneau and others, 2007; Sturge-Apple and others, 2010). For example, in their study of parenting by abused mothers, Huth-Bocks and Hughes (2008) argue that 'there is considerable evidence that parenting stress has a direct effect on child-adjustment problems' (p. 245). Implicitly, children are seen in this stream of research not as subjects who have the capacity to take deliberate action, but as objects whose successful 'adjustment' is determined by their mothers' behaviour.

What is excluded from consideration in this research is the other half of the mother–child relationship: that is, children's effects on their mothers. The vast majority of studies in this area *do not* collect data about children's agency or their active participation in the mother–child relationship (see Huth-Bocks and Hughes, 2008; Johnson and Lieberman, 2007; Letourneau and others, 2007; Levendosky and others, 2006; Samuelson and others, 2012; Sturge-Apple and others, 2010). The data collected about mothers focus on their ability to take effective action as a parent, often through measuring their parenting warmth, adaptability,

use of discipline, or mental health. Mothers' actions are examined because they are seen as agentic. By contrast, children are seen as passive. The data gathered about them (through, for example, the Child Behavior Checklist or the Children's Depression Inventory) are almost always designed to assess whether they are aggressive, withdrawn, depressed, or suffering from PTSD or other problems, and are therefore limited to recording the level of damage they have sustained and their resulting behavioural (mal)functioning. These data are rarely accompanied by data on the active coping strategies children are using or their ways of interacting with their mother on an everyday basis. As a result, considerations of children's agency or actions have been all but missing from the quantitative research on domestic violence and mother-child relationships.

Impacts of the unilateral model on domestic violence research

Mother-blaming

By viewing mothers as active and children as passive, the unilateral model clearly holds back the recognition of children's agency in domestic violence research. However, there are other drawbacks to this model, which may be seen through an investigation of 'mother-blaming' and its established solutions. The form of mother-blaming that is most recognised by the children and domestic violence field is where the onus is placed on abused mothers to ensure their children's well-being, and they are held responsible for 'failure to protect' if the children are harmed (Lapierre, 2008; Radford and Hester, 2006). This tendency towards mother-blaming may be seen in the literature on domestic violence and parent-child relationships analysed in the previous section, which overwhelmingly focuses on mother-child not father-child relationships when attempting to explain children's behaviour problems (Hungerford and others, 2012).

As critiques by other scholars have already suggested, this mother-blaming framework inhibits discussion of the perpetrator, usually the children's father or father-figure (Eriksson and others, 2005; Lapierre, 2008). Ignoring the perpetrator has resulted in a failure to acknowledge that it is *his* behaviour which is damaging children, or that *he* is primarily responsible for any difficulties his partner experiences with her parenting. It has also meant that most quantitative studies examining the ways that children are harmed by domestic violence have failed to collect data about the perpetrator's day-to-day behaviour and parenting style (Hungerford and others, 2012).

However, the first point I wish to make is that identifying the perpetrator's responsibility for the harm done to children (which is the established solution to mother-blaming) often still involves the unilateral model of parent-child relations and its view of children as passive. For example, innovative work by Bancroft and Silverman (2002) shows how some perpetrators confuse their children about who is responsible for the domestic violence and deliberately undermine the children's relationships with their mother. However, their work largely ignores the possibility that children may be agentic in relation to the perpetrator. When they argue that the perpetrator's behaviour may 'shape' the children's perceptions of their parents, and that '[c]hildren tend to *absorb* the batterer's view of their mother over time' (p. 11, my emphasis), children are still imagined as passive objects who are directly affected by the actions of the parent, even if in this case it is the perpetrator and not the mother.

This is problematic because other research has suggested that children do have the capacity to resist manipulation and to reject the perpetrator's view of the situation. For example, in the study by Mullender and others (2002), one twelve-year-old girl says: 'I ask [Dad] sometimes, when I see him, why he hit Mum. He always says that she hit him first and she started it, but she didn't' (p. 168). Like many other children in the research literature, this girl

shows an ability to reject her fathers' assertions. She has a sense of certainty that *he* started it, and refuses to 'absorb' or be 'shaped' by his attempts at manipulation.

