1 Introduction

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BACKGROUND

Children behaving badly are a national scandal, a crisis never before seen, where children are out of control and dangerous. The streets are filled with hooded gangs of feral youths, while children routinely intimidate, attack and stab each other. Adults are no longer respected, their authority, values and laws disregarded. The rule of the street, governed by delinquent sub-cultures, has replaced the comfort of family values, with ever younger children being initiated. Or so we are led to believe. This represents, it has been argued, nothing less than a contemporary moral panic (Blackman and Walkerdine, 2001).

It is unclear what facts are submerged in this mist of rhetoric. How great a social problem is violence between children and young people? Has there been an unprecedented escalation in children's violence, or has such violence always been present but lain unrecognised and hidden, as with child abuse and domestic violence? Who are these child perpetrators and their victims, and what can we do to safeguard all children and young people's welfare in this area?

This book was conceived as a dispassionate and considered response to these questions, and to challenge some of the erroneous beliefs that surround children's violence or, as one author describes the problem, 'toxic childhoods' (Palmer, 2007). Such ideologies around violent and out-of-control childhoods not only pervade public attitudes and prejudices towards children and young people, but also influence how policy makers and practitioners respond to these problems through, for example, social welfare settings, education and the criminal justice system, including the courts.

Not all forms of peer violence receive equal recognition or concern. Although we acknowledge that professional and public attention, mediated though a moral panic agenda, can be unhelpful and counter-productive, some aspects of peer violence fail to reach public or policy consciousness. Indeed, a common form of violence between young people occurs on the battlefield, where the UK and the US have deployed 18-year-olds in armed conflicts – for example, in Iraq and Afghanistan. Perhaps the only form of peer violence to

come under sustained public and policy scrutiny, apart from, unsurprisingly, young offenders, has been school-based violence, generally conceptualised as bullying. Why some areas receive unparalleled attention while others remain concealed is open to interpretation.

However, a plausible explanation surrounds wider power inequalities. Children's violence that directly challenges societal norms or institutions, such as that involving young offenders or some forms of school-based violence, is perceived as necessitating intervention, whereas peer violence that reflects wider power structures, especially inequalities based on gender, sexuality and 'race', continue to be tolerated (see Chapters 7, 10 and 13). In reality this has meant that little shared understanding has developed concerning the similarities and differences between different forms of peer violence, including the messages each can bring to best practice. There is an urgent need to inform understanding and professional responses in this complex and contested area of child welfare.

OVERVIEW OF OUR WORK ON PEER VIOLENCE

Both of us have wide experience in the field of child welfare research. Over the past 15 years our joint work, funded by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), a large UK children's charity, has focused mainly on under-recognised and under-researched areas of peer violence. Initially this interest started with our research on NSPCC investigations into children's allegations of institutional abuse (Barter, 1998). The analysis revealed that young people's allegations concerned abuse by *peers* as well as staff. Yet many of the NSPCC investigators interviewed felt that their recommendations concerning peer abusers were often viewed with less importance by the commissioning authority than those relating to staff.

Our interest in peer violence was further intensified in our subsequent work on young people's experiences of racism and racial harassment (Barter, 1999). This review showed that *peers*, rather than adults, were the main instigators of racism. However, from a child protection perspective, the review also found a lack of social work awareness regarding the impact of racial harassment and violence on children and young people, and an absence of practice guidance in the area.

These findings led to our research, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council under its Violence Research Programme, on peer violence in residential children's homes (Barter *et al.*, 2004). The research was the first UK study to focus exclusively on peer violence in this context. The level of peer violence we found in children's homes was a major cause of concern. It is important to acknowledge that settings with very similar resident groups exhibited very different levels of violence, indicating that violence is socially determined and not simply an individual preoccupation. The conceptual

framework developed from this research, based on young people's narratives, is used in this volume by Andrew Kendrick (Chapter 6) to look at peer violence across all out-of-home settings.

