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Gaps in the knowledge base

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Introduction

This paper identifies gaps in the knowledge base related to the sexual exploitation of young people. The gaps were identified as part of the process of developing 'Key Messages from Research' papers on sexual exploitation for a range of professional audiences. Whilst gaps in the evidence base on child sexual abuse (CSA) more broadly are also noted, they do not represent a comprehensive list.

Child Sexual Exploitation

Overall and extent

- Prevalence of sexual exploitation.

- Ways to differentiate 'at risk' and actual cases.

- The relationship between childhood neglect and subsequent sexual exploitation, preferably explored through a longitudinal study (Hanson, 2016).

- How poverty, and community and neighbourhood contexts might contribute to sexual exploitation (Hanson, 2016).

- Why so little identification and referral from health professionals (Harper and Scott, 2005).

- Why particular groups of children and young people remain under-represented in those identified as at risk (boys, minority ethnic young people, disabled young people, LGBT young people and young people involved in offending etc.) (Gohir, 2013).

- Establish a fuller national picture of the scale and a better understanding of offending behaviours and patterns across ethnic communities (Gohir, 2013).

- The evidence base on effective sexual exploitation primary prevention work (Bovarnick and Scott, 2016).

- Sexual exploitation and female genital mutilation.

Indicators/risk

- The effectiveness of specific risk assessment tools (RiP, 2015).

- Evaluation and methodologically rigorous large scale testing of risk assessment tools (Brown et al. 2016).

- The geographical distribution of individual-level risk – or features of the immediate environment promoting or preventing sexual exploitation (Cockbain et al. 2014).

- What decreases risk/are protective factors, evaluations of current interventions with those at risk of sexual exploitation, the use of risk assessment findings and outcomes for children categorised as low risk or no apparent risk (APPG, 2016).

- The links with domestic violence (Hester and Westmarland, 2004).

- Nature/strength of the evidence around the 'links' to sexual exploitation – multivariate analyses that attempt to identify either risk factors associated independently with sexual exploitation, or specific interaction effects to look at combinations of risk factors.

Victim-survivors

- Social, material and psychological vulnerabilities to various forms of sexual exploitation from the perspective of young people who have experienced sexual exploitation – what factors they perceived played a part, and what helped them move forward (Hanson, 2016).

- The experiences and voices of LGBT, or BME young people sexually exploited boys, and what approaches and interventions are most effective for these groups (Hanson, 2016; Jago et al. 2011; Health Working Group, 2014; Firmin, 2015).

- More research on young people's experiences of being groomed online (Whittle et al. 2014).

- The impacts on young people from different racial origins and cultural heritages (Lillywhite and Skidmore, 2006; Ward and Patel, 2006; Gohir, 2013; Sharp, 2015; Coy, 2016a).

Perpetrators

- Strategies used by perpetrators to entrap young people in offline contexts, including from the perspective of victim-survivors (Hanson, 2016), and what might interrupt their targeting of young people.

- The motivations of men who pay for sex with children (Lillywhite and Skidmore 2006; Coy, 2016b) including in other countries.

- Correlations between victim and offender ethnicity (CEOP, 2013).

- Perpetrator profiles linked to the different models of abuse through child sexual exploitation including gangs and groups, on-line and 'boyfriend' models. This should also include peer on peer child sexual exploitation (Blyth, 2015) and peer recruitment (Warrington, 2016).

- Whether major crime/complex investigation status would increase detection of offenders (Myers and Carmi, 2016).

- Different offender-victim models in different communities, including the sexual exploitation of BME victims with disabilities and of those categories deemed "vulnerable adults" (Gohir, 2013).

- Female perpetrators (NatCen/UCL, 2014).

- The identification and de-escalation of perpetration especially with respect to 'female facilitators', peer-on-peer exploitation, group-based harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) and online exploitation involving social media (Firmin, 2015).

- The extent to which adults groom youth via mobile phones (Wurtele, 2016).

Interventions and practice

- The role of parents for children affected by sexual exploitation, including:
  - The strategies used by perpetrators to disrupt the relationship between parents and young people (PACE, 2016).
  - How parents identify and respond to signs of online grooming (Whittle et al. 2014).

- What makes a protective parent/carer in this context and key assessment issues for non-abusing parents.

- The links between child sexual exploitation and health services (Hagell, 2013; Health Working Group, 2014).

- Good practice in youth work (Zero Tolerance and YWCA Scotland, 2015).

