CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

A MULTI-AGENCY CASE STUDY

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Contents

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Summary

The present study was commissioned to provide comment on nine cases of child sexual exploitation (CSE) identified in Glasgow. Through case file and documentary analysis, and discussion with professionals, the aim was to identify pathways into exploitation, agency responses and outcomes for young people. Its longer term objective is to provide baseline information from which to develop a more robust assessment framework for practitioners to better identify and support children and young people.

The case file data and agency reports provided both historical and contemporary context about the circumstances of children and young people and interventions over a number of years. It also provided contextual information to inform focus group discussions, which provided a valuable opportunity for experienced practitioners in the city to share some of their thoughts about practice. Their input provided a complex picture of CSE, with both positive and negative perceptions of practice and responses. Professionals shared their anxieties about working in such a complex and challenging area of child protection, under political and media scrutiny.

There are limitations in such small scale case studies which preclude any definitive, generalisable statements. However, the indicative findings suggest that Glasgow has made progress in addressing concerns about child sexual exploitation that can now be built on to support practitioners in protecting children and young people.

The study found evidence of growing awareness and confidence in responding to CSE in the city, tempered with recognition that challenges remain in addressing such a multifaceted issue. Recognising the complexities, challenges and uncertainty inherent in CSE the outcomes for victims are not all positive despite substantial, and in many cases, early and long term multi-agency involvement and commitment from many professionals. It appears those children and young people with less adverse histories are more likely to seek support, exit exploitation and achieve more positive outcomes.

Even from such a small number of cases the varying complex pathways into sexual exploitation, and other negative outcomes, indicate the need for more robust assessment frameworks and risk indicators. It is apparent that the indicators and risk factors commonly used in existing matrixes are also indicators for many other types of adverse outcomes; risk and vulnerability to CSE is not easy to identify amongst a myriad of other concerns. Future work can develop the data capture form to provide a comprehensive overview of the background circumstances of children and young people who have been sexually exploited, preferably with a comparison group, to support the development of a more robust framework for assessing potential risk.

Introduction

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse in which a person(s), of any age takes advantage of a power imbalance to force or entice a child into engaging in sexual activity in return for something received by the child and/or those perpetrating or facilitating the abuse. As with other forms of child sexual abuse, the presence of perceived consent does not undermine the abusive nature of the act (Scottish Government 2016a)

The definition of child sexual exploitation has just been revised as part of the national action plan to tackle the issue in Scotland (Scottish Government 2016b). The new definition is accompanied by a briefing paper (Scottish Government 2016a), which describes the key factors distinguishing child sexual exploitation (CSE) from other forms of sexual abuse being some form of exchange; that is the child and/or someone else receive something in return for the sexual activity. Despite attempts to standardise definitions there remains problems in the conceptualisation and understanding of CSE, as evidenced by slightly different definitions in use across the UK. The term is a relatively new one, often accompanied by a lack of clarity about what behaviours actually constitute CSE (Cree et al 2014; Meyer 2016). This report is not attempting to define and identify CSE; identification had been undertaken previously via a multi-agency operational forum in Glasgow.

Following a number of high profile operations and reports Glasgow wanted to focus on a different approach to understanding trajectories into CSE for children and young people; an approach that might be useful for promoting early intervention, combined with initial analysis of responses once identified. The present report involved a comprehensive analysis of social work electronic and paper case files, multi-agency reports and unpublished documents pertaining to the responses to child sexual exploitation in Glasgow. The cases, first recognised as CSE in 2011, predate the high profile operations reported in the media, but were identified for the present study to allow analysis of historical data from case files, through to contemporary multi-agency practice and comment on longer term outcomes for the children and young people.

The work was commissioned to begin the process of developing a comprehensive overview of children and young people in an attempt to identify pathways into and out of exploitation. There is a longer term commitment in Glasgow to intervene with potential victims earlier if possible, and to prevent exploitation by identifying any common characteristics or pathways.

The aim of the study and report is not to provide harrowing detail of the exploitation experienced. Suffice to say the exploitation and abuse of the children and young people relates to multiple cases of rape, sexual assault, sexual and physical abuse and deprivation of liberty, by multiple perpetrators, in addition to historical familial and extra familial abuse and neglect.

Scotland

There have been a number of investigations, reports and papers across Scotland seeking to conceptualise and address the issue of child sexual exploitation and inform policy and practice, with suggestions for effective interventions. In 2003 the Scottish Executive identified that vulnerable young people, both boys and girls, were being sexually exploited across the country, although there was also acknowledgment that the numbers involved were not known (Scottish Executive 2003). In 2012 a Scottish Government commissioned report identified that knowledge in Scotland was piecemeal and there had been limited national research looking at the issue of CSE in the country, although the concerns were likely to be similar to the rest of the UK (Brodie and Pearce 2012).

Leperniere et al (2013) and Welch et al (2014) undertook a scoping study of sexual exploitation amongst the looked after child population in two local authority areas in Scotland (not Glasgow). They reported a prevalence of CSE amongst looked after children of 11%, rising to 29% of children looked after in residential units. In 2014 the Scottish Parliament conducted an inquiry that aimed to identify the nature and extent of CSE in Scotland. The inquiry found there remained limited understanding about most aspects of CSE and there was a lack of knowledge about prevalence. The committee concluded that overall the responses to CSE are patchy and poorly co-ordinated with no national strategy and differences at a local level in addressing concerns (Scottish Parliament 2014).

While there has been some effort to address CSE from a research and policy perspective in Scotland, any national overview has been hampered by inherent methodological issues and the complexities surrounding the abuse. These include small sample sizes, work in specific geographical areas and a focus on looked after and accommodated children (Fotopoulou 2016). This report, an update of an earlier WithScotland mapping exercise (Laird 2014), again identified the difficulties that local authorities continue to face in identifying and responding appropriately to victims of CSE. It also identified there was little consistency, with few relevant and robust research instruments used to identify young people at risk. However, the report identified that CSE has been conceptualised as a form of child sexual abuse, such that the skills of an experienced workforce along with long established procedures in Scotland should be better utilised. In addition Fotopoulou (2016) and Rigby & Fotopoulou (2016), both highlight a continuing lack of consensus about the extent of CSE across Scotland and largely uncoordinated attempts to address the issues at a local level, despite the developing national strategy.

National and local campaigns (see WithScotland undated) have detailed responses and guidance, but are to date not underpinned by a clear and robust evidence base as to the nature and prevalence of CSE, with enduring widespread problems in identifying its extent (Rigby and Fotopoulou 2016). Although deriving from a small sample, it is indicative that 85% of attendees at the symposium leading to the Rigby and Fotopoulou (2016) report, acknowledged that in their local authority areas there was little, or no, idea of the extent of the issues, nor what CSE actually looked like. How each area may differ, in terms of definitions and identification, is an important consideration when in the contemporary discourse the concept has been stretched to

encompass many different behaviours, to the extent it may be becoming '*rather meaningless'* (Melrose 2013: 160).

Following the concerns raised a national strategy and action plan for CSE in Scotland (Scottish Government 2014), is progressing following a partnership between the Ministerial Working Group to Prevent and Tackle Child Sexual Exploitation and the National Child Sexual Exploitation Working Group. The working group is now taking this forward with an updated action plan (Scottish Government 2016b) and the new CSE definition, as part of the child protection improvement programme. Sexual exploitation is also one of the key themes in the Child Protection Improvement Programme, with continuing recognition about the absence of any clear evidence of extent and nature of the abuse (Scottish Government 2017).

Glasgow

In Glasgow concerns about the sexual exploitation of vulnerable young people have been present for a number of years and since 2000 there have been a number of reports highlighting abuse of children and young people. Glasgow Child Protection Committee multi-agency guidance on sexual exploitation was first published in 2001, at a time when multi-agency working groups were meeting in the city to discuss the issues. The guidance was reissued in 2006 (Glasgow CPC 2006) to provide an updated framework to assist practitioners in assessing and safeguarding children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation. This guidance was located within the overall vulnerable young person (VYP) procedures[1] and was a result of research in Glasgow and the surrounding area by Barnardo's (Dillane et al 2005; Creggan 2005); identifying that between 32% and 90% of the looked after and accommodated population may have been sexual exploited.

There have been a number of high profile police and social work led operations on the west coast of Scotland following identification of a number of young people who had been sexually exploited, or were at serious risk. These operations have been widely reported in the media (Garavelli 2014; McGinty 2014), most notably Operation Dash established in 2013. A number of confidential agency reports have also been published to share the learning and challenges from these operations. Operation Dash identified nearly 100 children as potential victims of CSE and resulted in reports being submitted to COPFS in relation to 27 individuals across the investigation. At present, of the cases heard in court, four men have been found guilty with sentences ranging from six years custody, to sex offender registration for 18 months.

In 2013 a report was published identifying the sexual exploitation of vulnerable young people in the looked after and accommodated population (Rigby and Murie 2013). This report identified that little attention had been paid to the previous local research and that the inter agency guidance was rarely, if ever, referred to by practitioners and managers when undertaking assessments of vulnerable young people. In 2015 an unpublished Glasgow CPC report also identified that 55% of victims of child sexual exploitation met the international definition of child trafficking (Murie et al 2015). A

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[1] Children and young people in Glasgow may be managed under the Vulnerable Young Persons Procedures if child protection procedures are not appropriate and the young person is vulnerable to exploitation or harm.

series of reports by Glasgow Child Protection Committee have also identified the trafficking of unaccompanied and separated children to, and within, the city, including being trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation (Rigby 2009; 2010; Rigby et al 2012).

