Chapter 6

ADOLESCENT AGGRESSION TOWARDS PARENTS: FACTORS ASSOCIATED AND INTERVENTION PROPOSALS

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ABSTRACT

Family violence has been the focus of numerous studies in the last decades. These studies have mainly analyzed protective and risk factors related to different forms in which this violence is manifested. However, whilst adolescent aggression against parents is neither a new problem nor a new challenge for researchers and therapists, its consideration has only occurred very recently. Indeed, there is hardy research examining causes and consequences of adolescent aggression towards parents or the most suitable and effective interventions for both children who behave aggressively in the family context and parents who put up with this situation of humiliation, harassment and defiance of parental authority. This lack of scientific literature is of concern if we take into consideration the important negative consequences that adolescent aggression against parents exerts on the family system as a whole and on social interactions existing within the primary socialization context for children. Along the chapter, we first put forward some data about the prevalence of the problem and examine the main risk factors related to this particular behaviour in adolescence.

The second part of the chapter described an approach based on Family Therapy background intended for working with parents whose children are out of control, or whose parents feel defeated and unable to manage them, *but still want to play the parental role.* In developing the approach, three groups of guidelines are offered, for parents, for the adolescents, and for professionals. Parents are proposed to give up a harsh

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control strategy based on global criticism, over-involvement, and hostility; and favoured a *containing attitude*. It is crucial to relate this attitude to a parental moral obligation, and not to the success in controlling the adolescent's behaviours. Professionals are proposed to side the parents, and playing a spoke-person role for the adolescent. It is also important the *attitude;* professionals are requested to model with the parents the attitude they are asked to have with their children –conveying that the parents still can give honest, firm and positive messages to their children against the odds. Adolescents are requested to be competent in three main areas –at school, at home and with their peers, and receive an attentive and competent care from the professionals.

INTRODUCTION

When talking about adolescent aggression towards parents, one should first think about the complexities of human behaviour within the family context: What are the limits for considering an action as acceptable or not when interacting with close relatives, and especially when this interaction is between parents and children? There is a great difficulty in defining the term "adolescent aggression towards parents" or "parental abuse" based on another difficulty, which is trying to distinguish between normative behaviours involving any kind of family conflict, rebellious attitude and defiant act, from those actions which entail an abusive behaviour against parents. In the second case, the abuse leads to a situation of humiliation, harassment and defiance of parental authority with the intention to domain and hurt parents. As some authors have remarked (Cottrell, 2001; Fernández, 2007) it includes the physical, psychological, emotional and financial dimensions. Thus, physical abuse implies hitting, punching, throwing things, and any other kind of physical violence; psychological abuse refers to intimidating and humiliating parents by means on many occasions of verbal violence; emotional abuse involves lies, blackmails and other malicious mind games such as manipulative threats; and financial abuse refers to stealing money from parents, selling their possessions or incurring debts that parents must cover.

Studies on this area, however, are scant. This lack of research is of great concern due to the extremely negative consequences this type of behavior has on the family context and on physical and psychological health of family members. Along this chapter, we first introduce some data about the prevalence of the problem to continue analyzing the main risk factors highlighted in the scientific literature as closely related to such behaviour in adolescents. In the second part of the chapter, we describe an approach based on Family Therapy background, intended for working with parents whose children are out of control, or whose parents feel defeated and unable to manage them.

PREVALENCE OF AGGRESSION TOWARDS PARENTS

As previously mentioned, adolescent aggression towards parents is an issue that has been traditionally neglected in social research and, in fact, no direct studies on the topic appears to have been undertaken in most European countries. There is only few available data based on surveys mainly conducted in North America. This lack of research, together with the lack of official data collection in police records, makes extremely difficult to establish real figures of

prevalence. Parents often show a profound rejection to reporting violence of their children, which makes it impossible to know the real number of incidents of parental abuse. Mothers and fathers show a great tendency to deny the seriousness of the aggressive attacks in order to perpetuate the myth of family harmony (Harbin & Madden, 1979). Protectiveness and secretiveness about the family situation represents a way of protecting their self-image as parents (Pagani, Larocque, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2003). Parental shame, fear of blame, and community judgment of their capacity to parent are factors that contribute to parents maintaining secrecy (Bobic, 2004; Agnew & Huguley, 1989). A feeling of loneliness and lack of social support, as well as the belief of failure on parenting, are common among these parents; moreover these factors increase stress within the family which worsen the situation.

Furthermore, figures available hitherto must be cautiously interpreted and cannot be generalized since cultural background may exert a remarkable influence on them. Finally, there is another additional problem, namely inconsistency in data collection: researchers have used different methods and scales of measurement which makes comparisons among countries not recommended. Not only comparisons of general prevalence are difficult, but also comparisons of types of violence exerted against parents, since most of research was conducted in the 1980s and early 1990s, when only physical aggression was assessed while psychological, emotional and financial abuse were completely forgotten (Bobic, 2002). Thus, rates of adolescent aggression vary widely depending on definitions and methods of collecting data (Paterson, Luntz, Perlesz, & Cotton, 2002). Likewise, many studies only use self-report measures where adolescents may minimize the rate and severity of their violence (Agnew & Huguley, 1989; Cornell & Gelles, 1982).

Having said that, the estimates of incidence within the available literature indicate that the number of adolescents having battered their parents at least once is 5-18% in the United States (Agnew & Huguley, 1989; Paulson, Coombs & Landsverk, 1990; Peek, Fisher, & Kidwell, 1985). In Canada, studies estimate that around 10% of parents are assaulted by their children (Dekeseredy, 1993). In a recent Canadian research conducted by Pagani et al. (2004), the authors found that 64% of adolescents boys and girls in the study (with a random sample of more than 2000 participants) were verbally aggressive towards their mother; physical aggressions were committed by 13.8% of adolescents, of which 73.5% pushed or shoved their mother, 24.1% punched, kicked or bit them, 12.3% throw objects, 44.4% threatened psysical violence, and 4.3% attacked the mother with a weapon. Statistics from Spain indicate that around 8% of families suffer from this situation, a figure that is on the increase since official data confirms that formal complaints made by parents in the last years have risen the 27% (Ministry of the Interior, 2005). Figures in France are significantly lower and indicate that less than 4% of parents are assaulted by their children (Laurent & Derry, 1999).