While the aim of the research was to explore violence between children's homes' residents, it also exposed another form of peer violence: teenage partner violence. Many of the girls interviewed spoke about their boyfriend's use of violence and control. A subsequent review of this area (Barter, 2006, 2009) showed that, although a body of evidence existed in the US, very little research had been undertaken in the UK. Similarly, policy understanding and professional awareness of this form of intimate violence, as distinct from adult experiences of domestic violence, was also disconcertingly absent. The editors have since undertaken two studies on partner violence in teenage intimate relationships, one of which is reported in Chapter 8 of this volume (Barter *et al.*, 2009; Wood, Barter and Berridge, forthcoming).

We have therefore explained our interests and credentials for embarking on this book. Similar themes were taken up in other related work (e.g. Berridge *et al.*, 2008; Kilpatrick *et al.*, 2008). But undoubtedly a main driving force for undertaking this book was the children and young people who have shared their experiences with us over the past 15 years. Throughout our work on peer violence, the most consistent and powerful findings have been children's and young people's own testimonies on how peer relationships, and especially those involving violence, are among the main causes of anxiety and unhappiness in their lives; and that these concerns remain largely unacknowledged by, and unreported to, adults. For example, when we explained our current research on violence in teenage relationships to participants, the response below was common:

> Zoe: That's cool, someone's fighting our corner.

DEFINITIONS AND MEANINGS

Violence is a disputed concept. In this book we have adopted a wide definition of violence that incorporates physical, sexual, emotional and verbal forms. We use Kelly's (1988) conceptualisation of a 'violence continuum', in which different forms of violence can have a similar impact. Thus we do not impose a pre-determined hierarchy of harm in which, for example, physical violence is given priority above other forms. This reflects children's and young people's own evaluations where non-physical forms of violence can be seen as damaging as violence involving physical force, as illustrated below:

> Having names called is worse … because it hurts you more … If you have a fight … the pain goes and it heals, but having been called whatever is always at the back of your head.
>
> Fiona, 14, quoted from Barter *et al.*, 2004, p. 29

We have used a definition of childhood that spans birth to 18 years. As much previous writing on peer violence has focused on older children and adolescents, we wanted to ensure that we compensated for this by including work on younger children's experiences, especially preschool children (see Chapter 2).

The age of 18, in many respects, legally defines the end of childhood in the UK. Some ambiguities to this threshold exist – for example, the state's responsibility for children 'looked after' can extend, at least in theory, into the early 20s. Nevertheless, reaching the age of 18 is generally seen as marking the final transition from childhood to adulthood. Unfortunately, the signifiers of adulthood, in terms of employment, housing and independence, are often severely restricted (Elliot, 1994). Thus, delimitations between childhood dependency and adult autonomy may be more theoretical than practical, especially for disadvantaged groups. While acknowledging this inconsistency, we have attempted to retain the age of 18 as the upper age limit for this book. Violence from young adults, especially men, has attracted considerable attention in research and policy, and we wanted to ensure that our focus remained on children's experiences.

VIOLENT CHILDHOODS – PROTECTION TO PUNISHMENT

Violence between children is a complex and controversial area and one where media-fuelled trepidation about an epidemic of violent children has come to dominate public perceptions and debate. Often such concern is based on appalling and therefore high-profile, although exceptionally rare, events. Major public concern in the UK can probably be traced back to 1996, when two 10-year-old boys abducted and murdered the two-year-old toddler James Bulger. The coverage of the murder, and the representation of the two 10-year-old boys in the press, by police and the courts as 'born evil' and demonic, were a watershed for how childhood deviancy in the UK has come to be perceived (Holland, 2004). The public was especially shocked by the very young age of the murderers. The imagery of a moral collapse prevailed where children, who are supposed to be innocent and protected, turned into killers. This case led to an intense and continuing scrutiny concerning the meaning of childhood, and especially the duality of the innocent/evil child. In this discourse, the innocent and therefore pure, angelic and uncorrupted child, who is in need of our protection, is juxtaposed against the evil, wilful and demonic child, who is in need of constraint for the protection of society (Higonnet, 1998). As Scraton warns:

