



Child Sexual Exploitation

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Key messages

- The research evidence indicates vulnerability to child sexual exploitation across a range of deprived groups, including those excluded from school, those looked after and those who are delinquent or gang-involved.
- It can take place through internet grooming, via online technology, through peer exploitation and through organised/networked child trafficking.
- There is some evidence demonstrating the vulnerability of gang-involved young women and young people with learning difficulties to sexual exploitation.
- Going missing – whether from the family home or from care placements – is a strong indicator of children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation.
- A number of factors can increase a young person's vulnerability to sexual exploitation including a history of physical or sexual abuse; poor mental health; problematic parenting; parental drug or alcohol misuse; parental mental health problems and the experience of disrupted family lives and domestic violence.
- There are recognised health issues as a result of sexual exploitation including physical injuries; engagement in drug or alcohol misuse; sexually transmitted infections; pregnancy and terminations; poor mental health; self harm and thoughts of or attempt at suicide.
- Each young person is an individual, with a unique experience of sexual exploitation. They may perceive and interpret their experience of sexual exploitation differently viewing the relationships as consensual and romantic.
- There is a need to raise awareness amongst professionals to improve early identification of child exploitation including training around factors that may increase vulnerability to child sexual exploitation, as well as signs and symptoms that is occurring.
- There is also a need to explore the challenges in providing services given the complex histories of the young people, including severe mental health problems, educational difficulty and past abuse.
- There needs to be an appreciation of young people's pre care experiences, the environment of the children's home, and the nature of support available to young people.
- Attitudes need to be challenged around gender and equality issues to address for some the belief that male perpetrators have a right and power over females.

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Definition

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a form of sexual abuse that involves the manipulation and/or coercion of young people under the age of 18 into sexual activity in exchange for things such as money, gifts, accommodation, affection or status.

There is an identified spectrum of exploitation including peer exploitation, where young people are forced or coerced into sexual activity by peers; the development of inappropriate relationships where the person believes they are in a loving relationship with an older perpetrator; and organised/networked exploitation or trafficking.

There is a lack of information about why children are exploited in this way but research suggests that sexual exploitation of vulnerable children is linked to other problems including parental disharmony, physical violence, relationship problems, sexual abuse, bullying, truancy or substance misuse.¹

Introduction

In December 2013 Rochdale Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) published its serious case review in response to a major police investigation in 2010, *Operation Span*.² Consequently, nine men were prosecuted for abusing 14 girls in the Rochdale Borough. In 2010 Operation Kern followed resulting in the arrest and prosecution of 12 males for sexually exploiting 27 young women in Derby.³

Barnardo's subsequently published *Puppet on a String* (2011) calling for the urgent need for attention to be given to child sexual exploitation.⁴ It also used the Public Petitions process in the Scottish Parliament to request an inquiry into the scope and nature of CSE in Scotland. During this same period, two police investigations, *Operation Cotswold* and *Operation Dash*^{5,6} in the West of Scotland added to the growing evidence of concerns.

The Public Petitions Committee published its report in January 2014⁷, following a myriad of other reports including the University of Bedfordshire's 2012 report on the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation in Scotland.^{8,9,10,11} In it GIRFEC was viewed as a useful framework to progress the issue.¹² Accordingly a data monitoring and self-evaluation tool, developed by the University of Bedfordshire, adapted to the Scottish context, is currently underway in Forth Valley, policy development supported by the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2010.^{13,14}

More recently Alexis Jay conducted an independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham 1997-2013 finding that at least 1400 children had been sexually exploited over a period of 16 years.¹⁵ This was followed by an announcement from the Children's Commissioner for England in July 2014 of a two year national inquiry into child sexual abuse in the family environment in response to "*It's a lonely journey – A rapid assessment on interfamilial child sexual abuse*".¹⁶

Why is this issue important?

What is known about the scale and nature of child exploitation in Scotland?

Research into the prevalence of sexual exploitation is complex with statistics needing to be treated with caution. Existing studies highlight difficulties in treating child sexual exploitation as an issue, together with the absence of consistent data gathering procedures in local authorities.^{17,18} Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) produced an audit of current knowledge using data from police forces, Local Safeguarding Children's Boards, children's services and service providers in 2011.¹⁷ The national figures from CEOP show there has been an increase in reports of exploitation from 5,411 in 2008/9 to 6,291 in 2009/10.