PROFILE OF AGGRESSIVE CHILDREN AND VICTIMS

There are three key indicators in middle childhood related to later violent behaviour in adolescence (Garrido, 2005): (1) The child shows incapacity to develop moral emotions such as empathy, compassion or love; they have great difficulty in displaying guilt feelings; (2) The child also shows incapacity to learn from mistakes and punishment, and looks for their own interest through behaviours based on a remarkable egocentrism; and (3) The child often

uses lies, threats and cruel acts against siblings and friends. In adolescence, one third of them also shows violent behaviours at school (Garrido, 2005). Thus, most of studies point out that the profile of the adolescents who behave aggressively against their parents show a cold personality which main features are presented in the following box.

- Get involved in aggressive behaviours along puberty (6-11 years).
- Display a great difficulty in expressing their emotions, principally compassion and love.
- Show a remarkable lack of social skills such as the empathy.
- Do not display guilt feelings for their aggressive acts.
- Their social interactions are based on an egocentric interest.
- Tend to challenge, lie and behave cruelly against others.
- Their parents normally show an educational style excessively permissive.

Studies carried out conclude that there are no significant sex differences in aggression towards parents in adolescence (Cottrell, 2001; Pagani et al., 2004; Paterson et al., 2002; Paulson et al., 1990). However, differences have been found in the type of aggression, being boys more likely to use physical violence and girls more likely to be emotionally abusive towards their parents (World Health Organization, 2000). With regard to the age, a study carried out in Canada suggests that aggressions begin at 12-14 years old (Cottrell, 2001). Statistics in the United States indicate that the peak age for violence among adolescents is at 15-17 (Evans & Warren-Sohlberg, 1998; Wilson, 1996) and that aggression diminishes after 17 (Agnew & Huguley, 1989). Also in Spain perpetrators of parental abuse are mainly between 14 and 17 years old (Garrido, 2005). In France, the mean age has been settling in 14 years old (Laursen and Derry, 1999).

Victims of abusive children are mainly mothers but also grandmothers and other female caregivers. Both boys and girls are more likely to be perpetrators of violence against their mothers than towards fathers. In the study carried out by Laurent and Derry (1999), findings indicated that 45.5% of violence committed by adolescents involved only the mother, 9% concerned only the father, and 45.5% involved both parents. Mothers and female carers usually suffer physical assault from boys (Evans & Warren-Sohlberg, 1998) and other types of violence, such as emotional, psychological and financial aggression also from daughters (Paulson et al., 1990). The fact that mothers are more often abused than fathers could be explained in part because in daily life, mothers engage in more limit-setting and supervision, which makes them more likely targets of adolescent frustration than fathers (Agnew & Huguley, 1989; Ulman & Straus, 2003). Gallagher (2004a) adds a number of reasons:

- Mothers are usually physically weaker than fathers.
- Mothers appear to be less likely to retaliate.
- Women are much more likely to be sole parents and spend more time with children.
- Mothers have far more often been victims of spouse abuse than have fathers.
- Common attitudes allow males (even juveniles) to feel superior to women.
- Mothers often feel guilty because of children's bad behaviour, trapping them in the relationship and making them less likely to be assertive.

These families have moreover some particular characteristics such as: the focus of the family relationships is the violence, that separate some members from others; the family is normally isolated from friends and other relatives; the adolescent is the one labeled as problematic; family members hold biased perceptions with respect to others; and there is an important lack of family communication which makes more difficult to sort out the problems and conflicts.

RISK FACTORS FOR PARENTAL ABUSE

As scientific literature suggests, instead of a sole factor explaining adolescent aggression towards parents, it is much more probable that a wide range of interconnected variables eventually contributes to parental abuse. Studies examining factors that put children and adolescents at risk of developing a violent behaviour against others, have grouped them into individual, family, school and community factors. From the ecological perspective of understanding human behaviour proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), all these factors are interrelated and mutually dependant. Nevertheless, as suggested, there are some individual factors that have been highlighted in the scientific literature as relevant to explain adolescent aggression. We give more detail in the next section.

Individual Factors

Studies have emphasized a number of individual factors related to the adolescent aggressive behavior including irritability, that is to say, the tendency to react in an impulsive and abrupt way to small provocations, closely linked to a low tolerance for frustration (Baron & Byrne, 1998); the lack of empathy or the ability to put oneself on the other person's place and recognize and perceive the emotions from the other (Evans et al., 2002); the poor satisfaction with life in general (MacDonald, Piquero, Valois, & Zullig, 2005); and the desire of dominating others (Carroll, Hatti, Durkin, & Houghton, 1999). Also, research suggests that partaking in antisocial activities (early deviant behaviour) and drug consumption (alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana) in middle school ages foster violent behaviour several years later (Ellickson & McGuigan, 2000). Regarding to antisocial behaviour, there seems to be an escalating process, a continuum of violence from minor to more serious acts and across different developmental stages (Moffit, 1993; Herrenkohl et al., 2001). In the longitudinal study conducted by Weisner, Kim and Capaldi (2005), the authors point out that early involvement in antisocial behaviour decreases individual's opportunities to engage in other kind of positive interactions and activities, entrapping the individual in a risked and dangerous lifestyle in which violent behaviour is often justified.

Also violent behaviour is frequently linked to drug use which has been identified as a relevant factor that enhances the probability of a person to get involved in other risk activities, and in adolescence to take part in violent acts (Barnes & Farrell, 1992; Butters, 2002; Denton & Kampfe, 1994). The association between drug use and violence seems to occur in both directions: as an example, in a recent study, Wei, Loeber and White (2004) found

bidirectional relationships between violent behaviour in adolescents, alcohol and cannabis use. These recent studies suggest that although there is not a clear cause-effect link, both risk behaviours -violence and drug use- walk often hand in hand. It is interesting, nonetheless, to highlight results obtained by Pagani et al. (2004) who found that high levels of drug consumption (alcohol and illegal drugs) were significant predictors of aggression toward mothers, increasing particularly the risk of verbal aggression by almost 60%. The authors explain that frequent substance use by adolescents might facilitate more hostile attributions and verbal disinhibition in conflict situations with mothers.

Family Factors

Also current literature reveals close relationships among violent behaviour in adolescence and certain characteristics of the family context. A family environment characterized by weak parent-child involvement in shared activities and positive interactions is an important risk factor (Pagani et al., 2004). Thus, problems of communication or the inadequate expression of acceptance and understanding, the lack of affective cohesion and parental support, have been identified as relevant influential factors associated with subsequent behavioural problems in children (Barrera & Li, 1996; Baumrind, 1978, 1991; Demaray & Malecki, 2002; Musitu, Estévez & Emler, 2007). Also the transmission of values about aggression is a risk factor: parents who use harsh child-rearing techniques are more at risk of being assaulted in comparison to those who use non-aggressive techniques (Strauss, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980).

