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# **EPISTEMIC PRACTICES IN SOCIAL WORK; HEAR ME OUT**

**PHD IN SOCIAL WORK BY PUBLISHED WORK**

**JUNE 2019**

## Abstract

This PhD by publication explores how 'knowledges' in social work research are authorized often to those who use and provide services. It draws together 11 publications, which are a mixture of sole and co authored peer reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and co authored publications for a range of charitable and public bodies both within the UK and Europe.

The concept of 'epistemic injustice', is used to examine the connections between my published works. Stemming from the tradition of feminist philosophy, epistemic injustice is when the capacity to hear another's testimony is diminished. With its focus on the interrelationship between hearing and being heard, epistemic justice has an under utilised value in social work practice and research. Building on the central themes of voice and justice, I argue that the discrediting of an individual testimony leads to individual and collective harm, as the opportunities for some to contribute to the common store of social meanings are diminished, including asylum seeking young people, victim and survivors of child sexual exploitation, child sexual abuse and child trafficking.

My published works are examined as case studies to consider which and whose knowledge is taken seriously and why. I consider the harms done through the process of being discredited; both to the individual (their testimony and their identity –as sense of self is shaped by these negative associations) and to a developing knowledge (as accounts are missed and the potential growth of connections (be they defeating, justifying or inferential) is lost. Although all knowledge is partial and co-produced, I consider the obligation to make relevant efforts to understand how the world looks from different points of view, especially those who use and provide services.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Corinne May-Chahal for her relentless enthusiasm and support; I always came out of a supervision session reenergised and full of ideas. I would also like to thank Professor Sylvia Walby for showing me other ways of working and writing together.

Thanks are also due to Dr Hannah Morgan, Dr Marian Foley, Dr Ian Cummins and to my colleagues at the Department of Sociology at Lancaster University.

Finally, a nod to my feline friends who have enjoyed this extended opportunity to sit on my lap.

### Author's Declaration

I declare that this is my own work; it has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

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## Introduction

This supporting document accompanies the submission of the attached list of peer reviewed journal articles, book chapters and reports for examination for the award of PhD (see Appendix one). Throughout this document, references to my published work will be indicated in bold text. During the course of my PhD by publication my surname changed hence the references to both Kelly and Palmer.

My PhD is a personal story influenced by children and young people that I have worked with, my time as a social worker, social work students and my own experiences. My journey (presented in *italics*) is threaded through the accounts of my published work in an effort to explain my shifting areas of interest. In retrospect, I see that most of my work seeks to understand claims making, be that of young people and their families, social workers and social work research itself. The production of knowledge about the self, others and for the discipline of social work raises question about whose and what knowledge is privileged and of my role as a social worker and now academic in contributing to that process.

*As a postgraduate social work student I learnt about the 'eclectic' nature of social work theory and research (Coady and Lehman, 2016). Whilst the term eclectic is no longer used in British social work education, it describes rather well the nature of my work. This PhD is wide ranging in its coverage, subject matter and concerns. My direction of travel has been determined by opportunity, invitation and through research grants. My initial interest in child trafficking was triggered by a Serious Case Review (SCR) in the Authority in which I worked at the time as a social worker. The SCR involved a 15 year old girl from West Africa died in hospital (of natural causes) and voluntary sector services were concerned about lack of recognition of the signs of child trafficking. I coordinated the first ever conference in the North West of England on child trafficking to raise awareness. This led to a national training post with ECPAT UK, an international charity set up to eradicate child sexual exploitation. My role was to develop and provide training on child trafficking packages to Area Child Protection Committees, leading to commissions by both the Welsh Government and Scottish Assembly (as was). In particular, I led the first research in Wales to examine the possibility that children were being trafficked into the nation (Kelly, 2009). Our*

*findings were sufficient to convince the Welsh Government to implement changes<sup>1</sup> (Watson, 2010).*

My research spans child trafficking, separated children<sup>2</sup>, child sexual exploitation (CSE), online child sexual abuse (CSA) and domestic violence. Underpinning all my work is an interest in ways in which some accounts are privileged and others neglected, especially in relation to young people as a group and to research processes. Credibility (of an individual, or group) emerges as a critical concern across my work leading to questions about who and what is believed and whose purposes that serves (Fricker, 2007). Accounts from victims of CSE (Jay, 2014) and from young people seeking asylum or victims of trafficking (Pearce, Hynes and Bovarnick 2009) are routinely disbelieved. This led me to question how can the profession of social work account for not listening despite its best intentions (Fricker, 2007). The explanation I consider in this supporting document is that those charged with responding to young people have failed to give 'credibility' to them both at an individual as well as collective level.

Throughout this supporting document I draw on Fricker's (2007) theorising of 'epistemic injustice' which considers the relationship between ethics and knowledge production. Fricker (2007) argues that there are two forms of epistemic injustice; testimonial and hermeneutical. Central to testimonial injustice is the harm done to someone when an individual's experience is not recognised by another, because of their social identity. This occurs between individuals and leads to the discrediting of another in "their capacity as a knower" (Fricker, 2007, p1). In emphasizing the value of individual experiential knowledge, Fricker (2007) reminds us that to be known is central to being human. In not being heard, social harm is caused at the level of what it means to be human (Fricker, 2007). 'Hermeneutical injustice' occurs at a structural level when common social experiences cannot be understood or accepted as they

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<sup>1</sup> Soon after I was asked to give evidence at Cross-Party Working Group on Trafficking of Women and Children in April 2009 in the Welsh Assembly and some of these discussions were highlighted in their report 'Knowing No Boundaries' 2010/ WAG. Within a year, an All Wales Child Trafficking Group was established whose –purpose was to monitor and circulate intelligence about child trafficking. A letter to all 21 Children's Services in Wales asking about status & use of the current guidance. Finally, the charity I worked for was commissioned to develop an e-tool on child trafficking. This built on the success of the e-tool I wrote for England and then for the Scottish Government.

<sup>2</sup> Separated Children in an umbrella term for any child living without parental care or guardianship

are “differentially available across relations of power and privilege, [which] excludes certain people from communal interpretive discourses” (Code, 2008, unpaged). Fricker (2007) draws on women’s testimonies of sexual harassment at work in the sixties in America, to highlight how such experiences could not yet be named.

Whilst the theoretical framework of epistemic injustice has been applied in other academic disciplines, especially in healthcare (e.g. Blease, Carel and Geraghty, 2017; Carel and Gyorffy, 2014; Reed and Rachel, 2015), it is rarely utilised in social work (Bell, 2014). Because of its focus on the marginalisation and even denial of an individual or a group’s ‘knowledges’ and the consequential ‘dehumanising’, Fricker’s (2007) work aligns well with the stated ethical and value base of social work. The ethical imperative to uphold human dignity, promote the right to participation and work in solidarity (BASW 2014) resonates with the argument that being counted as a source of knowledge matters (Fricker, 2007). To hear another’s account is a core social work skill (Gubrium, 2005) yet there are many documented instances of individuals and groups being disbelieved. Fricker’s (2007, p80) characterisation of a “virtuous hearer” as someone who draws on emotion and empathy in their moral reasoning about another’s trustworthiness points to aspects of practice that are rarely articulated; the conditions for belief and disbelief.

The act of ‘hearing’ is under theorized in social work. Much has been written about seeing and ‘listening’ especially in relation to children and young people (Munro, 2011; Ferguson, 2017; Howarth and Tarr, 2015). I first explored ideas of invisibility in relation to young West African girls who were kept in conditions of domestic servitude in the UK (Bokhari and **Kelly**, 2010) foreshadowing work by both Horwath and Tarr (2015) and Ferguson (2017) who interrogate the concept of visibility in child protection social work. The concept of visibility has particular resonance in child protection work, as social workers are charged with ‘seeing’ children believed to be at risk. As Horwath and Tarr (2015) note this can be reduced to a mechanised tick box approach in which the child and their daily lived experience is never understood. Ferguson (2017) argues that children become ‘invisible’ when organizational pressures and emotional overload result in social workers being unable to engage with a child’s reality. In these situations, social workers are in the physical presence of children but do not recognise them as subjects (Ferguson, 2017). For my own work, I argue that there is a connection between hearing (being heard) and visibility (being seen). Hearing is a means of making something (or someone) evident and affords an element of audibility.

Experience and the many ways in which it is constituted is central to both my social work practice and research. My own questions include what is experience and does all experience constitute knowledge? Knowledge derived from experience is the cornerstone of feminist standpoint theory (Hekman, 1997). The emergence and then acknowledgment of women's experiences of violence in the home and every day sexual violence (Kelly, 1988) has changed knowledge relations, creating spaces for recognition of other hidden personal experiences (Fricker, 2007). That such space is still necessary is illustrated by the current truth projects about childhood sexual abuse taking place internationally. Taken as a whole, such public disclosure of harmful experience points to the interrelationship between the subjective-state and structural injustices. Whilst individual experience has absolute validity on its own terms, it is also understood within a set of social meanings that privilege the few. In this document I explore how such social prejudice serves to render some young people 'inaudible'.

The supporting document will consider my published work ordered to allow for a focus on review methodology and evidence and then follow with four case studies exploring the epistemic relationship between forms of data and claims making. The first cluster begins with an analysis of the role of literature reviews in claims -making and how this has shaped my understandings of the nature of social work knowledge and research. The cumbersome term 'knowledges' is often used in social work to account for the various forms of knowledge that influence the profession; service user knowledge, practitioner knowledge, research knowledge, policy knowledge and that of the individual and organisation in which they work. Beyond this plurality, is an important question about who is allowed to possess and distribute knowledge and what forms of knowledge can be 'heard'. This section includes my most recent co-authored publication, a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) for the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse<sup>3</sup> (IICSA), (May-Chahal and **Palmer**, 2018).

In the second cluster, I begin with a paper that drew on 'misery memoirs' to provide another perspective, that of the 'victim and survivor', of child sexual exploitation (**Palmer** and Foley, 2016). This paper takes the knowledge base further by analysing why professional responses are absent and looking at alternative methods of claims

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<sup>3</sup> The aim of IICSA is to investigate whether public bodies and other non-state institutions have taken seriously their responsibility to protect children from sexual abuse in England and Wales, and to make meaningful recommendations for change, to help ensure that children now and in the future are better protected from sexual abuse.

making that lead to appropriate support (albeit limited). In the second case study I explore how semi structured interviews with parents affected by CSE revealed that they are ostracized by safeguarding professionals (Palmer and Jenkins, 2014). Then I move to consider how national and European institutional policy priorities influence research and the construction of knowledge about practice (Walby et al., 2016b; Walby et al., (2017); Palmer, 2018). Finally, the role of 'professional epistemologies' (Boxall and Beresford 2013) are examined through two book chapters contributions, both of which consider ways of knowing informed by practice (Kelly, 2011; Palmer, 2019).

### First Cluster: Review Methodology

Methodologically, much of my work uses a form of review reflecting a pivotal placement experience in the systematic review team at the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), as part of an ESRC-RD14 initiative (McDonald, Bernard, Forrester, White and Shemmings, 2012). *At the time, I had just started an academic post as a lecturer in social work at University of Salford.* The aim of this research programme was to train mid-career social work academics in research techniques through a series of workshops and mini-conferences culminating in a two-week placement with a research organisation. Working with the SCIE review team I began to understand that there was much more to the process of literature reviewing than simply gathering together published work. The nuances and dilemmas involved showed me that a particular version of methodological precision is critical to claims about knowledge within the systematic review paradigm.

My placement at SCIE exposed me to many questions about the nature of social work research that have continued to resonate throughout my academic career. Research in social work is complicated by questions about its relationship to practice, who is producing it, who is consuming it and how it dovetails with service user, policy, legislative, political and academic concerns. Unlike some allied disciplines, there is no linear relationship between research findings and outputs and social work practice. I believe the profession is still tainted by an anti-intellectual tendency in which research knowledge is often devalued as not being 'real' or not applying to the 'real world'. However, the problematic association between academic research and objectivity remains challenging for social work leading to hierarchies of knowledge production, which is antithetical to the value base of the profession.

There are many forms of literature review and most social work publications will at least claim to have 'reviewed the literature'.

Social work bases its methodology on a systematic body of evidence informed knowledge derived from research and practice evaluation, including local and indigenous knowledge specific to its context.

BASW, (2014 p7)

However, there are substantial differences in approach. Variations include systematic review, a Cochrane or Campbell determined review, a scoping review, a Rapid Evidence Assessment and narrative review (Aveyard, 2010; Hart, 1998). Each form varies in relation to a number of methodological factors including; the extensiveness of the search process, the types of research included or excluded, the number of individuals involved in blind coding and methods applied to analysis and synthesis of the data retrieved. Such detail is critical to contextualizing any claims based on the literature.

Literature reviewing establishes and revisits what is known in a discipline area. Indeed, Hodge (2011, p1) argues that the process constitutes the foundation of an academic discipline as "the most fundamental characteristic of a profession is its disciplinary knowledge base". As such, the process of review takes on particular significance. However, the parameters are set to outputs compiled within a specific academic tradition; not all research is equally available or mandated by the academic peer review process. As McLaughlin (2012) asks, how do we take account of research that is traditionally hard to access or that is produced by groups outwith formal academic systems? Such questions highlight the challenges of making claims about a knowledge base when some forms of knowledge are routinely excluded. Whilst there are a number of reasons for this exclusion, the privileging of some forms of knowledge production over others is antithetical to social work ethics and values. One of the unique features of the profession of social work is the expectation that ethics and values (embedded in our Codes of Conduct i.e. HCPC, BASW and IFSW) will guide how we make meaning in practice and in research.

Voices excluded in the canon of published research often include those of service users and carers and social workers as practitioner researchers (Beresford; 2006; Boxall and Beresford, 2014; Mitchell, Lunt, and Shaw, 2010; Shaw and Lunt 2011). The knowledge of service users begins with their direct experiences of policy, practices and services but as Beresford (2006) argues it extends to include the valuing of subjectivity. During my placement at SCIE the importance of inclusion of the service user voice in literature reviewing (SCIE, 2010) was emphasised. If there was no research available then SCIE would commission a piece of work with service

users. Such commissions highlight the value placed on service user perspectives and is now embedded as a principle with all SCIE knowledge outputs being 'co-produced'. The shift represents a change in public body requirements to ensure that the voices of service users and carers are included. However any value is tempered by how participatory or not the involvement is (Boxall and Beresford, 2014; McLaughlin, 2012). Research based on filling gaps implies an *a priori* agenda; one that service users might help to fill but rarely do they take the lead in setting the agenda. Moreover, such an approach assumes that professionals need to determine the research agenda rather than service users establishing what is important to examine, with user-led research agendas (Beresford, 2006).

Practitioner research is ill-defined despite several attempts to categorise key features (Mitchell, et al., 2010; Shaw 2005). In summary it involves a small scale analysis of local practice by those who understand its complexities, with an aim or improving practice. It occurs across a range of applied disciplines including social work (Shaw, 2005). Practitioner research is carried out by social workers but the term is extended to academics who immerse themselves back into practice. Despite the 'inaudibility' of much practitioner research it is estimated that there are more social workers undertaking research than social work academics (Shaw, 2005). In mapping the extent of research produced by practicing social workers, Mitchell et al., (2010) found much activity, principally focused on improving practice in local areas. Their results are based on a literature review, which is problematic as much practitioner research remains unpublished. Notwithstanding this design challenge, the authors raise issues of poor methodological quality across the practitioner research leading to questions as to whether minimum standards are required to promote rigour and reliability. A more progressive approach might be to consider what practitioner research can contribute to methodological development.

Literature reviewing describes both a methodological approach as well as a necessary step in any social science research (Hart, 1998). The process of identifying key literature in a field is undertaken to set the context for a research study. Through identifying the key authors and evolution of ideas in a certain subject, gaps that require further research are understood. A review of 100 published social work articles found that in 77% the purpose of the study was to fill a gap in the literature (Gringeri, Barusch, and Cambron, 2013). The value of such reviews depends on their rigour and replicability. There is the danger of endless reiteration of the same form of knowledge, which is cited because it has been referred to before. The knowledge gains authority through repetition. In such a way, stereotypes and falsehoods can persist as a publication is referred to without analysis but because it is perceived to be part of the canon. This often happens with government policy documents (and policies) which some refer to as 'policy based evidence'. The Family Nurse Partnership programme is a case in point. Based on often cited research conducted

in the US this programme received government investment of over 17 million pounds yet evaluations, including a Randomised Control Trial (RCT), in a British context revealed outcomes were not improved according to its own measures (Robling, 2014).

A literature review, especially a systematic one, is a methodological approach in its own right; it is the research process. A systematic, sequential and ordered approach to the finding and analysis of the literature can contribute to the state of knowledge in a given field. For such claims to be made, the review process has to be transparent (SCIE, 2010). Rigour depends on an ordered, sequenced search in which every decision point is recorded (SCIE, 2010). The most rigorous systematic reviews follow the Cochrane and Campbell Collaboration protocols. Cochrane established the process of systematic reviewing in health interventions in 1993. The aim is to provide the highest quality evidence to assist with health care decision-making and the “reviews adhere to the principle that science is cumulative and facilitate decisions considering all the evidence on the effect of an intervention” (Higgins and Green, 2011. S1.1.1). The Campbell Collaboration commenced in 1999 with a similar focus on producing scientific evidence to inform policy and practice in health and social care (the focus is broader than, or peripheral to, specific social work issues). Both Campbell and Cochrane are international networks with British links. In England and Wales, SCIE<sup>4</sup> was established in 2001 as a social care equivalent to NICE<sup>5</sup>. SCIE’s aim is to achieve excellence in practice through “co-producing, sharing, and supporting the use of the best available knowledge and evidence” (SCIE, ND).

Common to all systematic reviews is an appraisal of the research or evidence that is being used. In the process decisions are being made about what forms of knowledge are valued. The ‘hierarchy of evidence’ has a powerful effect in shaping what is thought to be the best research, namely that derived from large scale experimental design studies using the preferred gold standard of a randomised control trial (RCT) (Qureshi, 2004). British social work (as an academic discipline) rarely produces this type of evidence. Indeed, one of the first RCT’s in British social work has only recently been realized (Carpenter, Jessiman and Patsios, 2016), despite this lack of RCT’s in social work being noticed in 1992 by McDonald and Sheldon (cited in Quershi, 2004). Unlike medicine and nursing, social work does not have a unified intervention method as might be applied in a medical procedure or use of medication. The problems it deals with are complex i.e. non-linear and multi-layered and solutions can vary from case to case and place to place. For this reason, much social work

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<sup>4</sup> Social Care Institute for Excellence

<sup>5</sup> National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

research is qualitative, interpretive and aimed at discovering different dimensions of the problems it seeks to address (McLaughlin, 2012).

Various tools exist to appraise the quality of qualitative data. Using the qualitative checklist designed by Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, nd) for the IICSA study, I was struck by the lack of clarity and specificity across many studies.

Irrespective of research design, few studies were explicit about the aim, the research questions, design, sample and limitations. Often there was some of this information but rarely was there all of it. More than any other work I have done, the REA for IICSA (May-Chahal and **Palmer**, 2018) made me aware of the necessity of precision and transparency in the description of a research study. Being clear and transparent about research aim, design and method allows others to judge the epistemic justice of the work. This applies both to my reading of research studies and to any future research work that I undertake.

The nature of evidence for social work practice is contested. Evidence based practice (EBP) has been defined as “the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions regarding the welfare of those in need” which is adapted from the original definition of EBP by Sackett in the discipline of medicine (Sheldon, 2000, p5). Key to the approach is what types of evidence is required to inform ‘effective’ practice. Unlike medicine with its focus on clinical outcomes, what constitutes effective practice in social work is debated. As Webb (2001) argues there is no linear relationship between cause and effect in social work interventions. The complexity of human encounters, combined with a professional ethos that prioritises self-determination (BASW, 2014) renders the straightforward application of medical research methods problematic.

Within social work, there has been a discursive shift from evidence based to a ‘research informed approach’, led by organisations such as Research in Practice<sup>6</sup>. This approach acknowledges that formal research is only one part of what influences a social workers decision-making and intervention. Munro (2008) suggests that other factors such as practice culture, reasoning skills, values, emotional wisdom and practice wisdom underpin much social work activity. In this way, formal research (in which Munro (2008) includes law and policy as well as research and theory) is just one element of a kaleidoscope of elements, whose exact relationship changes with

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<sup>6</sup> Established in 1996 Research in Practice is an independent network that seeks to improve practice through an evidence informed approach.

each encounter. It is this interaction of factors that makes social work practice unique.

This next section provides a discussion of outputs (summarized in Table One below) that had a literature review as their methodological approach.

**Table One**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Publication type</b>
Systematic and Just ( <b>Kelly</b> , 2012)	Peer reviewed journal article
Listening to Separated Children – ( <b>Kelly</b> , 2012)	Book chapter
Technology and Trafficking for the purposes of the sexual exploitation of women and girls in the digital world (Walby et al., 2016a)	Multi-authored chapter for a report for the European Commission
Rapid Evidence Assessment - Characteristics and Vulnerabilities of victims of online facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation. (May-Chahal and <b>Palmer</b> , 2018)	Co-authored report for The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)

### Systematic and Just

This next section considers my sole authored paper, which was published in Social Work and Social Sciences Review (**Kelly**, 2012). It begins with the hypothesis that at that time of writing social work academics did not understand the significance of literature review methodology. During my placement with SCIE I began to understand how challenging complex and critical the process of reviewing literature is. The article summarises the literature review process in social work, exposing many of the common assumptions and pitfalls. The focus on social work is significant as what counts as evidence within the discipline and in practice is contested both in academia and in practice (Webb, 2001; Munro 2008; Boxall and Beresford, 2014).

The title of the article resulted from restrictions imposed by the guest editors of the journal. They selected the title of 'social justice' as the theme for anyone of us on the RD14 programme<sup>7</sup> to write on. Initially I struggled with this theme, as there were no

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<sup>7</sup> RD14 was an ESRC funded programme to support early career social work academics

obvious links to either the methodology or research that I had been involved in with SCIE. On reflection, I realised that there was something important to say about what forms of knowledge are ‘allowed’ into the profession; the processes of academic journal publishing are not inclusive. From this starting point I began to reflect on the role of ‘knowledges’ in social work and in particular which forms are given credibility and which are diminished, leading to a form of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007).

Equally important is how the mechanics of the search process contributes to what can be found; for example, a key question is how extensive is ‘reasonable’ for searching? For my own work, what ‘reasonable’ constitutes changes over time and it is worth noting that search processes have altered significantly since this 2011 article. In the article I attempt to demystify aspects of the literature review process; in doing so I highlight that at each step choices are made which will affect the final selection of literature (Braye and Preston Shoot, 2007; SCIE 2010). Without transparent reporting of these steps, any claims based on the literature found may be flawed. To ensure rigour in a literature review, one needs to be able to work with search terms, key words as well as the thesaurus built into some databases. These tasks are not easy as every database interface is different. Some limit the number of search terms or number of Boolean operators, as we found in the REA for the IICSA (May-Chahal and **Palmer**, 2018). This variation has led some social work academics to suggest “that a shared language needs to be developed around keyword classification” (Braye and Preston Shoot, 2007, p318). Finally, questions of value, worth, authenticity, reliability and so forth can only ever be answered satisfactorily in context, at that time, for the purpose at hand.

### Listening to separated children

This chapter grew out of a frustration in practice with social workers and other safeguarding professionals who repeatedly told me that young people seeking asylum would not tell them their ‘story’ (Kohli, 2006a; Kohli 2006b). I was curious as to what they meant by a story; this was the gap to be considered. Drawing on ten published studies, I explored what is known about young people seeking asylum in the UK. The methodology underpinning the chapter was a literature review of original research with separated children. As well as practicing my newly acquired literature reviewing skills, my methodological choice aimed to mirror the dilemma experienced by practitioners. Do we need to always have a first-hand account to believe or understand an individual’s experiences?

What emerged from the literature review was a social work pre-occupation with the ‘truth’ of the stories of asylum seeking children (Kohli, 2006a; Kohli, 2006b). This pursuit of the truth was relentless, often intrusive and led to questions about the child’s credibility (UNHCR, 2014). Credibility is an under researched area of practice,

even though it features in the accounts of social workers assessing separated children (Franklin and Doyle, 2013; Pearce et al., 2009) and from children feeling disbelieved (Crawley, 2007; Newbigging and Thomas, 2011; UNHCR, 2014). At first, I thought that this search for the ‘truth’ was linked to a broader project to discredit asylum seekers including children. However, in more recent publications (**Palmer** and Foley, 2016; **Palmer**, 2019) I comment on the same patterning; the refusal to take a young person’s story seriously. For instance, victims of child sexual exploitation state repeatedly that they are not believed; the contrast here is that they have told someone what happened but their accounts are discredited. Hallett (2017) in charting the history of attitudes to CSE, notes that the binary construct of innocent child victim or ‘deviant’ adolescent is still pervasive, leaving little conceptual space for consideration of choice and agency by young people. As such, the accounts of young people remain ‘unheard’ as the listener cannot situate their experiences (Fricker, 2007).

#### Technology and Trafficking for the purposes of the sexual exploitation of women and girls in the digital world

I undertook the literature review for this chapter on technology and trafficking, as part of a broader European Union funded project on gender and trafficking (Walby et al., 2016a). SCIE (2010) recommend accessing 21 databases for a structured review, however in any non-systematic review, the number of databases accessed is limited to those that are available through the institutional library. Only 8 of the 21 recommended databases were available at Lancaster University Library. It is possible that we missed relevant research simply as a result of institutional preferences about database provision. In comparing coverage of five journals in three databases, Bergman (2012) found a high rate of unique references with only 22.3% appearing in all three databases searched, suggesting that the more databases consulted the better a search will be. The search strings for this study were relatively simple consisting of:

[Traffick\* & Technology] & [Women] OR [Child\*]

[Traffick\* & Internet] & [Women] OR [Child\*]

The use of truncation<sup>8</sup> instructs the database to search for all forms of a word; so child\* led to a search on child, children, child’s. Searching for traffick\* is challenging as it picks up literature on road traffic, although this was minimised by the inclusion of ‘k’ to traffick. Finally, the term child was used despite the gender focus. Adding in

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<sup>8</sup> Truncation is represented by an asterix.

a gendered component would have complicated the search given the variety of terms used (all of which are unsatisfactory) to describe female children (e.g. girl child, teenage girl, young woman, daughter etc.). The extant literature supports the approach as far more female than male children are trafficked within Europe (Hughes, 2014). Two main strands of literature were found; technology and trafficking and gender and trafficking.