This growing awareness of the problem is well documented in Scott and Skidmore's (2006) data collection of a sample of 557 young people in contact with Barnardo's services in the UK, in which they detailed information on the case histories of 42 young people.¹⁹ So too other voluntary organisations have reported increased numbers of young people contacting them for help regarding child sexual exploitation.²⁰

In Scotland, the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee carried out an Inquiry into child sexual exploitation in 2013 to explore its scale and nature. It heard from the National Working Group estimates from Scottish agencies of the likelihood of child sexual exploitation victims ranging from 64 to 300 for each agency. It also highlighted concern around under-recognition of the issue, particularly in rural areas.²¹

Four studies have identified sexual exploitation in Scotland, although none of these have examined prevalence, and are small scale, empirical studies of specific groups of young people known to be at risk of sexual exploitation – looked after and accommodated young people and young people placed in secure accommodation.^{22,23,24,25}



These findings support research in the rest of the UK regarding the processes through which young people become sexually exploited, and some of the challenges in providing services. They also emphasise the complex histories of the young people, which include severe past abuse, educational difficulty and mental health problems.

^{22,23}

All these studies emphasise the importance of having appropriate placements/accommodation, and supportive peer and carer relationships for these vulnerable young people. These same studies also acknowledge considerable variations amongst carers and local authority staff as to the understanding of child sexual exploitation resulting in differing approaches and practices.

What does the research tell us? Who is most at risk?

Some groups are especially vulnerable including those with family difficulties, those subjected to different types of abuse and neglect, those having experience of the care system with a history of truancy and exclusion from school, of running away or going missing and those engaged in drug and alcohol misuse, delinquency and gang involvement. ^{18,19,22,23,26,27}

In a recent small scale study in Scotland factors associated with confirmed sexual exploitation included being a girl, the misuse of alcohol and drugs during the last year, being aged 11 and over and with experience of sexual abuse before becoming looked after. ²⁸

Furthermore, a number of factors can increase a young person's vulnerability to sexual exploitation including a disrupted family life and domestic violence; a history of physical or sexual abuse; poor mental health; problematic parenting; parental drug or alcohol misuse and parental mental health problems. ^{26,27} A note of caution must be exercised here as these are also indicators and vulnerability factors for many other things such as suicide, offending and violence.

Children can be exploited via online grooming as internet and mobile technology become increasingly common. ²⁹ They can be exploited through peer exploitation and gang involvement. ^{30,31,32,33,34}

Younger children are increasingly at risk of sexual exploitation, ³³ alongside young people with learning difficulties, ¹⁸ whilst the sexual exploitation of boys and young men is becoming more documented. ^{35,36} Runaways can easily find themselves at risk and in danger of sexual exploitation or become a runaway to escape sexual exploitation. ³⁷

These vulnerable children can be commercially sexually exploited and/or trafficked into prostitution. ^{25,38,39,40,41}

Risks can be reduced in a number of ways by providing safe and supported accommodation for young people who are in the care system and at risk of experiencing sexual exploitation or are subjected to trafficking for sexual exploitation purposes. ⁴² It is important for practitioners



to adopt a tripartite response addressing the physical, relational and psychological aspects of safety and security for young people in care who are affected by sexual exploitation. ⁴³

It is important to treat each young person as an individual, with their own unique experience of sexual exploitation. They may perceive and interpret their experience of sexual exploitation differently, viewing the relationships as consensual and romantic. ⁴⁴ What might appear to be the love and physical affection they yearn, can be so easily twisted into sexual activity and ultimately exploitation. It is therefore important to broaden the discussion with young people as to their role in relation to sexual exploitation. ⁴²



Impact

The inability of young people to adaptively cope with the trauma of child sexual abuse is common. The exposure to extreme stress can produce a broad array of cognitive, emotional and psychological difficulties and can result in the development of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).⁴⁵

Young people may suffer from physical injuries; engage in drug or alcohol misuse; experience repeated sexually transmitted infections; pregnancy and terminations; a change in physical appearance; poor mental health; self harm and thoughts of or attempt at suicide.^{45, 46}