But among all family variables examined in relation to adolescent aggression towards parents, *parenting styles* have been stressed as crucial. Parental style can be defined as the constellation of attitudes towards the child that, jointly considered, create an emotional environment where parental behaviours are expressed (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). One of the classical studies in this field is Diana Baumrind's research (1978). She distinguished between three types of parental styles: (a) the authoritarian style, when parents value obedience and restrict the child's autonomy; (b) the indulgent style, when parents do not exert any type of control over the child and let them be autonomous, as long as the child is not in physical danger; and (c) the authoritative style or a middle point: parents try to control child's behaviour through reasoning over imposition. Research has shown that a parental discipline based on excessive permissive or authoritarian control is a risk factor for violence at home (Beyers & Goossens, 1999; Weiss & Schwarz, 1996).

More concretely, some authors as Cottrell (2001) and Garrido (2005) have recently suggested that it is the contemporary permissive parenting style in moderns societies, in which there is an equal relationship between parents and children that sometimes produces an imbalance in individual's power, which is in the base of the problem. Thus, excessive permissiveness as well as excessive overprotection seems to be both detrimental. Both closeness and control should be balanced in parental style. One example of this can be found in Wilson's literature review where it is suggested that in some particular cultures like the Hispanic, characterized by both a demanding and emotional warm parenting style between family members, adolescent aggression towards parents is less frequent than in Anglo-Saxon cultures (Wilson, 1996). Closely related to this, some researchers (see Bobic, 2004; Cottrell, 2001; Downey, 1997; Heide, 1994; Laursen & Derry, 1999; Wilson, 1996) distinguish two main types of family contexts which can precipitate the development of adolescent aggression

towards parents. In both cases there is a common key aspect: parents are not perceived as authority figures by children:

(1) Families with inadequate parental guidance and supervision in which parents do not set any limits because they have lax educational principles, they feel guilty in a case of divorce, or are incapable to do it for financial, social or health reasons. In this absence of rules within an insecure environment in which parents are unable to assume their role as adults, children are forced to burden with this role and assume self-autonomy before being ready and can show rejection towards their parents and punish them for having neglected their parental role.

(2) Families with overprotective parents in which autonomy of adolescents is completely denied. These children are dependent on their parents who immediately fulfill their desires avoiding any behaviour that could cause frustration to children. Under these conditions, there is a great risk that children's demands increase and tyrannical behaviours appear. Aggression committed by these adolescents can be also understood as a search for autonomy.

Other dysfunctional parental strategies in families with adolescent are, as suggested by Pagani et al. (2004), obsolete strategies that were previously used when children were younger and negative strategies that directly evoke aggression. In the first case, as the need for autonomy and independence grows, many adolescents become more sensitive to certain messages from their parents that interpret as accusatory and punitive; as a consequence, children display negative feelings related to their frustration. Pagani et al. (2004) point out that "parental responses to overwhelming child behaviour could reinforce a coercive sequence of inconsistent and inappropriate aggressive rearing responses" (pp. 529). Along this line, Patterson (1982) remarks four steps in the cycle of coercion that predicts later aggressive and disruptive behaviours in children: (1) the adolescent perceives parental demands as an intrusion or an attack on the current activities; (2) the adolescent counterattacks with aggressive behaviour; (3) parent is yielded into submission, initiating a negative reinforcement cycle; and (4) adolescent and parent maintain this cycle. With regard to strategies that directly evoke aggression, high-intensity discipline strategies during middle childhood such as yelling, threatening and hitting, seem to be predictive of aggression over the short term (Dodge, Coie, Pettit, & Price, 1990) and the long term (Farrington, 1991).

The relationship between divorce and parental abuse has been also examined in a few studies (Cherlin et al., 1991; Pagani et al., 2003; Wallerstein, 1991). These longitudinal studies have concluded that it is not the divorce itself, but the dysfunctional family environment which influences maladjustment in children. As noted by Pagani et al. (2003, p.216) "divorce involves inter-parental discord and emotional distress distinctly affecting all immediate family members. Parenting becomes more difficult in an emotionally overtaxing situation, in turn straining parent-child interactions". To put it in other words, it is the concomitants of divorce that may be detrimental to the family relationships increasing the risk of parental abuse by their children. This link seems to be mediated by two other factors, namely family environment and social support seeking behaviours on the part of parents (specially the abused mother). On the one hand, a more positive family environment is associated to a lower risk of verbal and physical aggression. On the other hand, parents that

seek support in their social network *offend* adolescents who feel exposed to social judgments and perceive humiliation in response to this coping strategy, replying with violence.

Another family risk factor is domestic violence or aggression between parents or from one parent to the other, that is to say, the fact of being witness of other types of family violence. In fact, the link between growing up in the context of family violence and the continuation of violent behaviour in descendants is in current social debate. Some studies point out that witnessing family and marital violence increases youth to parent violence (Carlson, 1990), as well as that children who witness aggression as a way of solving problems are likely to repeat this behaviour themselves (O'Keefe, 1996). However, the scant research on the link between domestic violence and aggression towards parents do not let us conclude the existence of a *direct* association between them. What studies suggest is that living with violence as a child is one risk factor of later perpetrating, but that the former do not inevitably leads to the latter. Moreover, some researchers suggest that the effect of witnessing violence at home has a stronger effect on male children. In this sense, Langhinrichsen-Roling & Neidig (1995) found that girls who had been witness of parental violence were less likely to develop an aggressive behaviour against their parents.

What it is clear, nonetheless, is that domestic violence defies children and adolescents to develop particular behavioural, emotional and cognitive characteristics with long-term adjustment problems (Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2001), as well as particular attitudes to violence which is viewed as an accepted norm in social interactions and as an accepted solution for interpersonal conflicts (Barkin, Kreiter & DuRant, 2001; Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2001). In fact, the National Crime Prevention's research (2001) about young people and domestic violence found that the strongest predictors of family violence were: beliefs about the acceptability of violence as a way to resolve conflicts, and beliefs about males being entitled to control their partners and household.

Finally, reciprocal coercion also contributes to parental abuse, given that many children who develop this behavioral pattern have been victims of corporal punishment (Ulman & Straus, 2003). Some studies have concluded that physical maltreatment, neglect and abuse in childhood lead young people to aggressive behaviour toward parents (Bobic, 2004; Browne & Hamilton, 1998; Ulman & Strauss, 2003). Patterson (1995) points out in this sense that physical punishment and abuse are normally used in coercive relationships which usually begin in early childhood and eventually culminates in aggression -both verbal and physical- towards parents when the child reaches adolescence. One reason for this is that adolescents who experience corporal punishment tend to feel infantilized by the use of authoritarian parental strategies typically used with younger children (Straus & Donnelly, 1993; Straus & Stewart, 1999).