> The conception of 'evil' within the aberrant child has long traditions … It resides permanently beneath the surface which presents a veneer of tolerance and understanding in direct contrast to the forces released once a child or young person steps out of line.
>
> Scraton, 1997, p. 167

Children quickly transgress from protection to punishment with little regard for the wider factors that may influence their actions. Once a child transcends one state to another there is little chance of redemption – through their actions they have relinquished the right to their own childhood. Again, this is illustrated in the Bulger case where the children were put on trial as adults, not juveniles. Owing to public outcry against these children, the then Home Secretary attempted to increase the 10-year sentence given by the courts to 15 years (although this was overruled by the Court of Appeal and criticised by the European Court of Human Rights).

Following this, as argued by Brown (2007), a new consensus emerged on the way in which children have come to be viewed by the state, where their own vulnerability and victimisation have been replaced by a more pronounced concern directed at curbing their anti-social and deviant behaviour. This is put succinctly by the following quotation from a young person:

> Some kids get left out of being seen as victims. They don't seem vulnerable, but just because they don't seem vulnerable doesn't mean they aren't. Often the worst behaved are the most vulnerable.
>
> Evans, 2004, p. 15

A comparable media and public outcry occurred more recently in 2009 when two brothers, aged 10 and 11, abducted, tortured and sexually humiliated two boys aged 9 and 11 in South Yorkshire (Doncaster Safeguarding Children Board, 2010). The boys, who were in the care of Doncaster social services at the time of the attack, were convicted in an adult court in January 2010 of causing grievous bodily harm. They were given indeterminate sentences, although they would be eligible for release in five years. Since 2004 the same authority has seen seven children die in suspicious circumstances, leading to a number of serious case reviews (Bennet, 2009), but these deaths failed to receive the same degree of media and public anger and condemnation that was directed at the brothers, who had not killed.

It is important to remember that not all countries view their children in this way. A year after James Bulger was murdered in Liverpool, England, a similar murder occurred in Trondheim, Norway – the Raedergard case. The response could not have been more different. Whereas in the UK the child murderers were represented as evil and in need of punishment, in Norway they were seen as innocent, in need of protection and rehabilitation (Franklin and Larsen, 2000). We should perhaps ask why some countries, including the US (Elliot, 1994), have so readily embraced such malevolent depictions of their young, while others question what their society has done to fail their children so terribly and how this can be amended? In the UK some commentators have argued for a similar approach to be adopted – for example, Johnston (2007) reported Professor Sir Al Aynsley-Green, the then Children's Commissioner for England, as saying:

> There is a crisis at the heart of our society and we must not continue to ignore
> the impact of our attitudes towards children and young people and the effect
> that this has on their well-being.

The recall to prison of one of James Bulger's killers in 2010 has re-ignited the
debate. Jon Venables, amid huge media publicity, was recalled to prison aged
27 as a result of breaching the licence under which he was released with a new
identity in 2001. According to the Justice Secretary, Jack Straw, an 'extremely
serious allegation' had been made against him (Walker, 2010).

Following the recall of Venables, the current Children's Commissioner,
Maggie Atkinson, stated that serious reconsideration should be given to raising
the age of criminal responsibility, and that we needed to reconsider how we
respond to children who offend (quoted in Thomson and Sylvester, 2010). She
continued that James Bulger's killers should not have been prosecuted because
children under 12 do not fully understand the consequences of their actions.
In England, Wales and Northern Ireland the age of criminal responsibility is
10-years-old, while in Scotland it is soon to be raised to 12 from 8 (Broadbridge,
2009). These represent the lowest ages of criminal responsibility in Europe,
where young people are criminally responsible from between 12- and 18-years-
old (Broadbridge, 2009).