There is also evidence to suggest the premature sexualisation of young people, where they are perceived as an object for sexual use with disregard to their dignity, with their worth being measured in terms of their level of sexual attractiveness. Here, the young people are emotionally, psychologically and physically unprepared for this at their particular stage of development.⁴⁷

Approaches adopted

Various reports document the need for secure accommodation and alternative provision for sexually exploited young people in Scotland.⁴⁸ Councils such as Glasgow City Council in 2006 issued practice guidelines for safeguarding children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation.^{49, 50} Although Rigby's (2013) research found that it was little used by managers and workers.⁵¹

The work of the Scottish Guardianship Service, delivered in partnership between Aberlour Childcare Trust and Scottish Refugee Council, has already helped support more than 100 unaccompanied young people going through the asylum system, some of whom are victims of trafficking and child sexual exploitation.⁵²

There has also been a call for a tool to be developed for practitioners that provides an evidence based resource for workers to more readily identify the risks associated with sexual exploitation.⁵¹

Finally it is important for services to continue to challenge attitudes around gender and equality. We cannot ignore that perpetrators and victims can be from either gender but for the males who feel that they have the right and power over females this misogyny must be challenged.⁵³

Resources available

Barnardo's has been the most pro-active in terms of preventative work with young people covering the prevention, protection and provision agenda and taken campaigning to a sophisticated level using political processes.

http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/our_projects/sexual_exploitation.htm

16 days of Action to Eliminate Violence Against Women,

<http://www.16days.org/>

The White Ribbon Campaign

<http://www.whiteribboncampaign.co.uk/>

CHILDREN 1st's campaign highlighting sexual abuse -

See, Hear, Speak, Act on Sexual Abuse

<http://www.children1st.org.uk/campaigns/see-hear-speak-act/>

Abby's room interactive worksheet through Facebook

<http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=59866&sID=25303>

Keeping Myself Safe and Curriculum Resource in Digital Safety (City of Edinburgh),

<http://digitallearningteam.org/digital-safety/curriculum-planners/third-level/>

Teen Abuse course VAW partnership (West Dumbarton)

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/299742/0093439.pdf>

CEOP Think You Know training

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>

My Dangerous Lover Boy;

<http://www.mydangerousloverboy.com/>

National Go Safe Scotland.

<http://www.gosafescotland.com/>

The Mentors in Violence Prevention Programme

<http://www.actiononviolence.co.uk/content/mvp-scotland>

The Bystander Approach

<http://www.actiononviolence.co.uk/content/pupils-be-trained-violence-prevention>

TESSA (To Explore Sexual exploitation/Sexual Abuse) Youth Project Prevention Workshops

<http://www.rapecrisiscentre-argyll-bute.org.uk/news.php>

Working with children and young people who experience running away and child sexual exploitation: An evidence-based guide for practitioners by Emilie Smeaton

http://www.barnardos.org.uk/CSE_practitioners_guide_v2_hr.pdf

Daphne programme report - What works in child sexual exploitation: sharing and learning
http://www.barnardos.org.uk/final_report_by_paula_skidmore_in_english.pdf

Guides for young people, Protecting self and keeping safe by
Mel Foley
http://www.barnardos.org.uk/secos/secos_contact_us.htm

Baldy Bane Theatre Group and drama workshops:
<http://www.baldybane.org.uk/>

Nae Danger
http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/policy_research_unit/research_and_publications/sexual_exploitation_research_resources.htm

Healthy Respect on issues of sexting:
<http://www.healthyspect.co.uk/StayingSafeOnline/Pages/default.aspx>

ROSHNI online training on culture and child protection:
<http://www.roshni.org.uk/our-projects-2/>

Zero Tolerance Under Pressure training:
<http://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/UnderPressure>

Just Whistle Training <http://www.justwhistle.org.uk/>

RespectMe <http://www.respectme.org.uk/>

Bwise2 Sexual Exploitation
http://www.barnardos.org.uk/resources/research_and_publications/bwise2-sexual-exploitation/publication-view.jsp?pid=PUB-1263

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