For this reason many children who behave aggressively towards their parents have been consider at the same time as victimizers and victims. In this respect, Gallager (2004b) points out the negative consequences follow from label these adolescents *purely as victims*: they may not be encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and they may feel justified in their actions, while parents are further disempowered and their guilt reinforced. As Gallaguer highlights (p.96) "Explanations, even good ones, are not excuses. The fact that a child has been abused and had a terrible life does *not* give him or her the right to abuse others any more than the fact of past abuse gives an *adult* the right to abuse others". This must be taken into account for interventions.

Other Social Factors

Other influential factors have been pointed out in the immediate social contexts of the adolescent, namely school and community. Recent studies suggest that disruptive and antisocial behaviour in the classroom is an important predictor of later aggression towards mothers by adolescents sons and daughters (Pagani et al., 2003). Thus, "The degree of risk increased in proportion to the severity and chronicity of violent behavior shown in primary school classroom", those with "behavioural patterns of aggression towards classmates showed proportionately increased risk of verbal and physical aggression toward mother" (Pagani et al., 2004, p.534). Also commitment and attitude to school, as well as the lack of educational goals, have been identified as risk factors for both truancy and involvement in risk behaviours (Hirschi, 1969). In many schools, misbehaviours eventually end up in temporary suspension or even expulsion as disciplinary measures. The few recent studies conducted on this topic show how suspension and expulsion from school, instead of modifying the behaviour they were designed for, are strong predictors of engagement in deviant activities including antisocial and violent behaviour as well as drug use (McAra, 2004; McAra & McVie, 2007; Smith, 2006). The same results have been found with respect to truancy, since characteristics of adolescents who are habitual truants are similar to those who are expelled from school (McCord, Widom & Crowell, 2001).

As regards the broader community, research suggest that neighborhoods influence children's behaviour by providing examples of the values that people hold, and these examples also contribute in shaping their perceptions of what an *acceptable social behaviour* means (McCord et al., 2001). Thus, communities in which violence and antisocial acts are common may exert a crucial impact on how children understand and internalize social norms of behaviour related to interactions with others (Proctor, 2006; Scarpa & Haden, 2006; Webster, MacDonald, & Simpson, 2006). A similar influence exerts mass media, the Internet and videogames on children and adolescents behaviour. There is a general agreement about how some violent behaviours in real life (in most of which children and adolescents are involved) are inspired in films, TV series and cartoons. Huessman (1998) found in this sense a significant relationship between time spent watching television during early ages and the subsequent implication in violent behaviours during adolescence and adulthood.

Nowadays, in addition to the fundamental importance of television in adolescents' life, Internet already constitutes the basic social and interpersonal communication channel, and videogames the entertainment space. Violent videogames foster on many occasions the «role-playing» of violence. In contrast with the mere visualization of violence on TV, a further step is taken in videogames: the player assumes the role of virtual aggressor. A recent study revealed that it was much more likely for a child to report a preference for violent videogames than for violent television or violence on the Internet (Funk, Baldacci, Pasold, & Baumgardner, 2004). Violent videogames could be more harmful in this sense since they are interactive, very engrossing and require the player to feel identified with the aggressor. Finally, we would like to highlight that videogames give a *representation* of the violence, but not an actual experience; that is to say, those playing the videogames are not exposed to the victims' physical pain, or to their own physical pain as a consequence of victims' self defense. Having an actual experience (as opposed to a representation), plays some role in stopping the violence since those involved in the fighting are aware of the pain inflicted.

Although research on the direct influences between watching violent television or playing violent videogames is really scant, there are some studies showing the association between these social agents of socialization and particular emotional adjustment problems, such as reduction of pro-social motivations and promotion of exploitation of others, due probably to the development of a hostile causal attribution bias (Kirsh, 1998; Sheese & Graziano, 2005).

The scientific literature, thus, has stressed the important negative influence of some characteristic of the individual and the immediate social contexts (community, mass media, etc.) in the configuration of particular attitudes related to violence and the development of aggressive behaviours towards others, in this case, parents. Family risk factors, as the parental styles and the emotional environment that they create, have been highlighted in this sense as the most important ones. In the next section we introduce intervention strategies to be applied with these adolescents and their parents from the Family Therapy perspective which basically address these parental styles and family values and commitments.

WORKING WITH PARENTS WITH ABUSIVE ADOLESCENTS: A FAMILY THERAPY APPROACH

The classic Family Therapy approach, for example Haley (1980, 1991), Fishman (1988), or more recently Micucci (1998), emphasizes working with the adolescent helping the parents achieving an agreement on: (a) what behaviours are more problematic for the parents –target behaviours; (b) what rules the adolescent must observe; (c) what is going to happen if the adolescent does not comply with the rules; (d) parental support in implementing the rules; and (e) treating the marital problems, if needed. The approach assumes that the adolescent will take advantage of the parental disagreements, but not that the adolescent's behaviours are caused by those disagreements. It is also assumed that the agreement between the parents will make it difficult for the adolescents to continue with their disruptive behaviour, the intention is not *controlling,* but helping the children to control themselves. The general assumption is that the adolescents need to assume and respect rules in order for them to be socially viable, and complete the leaving-home process.

Summarizing, the approach emphasizes working with the parents helping them to agree and being consistent in applying the agreements achieved. In getting these goals, the adolescents may refuse to be present. Obviously, they are not excluded; it is much better for them to be present and defend their point of views about the problems, and about the agreements between the parents. There is not a separated treatment for the adolescents, although occasionally they can be seen at their own. But the treatment includes both, the adolescent and the parents in a conjoint session.

The approach proposed assumes that: (a) the parents cannot control their children's behaviour, they feel defeated; (b) they want to continue their roles as parents; (c) they feel accountable and want to do something in regard with the disruptive behaviours. They may see that their responses could not control their children's behaviours, but, nevertheless, feel responsible for doing something. The approach cannot be applied if the parents reject to play the parental role with the adolescent.

Intervention Goals

In box below, we outline the goals; they have been grouped in three sections, goals for the parents, for the adolescents, and for professionals.

Parents:
- Helping the children to gain self-control in order to be independent –Not parent controlling the children.
- Criteria of competence: at home, at school (or at work) and with the peers.
- The adolescent's demands are progressively taken into account as they are competent in the three criteria.

Adolescents:
- Help them to be competent in the three criteria.

Professionals:
- Side with the parents (but in cases of actual abuse).
- Being the spoke-person for the adolescents' positive aspects and the hopes for bringing about changes.