The similarities and cross over between sexual exploitation and trafficking are well documented and England and Wales have begun to identify the sexual exploitation of children and young people as trafficking (Jay 2013; Brayley and Cockbain 2014; Melrose and Pearce 2013). The National Referral Mechanism (the UK Government process for identifying human trafficking victims) statistics for 2015 indicate that nearly half of all referrals of minors in England and Wales for the purpose of sexual exploitation were UK nationals. While comparisons are problematic because of the differences in populations and demographics the identification of UK nationals as child trafficking victims for the purpose of sexual exploitation appears lower in Scotland where 2/8 children referred to the NRM for sexual exploitation were UK nationals (NCA 2015).

Similar to the national picture where the issue of CSE is a multi-agency priority across all services (Laird 2014; Fotopoulou 2016), Glasgow has identified child sexual exploitation as an important policy area (Glasgow CPC 2015), and there has been substantial development and learning from early reports, guidance and multi-agency operations. In many respects Glasgow is in a better position than many other areas of Scotland to comment on its prevalence and responses, largely due to the commitment to research and an evidence based approach since 2000. However, there remain concerns that not enough is known about the issue in the city and that identification and support is unpredictable.

Risk and vulnerability factors for child sexual exploitation

Adversity, risk and vulnerability are terms that have a long and contested history in child protection (Daniel 2010), and invariably cause much consternation in defining and explaining their use. Daniel sees vulnerability as a particularly problematic term, not least because of inherent assumptions about general vulnerability by virtue of being a child. Lebloch and King (2006) define vulnerability factors as those social, environmental and family circumstances or experiences that make some children more likely than others to be exposed to risk of, or actual, sexual exploitation.

Daniel (2010) defined 'adversity' as life events and circumstances which may combine to threaten or challenge healthy development. These adverse factors can range from narrow to the very broad including; physical or sexual abuse, traumatic incidents like loss and bereavement, neglect, family stressors and structural inequalities and socio-economic disadvantages.

'Risk' denotes the chances of adversity translating into actual negative outcomes for children (Daniel 2010). In the context of the present research this relates to the chances of experiencing sexual exploitation and having a significant negative impact on wellbeing and longer term outcomes. Lebloch and King (2006) define risk indicators as particular behaviour that is worrying, problematic or dangerous and likely to require further investigation and assessment, and which should alert professionals to the possibility of a child being sexually exploited.

UNODC (2012) suggest that the term 'vulnerability' generally refers to environmental or contextual factors that increase susceptibility to an adverse event. However, UNODC believe vulnerability is not fixed or predetermined and suggest there are numerous factors that impact on the social and environmental context where exploitation occurs, and the capacity of the individual to respond. UNODC emphasise the need for a clear individual, situation specific analysis to begin to understand vulnerability for individuals.

Within this contested conceptual arena of risk and vulnerability identifying and responding to perceived threats is complex and difficult. However, there are numerous factors that have been identified as contributing to an increase in a young person's vulnerability to sexual exploitation and suggestions that vulnerabilities and risks associated with sexual exploitation are now well established. Numerous research and reports have identified the myriad of 'factors' that are considered to be 'predictors' of child sexual exploitation (see for example Beckett 2011; Berelowitz 2012; Coy 2009). While there is some consistency in many of these indicators, there are also variations in what is included; in Scotland the recently published briefing paper (Scottish Government 2016a) identifies many of the potential indicators and vulnerabilities, some of which are discussed below.

However, there are caveats to these lists, as many, if not all, are also indicators and vulnerability factors for other potential negative life outcomes including suicide, offending and violence (Webb and Laird 2014). Coie et al (1993) note that one risk factor is rarely associated with a particular negative outcome as many negative 'disorders' (outcomes) share similar risk factors. They also note that risk factors vary with the developmental state of individuals and that multiple factors have a cumulative effect. Therefore, identifying specific future potential negative outcomes (eg sexual exploitation or violence and offending) from individual risk factors can be extremely problematic. Brown et al (2016) suggest that given the limited, methodologically robust research, it is not possible to reliably identify those children most 'at risk' of sexual exploitation. They suggest there are only two indicators with 'clear' evidence of increased risk of becoming a victim of sexual exploitation – disability and residential care.

Brown et al (2016) also identify a major concern that the vulnerability and risk factors often identified in assessment frameworks are actual signs exploitation is occurring. This was an issue prominent in the last Glasgow report (Rigby & Murie 2013), and these factors were re-designated as 'warning signs' and 'strong indicators' exploitation was taking place, rather than a risk factor.

Linked to the continued identification of possible risk factors there has been a corresponding growth in the use of checklists, although they are also problematic in that ticking fewer or more items does not improve their predictive validity (Leperniere et al 2013). Similar to other areas of child exploitation, there is little understanding of how indicators combine with background and social circumstances to aid assessments, predict risk and help in determining which services may best meet children's needs (Rigby 2011). As suggested by the Scottish Executive (2003) the indicators should not be viewed as a definitive list as they are intended as a guide to be included in a wider assessment of a child's circumstances. While the 'checklists'

may have use in aiding professional decision making there is an absence of research evidence on which to base their use as 'risk assessment tools' (Brown et al 2016).

Given the problems associated with the use of indicators and checklists the present research is the commencement of a project to establish a more rigorous approach to identifying dynamic life circumstances and characteristics that may begin to better aid professionals in their work with children and young people. This approach has much more in common with an ecological model of understanding vulnerability and risk, moving away from the focus of vulnerability characterised by personal attributes and low self-defence skills combining to increase risk (Hollomotz 2009). Hollomotz highlights how such an ecological model can take account of the environmental, cultural and social factors that impact on risk. With regards to CSE this is an important consideration.

Multi-agency working

The Scottish Government are clearly committed to a multi-agency response to addressing CSE, recognising the part that many different stakeholders have in protecting children and young people, as part of the overall GIRFEC (Getting it right for every child) policy approach (Scottish Government 2016c; 2017). As part of the wider child protection programme this multi-agency response is wedded to a commitment to intervening as early as possible to identify children at risk of abuse and exploitation. The commitment in Scotland to partnership working has been reflected in the national outcomes and performance framework (Scottish Government 2007), which sets out the vision for Scotland through the pulling together of key public, private, community and voluntary organisations. This approach is further solidified in relation to CSE in the action plan update:

> *'Preventing and tackling sexual exploitation requires a co-ordinated multi-agency response. Universal and specialist services have important roles to play….Children and young people need information to help them build resilience and make safe choices. Parents and carers need information about how to talk to their children and how to recognise the signs that their child may be at risk. Practitioners must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to recognise sexual exploitation and respond appropriately. This must be accompanied by work to detect, disrupt and prosecute perpetrators and reduce re-offending'* (Scottish Government 2016b).

Despite a general consensus that working collaboratively is preferable to agencies working alone there remain many problematic aspects to partnership working. These include various definitions underpinning principles and models of partnership working and the absence of clear outcomes linked to the collaborations (Larkin et al 2012). Cameron et al (2012:1) reported that *"the evidence base underpinning joint and integrated working remains less than compelling"* and a 2017 National Audit Office report on integrated working has indicated that despite 20 years of initiatives effective joined up working has not been achieved and there is no robust evidence that joined up working leads to better outcomes (NAO 2017). The difficulty in evidencing positive outcomes for integrated work with children has been highlighted by Oliver et al (2010), and in relation to children's services in Scotland there has been concern about the

focus on the process of collaboration, rather than outcomes achieved through partnerships (Brown and White 2006).

In relation to CSE specifically the numerous inquiries and reports looking at the issues across the UK generally refer to problems in multi-agency working and sharing information as key aspects of failing to address CSE effectively (see Jay 2013; OSCB 2016). CEOP (2011:4) stated that *"multi-agency working is essential to tackling child sexual exploitation."* However, definitions of multi-agency working, and different models of collaboration, are generally not analysed in these reports, even though there are different typologies of working together (see Payne 2000 and Atkinson et al 2002), and definitional issues remain widespread in this discourse (Larkin et al 2012). Similarly, as discussed in relation to outcomes in general (Brown and White 2006), there are few studies that can point conclusively to which models of multi-agency working are most effective in relation to CSE.

While the present study does not look specifically at multi-agency working, where it is referred to the broad model it encompasses appears to reflect that of co-ordinated delivery (Atkinson et al 2002), or Payne's (2000) pattern of multi-professional services; where professionals from different backgrounds often come together to address difficult tasks when there is a high degree of risk involved. Glasgow does not have a specific CSE multi-agency child protection team.