I therefore believe it is necessary to approach discussions of parents' manipulation from the premise that children are agentic subjects. This would not remove our ability to explore how children are manipulated, as agentic subjects are still vulnerable to manipulation. Rather, conceptualising children as agentic subjects capable of constructing meaning, acting strategically and resisting domination by others would allow researchers wishing to overcome mother-blaming to explore how children are both manipulated by their domestically violent fathers and are sometimes able to resist such manipulation.

This leads to my second point, that mother-blaming may result not only from holding mothers responsible for the harm done to children but also from ignoring the agency of the child in relation to the mother. This different form of mother-blaming may be seen in a passage by Holden (2003), who states that 'one potential problem [...] occurs when there is "parentification". Here, the mother turns to the child for comfort and support and *inappropriately* discusses the violence and her relationship with the perpetrator' (p. 158, my emphasis). This passage is representative of a common form of mother-blaming in domestic violence research, which often assumes that (passive) children have been *forced* into caregiving roles because their (active) mother has elicited support from them. Admittedly, there may be cases where abused mothers do look to their children for support and this is experienced as burdensome by children. However, the problem with the unilateral model is that it automatically assumes that mothers have compelled their children into caring for them. Research using this model leaves no ground for considering that, in some cases, (active) children may *choose* to support their abused mother or *initiate* conversations with her about what is happening.

Interpreting evidence of supportive behaviours by children

This article has examined the quantitative, clinical research on domestic violence and mother-child relationships, showing that the unilateral model remains at the heart of this work. As we saw, this has created a strong tendency to view children as passive objects and parents as all-powerful actors. On the rare occasions when children's supportiveness towards their mother *is* identified, it tends to be viewed as automatically negative or as evidence of 'parentification'.

This section will therefore look more closely at how the unilateral model is limiting understandings of children's supportiveness towards their abused mothers. I do not wish to suggest that the primary response of children living with domestic violence is to support their mother, as mother-child relationships can be severely undermined by domestic violence (Humphreys and others, 2006). However, much research, including that discussed below, suggests that supporting the mother is one significant reaction which requires further consideration. Here, my analysis widens to include the qualitative feminist or child-centred literature which, because it allows survivors to give their accounts in their own words, tends to find more evidence of this behaviour. I will argue that there are a range of supportive behaviours by children that are visible in this literature but not fully discussed. Even this literature can be seen to follow the unilateral model by:

- a Considering supportiveness to be a parental role that children should not adopt
- b Ignoring children's agency, and focusing on the agency of mothers
- c Marginalising cases where children take overt action to help their mothers
- d Assuming that children's attempts to support their mothers are unsuccessful or unreciprocated

I will pursue each of these issues in turn through reference to key texts in the existing domestic violence research literature. My intention here is not to critique the authors of these texts (especially as they are highlighting other important issues), but to draw attention to how some children support and advise their mothers and how these purposeful and agentic behaviours may produce a range of outcomes for mothers, children and other family members.

Considering supportiveness to be a parental role that children should not adopt

Firstly, because the unilateral model lacks a concept of children's agency, it sees children's supportive actions only in terms of (parental) 'roles', which are 'adopted' by children, rather than as a functional part of being a child that may exist alongside the parental roles of adults. In domestic violence research, this often leads to a negative interpretation of children supporting their mothers as 'parentification', seen, for example, in a review by Holt and others (2008) which states that: 'Adolescents may adopt care-taking roles for their mother and siblings and although this can [be] empower[ing] [...] the cost of *over parentification* is a *lost childhood* and the likelihood of *severe emotional distress*' (p. 803, my emphasis). The unilateral model therefore creates a tendency for domestic violence research to assume that children's supportiveness towards their mothers is automatically negative, rather than exploring it in a more complex way.