Parents' goals: The main goal for the parents is to foster the autonomy of their children. In order to get such goal, they compromise to teach and model the norms they consider appropriated; it is supposed that the adolescent has first to respect and then to incorporate those norms. That means to accept to be parents of a rebellious adolescent. The moral duty of the parents is to teach the norms. The adolescents have the freedom of observing them or not; but if they do not comply them, the parental duty includes to correct (sanction) the misbehaviour according with its seriousness. In normal circumstances, the parental goal is to control the behaviour, but with very rebellious adolescents this control is rarely achieved. Giving up the teaching and the modelling role conveys toxic messages about the norms (they are not important, nothing happens if they are not observed), about the parents (they quit their role as parents), and about the adolescents (they are not good enough for the parents to work hard). Furthermore, they are teaching to the adolescents that it is licit to behave such disruptive way. This is why it is important for the parents to keep on responding to the adolescent's misbehaviours with their current ethical norms. The idea is to disconnect the effects of setting norms from controlling the adolescent's behaviours; if the adolescents control themselves is ok, if not there are no reasons for them to give up their moral duty of setting norms and teaching them what is correct in life. The core of the proposed approach relies on this moral position as a way of helping the parents to persist in their role as competent parents in the face of very serious and disruptive adolescent's behaviours. *The parents' behaviours are associated to a moral duty, not to a change in their children' behaviours* as a way of avoiding that the lack of change in their offspring dissuades them; therefore it is intended to make more secure their persistence on the behaviours and norms they want to transmit. Parents are given a *containing role;* as it will be proposed below, assuming that spilling out the glass (container) is a problem, but the problem will be much more serious if the glass (container) gets broken.

Both parents and adolescents must have some criteria about in what areas the adolescent must be competent. First, the young must address their bizarre behaviours, but, in general,

they must show competence in three main areas: (a) at home (helping in the domestic chores as cleaning and organizing their rooms, complying with the norms of living together); (b) at the school or working (observing time tables, passing courses, getting marks according with his competencies, etc); and (c) with their peers (having good and reliable friends, knowing how to get out of dangerous situations as drugs and sex, etc). The rule is as the young gains competence, they will be taken more in account by their parents (Haley, 1980).

Furthermore, it is also important that the parents, but also the adolescent, have a clear idea, and agreeing on what are the problematic and the desired behaviours. Having those goals set will limit an endless request for changing all kind of behaviours and the understandable adolescent's exasperation. We will come back to this topic below. Once the goals have been achieved, the adolescent can try to negotiate. The parents do *not* negotiate with the young, but progressively they must take in account their demands as they gain competency. After some time, once the competencies have been gained, the whole situation turns to be more normal, and the parents *allow* the young to negotiate with them as almost equal partners. It is the role of the professional to be the spoke-person of how competent the adolescent is if the parents ignore it.

Goals for the adolescents: The adolescents are the ones who have both the initiative in controlling their disruptive behaviour and in showing competence in the three areas mentioned –at home, at school or work, and with peers. They are responsible for their behaviour, and it is assumed that neither his parents, nor the professionals will be able to change them if they refuse to do it; we think that this attitude is both honest and realistic. This is the way in which the professionals try to get out of the vicious circle of control-challenge, out of being the needed allies of helpless parents who oscillates between inviting the professionals to take over and summoning up one's strength to overpower the adolescent. Although these oscillations are understandable, getting trapped in this dynamic triggers more challenge. Getting out allows the professional to introduce him/her as a valid partner for the adolescent, someone who does not ignore that the adolescent keeps the control to change or not, someone who is not interesting in disputing that control, but in showing the consequences for the adolescent of using the control in a wrong way.

From the very beginning, the situation can be summarized as follows: (a) Parents will ask the young to stop certain problematic behaviours, and observing certain norms. If the adolescent refuse to do it, they will apply some negative consequences according with the severity of the transgression. They are invited to relate the punishment to the parental role (a duty), and not serving to a control strategy. (b) The adolescents have the control to bring about a change. From that moment onwards everything will depend on them. They can bring about a change and accept the norms. Mirroring this process, the parents will take more into account the adolescents' needs, stopping overwhelming them; probably their relationship with the adolescent will improve as well as the whole living together. The adolescent may not change at all facing the parental punishments to the point of being very uncomfortable living together, and the possibility of leaving home.

Goals for the professional: Professionals are not neutral. They side with the parents, except when they are clearly abusive or neglecting, in these cases they must guarantee the safety of the minor (Haley, 1980). This siding must co-exist with being the spoken-person for the changes operated by the adolescents (if any), with their positive aspects, and with the

hopes for the changes to come, especially if the parents have been able to transmit positive values in the pass, although the adolescent do not show any of those values in the present.

Although it is easy to explain what the professional attitude must be, the practice is another thing. The professional skill has nothing to do with the long praised therapeutic value of neutrality (s/he is clearly sided with the parents), nor with being in agreement with two who disagree –parents and adolescent. The professional takes side with the parents in their need of helping the adolescents to control them, in discussing with them about how to achieve that goal with efficacy and without being abusive, defeated or giving up. At the same time s/he is the person with whom the adolescents can speak, the one who defends their competencies and progresses, encouraging them the need to bring about changes that resolve their personal and living at home problems.

Defining the Problems

Usually, the parents define two types of problems equally serious. The first type has to do with the disruptive behaviours: adolescents are abusing and trading drugs, truants, steal family devices for getting money, physically and verbally abusive (especially with the mother), do not help in any sense at home, do not respect the home timetable, they have rough friends, they are absent from home for periods without any warning, perhaps involved in (minor) delinquency, parents may have called to the police and then dropped charges, they also may have fights with the neighbours or get involved in public fighting... Girls may have been pressing (phoney) charges of abuse against their parents (especially fathers), causing the intervention of social services who may have threaten or actually remove the minor from the home for some time; parents can feel deeply humiliated, ashamed, and threatened by the legal consequences of the whole event, and entering in a kind of "probation trial" period of time.

The second type of problem has to do with the lack of control. Usually, parents introduce themselves as having doing whatever was needed to *control* the problems with no success. They ended in a pattern of interaction well documented, including hostility –verbal, but also physical; global criticism –criticism towards the individual, not to behaviours; and over-involvement, ranging from repeating something many times (what increases dramatically the emotional climate within the family) to doing something that adolescents can do themselves (e.g., setting a clock-alarm for waking). The whole pattern is responded by the adolescents by increasing their challenges, or ignoring the parents and doing whatever they want to do. This pattern of control-challenge can escalate to physical abuse. Parents may feel helpless, desperate, humiliated, furious, very worry and guilty. They may thought turning them out of the home; or quitting and refer them to the social services. At this point, they may have forgotten the adolescent's positive aspects; only perhaps in the past, ad maximum. Some parents are totally incapable of saying something positive of their children.