Methods

A case study approach was adopted to investigate the cases for this research. Case study methodology aims to capture the complexities of a single case, or in this particular situation the complexities of child sexual exploitation as the single subject of investigation. Case studies are often used in practice oriented fields when the researcher has little control over events (in this research the numbers of children included in the sample and the interventions), and when the focus is on a contemporary issue in a real-life context, where precise boundaries can be difficult to draw (Gillham 2000; Yin 1994). The competing definitions and understanding of CSE certainly have problems with boundaries, and what should, or should not, be classified as CSE. In practice there are few, or no, preconditions to what actually constitutes a 'case', (Bryman 2001), hence the focus on CSE as the 'case' for this study.

Gillham (2000) points to case studies as benefiting from adopting a more qualitative approach to the gathering of 'evidence' and moving away from a scientific quantitative methodology; in the real world of CSE experimental studies may not be suited to the complexity of the phenomena. Stake (2000) describes a collective case study as involving a number of cases to achieve a better overall understanding or theory, and the present research adopts this approach to gain a better understanding of CSE in the Glasgow context. The generalisation of the research findings is a major consideration from a wider practice and academic perspective, and for the Scottish context; further work is required to progress beyond indicative findings in one Scottish city.

Sample

Cases of CSE for inclusion had previously been identified via a multi-agency process involving Police Scotland, social work, education, health and third sector agencies. These were not suspected, or at risk cases, but children and young people who had been positively identified as victims of CSE via a robust approach involving initial identification, screening, interviews, case discussions and record checks.

The research was not designed to enhance the identification process, but to identify those factors that may have preceded entry into exploitation, explore the interventions and multi-agency involvement and, where possible, identify the exit strategies of the young people and continuing multi-agency support. At its conclusion the research aims to provide a 'template' for future recording of key information that could eventually lead to, with other local developments, the design of a 'risk assessment' tool for use in Glasgow to aid earlier intervention. The vision is not for a 'risk indicator matrix' type tool, but a standardised assessment based on those factors identified in Glasgow that may increase risk for young people. At present there are no robust 'risk assessment' tools that are supported by a clear evidence base (Brown et al 2016). As such, the present research was an exploratory piece of work requiring ongoing commitment from a number of agencies to contribute to future progress. It is also noted that any 'risk assessment' requires to sit alongside a comprehensive GIRFEC holistic assessment to encompass all the needs and risks of individual children.

Data collection

Both quantitative and qualitative methods of enquiry were included in the present research, this involved:

- Documentary analysis – national and local policy documents, together with past Glasgow specific research reports, were consulted to place the research in a contemporary and historical policy context.

- Multi-agency reports - Glasgow Child Protection Committee and various partners provided confidential reports and policy documents to further contextualise the work. These were a rich source of background information regarding individual cases and strategic responses.

- Case file analysis - comprehensive case files on nine children were examined. These were predominantly social work electronic and paper files, although access to third party reports and information was also agreed. Data from this source was recorded on a data capture form that identified risk and vulnerability factors pre and post CSE concerns.

- Focus groups - two multi-agency focus groups (total of 23 people) were held. These included professionals who had been involved with the nine cases, and others not involved, but who have extensive experience of CSE in the city. There were representatives from social work, police, health, education and various third sector organisations.

Analysis

The case files and reports were a primary source of information. For this report, and due to the small number of cases at this time, information pertaining to this data is presented as descriptive statistics. However, this limited analysis has identified that the design of a more comprehensive and targeted data capture tool is possible for future work looking at retrospective factors of known CSE victims. The information from the case files was used to inform the discussion at the focus groups, predominantly to triangulate the data, rather than to identify new themes. The focus groups were provided with a synopsis of the main points from the case files to direct the discussions – however, there was also the opportunity for the groups to discuss any other issues relating to their experiences. The focus groups were recorded and transcribed, and feedback was also provided by some of the focus group members after the meetings.

Ethics

In the present media and political climate the issue of CSE is a controversial topic and the sensitivities of the subject areas were a constant accompaniment to the research. The research was not commissioned as an inquiry into agency responses, but as a learning process to aid future practice in the city. Ethical clearance was provided by University of Stirling ethics committee and Glasgow City Council Social Work Services. Other agencies provided approval to view documents and for staff to attend focus groups, via the local Child Protection Committee. Individual participants at the focus groups also provided informed consent to participate and have the meetings recorded. Due to the sensitive nature of the subject area, both for vulnerable children and agencies, some information has been omitted from this final report and specific agencies are not referred to by organisational name. Young people were not consulted for operational and confidentiality reasons, there are ongoing police and child protection investigations. The Senior Officer for Child Protection as part of the research team followed up any ongoing practice issues.

Limitations

The inherent difficulties of work with children and young people at risk, or victims of sexual exploitation, in terms of definitions, identification and responses have been well documented. The present research is no exception in relation to methodological approaches and understanding of the issues. It is recognised that there is much disagreement about the definition of CSE and the types of behaviours that fall under the label.

The research did not seek to challenge the identification of the children and young people as victims. There was no dispute or disagreement amongst agencies and professionals that a collaborative approach had previously identified the children as victims of CSE, along with a number of other victims identified at later dates. The small number of cases for inclusion was decided upon from a resource perspective, and by the fact that at the commencement of the research sufficient time had passed to be able to comment on identification, responses and longer term outcomes. In this respect it allowed for a critical observation of the responses to CSE in Glasgow and permitted some of the earlier learning and development to be included in the

discussion. However, the small number of cases prevent any definitive statements being made about the prevalence and profile of CSE across the city. In respect of the demographics of victims and perpetrators the selection of these cases, and the pre-existing links identified, may not uncover some of the hidden diversity, of either victims or perpetrators (Fox 2016). As such it cannot be claimed the work is representative of a wider CSE profile.

Findings

Due to the small number of children identified for inclusion in the work some of the information has not been published to prevent identification.

Demographics

Eight girls and one boy were identified for inclusion in the study. Having previously been identified as victims of exploitation this gender difference does not imply that victims of CSE across Glasgow are predominantly female. Seven were of white Scottish heritage.[2] Seven of the children were known to social work services at the age of 10 years or before, indicating substantial vulnerability over the life course. Six children had been looked after and accommodated at various times, although for only one child were concerns about CSE noted in files prior to being looked after and accommodated. While this may initially indicate CSE commencing after being accommodated, careful analysis of the files and potential indicators suggest that CSE may have been a factor contributing to the behaviour of young people being accommodated, without it being formally identified.

Where perpetrators were identified in the case files, all were male and where defined by ethnicity, many, although by no means all, were described as Asian (or from particular countries). From such descriptions in case files it is not possible to be more precise about the heritage of perpetrators. The findings do indicate issues in the way ethnicity is recorded, and the limited usefulness of such generic descriptions when attempting to provide a context for perpetrators of exploitation.

Vulnerability / risk factors

Notwithstanding the contested nature of vulnerability and risk, and the issues highlighted above in identifying pathways to exploitation by the identification of specific risk elements for CSE, the present work identified numerous adversities and factors in this group of children that have been associated with sexual exploitation. These were historical and contemporary, and there was recognition that vulnerability factors had been present for some young people over a considerable period of time:

"In terms of vulnerability factors, what was clear for me was that vulnerability factors are part of a young person's chronology, part of the narrative".

Focus group members highlight the often chronic nature of the concerns, and a number of participants questioned why a child could not be kept 'safe' at an earlier period, perhaps preventing entry into exploitation. Early intervention was a recurrent

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[2] Other ethnic origin data is not included to preserve anonymity

theme, but also one that participants had no clear answers for, as many of the children had substantial multi-agency involvement from an early age and were still victimised. In this context the key question may be what type of early intervention, before CSE victimisation, is being referred to?

"Thinking of children that I've been involved with subsequent to this. One in particular known to social work since the age of 2, moved round various foster homes, in and out of various looked after children's homes as well. But clearly being exploited from the age of 9. So what is it that's meant that we haven't been able to keep this one particular child safe, with all the agencies involved?"

"I normally deal with people that are older so it's only looking back retrospectively that I've got that perspective ……… we tend not to see anybody under the age of 13 and there are few exceptions to that, so we're seeing people too late to do anything other than protect them ……..”

While these points were made specifically in relation to CSE it was acknowledged that many of the young people that professionals work with have the same vulnerability factors but do not become victims of sexual exploitation. In this respect any future work looking at the specific pathways into exploitation in Glasgow could also usefully include a comparison group of children and young people who have not been exploited to identify more clearly if there are specific combinations of factors that may increase risk, or be protective, even in adversity.

Despite some reservations, the focus groups appreciated the use of indicators and checklists, and indeed the initial identification of this group of children and young people was supported through such an approach. This group member highlighted the concern that reflection on possible vulnerability factors is not sufficiently robust to support practitioners in identifying those most at risk:

"I think we need to be much more alert to what are the different vulnerabilities, rather than this is our set of vulnerability factors and that's the same for everybody."

Also raised was the issue of those children who would have presented with no risk factors or vulnerabilities:

"So there's a small amount of children, or a proportion of children, who would not be flagging concern with anybody, do you know what I mean? Wrong place, wrong time, wrong relationship built with somebody."

For two children in the case analysis, absence of prior risk factors would have been a key issue, as they presented no concerns that may have indicated any threat. It was acknowledged these cases present with specific challenges for both identification and early intervention before exploitation commences. However, it was suggested the importance of education on healthy relationships may be one of the routes to addressing general risk.