Technology advances the possibilities for trafficking and is used in the recruitment, sale and exploitation of girls and women. It also increases potential reach with the opening of new global markets for the consumption of child abuse images, including live pay per view websites. Technology contributes to the mainstreaming of abuse (Leary 2014) as the sheer frequency and availability of images and live sex acts online, appears to lower the threshold for consumption (DeMarco et al., 2018). Traffickers are always ahead in relation to using technology in a way that avoids detection, through encryption, bitcoin payment, peer to peer sharing and the 'dark-web' (CEOP 2013; IWF, 2015). There is a strand of technological literature that considers how sophisticated programs, which mask illegal activities can be disrupted by the Police (Mitchell and boyd<sup>9</sup>, 2014). However, as Muston and boyd (2014) argue technology can also be used by law enforcement agencies to mask surveillance activities and gives the false impression that all activity can be tracked.

The technical literature rarely paid attention to gender (of children or adults) and thus the assumption was that gender was irrelevant to the findings retrieved. The category was a gender neutral 'victim' rather than women or female child. A gendered lens exposes the structural conditions that create vulnerability for girls and women and can lead to exploitation and trafficking. These conditions include; lack of birth registration, limited or no access to education, early or forced marriage, preferential family and social treatment of the male child and being abandoned or 'left-behind' in country of origin (; Bokahri & Kelly, 2010; Dotteridge 2006; Palmer, 2019). A gendered lens highlights that women and girls are disproportionately caught up in trafficking (Hughes, 2014). The literature revealed that there were no gendered solutions despite it being a gendered problem.

Efforts to address gender issues highlight the assumptions that underpin much anti-trafficking work. The trafficking discourse subsumes women and children into one category ignoring the very real differences between child and adult victims. It also creates artificial socio-legal boundaries centered on age, whose consequences can be profound as young women are excluded from support services because they are over 18, even if their trafficking experiences occurred whilst they were still a child. A

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<sup>9</sup> Please note this is the authors preferred spelling of her own name

further moral complication is the conflation of trafficking with sex work (Sanghera, 2012) especially dominant in some of the organisations which support victims (Walby et al., 2016a). In this way anti-trafficking initiatives introduce a moral component as they attempt to redefine trafficking into a simple matter of choice or coercion.

Echoes of equally harmful dualism exist in professional responses to child sexual exploitation with questions being asked as to whether young people have 'chosen' to have sex in exchange for money, gifts and favours (**Palmer** and Foley, 2017).

As the points made above suggest there is a gap between understandings of trafficking which are accentuated with a focus on gender. This gap is played out in practice with the continued separation of the on and offline worlds as sites of abuse and exploitation. The trafficking of girls and women occurs across physical and digital dimensions, which do not represent separate social spaces (May-Chahal, et al., 2014). As I argued in the 'Misery Memoir' article, perpetrators can use mobile digital devices to record offline sexual assault to further control and humiliate victims online (**Palmer** and Foley, 2016), creating what Hughes (2014, p6) calls "enhanced victimization". Across the REA (May-Chahal and **Palmer**, 2018), the 'misery memoir' article (**Palmer** and Foley, 2016) and the EU trafficking research projects (Walby et al., 2016a; Walby et al., 2016b), the reviewed literature presents the Internet and mobile technology as a separate 'digital' space. However, in my publications I argue that this separation is artificial as digital and mobile devices are enmeshed into daily life and there is fluidity of exchange across domains. This fluidity represents a real challenge for safeguarding services.

#### Rapid Evidence Assessment for the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

In 2017, I was part of a small team commissioned to undertake a Rapid Evidence Review (REA) for the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA). Our review examines one aspect of online child sexual abuse as part of the Inquiry's stream on Internet facilitated child abuse (May-Chahal and **Palmer**, 2018). The research questions were set by the Inquiry. Our report totals 113 pages including references and appendices and was peer reviewed and also reviewed by the senior members of the Inquiry.

An REA has similarities to a systematic literature review but prioritises timeliness over comprehensive coverage. The aim of the approach is to 'review' and synthesize evidence in a systematic way but is constrained by tight timescales, so that policy and practice recommendations can be produced within a reasonable time frame (Government Social Research Service, ND; Varker, et al, 2015). REA's are expected to take between 2-6 months and inevitably, some concessions will be made with regard to how much literature can be included and of what type (Government Social Research Service, ND). For instance, at the beginning we made the decision to exclude all books and PhD theses, the former because primary research is usually

published in articles or reports and the latter because of time constraints. Key to an REA is precision tracking whenever decisions are made to exclude research; recording in this systematic way means that the findings can be contextualized and limitations made explicit. Many REA's are limited because they do not adopt such a transparent methodology (Varker, et al., 2015). Adopting this rigorous approach enabled me to build on the skills I had acquired at SCIE.

Assisted by two librarians, we developed a complex search string to source the available literature. Given that we did not anticipate finding many interventions, we adopted a SPIDER<sup>10</sup> (Cooke, Smith and Booth, 2012) framework to guide the searches instead of the more common PICO<sup>11</sup> model. Despite my background in literature reviewing, I was still stuck by how subtle word changes or placement of a search term in the search string could affect what literature was found. For example, the number of results retrieved from combining the Sample, Phenomena of Interest and Evaluation strings returned 1588 but when combined with the 'Design' string this reduced to 78 results. The design category was removed at this stage as it was limiting the results far too drastically. There were also problems with some databases, which could not cope with a complex search string or refused to accept wildcards<sup>12</sup> so the searches had to be modified. A further challenge was that some search engines (mainly journal platforms) would not enable exporting data into excel. Given the volume of references we were dealing with, it was decided to manually import the first 50. At each stage, these decisions were discussed, agreed and then a record made.

Using an REA methodology (Government Social Research Service, ND), the review explores the evidence on the vulnerabilities and characteristics of victims of online facilitated child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation (hereafter CSA). The overall question was broken down into four more focused questions including the relationship between self-generated material and online CSA as well as transnational online CSA (IICSA 2016). By introducing questions on the relationship between self-generated imagery and child sexual abuse, it became necessary to search for a range of behaviours. It was only half way through the project that I understood the enormity of the task set. Each question covered a broad range of concepts (such as

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<sup>10</sup> SPIDER: Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, Research type

<sup>11</sup> PICO: Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome

<sup>12</sup> A wildcard is a way of searching for different spellings of the same word, using the symbol ?

resilience and vulnerability). This was further complicated by the multitude of terms used to describe online facilitated CSA and associated manifestations. The subject area is itself unclear with some of the key terms being contested, such as child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation. According to Working Together (2015)<sup>13</sup> child sexual abuse now includes a range of actions and behaviours beyond the actual sexual assault of a child, such as being made to look at pornography or being forced to have sex in peer to peer relationships. The Inquiry merges CSA and CSE. Even the commissioners of the report changed their terminology during the review, moving from online CSA to online facilitated CSA.

Initial searches yielded 5297 results, which were imported into a software package designed to manage systematic reviews known as Covidence<sup>14</sup>. The programme enabled myself and two other researchers to screen titles and abstracts independently, affording the opportunity for 'inter-rater reliability' (Varker et al., 2015). In this instance, inter rater reliability was statistically defined using Cohen's kappa coefficient (Bryman, 2012). Drawing on a statistical model is supposed to reduce bias although it cannot capture the inter-subjective decisions that take place or for the possibility that some research will be excluded. For example, most articles were only partially relevant and I noted a difference in approach between myself and the other rater who was not a social worker. The other person found it easier to reject articles as not relevant but with my background in child protection, I often disagreed as I could see they had potential relevancy. Of course, such an experience is part for the reasons of coding in this way; to test and check all of our assumptions. According to Barbour (2001 p 1116):

the degree of concordance between researchers is not really important; what is ultimately of value is the content of disagreements and the insights that discussion can provide for refining coding frames.

Our discussions centred on the parameters of online child sexual abuse; where did we decide what was relevant enough for inclusion. In particular, our search was complicated by results on cyberbullying and online victimisation of other forms (i.e. non-sexual). Studies that focused on online victimisation were rejected unless they

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<sup>13</sup> I note that there is a newer version of Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.covidence.org/home>

contained a sexual abuse component. However, there is no clear boundary between 'sexual communication' and online facilitated CSA, especially when peer to peer communication (such as sexting) is included. Whether a sexual communication is abuse or not depends on a number of additional factors (context, content of the communication, how it is received, whether harm ensued to name a few). These considerations lie at the heart of understanding child sexual abuse itself, especially from a victim perspective. Yet here, I was being forced into making decisions about the worth of an information source often without this contextual data. It is a further example of how epistemic injustices occur under the authority of an agreed method; I could only outline our decision 'rules' in the final report.

The wording of the research question(s) emerged as critical to navigate us through the literature. In order to resolve some of the nuances around search terms and results we repeatedly returned to the original question as set by IICSA to determine if a paper should or should not be included in the final stages. However, the construction of the questions implied differences and distinctions that were not reflected in the research. For instance, we spent much time reflecting on what constituted characteristics and vulnerabilities for children, given that we had to answer to both. In the end, we chose to understand 'characteristics' to be chronological age, sex at birth, gender and declared physical or learning disability. Of course, each of these can also make a child vulnerable and we noted that vulnerability is not fixed or immutable (Rutter, 2007). In addition, there are situational vulnerability factors to take into account such as time spent on the Internet or parental monitoring. Neither of these could be classed as 'adversity factors' as per models of resilience that are primarily psychological or psycho-social (Rutter, 1987; Rutter 2007) premised on internal human characteristics and external social relations.

Despite a rigorous approach to the REA, we ended up with many studies that were not relevant and missed some that were. I was very curious as to how this had happened. In part, it can be attributed to the difficulties in disaggregating data relating to online-facilitated CSA from internet harassment and bullying research. Moreover, the lack of definitional clarity means that very few studies compared the same phenomena but this is to be expected. There is a lack of guidance on how to proceed when screening if the key terms are unclear or contested or there is considerable subject overlap. Of the total 5297 unique references, 75 were finally included in the analysis. However, as these choices illustrate, it was not straightforward to decide which literature should remain in the final review. Reflecting on this process has made me even more aware of the methodological

complexity of a literature review, highlighting the potential for epistemic injustice to creep in.

At the behest of the funder, we also contacted 51 individuals to see if they had any additional material to contribute; for example unpublished material or datasets that underpinned original studies. That such material exists in academic domains speaks to the power and ownership of data and its relationship with academic privilege. Direct approaches have a precedent in other REA's (Horvath et al., 2016) but there is only a limited evidence base in methodological terms. Greenhalgh and Peacock (2005) note that systematic reviews of evidence cannot rely solely on protocol-driven search strategies because of the complexity of human encounters. In a review of healthcare services, they found 31% of the sources via the protocol approach, 51% through snowballing and reference harvesting and 24% through personal contacts. Our approach involved fewer personal contacts and more people who are well established in the field. We had to seek approval from the Inquiry to contact each individual person. Then, as it was an additional request it required a modification to our ethics form, which had already been approved. Given that we were unsure what we would receive, systems had to be put in place in case material being sent to us was either personal (a first person account), offensive or raised child protection concerns. We only received responses from 10 of the 51 individuals contacted and only 5 of those responded with information that was relevant.

In the REA we were able to comment on some of the characteristics of young people that make them more vulnerable to online facilitated CSA. Victims (and survivors) of reported abuse are more likely to be female, with a history of adverse childhood experiences (May-Chahal and **Palmer**, 2018). Some of the victim characteristics found in the reviewed literature are similar to those of victims of offline child sexual exploitation; young females. Above average Internet use increases vulnerability when interacting with other characteristics, such as having a disability or low self-esteem. There was too little data to make confident assertions about children who have a disability, or in residential care or if risk increases or is different for BME children. However, some victims are atypical; male, from middle to upper income families who are confident Internet users. Young men who are exploring their sexuality are at greater risk of abusive online encounters.

Our REA made two original findings and suggest further areas for research (May-Chahal and **Palmer**, 2018), demonstrating once again the potential for a review methodology to identify gaps. An important finding in the REA is the under reporting

of young children who are subject to online-facilitated CSA. This finding has emerged from comparing the studies of internet content and those focused on reported cases, either in surveys or gathered through case file analysis, although it is not referred to in the research studies themselves and no explanation is recorded. Second, much research examined for the REA is unclear about whether the 'perpetrator' is an adult or a child. If it was the latter, then again there was a lack of specificity about whether the child was a peer (in the same age range) or if an older child was targeting a much younger child.

Finally, I noted how tempting it was to offer explanations for described phenomena when there is no causal evidence e.g. seeking to use ideas of 'early sexualisation' to explain victim characteristics and vulnerability factors. Repeated checking of the questions(s) and what the evidence reviewed said and did not say enabled us and our funders to keep this tendency in check.

As detailed above, my published work above demonstrates three different forms of literature review, each characterized by a different degree and rigour of searching. Central to understanding this body of work is the question of how a methodological approach can contribute to epistemic justice. The sites for potential injustice are multiple and have led me to reflect on the nature of claims making in social work research. I have argued that what appears to be neutral in relation to data gathering through a literature review approach is loaded with potential bias. At each stage choices are made which can appear to be 'objective' but have an inter-subjective morality (e.g. inter-rater reliability). Some of these issues are beyond the control of the individual researcher. That only some voices are 'authorised' through the academic peer review process, excludes others, in particular those with experience of either receiving or delivering social work services. In privileging academic understandings of a social problem the value and complexity of individual accounts can be glossed over. This is particularly inimical in social work.

### **Second cluster: Epistemological case studies in social work**

In the second half of this PhD submission, I explore through four case studies how different approaches to knowledge creation shape ways of knowing. Each of the case studies involve different ways of knowing about social work. The first considers the role of narrative text as a new form of service user contribution and one, which allows young people (in this example) to document their experiences of safeguarding interventions (Palmer and Foley, 2016). Second, I examine how a study using semi structured interviews allowed for the voices of an inaudible population to emerge; namely parents whose children have been subject to child sexual exploitation (Palmer and Jenkins, 2014). A particular challenge in this study was researcher bias

and how to move to a point of being a 'reflexive researcher' (Bryman, 2012). Third, I consider three separate publications, which are situated within a national and European institutional and policy framework (Palmer, 2018; Walby et al., 2016b; Walby, et al., 2017). Analysis of the relationship between institutional and policy objectives and outcomes reveals a set of assumptions about the nature of social work practice. Finally, I reflect on two book chapters that were written for social work practitioners (Bokhari and Kelly, 2010; Palmer, 2019). Embedded within such research, is a way of knowing that is relevant to and validated by frontline practice.

#### Case study one; narrative text 'I have my life back'<sup>15</sup>

This article is about the recovery experiences of young people who have been subject to child sexual exploitation. There are three important strands to the paper. First, it uses the published accounts of three survivors, presented in the form of a 'misery memoir' (Girl A and Bunyan, 2013; Jackson, 2012; Taylor and Clark, 2013). Second, these accounts offer young people's perspectives on how CSE happens. Finally, it examines recovery experiences from the perspectives of the young people themselves. At time of publication, little had been written about if and how young people can 'recover' (Dodsworth, 2012; Dodsworth, 2014; Pearce, 2009; Sanders, O'Neill and Pitcher, 2009; Taylor-Brown, 2002) and importantly what social workers can do to help this process.

The public, policy and academic interest in CSE is relatively recent despite evidence that the sexual exploitation of young people has occurred for centuries (Hallett, 2016). In part this interest has been fuelled by media attention to the problem, especially the work of Andrew Norfolk, an investigative journalist for The Times. Norfolk's exposé of group-related CSE in South Yorkshire drew public attention to what was presented as a problem of young white girls being sexually exploited by 'Asian'<sup>16</sup> men. Such a perspective was of obvious public interest as it powerfully connected two distinct social problems; race relations and the sexualisation of young girls. This presentation of CSE allowed far right political parties to use ethnicity, or

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<sup>15</sup> This article was published in the British Journal of Social Work, which is the premier journal in British social work with a 5 year impact factor of 1.827. Recent analysis found that 22 of the top 100 papers in international social work were published in BJSW (Hodge et al., 2010).

<sup>16</sup> The term 'Asian' does not reflect the Office for National Statistics categories used to describe ethnic identity in the UK.

more precisely Islamic faith, to explain the grooming of young white girls. It also provided a ‘legitimate’ space for public descriptions of sexual violence, which has erotic potential; for some the descriptions of young girls being gang raped will titillate.

The three selected texts offer the young person’s account of their experiences of sexual exploitation through memoir. As such they present their reflections and thoughts on the exploitation, providing rich contextual information on the specifics of their situation. Non-fiction in the form of memoir offers a different kind of knowledge for social workers, as it can “illustrate the density of the sequences of cause and effect in individual lives” (Thomson et al., 2002, p. 336). One of the challenges of such accounts is that the narrative form is pre-set; all good stories have a beginning, middle and end. This is very different from the fragmented stories that social workers are usually presented with in their daily practice. As social workers and social work researchers we hear about the lives of others, aiming to understand their experiences, their sense of self and how situations occur. Whilst a narrative approach has some traction in social work research (Riessman and Quinney, 2005) practice in the UK frames the gathering and ordering of information about an individual as an assessment. Indeed, the process of listening to fragments of life events and piecing it together to make some shared understanding is what underpins assessment. However, assessment is often less than the sum of its parts. Often there is a focus on a single event, which obscures how the event links to other previous experiences and encounters. It also ignores how in the very process of telling and being listened to, the shape of a story is changed yet again.

My object of interest is not the story per se but its ‘narrative practice’ (Gubrium, 2008). Each account privileges some aspects of the story over others, revealing what Gubrium (2005) identifies as the ‘social consequences’ of production. In choosing to write about the attraction, fun and pleasure involved in “hanging’ out with men the authors help the reader to understand why they returned to their abusers, despite the sexual violence. All authors reject the idea that they were targeted because they were white British. Instead they focus on the initial generosity and interest of the men and how it made them feel. They locate responsibility with their families, the services who should have safeguarded them and critically, their social environments.

Memoirs can provide an important and unique testimony about lived experiences of child sex abuse and CSE. The voices of young people who have been sexually exploited are underrepresented in the current service user literature. Whilst there is some creative youth work with this group much of it is unpublished (Sanders et al., 2009). Samples are often very small, which raises questions about trading uniqueness for generalisability (again lying at the heart of epistemic injustice). For example, one

study is presented as the words of young women about all aspects of their exploitation but only four participants were under the age of 18 at time of interview (Taylor-Brown 2002). The needs and future hopes of these young women are documented but this study does not (and cannot address) long term outcomes (Taylor-Brown, 2002).

The analysis of memoir is a creative way to engage with the voice of service users and at the time of writing was a unique approach. The recording of a young person's story in either written, video or digital form allows for a traumatic story to be told but without constant repetition. However, once these experiences enter the public domain it becomes harder, if impossible, to erase at a later stage if the individual wishes to do so. The right to give an experiential account of events is one of the drivers of these books. As Emma, one of the authors' notes

*I don't have paper qualifications, but I can look any professional in the eye and give my opinion. And I'll give it straight* (Jackson, 2012, p287). Here, Emma speaks of her right to share her knowledge, which has been experientially gained, amongst a group whose claims of understanding rest on knowledge acquired through education and practice. It is a claim of the right to be heard on her own terms and as Fricker (2007) argues the need to be taken seriously by the hearer.

Much of what is known from a young person's perspective about CSE sits within the disclosure literature. All too often this illustrates why young people find it so hard to tell someone what is happening to them e.g. Tucker (2011). The memoir serves to story the disclosure, to help the reader understand the complexities and nuances of developing relationships, highlighting that disclosure is as Pearce, et al., (2009, p. 21) write "a process, rather than an event". In these accounts disclosure was hampered by uncertainty about what constituted consensual sex (Coy et al., 2014; Firmin, Warrington and Pearce, 2016). Two of the three authors reflect on how were they supposed to know if what was happening was 'normal' and only in hindsight could they re-categorise their experiences as one of rape. These insights trouble assumptions that all of their experiences with the perpetrators were harmful; in fact, the pleasure and fun that the young people recall about other shared activities is a significant counter balance to the sexual violence they describe. The professionals responses, typify what Firmin et al., (2016) defines as 'condoned consent' in which accounts of CSE are ignored or reframed by social workers and others to imply that a young person consented (Hallet, 2017).

Few research studies in the UK explore how young people cope with the consequences and impact of CSE (Dodsworth, 2012; Dodsworth, 2014; Pearce et al., 2009; Sanders et al., 2009; Taylor-Brown, 2002). The Department of Children Schools and Families (2009) supplementary guidance on CSE only dedicates two paragraphs out of 97 pages to long-term support needs. They stress the need for the young

person to develop a “meaningful relationship with appropriate adults” (DCSF, 2009, S.6.41). This is reinforced in the 2011 and 2012 Government Action Plan on CSE. Whilst the impact of exploitation will be unique to each young person, it is likely that they will experience a range of physical, psychological and health needs both during and after the exploitation (DfE, 2011; Jay, 2014). Some young people may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or ongoing mental health difficulties (Hossain et al., 2010; DoH, 2014).

The concept of ‘recovery’ is problematic if assumed to infer a linear relationship between abuse and long-term outcomes. At the time of writing I was unaware of the concept of post traumatic growth although the possibility that trauma can lead to positive change is acknowledged in the paper. Post traumatic growth theory proposes that trauma can lead to positive adaptations in an individual’s life. The concept is rarely used in social work but would seem to be highly relevant to epistemic justice concerns. For example, Joseph and Murphy (2014, p1101) argue that it functions to link individual experiences and structural concerns allowing “the naming of the phenomenon to remain in the hands of those who actually experience it”. I would argue that a further step is required; experience needs to be heard and ‘credited’ (by another) to give meaning to what has been said.

#### Case study two: Interviews with parents for Parents Against Child Sexual Exploitation (PACE)

In this case study, I explore how a small scale qualitative research project, enabled me to argue that parents are often blamed for their child’s involvement in sexual exploitation. Few studies have looked in detail at this phenomenon. At the invitation of a colleague, I co-led a research project on the involvement of parents in safeguarding their own children from CSE, building on an earlier evaluation of the work of a charity established to support parents (Jenkins and Kelly, 2011). There are several strands to this study and subsequent report that are relevant to its inclusion here. First, with respect to my PhD submission, this research is unique in that no-one else had gathered primary data on this topic, although there is much written about mother blaming in child sexual abuse (Parton, Thorpe and Wattam, 1997). Second, it led me to reflect on the role of the researcher’s own experience in producing data and the relationship between personal experiences and bias. Third, I propose a ‘safeguarding model’ that does not assume the family unit as the site or causation of abuse.

In research and policy documents, it is assumed that young people who are sexually exploited are likely to have a ‘problematic’ family history (DfE 2017a; Scott and Skidmore, 2006). Most research identifies parents as a potential risk factor, citing familial abuse and breakdown as one of the push factors into CSE. Assumptions

about parenting styles and behaviours as contributory factors underpin many of the studies in the last 15 years, some of which use a resilience model to explore vulnerability and adversity factors (Rutter, 2007). It is stated that risk factors include physical abuse, sexual abuse (Coy, 2007; Scott, 2001; Scott & Skidmore, 2006), parental mental health issues, domestic violence and family breakdown (Creegan, Scott and Smith, 2005). Moreover, the language used to describe parents is often negative: for example, “there was a clear deficit in the parenting capacities” and “capacities of the mothers in these families to act as reliably protective and supportive parents was severely limited” (Scott and Skidmore, 2006, p13 and p. 17 respectively). The DfE guidance (2017a, p14) adopts a ‘child-centered’ approach and minimally acknowledges the role of the family noting that “they may have a valuable perspective to add”. Even the research by the Office of the Children’s Commissioner (2013; 2014) perpetuates this view, barely acknowledging the potential capacity of parents to protect.

The data collection for the research<sup>17</sup> was twofold; semi-structured interviews and agency data e.g. referrals, data on uptake of the charity’s services, reports of support work undertaken with families affected by CSE, prosecution and conviction data supplied by the Police. For the interviews, a semi-structured approach was chosen to explore the views of parents and professionals, enabling both groups to talk as freely as possible about their experiences. We interviewed four sets of parents, two parent support workers and eleven professionals (made up of eight police officers, two child support workers and one project manager).

Interviewing people reminded me of the core skills of social work. Research interviews condense the time spent but the process remains familiar; engagement and rapport building, sensitive use of questioning, clarification and summarizing and endings. Central is the interest and challenge of engaging with another and understanding their story (Gubrium 2008; McLaughlin, 2007; Shaw 2005). In particular, the interviews with parents were at times emotionally charged and often the interviewee was upset. The sense of self-blame compounded often by the response of services was palpable. As with the REA for IICSA, I felt it was important to be knowledgeable about child protection to be able to contextualize what I was hearing, although this knowledge was always circumscribed by my own standpoint within it.

Although we claimed to work within a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Straus, 1967) differences in our approaches to theory development soon emerged. I stuck fairly closely to the interview guide, only using prompts when

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<sup>17</sup> Research commissioned by the charity whose services we were ‘evaluating’

necessary. Listening to the transcripts, I realized that my co-researcher had taken a more unstructured approach (Bryman, 2012), rephrasing some of the questions and following up with additional questions that were not on the interview guide. Such differences continued through to the data analysis stage, becoming increasingly problematic. Essentially my colleague took a deductive approach and I an inductive one. I felt unable to challenge my colleague on this because his position was so firmly located in his own personal experiences. The power and pain of these experiences silenced me.

My co-researcher had asked me to be involved to minimise bias; he had been a beneficiary of the support services provided by the charity whose work we were exploring. Although we discussed this it did lead to significant differences in what we pursued in the interview and then allowed to emerge in the analysis stage. It is for this reason that apart from the report itself and one conference presentation, the work remains unpublished in any academic papers. I did not agree with his analysis of the transcribed interview data. He approached the data to confirm what he felt was important; that professionals should take the views of parents affected by CSE more seriously. I felt the data from the professionals revealed ambivalence about the involvement of parents in safeguarding their children from CSE. Most interviewees dealt with this by categorizing parents into those that can support and those who are unable to; this classification was permeated with moral categorization. For example;

*Some parents have been completely gobsmacked and have absolutely no idea what their daughters are getting up to, while others on the other side of the spectrum, don't really care. They're happy that their daughter's out of the house all night and not really bothered where they are (police officer, CSE team).*

*the parents would probably want this child back because they would lose the [disability] benefits. And as much as you don't want to be so challenging of parents, it doesn't seem inappropriate that comment, knowing what we know (member of a CSE team)*

Despite our seemingly objective approach, cracks and flaws emerged in the process of data collection and analysis. I became increasingly aware of how researcher bias can shape the production of knowledge. The irony is that I too had a personal perspective that influenced my understandings. I completed this research just after a period of being off sick from work because of intense flashbacks of childhood abuse. In retrospect, I can see that the timing for my involvement was less than ideal. However, I learnt that personal experience is unavoidable and acceptable as long as I adopt the position of a reflexive researcher, acknowledging “the implications of their [my] methods, values, biases and decisions for the knowledge of the social world they [/] generate” Bryman, (2012) p 393.