Adding more complexity to a situation already complicated, some other social agents are also involved including the police, the court, social services and the educational system. Usually the relationship between these social agents and the parents is a difficult one. Parents are accused (phoney or not) of being abusive, turning them into the villains of a story in which they feel playing the victims role; sooner than later they end up developing a mixture of hostility and fear towards those who have the power of evaluating them as "right" parents. When, for any reasons, the relationship is good enough, the parents still feel that they are

judged and are in a kind of "probation trial", and, above all, they rarely feel helped in their problems with the adolescent. Mental health services are not helpful neither, their role may be limited to prescribe medication, and quite soon parents discover that the prescriptions are not the solution for a number of reasons –truancy or delinquency are not diseases, frequently the adolescent refuse to take the medication, or to visit the physician. Also, parents discover that the services for difficult adolescent are scarce and overcrowded, if does exist…

The extended family usually helps on a time-limited base, if does, as far as the adolescent is under some control; they usually play a respite role. Their advices usually involve certain degree of criticism towards the parents including being very permissive, obsessive with certain behaviours, inconsistent with the punishments, and so on, criticisms that undermine both the authority and the self-confidence of the parents. They may respond to this attitude distancing from their family, losing a needed and potentially valuable support. Once the adolescent has left home, the extended family plays an emotional support role, usually validating the attitude of the parents.

Finally, both the adolescent and their parents are involved in a sequence which includes on the part of the adolescent aggressive behaviours in and out home, drugs abuse and sometimes dealing also, passivity (doing nothing but wandering around with though friends), (minor) delinquency and not observing any rules at home. In the other part, parents are resented, despaired, preoccupied and exhibiting the triad of high expressed emotion: over-involvement, global criticisms and hostility, we will come back to this high expressed emotion pattern below. The pattern of interaction can be understood as a cycle of control-challenge more control-more challenges… in which social agents must help, but unfortunately they are usually blaming or not helpful, or both.

Agreeing between Parents

As it was mentioned before, is not assumed that a conflict between the marital couple is related to the adolescent's behaviours. If this would be the case, the standard procedure dictates to start with the adolescent's problems, and then, and if they ask for it, proceed with the marital problems. Working in reaching an agreement about what to do with the adolescent may be a good training in solving the marital problems (Haley, 1991).

The basic assumption is that the parents must agree in a number of behaviours that they would like to teach to the adolescent. Teaching the adolescent certain behaviours is assumed as a moral duty; parents must teach and the children must learn how to control themselves. Parents agree in a number of questions: what they consider as a disruptive behaviour; what rules must be observed by the adolescent; when they want the rules to start; the consequences of not observing the rules; and how they are going to support each other in enforcing the rules. Parents must first agree in which the problems are, and then explain how they understand the problems. With adolescents having serious and long-standing problems, the parents usually have no doubts in defining the problems or have minor disagreements. Often, problems come from other directions.

In this clinical population of very disturbed adolescents, because parents have been feeling a long-standing frustration and resentment they may extent the definition of what constitutes a problematic behaviour to other adolescents' behaviours that clearly are minor problems or not problematic at all. They over-react to those behaviours creating a high

demanding, tense atmosphere within the family; an atmosphere of perfectionism, as it was mentioned in the first part of the chapter. This demand of perfectionism further triggers violence in the adolescents, which partially can be understood as a way of creating their space free of criticism. Having enduring many cycles of serious arguments, parents not only include in their definition of what is problematic the behaviours but also the "clues" pre-announcing those behaviours, initiating a process of generalized criticism. For the adolescents this means that even before they do something wrong, they received a harsh response; sometimes an accusation with no base. It is not easy to get out of this entrenched vicious cycle; parents need a combination of good reasons for changing and a way of doing it. According with our experience, it is not enough to show them that they have been applying "wrong" solutions (Fisch et al., 1982), or to help them in searching "exceptions" (right solutions) (Shazer, 1991; White 2007), or training them in skills (communication, problem-solving, negotiation and so on), and base the discussion with them in a "technical arena". We suggest that for them to bring about a change and persevering in the face of very serious disruptive behaviours, they need better reasons. The proposal of this paper is twofold, first link their behaviour to a moral duty as parents who have accept to parenting a rough adolescent, and second quitting control strategies and try *to contain,* which is the "technical" consequence of the first moral commitment.

Family Therapy literature has emphasized that marital problems can seriously hinder their ability to reach agreements; although perhaps such problems may affect even more to how consistent and mutually supportive they are in implementing the agreements. We usually appeal to their role as parents, asking for the marital problems to be put aside until the problems of the adolescent come to an end; then help for the marital problems is offered, if needed. Perhaps, the major leverage for bringing about a change in their attitude is to remind them their (moral) duty of teaching and passing through what they consider important for the adolescent to know. We also help the parents to realize that doing nothing, or being abusive, means condoning the disruptive behaviours of the adolescent. Eventually, the parents are helped in writing down a list of behaviours ordered from the less to the most disruptive, and then to reach agreements about what negative consequences such behaviours would have. They are told not start to apply the agreements until they feel strong enough. This has also proved to be difficult, one of them may play the "weaker, or more affective" part, making it impossible to present a conjoint front. The other partner has to be patient until the first can summoning up enough strength, and helping the process. Sometimes, they may agree in allowing the "stronger" to take over the responsibility of acting on behalf of the two; if this is the case, a clear statement of agreement must be ensured, along with some further agreements about how to proceed. Neither of the alternatives is optimal, the best solution is for the two of them having a conjoint and agreed line of behaviour.

WHAT DOES EDUCATION MEAN?

Educating means to orientate to values and goals that parent consider important for the children to thrive in life. In doing so, parents are passing through what they think are their best and more value heritage. Educating means to be secure enough that those values have been *incorporated,* not necessarily *accepted or implemented,* by the children, and then trust in

their (future) effect: once incorporated values will help the adolescents to be better persons. It does not mean that the children have to automatically obey what the parents say; this probably implies to have a certain degree of tolerance to failures. Education transmit values, values work as yardsticks that define what is good or evil, and orientate, not exactly *determine,* our actions; once incorporated we can orientate ourselves in the (social) world, they have a survival character.

Educating basically means looking at the future. In the face of severe problems, it means maintaining the commitment in behaving and teaching the very same values (again, trust their values and their effects), against the odds of the present difficult adolescent's behaviours. Having this confidence helps the parents to maintain the relationship with the adolescent.