Ignoring children's agency, and focusing on the agency of mothers

Secondly, the unilateral model expects only mothers, not mothers *and* children, to be agentic, and this tends to influence the interpretation of findings. For example, Rhodes and others (2010), who conducted focus-group interviews with thirty-nine women, did not develop an analysis of the deliberate interventions by children which are evident in their own data. Their findings include one mother describing how: *My daughter's the one that ended up calling the very last time. The taxi cab, then she called two cabs and said that we need to go somewhere safe* (p. 488, my emphasis)', and another saying:

When the children were involved [...] that helped a lot, especially seeing (my daughter) and *her cry, Mommy, you don't have to have this happen*. I mean, you know, a ten-year-old [...] knowing something that I just couldn't see [...] she was way above the intelligence that I was at that point. (p. 488, my emphasis)

These quotations seem to indicate that some children play an active role in their mother's leaving process. However, in their analysis, Rhodes and others comment on these statements only to emphasise mothers' actions and protective roles, which barely feature in the passages. The first is treated as an example of a mother not wanting 'her children to have to take an active role in the process of leaving' (p. 488), while the second is seen as an instance where 'concern for their children motivated mothers to ultimately seek help or leave the relationship' (p. 488). Here, the authors explore children's *passive* roles as objects of concern, yet the lack of focus on children's agency prevents them (and the wider field) from considering some children's *active* roles in mothers' leaving processes.

Marginalising cases where children take overt action to help their mothers

Thirdly, the unilateral model makes it difficult to fully consider or theorise the mother-child relationships in which children are most active. An example of this can be seen in the chapter on mother-child relationships by Mullender and others (2002). This chapter shows that, although some abused mothers and children are too concerned about upsetting each other to communicate about what is happening, there are also mutually supportive relationships

where ‘mothers may turn to their children for support [as well as] do[ing] their best to try and protect their children from knowledge and sight of violence’ (p. 156). However, the authors provide only minimal illustration of these latter families — where children ‘dared to tell the truth whilst living with the abuse, thus strengthening their mother’s resolve to separate’, and ‘shored up [their mothers] decision to make it on their own’ (p. 174) — and conclude the chapter without reference to them. As the unilateral model does not provide a framework for understanding the dynamics in these families, they are under-explored, and opportunities are missed to understand more about the potential impacts of mutual support between children and mothers.

Assuming that children’s attempts to support their mothers are unsuccessful or unreciprocated

Finally, the unilateral model restricts understanding by shifting focus away from cases where children’s supportiveness is successful. For example, Epstein and Keep, in their 1995 study of children’s calls to the helpline *ChildLine*, report children ‘making suggestions to their mothers [and] encouraging them to leave or separate from their partners’; but they note immediately that ‘such concern is not always acknowledged or appreciated by the mother herself’ and that ‘[i]t can be confusing and hurtful to a child when their mother does not accept or act on the advice she gives’ (pp. 49–50). This awareness that mothers’ lack of receptiveness may harm children is important; yet, it is also important to consider that mothers sometimes *are* responsive and children’s interventions sometimes *are* successful (see Rhodes and others, 2010, above) so that these outcomes do not remain invisible in the field.

Effects on practice

We do not know how domestic violence interventions are affected by the unilateral model, or the difficulties it creates in understanding supportiveness between children and mothers. However, there are some signs in the literature that the unilateral model does have an effect on practice and may be undermining the effectiveness of some interventions. For instance, Mullender and others (2002) note that social workers had not talked to some of the children in their study or given them opportunities to share in decision-making. The authors suggest that ‘some of the children [...] had wanted so much to be active in coping with the difficulties that it appeared they might have been subjected to further unnecessary detrimental effects by being prevented from doing so’ (p. 129). Although Mullender and others do not discuss this, it is possible that for the children in their study who coped by supporting their mother and siblings, this exclusion from decision-making may have been particularly distressing.