Since then I have chosen to more actively occupy a ‘position’ within my teaching and research as an individual with experience but not an expert<sup>18</sup>. As Fox (2016) outlines personal experience of services can be used to enrich teaching as well as challenge some of the stereotypes about those who use services. A challenge remain regarding power and whether a ‘hybrid’ academic service users voice is accepted more readily because it is legitimized by their socio-economic and ‘intellectual ‘status’. Whilst there is a degree of acceptance of personal experiences of mental health (Boxall and Beresford 2012; Fox, 2016) the stigma of child sexual abuse remains; very few academics publicly own this form of experience (Cree, 2012). Even when undertaking the REA for IICSA, with their emphasis on the inclusion of survivors, I did not feel able to fully own my position as a researcher with a history of abuse, although importantly on this occasion my colleague was aware.

A further level of bias was the omnipresent influence of the funder; a small scale charity whose future depended on positive findings. Everyone we interviewed wanted funding for this organization to continue. Moreover, the charity needed a successful evaluation to demonstrate that they had achieved their objectives for the commissioner. In this vein, I was asked to ‘modify’ some of what I had written in the first report to make it more sympathetic. Some recommendations were simply too challenging for the charity to accept in a public facing document. My practical response was to write a further internal document in which I could be more critical. Since then (for example, with the EU trafficking report) I have learnt how to phrase my comments to be indirect and avoid any specific criticism of the funder and its practices. Whilst this was useful learning it does raise questions about integrity. These questions go well beyond my own research, to the way in which Governments can use funding contracts to silence researchers, as with the unsuccessful proposal in 2016 to block findings being used for lobbying purposes (Weaver and Butler 2016).

Our research was the first to challenge the view that family is either a causative or a contributory factor in the exploitation being investigated. We posited that the conceptual map used to understand CSE was unhelpful, given that it is centered on the family as the site of abuse. A child protection model assumes that parents may be partly responsible for the abuse that a child is experiencing; it is the standard approach in familial child protection where the role of the social worker is to assess parental and home circumstances (DOH, 2000, and other references). This approach does not fit with CSE, as the grooming and the exploitation usually take place outside of the family home. Whilst there may be factors at home that in some cases

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<sup>18</sup> The term ‘expert by experience’ stems from the user movements in mental health services but is now integrated into NHS and social care services (e.g. Quality Care Commission) to encourage participation by those with experiences of services.

exacerbate a young person's vulnerability, the safeguarding model we proposed assumes that parents want to and have the capacity to protect their child, unless repeated evidence or their behaviour proves otherwise.

However, we conclude that it is not enough just to support parents, but that they should be actively welcomed as partners in safeguarding their child. The family-centered approach also sits well with a shift to a more 'relational model' of child protection, strongly recommended by the Munro Review (2011). In CSE, this means recognising the role they can play in sharing information as well as having their concerns taken seriously and responded to quickly. Such an approach stands in contrast to the punitive trend in social work practice over the last ten years.

Research on family support (Featherstone, Morris and White, 2014) and supporting parents with drug and alcohol misuse (Forrester, et al., 2009) or where domestic violence (Stanley, Miller and Richardson 2012) occurs similarly conclude that social workers blame rather than support the parents. Thus, our proposed model could well apply to other areas of child protection and has been acknowledged as helpful in work on risk and adolescence (Hansom and Holmes, 2014).

In my later work (**Palmer**, 2018; **Palmer**, 2019) I revisit the issue of how to capture the experiences of harm that occur out with the family unit, or at most are partially influenced by the family dynamics. Whilst there is increasing interest in this subject no satisfactory term exists to describe abusive events that do not (always) involve a parent/ family member. Instead, there are a stream of policies and guidelines that attempt to explore 'other' forms of abuse. In Working Together 2013, 18 numbers of 'other' forms of abuse were listed; this was reduced somewhat in Working Together 2015 to 8. More recently, attempts have been made to group these 'other' experiences together under the banner of 'contextual safeguarding' in revision to Working Together (2018).

Contextual safeguarding is a term coined by Firmin (2017) in an attempt to move professional focus away from the family as the site of harm. Specifically, the term has developed in relation to understandings of child sexual exploitation as well as other forms of peer on peer abuse. It is a challenge to propose a term that adequately represents abuse that occurs outside the family home. The phrase contextual safeguarding is problematic as it is unclear whether it is the context that is abusive or whether in safeguarding, professionals need to take the strengths of a context into account? Moreover, Lyngstad (2013) questions how to define context; is it locally, nationally or even globally defined? With reference to CSE, the context is arguably all three (local conditions, national policy and media response and internationally through the movement of victims and perpetrators) and is further complicated by the artificial divide between the on and offline worlds (Leary, 2014).

### Case study three: A policy and European institutional epistemology

In this section, I explore how national and European institutional policy priorities shape ways of knowing, focusing on three of my outputs (Palmer, 2018; Walby et al., 2016b; Walby et al., 2017). Two outputs (a report and a peer reviewed paper) stem from one project funded by the European Commission to evaluate all anti-trafficking projects funded by the European Union (EU) from 2006 to 2015 (Palmer, 2018; Walby et al., 2016b). The other contribution, as one of several co-authors of a book, considers how data about domestic violence is collected and whether a common framework for measurement could be agreed across all services in Europe (Walby et al., 2017). My contribution was to explore the mechanisms in social work to collect data, which is predominantly through the performance measurement categories set by Government. Analysis of performance indicators reveals a set of assumptions about the nature of social work practice in situations of domestic violence. However, the knowledge gained from performance indicators is partial. Social workers need to have data that gives a more meaningful assessment of domestic violence related interventions.

### Child Trafficking in Europe

In 2015-16, I was part of a group of researchers commissioned by the European Commission to evaluate all the anti-trafficking projects funded by the EU from 2006 to 2015. The projects were evaluated against the five strategic priorities of the EU Anti-Trafficking Strategy 2012 to 2016:

- A. Identifying, protecting and assisting victims of trafficking
- B. Stepping up the prevention of trafficking in human beings
- C. Increased prosecution of traffickers
- D. Enhanced coordination and cooperation among key actors and policy coherence
- E. Increased knowledge of and effective response to emerging concerns related to all forms of trafficking in Human beings (European Commission, 2012, p5)

The recommendations we made as a research team were adopted by the EU in their latest EU Strategy 2017 (EC, 2017), including the need for better prevention efforts to more effectively address child trafficking.

My role was to work with one other person to review all the projects that focused on children; this included projects within the EU (n=26) and those funded as part of

the EU commitment to global sustainable development (n=47). The timescales for undertaking this work were short (four months). Each anti-trafficking project was reviewed using a number of techniques. First, we had access to the documentation submitted to the EU by each funded project as part of the bid process. This ranged from a complete set of documents detailing the funding application right through to final reports to projects with just the funding application. Often an 'end-product' could be found through an online search but it did not appear in the EU database. The mismatch between the financial investment in a project and lack of documented/audited outputs was striking. It suggests that the act of commissioning a project was of more significance than the results. Neither the output or outcome was routinely collected, minimising both the importance of action and the importance of accountability.

A second approach to data analysis involved techniques developed in the discipline of corpus linguistics (Anthony, 2013). All the documents from all the projects were scanned into software to create a 'corpus', consisting of 20 million words (Walby et al., 2016b). Using free software (AntCon, available at:

<http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software.html>) the corpus allowed for quick analysis of key words. The software toolkit enabled detection of word frequency as well as the identification of 'collocates' i.e. the words that occur in close proximity to the key word; this proximity parameter can be set. The latter function proved challenging when searching for the key word 'child'. Many of the references to 'child' were in fact citations of the United Nations (2000) 'Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children'. Some projects claimed to cover children simply because of their reliance on this definition. Few projects addressed the need for better understanding of transition from status of a child to that of an adulthood, although their exploitation may have commenced when aged under 18. The advantages of the methodology was that it provided an empirical approach that allowed for patterns in the text to be detected and then analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively (Anthony, 2013).

We evaluated the projects against the five priorities of the EU Strategy 2012-2016. These priorities shaped how the projects framed the work that they undertook (or proposed to undertake); other discourses were marginalised or silenced or only enter when relevant to the institutional discourse. For example, whilst many projects stated that they would consider Priority E2 (about 'high-risk' groups including children left behind, Roma children, early school leavers and children with disabilities), none actually considered the needs of children with disabilities. The priority actions for child victims of trafficking were; addressing reintegration and trafficking of child victims, strengthening guidelines on child protection systems and best practice models of Guardianship (priority A3). Embedded within these three foci

are an interest in the better identification of child victims (priority A2) and to a lesser extent, consideration of how to prevent children becoming vulnerable to trafficking (such as addressing prevention from a child's rights perspective or offering legitimate employment opportunities).

The review revealed that certain aspects of the priority actions were privileged over others. Many projects focused on national and intra EU mechanisms for the identification and support of children who may have been trafficked. Awareness raising programmes within and across nation states were used as a means of improving recognition. The assumption was that if a potential child victim was recognised then they would be eligible for state support and protection. However, as the projects themselves indicated, 'recognition' is problematic as it leads to demands on resources. As a consequence groups of children (especially Roma children) remained 'un-recognised', through disputes about their age, their credibility and legitimacy (UNHCR, 2014). A division emerged between groups of children who were allowed to access support services and those who were not; an approach clearly at odds with the child rights approach, which is embedded within EU policy and law.

A child rights discourse is central to European Union policy about the welfare of children, including migrant children. However, there is a tension between the principles of a child rights approach and the valuing of children as social actors (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). This tension is not unique to these projects but is highlighted by the fact that children and young people can move freely within the Europe Union, thereby emphasising their agency. Similar debates occur, especially in the global south, about the universalising trend of the United Nation Convention Rights of the Child (UNCRC), against regional and national socio-cultural practices, for instance with regards to child labour (Cregan and Cuthbert, 2014). The UNCRC and subsequent protocols present a fixed and universal model of childhood, in which rights are contingent on being under 18. As such, child rights as an organizing framework is static, representing the aimed for privileges of a Western childhood (Cregan and Cuthbert, 2014: Tobin 2015). Child victims of trafficking present a paradox to child protection services. At one level, their experiences embody profoundly exploitative human action and it seems common sense that a society would wish to protect children from such harm. However, the narratives of many child victims of trafficking are complicated by their own agency as social actors (Goździak, 2008) Their stories are frequently 'discredited' and as Fricker (2007) argues such credibility deficit can result in prejudicial hearing.

The proposition that children have agency (James et al., 1998) offers a more dynamic organising framework. The capacity of that agency is contingent on age, gender, sociocultural practices and country of origin. In relation to trafficking, the ability to move freely challenges typical Western notions of childhood that are firmly located

in the home. Instead, children and young people can be understood as making difficult choices in constrained sociocultural environments, where the fact of their age limits access to resources in a different way to that for adults. Some projects considered how to increase safety for children on the move, acknowledging the difficult choices young people have to make in less than ideal circumstances.

However, very few projects address the structural factors (poverty, ethnic discrimination, lack of national child protection infrastructure, conflict, lack of opportunity) that lead children and young people to be vulnerable. This led me to argue that children and young people's perceptions of risk need to be taken into account in any anti-trafficking strategy.

Children and young people were involved in the co-production of the work in ten projects (14%). Most projects concerning children involved children as sources of data (for surveys, interviews or other data collection methods) or drew on 'experts' and adult actors working with children. This approach reinforces the victim status of childhood and reduces the potential to help intervene in the realities of child trafficking as they are experienced by children and young people themselves. The voice of the child was peripherally relevant; it had to be there because of the child rights agenda but the thrust of what they wanted, such as safe accommodation and right to move on, was not acknowledged. Hart's (1992) 'ladder of participation' highlights that involving children and young people can range from manipulation to jointly owned decision making. Participation is tokenistic if the act of consulting is prioritised over the need to act on what children and young people say they want to be different. For my own work, the glossing over of young people's ability to lead and share in knowledge generation is critical.

### **Child Protection and Trafficking in the European Union**

Child protection systems are deemed to be integral to the identification, support, assistance and possible return of child victims of trafficking (UNICEF, 2011). Many of the projects in the EU research alluded to national child protection systems that were presented as ineffective in preventing child trafficking or protecting suspected victims. Despite this criticism, the idea of a functioning child protection system was offered as a panacea. This became the focus of my sole authored paper, which critiqued understandings and representations of national child protection systems across the EU 28 (Palmer, 2018). It is a complex area because the authority of the EU to impose specific systems and actions on individual member states is limited. The Treaty of Lisbon (2007) governs the division of labour between the EU and the member state but it is generally confined to co-operation and co-ordination, such as providing information and exchange of best practices.

Writing this paper made me reflect further on claims making, especially the nature of

the evidence (and its quality) on which my paper was based<sup>19</sup>. My discussion of the projects was solely based on an in-depth reading and the corpus linguistic analysis. What could I really claim on this basis? Instead of leading to an epistemic cul de sac, I see my contribution as one way of ‘knowing’ about this subject. Straddling both evaluation and review methodologies, I consider some of the emergent themes in child trafficking in Europe, albeit within the confines of the funded projects. Even from this position, it was still possible to identify areas that were sidelined, notable was the lack of attention paid to the role of technology in trafficking or the number of children who are missing across Europe. I was also mindful that I had to exercise a degree of sensitivity in highlighting challenges for the funding body (not a new dilemma in research but one that is not always acknowledged).

### **The concept and measurement of violence in women and men**

Finally, in this section I consider a co-authored short book contribution on how domestic violence is measured by public agencies within the UK and Europe, part of a wider project of improving knowledge about domestic violence through standardised multi-agency data collection (EIGE, nd). Of specific interest was how administrative data can be collected across services that may come into contact with a victim of domestic violence. Administrative data is that which is routinely collected by public agencies as part of their work; the records, notes, forms, checklists and assessments completed by health practitioners, the Police, social services and other agencies. Such data can be used to inform policy aims and funding priorities.

I searched the literature to find any relevant research and policy in the UK and Europe. The search was thorough but not systematic as the remit was to scope the problem; as a consequence what can be claimed from this review is limited. The search was complicated by numerous definitions of the key search terms (domestic violence or domestic abuse or interpersonal violence or intimate partner violence). Few studies have looked in detail at how administrative data about domestic violence is collected and presented in social work services. Two separate subject areas (domestic violence and social work and performance management in social work) were interrogated separately to consider what social work services could contribute to the measurement of violence. Social work research has already revealed much about the nature and impact of domestic violence, principally in relation to children and young people (Hester 2011; Holt, Buckley & Whelan 2008; Humprhreys and Bradbury Jones, 2015; Stanley, Miller, and Richardson Foster,

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<sup>19</sup> This was reinforced in the subsequent research project for IICSA; when reviewing academic papers the clarity of evidence claims was the key evaluative criterion.

2012). Far less is known about adult women who are not mothers (Keeling and Van Wormer, 2012), unless they have additional needs (Hague, Thiara and Mullender, 2011) or in relation to multi-agency contribution at the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (Robins et al., 2014).

Governmental social work services in all European countries are required to collect and submit data about their work; the foci for data collection are set by central governments. Performance indicators are made up of what public bodies (local authority/ government/ European Union and the UN) decide is important to measure. Such categories are political as they focus on social phenomena deemed to be important (Merry, 2016). In this way, social problems can be hidden or revealed, with specific constructions created because of the way in which an indicator is set. As Merry (2016) points out performance indicators are not neutral categories; they have been developed over a period of time by specific groups of people with specific agendas. This development is not linear but complex as socio-political trends effect what is deemed important to know more about; for example the introduction by Ofsted of joint targeted area inspections on CSE post Rotherham and Rochdale.

In the UK domestic violence has only been explicitly measured in Children's Services since 2013/4, when a category was introduced at point of **case closure** in response to Munro's (2011) report. Concerns about domestic violence are not measured at point of referral, instead the reasons for initial contact are determined by the Child in Need (CIN) categories. The CIN census is a 'child-level' data collection tool that collects data on children referred to Children's Services because their health or development is at risk. In principle, it enables the Government to track a child through their contact with social services from point of referral to case closure in the UK (DfE, 2015a). It commenced in 2000 and has run annually since 2008 using an entire years' financial activities (Gatehouse, Ward and Holmes 2008). The CIN categories are oblique and at points overlapping.

Important to the consideration of how domestic violence is measured is the language used to determine what data is collected. The three exit categories for social workers to complete at case closure are ambivalent and concerns must be 'currently relevant' (DfE, 2015b) .

**‘3A Domestic violence:** Concerns about the **child** being the subject of domestic violence.

**3B Domestic violence:** Concerns about the child's **parent/carer** being the subject of domestic violence.

**3C Domestic violence:** Concerns about **another person** living in the household being the subject of domestic violence.' (DfE, 2015b, p32)

These three categories represent a missed opportunity to learn more about social work intervention when domestic violence is a feature of the work. **3A** is framed by out-dated understandings of harm being caused by physical assault (Katz, 2015) rather than effects of seeing or hearing harm as recognized in the Adoption and Children Act 2002. **3b** is unhelpful as it does not draw a distinction between the mother or father or the nature of the 'carer' and fails to acknowledge the gendered nature of domestic abuse (Coy 2015). **3c** relates to the broad definition of domestic abuse adopted in 2015 in England. Domestic abuse is defined as including young people (16-18) and other people in the household and can include coercive control (Home Office, 2013). What is being measured by these categories is the Government's definition of domestic abuse, not intervention and outcome.

Performance indicators are one driver of social work practice. However, the lack of control that local authority social workers have over what data is prioritised has consequences for practice. Completing forms has been reduced to a meaningless administrative task (Broadhurst et al., 2009) instead of an opportunity to better understand patterns of referral, need and abuse, intervention quality and outcomes for service users. There are forms of knowledge that are currently missing from administrative data collection that would better service the social workers who provide the data currently. They, and their managers, need to have data that gives a more meaningful assessment of domestic violence related interventions.

Implementing a measurement tool in social work could help see incidents as part of a pattern rather than in isolation. In terms of case management, this kind of information is valuable in indicating where resources would best be placed. Local Authority lack of power to make measurement decisions is another form of epistemic injustice.

Case Study four; Research for practice; unaccompanied asylum seeking children. The final part of this supporting document explores how my social work practice and ongoing training of qualified social workers shapes my writing and research contributions. Holding on to my professional identity as a qualified and registered social worker is a significant part of my academic self. I am aware that in my university teaching, in training and in meetings with external agencies, being a qualified social worker makes a difference to the way in which what I say is received. Maintaining my professional registration in part legitimates my academic identity. In my last two published works, I have reflected on how being a registered social worker has influenced my interpretation and presentation of information and data.

The value of a practice background is a specific dimension in academic practice that is most clearly articulated in nursing literature (Elliott, & Wall, 2008).

In retrospect, I understand that knowing the intended audience of a piece of writing is critical. My first published work<sup>20</sup> is a co-written chapter, which forms part of an edited collection of articles to commemorate in 2007 100 years of the abolition of slavery (Bokhari and **Kelly**, 2010). The collection was one of the first attempts to address modern slavery in the UK and was used to lobby in the House of Commons. My contribution includes the introduction and conclusion of a chapter about culture and child exploitation, as well as section on West African children being used as 'domestic servants' in the UK. In particular, I questioned why the West African cultural practice of 'fosterage' which led in some situations in the UK to children being kept as 'domestic servants' was beyond professional recognition. Although domestic servitude occurs within the confines of a house, in many cases the victims of trafficking were 'seen' but still treated as if they were invisible. Such invisibility is amplified in many child sexual exploitation cases where the exploitation takes place in public spaces (parks, take-aways, shopping centres and taxi ranks). Common to both are situations in which social workers and other professionals only intervene when the abuse has become so manifest that it cannot be ignored any longer (Jay, 2014). Despite making important points, this chapter did not lead to practice changes as the intention of the edited collection was directed more to policy change.

In 2017, I was approached to write a chapter on the assessment of asylum seeking, refugee and trafficked children, building on previous publications in this field (**Kelly**, 2011; Crawley and Kelly, 2011). The language used to categorise children and young people on the move is complex and, as I found in the EU work, has the potential to be divisive (Walby et al., 2016b). The categorization of children into separate groups depending on their immigration status leads to a fragmented approach to a wide group of children and young people (Dotteridge, 2006; EASO, 2013). Instead, I prefer and have persistently promoted the term-separated children (**Kelly** and Bokhari, 2011). 'Separated children' is an umbrella term used to describe any child in a country who is without the support and care of their parents or a legal Guardian (SCEP, 2009). My chapter sits within the third edition of a popular book on assessment for children and family social workers (Basarab-Horwath, 2001; Basarab-Horwath, 2010). The previous two editions did not include a chapter on the needs of separated children but there is an increasing awareness of the needs of this group through national policy (DfE, 2017c) and potential impact on LA budgets (ADCS, 2016).

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<sup>20</sup> The first submitted for this PhD.

Despite a simple brief, the chapter posed many challenges. First, the editors had produced a guide as to what content they would like to see in all chapters to provide thematic coherency. This centered on the role of the family as a site of protection, which is not often relevant for separated children. Second, it had to be written in a way that was accessible to social workers but to also draw on the ‘best’ available research evidence. Third, the word count at 4000 words was relatively low given the complex nature of the subject matter. This was further complicated when at the third draft I was asked to make reference to legislation in each of the four nations of the United Kingdom. Whilst immigration and asylum are non-devolved issues, national law on the protection of children is distinct for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The editors adopted the terminology of ‘best available research’ without offering any guidance as to what this might be. There are sets of ‘knowledges’ in this field that are very different from one another; from the lived experience of an individual, to the data and information produced by Government and that of NGO’s and non-governmental public bodies, such as the Office of the Children’s Commissioner. The latter find that the support and protection for separated children is inadequate (e.g. Coram International, 2017). Moreover, many young people have difficulties in the UK, which are exacerbated by the nature of the child protection and immigration systems (O’Connell Davidson 2013; Kohli, 2006a). For example, restrictions on work and movement many be at odds with their survival experiences up until point of identification in the UK.

This chapter builds on a previous co-authored chapter (Crawley and Kelly, 2012) on the same subject in my co-edited book (**Kelly** and Bokahri, 2012). However, much has changed since the publication in 2012. In particular, the issues of age assessment remains contested. An age assessment is undertaken when there is genuine doubt over an individual’s age although they claim to be a child (DfE, 2017b). Over 15 years of case law governs practice in this area; the pendulum swings from criticism to endorsement of social worker age assessments (Brownlees and Yazdani, 2012). Currently, age assessments need to be undertaken by two qualified and age assessment trained social workers to be considered compliant with case law (ADCS, 2016). Assessment of age also features in the detection of online child sexual abuse images. In this domain, the challenges of accurately determining age are readily accepted: the Internet Watch Foundation (2015) note that determining the ages of children over 16 is challenging, widening the category to 16-20 in their assessment to ensure inclusion of 16-18 year olds. This illustrates that the need to categorise age changes according to the practical purposes at hand.

How is age known? Age can be claimed because it is as the Supreme Court found ‘an objective fact’ ([2009] UKSC 8). However, such subject claims are rarely sufficient in

the context of Local Authority provision and are dismissed as inadequate. Age can also be verified by various identity documents (birth certificates, passports) but these are frequently unavailable or they are not accepted as valid (ADCS, 2016). So, the two methods available to citizen children are negated by the age assessment process; immediately establishing a division between authorised and need-proof-to-be-authorised children. A culture of disbelief is legitimised through the focus on age and eligibility to services (Crawley and Kelly, 2012). It points to a broader injustice whereby a group of young people are collectively disadvantaged; the denial of their social experiences, including their very fact of their being (Masocha, 2014) furthers the harm that they encounter.

A further challenge in this chapter was how to distill published research into a form that is easily accessible and readily applicable to the practice of social work. To a degree, this question is disingenuous as the chapter sits within a book so its accessibility is limited to those who can afford to buy the book or have access to an academic library. Only open access books such as the co-authored book on the measurement of domestic violence (Walby et al., 2017) begin to circumvent these publisher restrictions. However, the way in which a piece is written (style, length and accessibility) will also affect its intelligibility to a practice focussed audience. A second concern is the assumed relationship between reading a practice-focused chapter and actual changes to practice. Theories of adult learning indicate that the process of acquiring and applying new knowledge is iterative as illustrated in Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle. Reflective supervision both individual and peer, the development of a learning culture and support for impact assessments in practice are crucial to creating the conditions in which new knowledge can be applied (Skills for Care, 2014)

Peer reviewers' feedback on the assessment of separated children chapter made me aware that I carried bias about social work practice in this area. My previous exposure to young people seeking asylum and child victims of trafficking was through a voluntary organisation. A combination of poor local authority practice and that only the worst of situations were referred to the organisation made me cynical about frontline practice. Some of this cynicism came across in my writing and I was rightly challenged on it by the peer reviewers. Renewed contact with local authority social workers has helped me to shift my thinking about practice with separated children. Training qualified social workers on age assessment practices has enabled me to see the ethical dilemmas that many face (Wright 2014) For example, social workers are frustrated by the time spent on planning for a looked after child's future given the likelihood that they will receive an immigration decision that returns them to country of origin aged 18.

In writing the chapter, I had a clear sense of the position that I was advocating and the evidence base to justify it. My approach in the chapter is threefold. First, I reiterate a point made in a previous paper (Kelly, 2011) that *all children* irrespective of circumstances have the right to be protected from further harm (Rigby and Whyte, 2015). This includes a reflection of why some young people seem harder to protect. Second, to expect and appreciate uncertainty in the assessment process (Munro 2011). Third that social workers need to evidence their professional values through adopting a relational model, as outlined by Ruch, Turney and Ward, 2010. A relational approach honours the individual and requires that self-knowledge about experiences be ‘credited’ (Fricker, 2007). It requires key social work skills such as engagement in working towards establishing a relationship based on trust. In advocating this approach I suggest that emotions, values and relationships are important ways of knowing in social work.