- Impact/effectiveness of training on sexual exploitation in a policing context.
- Responses to children who go missing, not only police action but also appropriate responses when a child returns (APPG, 2016).
- How the care system works for those affected by gangs, sexual exploitation and going missing (Sturrock and Holmes, 2015).
- Capacity and ability of teams working with disabled young people to recognise and respond to sexual exploitation (Franklin and Smeaton, 2015).
- How children classified as absent are safeguarded (Pona, 2016); barriers to effective responses to children who go missing (Ofsted, 2016).
- Police officers' perspectives and experiences to compare and contrast practices in safeguarding children and young people at risk (Dodsworth and Larsson, 2014).
- Young peoples' experiences and perspectives on engaging with police officers (Dodsworth and Larsson, 2014).
- How effective SOPOs and RoSHOs are in tackling child sexual exploitation (Marshall, 2014).
- Investigation processes: the success rates of different approaches to investigating sexual exploitation; timescales, challenges of investigations; and the identification of trends across cases which don't proceed to charge (Firmin, 2015).
- Targeted sexual exploitation intervention models in alternative educational settings (Scott and Bovarnick, 2016).
- The meaning, delivery and outcomes of child-centred practice and participation within sexual exploitation services across the UK (Warrington, 2016).
- Specific aspects of service provision for sexually exploited children and young people (Oxford Brookes University, 2015).
  - Group work (Warrington, 2016).
  - What works for sexually exploited boys and young men (Barnardo's, 2014).
- Successful models of multi-agency working (Firmin, 2015).
- Child protection policies and procedures and their appropriateness for sexual exploitation cases (Pearce, 2006; Pearce, 2014; Firmin, 2015; Hallett, 2015; Martin et al. 2014).
- The success/challenges of public–space interventions (Firmin, 2015).
- Support for families (Firmin, 2015).
- Wider community engagement in responses to sexual exploitation (Firmin, 2015).
- Effectiveness of information sharing.

Trafficking

- Young people's accounts of why and how they were trafficked into the UK from abroad (Pearce et al. 2009).
- Links between trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing and types of placement, gender and age issues (ECPAT UK and Missing People, 2016).
- The challenges faced by practitioners who are trying to recognise and respond to the needs of trafficked young people (Pearce et al. 2009).
- The experiences of trafficked boys and young men and evaluations of interventions to address them (Leon and Rawes, 2016).

Child Sexual Abuse

- Department for Education data suggests an overlap of CSA and neglect within family contexts, what is unclear is whether this is a function of allocating a category of need at assessment or if there is a correlation in childhood experiences (Flood and Holmes, 2016).

- The role and practices of generalist services in identifying and supporting sexually abused children and young people (Allnock et al. 2015).

- Tracking the effectiveness of interventions – research at the individual level and over time (Hester and Westmarland, 2004).

- The confidence and skills of social workers who are supporting young people who have been sexually abused to ask about whether images of abuse were produced (Martin, 2016).

- A better evidence base for current approaches to working with children and young people who have experienced sexual abuse (Allnock et al. 2015).

- Provision for younger children experiencing intra-familial CSA (Allnock et al. 2015).

- The best ways to provide emotional support to children and young people who have experienced CSA/sexual exploitation, and the role of SARCs within this (Allnock et al. 2015).

- The specific needs of LGBT, black and minority ethnic (BME) and disabled young people and adult survivors (Flood and Holmes, 2016).

- Service responses to black and minority ethic (BME) women and girls experiencing sexual violence (Thiara et al. 2015).

- The ways services respond to children with complex needs (Allnock et al. 2015).

- Further research into child sex abuse in Asian and Muslim communities (Gohir, 2013).

- Why some service user groups continue to be under-represented in referrals to services and among those who receive services (Allnock et al. 2015).

- What are the pathways underpinning the associations between victimisation and harmful sexual behaviours (Flood and Holmes, 2016).

- How social and psychological impacts evolve over time, in connection to community and social contexts, this could include a focus on what increases and reduces risk of 'revictimisation' including in terms of sexual exploitation, using a range of methodological approaches (Hanson, 2016).

- Untangling the complex interactions between HSB, sexual exploitation and CSA, including frequent exposure to pornography and what this suggests about early intervention (Ghani, 2016).

- The safeguarding implications of exposure and/or access to pornography on children and young people, particularly in relation to their experiences of teenage relationship abuse and peer exploitation (Horvath et al. 2013).

- Gaps in HSB service provision and the effectiveness of different approaches (Ghani, 2016).

- The extent to which indicators of risk of and protection from child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation to identify either victims or perpetrators (Brown et al. 2016).

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