Atkinson argued that we should look to other European countries' methods
of dealing with young offenders that are 'more therapeutic, more family- and
community-based, more about reparation than simply locking somebody up'
(Thomson and Sylvester, 2010). James Bulger's mother responded by calling
for Atkinson to be sacked for her 'twisted and insensitive' remarks. In response
Atkinson apologised for any 'hurtful' comments while reiterating her belief
that a serious discussion about increasing the age of criminal responsibility to
12 years old still had to take place (BBC, 2010).

The Commissioner also called for a debate regarding to what extent victims
of crime should influence policy and practice in criminal justice and child
welfare services (BBC, 2010). This is a concern that both editors agree requires
attention. Although the abhorrent and tragic circumstances of individual cases
require recognition, and lessons need to be learnt regarding what may have
prevented a tragedy occurring, the voices of individual victims should not
determine policy and practice. The continuing rights of victims and their rela-
tives, therefore, require further debate. We need as a society to put aside our
anger and examine instead, calmly and with compassion, how such children
can be helped and rehabilitated. There is a risk that politicians and the
media can respond to such tragedies in a way that makes matters worse. Policy
in this sensitive area needs to be underpinned by a measured and robust debate,
in which children's rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights
of the Child are upheld, and the needs of both the victims and their assailants
are recognised. This may not occur when individual victims, however devastat-
ing their situation, have the ability to stifle debate and determine policy.

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The following articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the corresponding obligations of governments to safeguard these rights, are of particular importance in relation to peer violence:

Article 3

1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.
2. States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.

Article 19

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.
2. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.

As argued by Yiasouma (2007) with regard to children's rights, a potential conflict of interest occurs when the aggressor is also a child; however, under the United Nations Convention a duty of care exists both for the victim and the child or young person who has harmed. The first priority must be to protect the former from further harm, and to seek appropriate services and support. But it is equally imperative that the child or young person who has caused the harm is provided with appropriate help and support to meet his or her needs. Applying a children's rights perspective does not entail letting violent children simply get away with it. It does, however, require a commitment to providing the services that will enable these children to reflect on their actions, understand the hurt they have caused, learn from their experiences and work towards building a positive future (Yiasouma, 2007; Garside, 2010). This will inevitably be a difficult process, and one that will not be helped by invoking the adult criminal justice system, or a society that views such children

and young people as inherently evil and unredeemable. Violence between children is clearly a highly charged topic. We need to remind ourselves that more children are *victims* of violent crimes than they are perpetrators (Elliot, 1994; Commission on Children and Violence, 1995).

CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

A study by UNICEF (2007), the United Nations children's organisation, looked at the position of children and young people in 21 industrialised countries. The researchers used 40 indicators to analyse the quality of childhoods in each country. The UK was ranked *bottom* of these developed countries in its ability to bring up children successfully. In relation specifically to children's family and peer relationships, the UK again came last of all 21 countries.

The research also showed that the proportion of children who report that their peers are 'kind and helpful' varied considerably across countries, from 80 per cent in Switzerland and Portugal to only just over 40 per cent in the UK. The World Health Organisation report (Currie *et al.*, 2004) stated that being liked and accepted by peers was a crucial factor in the health and development of children and young people, and that those who were not socially integrated were far more likely to exhibit difficulties with their physical and emotional health. The above findings are particularly worrying when we look at young people's exposure to violence from their peers. This is illustrated in Cawson *et al.*'s (2000) large, representative survey of nearly 3,000 young adults on the prevalence of all forms of childhood maltreatment. This study showed, as have others, that the most common source of distress to the sample during their childhood had been bullying and discrimination by other young people. Another recent school-based survey of 1,353 young people showed that approaching 1 in 6 of the total sample, equally for boys and girls, reported that their friends used aggression towards peers (Barter *et al.*, 2009). Elliot (1994) argues that the strongest cause of peer violence is being attached to a delinquent peer group where violence is encouraged and reinforced. The UNICEF (2007) study also positioned the UK bottom for young people's risky behaviours, such as smoking, drinking and under-age sex.