This chapter demonstrates proficiency in one of the central challenges in academic social work; how to fuse research and practice experience in a way that is accessible. The very different epistemological positions of research and practice help to explain why and how this is so challenging. My characteristic approach in both training social workers and writing the chapter is to relate new knowledge to that which they are already comfortable with, such as understandings of disclosure in social work. Second, I aim to enable the reader to draw on their own experiences to help them appreciate what it can be like for a separated child; a simple example of this technique is to imagine finding your way in a new place without a map after a long journey; trying to tune into the felt experience can open up spaces for reflection.

### Conclusion and next steps

In summary, this supporting document has outlined the contribution to social work I have made through asking the question ‘what is knowing in social work research and practice’. Through a dual focus on research processes (principally review methodology) and ways of including or excluding knowledge, I argue that partial epistemologies lead to epistemic injustices. The totality of this goes beyond design flaws in research methodology to the mechanisms of knowledge control or “the operation of social power in epistemic interactions” (Fricker, 2007, p1). My route into this subject was twofold. First, my placement at SCIE revealed some of the many points at which bias is introduced in the production, dissemination and academic ownership of research (Kelly, 2012). In my subsequent work, I have further explored how the process can distort claims making (Kelly, 2011; May-Chahal and Palmer, 2018; Walby et al., 2016a). Adopting a case study approach in the second half of the supporting document has enabled me to explore the different forms of knowledge construction in my research. Finally, drawing on Fricker’s (2007) ideas about

epistemic injustice particularly at a testimonial level has helped me make sense of the practice of disbelief that permeates some social work practice.

I have argued that that knowledge practices in social work are partial. Despite the professional mandate to be inclusive and empower individuals, groups and communities, the voices of some are routinely excluded. This exclusion happens at two levels within the research process. First, as illustrated in my research for PACE (**Palmer** and Jenkins, 2014) the EU (Walby et al., 2016b) and IICSA (May-Chahl and **Palmer**, 2018) the mechanics of funding, data collection methods and reporting of findings serve some producers of knowledge better than others. Second, there are sets of 'knowledges' in this field that are very different from one another; from the lived experience of an individual (as I explored in the 'misery memoirs' article: **Palmer** and Foley, 2016) to the data and information produced by Government (explored in relation domestic violence; Walby et al., 2017). I argue that all are important and valid sources but some 'knowledges' are given preference. As such certain voices remain inaudible because they do not fit within a given convention.

To allow for another's knowledge, it first has to be 'heard'. Throughout this thesis, I have argued that social work practice, despite best intentions, often reveals an inability to hear. Prejudice, against for instance asylum seeking and trafficked children diminishes the capacity of another to hear. This prejudice operates at individual, organizational and structural levels. In relation to young people, the prejudice is socio-cultural and is formalized through the law. Both the Children Act 1989 and the Sexual Offences Act 2003. situate young people as as children in need of protection. As such, the protective category of child is ambivalent and selectively applied. A major barrier to recognition of child trafficking, child sexual exploitation and asylum seeking children is that many of the victims do not fit the dominant 'passive' construct of childhood (**Kelly** and Bokhari, 2012; **Palmer**, 2018; **Palmer**, 2019). Instead of the resilience and resourcefulness of young people being celebrated, it is the act of exercising agency that makes professionals question aspects of their core self; be it their age, their story or their behaviours. The operation of the category of child is mutually exclusive; they can either be a victim or a social actor, never both.

I continue to explore the conditions for disbelief in social work and safeguarding practices. With a focus on babies and infants, my next co-authored work <sup>21</sup>will focus more on what is not seen (even though it easy to view) rather than what is unheard. However the same conditions of disbelief exists. As identified in the REA (May-Chahal and **Palmer**, 2018) a large number of images of the sexual abuse of babies and

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<sup>21</sup> Co authored short book for Policy Press; due early 2019.

infants exist and these images are increasing in number (McManus and Almond, 2014). They have begun to become visible through studies that focus on the detection of child abuse images online more generally and law enforcement reports (May-Chahal and **Palmer**, 2018). Moreover, images of the child sexual abuse of babies and infants represent more severe acts of abuse than that of older children (Bissias et al., 2016). These studies confirm that the sexual abuse of babies and infants occurs.

The online circulation of images of sexual abuse of babies and infants remains 'hidden' to professional view, despite the relative accessibility of such images on the web. As previously argued, children can be exploited in public or semi-private spaces but remain unseen. By ignoring the online domain safeguarding services miss opportunities to protect children and young people who are victims of sexual abuse. One local example, which illustrates the professional aversion to contemplating the sexual abuse of an infant is Poppi Worthington, who died at 13 months old. Poppi's death was not properly investigated immediately despite clinical observations at time of death about possible anal injuries (CPS, 2018), nor in the following eight months (Cumbria County Council v M and F [2014] EWHC 4886 (Fam)). No criminal charges have been brought against her father (CPS, 2018). Acknowledging their failings, Cumbria Constabulary (no date) note that their role in investigating an infant death is to "*provide a voice for the child*". Such failings in hearing and seeing are not unique.

Throughout this document, I have alluded to interrelationship between my personal experiences and my academic development. Such reflections have occurred in tandem with my consideration of the process and nature of claims making in social work. I have sought to understand claims that have been made on partial knowledge and how such claims can be made. Only through scrutinising the practices of knowledge generation can we be confident that individuals are heard and that we learn from their experiences. The significance of subjectivity and in particular the need to have individual experience validated (through being heard) cuts across my work. In drawing on Fricker's (2007) concept of 'epistemic injustice' I have shown how disbelief and discrediting of individuals and groups is perpetuated despite our professional mandate. Personally, the disjunction between the stated values and ethics of the profession (BASW, 2014) and actual behaviours remains a profound intellectual dilemma. There is much work to do before we can be certain that the claims made in social work practice and research are just.

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Appendix One:

List of Published works for submission for PhD by publication

Published Work	Type of work	Authorship
Bokhari, F. & <b>Kelly, E.</b> (2010) 'Child Rights, Culture and Exploitation – Learning from UK Experiences of Child Trafficking'. In Craig, G., Ed <i>Child Slavery Now</i> . Bristol. Policy Press	Chapter in edited book – 6 pages authors own.	Joint author 50%
In <b>Kelly, E</b> & Bokhari, F (Eds). (2011) <i>Separated Children: Safeguarding Refugee, Trafficked &amp; Migrant Children in the UK</i> . London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers.  <b>Kelly, E.</b> (2011). 'Listening to Separated Children'. pp135 -151	Edited book – 176 pages.  17 pages	Co-editor  Sole author of 1 chapter
Kelly, E. (2012). Systematic and just; the use of a systematic review methodology in social work research. <i>Social Work and Social Science Review</i> 15 (3) pp.72-85.	Refereed Journal article, 6, 000 words	Sole author 100%
<b>Palmer, E.</b> , & Jenkins, P., (2014). <i>Parents as Partners in Safeguarding Children: An evaluation of PACE's work in four Lancashire multi-agency CSE Teams</i> . Leeds, PACE (Parents Against Child Sexual Exploitation	Evaluation report	Joint author, 50%

<p>May-Chahal, C., Rashid, A., Edwards, M., Palmer, E., and Brennan, M. 'Emerging Cyber Technology' in Walby et al., (2016) <i>Study on the gender dimension of trafficking in human beings</i>. Lancaster University and the European Commission.</p>	<p>Report for the European Commission</p>	<p>Contributing author to one chapter</p>
<p>Walby, S., Towers, J., Francis, B., Shire, K., Kelly, L., Apitzsch, B...<b>Palmer, E.</b> (2016). <i>Study on Comprehensive Policy Review of Anti-Trafficking Projects</i>. Funded by the European Commission. HOME/2014/ISFP/PR/THBX/0052. Lancaster University</p>	<p>Peer reviewed research report,</p>	<p>Contributing author</p>
<p>Palmer, E., and F, Marian. (2016) I have my life back; recovering from child sexual exploitation. British Journal of Social Work, 47(4), pp.1094–1110. <i>British Journal of Social Work</i>.</p>	<p>Refereed Journal article, 7,000 words</p>	<p>Joint author 50%</p>
<p>May-Chahal, C., <b>Palmer, E.</b>, with Dodds, S., &amp; Milan, S., (2017). <i>Rapid Evidence Assessment: Characteristics and vulnerabilities of victims of online facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation</i>. Funded by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. 22.01.2018</p>	<p>Peer reviewed research report 34,768 words My contribution is in chapter five.</p>	<p>Joint author 50%</p>
<p>Walby, S., Towers, J., Balderston, S., Corradi, C., Francis, B., Heiskanen, M., Helweg-Larsen, K., Mergaert, L., Olive, P., <b>Palmer, E.</b>, Stöckl, H., and Strid, S. (date). <i>The concept and measurement of violence against women and men</i>. Bristol; Policy Press.</p>	<p>Co authored book 53 699 words</p>	<p>Co author with 11 others</p>

<p><b>Palmer, E. (2018 )</b> Assessment of asylum seeking and trafficked children in Howarth, J., and Platt, D, eds. <i>The Child's World</i> (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers.</p>	<p>Refereed book chapter, 4,000 words</p>	<p>Sole author</p>
<p><b>Palmer, E. (2018).</b> Trafficked Children and Child Protection Systems in the European Union. European Journal of Social Work 22(4), pp.551-562.</p>	<p>Refereed Journal article, 7,000 words</p>	<p>Sole author</p>

Bokhari, F., and Kelly, E. (2010) 'Child rights, culture and exploitation: UK experiences of child trafficking' pp. 145-159 in Craig, G. *Child Slavery Now: A Contemporary Reader*. Bristol: Policy.

This is a post-peer-review, pre-copy edited version of a chapter published in *Child Slavery Now: A Contemporary Reader*. Details of the definitive published version and how to purchase it are available online at:

<https://policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/child-slavery-now>.

### **Abstract**

This chapter analyses the grounded experience of children trafficked into the United Kingdom, including those – such as an identifiable group of girls and young women – who are then trafficked on into other European countries. It uses a child rights perspective based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to examine dilemmas associated with child trafficking. It is widely believed that hundreds, and more likely thousands, of children are trafficked into the UK annually, and that this is not solely for sexual exploitation but for a much wider range of purposes. The chapter looks at the experience of children trafficked from West Africa into the UK, as well as their exploitation through domestic servitude, private fostering arrangements in the UK, child trafficking for forced marriage, and the link between culture and child trafficking.

**Keywords:** United Kingdom, child rights, culture, sexual exploitation, child trafficking, United Nations, West Africa, domestic servitude, private fostering, forced marriage

*It is vital to listen to children, as well as involving them as actors in efforts to enhance child protection.* (Dotteridge, 2008, p 11)

### **Introduction**

The plight of children trafficked across or within countries has recently been headline news in the UK and internationally. Increasing awareness has seen a concurrent rise in policy and practice responses by government, practitioners and civil society groups. In the UK, international legislation has been ratified, multiagency national and local protocols developed, advocacy campaigns conducted and research reports published. Yet contradictions remain, and at the heart of these lie problems in listening to the views of children, attitudes towards different cultures and what constitutes exploitation and inconsistencies in best practice when applying child protection principles to safeguarding migrant children, including trafficked children.

The true magnitude of child trafficking in the UK is difficult to gauge given its covert nature, the difficulty in identifying children and the lack of a systematic and centralised data collection system. According to an analysis by the Child Exploitation

and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), 325 children were trafficked into the UK between March 2007 and February 2008 for a multitude of purposes including: sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, forced marriage, drug trafficking, unregulated adoption, cannabis cultivation and other forms of criminal activity, benefit fraud and other forms of labour exploitation (CEOP, 2009).

Despite these varied forms of exploitation the media have tended to focus on children being trafficked for sexual exploitation to the exclusion of more hidden forms of trafficking. These more invisible forms include child trafficking for domestic servitude, mainly through unregulated private fostering arrangements, and child trafficking for forced marriage. These trafficked children are hidden because they live in a domestic family environment rather than being exploited by organised criminals. Their exploitation may be seen as 'normal' and for their betterment, by their exploiters, their community and sometimes the children themselves. British experience has shown that professionals may also view these types of cases as acceptable cultural practices within certain communities. These attitudes, although borne out of government multicultural policies to respect diversity, have had contradictory effects, leading to a homogenised view of migrant and UK minority cultures to the disadvantage of protecting children in such cases. The result has been confusion and professional paralysis where child rights and child protection principles should be paramount.

Furthermore, despite sometimes harrowing accounts of abuse at the hands of traffickers, agencies appear to be sceptical of migrant children's experiences of trafficking. Whether this is because such children are largely seen as economic migrants, or criminals falsely seeking asylum, or even adults pretending to be children, the consequences of official disbelief are serious for children. Their ages can be disputed, thus denying them child services support and leaving them vulnerable to continuing abuse. They can be detained and then deported without any risk assessment as to the situation to which they would be returning. However, the vast majority of trafficked children remain hidden within specific communities and it continues to be a challenge to identify and protect them (UNICEF, 2003).

We draw on our research and fieldwork experience in a reflective attempt to analyse these dilemmas and move forward using a child rights perspective based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989). The overarching principle of the CRC is to ensure the best interest of the child and for a child 'who is capable of forming his or her own views, the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child' (CRC, Article 12).

Children trafficked from West Africa into the UK

The first professional recognition of child trafficking into the UK was specifically in relation to West African children trafficked for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation. In 1995, West Sussex Social Services identified a trend of young Nigerian girls arriving at Gatwick airport, claiming asylum, being accommodated by the local authority and subsequently disappearing (AFRUCA, 2007). Some children went missing soon after arrival and others later on while in public care (Beddoe, 2007). Seemingly, some were trafficked out of the UK to Italy and Spain to be exploited there (Harris and Robinson, 2007). By 2001, West Sussex Social Services had a list of 71 missing children, including 40 West African girls and 14 boys; all were probably trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation (McFaydean, 2001). While Nigeria was the first identified source country and remains a key starting place for children trafficked into the UK (CEOP, 2009), other children have been discovered from Ghana, Benin, the Ivory Coast, Mali, Cameroon, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Further evidence of West African children being trafficked into the UK has emerged with a particular recognition of female child victims being trafficked for sexual exploitation or domestic servitude. These trends were made explicit in the 2007 government study into the extent of child trafficking in the UK (Kapoor, 2007). Sixty-one West African girls were identified aged between 12 and 17. The youngest child, aged 12, was trafficked for domestic servitude and a girl of 14 identified as the youngest victim of sexual exploitation. Although a number of West African countries were represented as source countries, by far the largest source country was Nigeria.

By 2009, the number of West African children identified by statutory authorities had reduced, perhaps reflecting reductions in the number of West African children entering the UK, a result of changes to accompanied minors visa policy (CEOP, 2009). In 2009, 33 West African children were identified, 27 of them female. A similar age range was noted, the majority of the girls being in the mid- to late teens, with three children entering the UK at eight or nine years of age. Male victims were much younger at point of entry, with ages ranging from 4 to 16. As well as being brought into the UK for exploitation, some West African children were also then trafficked on to other countries.

### **Vulnerabilities in source country**

The reasons for children leaving their source country are both simple and complex. The simplest driving force for many of these children and their parents is the desire for a better education and a better life. The complexity of the situation lies in the uniqueness of each child's circumstances and while some children are sent abroad by their parents or primary carers, others act independently. Some may enter into agreements with agents knowing that they will be required to perform labour; others will entrust themselves into the care of strangers genuinely believing the stories of the likely benefits to them (Blagbrough, 2008). The problems of survival and success

are manifold, with children being put under significant pressure economically to support their natural families as well as to improve their own life chances (CEOP, 2009).

Within West Africa, two key factors contribute to creating opportunities for children to be recruited and exploited through trafficking – migration and ‘fosterage’. These factors play a role in the perception and identification of victims in the UK. Large numbers of children migrate in West Africa, either alone or with their families, within their country of origin or to a neighbouring country (UNICEF, 2005). Most children migrate to find work, often moving from rural communities to areas that have a specific demand for labour, or to cities. While the primary driver may be the need to obtain work, it has also been argued that migration forms part of a socialisation process (UNICEF, 2005; Hashim, 2006). For instance, in Ghana’s northern region, some girls will feel it necessary to save and provide for their wedding, so ‘they migrate to seek work to purchase these items’ (ECPAT International, 2008, p 14). The fact of moving to another area means that they will end up living with no parental or community supervision, rendering them more vulnerable to recruitment by agents and traffickers.

Girls are also subject to a well-established practice that is known as fosterage, where a child finds work with another family, usually some distance from their own family. Their role within the family is to cook and clean, as well as looking after other children. These arrangements may be made among families, between distant friends or by recruitment agents, often termed ‘aunties’ (Blagbrough, 2008; Dotteridge, 2008). If formal agents are involved, they can be either a protective factor in the girl’s life or a primary source of abuse (UNICEF, 2005). The potential for exploitation in these situations is well documented (Blagbrough, 2008; ECPAT International, 2008) with some children then being passed or sold on to families living in the UK or other European countries.

### **Exploitation in the UK through domestic servitude**

Significant anecdotal information exists about girls brought to the UK for the purposes of domestic servitude (Beddoe, 2007; CEOP, 2009; Kelly, 2009). While some children have been identified as domestic slaves, the majority may go undetected for many years (CEOP, 2009; Kelly, 2009). A typical narrative involves a girl recruited from home to work and live with a family in a European country. Once in the UK, having entered often as an accompanied child on a visa, she is forced to work for a family while locked up in their home. The promises of an education and a better life are replaced with the reality of looking after someone else’s children and home, and not being allowed to leave the property. Some children will be subject to physical and sexual abuse and suffer from many of the typical characteristics of neglect: no education or healthcare, lack of food, inappropriate or no sleeping arrangements

(Ayrio, 2007). In the main, these children are identified only after many years of exploitation, either because they are told to leave or they manage to escape (AFRUCA, 2008). Even then, many are fearful of reporting their experiences.

Within the UK, children trafficked from West Africa remain hidden and exploited. In large part this stems from the domestic nature of their exploitation; the fact it happens in a home behind closed doors makes it near impossible to detect. This invisibility is furthered by a tacit acceptance of migration to and fosterage in the UK as customary practices; acceptance is both from local communities and the professionals tasked with safeguarding children.

### **Private fostering**

Private fostering arrangements in the UK echo the fosterage systems of West Africa with children living with other families in unregulated environments. Utting's comment in 1996 remains as valid today: 'this is a situation that cannot be tolerated. These must surely be the most vulnerable of children living away from home' (Stuart and Baines, 2004, p 74). It has long been recognised that West African children are particularly likely to be privately fostered in the UK (Bostock, 2003), although historically this has involved West African children being placed with white families from the 1960s onwards (Peart, 2005). By 1991, a study into private fostering in London showed that 6,000 to 9,000 children were privately fostered and that 80% to 90% of these children were of West African origin (Bostock, 2003). The majority of these children are likely to be protected and cared for but where are the mechanisms for identifying risk given that the practice is perceived to be one of custom?

Identification of exploitation through domestic servitude of West African children arguably rests with the UK West African communities, and this is one of the challenges. It relies on community members recognising that a situation is abusive and a violation of a customary practice, and then having the courage to report it. Some of the barriers to such identification are the myth that domestic work is important training for later life and that it is a safe practice as the child is within a family context (Blagbrough, 2008). A recent survey for the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF, 2009) illustrated that 22% of the public would not do anything if an unknown child moved in next door and 7% would not act if that child then disappeared. Research with young people who had been trafficked for domestic servitude reiterates the lack of opportunity for identification; in their opinion the only possible place where someone could identify their situation earlier would have been in a place of worship (Wirtz, 2010).

### **Migration**

The Climbié Inquiry made reference to the customary practice of sending children to live with a family in another country, with the Inquiry chair, Lord Laming, noting that: 'I have seen evidence which shows that entrusting children to relatives living in

Europe who can offer financial and educational opportunities unavailable in the Ivory Coast is not uncommon in Victoria's parents' society' (Laming, 2003). Lord Laming declined to comment on the appropriateness of this practice, thus denying the opportunity for professional debate on the safeguarding measures required for West African children migrating to the UK. It is the perceived normality of such arrangements that makes it far harder for UK professionals to challenge families who have a non-related child living with them. As a result the practitioners who are in a position to identify West African children who have migrated to the UK are often afraid to report these arrangements to the local authority for fear of being accused of a breach of confidentiality and losing all contact with a family already perceived to be on the margins of society (BAAF, 2006). Practitioners may well recognise these dilemmas but choose not to investigate further for fear of discovering a situation that they do not feel confident of responding to (Kelly, 2009; Pearce et al, 2009).

### **Child trafficking for forced marriage in the UK**

The UK government recognises forced marriage as a form of domestic violence and child abuse, but it is also argued that 'forced marriage, where it involves the movement of a child for exploitation, is a manifestation of human trafficking' (Bokhari, 2009, p 7). Children, mainly girls, forced into marriage experience a number of human rights abuses including sexual assault and rape, enforced pregnancy and abortion, physical and emotional violence, domestic servitude, isolation and being prevented from leaving the house. Ways of preventing such marriages from taking place and ensuring the safety and well-being of children who are already in forced marriages are two key challenges with which practitioners are faced.

Forty-eight cases of this nature, including suspicions of the intent to force a child into a marriage, were documented covering a period of three years, from 2006 to 2008 (Bokhari, 2009). This research shows that British-born children have been trafficked out of the UK to be forcibly married abroad, and migrant children have arrived into the UK (sometimes on forged identity documents making them appear older) having been forced into a marriage in their country of birth to a UK citizen. In the most hidden cases of all it is believed children may be forcibly married in the UK. British girls – 13- to 15-year-olds – were taken mainly to countries such as Bangladesh and Pakistan but also to Iraq, Iran, Somalia and in one case to France.

Migrant girls from Somalia, Iraq, Iran and Bangladesh were forced into marriage in their country of birth, then brought to the UK to live with their British spouse. Due to a combination of factors, these migrant girls can be particularly invisible in the UK and often live in harsh circumstances of domestic servitude and violence (Bokhari, 2009). Other studies have identified suspicions of underage marriage involving Somali females (Beddoe, 2007) and Romanian Roma children (CEOP, 2009) brought into the UK for marriage. The government agency designated with forced marriage

casework and policy, the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU), deals with about 300 or more cases of forced marriage per year, of which 30% comprise children, mainly girls, under 18 years old (Home Office, 2007).

### **Why children are vulnerable**

British and migrant children are vulnerable to trafficking for forced marriage for a number of interconnected reasons. For UK families, their child's marriage may be motivated by wanting to maintain kinship ties, control female sexuality and prevent unwanted relationships, improve their economic position both in the UK and abroad, and/or for close kin spouses to gain permanent residence in the UK (Brandon and Hafez, 2008; Bokhari, 2009). The pressure to marry a child may come from relatives outside the UK and for British families this combines with a strong sense of obligation to take precedence over a child's choice or consent (Shaw, 2001; Eade and Yunas, 2002).

Whereas deception and coercion are widely used in forcing British children into marriages abroad, migrant children may be coerced and also may obey their parents out of a sense of obligation and not see themselves as being exploited. Families and communities may hold a different view of childhood and see children of a certain age as mature enough to marry or see marriage as protection in a culture that connects their daughter's virtue with family honour. (p.152) European studies have also shown how child marriage has been used to recruit girls for sexual exploitation (ECPAT UK Law Enforcement Group, 2004). In regions where child marriage is widely practised, traffickers find it relatively easy to convince girls and their families into agreeing to a child marriage or the promise of one in the hope that marriage and travel abroad in a new country will improve the child's life. In other cases children and adolescents may be motivated to accept such offers to escape familial violence and abuse.

It is important to note the existence of diversity among family formations and marriage practices even within the same community to avoid received views of family orthodoxies and cultural practices. While bearing this in mind, in certain communities in the UK, arranged marriages are prevalent. In describing an arranged marriage the UK government has stated, 'the families of both spouses take a leading role in arranging the marriage. The spouses have the right to choose – to say no – at any time', whereas in a 'forced marriage there is no choice' (Home Office, 2000). In practice it is a challenge to distinguish between a child of legal marriageable age forced into a marriage and one whose marriage is arranged, if the child does not self-identify as having undergone a forced marriage, but instead sees the marriage as arranged and culturally acceptable (Gangoli et al, 2006). It is widely acknowledged that children under the age of 18 are emotionally, physically and financially dependent on their parents and thus vulnerable to parental coercion and manipulation, key methods employed by parents and families in cases of forced

marriage. Further research into structural and material processes, such as the impact of globalisation on transnational marriage patterns, would help to widen the debate on the vulnerabilities children face in trafficking for forced marriage.

### **UK as a source country**

A typical scenario is where British girls, predominately from a South Asian or Middle Eastern background, are taken abroad, either unaware of an impending marriage or having been coerced into agreeing to a marriage. Once abroad they often face physical and psychological violence, documents are removed and movements closely monitored so they cannot leave or seek help. After the marriage ceremony they may be left in the country abroad, sometimes never to return to the UK. Many, however, are brought back, some expected to sponsor their husbands to live in the UK.

Detecting children or young people at risk of a forced marriage at ports of entry or exit can be challenging given that they are travelling with their family and often unaware of the real reason for the trip. When a child is reported as missing the FMU will try to trace their location and repatriate them to the UK. This is not, however, always possible because of problems of access in destination countries or lack of information. This is why women's rights agencies and the FMU stress that all child safeguarding agencies need to prioritise identifying children vulnerable to a potential forced marriage before they are taken out of the UK. These children are particularly invisible but agencies that are trained and familiar with forced marriage and child trafficking indicators are better equipped to identify these cases (HM Government, 2009; LSCB, 2009). This invisibility is compounded by multifaceted factors where children may be too afraid of the repercussions to themselves or their family and thus not seek help, communities may consider these practices as acceptable and 'normal' or be afraid of calling attention to themselves for fear of 'Islamophobia' by the wider British community (Eade and Yunas, 2002) and not report cases they are aware of. Individuals and organisations may fear ostracism and other repercussions in speaking out against such practices and even though forced marriage has been integrated into domestic violence and child abuse policy, professionals may continue to view it as a cultural and private family matter and fail to take appropriate action when cases do present.

### **UK as a destination country**

Adolescent girls, particularly from Eastern Europe, have long been known to be trafficked into Western European countries, including the UK, on promises of marriage, as fiancées or girlfriends, but on reaching their destination are forced into sexual exploitation (ECPAT UK Law Enforcement Group, 2004; ECPAT International, 2008). They enter the UK accompanied by their trafficker 'boyfriend' or meet him soon after arrival. Since many belong to EEC member countries they have visa-free entry into the UK and do not raise any concerns at ports of entry or exit.