CONTAINING VERSUS CONTROLLING

Containing is the parent's commitment in persevering in a competent attitude and behaviour in the face of no change. Parents are given a metaphor –the glass metaphor, to summarize and anchoring what *containing* means: *if you poured, and poured water in a glass, spilling out might be a problem, but the problem will be much worst if the glass gets broken.* They are the glass; the adolescent's disruptive behaviours are the spilled water. *Containing* means to change the focus from the water to the glass; from worry about the mess created by the water to try to keep the glass safe and in good conditions. A number of positive, what to do, and negative, what to avoid, rules can be deduced from the metaphor, e.g. *the water can hit the walls of the glass, but the glass keeps straight, without attacking the water.* It can be put into discussion what does mean "breaking the glass". How they have to behave in order to "breaking the glass". Finally, the parents' behaviours can be related to the glass, working as a yardstick to gauge how correct their responses might be.

The containing attitude can be described with the following features:

- *No tolerance:* A clear awareness and message, that the disruptive adolescent's behaviour will be no tolerated.
- *Doing something:* A clear message that they are ready to do something and actually *doing* something, as a response to the bizarre adolescent's behaviours no matter if what they do does not stop (*control*) the problems.
- *Consistency:* A clear message that *both* parents will persist in responding as long as needed.
- *Betting for the young and for the relationship:* A clear message that they do not accept the problematic behaviour, but accept the adolescents, and want to maintain the relationship with them. They want to parent them, no matter what problems they may exhibit. In doing this, they are also saying that even though there are a number of problems, they trust they can be fixed because the adolescent has positive aspects, personal resources and values that might re-surface at any time.
- *Availability:* Parents are available any time for helping the adolescent to fix the problems. Parents have no intention of quitting their role of pointing out what is wrong, and are decided to transmit their most valued believes.

Summarizing, *containing* means to develop the skills to play a twofold role, confronting (responding), to each of the bizarre adolescent's behaviours, and at the same time being available and transmitting that those behaviours can always change because the adolescent has positive aspects.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE PRESCRIPTIONS

They summarize what to do and what the parents are supposed *not* to do. For the very same reason, that is, helping them to remind and anchoring the information, another two metaphors are given, the *Monkey Strategy* and the *Four Horsemen of Apocalypses*.

The three metaphors are different in nature. The glass metaphor is intended to provide a general yardstick with what the parents can ascertain how correct their behaviours are. The metaphor transmits the idea of being firm and not abusive as a response to the adolescent behaviours and can be applied to a very broad range of parental behaviours and attitudes. The two latter metaphors prescribe what to do or not to do in more specific terms and summarize what the research, and the clinical wisdom, has concluded about the so called *chronic bad interpersonal relationships*.

The *Monkey Strategy,* do not see, do not hear, do not speak, and eventually get out of the scene, addresses the *escalation of symptoms* between the adolescents and their parents, and advices having no contact and eventually using a time-out strategy as a response, if needed and if possible. Used in Domestic Violence for creating safety, the strategy may play also here the same role of avoiding the physical and the emotional violence. The assumption is that the abusive behaviours follow a predictable pattern of escalation that can be depicted with a certain degree of clarity; once the pattern has been established, the Monkey Strategy must be applied to the very early stages of the pattern of escalation; the earlier the better. The strategy is applied to the escalation of bad manners, challenges, shouting, violence… Should the adolescents ask for something in a respectful way, even if the parents dislike it, the strategy must not be applied. The strategy addresses bad manners and escalations, transmitting two clear messages: bad manners are intolerable and they will not get any advantage using coercion. In addition, as a passive strategy it is not punitive, fitting well with the glass –containing, strategy and its basic tenant: *we cannot avoiding you being disruptive, but nevertheless, we will teach you what we consider important.*

Although not actively punitive, the strategy implies a certain degree of negative consequences (punishment). This is also important; the adolescent's behaviours must have a negative consequence, assuming the responsibility of teaching that bad manners are unacceptable means to apply negative consequences. Sometimes, the parents do not know, or fear that a more active punishment will trigger physical violence; if this is the case, *safety* (avoiding the violence), must be the rule, and the Monkey Strategy the only consequence. If the safety is not a problem a more pro-active role is advised in the line of the *action,* avoiding unproductive endless conversations or preaches which usually generated more intensity and further trigger more disrespectful attitudes. Again, it must be reminded that the goal is not control, but transmitting that the parents may be incapable of controlling but they do not desert in showing what is wrong.

Summarizing, abusing behaviours and attitudes must have consequences, otherwise parents are teaching that such attitudes are acceptable. The negative consequences may range from an ongoing seriousness, if any other option seems unworkable or dangerous, to a more

pro-active behaviours as withdrawing privileges, not cooking or doing the laundry, or locking the front door if he is late. The Monkey Strategy is a way of avoiding dangerous escalations of bizarre or violent behaviour; it can also be used when more active attitudes seem dangerous.

In the first part of the chapter, the section on *Family factors* analyzed a number of "family emotional environments" as risk factors fostering the violence of the adolescents. The Four Horsemen of Apocalypses is the clinical operational version of these studies. The metaphor summarizes what the parents should avoid: over-involvement, doing what the adolescents are able to do for themselves; hostility, behaving in such a way that they can interpret in terms of not being loved, or being rejected; criticism, showing that they only have negative traits; and raising intensity, shouting, repeating and preaching endlessly. Basically, advices are given for not responding with the same abusive attitude than the adolescent because if they do, parents are conveying that abuse is right and admissible. There is a second reason; the Four Horsemen are very detrimental in mental health terms.

The name of the metaphor has been borrow from Gottman (1999), and it is a re-interpretation of the research on "expressed emotions", a pattern of interaction exhibited by the families with schizophrenic members (e.g. Leff and Vaughn, 1985; Anderson et al., 1986); here we have extended it to the chronic conditions (Gutierrez, 1995). The pattern has been found to be the best predictor of relapse for schizophrenic patients, proving how toxic it is in mental health terms. Two notes of caution must be taken in account. First, as any pattern of interaction the Four Horsemen must be repetitive, it should be the current family pattern of interaction (communication environment); otherwise its effect is less severe. Second, all the ingredients must be present at the same time; it is the synergy among the four variables what causes its toxicity.