Substance use

The relationship between alcohol and drug use, young people and sexual exploitation is far from clear. While seven children and young people were identified as having problematic substance use at the time of the file reading, these concerns were only apparent for three young people prior to the sexual exploitation commencing. Nearly two thirds of the young people having no concerns prior to being exploited:

> *"I think that it's quite interesting the alcohol and drugs one, isn't it? Because you do see kids going into residential care, or who are going to CSA* [agencies]*, who have not used before. Actually it is a product, or a symptom of the exploitation, beginning to use alcohol and drugs and that almost escalates, it's not that it's been a pre-existing thing."*

Focus group discussion on this issue centred around the possibility that substance misuse, predominantly alcohol, while being linked to sexual exploitation, may be more related to the fact that it is used as a form of "*self-medication as well*" to deal with the effects of exploitation and trauma, and / or to cope with the actual exploitation at the time.

While alcohol / drugs may be methods of ensuring compliance by the perpetrators and to facilitate abuse (Brown et al 2016), it is not apparent from the Glasgow cases that substance use was a risk factor that increased vulnerability prior to exploitation. This raises the question, for this group at least, to what extent substance use was present prior to becoming a victim, used as self-medication or being provided by perpetrators to facilitate abuse. While this is a particularly controversial and complex area because of the prominence given to substance use as a risk / vulnerability indicator, more work is required to explore if substance use is a valid and reliable vulnerability or risk factor prior to the exploitation commencing. In a previous Glasgow report alcohol and drugs were as prominent an issue for children and young people who were not exploited, as for those who were (Rigby and Murie 2013). This again highlights the need for comparison groups in any future work.

Family factors

In relation to substance use however, it was apparent that most of the children (7/9) had parents who were identified as problematic substance users. It would appear that parents with substance use issues may have been a better indicator of future child sexual exploitation for this group, rather than the substance use of the children themselves. This comment from a focus group member highlights the complexity of the contribution of substance use, and also brings to the fore the role that familial experiences play in increasing vulnerability:

> *"I think what's apparent over the years is the number of children who have maybe grown up in households where alcohol has been a feature. It's not necessarily that they've been doing the drinking, but it's a feature in terms of what's acceptable, the norm, do you know what I mean? So when somebody else plies them with alcohol it's the next step, it's not necessarily a chosen path but it's just something...it's not unusual for them."*

There were other family factors apparent for a number of children that may have impacted on their childhood experiences; although the relationship with CSE is not known. Three children had experienced parental bereavement and three had parents with substantial mental health problems. Five children were from families where aggression and violence were prevalent and four from families who had separated when the children were young. While these factors were present, much more detailed analysis of a larger sample would be required to explore any clear relationship with CSE. It is likely that any relationship may have to look at the combination of factors and individual circumstances, rather than focus on the factors themselves. However, in terms of the support that parents / carers can provide to children and young people in respect of exiting CSE (discussed later) it may be that some of these family factors impact on the support provided, rather than being a risk factor in themselves.

Past abuse & neglect

Neglect was apparent in eight of the case files as a past, and sometimes present, adverse issue, although for one of these this was a retrospective concern and had not been a referral to social work and multi-agency input prior to exploitation. Seven of the young people who had been known to social work services at the age of 10 or before all had clear indicators of neglect; a result of a number of factors that necessitated the referrals, including parental substance use and domestic violence. While the relationship between poverty / inequalities and neglect has been the focus of recent work (Burgess et al 2014), any links to risk of exploitation are more circumspect as the prevailing discourse is any child is at risk (Beckett 2011; NSPCC undated; Scottish Government 2016b). Data on poverty / inequality was not available for this group of children and young people.

Past sexual abuse was apparent for four of the children and physical abuse for six. Four children had multiple abuse recorded in their case files. While these issues were present in the histories, any linear and clear pathway from past abuse through to CSE also remains elusive; previous research in Glasgow identified these risk factors present in other children with different adverse outcomes (Fuller et al 2012). Brown et al (2016) suggest there is insufficient evidence to make any definitive statements on such pathways; other reports indicate past abuse is a good indicator of future risk (Beckett 2011; Berelowitz et al 2012).

Missing

Despite the high incidence of past abuse, only two case files had recorded missing and running away as concerns prior to sexual exploitation commencing. Again, while definitive conclusions cannot be drawn from this small scale exploratory study, the relationship between going missing may need to be looked at again in terms of it being a risk factor prior to exploitation. In the Rigby and Murie (2013) study almost half of the young people who were not sexually exploited had also gone missing from local authority care.

Complexity of vulnerability

The existence of numerous vulnerability and risk factors over the life course of the children and young people highlights the complexities of identifying those children who might be most at risk of CSE. There is a complex relationship between a range of factors that when combined may lead to increased risk (Brown et al 2016); it is perhaps this combination that needs to be examined further when looking at the life course vulnerabilities for children and young people.

At present the combination of risk factors that may increase vulnerability to sexual exploitation, rather than a general notion of 'vulnerability' remains contested (Brown et al 2016). Working with additional identified cases of CSE in Glasgow and developing a more robust, retrospective, data collection tool, and also including a control group, may begin to improve early identification – one of the key longer term aims of the present research. However, the present study does suggest that a focus on the label of CSE may not be helpful in the context of the possibility of multiple adverse outcomes; and it may serve to hide the complexities of children's exploitative and abusive experiences.

Identification and awareness raising

The case file analysis clearly identified improvement in practice post 2011/12 in relation to the language used in reports and case notes, suggesting there has been an increase in awareness of CSE and the related indicators. The consensus of the focus groups was that awareness raising has been good, but more is required around interventions and recovery as workers are still struggling with those aspects of the work. While there was agreement there had been a 'sea change' in practice, how this related to positive outcomes for children and young people was viewed as more problematic.

YouGov (2013) highlighted the disparity in awareness and understanding amongst professional groups as being crucial to progressing practice. An interesting point raised in one of the focus groups was that although training and awareness raising was improving across the city, this did not necessarily relate to improvement in practice, and advances in good practice were not evident until workers had actually worked with a number of victims of CSE. This is an issue requiring further exploration as while awareness raising and training are key components of local and national strategies, it is not entirely clear how the effectiveness of this process will / can be measured, and what additional steps are required to improve practice and protect children:

> *"Some workers who have been actively involved in some of the investigations get it and they get it pretty quickly, and they get onto it pretty quickly. And most workers across the city in terms of social work haven't actually dealt with it. .... with the best will in the world, no matter how much training and information is given, until you're actually working with it, that's when you really learn that. But I still think there's a huge amount of work in terms of training, delivery, helping people identify...the workers need to identify it in the first place."*

One approach suggested as an interim measure is to promote the appointment of 'locality champions' with specific understanding, knowledge and experience of CSE, to work in each geographical areas and support staff until experience becomes more widespread.

Multi-agency working

"And there's been times when we've been asked to provide intensive support when other intensive packages of support are already in place. And I'm thinking, we are absolutely suffocating this young person and it's not helpful."

Numerous official enquiries, inspections and serious case reviews over the last few years (see Jay 2013; Bedford 2015), have highlighted the failures of agencies to work together and share information. The present work identified comprehensive collaboration, both prior to identification of CSE when other issues were present, and post CSE identification. The statutory and third sectors have worked well together in Glasgow and the case files indicate numerous third sector support for children and young people alongside social work, police, health and education services. However, there were a number of issues raised that question some aspects of multi-agency working, and its ability to be a panacea due to the complex aetiology of CSE.

Post identification multi-agency involvement was apparent in all the case files and it was not unusual to have well over a dozen agencies involved. Information sharing was also apparent in all cases, with reasonably comprehensive records of concerns and planning. However, it was also apparent that with the number of agencies involved it was not always clear who was doing what, and if indeed they were having much success as children and young people often chose not to engage, and services struggled to engage individuals.

The focus groups explored this issue further and a number of respondents commented on the *'madness'* of having multiple agencies present at meetings when it was often clear that children and young people were not engaging, and in many instances denying they were being exploited. There was consensus that often there are too many agencies involved:

"I worked with a young person...........and she had 8 or 9 different agencies around about her.... There has been no impact on her having 8 or 9 different agencies around, apart from frustrations from probably myself through information not being shared properly, different pieces of work being done with her, all bitty, she's getting a message from here and a message from here. It's not worked."

In such circumstances multi-agency child plans as guided by the policy and guidance are evident, but they may not be effective where children and young people are unable to acknowledge they are being exploited, or where they are being exploited and do not want to engage with agencies on these issues (see below).

"One of the first things I learned was that if a kid has lots of vulnerability factors and lots of needs you would go to a meeting and there were 7 or 8 or 9; and I remember one

day there were 16 people in the room – the kid wasn't there. And this had been going on for years and years and years, and I kind of lost the plot a wee bit and said for God's sake! And it's all about what my agency does, and what my remit is, and how I got funded and all that kind of stuff."

Linked to the number of agencies involved the focus groups also expressed concerns that at times there is confusion regarding roles, leading, and/or contributing, to a lack of focus on the child at the centre. It was acknowledged that, if appropriate, the number of agencies could be reduced, although this was tempered by a concern that while multi-agency working is not only a policy imperative, its absence is also a problem identified in the numerous reports and enquiries.