Many of these girls are leaving situations of family breakdown and violence, existing sexual exploitation in the home country's sex industry or economic instability in their countries. Their aspirations are those of other children seeking to migrate for a better life and they are just as vulnerable to recruitment by traffickers who befriend them. Some girls may travel abroad independently with a marriage arranged through a marriage broker (ECPAT UK Law Enforcement Group, 2004). In the UK, these girls are sold and sexually exploited in suburban locations, typically locked up, controlled with threats of violence to themselves or their families abroad should they escape, and debt bondage involves them having to pay traffickers a 'debt' far higher than they can ever repay (Kapoor, 2007). Like the West African girls sexually exploited in the UK, a few of these girls may escape or be abandoned by traffickers if they become pregnant.

Girls from South Asian, Middle Eastern and African countries are also married to British men abroad and brought to the UK. Some of these are underage marriages, as legally defined by both UK law and the civil law of the country where the marriage takes place. In cases where the girl is older than the legal minimum age of marriage but still under 18 it is debatable whether she has given her free and informed consent to the marriage. It could be a case of exploitation where there is evidence that the marriage consists of domestic and sexual servitude, physical or psychological violence and severe restrictions on outside contact or movement. Often such cases only come to light when an adult woman seeks help for domestic violence and only later discloses her underage or forced marriage, which even she may have considered 'normal' at the time (Gangoli et al, 2006). This is partly to do with notions of honour and shame in some communities where disclosing family problems to anyone outside the family or community is considered shameful. This acts as a strong deterrent to girls disclosing domestic abuse (Izzidien, 2008) and makes such cases particularly hidden and difficult for professionals to detect.

Police, alerted by other agencies (non-governmental organisations [NGOs], social workers or the FMU) have investigated forced marriage cases involving domestic servitude and violence by husbands and in-laws. If these girls have an irregular immigration status they are deemed as unqualified for support (except for healthcare and employment) by the local authority and not provided with accommodation. Their options are limited: temporary accommodation in a women's refuge or deportation without a risk assessment (Amnesty International UK and Southall Black Sisters, 2008). Women's groups find that the legal and financial implications of obtaining residency are a major obstacle to these girls seeking help (Khanum, 2008).

## Conclusion

Children, whether alone or accompanied by an adult, migrate within their countries and across borders for diverse reasons and circumstances. Not all of them will be exploited. However, cultural traditions of migrating for domestic work within private fostering arrangements and child marriage do make children vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Children exploited and abused through these practices are likely to remain hidden and invisible as long as families and local communities fail to recognise or report the abuse and child safeguarding professionals fail to take action. Trafficked children, in common with victims of domestic abuse, rarely self-disclose and may not see their experience as exploitative or use terms such as 'trafficking' when describing their experiences.

For the practitioner, the process of assessment and identification involves building trust with children to enable them to reveal their experience, history, family circumstances and journey of being trafficked. Core to this process is for adults to believe the child, however fantastical their account may be. British minority ethnic children forced into marriages abroad may be more aware of their rights, but still have a deep distrust of adults by whom they feel betrayed and be reluctant to approach mainstream agencies they feel may not understand their background or needs (Izzidien, 2008). Practitioners should apply their existing knowledge and expertise on child abuse to such cases with the aim of ensuring the safety of a child, whatever the child's background or family context. In the recent Laming report (2009) it is recommended that complex child protection cases be dealt with by experienced social work consultants who are supported by senior practitioners and for multiagency training across all services that work to protect children.

However, to be truly effective, community partnership building should be at the heart of antitrafficking strategies in the UK. Communities and families are the source of a sense of identity for children; their involvement is therefore necessary in shaping debates on child rights and developing a culture that recognises exploitation and empowers children. However, communities in the UK are highly diverse, both within and between communities, and therefore a wide spectrum of groups and individuals should be engaged, certainly not just faith-based leaders. In recognition of the importance of partnership working between statutory agencies and local minority ethnic communities in safeguarding children, the government piloted a community partnership project in eight London boroughs between 2006 and 2007 (LSCB, 2007). The project found that isolation from mainstream services contributed to a lack of awareness of UK child specific laws and standards by minority ethnic communities. This could be overcome through the work of a dedicated and permanent local authority community representative. What needs to be borne in mind is that engaging with local communities to influence attitudes is not the same as seeking mediation, reconciliation and family counselling through local community leaders on

specific cases. Government guidance warns against facilitating mediation and reconciliation between the victim and the family (DCSF, 2006, p 151). In the past this has exposed children to further coercion and violence (Khanum, 2008). In the event that children do ask to speak to their natural family or to return home, a comprehensive risk assessment would be called for to ensure their safety.

Experience from other countries may suggest innovative and more effective ways in which to encourage community responsibility and engagement in the UK. Blagbrough (2008) provides examples of community action in cases of child domestic work. For example, similar in concept to the Neighbourhood Watch crime schemes in the UK, a childwatch community scheme operates in the Philippines to detect the recruitment of children by traffickers. This involves training individuals and groups within affected communities to help them act appropriately, and also includes local authorities 'maintaining a high profile in local communities to ensure that their services are well-known and accessible' (Blagbrough, 2008, p 29).

The trafficking of children is a multifaceted problem of global dimensions. The solutions too must be multidimensional, requiring coordination and cooperation between all child welfare agencies, both nationally and internationally. Tackling the underlying causes lags behind other initiatives, but if given the commitment and resources, can lead to real and lasting change for all children. The best way forward is to situate anti-child trafficking strategies within a broader child rights and child protection framework that promotes their participation in decisions affecting their life (Dotteridge, 2008; Pearce et al, 2009).

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## **Introduction**

This chapter considers the experiences of separated children through their own voices. To a degree, this group of children have been represented in research literature, although much of it is filtered through the eyes of another, usually an adult in a professional capacity (Chase 2010). While the views of professionals who work with separated children are significant and useful, they should be seen as distinct from what young people can tell us. A number of research studies have been undertaken to ascertain the views of separated children, although the subject is fraught with ethical and access issues. Not surprisingly, studies on the experiences of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) tend to predominate as they are a readily identifiable and definable group, unlike for instance accompanied minors. In general the research literature is tripartite, covering experiences predeparture, the journey, and arrival and adapting to life in the UK.

While this review of the literature about separated children's experiences is not systematic in its intent, the aim has been to be thorough in the identification of research in this area. No exclusion criteria were applied other than that the research must involve the gathering of views, opinions and experiences directly from separated children up until 2010. This presents a challenge, given that different authors use different descriptions to capture this group of children including refugees, migrant children, children living with families who are seeking asylum and hidden children. Moreover, many of the studies cover the views of young people, who may now be in their twenties, and it is not always clear what proportion were under 18 on arrival in the UK. Most studies look at the accounts of adolescents (with a range from 11 to 18 years, with some stretching up to age 30) and overall there is a lacuna of information about younger children's experiences. Given the age range covered, the term 'young person' will be used throughout unless specifically addressing issues concerning younger children. In total nine empirical studies have been used in this chapter – seven written about separated children in the UK, one about young people in Ireland and one about separated children in Europe.

## **Ethical issues**

Numerous ethical issues make this area difficult to research; however, some of these dilemmas are worth exploring as they have parallels with practitioners' experiences in gathering information about separated children. Hughman, Pittaway and Bartolomei (2011) argue that there are at least five reasons why practitioners should

concern themselves with the quality and nature of research with refugees, three of which are relevant here. First, the need to avoid any trauma is central; this is one of the reasons given for the lack of qualitative research with child victims of trafficking (Pearce, Hynes and Bovarnick 2009). Also other researchers specifically choose not to ask separated children about their past because of the concern about reactivating trauma (Brownlees and Finch 2010). Second, young people may be rightly fearful of being identified through their comments, despite researchers' best efforts to anonymise their information; again, these concerns are particularly acute in the area of child trafficking. Third, potential interviewees also need to be clear about the purpose of the research and give their informed consent; however, this is a complicated process. Separated children may give their consent because they think that they will gain something from the process (such as successfully claiming asylum) or because they feel that they have to do what someone in authority asks them: 'the context of giving consent does have an impact on understanding, choice and so on. Autonomy is a capacity that is socially acquired and can be enhanced or undermined in many different ways' (Hughman *et al.* 2011, p.10). Finally, Adams (2009) challenges whether our intentions in hearing the child's voice can ever be truly honourable as in the process we make him or her the 'modern subject'; that is the object of our study.

### **Finding separated children**

The studies show a bias towards collecting the views of UASC. This is not altogether surprising and reflects the relative accessibility of UASC. By definition, to seek asylum as a child entails both the Home Office (through the auspices of the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA)) and the local authority being aware of the child; data are collected for service provision, performance and budgetary management and border control. This does not actually mean that such data are always easy to find or that they are collected by central government, but at a local level those children who are defined as UASC are relatively easy to identify by researchers. Other children, such as those who have been trafficked, accompanied minors and children who have overstayed on a visa, present greater problems of identification (Brownlees and Finch 2010). By their very nature, these children are hidden from children's services. Even when there are suspicions that these children are, for instance, trafficked, it is difficult to transform the suspicion into a proven fact; for instance, very few children are defined at a national level as trafficked (Pearce *et al.* 2009).

To date there are no empirical research studies in the UK that consider the views of trafficked children, and all that has been written focuses on professionals' contact with these young people (Beddoe 2007; Brownlees and Finch 2010; Kelly 2009; Pearce *et al.* 2009). Few studies look at accompanied children, that is those children who either entered the UK with a relative or who have gone to live with an adult once in the UK. One study looks at the experiences of 'hidden children' in which

“hidden” is intended to refer to the unseen nature of the exploitation, the lack of awareness about these young people and the fact that exploiters deliberately act to keep them and their treatment hidden’ (Wirtz 2009, p.5). Issues around access and ethics perhaps account for the small sample size of eight children who were formerly hidden and are now in receipt of local authority services, interviewed for Wirtz’s (2009) study.

One of the surprises about the literature is the absence of information regarding EU migrant children. Individuals and families from European Economic Area (EEA) countries have a right to enter, live and work in the UK, although there are some exceptions for citizens from Bulgaria and Romania in relation to work (UKBA 2010). It is suspected that significant numbers of migrant children from the EEA and A8 (countries that joined the EU in 2003) enter the UK, either alone or accompanied by an unrelated adult; however, there are no recorded figures (Crawley 2006). In addition, the term ‘migrant child’ is often used broadly to describe a group of children similar to separated children (i.e. accompanied and trafficked minors) (Sigona and Hughes 2010). Data collected annually by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) have tracked a rise in the number of children thought to be trafficked from EEA countries, with children identified from Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Hungary and Portugal in 2010. Trafficked children from Eastern European countries tend to be female and are being sexually exploited commercially in the UK (CEOP 2010). There has been a particular focus on the trafficking of Roma children from Bulgaria and Romania with children identified primarily through law enforcement agencies, which perhaps explains the comments made by the UK government on the latest figures: ‘The 32 children identified is almost certainly an underestimation of the scale and level of threat’ (CEOP 2010, p.31).

### **Participation agenda**

A child’s right to be heard is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), domestic law and policy. Despite these obligations, the second-class treatment of separated children is well documented, with all too frequently their immigration status taking precedence over their rights, views and needs as children (Burke 2010; Crawley 2006; Dennis 2002). The four Children’s Commissioners have taken a particular interest in separated children and their lack of basic rights in the UK, documented in primary research into children’s and professionals’ views (Burke 2010; Children’s Commissioner for England 2008; Kelly 2009; SCCYP and Perth UHI 2011) and a pilot scheme of guardianship for separated children in Scotland. The persistent agency and organisational barriers faced by separated children across diverse services such as health, children services and government agencies have been well documented. According to Burke (2010), separated children face barriers to participation at both strategic and individual

levels, whether during immigration interviews, age assessments or while being held in detention centres.

Underpinning the debate about organisational barriers for separated children is the belief that children lack 'capacity', that is the ability to make complex decisions for themselves. Capacity is an interesting concept when applied to children, because a duality exists between the rights of all children to be heard and the rights of parents over children. Even in situations where parents are absent as with separated children, agency structures demand that someone (an adult) take 'best interest decisions' for a child. Despite the participation and child rights agenda, research based on talking to looked after children found that children are listened to with less attention than adults (Thomas and O'Kane 2000), which perhaps accounts for separated children's views that professionals have 'selective hearing' in relation to their needs and wishes (Wirtz 2009).

One of the key approaches to the literature is that children have the right not only to be heard but also to have their wishes acted on. While all who work with children in the UK will be familiar with the rhetoric of listening to children and ensuring their full participation, this can be extended to encompass the idea of 'child agency'.

Conceptually, this moves beyond the universalist assumptions about rights to recognise that children have the ability to make significant decisions for themselves, including acting independently of their families. The 'conceptualisation of the child as an agent – capable of acting' (Whitehead, Hashim and Iversen 2007, p.4) is frequently used in the developing world, but it challenges western assumptions about the nature of childhood and the implied dependency and passivity of childhood.

According to Sigona and Hughes (2010), in our struggle to conceptualise separated children they are positioned either as vulnerable in need of protection or as bogus asylum seekers, who deliberately falsify claims. Similar binary constructions are recognised by Crawley (2010), who argues that separated children are seen both as passive victims with no agency and as a potential threat, so that the social constructions of childhood and asylum seeker collide creating unfavourable outcomes for separated children: current understanding of the experiences of separated asylum seeking children is dominated by adult explanations and rationalisations which fail to engage directly with children and young people themselves. Separated asylum-seeking children are acted *upon* but they do not act: they are assumed to have no agency. (Crawley 2010, p.163) The message from the literature is clear. Separated children may present as more resilient and advanced compared to equivalent looked after children in the UK (Chase, Knight and Statham 2008), yet they continue to receive services that have the effect of negating their sense of self by questioning the nature and veracity of their identify.

### **Credibility issues**

Linked to the notion of listening to separated children is the often reported concern that they are not always credible. Indeed the literature suggests that many young people have experienced being disbelieved either by UKBA or children's services (Beddoe 2007; Brownlees and Finch 2010; Crawley 2006, 2007; Kelly 2009; Pearce *et al.* 2009). Inconsistency in narrative, inability to remember key events and elected silence are all taken at face value by some organisations, notably UKBA. Yet, evidence suggests that a number of complex factors are at play. First, trauma can lead to an individual being unable to (Zimmerman *et al.* 2006) or choosing to (Kohli 2006a) keep quiet about their experiences. Kohli (2006a) found on interviewing social workers about young people they were working with that all maintained silence over some aspects of their experiences: 'silence about the past was an organizing feature for many of them' (Kohli 2006a, p.713). Second, children may have been advised and warned not to tell authorities about their story and instead given false accounts to present when asked (Beddoe 2007; Crawley 2007); these can then conflict with a truer account given later on. Third, many young people may be uncertain as to why they are being asked such questions and of their potential significance. Fourth, some children may find it culturally unacceptable to talk about what has happened to them, especially if it has involved sexual abuse or exploitation (Pearce *et al.* 2009).

### **Departure experiences**

Nearly all of the studies look at separated children's accounts of why they had to leave their country of origin. Although the accounts given are varied, the information is useful, because it fills a void that many practitioners face when working with separated children as accounts of their history are notoriously difficult to obtain. Some children chose not to talk about this aspect of their lives. Hopkins and Hill (2006) during their interviews with 31 young people (whose status was 15 discretionary leave, 6 indefinite leave to remain, 7 awaiting claim and 2 uncertain) in Scotland noted a general reticence on this subject and that 'the children displayed a range of degrees of openness with regards to discussing their previous experiences' (Hopkins and Hill 2006, p.30). They found that for the majority, someone else had made the decision that they should leave, although it is not clear who it was. Similar findings are reported by Chase *et al.* (2008) in their study of 54 young people, noting that children entered the UK as young as nine years of age.

In 2000, a major study for Save the Children looked at the experiences and accounts of separated children in Europe, with a specific focus on predeparture accounts. Of the 218 young people, nearly half had originated from countries where there is armed conflict and a total of 441 possible movement reasons were given, with many children moving for multiple reasons. Reasons include separation of the child from

parents (77), direct violence (70), children persecuted because of their political opinion or that of a family member (47), trafficked (26) and state sanctioned torture (25). This leads Ayotte (2000) to conclude that 'a striking feature of many cases was the complexity of reasons or contributory causes that resulted in children leaving their country' (Ayotte 2000, p.24).

A similarly distressing set of factors was found by Thomas, Nafees and Bhugra (2004) in their corroboration of young people's accounts in interviews, with legal and social work case notes. The sample in this study is large at 100, although it emerges that only two-thirds of the sample (67) was willing to be interviewed. Reasons given for not wanting to be interviewed were that the information was secret, that they did not want to talk about it or that they had experienced problems (Thomas *et al.* 2004). In exploring why children leave their country of origin, six main reasons are identified: death or persecution of family members, persecution of the young person, forced recruitment, war, trafficking and for a better education (the last group was made up of five children from African countries). The narratives of the young people highlight high levels of pre-departure violence (estimated at an average of 4.8 incidents per child), including torture, imprisonment and sexual violence. Of note is the level of sexual violence, given that over half the sample (59) were boys: 'of particular concern was the finding that a third (32%) of the young people included in this study reported being raped before leaving their country of origin, with around half of these reporting multiple rapes' (Thomas *et al.* 2004, p.119).

The stories told highlight the potential for traumatic events to have occurred pre-departure. However, Hopkins and Hill (2006) make the point that we should not assume a certain set of experiences for the child simply because a child comes from a certain country: often the child may come from a well-educated family but in a resource-poor country. Likewise, Chase (2010) points to the unique experiences that each separated child will have and that each child must be treated as such. While some of the young people in the study had experienced pre-departure traumatic events, others had not. In a narrative study of the stories of seven separated children, the theme of uniqueness is also prevalent:

My young informants shared no common collective or personal histories of homeland or displacement from which cultural narratives of immigration are sometimes shaped. What the young people did share were a series of engagements with immigration, welfare and voluntary service institutions. (Adams 2009, p.166)

### **Experiences while en route**

Similarly to pre-departure experiences, separated children tend to be reticent about their experiences during the journey to the UK. What is clear is that very few

separated children know that they are travelling to the UK, with some asking their whereabouts on arrival. The assumption, supported by some evidence, is that most children do not travel alone even if they end up unaccompanied on arrival in the UK. According to Ayotte (2000), the majority of young people travelled with someone. Some children will be accompanied by a known adult, such as an extended family member, friend or humanitarian worker (Hopkins and Hill 2006), but others will be accompanied by someone who is an agent, or posing as related to the child (Ayotte 2000; Chase 2010). In part the difference depends on which country the child originated from, mode of transport used and what the intended purpose(s) of him or her coming to the UK are (Ayotte 2000; CEOP 2010). From the study of young people in Glasgow, Hopkins and Hill (2006) conclude:

Almost all of the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from Africa were brought by an agent, while the smaller number from Asia were either smuggled, or had to make their own way here without an agent. There may therefore be a more organised system of agents working in some of the African countries, with children from Asia having to adopt alternative strategies in order to seek safety. (Hopkins and Hill 2006, p.45)

The descriptions of children's journeys to the UK and Europe are varied. Some travel in relative safety, others experience hazardous conditions, including travelling as stowaways in boats and lorries, or being held temporarily in refugee camps. Chase *et al.* (2008) comment on 'the complexity and duration of their journeys', noting that some separated children travelled for several years before arriving in the UK (Chase *et al.* 2008, p.25). During transit, children may be subject to abuse, exploitation and neglect, which leads Ayotte to conclude that 'in many cases children face dangers in transit as serious as those they fled from' (Ayotte 2000, p.84).

### **Immigration status on arrival**

Separated children arrive in the UK in a variety of ways, which in part reflect their immigration status. According to Ayotte (2000), the majority enter Europe with illegal documents or without documents; however, in the UK there are considerable data to show separated children passing through immigration control on either real or fake travel documents (CEOP 2010). For young people travelling from EEA areas, whether alone or accompanied, it is only the fact that they are bona fide members of the EEA that they need to demonstrate. Often difficulties arise just before or after the young people have passed through immigration control as their agent then abandons them (Beddoe 2007; Chase 2010). For some, the abandonment may be temporary and planned. Accounts of child victims of trafficking highlight that they are pre-warned of this plan and are expected to re-establish contact with the agent or someone else in the trafficking ring at a later stage (Beddoe 2007). Very few young people have spoken about this process, so it is based on a professional

understanding in relation to patterns of young people going missing (Beddoe 2007; Pearce *et al.* 2009). For others, the abandonment is permanent as the agent has fulfilled their part of the contract by getting the children into the UK; numerous accounts have been documented of young people sleeping at airports or in city centres for several days before they either seek or attract assistance (Chase 2010; Stanley 2001). Other children enter the UK on a clandestine basis, usually hidden in the backs of lorries, from which some later escape or are released (CEOP 2010).

While some children will claim asylum at port of entry, the majority claim asylum later on (Home Office 2010), either once they have been abandoned or they have escaped abusive situations. For those young people who do come into contact with statutory services, including the police and immigration, their reception experiences are generally poor. Stanley (2001), in her study of the experiences of 125 young people seeking asylum in England, noted that at least one-quarter had 'chaotic experiences on arrival and received little or no support' (Stanley 2001, p.25). These experiences include being left to fend for themselves despite requesting support from the police, UKBA, children's services and surprisingly, according to Chase (2010), some NGOs. Other young people find themselves being detained by UKBA as adult asylum seekers or subject to dispersal according to the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. In one case, the Children's Commissioner for England (2008) documented the experiences of a 15-year-old boy from Afghanistan whom he met at an asylum screening unit:

He had been in the country for two days and had spent the night before last in a police station cell. He wanted to tell the police that he needed a shower, but was unable to do so because of the language barrier. He said that an Urdu interpreter had been provided, but that he could not understand him. He had no evidence to suggest which police station he had stayed at. (Children's Commissioner for England 2008, p.22)

Often separated children are befriended by strangers, who direct them to a voluntary agency or local authority service for support, leading Stanley to conclude that presenting at a specific children's services office is more 'as a result of chance rather than design' (Stanley 2001, p.25).

According to Hopkins and Hill (2006), young people spoke positively about the reception they received in Scotland but mentioned that they disliked the weather and poor accommodation (many had to wait some time to be in accommodation with cooking facilities). These two concerns, along with lack of familiar foods, run across many young people's narratives – 'at first I just got very cold, very cold, in fact I'm always cold here, even in the summer season it's never warm in England' (Adams 2009, p.163). Themes of acceptance emerged in the first study in Wales into the accounts of separated children in which 47 children and young people were

interviewed, some of whom were part of a family group claiming asylum (Hewett *et al.* 2005). The young people reported not knowing much about Wales but experiencing a positive welcome on their arrival, with a nine-year-old male commenting: 'I thought it was going to be really fun just living in Wales because in London people don't talk to you but in Wales they talk to you more' (Hewett *et al.* 2005, p.33). According to Hewett *et al.* (2005), children who wanted to leave Wales gave their reasons as wanting to be in more diverse communities and having friends or family elsewhere in the UK.

### **Adaptation to life in the UK**

Much has been written about how separated children adapt to life in the UK, although these studies tend to focus on the experiences of UASC, with the exception being a study by Brownlees and Finch (2010) for UNICEF UK; focusing on three local authority areas, the researchers interviewed 59 separated children between the ages of 13 and 23. However, this study acknowledges the difficulties in accessing potential interviewees as social workers acted as their gatekeepers (Brownlees and Finch 2010). Despite a professional preoccupation with assessment of the past, according to Kohli (2006b), most separated children are keen to focus on the present first, then the future, and finally the past. Research with nearly 200 young refugees (including separated children) supports this hypothesis. On being asked what they would most like from services, the researchers found overwhelmingly practical responses, including more help with language skills, help into school or college, spending more time with peers and more money (Princes Trust and Refugee Council 2003), while the need for practical information has been highlighted elsewhere (Brownlees and Finch 2010). Likewise in Hopkins and Hill's (2010) analysis of an earlier study, the young people's focus was very much on immediate needs. Across much of the research similar issues covering the whole spectrum of separated children's needs are addressed, including accommodation, social care services, health services, immigration status and legal services, social isolation, resilience and moving on. These issues are explored as additional needs, relating to their status as separated children, on top of the needs common to all young people.

### **Accommodation**

Dependent on age and to a certain extent local authority policy and resources, young people may be accommodated in foster care, residential care or private shared care. Clearly, accounts of such care will vary enormously from child to child and also reflect their preferred needs of caregiving. However, three key issues cut across all placement types. First, the child's perceptions of safety at the placement. Second, the degree to which the placement is or is not culturally appropriate. Third, distance of the placement from the local authority providing the service. Sense of safety is linked to both the nature of the placement and the previous experiences of the child (Hewett *et al.* 2005; Princes Trust and Refugee Council 2003). Residential (hostel and

bed and breakfast type) care was felt to be more threatening than foster care, with separated children who were placed in hostels describing feelings of particular vulnerability: 'Hostel not too good really. Not at all. Food crap. English people there taking drugs...I was the youngest there [14] I had some friends my age. Four months at a hostel, two in a bedroom, shared bathroom...I didn't like it' (Stanley 2001, p.46).

One study identified a population of hidden homeless among separated children, defined as young people who were 'sofa surfing' or living in squats (Princes Trust and Refugee Council 2003). Echoes of similar concerns were noted in Wales, when separated children were refused asylum and 'disappeared' into the informal economy (Hewett *et al.* 2005). Children who had been trafficked can be left with residual feelings of paranoia and distrust; many found it hard to believe that their foster carer or residential carer worker had their best interests at heart (Fursland 2009). Some separated children report positive experiences of 'matching', but Chase (2010) concludes that matching needs are less important than the quality of the relationship that develops between the child and the foster carer. In addition, pressures on local services and lack of placement availability, combined with concerns about community resources and integration, have led some local authorities to seek placements for separated children outside of their area (Hewett *et al.* 2005).

### **Healthcare provision**

The type of healthcare provision available to separated children partly depends on their status; looked after children will benefit from a full medical, whereas children who are intentionally hidden may go for years without their basic health needs being met. Surprisingly one of the main preoccupations across many of the studies is a concern about diet and food, although issues such as access to a GP and secondary health services are also raised (Brownlees and Finch 2010). The concern is less about the availability of traditionally significant foods, although some children did lament not being able to eat specific foods, but more about lack of facilities and money. Many separated children comment on poor or non-existent cooking facilities in their accommodation, resulting in them relying on takeaway food (Brownlees and Finch 2010; Hopkins and Hill 2006). Hewett *et al.* (2005) give an example of a young person who had lived in a hostel for 13 months and throughout that time had to rely on fast food. A lack of knowledge about how to cook also led some young people to rely on takeaway food, which is invariably unhealthy and costly.