Thus, it is not surprising that research by Margo and Dixon (2006) argues that Britain's youths are the worst-behaved in Europe. However, work by Barter *et al.* (2009) provides evidence regarding the prevalence and possible influence of violence from *adults* on young people's lives. Disconcertingly, 13 per cent of girls and 9 per cent of boys reported that they had experienced violence from an adult family member, and 20 per cent of girls and 10 per cent of boys witnessed domestic violence. For these, violence could seem a normal part of everyday life.

The 2007 UNICEF report also highlighted that young people's subjective sense of personal well-being was rated second to bottom. Rankin (2006)

showed that around 1 in 10 UK children aged 5–16 had a mental health problem, one of the highest incidence rates in Europe. Worryingly, longitudinal research shows that young people's mental health in the UK has been in decline over the past 30 years. This deterioration has not occurred to the same degree in many other developed countries including the US (Collishaw *et al.*, 2004), nor with any other age group (Rutter and Smith, 1995).

Layard (2005) states that it is important to recognise that mental health problems and poverty are intrinsically linked. This may help to explain the high relative level of mental health problems for UK children. The 2007 UNICEF report showed the UK to have one of the highest levels of relative child poverty and deprivation of all 21 countries. No consistent relationship between a country's wealth and the well-being of its children was found. However, it did reveal that children who grew up in areas of deprivation were more vulnerable and significantly more likely to be exposed to multiple hardships. Given these findings, we may conclude that UK childhoods are not something to be envied; and there seems to be something seriously amiss in the UK in what we are doing to children's lives.

CHILD WELFARE POLICY AND PRACTICE – AMBIGUITY AND DISCORD

Perhaps the single most recognised form of peer violence, at least in educational policy and practice, is bullying. In the 1970s bullying began to emerge as an area for study and policy attention. Since then, awareness and policy developments have become widespread and now every UK school is inspected by the national inspection agency OFSTED on their response to bullying. Anti-bullying policies have become an integral part of the official school agenda, although commentators have argued that in the past only certain forms of bullying have received official recognition (see Chapters 10 and 13). A wide range of policy and practice initiatives, aimed at stopping or reducing school bullying, have been developed in the UK and internationally.

Over the last decade the government has issued a range of new guidance for schools under its Safe to Learn initiative (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007a). This covers different aspects of bullying including homophobic bullying (ibid., 2007b), cyber bullying (ibid., 2007c), bullying involving pupils with special educational needs and disability (ibid., 2008), bullying in the community (ibid., 2009a), bullying in children's homes (ibid., 2009b), and also sexist, sexual and transphobic bullying (ibid., 2009c). This is in addition to the existing guidance on tackling bullying related to race, religion and culture (Department for Education and Skills, 2006). The Safe to Learn initiative (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007a) defines bullying as 'behaviour by an individual or group usually over time, which intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally' (p. 11).

It is still too early to determine the impact of these new guidelines on levels of school bullying, although evaluations concerning the effectiveness of other strategies and initiatives have been mixed (see Chapter 3).

Although school-based bullying has become an established area for policy development, other forms of peer violence have not benefited from this heightened recognition. Indeed, child welfare policy has often failed to acknowledge the significance of peer violence on the lives and well-being of children and young people. Much child welfare research and practice focuses exclusively on *adult–child* interactions, be they neglectful/abusive or in a professional context (Barter, 2009). Only recently has social work attention moved to incorporate other aspects of peer violence – for example, in relation to sexually harmful behaviours. Regrettably, other areas of peer violence and abuse still remain largely neglected in social work research, despite the fact that young people themselves have repeatedly identified peer relationships, and especially those involving violence, to be one of their main concerns (Utting, 1997; Barter *et al.*, 2004).