As the risk increases it may not be the solution to increase the number of agencies. It was proposed by some participants that adaptable services, in terms of access and engagement, may be the way forward with an 'open door' policy and quick access when a young person decides they are able and willing to engage. It was suggested that chairs of case conferences (Assistant Service Managers) take a more active approach in cutting through this and refining and reducing the number of professionals to a small core group directly involved and valued by a young person.

While this issue requires to be explored further, there is little evidence from the case files, or agreement from professionals, that increasing the numbers of agencies involved necessarily leads to better outcomes for children and young people. A more nuanced approach to collaboration is perhaps required that avoids *"Too many people trying to do too many different things and actually the kid in the middle of it is lost."*

Communication and the 'tipping point'

While the case file analysis, and focus group discussions generally identified comprehensive multi-agency working following identification of CSE, there remained questions about how communication and sharing of information could be improved, especially prior to initial identification. There were some divergent views about communication, although the case file analysis indicates that post identification communication was good about CSE concerns:

"I think we've got a really good communication……. I think we've got really good communication with outside; you know, that's been for years, really good communication."

"It's about the sharing of information and intelligence between the different agencies – we were rubbish at it then, we're rubbish at it now and the chances are we'll be rubbish at it forever to come because there are just such boundaries between the police, social work, health, education…they're almost unbreakable it would seem."

Reconciling such divergent views may be difficult.

Prior to identification there were concerns specifically relating to the questions - at what point, when different agencies held specific information which of itself may not

be sufficient to raise concerns, were questions asked? At what point should, or would, these concerns be raised in a multi-agency forum? When is the 'tipping point' reached when concerns are raised?

> *"But there's got to be a tipping point for all of us. SW have got lots of information, police have got lots of information, the children's units sort of a barrage of information. At what point does somebody say…………we're worried?"*

> *"…when do they put their hand up and say I think we should actually get together?'*

The tipping point is a pertinent consideration in terms of identification of CSE and an issue that has been identified previously in Glasgow. The Rigby and Murie (2013) report found that while there were indicators of sexual exploitation these were not always interpreted as such, also raising questions about the nature of evidence used by practitioners (returned to later). What is the tipping point is central to the issues of not only early identification and intervention, but also to what are considered indicators of sexual exploitation and / or vulnerability factors. Without robust and reliable indicators for agencies to make these decisions how will professionals and agencies know when the tipping point is reached?

There was discussion in the focus groups about chronologies as an important aspect of identification that may inform decision making, and identify when the tipping point is reached:

> *"The chronologies I think are really important. For instance, one young person I looked at yesterday, she is 16 and there hasn't been a chronology done, …….. so the longer you look back, there have been times that, you know, things have been mentioned about sexualised behaviour; maybe to a teacher, or to a social worker, or to an auntie and there was no further action done on any of it."*

Chronologies have been identified as being invaluable as a record of a child's development (Care Inspectorate 2017), and throughout ongoing CSE investigations in Glasgow there has been a commitment to writing chronologies to track a child's pathway. However, these have often been completed retrospectively after the identification of CSE. Contemporaneous single agency chronologies may better support decisions about the tipping point.

The named person was identified by some participants as the person to make decisions regarding tipping points and multi-agency involvement. Others, thought this was not the purpose of the named person and there was little consensus about how a named person could overcome some of the issues discussed in relation to CSE. It was also suggested the named person may be in a good positon to identify which agencies are best placed to work with a child, although again there was also comment this is probably not the envisaged role of the named person, who might not even have a good relationship with the child to make that decision. Overall, there were a number of views expressed in relation to the potential role of the named person in relation to CSE, a debate that is likely to continue.

Relationships

> *"The pull of the perpetrator was huge for her, it was the most important relationship in her life and it was only when actually he was arrested and incarcerated and then deported that the link was broken."*

Aligned to the focus group debates about the shortcomings of the present multi-agency milieu around some of the children and young people, there was a consensus about the importance of key relationships to facilitate disclosure, ongoing engagement and exit from exploitation. However, as the comment above illustrates perpetrators may be the most important relationship for the young person, creating ever more complex challenges. If the young people view the relationship with the perpetrator as *"the most exciting days of my life…….I couldn't have been happier. …. It was wonderful." (Billings 2015)* the challenges for professionals in developing good relationships and supporting change cannot be underestimated.

In terms of professionals being the main relationship there was some agreement that residential services may be key to this for children who are looked after and accommodated; but with concern noted that multiple placements and movements can erode a young person's ability to develop relationships with staff:

> *"I think a risk factor is sometimes when you've got young people who have had multiple placements. So they come to us and they've had maybe six prior placements, ………. so that if there are areas of concern sometimes the young people are reluctant to share that with us because they've not built up that trust and it's 'when's my next move?' So it's quite difficult to build that relationship up, for that young person to trust you talk about concerns they might have. So I really do believe that a risk factor could be children who have been in multiple placements ………. so the relationship's not there, so it can take quite a lot of time to build that up for kids."*

Frequent changes of professional were also identified as factors that may hinder progress:

> *"They don't trust anybody, you can see it, it's like a movement, one minute they're there, they're ready. We were at cases where we're like, yup, she's about to tell us everything – social worker changes and then that's it. We're right back to square one and we have to start again."*

The aspect of trust was a common theme in the group discussions, and while the importance of relationship based practice is clearly identified (see Ruch et al 2010), the element of trust is a key factor that may facilitate discussion of behaviour and risky situations (Lefevre et al 2017). As discussed below this may be especially important when issues relating to the 'right questions' and 'disclosure' are highlighted.

Despite the importance of stability and good relationships the case file data evidenced that for some young people good relationships are still not sufficient to provide an exit strategy from exploitation, reflecting the complexities and uncertainty of child protection work (Munro 2011). Focus group participants were particularly concerned in situations where children had engaged well with services, but the exploitation had

also continued during and beyond this period. These conditions were particularly frustrating for professionals who thought they had good relationships with children and young people, but knew they were returning to exploitative circumstances.

The 'right' questions - *'all that stuff that was going on'*

"That stuff – they used that word. …… 'You know all that stuff', and I'll say, 'No I really don't know that stuff because you didn't say it.' We all knew but, you know, it was unspoken, we all knew what the stuff was but now they recognise it."

The above participant articulated the frustrations of professionals when some time later young people acknowledge their past experiences. But, interestingly the worker was waiting for the young person to *'say it'*. While recognising that the ability of professionals to ask the right questions, and feel confident in doing so, was crucial in making progress, there was concern that workers were sometimes reluctant to ask / explore issues of exploitation and abuse.

"…….. I think sometimes some people are scared of having that conversation and I think that's part of the issue. Because, having worked with young people for a long time, they said 'if somebody had just asked me I would have told them, but nobody asked me, nobody ever asked me.' That's more than one young person has said that and I think we need to be mindful. I'm not saying it can be done at every opportunity but I think it's something that as social workers we need to be mindful of."

It is problematic if professionals are not able to ask the right question in terms of sexual exploitation, but it is necessary to have a good and trusting working relationship and to be sensitive in questioning (Coy et al 2017; Lefevre et al 2017), if it is expected that children are to engage. While these issues may be inextricably linked, even then progress may be difficult when children and young people, for whatever reason, may not be able to acknowledge, or recognise, abuse, even if asked:

"I mean you can ask questions but her willingness to say 'yes' wasn't there so although you have the indicators and the concerns, and you progress and you talk to agencies, she wasn't at that point able to…"[disclose]

Evidence and language

The 'right question' also relates to what professionals and agencies consider to be evidence of exploitation and the language that surrounds it. If professionals are concerned about exploitation (presence of indicators / behaviours) and in such circumstances children and young people are not able to disclose, or are talking about 'stuff', it is important that professionals are able to place a 'protective framework' around individuals, whether young people believe the behaviour to be consensual or not.

"But she wasn't ready to do that at that time and that's really important for our practice isn't it? It doesn't stop us putting a framework around her that is protective. But actually

kids are going to tell…that's what we know about sexual abuse isn't it? Kids are going to tell when they're ready to tell. So, brilliantly, she was able to do it later."

However, the nature of this framework may be difficult to discern at times, especially in the absence of 'evidence'. In this complex, and contested area, a key consideration may be that *"exploitation is contextually relative, particularly from the perspective of the victim"* (UNODC 2012: 76). In such circumstances is it appropriate to wait for a disclosure or 'hard' evidence of exploitation before acting? Controversially, there have been strong arguments for discounting the views of victims in determining whether they have in fact been exploited, suggesting that instead exploitation should be assessed and identified on the basis of the benefit to the perpetrator(s) (UNODC 2012). While this approach is located in the trafficking discourse its sentiments coalesce with the difficulties identified in working with CSE in Scotland, the issues of children and young people not viewing themselves as exploited, or too scared to 'disclose'

A number of participants were able to share examples where they believed they had identified indicators of CSE, but children and young people were adamant they were not being exploited.

"We've had a young person recently, a very articulate young person, who really just talked about her life and named every single risk factor, in my book, for child sexual exploitation. But getting her to understand the risk………. because she didn't see anything wrong with it, she just didn't see anything wrong with it …….. she cannot act to keep herself safe because she doesn't want to."