### **Social care provision**

In general, accounts of children's services are very mixed, with some separated children making it clear that they valued the time and effort that their social worker put in. However, evidence of mistrust and confusion is also clear in accounts of contact with children's services. Principally, this mistrust emerges through choosing

not to share information with their social worker, either because they did not trust them or because they were never asked during monitoring visits, as described by this young female hidden in a private fostering situation: 'Useless. So many opportunities and they missed it. I would have been like Baby P' (Wirtz 2009, p.35). Lack of trust stemmed from previous experiences of statutory services in their country of origin, uncertainty about the role and function of children's services in the UK and the association that was made between social services and immigration. This distrust may increase with age, with Chase (2010) noting that those close to age 18 were also 'more mistrustful of the interplay between social care and immigration services' (Chase 2010, p.2060). Irrespective of the reality of the relationship between social services and UKBA, for separated children they were linked, both forming a part of the 'surveillance systems' that they describe being continually a part of (Chase 2010).

### **Educational provision**

The provision of education to separated children is essential, although young people report varied experiences in relation to access. What is clear from all the literature is the value that separated children place on education, with some young people commenting that they would rather do extra study than any other extracurricular activity (Dunkerley *et al.* 2006). Other authors suggest that 'education is the key to their successful adulthood and, we might speculate it is something with which to gain control and stability through the normalising activity of school in an otherwise unpredictable situation' (Maegusuku-Hewett *et al.* 2007, p.315). Provision should be automatic for under 16s but for young people aged 16 plus, there are far fewer opportunities. Young people report having to attend adult language classes with little else available for them. Restricted access to mainstream education impacts on social integration, both in a day-to-day sense and in that young people do not have the opportunity to develop their language skills. As one unaccompanied minor said, 'I want to work and go to college, go to university one day. Yes, I have dreams' (Hopkins and Hill 2010, p.402).

### **Talking about it all**

Evidence emerges across the literature that separated children are very selective about whom they talk to about their experiences and about the experiences they choose to reveal. Separated children's silence is particularly acute, with 'state' services such as UKBA, but even with friends, separated children seem to be reticent to talk about their experiences. According to Chase (2010), some young people told friends some aspects of their past, but never all. Underpinning this reticence, it is argued that young people need to create a story that fits, or indeed one that makes them fit more easily into their social environment. Adams (2009) argues that this storytelling is essential in the management of their 'life-chances'. In a similar vein, Kohli (2006a) describes it as the 'thin stories' that children actively present; 'while the thick stories might be multi-layered and complex, it is the simpler thin stories

that are perceived as being admissible to the receiving authorities', which are stories about the need for protection from suffering (Kohli 2006a, p.711). Some young people indicate that they do not want to talk about the past because it is too difficult, such as Hellen from Ethiopia:

Sometimes they don't understand you when you are sad. They keep asking you questions. It makes me angry; it makes me want to shout. It makes me remember all the bad things and they don't understand that. If they ask me [questions] I will suffer for months. (Chase 2010, p.2060)

For other separated children, hiding the past is a way of reducing the perceived stigma of being an asylum seeker, so they develop strategies to resist that label, usually by not telling anyone of their status even when they have been in the UK for some period of time. Adams suggests 'a common story of radical and irreconcilable social dislocation' (Adams 2009, p.161) in the seven children she interviewed; these children actively presented a sharp distinction between the past and their present life in the UK, even when there might be mediating aspects such as access to TV channels native to their country.

Not surprisingly many separated children give accounts of being socially isolated and lonely (Chase *et al.* 2008; Hewett *et al.* 2005; Hopkins and Hill 2006), with one young person commenting: 'Well, I suppose I'm not having any friends. The woman and the shopkeeper are my friends at the moment' (Hewett *et al.* 2005, p.34). According to Hopkins and Hill (2006), these feelings are exacerbated by differences in language and culture, experience of racism and uncertainty of asylum application. One study, which compares the views of unaccompanied minors with those in families, challenges this view, noting that 'young people arriving in the UK alone or with strangers appeared to be more ambivalent towards public opinion. Almost twice as many young people who travelled unaccompanied stated that they are unaffected by what the public think of them', which the authors suggest may be a result of 'intensity of their experiences and sense of self-preservation' (Princes Trust and Refugee Council 2003, p.11).

### **Adaptation and resilience**

But I'm trying to keep my head up... You know, because I know things one day are gonna get better. You know I mean, so... I'm hopeful. It won't be this way every day. It won't. (Raillaigh and Gilligan 2010, p.230)

In listening to separated children's voices, considerable aspects of strength and resilience have been identified, including the desire to learn, the ability to work hard as well as an optimistic outlook. The literature on resilience in separated children is complicated given that it has the potential to suggest a set of typical winning characteristics but as Maegusuku-Hewett *et al.* (2007) point out, resilience strategies

in one child may manifest themselves at different times and ways in another child. Drawing on the data for a Save the Children study in Wales, Maegusuku-Hewett *et al.* (2007) explore two aspects of coping strategies that were revealed in the narratives of the young people; namely personal attributes and a positive cultural identity. Some of the young people demonstrated optimism and a belief that they were capable of actively overcoming prejudice, hardship and adversity, both at a personal level and in relation to external factors such as cultural difference. This leads Maegusuku-Hewett *et al.* (2007) to conclude: 'it is the collective sense of having a particular cultural identity that supports resilience in many stressful environments' (Maegusuku-Hewett *et al.* 2007, p.315).

In a similar vein, Raillaigh and Gilligan (2010) propose that separated children actively choose their coping strategies:

The narratives of the participants suggested that the coping strategies that they used were purposefully chosen as they believed them to be the most compelling options available in their circumstances. As such, the participants were active in their efforts to survive. (Raillaigh and Gilligan 2010, p.233)

Collecting data through interviews from 31 young people living in lodges in Ireland, six active coping strategies are identified. These six strategies include the need to maintain continuity in a changed context, adjustment by learning, adopting a positive outlook, suppressing emotions and seeking distractions, acting independently and distrusting agencies. What surprised the authors was the central importance of religion as an underpinning coping strategy, with 30 of 31 young people mentioning the role of their faith. These findings are significant, giving practitioners' insight into the importance of religious beliefs and the need to ensure that these are assessed accurately and never undermined.

## Conclusion

The voices of separated children are there to be heard. It remains an irony that so much social work and other childcare practice is dominated by expressions of the difficulty in 'making' young people talk, when the views, attitudes, experiences and hopes of separated children have been so clearly captured both in the UK and elsewhere in Europe. The remarkable consistency of accounts given about time in the UK is striking. Throughout the studies, separated children have told us about their poor experiences at the hands of statutory services, of our professional obsession in wanting a full disclosure while being provided with substandard accommodation and Safeguarding Children support. Our responses to such accounts are underpinned by uncertainty about how to conceptualise separated children and indeed all children. Are they victims in need of protection or young people capable of making significant

decisions? Practice responses indicate that we are uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity, wanting a child to be one or the other, and never both. Yet current English and Welsh guidance is clear that we can recognise both these roles for separated children by safeguarding children *and* promoting their welfare.

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*Abstract: This discussion paper is based on my experiences with the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) on a 12 day placement as part of the Research Development Initiative 4 (RDI4) program. Claims and counter claims are made about the appropriateness of a systematic review methodology in social work. These debates pivot around understandings of knowledge creation, function and ownership in social work and what constitutes evidence. This paper considers the contribution systematic review methodology can make to social work research. The SCIE systematic review is considered within the context of broader review types such as literature and narrative reviews. The review methodology developed by SCIE is promoted because of its explicit inclusion of service user and carer evidence. Systematic review methodology also offers social work researchers the opportunity to scrutinise their searching technique and process. A detailed examination of some obstacles in searching highlights the potential for error and bias. Frequently these are introduced unintentionally through a less than rigorous search of literature. It is hoped that an awareness of the pitfalls of literature searching will lead to greater transparency about claims made based on 'available knowledge'. Social work has a specific contribution to make to the systematic review methodology as we pioneer ways of including service users and carer experience and knowledge. Systematic reviews are an appropriate methodology for social work and present an opportunity for the profession to raise the profile of alternative but reliable sources of evidence.*

**Keywords:** systematic review; knowledge; database searching; social work methodology; literature review

**Date of publication (online):** 20th September 2012

### **Introduction**

Systematic reviews occupy an important but under examined place in social work research. The aim of this paper is twofold. First, to consider the methodology of systematic reviews in social work research. Second, to examine the technical aspects of literature searching, which can affect outcome by introducing bias (McDonald, 2003). Underpinning this discussion is a focus on 'comprehensiveness', sources of knowledge and quality of evidence, which are the defining features of systematic

reviews. A comprehensive coverage of published, unpublished and service user material should provide an overview of knowledge in an area. Each step of the journey of a systematic review is fraught with potential to 'miss' available information (McDonald, 2003). This may be a result of technical difficulties in access, database usage and coverage of material but also relates to the selection and production of a body of knowledge by a discipline (McDonald 2003; Taylor, Demster & Donnelly 2003; Rutter et al., 2011). Underpinning review methodology is the question 'how extensive is 'reasonable' for searching? (Taylor, 2009, p. 366).

As a developing academic discipline, social work researchers must be clear about the methodological approaches used and their influence on knowledge production. Approaches adopted 'should be congruent with the aims of values of social work practice' (Butler, 2002, p.245). It has been argued that the purposeful inclusion of social work values in social work research is one of its distinguishing features (Shaw et al., 2006). Whilst the emphasis placed on values varies there is a demonstrable professional commitment to social justice as defined in the BASW Code of Ethics (2012). This code highlights the need for social work to be committed to actively challenging power and resource differentials and these principles need to be applied to social work research methodology too. To date, the focus of social work research in the UK is principally on qualitative methodologies and how such approaches can capture underrepresented voices (for example Humphries, 2008). It is argued that systematic reviews also require us to be mindful of different forms of evidence because researchers must be vigilant to process. This need for vigilance should lead to questions about what sources are being used, encouraging transparency in defining what is 'known' (Taylor et al., 2003; Braye & Preston-Shoot, 2007).

### **Reviews & Reviews & systematic reviews**

#### **Review types**

Literature reviews are a standard part of many social work papers and research endeavours. Nearly all social work research will commence with a contextualisation of the study in relation to previously published literature (Grayson and Gomersall, 2003). There are many variations on types of reviews including 'literature reviews, scoping studies, briefing papers and rapid reviews' (Boaz, Ashby and Young, 2002, p.3). Grant and Booth (2009) from the discipline of librarianship suggest that there are at least 14 different types of review, each one with their own strengths and weaknesses. In essence, review designs differ in their comprehensiveness and treatment or 'synthesis' of study findings. A literature review can be a quick search in relevant journals to ascertain 'new' information to be incorporated into the researchers existing body of knowledge. The potential to miss relevant research is inherent with this approach. It can also indicate inadequate efforts to identifying relevant literature (McDonald, 2003) or demonstrate bias through a selective

approach (Grayson and Gomersall , 2003). Other researchers will take a more planned approach to the collection of literature but will be beset with technical and methodological issues, some of which will be explored in the second half of this paper.

Identifying a literature review as 'systematic' is an indicator of rigour and replicability. The term systematic review indicates that the review has been undertaken against a set of standards (Boaz et al., 2002). The standards include developing a research protocol, specificity of the question being explored, identifying all relevant literature, examining the quality of the literature found, synthesising the results, removing bias and being mindful of new literature and the need to update the review (Rutter et al., 2011). Within these standards there is scope for interpretation and as a result there are some variations in how systematic a systematic review can be. In evidence based healthcare studies, the apex for a systematic review is the methodology prescribed in the Cochrane Handbook (2011) for review and dissemination. Utilising systematic review methodology a reviewer:

...attempts to collate all empirical evidence that fits pre-specified eligibility criteria in order to answer a specific research question. It uses explicit, systematic methods that are selected with a view to minimizing bias, thus providing more reliable findings from which conclusions can be drawn and decisions made (Higgins and Green, 2011, Section 1.2.2)

Cochrane reviews are primarily associated with health-care studies and the international equivalent for social care (as well as education, crime and justice) is the review process established by the Campbell Collaboration. In addition to the explicit search and synthesis of studies a Campbell systematic review also requires a search for unpublished research 'to avoid publication bias' (Campbell Collaboration, 2011). Littel (2010) argues that there are few substantive differences between the two review methods; the main difference being the debate over whether to forefront 'reliable evidence' over best available evidence. This debate is critical to social work methodology too, yet such scrutiny and analysis of the acquisition of sources of knowledge are rarely transparent in social work literature reviews.

### **SCIE Systematic Reviews**

As a leading social care research organisation in England and Wales (the equivalent in Scotland is the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Science, or IRISS), SCIE have established a set of guidelines for systematic reviews (Rutter et al., 2011). These guidelines are underpinned by guidance on knowledge creation and knowledge use in social care (Pawson, et al., 2003; Walter et al., 2004; Marsh & Fisher, 2005). The systematic review is of primary importance at SCIE, a position based on their stated belief that 'systematic review methods can be applied to any type of question'

(Rutter, et al., 2011, p 12). Two key aspects of the SCIE systematic review guidance are of particular significance and merit further exploration; the definition of the term systematic and the emphasis placed on inclusion of service users views. In the SCIE guidance the term research review and systematic review are used interchangeably. The definition offered for a systematic review is a literature search that uses a 'transparent, rigorous and comprehensive methodology' (Rutter et al., 2011, p 14). A particular emphasis is placed on replicability, so that the parameters of the literature search must be transparent to enable another set of researchers to replicate the literature search and by default, come up with the same findings. Rigorous refers to the measures put in place to ensure that all available studies are identified and located; a task that is becoming increasingly challenging with the explosion in published journal articles (Taylor et al., 2003).

The second key strand of a SCIE systematic review is the need to involve service users to ensure that service user knowledge is taken into account. SCIE in particular take a firm position on evidence and insist on the inclusion of service user views (Rutter, 2009; Rutter et al., 2011). This is a specific contribution that social work can make to the development of systematic review methodology, by developing mechanisms for the inclusion of service user views and 'knowledge' (Braye & Preston-Shoot, 2007; Rutter et al., 2011). According to SCIE, service users can be involved in numerous ways including scoping the review, working as part of the review team, as an advisory group to the study or identifying research that is about service user views (Rutter et al., 2011). The process of enabling service user participation and knowledge dissemination is not straightforward. Obstacles such as length of time required, expenses and commitment were all highlighted when service user participation was sought in relation to social workers application of the law (Braye & Preston-Shoot, 2005). Inclusion can lead to unexpected insights by:

...forcing the researchers and other stakeholders to scrutinize their assumptions. Such participation fundamentally challenges the established power relations in production and application of knowledge, thus acting as a key mechanism for anti-oppressive practice. (Braye & Preston-Shoot, 2007, p.325)

This sharing, verifying and challenging of interpretation represents a fundamental shift in ways of establishing what is evidence in social work research and provides a template for more inclusive forms of review.

There are limited numbers of systematic reviews of social work in the UK (Marsh & Fisher, 2004; Rutter et al., 2011) although since 2010 more have been published (for example, Webb and Carpenter, 2010; Woods et al., 2011). This increase mirrors a general rise in the number of systematic reviews across disciplines (Grant & Booth, 2009) reflecting a policy-driven preoccupation with evidence based practice. There has also been an institutional effort to raise the profile of systematic reviews in social

work research (McDonald 2003; Rutter et al., 2011) with the work of SCIE, the Campbell Collaboration social welfare group and the European Social Research Council (ESRC)-supported 'Systematic reviews in Social Policy and Social Care Centre' at the University of York. The low profile of systematic reviews in British social work can be in part attributed to the many challenges facing social work researchers. These include no dedicated public body to fund social work specific research, lack of overall government funding for social work research and the relatively recent recognition (2004) of social work as an academic discipline in its own right by the ESRC (Marsh & Fisher, 2005). Orme and Powell (2007, p989) comment on the need for a social work research strategy whilst acknowledging the complexity of this aim; as the strategy 'has to address the way research is produced and utilized, and acknowledge multiple stakeholders involved in the research process'. Furthermore, the relatively modest results in the 2003 RAE (Research Assessment Exercise) have resulted in low levels of ESRC funding for social work research (Orme and Powell, 2007).

Systematic reviews are often viewed with suspicion (Boaz et al., 2002) by social work researchers. Principally, this may be a result of the association between systematic reviews and the 'positivist' paradigm. The combination of the traditional value placed on a hierarchy of evidence and 'the explicit assumption that only certain types of knowledge are 'real'' hinders the uptake of systematic reviews in social work (Norton, 2008, p.382). Another challenge in promoting systematic reviews for social work research in the UK is the association with evidence based practice. For instance, part of ESRC program to improve social care knowledge production, led to the establishment of the Kings College London Evidence Network in 2001. The forefronting of 'evidence' takes us to the centre of the debate about the benefits and challenges of evidence based social work research, as the network aims to provide (rigorous) information to assist in 'better quality decision' making in social and public policy. As Boaz et al., (2002) points out a key feature of evidence based practice in healthcare is the findings of systematic reviews, leading the latter to become indelibly associated with the former. Questions are rightly asked about the transferability of this model to a social work context however, it may be that social work can add something to the developmentCurrent situation in UK of the systematic review methodology (Boaz et al., 2002; Braye & Preston-Shoot, 2005; Braye & Preston-Shoot, 2007). Rather than reject it outright, the challenge is to develop the methodology of a systematic review so that it retains its key quality of rigour and reliability but is more open to different forms of evidence.

Both Cochrane and Campbell systematic review methodology allow for the inclusion of qualitative studies as long as they meet certain criteria. Systematic reviews in social work need to take a new approach to defining quality but in way that acknowledges that a triad of social justice, judgements of quality and judgments

about method (Norton, 2008). The criteria are clear for quantitative studies yet it may be that most social care systematic reviews adopt a less rigorous approach to analysis of qualitative research (Grayson & Gomersall, 2003). Determining quality in qualitative studies is a complex topic; numerous tools exist to assist e.g. Critical Skills Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) and the Cabinet Office framework (Spencer et al., 2003). Rutter et al., (2011) emphasises that systematic does not mean that certain types of studies are excluded; it is the search that is systematic not necessarily the studies searched for. There is an emphasis of knowing what methods are used in studies so that the methodology must be made explicit for the reviewer to be able to evaluate the quality of the study, removing the 'epistemological hierarchy from the systematic review method' (Norton, 2008, p.384). To further remove bias in assessing the quality of each piece of evidence it is recommended that the literature identified is 'quality assured' by another person. The Campbell Collaboration are explicit on this matter; systematic reviews cannot be undertaken on one's own.

Traditional synthesis in systematic reviews requires meta-analysis of the studies identified however it is argued that this model does not easily lend itself to qualitative social work research (McDonald, 2003; Littel 2010). Qualitative studies present challenges as some are long, complicated projects that have multiple decision points which can affect outcome (Pawson 2002; Boaz et al., 2002). Such studies question how and at what point is difference or change achieved. SCIE's approach to synthesis depends on the type of studies that have been identified but emphasis is placed on 'an assessment of the strength of evidence contributed by a particular study in its own terms' (Rutter, et al., 2011, p.58). Pawson (2002) argues that given the contextual complexity of many interventions that a range of sources need to be included for analysis of evidence including fragmentary sources:

My methodological gold standard has thus been the rather unusual one of whether the fragment of evidence (and not the whole study) is 'fit for purpose'. The working rule is thus – does this piece of information constitute useful evidence to refine that portion of the theory under test? Such a methodological approach rests on the extremely high probability (in this case well founded) that no one report on a complex intervention can be comprehensive and cover its every aspect equally well. Pawson 2002, p.52.

Pawson (2002) applies this model to a systematic review of Megan's Law in the USA and in doing so makes claim for the role of inference in our analysis; this is perhaps been a default position for many although Pawson (2002) is amongst the first to acknowledge it as a methodological approach.

## **What can systematic reviews offer?**

The strengths of a systematic review are many. They can reveal significant trends and practice implications through the synthesis of all available research in a given area, as well as identifying areas that need further research (Boaz et al., 2002). This synthesis of information can be used to determine policy developments ensuring that public money is invested in interventions that 'work'. Therefore at their best systematic reviews may actually 'legitimise action' (Braye & Preston Shoot, 2007, p.331).

Establishing what is known and not known in social work is a core part of developing a knowledge base for the profession and many agree that such a canon of knowledge is required (Taylor et al., 2003; Holden et al., 2009; Hodge, Lacasse & Benson, 2011). According to Holden et al., (2007, p.487) 'the adequate identification and acquisition of the population of prior publications serves many purposes, but the most obvious is that research programs and theory development depend on a progressive (if not always orderly) path of dissemination and testing'. If searching is not done rigorously and with a mind to a range of evidence then the foundation of knowledge is flawed. Boaz et al., (2002) suggest that the principles of systematic reviews may have a positive impact on qualitative research because of the emphasis on clarity and transparency; this could lead to better 'standards for assessing the quality of qualitative research' (p.12).

## **Searching bibliographic databases**

### **Range of databases**

Bibliographic databases are constructed to enable both quick and advanced searches across a significant amount of literature; however there are a number of issues to be considered in working towards 'exhaustive' coverage (Clapton, 2010). A common approach to a literature review would involve searching databases for key terms, then following up these references and possibly finding further material through the reference lists of the articles identified (Hart, 2001). Unlike many other practice and academic disciplines, social work does not have its own reference database (Taylor 2003; Clapton, 2010; Hodge et al., 2011), so searches must be conducted across a number of databases allied to a range of professions. Social Care Online, managed by SCIE, is attempting to fill this gap but Taylor (2009) argues that its coverage is not sufficiently comprehensive for this purpose. According to Coren & Marsh (2006), at least 20 named databases could be searched in relation to social care topics although this may not be necessary depending on the subject matter (Clapton, 2010). Some UK databases offer national coverage (for example, Ageinfo, ChildData) whilst others provide international coverage; according to McDonald (2003) a systematic review has to be international in its coverage of the literature. The practice of accessing the reference databases available at one's academic institution or place of research is acceptable only if this limitation is acknowledged in the methodology.

### **Database construction**

There is a dearth of social work literature about the function and operation of bibliographic databases. Questions need to be addressed regarding the construction of databases, including who is paid for the task of data-inputting as well as the ethics and investment principles of the companies who provide databases (Holden et al., 2009). Database construction is not a neutral and objective activity. Mackay (2007) considers that databases present a restricted and socially constructed version of acceptable knowledge; 'because electronic reference databases searches reveal dominant social work discourses as mediated by information technology, the searches thus generated construct and confine the range of literature available' (Mackay, 2007, p237). Little social work research has been undertaken that considers which and what research is prioritised for inclusion in databases. Holden and colleagues have twice found that there is a substantial bias in the inclusion of some journal articles over others in the American database, Social Work Abstracts, hereafter SWA (Holden et al., 2007; Holden et al., 2009). Coverage of articles from 33 'core' social work journals (including British titles) were examined over a period of seven years (1989-1996) in SWA. Given that SWA claims to cover these 33 journals comprehensively Holden and colleagues were surprised to find a low coverage rate. Editions were missing from 27 of the 33 journals that SWA claimed to cover in full (Holden et al., 2009). In addition, they found bias in favour of SWA abstracting journal issues from the National Association of Social Workers; the largest professional body of social workers in the world, based in the US. Results such as these indicate the degree of caution required when using bibliographic databases; despite their intentions, they cannot be comprehensive. To rely on the databases to cover core social work journals will lead to potentially relevant articles being missed (Holden et al., 2009).

### **Functionality**

In 2009, Taylor and colleagues examined the functionality of seven databases in relation to a chosen social work research question. They concluded that Medline, SSCI or the Social Sciences Citation Index and CINHAL (Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature) produced the most accurate 'hits' (relevant articles) although other specific databases (e.g. Ageinfo) would also be useful depending on the service user grouping (Taylor et al., 2009). Clapton (2010) highlights that database relevance varies depending on your chosen search topic; consequently reviewers should not stick to their favourite or default bibliographic databases. The possibility of substantial gaps in the information contained within databases and that these gaps might be unexpected is an important aspect in the review process. Checking two or more databases does not guarantee comprehensiveness either as each one may have partial coverage. Clapton (2010) found that whilst overlap exists

between databases, 38% of references for the chosen subject (children's social care) area were found in one database only. Other challenges include potential publication bias (Braye & Preston-Shoot, (2007). This can lead to the prioritization of some articles over others, such as those that have positive results and 'because research with interesting, welcome or significant results is more likely to be published' (Braye & Preston Shoot, 2007, p.318). Research that has a negative or inconclusive result may be less attractive for publication, even though such findings may demonstrate that which is already 'instinctively' known in practice. Unintentional bias on the part of editors can also lead to some research remaining unpublished and hidden, which skews the social work knowledge base.

There has been an increase in the amount of social work research that is published (Taylor et al., 2003) creating a welcome but challenging field when searching . Hodge et al., (2011) identified a concomitant rise in the number of social work journals, from ten in 1978 to over 70 in 2005. Unfortunately no published studies indicate whether the number of social work journals has increased or decreased since 2005. According to Hodge et al., (2011, p.2) the function of these journals is 'transmitting the field's intellectual ideals, concepts and accomplishments'. However, academic journals are only one source of information and present a range of issues for those who cannot pay or do not have institutional access. University information repositories, free online journals and blog based research present new means of information sharing and by implication for searching too. 'Open content' points to new horizons for literature dissemination and searching for academics, practitioners and service users and carers. Making literature and research available in more democratic domains highlight the current industry around paying for 'knowledge', which serves to limit access.

### **Key words and indexing**

Database interfaces add another layer of complexity to the search process. User interfaces are what we are presented with when we look at a database; a set of graphics that make it easier to navigate our way around the actual database. Younger and Boddy (2008) conducted a simple health related search in one database across three interfaces to examine what if any discrepancies emerged. They found that it would be easy as a novice searcher to miss up to 70% of citations (Younger & Boddy, 2008). Whilst they do not define a novice researcher, one assumes this to mean anyone who has not had specific training in complex database searching. To find the same citations across the three interfaces the researchers had to use a range of more sophisticated searching techniques such as truncation and amending the search terms. Successful searching requires an understanding of how each database operates; does it use index terms, what are the default options and what is the capacity of the database to manage complex search terms? A search that returns nil results may reflect the user's lack of knowledge of the intricacies of the database

rather than no research. Very few social work researchers are offered this degree of training in how to maximise database searching so by default their results are problematic and even information specialists acknowledge the scale of the problem in social care (Clapton, 2010).