Furthermore, Bancroft and Silverman (2002) argue that, in the US, the children who are most able to remain close to their mother and see their father’s abuse as wrong may be the most likely to be forced into a continuing, unwanted relationship with him post-separation. This is because:

Families who remain the most unified and who have the greatest degree of psychological health among mothers and children appear to be among the most vulnerable to being labelled as having ‘parental alienation’, which can result in forced visitation for children with the batterer or even a change to being in his custody. (p. 82)

Once again, this tendency may be attributed to the unilateral model, which does not recognise that children have the capacity for ‘meaning construction’ or ‘intentional action’ (Kuczynski and others, 1999). Professionals influenced by this model may see children as incapable of independently deciding to cease contact with their violent father (Eriksson and

others, 2005). In practice, this model may therefore have serious consequences, with mothers being blamed for children's decisions and children's decisions being ignored or overruled.

Redefining strong, positive mother-child relationships

It is necessary to return now to the question of what a strong, positive mother-child relationship looks like in the context of domestic violence. The mother-child relationships that are usually connected with children's resilience, healthy adaptation or well-being are the ones where mothers have been able to maintain a 'high standard of parenting' (Letourneau and others, 2007). While this is undoubtedly an important factor, it is also possible to see that this view reflects the limited nature of the unilateral model, which only focuses on mothers' parenting while ignoring children's agency and their contributions to the parent-child relationship (Kuczynski and others, 1999).

By contrast, the bilateral model conceptualises positive parent-child relationships as ones where agentic children and parents support each other. It is not yet clear how this model might apply to families experiencing domestic violence. However, there are some indications in existing research that, where children have gone down the route of supporting their abused mother and this support has been valued and reciprocated, children (and mothers) may experience more positive outcomes. Some research literature, although usually still constrained by issues a-d discussed above, is beginning to suggest what these positive outcomes may involve. For example:

In cases where the mothers and children succeed in remaining unified against a batterer [and] *supporting each other* [...] the mother may increase her self-esteem and self-confidence [...] We have spoken to a number of battered women who state that their relationships with their children were an important factor in their being able to ultimately leave the abuser. (Bancroft and Silverman, 2002, p. 77, my emphasis)

Our findings indicate that *closeness among family members* is key in creating a new, supportive family climate [post separation]. In many cases, closeness and teamwork result in relationships between [mothers] and children that, when viewed through a traditional lens, are most consistent with that of 'peers' [...] Our findings suggest the need for cautious assessments of such relationships and *recognition of their benefits in families with a history of Interpersonal Violence*. (Wuest and Merritt-Gray, 2004, p. 272, my emphasis)

[Children] talked openly about [...] formulating plans, and attempting to take responsibility for their mothers and siblings and overall for seeking out solutions. This type of involvement might mitigate in favour of *improved outcomes* for the children when they reach adulthood. (Hague and others, 2012, p. 30, my emphasis)

These quotations suggest that it may be necessary for domestic violence research to widen its vision and understanding of what makes a positive mother-child relationship. Shifting to a bilateral model of parent-child relationships may be seen as an important part of this process.

Conclusion

There are underlying models or ways of thinking that influence a field of research, shaping the way that issues are viewed and questions are asked. Outside the field of domestic violence research, there have been strong critiques of the unilateral model that focuses only on parents' actions. Bilateral models have been developed, conceptualising children as agentic subjects and exploring how both parents and children contribute to parent-child relationships. Inside domestic violence research, these models have generally not been utilised and the field continues to be influenced heavily by the unilateral model.

Incorporating a bilateral model into domestic violence research would represent a significant advancement. It would allow this research to explore parent–child relationships in more sophisticated ways, enabling us to consider the variety of different means by which some children may be actively supporting their mothers, the mix of positive and negative impacts this may have, and the particular ways these mothers and children may experience domestic violence policies and practices. This shift would not prevent us from continuing to explore families where children support their mothers little if at all and, conversely, those where children perform caring roles that are ‘excessive’ (two areas which have already received much attention in the literature to date, although with little focus on agency). Rather, it would create a space where children’s agency in parent–child relationships may be recognised and not automatically seen as negative. This would provide a nuanced awareness of when children’s caring roles cross into excess, and produce a more advanced insight into the positive and negative impacts of supportiveness between abused mothers and children. Above all, shifting to a bilateral model may increase our understandings of how children themselves experience domestic violence and why living with it damages some children more, and some less, than others.

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