"The story was changed at the last minute, when you're ready to give an actual statement to police it changed; 'no it was my boyfriend, it was consensual' - end of story!"

Other responses indicated that for many professionals their *'capacity to do things'* is often compromised when children do not disclose, or recognise exploitation. Not only did participants find this *"a hugely frustrating thing"*, they also voiced anxieties about being able to intervene effectively when young people did not recognise, or acknowledge, exploitation.

"They've come, we've had to chase them along, but when we've finally got them they have said enough to get through and absolutely denied any of the other concerns, and kept up with that for months. Like, nine months, ten months down the road of working with them and building up trust they are still like 'not going there, not going there".

An example was provided at a focus group where there had been a disclosure of rape by multiple males at a party flat and then retraction of the allegation at the point of joint interview. The case file analysis also identified another case where a young person had been held against her will, contacted her key worker when she was raped, but later retracted the statement. Professionals identified such occurrences as exasperating in terms of apprehending perpetrators, but also difficult emotionally and professionally as they were convinced the young people had been abused and

exploited, but young people were reluctant to acknowledge this – either because of continued threats, or other means of control.

There are clear indications from the case files and group discussions that the nature of what may be considered 'evidence' of CSE is changing, although it is far from being resolved, as what constitutes evidence continues to challenge practitioners, some of whom remain concerned about what stage suspicions, or allegations, can be progressed, when do they have the '*legal capacity to do things*'?

> *"There's repeated allegations or suspicion about sexual abuse through schools or through sexually inappropriate behaviour often among peer groups or friends or wee ones. And, I suppose, evidentially, or in terms of to progress that with an investigation ....it's often not as straightforward as you might think."*

A number of case notes over the years also indicated that failure to make a disclosure, or engage, had influenced decisions, for example:

> *"Assessment concluded due to **** absconding and placing herself at extreme risk in the community. It was agreed that ****'s lack of engagement has concluded the assessment and it was agreed she needed secure accommodation to keep her safe"* [case note].

Another case record contained a statement that an earlier interview had *"…provided nothing of any evidential value relating to offence or perpetrators"* [case note], despite the case notes clearly recording concerns around a number of key indicators. Similarly, another note indicated *"…no disclosure so police can't take action".* However, it was apparent that from about 2012 recording and the professional language in case files started to change. Language referring to a 14 year old girl who *"has been showing an interest in the sex trade"* and was *"curious of prostitution"* (case notes from 2010) and another stating the young person *"does still have a history of being involved in prostitution"* were absent in more recent records.

Professionals are beginning to explore different ways of recording their concerns, without resorting to pejorative language about the behaviour of the children, or focussing on 'no evidence' (as in no disclosure). However, the nature of, and what constitutes 'evidence' of, exploitation remains a complex practical and conceptual issue for practitioners, and not one that can be addressed easily if there is to be a continued focus on prosecutions. Additionally in respect of the above issues of the 'tipping point' and difficulties with relationships; what is 'evidence' in determining the sexual exploitation of children becomes not merely a philosophical question, but one that will impact in all areas of identification, support; conviction; continued exploitation; belief and children's agency and choices.

Models of exploitation

Barnardo's (2012) identified a number of possible models that may begin to highlight various forms of exploitation. These include, older boyfriend / girlfriend; trafficking and moving children around; loose networks; organised gangs; peer abuse and using the internet and social media to exploit. However, it has been suggested that such simple conceptualisations may lead to focussing too much on a particular model or type of

exploitation and abuse, with stereotypes of indicators, populations and / or perpetrators (Brown et al 2016).

Identifying single models of exploitation was difficult for this group as children and young people's experiences often encompassed more than one of the models. The boyfriend / girlfriend model was most visible at initial recruitment, but this was often linked with the movement of victims to different locations and multiple perpetrators. Four of the children and young people also exhibited behaviours suggesting they were also involved in the recruitment of other young people to exploitation. Whether this was to protect themselves from further abuses, protect themselves from violence or as perpetrators of sexual violence was unclear.

The behaviour of young people and perpetrators indicates that while conceptually useful as an overview of the many different forms CSE can take, models of exploitation may overlook the multiple exploitative situations children and young people are subjected to. It is likely there is no single model / explanation of sexual exploitation that can assist practitioners in contextualising assessments and intervention; reflecting the complexities of the issue and the often varied definitions contained in agency guidance, and reiterating the suggestion various models can operate simultaneously (Melrose 2013). However, one of the models that is receiving increased attention is trafficking, with a recognition that England and Wales have identified this more clearly than Scotland:

> *"We haven't collectively been that good at trying to compare ourselves to how they use trafficking legislation down south in terms of the NRM and stuff like that – national referral mechanism. So our practice hasn't been that good and we haven't had that many charges where we've implemented trafficking legislation."*

A particular focus on trafficking may be useful because of the possibility of prosecution under the new Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015 not being related to the perceived consent of victims. In terms of the commonly accepted definition of trafficking – ie movement for the purpose of exploitation – there were clear indications from case files that three of the young people had been moved around Scotland / UK to be exploited. For another four young people persistently missing and being away overnight were features of their lives. Taking into account the fact that the international and national definitions of trafficking also include, recruitment, harbouring, receipt with intent to exploit, the apparent organised nature and extended timeframes of the exploitation, and multiple perpetrators involved, indicates that two thirds of the children may have met the definition of being trafficked for sexual exploitation. An unpublished Glasgow CPC (Murie et al 2015) report previously identified that 55% of children identified as victims of CSE in the city met the international definition of trafficking.

The focus group discussions confirmed that professionals were becoming more aware of the issue of trafficking for the purpose of exploitation:

> *"I think being moved across the city too, and I know it's not different countries, different cities but moved across the city, you know, from Govanhill to the Red Road flats to*

whatever. It's the same in terms of the young peoples' experience of exploitation and abuse of power."

Identification of child sexual exploitation as trafficking has been an underutilised approach in Scotland. A number of reports from Glasgow have now questioned the binary categorisation and this requires further investigation and work to identify the cross over. It is now also clear that professionals are more alert to the similarities and understanding that trafficking may not solely be a cross border issue.

Ethnicity and community engagement

Despite evidence that perpetrators and victims are ethnically diverse (Berelowitz 2013), the ethnicity of perpetrators has often made the media headlines in relation to recent reports and enquiries (see Boyd 2015; Meyer 2016), and it is often the media that plays a substantial role in raising public awareness of CSE (YouGov 2013). Fox (2016) also identified that children from the BME community feature regularly amongst hidden victims of CSE.

The case file analysis in the present research identified that seven of the nine children were white UK heritage[3]; while there were a number of BME perpetrators identified it was also clear that amongst the multiple abusers there were also white UK offenders. It was suggested in the focus group discussion that the predominance of BME perpetrators in the study may be a result of the links that had been previously identified between the cases. In this respect the relatively high number of BME perpetrators may not be representative of other CSE cases in Glasgow.

The focus groups raised concern about the potential, and actuality, of exploitation amongst non UK children and children from minority ethnic communities in Glasgow. Literature and reports have been criticised for a focus on young white women, with victims presented as a homogenous group (see Ward and Patel 2006; Sharp 2013). Indeed, it has been argued that victims of CSE are often categorised by their ethnic origins, non UK children are victims of 'trafficking', while UK children are victims of 'sexual exploitation' (Ward and Patel 2006). Arguably, this drive to categorise victims of exploitation into distinct groups is a result of media and political agendas to overlook the complexities of abuse and exploitation and address the problems through *"realisable and singular policy goals"* (Arocha 2013: 142).

There were particular concerns raised about the numbers of children 'coming and going' from school and teachers especially being unclear about what was happening. Participants spoke about cases of sexual exploitation emerging following such movement and professionals struggling to engage with the issues, with concern there may be a mistrust of authorities and support agencies amongst some communities, such that CSE may be *"hidden and within certain communities or cultures."* While care is needed to avoid 'blaming' certain communities, Gohir (2013) also suggests there may be specific vulnerabilities related to culture creating barriers to disclosure and reporting. Engagement with all communities is identified as crucial if exploitation is to be addressed (Hynes 2013); although this participant articulated a number of barriers perceived to be present:

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[3] Specific ethnic origin of the two other children has been withheld.

"There's the language barriers, there's the cultural expectations within that community, there's suspicions of services as well that all adds to the mix."

Overall, while care is required to ensure certain communities are not targeted, the focus group discussion clearly pointed to professional concerns about communities that protective services have difficulty engaging with, and which have been identified with the possibility of hidden victims (Fox 2016). While the case file analysis did not identify this as a specific issue, perhaps a result of the small numbers, the focus groups indicated this as "*a real issue for Glasgow.…….. something we need to be really aware of in terms of that being an emerging issue that we've probably not captured yet."* It is an areas that requires further investigation to identify any particular issues.

Interventions and outcomes

The case files indicated multiple types of intervention at different life stages for the children and young people. However, both case file analysis and focus group discussions often identified a lack of clarity in relation to the types of intervention employed, in what circumstances and with what results. As risk and concern increased the numbers of agencies also increased, but often with a lack of clear planning about who was doing what, when and why (see also Rigby and Murie 2013). There was also some agreement in the focus groups that agencies (and multi-agency meetings) should plan better and "*stop throwing services"* at young people, especially as this at times has little, or no measurable impact on reducing risk.