The role of key words and terms is pivotal to successful searching. Key words are what you search for in a particular database to find the available literature. There are a number of difficulties with key words. First, information specialists with social work specific knowledge need to take on the task of allocating appropriate search terms to the articles they input. Second, there is no national or internationally agreed set of key terms or 'controlled language' in social work databases (Clapton, 2010). Consequently the researcher needs to use multiple key words or different spellings of the same term to be certain that all available information has been retrieved. Different databases may require different search terms even though they may lead to the retrieval of identical articles (known as overlap). One hint is to check how the database functions in relation to key terms; are they 'natural' or is there a controlled index (which means that the indexer has pre-selected the search vocabulary). Search terms have to be adapted and amended as you progress with precise recording of all the combinations used so that someone else could replicate the search. Further development within social work research is needed to create a 'shared language....around key word classification' (Braye and Preston-Shoot, 2007, p.318) and 'appropriate index terms and search filters' (Taylor 2009, p.367). This would be easier if social work had its own subject specific bibliographic database too.

### **Other search strategies**

Recently Internet search engines have been found to offer valid alternatives to finding research literature. Hodge et al., (2011) argues that social work researchers may be as well to use Google Scholar as their primary search engine, a search strategy which is well-established in other disciplines. Through analysis of popular social work citations, it appears that 'Google Scholar appears to offer greater access to relevant, citeable content in the social sciences relative to Thomson ISI' (Hodge et al., 2011 p.4). Citations refer to the number of articles that refer/cite a particular article and as such the most popular reflect something about the knowledge base in social work. Analyzing 79 journals Hodge et al., (2011) found that two thirds of the most frequently cited articles appear in four journals, of which, incidentally, only one is British, namely The British Journal of Social Work. Information specialists would advise that Google Scholar is used in addition to bibliographic database searching as relying on the former alone is not a comprehensive search strategy (Clapton, 2010; Rutter et al., 2011).

Other search strategies include finding all the work by a published author and checking their reference lists (known as 'snowballing') or hand searching key

journals, a process known as 'reference-harvesting'. Taylor et al., (2003) argue that databases must be used and hand-searching techniques cannot be relied on alone. The alternative is to consider whether electronic searches are themselves sufficient. One influential health-led study considered this question and explored the results that could be obtained through the above named methods of literature searching. 495 references were identified but only a quarter of which were found in the electronic search, which is quantified as 'an average of one useful paper [for] every 40 minutes of searching' (Greenhalgh and Peacock 2005, p.1065). Other papers, those not identified in an electronic search, were found through contacting colleagues (23% of total papers). Reference-harvesting, was also useful as it led to a further 24 new studies being found however it is labour intensive given that the authors estimate it took on average nine hours searching for one successful 'hit'. Using a 'protocol-driven strategy' is not sufficient to guarantee 'comprehensiveness' however considerable time is required to ensure that important sources are not missed (Greenhalgh and Peacock 2005). Braye and Preston-Shoot (2007) concur and conclude that one cannot rely on database searching alone in social work research, as the knowledge area is underdeveloped.

### **Grey literature**

Whilst Government reports are easily available in the UK, other literature may reside in specific databases, such as 'Sigle' and Open Grey (both European), which attempt to capture what is known as 'grey literature'. Grey literature includes PhD theses, conference reports, technical information, online resources and other documents that are not formally published and is the domain of much social work research (Clapton, 2010). A considerable amount of social work research remains unpublished, particularly that carried out by practitioners, creating real difficulties in ensuring all available material has been located. Explanations for this poor publication profile include the small scale nature of the research, that is has a local focus and that those doing the research, especially social work practitioners and service users and carers may not have the confidence to believe they can be published (Mitchell, Lunt & Shaw, 2010). Little social work research has been done to consider the coverage of grey literature databases of social work research. Clapton (2010) concludes in her study on the coverage of children's social care topics across 16 databases that it was difficult to identify how much grey literature was being included in each databases. Anecdotally, Braye and Preston Shoot (2007) indicate a contradictory coverage; searching in grey literature they found articles that they were unaware of and yet were surprised at some of the gaps. Gaps cause concern as they indicate missing information, which in turn affects the reliability of the claims made in a literature review.

## Conclusion

This paper considers the role of systematic reviews in social work research methodology. Three models for systematic review were identified with a focus on the approach developed by SCIE (Rutter et al., 2011). Systematic review methodology sits at one end of a spectrum of review types, many of which are currently used in British social work research such as the literature review. Undertaking a systematic review creates an opportunity for British social work researchers to contribute to the development of the methodology. Rather than rejecting systematic reviews because of their association with hierarchies of evidence, we have an opportunity to develop new ways of appraising 'quality' from a broad range of sources. The continued polarization of quantitative and qualitative methodologies is stifling a more interesting debate about how social work researchers can develop methods that reliably capture the complexities of the social world in which we practice and research. The contribution of service users and carers in the creation of knowledge for systematic reviews offers an opportunity for us all to shape the debate about what constitutes reliable enough evidence.

The attention to searching, appraisal and synthesis coupled with a concern about replicability offer transferable benefits to all undertaking any form of review. However, bibliographic databases present many challenges to the researcher, especially in the field of social care where we rely on multiple databases. This coupled with the breadth of unpublished social work research, requires an exacting search technique to ensure coverage is exhaustive although 'perfect searching' is not possible (Clapton, 2010). The emphasis on transparency, rigour and comprehensiveness encourages further debate about what evidence and knowledge we currently prioritize in social work knowledge production. Social work researchers in the UK need to be more open to the benefits of systematic reviews and see their potential for revealing what is known in a specific area of practice at a specific time and place. These aims naturally align themselves with social work's ethical basis and our code of research conduct (Butler, 2003).

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### **Acknowledgements:**

The authors wishes to acknowledge the help of the parents and practitioners who contributed their experiences and perspectives on PACE . We would also like to thank Thomas Brindle, Engage and Jenny Berrill, Lancashire Constabulary, for helping us with the data and Horiya Shah for transcribing some of the interviews.

### **Introduction:**

PACE is a unique, parent-led charity, which works with parents to end the sexual exploitation of children and young people. PACE, formerly known as CROP, was founded by Irene Ivison following the murder of her daughter who was sexually exploited by her boyfriend. PACE has always been run by parents for parents, offering individual telephone support and running self-help groups. When parents organised the inaugural CROPPACE conference in 1998, they ensured that police officers, social services, health authorities and children's charities attended to hear their voices for the first time In 2002, CROPPACE received funding for its first full- time Parent Support Worker (hereafter PSW). Their work enabled them to identify a new form of child sexual exploitation (hereafter CSE), organised by local networks of formal and informal groups, rather than just by individual perpetrators.

PACE has actively researched the role of parents in CSE and has succeeded in influencing national policy and guidance as a result. The report on localized grooming and gangs in 2006 led to a change in perception about victims of child trafficking; this report established that victims could be UK nationals as well as children from abroad (CROP 2006). Other publications have been aimed at increasing practitioner awareness about CSE and providing practical resources to assist with training (CROP 2006: Kosaraju, 2008; 2011). Many of the findings of this evaluation report echo the key points in the 2008 CROP guide to parent support work, which detailed what parent support should look like and why it is required (Kosaraju, 2008). Since CROP involvement in the multi-agency CSE teams, a number of publications have been produced that explain exactly what a PSW can bring to a multi-agency team and why this work is so critical (Willmer, 2011; Jenkins & Kelly, 2011). Finally, PACE has produced two guides to Court work (2013), which gives parents and professionals an outline of the court process, as this is something that is not well understood.

PACE secured a 2-year grant from the Department of Children Schools and Families (now Department for Education) from April 2009 to March 2011 to work with the Engage team, a multi-agency CSE team in Blackburn with Darwen. Then PACE was awarded a 3-year grant from Comic Relief, starting in October 2010 through to September 2013, to continue the work in Engage and extend it into other police divisions in Lancashire. PACE is now working with 4 of the 6 police divisions in Lancashire: Engage in Blackburn, Freedom in Burnley, Cherish in Ormskirk with Skelmersdale, and Deter in Preston. PACE employs 1 full time worker and one half time worker to achieve this work. The evaluation considers PACE participation in the four multi-agency teams in Lancashire for the period October 2010 – October 2012.

**Make up of the four CSE teams:**

Lancashire Constabulary is dedicated to tackling child sexual exploitation and is seen to be promoting best Police practice (DOE 2011, Police life 2012). Overall there are six CSE teams in Lancashire, however PACE is only involved in four of these. The influence of PACE involvement in the 4 teams is in line with the policy adopted by Pan-Lancashire Safeguarding Agencies (3 safeguarding boards and the Lancashire Constabulary) whose action plan stresses the need for a “*total Family Approach when Supporting families ...and....to ensure the Commitment of multi-agencies response to work with families*” (Lancashire Constabulary, ND, p7)

The first team to be established was Awaken in Blackpool in 2003, followed by Engage in 2005 and then by the others in 2008/09. Whilst all teams are dedicated to tackling CSE, each team has a different multi-agency make up and approach to their work, which in part reflects the local demographics (see Table One).

Range of activities carried out by PACE	ENGAGE (Blackburn with Darwen)	CHERISH (Ormskirk & Skelmersdale)	DETER (Preston)	FREEDOM (Burnley)
Multi-agency preventative work	X	x	X	X

Training / awareness raising	Schools/ foster carers/ residential carers	Children's Social Care	Children's homes / Looked after children (LAC)	
<b>CEOP Training</b>	X		X	
<b>Family support</b>				
- 1 to 1 support	X	X	X	X
- parent support groups	X	x		
<b>Witness Support work</b>	X	X	x	X
- peer support	X			
- post-court debriefing	X	x	x	X
- production of witness support pack	X			X

**Table One: Comparison of CSE-related activities carried out within four multi-agency CSE teams**

**Cherish:** Cherish was established in 2009. The team make up has varied but until recently included a Detective Sergeant, 3 Detective Constables, a social worker, a worker from 'Street Safe', a Missing From Home coordinator and a PSW from PACE. The team are not co-located and the multi-agency set-up is not as well established as other teams in Lancashire.

A Parent Support Worker from PACE has been involved in the team since 2010 on a part time basis. Most of Cherish's work is preventative, working to protect young people from peer group perpetrators and lone adult males.

Deter: Deter is the newest of the four CSE teams considered in this evaluation. It was established in 2009, with 1 Detective Sergeant and 4 Detective Constable's. Deter is intended to be a multi-agency team. Currently the frontline team is primarily Police-based. In the past, the team has also comprised a social worker from Children's Social Care (CSC) and a Family Support Worker, also from CSC. Deter is steered by a multi-agency management committee, known as the Integrated Working Group (IWG). The IWG meet monthly at the Preston Police HQ to discuss referrals and share intelligence.

PACE's involvement with Deter has fluctuated over the time period concerned, although they first became involved in 2010. PACE proactively facilitated this involvement. Limited resources, changes in working practices and the restructuring of the Police have meant fewer referrals and, as a result, less work for PACE, as is evident in Table Two.

Engage: The team was established in 2008 following a lengthy Police-led operation from 2005. Engage retains its multi-agency format, with staff from a number of agencies co-located at the office. Co-location is considered by all the team to be a vital factor in their effectively working together. The team meets for a weekly brief to discuss new referrals and ongoing casework. The work of the team is guided both by Lancashire Constabulary and by Blackburn with Darwen Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB).

A PACE worker has been involved since 2009 and is embedded in the team. The role of the PSW in this team is considered vital and it is noted that *We [the team] would be massively compromised if PACE lost service funding*. The Engage model is held as an example of good practice (Ofsted, 2013). The role of PACE and its unique contribution to ENGAGE has been examined previously ( Jenkins & Kelly, 2011; Willmer, 2011).

Freedom: The Freedom Team was established in 2008. The co-located team includes Police Officers, a Social Worker, a Sexual Health Worker, Missing From Home coordinators and charitable organisations including Brook, Lifeline and Barnardos.

The majority of personnel have stayed the same since the team's inception. The team has focused on high profile court cases in the past two years, involving gangs, which is reflected in the high intensity work that the PACE PSW has undertaken there (see Table Two).

A PACE worker has been involved with the team since October 2011, after explaining the potential benefit of her role to the team.

#### **Overview:**

All four teams have experienced significant operational change in the past 6

months. In April this year, Lancashire Constabulary established Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH), which consists of the CSE team, the Domestic Abuse team and the Public Protection Team, merged into one. Many officers interviewed for this evaluation commented on the impact of this reorganisation and the subsequent dilution of their CSE work. Whilst this reorganisation has occurred outside of the time frame being evaluated, it has heavily influenced interviewees' responses.

It was the unanimous view of those interviewed that the best model of practice was a co-located multi-agency team, which has a sole focus on CSE. Concerns were expressed about the recent Police Authority restructuring and the ongoing funding issues that affect the Children and Parent Support Workers and the involvement of Children's Social Care.

	<u>Cherish</u>	<u>Deter</u>	<u>Engage</u>	<u>Freedom</u>
<u>Referrals to</u> <u>team</u>	<u>NK</u>	<u>310</u>	<u>579</u>	<u>NK</u>
<u>Referred to</u> <u>PSW</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>72</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Supported at</u> <u>court</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>3 (1 pending)</u>

**Table Two : Referrals to the PSW in the four CSE teams**

Table Two indicates the numbers of referrals to each team and those referred to a PSW for support. These figures come from PACE. The difference in terms of volume of referrals between the 4 teams is striking. The difference is attributed to a number of factors, including location and local demographics, how the team manage risk and the emphasis placed on preventative work. If preventative work is successful, then cases do not go to court, as a young person successfully exits the exploitation. This is a paradox. As one interviewee noted: *What is better? We intervene early and the perpetrator gets 9 months or we get involved later on and he gets 14 years?*

### **Section 2: Research methodology:**

The aim of the evaluation was to explore the effectiveness of working to a relational safeguarding model, rather than a child protection model, with parents as partners. This included an analysis of PACE's contribution to achieving the following objectives:

To support work with parents/carers  
 To increase parents' understanding of CSE  
 To improve relations within the family  
 To reduce risk to children and young people  
 To improve evidence gathering  
 To support parents through prosecutions  
 To realise potential cost-savings by involving parents

**Ethical approval:** Ethical approval was provided by the University of Salford (ref HSCR/1289) to undertake this research. All participants were given an information sheet explaining the evaluation and outlining their right to change their mind; written consent was obtained from all interviewees before the interviews began.

**Methodology:** The evaluation consisted of a series of interviews with staff working in the four multi-agency teams (see Table Three), semi-structured interviews with parents and analysis of the outcome data kept by the PACE workers and for each CSE team.

**Table Three: List of professionals interviewed by role and by team**

1	PSW	PACE
2	PSW	
3	Detective Sergeant	Deter
4	Detective Sergeant	
5	Detective Constable	
6	Detective Constable	
7	Manager	Engage
8	Detective Sergeant	
9	Children's Support Worker	
10	Children's Support Worker	
11	Detective Sergeant	Cherish
12	Detective Chief Inspector	Pan-Lancashire role

13	Detective Sergeant	Freedom
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Table Three lists those professional staff interviewed for this evaluation. As can be seen, we could not achieve an equal distribution of interviews across all the four teams. Each team was approached the same way, with an introductory letter and follow up telephone call. In addition, the multi-agency nature of some of the CSE teams, meant that we were asking a number of organisations for consent to participate; overall the Police were the most responsive. Second, the multi-agency make up of each team was subject to considerable change, so two out of the four teams were principally staffed by the Police despite their nominal multi-agency basis (at the time of interview). All the comments from those interviewed have been anonymised and are italicised. Throughout the interviews, the professionals mentioned cases in which PACE had been involved. In order to ensure anonymity these are listed as an Appendix and are not directly referred to in the main body of the report.

Parents: In addition, four parents who had been through the court process were interviewed for this evaluation. We had hoped to interview six parents; however the majority of parents approached by the PACE workers were unwilling to participate. This unwillingness was attributed to not wanting to revisit old and traumatic feelings and events. There is some learning here for PACE as how to best capture information and feedback from parents post prosecution, before it is too late. All the comments from parents have been anonymised and are in bold print.

Project Data: Finally data from the four teams was sought including project data, e.g. referrals, uptake of services, report cards of support work undertaken with families affected by CSE, prosecutions, convictions and other relevant outcomes. Again our experience was that some teams were more able to locate and share this information than others. This data is supplemented by PACE's own data collection on the number of families they have supported in each of the four teams.

One of the key challenges in such an evaluation, is how to separate PACE work and outcomes out from that of the rest of the team. In the teams where multi-agency working was strongest, the PACE worker role was considered to be a vital element, but one of several such elements. In such scenarios, it is impossible to disaggregate data and say one specific outcome was achieved because of PACE, as the whole team approach contributes to the outcomes. Parents also attributed the support they received with the team as a whole, rather than to just the PSW; parents appreciated their 1 to 1 support, but also saw the work undertaken by the Police and the Children's Support Worker as part of this package. The four parents interviewed could only identify the support they received as coming from

the CSE team, and they were not aware of PACE as a separate organization.

### **Section 3: Evaluation**

This evaluation will consider each of the seven objectives, to establish the effectiveness of working to a relational safeguarding model, rather than a child protection model, with parents as partners. A child protection model assumes that parents may be partly responsible for the abuse that a child is experiencing. It is the standard approach in familial child protection, where the role of the social worker is to assess parental and home circumstances (DOH, 2000). This approach does not fit with CSE, as the grooming and the exploitation are taking place outside of the family home. Whilst there may be factors at home that in some cases exacerbate a young person's vulnerability, the relational safeguarding model, identified in these teams, assumes that parents want to and have the capacity to protect their child, unless repeated evidence or their behavior proves otherwise. As such, it represents a variation on the safeguarding model outlined by Jago et al., 2011 in which safeguarding describes lower level early intervention work. Nevertheless all four teams were absolutely clear that the child always came first in their work.

The central problem with the traditional child protection model applied to CSE is that it fails to engage with and appreciate the critical role of grooming in preparing a young person for sexual exploitation (see Diagram One). Working effectively with CSE, in the experience of the teams studied, requires a much more holistic view, which is relational and family-centered, and one which in acknowledges the crucial and damaging effects of CSE on siblings and parents, as well as on the targeted child.

A family-centered approach also engages with the *emotional and relational* dynamics of grooming, in terms of broken relationships within the family, rather than simply noting *behavioural indicators* of increased risk or vulnerability for the targeted child. The normally protective relationship between parent and child has to be gradually undermined and then decisively broken by the adult exploiter through the grooming process (illustrated in Appendix A 3.1), if the sexual exploitation can be effective. The disempowerment of parents as protectors can then be unwittingly increased by some professionals, who may assume that the parent or family is unwilling or incapable of protecting their child from exploitation (diagram 3.2). A family centered approach to CSE understands the dynamics of grooming, its impact on family life and seeks to engage parents and family members as *allies and partners*, rather than as objects of professional suspicion (diagram 3.3). This approach is rooted in best practice, as recommended by statutory guidance (DCSF, 2009), PACE policy (Kosaraju, 2008; Willmer, 2011) and demonstrated by the professionals in this report. This family-

centered approach also complies with the shift to a more ‘relational model’ of child protection, strongly recommended by the Munro Review (2011) of safeguarding policy and practice, i.e. emphasising “the centrality of forming relationships with children and families” (Munro, 2011, p 8).

**Outcomes:**

**To support work with parents/carers**

Supporting parents is at the heart of the PSW role (see Diagram Two on next page). It was summed up by one interviewee as: *Their role is to work with that parent, representing the wishes and feelings of the parent, advocating and educating whilst being fully aware of the work that is being done to protect the child.*

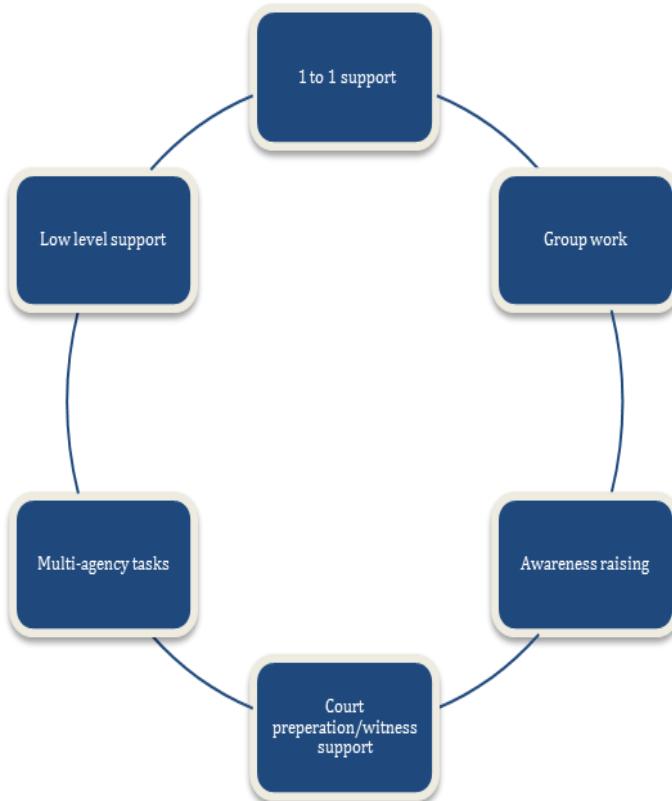
The role of the PSW is multi-faceted and can involve many aspects as illustrated in diagram two.

There has been learning over time about where their efforts are best directed. An example of this concerns the group work that the two PSW offer. Previously, a number of parents were invited to a set of group sessions for support and raising awareness. Now the focus is on a one-off session, which focuses on what grooming is and how to record information. Whilst this change in content is successful, the method of recruitment is not; the PSW sends a letter to parents if they are deemed low risk, or if their children have been identified as vulnerable through a raid. This approach has led to a drop in the number of parents attending.

The support work offered to parents varies as a consequence of three interrelated factors: capacity, flexibility and multi-agency perceptions.

Clearly the PSW cannot dedicate the same amount of time to each task and the emphasis in their work shifts according to parental need, CSE team requirements and organisational priorities.

**Capacity:** Both workers are presented with more cases than they can manage, especially given the geographical distribution and travelling time incurred. Capacity is in part managed by a threshold assessment (low, medium and high risk). This threshold assessment is a core aspect of the CSE team process.



**Diagram Two: Key dimensions of the PACE Parent Support Worker role.**

The full time PSW began by offering support to a wide range of families, including those whose children were assessed as low risk, according to the model used by the three of the four teams. In the past two years, this preventative work has been supplanted by a more concentrated focus on high-risk cases. High-risk cases are defined as those in which the child is subject to CSE and/or is going to court about the CSE. This role is made operationally explicit in three of the four teams (I.e. Engage, Freedom and Cherish).

The 1 to 1 support is often intensive and time consuming and continues over a significant period of time. For example, in one case, the PSW would visit twice a week and phone daily to build a good rapport with the parents and family. The PSW will support parents at home, at meetings, including child protection case conferences, as well as prepare them for Court. The court preparation involves visits to court, making any necessary special arrangements, explaining the process and associated jargon to the parents and accompanying them to numerous court hearings. The fact that the PSW can dedicate so much time to a family was seen as the key contribution by other agencies.

Organisational, PACE has also agreed to prioritise some aspects of support work over others;, one PSW has spent much time supporting one particular family

through a protracted court case (2 plus years). This was agreed because of the number of perpetrators involved in the case and the history of PACE involvement. Whilst this is a significant investment of PSW time in one family, the justification is that the learning from the case is likely to have national ramifications. Already, the Children's Commissioner for England has sat in on one court hearing. In addition, the PSW is liaising with the Crown Prosecution Service about changing the current practice of multiple defence barristers questioning one young person; an area of practice which is currently subject to national review (DfE, 2011; BBC, 2013).

Both workers have attempted to supplement their high risk support work with group work and contacting parents who may be affected by CSE. This enables them to manage their anxieties about not providing a service: "*in the back of my mind, I might not be able to work with them, but they could go and phone Leeds*". Both workers spoke of the dangers involved in not taking low-risk referrals and the fact that they might be missing early indicators caused them concern. In contrast, some interviewees saw the PSW as undertaking preventative work; if the Police had no further role with a family, as no criminal investigation was planned, then it was the PSW who would continue to work with the family.

In view of the substantial pressures on PSWs in working with both low and high intensity CSE work, it is suggested that they continue to be offered access to external therapeutic supervision, in addition to their line management supervision, if desired.

**Flexibility:** PACE currently employs 2 PSW's, one full time covering 3 teams and one part time covering the fourth team. At one point the part time worker was specifically working in the evenings and weekends, but now works during the day. However, both PSWs show considerable flexibility in their role and make themselves available to parents out of office hours. One interviewee noted how such sustained support can progress a case:

*The PSW did intensive work, maybe every day for the first 2 weeks as they [the family] could not comprehend what was happening to them, X was on the phone with mother a lot, mum needed it, even out of hours in the evening.*

**Flexibility** has also been exercised on what form support may take, with the 1 to 1 support changing over time as parents needs change. One PSW noted:

*Whatever role that might take us in because so many things happen during that time, whether its mental health, family breakdown, just somebody who's there who's kind of be a constant and that for me has been really kind of key.*

This knowledge of the whole family was a quality that was particularly praised by several interviewees. The PSW demonstrated capacity to understand the whole family, not just the parents and were able to see all the family's needs, not just focus on the CSE. Recently one PSW has supported a young person in court at the request of the parent. This decision was not taken lightly, but done with the belief that it was the best way that PACE could offer support to this parent. The Detective Sergeant overseeing this case was unequivocal that, without the PSW support, this case would not have gone to trial. Three men have been convicted as a result of this work.

Finally the PSWs have been able to offer some support post conviction. Whilst a successful conviction is the end of an investigative case, the parents and young person still have support needs. Careful planning is required to ensure that parents are not 'abandoned' post -court. In one case, a parent said that she still phoned the PSW 9 months after the end of the trial, as she worked through further emotional needs (a need to visit the perpetrator in prison) and practical (application to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board) matters.

**Perceptions:** The perceived role and subsequent allocation of work to the PSW in supporting parents varies between the four teams. One team would prefer that all parents work with the PSW, even if the parents do not want to engage. The PSW has to challenge this in a multi-agency environment. At the other end of the spectrum, one team has deployed the PSW to support one family only.