Being exposed to the Four Horsemen of Apocalypses transmits a very confusing message. In a typical example, the adolescent gets up late and is loosing classes in the school, mom sets the alarm up (over-involvement, this is something that they can do it for themselves), but also it involves being helped; conveys *interest*. But, at the time of waking him/her up, she may shout (raising emotional intensity), and desperate as she is, she may calling her/him names (criticism, transmitting a harsh personal view, *there is nothing valuable in you*). The two things together, intensity and criticism, means hostility (transmitting *I hate you;* in instead of *I hate what you are doing*). The whole pattern of interaction includes opposing messages at the same time, showing interest (doing something for the adolescent), but also criticisms and hostility. The adolescent reaction to this incongruent message is one of cognitive (confusion because the incongruence), and emotional (rage because the undermining nature of the messages), as it was stated by the Family Therapy long time ago (Jackson, 1968).

Summarizing, the pattern transmits a message of *personal incompetence and lack of value*. Competent parents should not expose their children to this messages, they cannot grow up healthy with this diet; eventually, they will develop low self-esteem and a rage difficult to control. Once the pattern has been established as an ongoing family interaction, it becomes a kind of emotional abuse; parents are teaching that emotional abuse is admissible when one feels abused, hurt or not obeyed. The Four Horsemen of Apocalypses are a good example of what *breaking the glass* metaphor does mean, and this is why it must be stopped at all cost.

The Glass metaphor asks the parents to contain the adolescents as an alternative to engage with them in an escalation for overpowering each other. The containing attitude leads

the parents back to their role as parents, mature adults knowing how to respond and not react at the same level than the adolescent. Once the parents and the disruptive young engage in a self-feeding vicious circle of disruptive behaviour-control-more disruptive behaviour-more control…, it is very easy for the parents to become abusive following the pattern described as the Four Horsemen of Apocalypses. The pattern is very detrimental for both, for the parents because it turns them out to be ineffective for controlling the adolescent and become helpless. Also for the children, because it is undermining their sense of self-esteem and intellectual competency. Finally, the parents are asked to *do* something, to respond to the adolescent's bizarre behaviour. What they can do range from the Monkey Strategy to a more pro-active attitude involving different types of punishments. Safety must be taken in account in the face of violence, but it does not preclude the parents to respond at some level. *Do not respond is a response transmitting that what the young did was correct.* Do nothing in the face of rough behaviour, and being abusive are ways of breaking the glass; that is, they both are ways of deserting from being parents.

FAILURES IN APPLYING THE AGREEMENTS AND THE METAPHORS

Failures are expectable and important parts of the whole treatment. The most repeated reason by the parents to fail is "loosing one's temper" as a consequence of the ongoing adolescent's challenges. This is normal. We try to reduce the impact of this in a number of ways, firstly, asking them to start to apply the agreements and the metaphors only when they feel ready. Secondly, we anticipate problems in the application. The adolescents may be more rebellious if they notice that the parents are doing something new, and parents may become mad at them, and lose the temper. This a very important moment because resuming the track will prove them how serious and determinant they are in keeping the role as competent parents.

Thirdly, failing is not a serious problem if they realize how important is to maintain the agreements and the metaphors. If they do, sooner or later they will resume their role as competent parents. Actually, what happens is that they move from a permanent control strategy to other more intermittent, what it is important is getting out from a family environment which includes the Four Horses of Apocalypses, an escalation between the parents and the adolescent, an endless and exhausting fighting for controlling, or doing nothing and quitting their responsibilities as parents. If the whole pattern becomes intermittent, then a change was brought in.

Maintaining the containing attitude is very appealing. If they are capable to do it, they feel competent parents; although containing (and not controlling) is the goal, sometimes, parents are rewarded by the change of the adolescents because it is difficult for them to maintain their behaviours when the parents do not argue but do something whenever they misbehave. If there is not change, at least they have the (moral) satisfaction that they behaved as they were supposed to do which is the main goal of the approach. When things are really tough, and the adolescent gets killed for example, having been competent and not abusive parents might be the difference between surviving or being traumatized or living a doomed existence.

CONCLUSIONS

Adolescent aggression towards parents has been a topic traditionally neglected in social research, a reason why it is extremely difficult to estimate its incidence. Only few studies have been carried out in North America and Europe showing figures between 4-18% of parents abused by their children. These adolescents have some characteristics in common that can be summarised in the following: they usually get involved in early disruptive and violent behaviour during puberty, show incapacity to develop moral emotions such as empathy, and do not display guilty feelings for their behaviour and its consequences. There seem to be no sex differences in aggression towards parents, however, when the type of violence is taken into account, studies indicate that perpetrators boys are more likely to use physical violence against parents, while girls use more frequently emotional violence. Victims are mainly mothers and female caregivers.

Regarding factors that put children and adolescents at risk of developing a violent behaviour against parents, studies available hitherto in the scientific literature have grouped them into some categories as individual, family, school and community. Individual factors include irritability, low tolerance for frustration, the desire of dominating other, and drug use among others. Family factors have been the most widely examined; these factors are associated to a dysfunctional family environment with features as the following: deep problems of parent-child communication, the lack of family support and expressions of affection, parenting styles extremely authoritarian or excessive permissive, that is to say, inadequate parental guidance and supervision, as well as overprotection, domestic violence or being witness of other types of family violence, and having been maltreated and abused in childhood.

Research has also pointed out other risk factors in the social domain, as for example commitment and attitude to school, living in a problematic community or neighbourhood. It might be interesting to note the role of the mass media, as Internet, videogames, tv , in spreading the culture of violence and contributing in the development of positive or, at least, too lax and tolerant attitudes towards violence as an accepted mean of social interaction. It is possible that these media start to play an important role in the process of socialization of the adolescent, competing with the traditional ones, family and the school.

Finally, regarding the therapeutic strategies mentioned to work with these adolescents and their parents, the proposed approach assumes that the parents accept to be accountable for their children no matter how disruptive and abusive they might be. Parenting these adolescents is a very difficult task. In clinical populations, being unable to control may lead the parents to two extreme positions: to give up or to develop a harsh, detrimental, and finally abusive pattern of interaction. Usually, the last pattern is the end point of parents' desperate battle for gaining control; once it is established that they are incapable of gaining control they feel discourage and may quit and do nothing. Unfortunately, they transmit that abusing is acceptable in both cases.

In order to help the parents to persevering in the face of the very bizarre adolescent's behaviours, it is proposed first to substitute *controlling* for *containing,* in order for the parents

to avoid being discouraged when they do not get the control. Second, *doing something,* and transmitting that the abuse is unacceptable although what they did could be useless in terms of control. The discussion about what to do is organized using three metaphors, *The glass metaphor, The Monkey Strategy* and *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypses.* The first defines what "containing" does mean, and it works as a yardstick for analyzing behaviours. The second is intended to stop potentially dangerous escalations between the parents and adolescent. The third describes a pattern of family interaction especially detrimental in mental health terms, a pattern which can degenerate in a kind of abuse that may foster further violence among all involved.

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