There was some agreement between focus group members, and also reflected clearly in the case files, that where the young person had less contact with services previously, less chaotic lifestyles and supportive parents / carers, they exited exploitative situations much faster:

"There's a continuum of involvement isn't there, and grades of involvement in child sexual exploitation and so for these kids, some of them were able to exit really well to seek help, to take help and move out of not continuing to be sexually exploited and their life's good…….So it's interesting to look at what worked with those young people and the ones who have been most successful in exiting have been the kids with the least damaged backgrounds, so it's not surprising really. The most supportive parents and they've got the help at the right time, so they've not had to wait for a service. They got a service, their parents got a service at the same time"

This focus on the wider support networks, beyond professional interventions, does appear to be important for exiting exploitation for young people and is one that should be considered further, rather than increasing numbers of services and multi-agency involvement if risk increases. In work with offenders a 'desistance paradigm' focuses on the processes of change, self-narratives and available support networks for people in facilitating change rather than intervention resting solely with the 'professional' (McNeil 2006; Farrall and Maruna 2004). Similar considerations may be useful for CSE, especially when children and young people have their own narrative about the situation.

"I do think we do need to be careful, though, in our action planning around CSE ……sometimes it reads as if the young person is a passive recipient of the information whereas, actually, it is so dependent on the young person buying into it.….I don't think they're given enough of a central role in the planning."

Four young people had progressed into serious and violent offending behaviour and for these young people involved in the criminal justice system it was apparent that interventions (and assessments and reports) quickly moved to a focus on the offending behaviour, rather than victimisation. This is a particularly controversial and complex area; while their behaviour cannot be ignored in terms of the risk they present to others, their victimisation also requires continued support. Such a dichotomous approach raises questions about young women especially being viewed as victims or risky (Rigby 2011), and challenges services to address their needs as both victims and perpetrators.

To a large extent the multi-agency involvement and multiple interventions make it difficult to identify clear links between intervention and positive outcomes and recovery. The case file analysis and the discussion in the focus groups identified interventions including residential and secure care, counselling and trauma therapy and groupwork, but with insufficient detail to provide indications what may work best for the young people, when. This opaqueness around interventions perhaps reflects a lack of clarity about 'what works' with young people who have been sexually exploited. Perhaps more accurately it reflects what the focus groups identified - that defining effective interventions and success is in itself problematic for this group of children and young people.

Overall, while it has been possible to identify some of the longer-term situations and life circumstances, attributing these outcomes solely to experiences of sexual exploitation, or specific interventions, is difficult. The focus groups shared concerns and frustrations in respect of outcome indicators that are presently used by services as indicators of 'success':

"They measure good outcomes by, you know, have they got a job, have they got a house when actually good outcomes is so much…….. engaging with services. So they might have experiences, significant trauma, but never been in a position to address any of that. So see, if a young person is engaging with ******** team or doing some work ……then that's a really good outcome."

There was consensus that a simple focus on 'outcome indicators' as identified via GIRFEC and policy documents is problematic when, as the case file reading identified, a number of young people had apparently far from 'positive' outcomes, as measured via these parameters. A blunt assessment by one of the focus group participants suggested that for some of the young people a good outcome is if *"they're still alive";* others suggested maintaining positive relationships, being able to have a positive attachment to somebody, remaining involved with services a few years later and maintaining contact are all good 'outcomes', often not represented as such. Most of the young people remained in contact with services at the time of the file reading – a good outcome?

In relation to CSE specifically the files and reports identified that for at least four of the young people their circumstances indicated possible continuing exploitation and risk factors remaining. For six of the young people outcomes were far from positive in terms of problematic substance use and involvement with the criminal justice system. As indicated, for those young people who had early childhood negative experiences, and substantial contact with agencies over the lifespan, there appeared to be more difficulty in exiting exploitative situations or relationships, and engaging with support services to deal with the trauma of their experiences. Conversely, those who had not experienced the same early childhood trauma and experiences were better able to seek and receive help, exit from CSE and recover from their abusive experiences.

Overall, the difficulty in measuring interventions and achieving success was clearly related by professionals to recognition that in CSE they are likely to be working with young people with multiple problems. In such circumstances, and often with denial about exploitation, it was suggested that professionals may need to focus on the most pressing issue:

"To be pretty clear as well about there's no way that you're going to solve all of those problems in one go. So you've got the CSE, sexual health, mental health, addiction services – what one are we trying to sort right now? Because one blinds the other and there's a cross between all of them. So, right, what are we doing just now?"

"I think one thing we have done wrong is to do everything at the one time – let's get absolutely everybody in at the one time and we'll sort everything at the same time……Doesn't work…………That's too much."

Notwithstanding the many issues identified with specific interventions and outcomes there were a couple of areas that prompted much focus group discussion. Education and community engagement came to the fore as examples of what the groups considered to be positive directions in Glasgow regarding interventions. In terms of beginning the process of engagement with the migrant population specifically, the importance of education as a protective factor was highlighted.

Discussion about disruption and prosecution as 'interventions' were prominent in the focus groups. Some participants felt there has been pressure on young people to disclose and that prosecution of perpetrators has been viewed as paramount. However, it was also highlighted that if perpetrators are abusing many children and young people it is important from a public protection and policing perspective to secure convictions. Breaking the link between the young person and perpetrator was also viewed as paramount for exiting exploitation, and may also be a key moment in disclosures being made, although there was also recognition this is never a straightforward process.

To better identify 'what works' and build on the good practice developing it is important that interventions and work undertaken is recorded more clearly. At the moment this recording is inconsistent, preventing a clearer picture emerging. Additionally, and a point that applies across Scotland, there has been little, or no, evaluation of what works (Fotopoulou 2016).

Discussion

This initial exploration of known CSE cases in Glasgow indicates that pathways to sexual exploitation are numerous and varied, even for this small group of children. Clearly, the sample size is too small to make any definitive statements, but as a baseline process to identify key practice issues and inform potential 'risk assessments' this work has raised a number of questions in relation to the widely accepted approach to identification and intervention. While initial identification remains problematic, services failing to identify CSE and offer support to the nine young people was not evident (although as this was a report looking at responses to identified cases of CSE it may not be possible to extrapolate this statement to all young people who have been victimised and not identified).

Once identified, there is a well-established multi-agency response, although due to the complexities of CSE, circumstances of the young people, and often multiple adverse events, positive outcomes are not always achievable and some children and young people remain at risk, despite the attention of services. In this respect the conclusions of Munro (2011:3) are pertinent in that what is required *"is for all to have realistic expectations of how well professionals can protect children and young people. The work involves uncertainty"*. However, this challenge and uncertainty should not preclude continued improvements in protecting children and young people and in this respect key emergent findings indicate:

- There is evidence of growing awareness and confidence in responding to CSE in the city, tempered with recognition that there remain challenges in addressing such a complex issue.

- Despite evidence of good multi-agency working, there is recognition of its limitations when too many agencies may be involved.

- Long term outcomes for victims of CSE are not all positive despite substantial multi-agency involvement; those most likely to seek support and exit exploitation, are those with less adverse histories.

- Indicators and risk factors commonly used in existing matrixes are also indicators for many other types of adverse outcomes – therefore risk and vulnerability to CSE is not easy to identify.

- Varying complex pathways into sexual exploitation, and other negative outcomes, indicate the need for effective interventions at as early a point as possible in the lives of children and young people experiencing adverse life circumstances. These should not just focus on the risk of CSE, but look at a child's overall 'vulnerability' and risk of harm.

Identification

Initial identification remains problematic because of often limited awareness amongst, and experience of, practitioners, related also to the absence of robust, evidence based indicators. Numerous reports have identified risk and vulnerability factors (see Beckett 2011; Berelowitz 2013), although the present findings clearly indicate that the

'accepted' vulnerability factors and indicators of CSE need to be examined more closely; they were not readily identified amongst the children and young people prior to sexual exploitation commencing. Similar concerns have been raised locally (Rigby and Murie 2013), and questions about the reliability of these factors have also been raised UK wide (Brown et al 2016), such that perceived wisdom about CSE, indicators and interventions requires much more robust analysis. There are key questions regarding the existing CSE matrixes and indicators and whether they may be problematic in identifying and differentiating between those who have been exploited and those who may be at risk, and indeed those young people who are just 'vulnerable' however that may be described. This latter point is important because despite the challenging life histories for many of these young people their circumstances do not appear to be fundamentally different to many other looked after young people.

At the moment risk assessment tools and checklists are not based on a strong evidence base, and may best be used to raise awareness and support decision making (Brown et al 2016), rather than being a definitive confirmation of exploitation or risk. They may not be overly supportive for practitioners in identifying children early, nor framing responses and interventions. Using the present research in Glasgow as a baseline it is possible to commence the development of a more robust approach, not least as the national UK study by Brown et al (2016) indicated that the methods previously employed in the city present a promising way forward in the search for increased understanding. There is more work to be undertaken if valid and reliable indicators are to be identified that could form the basis of a robust risk assessment to support earlier identification.