Consequently, professional practice may not be reflecting young people's own concerns and wishes regarding the impact of peer violence. A number of obstacles have been presented to explain this omission, including viewing peer violence as experimental; fear of stigmatisation; a mistaken view that peer abuse is less harmful than abuse by adults; lack of awareness of adolescent abuse generally; and low reporting levels (Hird, 2000; Barter, 2009). The omission to respond to peer violence in current safeguarding responses may reflect a limitation of the system itself:

> In many respects the UK child protection system, its tools and current practices, are poorly equipped to protect a young person whose problems do not necessarily revolve around the quality of parenting at home, but may be created or exacerbated by their own behaviours.
>
> Children's Society response to the *Paying the Price* consultation,[1]
> November 2004, quoted in Evans [2004], p. 16.

Reforms through the government's 'Every Child Matters' (2003) agenda were designed to improve life for all children and young people, which should include peer relationships. Five outcomes were presented, which all children should achieve:

- be safe;
- be healthy;
- enjoy and achieve;
- achieve social and economic well-being;
- make a positive contribution.

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[1] *Paying the Price* was a consultation paper on commercial sex in the UK, published by the Home Office in July 2004. It provided information and opinions on a wide variety of problems associated with on- and off-street prostitution.

The reforms included new duties to cooperate with, and to consider, safeguarding and the promotion of welfare for all children. It was argued that the outcomes would be achieved through meeting the needs of the most vulnerable through high-quality, inclusive, universal services. It may be asked, for example, if it is possible for children and young people to 'make a positive contribution' to their community or society given the very negative and stigmatising ideologies around aspects of childhood that currently prevail.

Alongside these reforms the previous government instituted a programme to decrease the level of anti-social activity, including violence, through its 'Respect' agenda. Although this agenda incorporated both prevention and enforcement, in practice the main emphasis was on enforcement to the detriment of prevention. Thus support for parents, youth activities and Individual Support Orders, configured into the Respect agenda, received far less emphasis than did enforcement measures, such as Anti-Social Behavioural Orders (ASBOs), which have been widely perceived as a central mechanism to combat youth delinquency (see Chapter 14).

This is a complex area and there is a need for greater clarity. While on the one hand government has been committed to meeting the needs of all children and young people through its Every Child Matters programme and its endorsement of children's rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the other hand it has demonised children and young people through its support of harsh, punitive measures, such as the high recent use of youth custody and ASBOs. In addition, and for too long, both social work practice and research have disregarded violence and abuse perpetrated between children and young people. This inconsistency leaves children and young people unprotected.

THEORETICAL STANDPOINT OF THE BOOK

This is the first UK publication, as far as we are aware, to directly address the complexity of peer violence from a range of perspectives and disciplines, including sociology, psychology, criminology, education, social work and child welfare. Any reliance on a single theoretical standpoint is likely to be inadequate in explaining the complexity of our social world, and especially in understanding violence. Empirical work needs to understand the ways in which complementary theoretical standpoints can help unravel multifaceted social problems (Layder, 1998). By adopting a multi-disciplinary approach, this book sets out to provide useful insights into theoretical understandings of the issues, and to highlight their implications for policy and practice developments.

Although diverse disciplines and perspectives are represented, the importance of understanding and responding to children's and young people's own views and experiences is a common theme of the book. Many of the

contributors, either overtly or covertly, use conceptualisations associated with the sociology of childhood. This sociological framework has, over the past two decades, become a well-acknowledged theoretical standpoint that juxtaposes children's own experiences of being a child and the institutional form that childhood takes (e.g. James, Jenks and Proud, 1998; Mayall, 2002, 2004). Within this literature, children are seen as being actively involved in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and the societies in which they live. This enables children to be viewed as significant actors in, and interpreters of, a complex social world (Brannen and O'Brien, 1996):

> The nature of children's childhood is not simply the outcome of the particular structural conditions in which children happen to find themselves … Neither is it solely the outcome of sets of discourses produced by adults … Nor is it yet simply a function of the cultural determinates associated with, for example class or kin relations. It is also a product of the everyday actions of children themselves.
>
> James and James, 2004, p. 23

To avoid the danger of simplistic accounts of a homogeneous childhood, the plurality of children's experiences must be acknowledged, according to gender, class, disability, ethnicity and age (James *et al.*, 1998). Much work, for example, has been undertaken on the gendered nature of childhood and the ways in which constructs of masculinity and femininity shape young people's realities (McRobbie, 1990; Holland *et al.*, 1998; McCarry, 2003; Sieg, 2007), including their experiences of peer violence (Chung, 2005; Barter *et al.*, 2009).