Young people

The backgrounds and circumstances of the children and young people identified are complex and challenging, precluding at this time any identification of common absolute pathways or trajectories to victimisation through sexual exploitation. With such chaotic and adverse life circumstances, assessing (even more so predicting) victimisation through sexual exploitation is problematic and professionals working with young people recognise these factors as potentially contributory to other adverse life events. Indeed, it may be more beneficial to consider the overall potential for abuse and exploitation of vulnerable children and young people, rather than focussing on a particular label, or category of exploitation.

There are also indications that it is the characteristics and background circumstances of the young people that have an impact on 'what works', or at least their ability to exit exploitation. Family and other supports also play a key role in helping young people to positive outcomes. This links to the ecological model taking account of all the factors that impact on risk and protection (Hollomotz 2009), and it may be that similar to the broad 'desistance' literature in criminal justice work other factors beyond professional intervention and personal attributes are as important in supporting positive outcomes.

In Glasgow, for a number of years, CSE has been clearly incorporated into the broader child protection / vulnerable young person framework. While addressing CSE through a child protection lens has been questioned (Pearce 2006), the present research indicates that focussing on CSE as a distinct issue may overlook other important aspects of a child's life and pathway into exploitation. Labelling a young person as a

victim of CSE may not encompass the totality of their experiences, and it certainly should not define them; although it is important to identify how they have been abused to minimise future risk.

What is apparent is that interventions most likely to be effective (however effectiveness is defined) are those where young people are involved in some of the decisions (Warrington 2013). The crucial decision for the young person may be 'who do I want to work with me?' While children and young people were not involved in the present study, for reasons of confidentiality and due process; their involvement is central to ongoing developments. How best to hear their views and ultimately for services to engage with them requires continued attention.

Interventions and outcomes

While it is not possible to identify definitively 'what works' in Glasgow from such a small scale study the present analysis has identified progress in responses post identification. There is evidence of good multi-agency working and numerous methods of intervention, although it is rarely clear which are most likely to make a difference, and longer term outcomes for some of the young people were not positive. After initial identification of concerns the complexities of many young people's lives, following years of neglect and abuse, made it difficult for services to maintain consistent contact and engage young people. It is important to focus on why services cannot connect, rather than why young people do not engage.

Flexibility of services and identification of key relationships for young people may be beneficial in this respect. While there has been substantial focus on multi-agency working and teams (see PACE 2017), this may be a simplistic solution to an extremely complex social and individual problem. Both the case files and the discussions in the focus groups, suggested that at times the multi-agency approach only served to further alienate children and young people with upwards of 12-15 professionals and agencies often 'involved'. Careful thought is required to ascertain how a collaborative approach can best serve children and young people who are sexually exploited.

While there is now a substantial body of recent research and practice wisdom (Hardy 2016; Ruch et al 2016) that has highlighted the importance of relationship based practice, there still remains a focus on increased multi-agency working, in response to increased risk. Pearce (2006: 326) asked the question *"does our very attempt to support a victimised young person disable them from being active agents involved in their own change?"* From the findings of the present research this can be reframed - is it now time to let children and young people who are sexually exploited identify those professionals with whom they have the best relationships and work with them? This may / may not be the child protection statutory social worker, the third sector worker, the police officer; nurse; teacher. Although addressing the issue under a child protection framework remains a priority – how best to manage this is a crucial decision that perhaps now requires some lateral thinking by policy makers, managers and practitioners. There seems to be little evidence that involving more and more agencies is improving outcomes.

An alternative, relational approach, focused on who the children and young people want to work with, would need to be managed carefully, to ensure key agencies are

still involved where statutory duties are required. This may include regular professional meetings, perhaps where children and young people were not present (albeit aware they were taking place) and senior management support to permit some of the 'main' services to take a step back if children and young people did not want to, or were unable to, engage at that point. Practitioners indicated this would be problematic from an organisational perspective - having an open case but not regular contact; however they were also clear that the present practice of multi-agency, multi-professional contact is alienating children and young people, many of whom do not view themselves as being exploited.

Next steps

While the present work has highlighted positive developments, it is limited by the small number of cases looked at as part of the CSE 'case study'. However, the findings (along with the 2013 Rigby & Murie report) do suggest that the vulnerability and risk indicators require substantial work if they are to be used as a robust risk assessment. There are indications that the retrospective analysis of known CSE cases can be informative in taking this forward, and future work may usefully focus on this to better inform identification and intervention.

The increasing numbers of children and young people identified as victims of CSE in the city over the last few years suggests that ongoing collection of historical data will be possible. This will begin the process of securing a better understanding of the complex routes into exploitation and contribute further to the support and protection of children and young people.

Postscript

The present study has been undertaken in the context of a number of ongoing investigations in Glasgow and the west of Scotland, and an ongoing national action plan (Scottish Government 2016b). The research was commissioned to explore the issues of CSE in Glasgow via a retrospective case file analysis of known cases, and discussion with professionals working with young people, to provide comment on pathways into and out of exploitation. Progress in the city is evident, attitudes are changing and practice is developing. However, substantial challenges remain, and in this context the report also aims to contribute to ongoing and future practice, locally and nationally.

Underpinning the work is a commitment from Glasgow Child Protection Committee to work towards the national action plan intermediate outcomes:

➢ The risk that children and young people are exploited is reduced through a focus on prevention and early identification.

➢ Children and young people at risk of or experiencing sexual exploitation and their families receive appropriate and high quality support.

➢ Perpetrators are stopped, brought to justice and are less likely to re-offend.

➢ Cultural and social barriers to preventing and tackling CSE are reduced.

The study has highlighted the difficulties of an early identification approach on the basis of present 'checklists' and 'indicators' as they are far from reliable as identifiers for CSE specifically. However, continuing work is to focus on the development of a 'risk assessment' framework to support practitioners in identification and intervention at all stages of exploitation. The commitment of the practitioners at the present focus group, and their willingness to identify both the positive and negatives of present practice, indicates a commitment to providing appropriate and high quality support. While support and interventions across Glasgow are supported by an evidence led approach that stretches back to the turn of the century, there remains at times a 'scattergun' approach to interventions as 'risk' increases. It is also recognised there are substantial cultural and social barriers preventing the tackling of CSE, the focus group discussion highlighted the challenges Glasgow faces in working with the BME community. These barriers were located in ethnic, gender and organisational structures and work is continuing to identify, address and reduce these blocks.

While this report has focussed on the experiences and outcomes for children and young people, as knowledge and practice has developed both locally and nationally there has been a recognition that there needs to be an equal, if not greater focus, on perpetrators to tackle this complex issue and intervene and prevent exploitation. As outlined in the background section Glasgow has had experience of a number of complex CSE investigations which have provided significant opportunities for ongoing practice learning and development.

Following earlier operations senior and operational managers across agencies reflected and critiqued their effectiveness in an attempt to identify learning from both

a single and multi-agency perspective. Practice at that time both in Glasgow and nationally was largely 'victim centred' however the experience of Glasgow and other authorities recognised the need to give an equal focus to perpetrators and move to a 'victim centred and perpetrator driven' approach.

There was continuing concern that children remained at risk of child sexual exploitation and agreement reached to set up Operation DASH, which looked at potential cases of CSE from 2011, as well as current cases of concern at that time. A list of children, young people and perpetrators were generated from agency systems and intelligence. From the outset the operation adopted a strong multi-agency approach to review and refresh information relating to over a hundred children and a similar amount of young and adult males and females via the compilation of historical single agency chronologies. These were later brought into an integrated multi-agency chronology. This approach supported information gathering and engagement strategies for both alleged victims and alleged perpetrators. The use of chronologies in the operation were cited as a good practice example in the recently revised Care Inspectorate Chronology Guidance (Care Inspectorate 2017).

Police Scotland committed significant dedicated resources to this operation with three individual sub-teams for victims, suspects and intelligence gathering and analysis. Agency champions were identified for each of the services involved to provide support to their respective teams and colleagues. Social work services also identified lead managers within three localities to chair and provide support to staff working both with victims and perpetrators. This facilitated a strong and informed working experience within services which was utilised to support and guide practitioners working with both victims and perpetrators.

Glasgow went on to have a further CSE operation which reviewed the earlier investigation. This operation has only recently concluded, however it again utilised the approach described above which had been carried forward and embedded into practice for our CSE practice across the city.

The outcome from Operation DASH and the most current operation has resulted in a number of charges being brought against over 30 suspects with around 80 to 90 individual crime reports being submitted to the Procurator Fiscal. Similar to the earlier operation some individuals received custodial sentences for serious sexual offences whilst others were charged with lesser offences, unlawful sexual intercourse with a minor, domestic violence, abduction, harbouring and others. Trafficking charges were also brought against a small number of perpetrators. Other approaches were also utilised to disrupt perpetrators and again charges of benefit fraud or working illegally. A further benefit is the information gathered and collated about adults of concern, is now located in secure police databases, and held for future reference should further concerns arise in subsequent investigations.

The learning from all the operations and developmental opportunities built into subsequent investigations have supported and resulted in a lasting impact on multi-disciplinary practice in Glasgow which will be taken forward and further embedded and reflected in revised CSE guidance contained in a review of the Vulnerable Young Person's Procedures.

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