RATIONALE FOR INCLUSION

All the following chapters are based on up-to-date research evidence; some present previously unpublished findings. Our contributors are experts in their field and we are grateful for their participation. A strength of the book, in our view, is that for the first time it brings together international research and commentary on a wide range of peer violence areas, which provide new insights and messages for child welfare understanding and practice. The collection spans the childhood spectrum developing a unique comprehension of peer violence from early childhood through to late adolescence. Contributors were invited so as to provide a diversity of perspectives and a combination of well-recognised and researched areas, such as school bullying, and less known areas, as with UK teenage partner violence and peer violence in out-of-home care. The collection directly addresses issues of diversity through consideration of wider power inequalities based on gender, 'race' and homophobia.

As editors, we wanted to report not only empirical and theoretical understanding but also to identify possible implications for practice. We therefore asked authors to conclude their chapter with a list of points or issues for practice. It is important to recognise that the diversity of authors contributing to

this collection means that some contributors work in a more directly applied manner, in relation to policy and practice, than others. Nonetheless we feel that the differences between chapters are part of the appeal of an edited volume.

LAYOUT OF BOOK

The 16 chapters of the book are divided into four sections. Part 1 includes five chapters, which address peer violence in very different contexts. In Chapter 2, Jane Brown focuses on peer violence among preschool children. Initially she revisits the contentious debates about the definition of violence and asks to what extent this term can be applied to very young children. The influence of attitudinal factors, including ideas of childhood innocence, is elaborated upon. She concludes by examining the challenges associated with interpretation of childhood aggression, including how physically aggressive and 'superhero' play in preschool settings is mediated by expectations about gender and social class. Chapter 3 by Helen Cowie explores the underlying causes of school bullying, its impact and the associated outcomes for the quality of peer relationships. She considers the ways in which professionals can work with young people to counteract bullying and understand more about the nature of their relationships with others. In the next chapter (4), Paul Naylor, Laurie Petch and Jenna Williams outline research on violence between siblings. They begin by clarifying what constitutes sibling violence and abuse. Findings from a recent systematic review are used to explore the prevalence, correlates and causes of sibling violence. The authors explore the effects of such violence on children and discuss what future research is required.

Chapter 5 looks at the controversial area of violent crimes by young people, including an analysis of 'gangs'. Using testimonies derived from research on violent street crime, Tara Young and Simon Hallsworth document the processes by which young men become immersed in violent street worlds. They explore the factors that lead young men to engage in 'a life on road', examining the violence they conduct and the street collectives in which they are immersed. Through this, the populist image of the 'gang' is challenged. Lastly in this section, Andrew Kendrick (Chapter 6) addresses the issue of peer violence in out-of-home settings. He adopts Barter *et al.*'s (2004) framework of peer violence from children's residential care and applies it across a broader range of out-of-home settings, including foster family care, secure accommodation and young offender institutions. He outlines the ways in which carers are responding to issues of peer violence in out-of-home settings, and identifies 'good practice' messages.

Part II of the book introduces the reader to different forms of peer violence. In Chapter 7, Les Back recounts the murder of Stephen Lawrence to provide a detailed exploration of the links between youth crime and the legacy of

violent UK racism. He provides a powerful and moving account of how the brutal stabbing provided a tragic watershed in the history of racism in Britain. The chapter draws on the struggle of the Lawrence family and their supporters to bring the murderers to justice, a struggle which, according to the author, lays bare the institutional failure and injustices of the British criminal justice system. Following this, Christine Barter (Chapter 8) focuses on one of the least recognised forms of peer violence in the UK: teenage partner violence. This chapter, based on an original UK research project, documents the incidence rates for physical, sexual and emotional forms of teenage partner violence, and addresses the associated factors that may increase a young person's suscepti-bility, either as recipient or assailant. The dynamics of teenage partner vio-lence, including frequency, development over time and help-seeking, are explored. Young people's own testimonies are presented throughout. The find-ings of this research led directly to the government's launching of a £2 million media awareness campaign on teenage relationship abuse.

Simon Hackett, in Chapter 9, is concerned with the problematic, abusive and harmful sexual behaviours perpetrated by children and young people. Official statistics, probably an underestimate, show that children and young people account for a significant proportion of reported sexual abuse. The chapter provides a concise analysis of the existing research in this sensitive area and looks at who these children and young people are, their family context and the risk of recidivism. The final chapter of Part II is by Ian Rivers and looks at homophobia and peer violence. The author argues that among adolescents, homophobic violence has a number of significant characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of peer aggression, particularly in schools. He reminds us that not all victims of homophobic violence are lesbian, gay or bi-sexual, because children and young people who are deemed to be somehow 'different' may also experience homophobic violence. He questions why young people use sexuality above any other mark of individuality to determine who is a target and who is unaffected.

Part III seeks to develop a more in-depth and critical understanding of certain aspects of peer violence. In Chapter 11, Veronica Herrera and Jeffrey Stuewig consider how child maltreatment and domestic violence have an impact on peer violence. Using longitudinal data, they examine the impact of three forms of child maltreatment – marital violence, child physical abuse and child sexual abuse – on children and young people's aggression, bullying and peer victimisation. Previous research in this area has largely failed to incorporate gender as a mediating factor. In response, the authors position this as a central component in their analysis and discussion. Following this, Sharon Nichols (Chapter 12) reviews the current theoretical and empirical literature on the media portrayal of youth violence. She explores, through various theo-retical lenses, how instigators and victims of violence are depicted, and the ways in which race, gender and age intersect with media portrayal. She addresses how US and European media compare, especially around how

youth violence is depicted and contextualised. Furthermore, she explores how prevalence rates of youth violence contrast to media representations. Chapter 13 then returns to the issue of bullying as Jane Ringrose and Emma Renold provide a challenge to how bullying is currently perceived and responded to in anti-bullying policies. Using a feminist post-structural framework, and drawing on recent ethnographic and qualitative data, they explore how the concept of 'bullying' works to simplify and individualise highly complex power relations embedded in girls' and young women's school-based peer group cultures. They contend that policy continues to ignore gendered and sexualised violence in schools. It will be interesting to see, given the authors' arguments, how the new guidance for schools on preventing sexist, sexual and transphobic bullying (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009c) has an impact on this form of gendered peer violence.

In the final section, we have two chapters that directly address responses to peer violence in two very different contexts. Chapter 14 by Peter Squires and Carlie Goldsmith is an exploration of the ambiguity regarding the police and criminal justice responses to young people. The authors draw on research evidence to determine whether 'new youth justice' has actually helped or hindered marginalised children and young people. In Chapter 15, Nicky Stanley, Jane Ellis and Jo Bell consider the role and effectiveness of school-based preventive programmes aimed at reducing teenage partner violence in intimate relationships. They draw on two independent evaluations of UK programmes to consider the achievements of such programmes and the challenges they encounter. Gender differences emerge as a key factor, which needs to inform both the delivery of these programmes and their content.

Finally, in the concluding chapter, the editors draw together some of the key messages and common themes from the book.

The book is aimed at policy makers, academics, practitioners and advanced students from a wide range of social welfare disciplines. It should be of both UK and international interest, and has important implications for safeguarding children's and young people's welfare. *Children Behaving Badly?* sets out to challenge populist and harmful representations of youth violence, and the associated narratives of modern children as essentially 'evil' and out-of-control. We hope you will feel that the book achieves its aims.

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