The involvement of the PSW has also led to broader discussions about the role of parents in protecting young people from CSE. All four teams were unanimous that some parents cannot be offered support because of their unwillingness to engage, or because their parenting is 'compromised'. Clearly this presents a challenge to the ethos of PACE. This negative view of some parenting styles was always counter- balanced with an acknowledgement that many families will engage. Moreover, it was commented on that families affected by CSE are from across the social spectrum, although those that do not engage often have multiple needs and a history of contact with statutory services.

The understanding of 'parents' has also been extended in some teams to encompass paid carers, e.g. foster carers and residential carers. Support has been made available to paid carers, in terms of how to best protect the young people in their care from CSE.

Across the four teams, there was agreement that the PSW most important role was to '*build bridges and open doors*'. In some cases, a family which would not work with a statutory service will speak to a PSW, as they value their role as being 'independent.' This role is being maximized in a Police operation, where 17 men

are suspected of exploiting 2 young people. Whilst the families do not want to speak to the Police, they are happy to meet and receive support from a PSW. There is a potential for some role blurring here however. The Police were clear that the PSW were only asked to do work within their remit; they were not ever put in a position of having to undertake Police tasks.

The faith that Lancashire Constabulary has in PACE is evidenced by them arranging national presentations that showcase their work. Police forces from England are being invited to the Lancashire HQ to listen to a presentation from a PACE worker.

**Parental views:** Affected parents are unanimous that, without the support offered, they would not have got through their ordeal. From point of discovery, the PSW supported the family and made parents believe that they could cope; all four parents alluded to how potentially they could have had a break down and believed they were saved from doing so because of the PSW input. For one parent, this was a long and sustained process, as the PSW supported them from point of initial discovery, through 3 separate trials and support after a conviction. None of the parents interviewed made any critical or negative comments about the PSW support.

The aspects that the parents particularly valued were :

That they felt believed;

*what you thought and felt was important to them.*

That the PSW kept them involved/ updated at all times;

they let us know anything new that came along, what was changing.

That the PSW is reliable and always return their phone calls and gives constant updates;

*Any problems I could just ring her...she helped us through it all...she came with us to the safe house (every other day)...as we were dumped there...she was our spokeswoman.*

That they do what they say they are going to do;

*...I don't know what we would have done without her. She's been our shoulder to cry on she's approachable and you can talk to her.*

That they genuinely care about the welfare of the family;

*their initial concern is your security...then they are concerned about you as parents, especially around what the perception will be. They acknowledge and believe you. You are valued, your feelings and opinion*

That they understood what a family might be going through;

*Things changed in a better way. They [X] deal with these things on a daily basis; they know the questions that need to be asked. So they would pre-empt what I wanted to know.*

That they were there throughout;

*X was with us the whole way through....without her I would be in hospital now.*

That they helped parents understand that it was not their fault;

*X explained everything to me...he groomed all of us.* Many of the comment made by the parents resonate with Munro's recommendations on child protection reforms (DfE, 2011), in particular the emphasis on building up good working relationships with families and maintaining continuity in support and building up trust.

To increase parents' understanding of CSE:

if you educate the parents, you educate the children: Interviewee

Improving parental understanding of CSE is vital for a number of reasons. First, it enables the parents to understand that they are not at fault for what has happened, as they learn about the grooming process. It breaks the stranglehold that the perpetrators have, as the parents begin to understand that their child is being manipulated and deliberately being estranged from them. Moreover, some parents need to understand that their child is not responsible either for what has happened, which can have a significant effect on family relations (see point 3).

Improved parental understanding is achieved through a variety of means by the PSW. Individual or group support are ways of sharing and exploring the process of grooming. Often the parents are learning the same things that their child is covering with the Children's Support Worker. This joint work is essential:

*[it is] really important that we have that mirroring effect...its about the equality of information shared...whatever the outcome may be, they [the parents] are part of the decision making process.*

Several interviewees commented on how important it was for parents to understand the grooming process and that it was this moment of comprehension that led to a positive change of direction in a case.

To improve relations within the family:

*We have had lots of successful cases but never without the scars...it always causes the friction in the home...Interviewee*

There is no doubt that CSE places a huge strain on family relationships. As part of the grooming process, the perpetrator(s) will deliberate seek to sever family relationships and instill a sense of distrust (Kosaraju, 2008). Many parents will already have experienced difficult events at home before the PSW becomes involved. Parents comment on noticing significant behavior changes in their child, but may not understand the cause (e.g. A child stops attending school, is out at night, their mood changes, or having frequent baths). Realising the cause of the behavior change does not make it easier for parents either; as they have to deal with distressing events and concerns that their daughter or son has been subjected to criminal offences, possibly including rape.

Once a CSE team becomes involved, then some parents experience disbelief that this could happen to their child without them realising it. Given the significant strain that CSE brings to family life, the role of a PSW is vital. All the professionals interviewed noted that by supporting the parents, they could then better protect the child.

Many of the professional commented on the damaging impact that CSE can have on families. Discovering CSE within a family can cause or exacerbate parental problems. It is a time of huge stress and professionals note that parents may start drinking, arguing, or even separating, as a consequence of the CSE. Unfortunately, in some families, this rift becomes permanent with parents separating and one or more of the siblings becoming a looked after child One interviewee noted:

*The impact on parents is varied and huge; drink/self-harm/ rejecting the children. So by supporting them the investment in parents is massive...Impact is so significant...this can be a matter of life and death for parents too.*

Guilt was raised as a major issue in some families, with some professionals attributing subsequent family break up to the fact that the parent(s) could not cope with the sense of guilt. "*CSE fragments them...it creates mistrust within a family*".

Several of the interviewees noted that parents may well feel guilt, chastising themselves for not realising sooner what was happening , or wondering what they could have done differently. *For some parents this was compounded by the fact that they did attempt to seek help sooner, from school or form the local police station and their concerns were not valued, recognized or responded to.*

Siblings are also affected by CSE. Some siblings report feeling left out and seek to gain attention in other ways. One interviewee noted that *there was a potential for them to become involved in crime at this point*, which may be triggered by

younger siblings desire to create the same opportunities for sexual exploitation for themselves. Other siblings feel that they want the same thing e.g. Intervention, as the subject child is receiving. A parent noted that one of her daughters had really struggled with the attention that the subject child was receiving and this ultimate led to a rift in their relationship and the young person being asked to be taken into care.

The four parents interviewed spoke of the enormous impact the discovery of CSE had on themselves, their family and their child(en) and that they could not have got through the ordeal without the support of a PSW. For some parents this ordeal was longstanding:

***It is difficult to describe, it has been relentless, you cannot breathe. It felt like forever***

This aspect of CSE work is rarely acknowledged in the literature. Pursuing a case to court takes a long time, the young person has to repeatedly go over what has happened in Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interviews, parents may be interviewed as witnesses and the family may be subject to threats and intimidation whilst they wait for the Court date (PACE, 2013). The support is not just about what happens at Court, but the consequences, such as housing needs, managing harassment, bullying and in one case, managing the fall-out from newspaper commentary. One parent noted how difficult their life became in their local area after a newspaper picked up on and printed a barristers comments in court that '*it takes two to tango*'. One of the families interviewed had been moved 3 times because of the threats they received, as the case against a number of men went through the legal process. This ended up with a further court case and two men being sentenced for intimidation offences.

Part of the work that the four CSE teams do via the PSW is to bring the family back together. For some parents this will mean taking the perpetrator to court and for others being involved in the decision not to prosecute is just as critical. The key is that by involving the parents and the young person, families are given some choices, when they thought these had all been taken away: '*We've given parents permission to move on and help them understand that it is not their fault*'.

### **To reduce risk to children and young people**

In the initial stages, the support of a PSW can hold a family together as it experiences this crisis. Evidence from both the professionals and parents interviewed suggests that, without the PSW, some families would break up. This early support from a PSW also enables the parent to be there for the child:

***The PSW was amazing...I did not have a breakdown but I was on the brink, but I could not as my child needed me.***

Supporting parents reduces the immediate risk of further crisis, so that they can all focus on the young person's needs and protection.

Risk is also reduced because of the network approach that the PSW and CSE teams take. If one young person is affected by CSE, then it likely that other young people may be being groomed. Using a network analysis approach (Cockbain 2011), links can be made between potential victims. One example given was that in one case, *the PSW went on to do some work at the school, as the group of friends all knew about it [the abuse]*. Whilst it cannot be proved that this prevented further CSE, it is likely that, with raised awareness, the group of friends would be more cautious about risky relationships with adults.

Measuring long-term outcomes is challenging, given the number of variables involved. The professionals acknowledge that, in most cases, risks to young people do diminish when the parents are supported. However this decrease in risk goes hand in hand with the support work done by the Children's Support Worker too. It is the *combination* of dual support that is considered by all the interviewees as the vital component of success.

Intervening early, adopting a relational 'safeguarding model' was seen to reduce the risks factors for the child and parents. The sooner intervention commences, the more likely it is that the outcomes will be positive. Success is deemed to rest on the level of risk the child has been exposed to. Generally the lower the risk, the more likely the child is to successfully exit. Unfortunately, this is not the case with some of the higher risk scenarios. Proactive early intervention work was seen as vital in protecting young people; however if these young people came from 'chaotic' backgrounds, with parents who had experienced statutory services, the view was that it was harder to extricate them from the exploitation; to that point that CSE has become '*entrenched in their way of living*'. In the handful of cases where this applied, familial abuse was part of the experience of the young people, before being sexually exploited.

Finally, in the higher risk cases, the young person generally remains at longer term risk of exploitation, or side-steps personal risk by recruiting siblings into CSE. One CSE team had also examined the links between CSE and being a victim of domestic abuse in adult life, after a distressing case, in which two female victims of CSE became high-risk young adults on the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) for domestic abuse).

To improve evidence gathering

*So much more [is] gained from a PACE worker than you would ever get from a detective or social services.*

Another key role of the PSW is to encourage parents to see the value in sharing information about what they notice and overhear; *she is always giving little snippets, or doing a provenance log...names, nicknames, cars, times etc.* This role is considered vital by the multi-agency partners, and several interviewees commented that, without this information, some cases would not have proceeded to trial. There are two important aspects here. First, that parents can be encouraged to take an active role in information gathering and can feed this back to the right person. Some parents will have had negative experiences of phoning the Police or Social Services to try and share information in the past. Moreover they may phone with information that would not meet a statutory service threshold, but that can be used by the PSW. *the PSW phoned these parents lot...and they would have not phoned in with this info otherwise as it seemed so insignificant.* In one case, this led to a disclosure and to an arrest on the same day. Secondly, the PSW can encourage parents to gather the right kind of information, such as car registrations, time of phone calls, names mentioned in discussions, Facebook comments etc. *X has come back with a lot of info about whom we need to work with and whom we need to target and enabling us to target hotspots, names of offenders etc....* One senior police officer mentioned that the information that the PSW provided each week was often substantial enough to generate new referrals for the team about other vulnerable young people.

At this stage, such information may not be enough to act on, however feeding it back to the CSE teams gives the Police and partners the chance to formalize this information and turn some of it into intelligence, as illustrated in Diagram Three. In some cases, this process has culminated in a sophisticated network mapping, that has led to a Police operation, targeting multiple offenders. The DS in charge notes that “*Without her...I cannot do my work...without a go-between we do not get the same results*”.

There is a distinction between information and intelligence and some frustrations can arise from parents when they share information that they think it is intelligence and will be acted on. One of the important roles of the PSW is to ‘help them understand the difference’ and act as a ‘vessel to pass information on’.



**Diagram Three: Developing the continuum of information, intelligence and evidence**

In addition, the PSW has developed a system of logging concerns, which have proved to be especially useful for foster carers and residential care workers. Called 'provenance logs', the sheets capture relevant information, which the Police can then use. The PSW has trained residential and foster carer staff on how to record in these logs and include evidence in a section called 'how do you know it is true'.

Recently this led to a speedy arrest after care staff became concerned about a female young person (aged 14) and brought her phone into the team office. This led to an immediate investigation and a 30 year old man was arrested and charged... as one of the team noted *this came about because of the work that had been done by PACE with carers...*

To support parents through the process of prosecution

*If she wasn't here, we could not get the same outcome, because of the dynamic in family, especially, around court time, support is needed at this time...which is why you need two workers, as it releases all of that pressure.*

Involving parents at an early stage has meant that cases have gone to court and perpetrators have been prosecuted. As one interviewee noted: *I have only had prosecutions since the PSW arrived, prior to that, mainly guilty pleas.* PACE workers are seen as one of the vital ingredients to ensure success in prosecution

because of their commitment to long term involvement. Establishing good working relationships at the start is acknowledged as key by the Government (DfE 2011).

Involving parents in prosecution takes a huge amount of time and skill and it an area of developing expertise for the PACE PSWs. The preparation covers emotional, practical and legal aspects. One PSW described the role as:

*For me it would be contacting witness support, arranging for them to take parents around the court and the young person to introduce them to the systems and processes and what would be expected of them. Perhaps a couple of visits pre-trial, liaising with family around information, perhaps the police might need any last minute information trying to reduce the impact of the shock, because things just crop up right before court cases for some reason. So I would do that, then on the day, the night before, I would make contact with them, confirm travel arrangements and stuff like that. Then I would pick the parents and sometimes the young person up.*

From the above, it is evident that the PSW will do whatever is required to support the family through the process, be it being in court with the parents, to explaining the jargon associated with court process, to ensuring adequate witness support protection, if required

*In a nutshell, what we have learnt is that having a constant person that they [the parents] trust has been the biggest part of the prosecution support.*

In addition, the PSW have developed a booklet for professionals and one for families that explains the court process (PACE 2013).

To realise potential cost-savings by involving parents

Assessing the potential cost savings of an intervention is a challenge. Given the complexity of social relations, there is rarely one intervention that on its own can be said to have made a difference. Attempts have been made to calculate the cost of early intervention services in CSE, suggesting that for every £1 spent on Barnardos support services saves the taxpayer either £6 or £12 in the future (2011). Such calculations are complex and not within the remit of this research. Nevertheless, the intervention provided by the PSW does, in some cases, prevent the need for more extensive services for a young person and their family.

In a number of cases, the interviewees believed that the PSW intervention had lowered the risk, as the parent became better equipped to deal with the situation. This resulted in the risk decreasing and no further need for statutory services, such as the Police, or Social Services. Related to this is the reduction of missing from home incidents. One interviewee was able to state that the PSW

did reduce the number of times a young person ran away, which had the potential to save £1,300 each time, a sum which represents the cost for the Police of searching for a missing from home child per night.

Second, some cases proceeded on the basis of information from the parents only, leading to a ‘victimless prosecution’. This option is noted by the Government as one way forward”, so long as all the elements of a criminal offence can be proved with sufficient other corroborating or supporting evidence” (DfE, 2011, p. 21).

Third, many of the interviewees commented on how the work of the PSW had held families together, when they were at breaking point. This is significant, as without that support, families may have separated and in some cases the children been taken into local authority care. According to the House of Commons, the average cost per looked after child was £37,669 in 2009/10 and there would be further expenditure on after care services if the young person remained looked after (Harker, 2012).

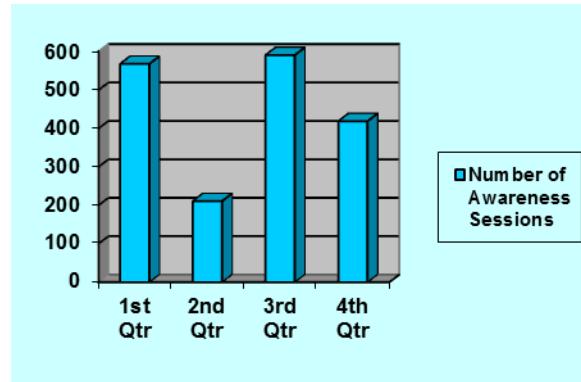
### **Outcome data<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Evaluation of outcome data:**

In addition to the interviews carried out with professionals and parents, this report is also based on project evaluation by PACE and on quarterly report cards by ENGAGE. Outcome data for the other three teams was obtained at a relatively late stage of the evaluation and is still being analysed. There are some intermittent gaps in the data for the ENGAGE team, but there is relatively consistent data for the recent period of April 2011 to March 2012. Some examples of the key outcomes achieved by the ENGAGE team include:

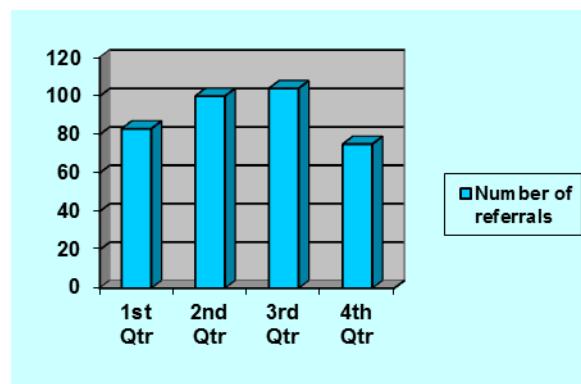
#### **Prevention:**

- Training: Awareness raising and training has been one priority for ENGAGE, with an average of 300 – 400 attending CSE sessions per quarter. 1750 professionals took part in awareness raising on CSE in 2011-12;



**April 2011 – March 2012**

- Referrals: Increased from 46 in last quarter of 2009 to 127 in corresponding last quarter of 2012; referrals have been running at an average of 100 per quarter. There was a total of 636 referrals for 2012.

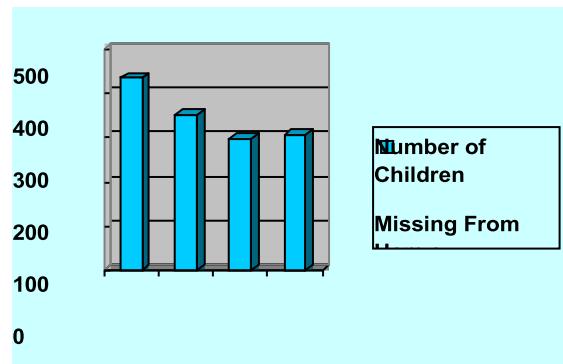


**April 2011 – March 2012**

<sup>1</sup> Graphics courtesy of Engage

Missing from home: The baseline of 'Missing From Home' (MFH) reports was 305 per quarter for 'E Division' in 2009, with one of the highest rates within the Lancashire Police Authority. While figures for MFH have not declined from this baseline, one innovation has been that ENGAGE became involved in 'return' interviews of young people not already receiving social work support from 2010, in order to aid support for and disclosure of potential sexual exploitation by the young person concerned.

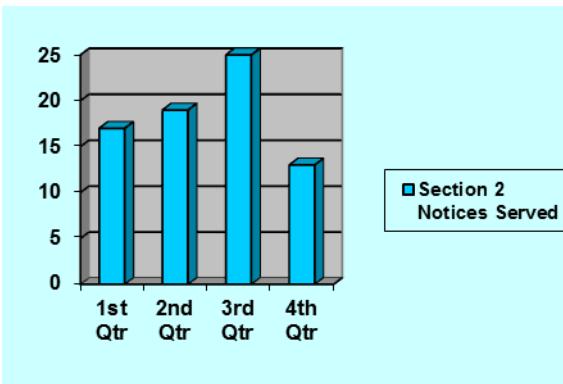
#### April 2011 – March 2012



#### Prosecution:

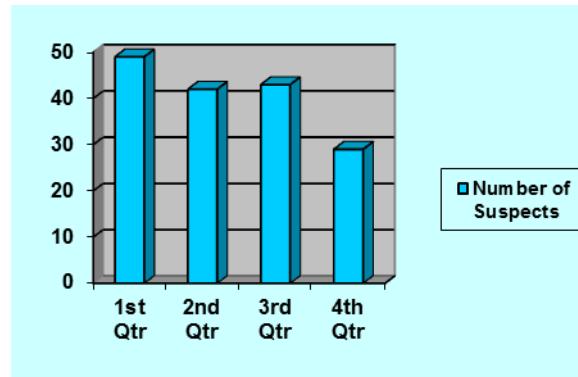
Use of section 2 abduction notices ( s.2, Child Abduction Act 1984): These are used as a 'red line' warning notice to suspected perpetrators. This measure, crucially, does not require the child's consent. Use of s.2 notices has varied according to the team's perception of their value with regard to overall strategy and tactics in relation to individuals and to groups of offenders. In the very early days after the team was first established, 150 s.2 notices were issued within a short period of time. This subsequently declined to a much lower level as other responses were then employed. S.2 notices rose again from 5 in 2009, to 38 in 2012.

#### April 2011 – March 2012

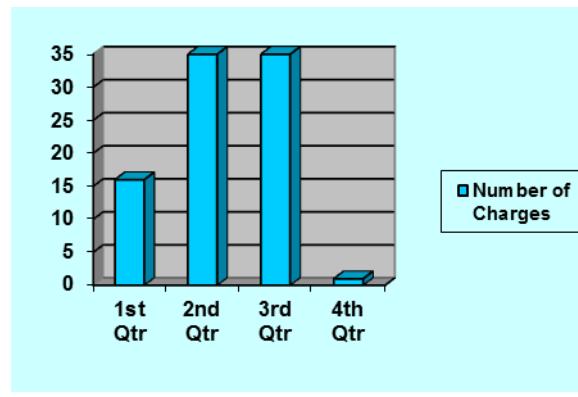


- Increased numbers of prosecutions and convictions: prior to 2008, only one offence of CSE was prosecuted within this Division. The number of offenders increased from 12, with 25 charges, in last quarter of 2009, to 44 offenders and an estimated 19 charges, in the last quarter of 2012.

April 2011 – March 2012



The number of charges for the final quarter in the graph below is uncharacteristically low, and is not representative of most quarters, which have an average of 25-30 charges brought against suspected offenders per quarterly period.



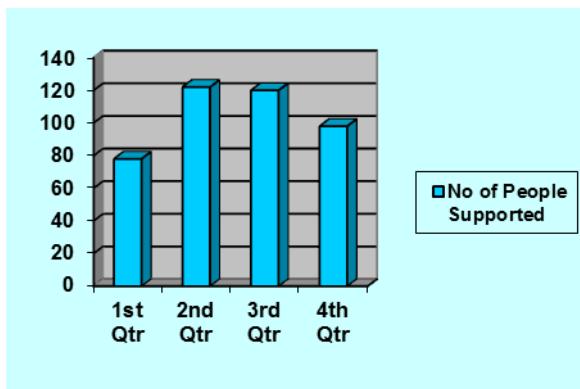
April 2011 – March 2012

It is also worth highlighting that 2012 saw the team's first successful 'victimless' prosecution, i.e. a case brought to a successful conclusion, which was based on forensic and other evidence, and which was therefore not reliant upon a complaint in person by the child who was a victim of sexual exploitation.

#### **Protection:**

#### **PACE Support for parents and families:**

ENGAGE provides a specialist service for families and children referred as being affected by CSE. The team has consistently worked with an average of about 100 young people and families from during each quarter during 2009-12. Roughly a quarter of this figure would comprise parents supported by PACE.



### April 2011 – March 2012

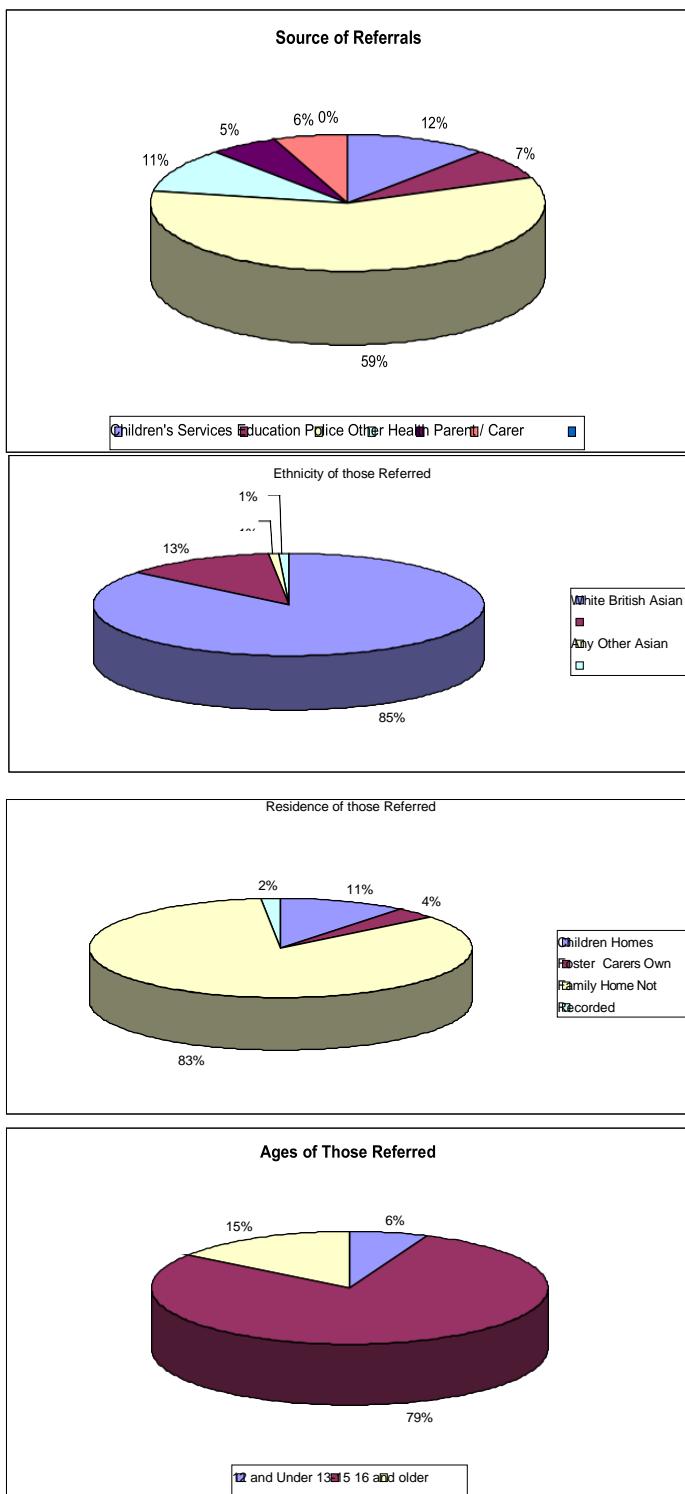
Assessments of risk are carried out by a team member and, generally, both parent(s) and child are allocated a worker. Prior to PACE's involvement, the team member would work with both parent(s) and child, which could be problematic, given that relationships between parent and child were usually intentionally broken or damaged by the abuser via the grooming process, precisely in order to facilitate CSE.

#### **Data on characteristics of children referred to ENGAGE:**

More recently, data has been gathered and presented by ENGAGE on the characteristics of children subject to CSE, based on the National Working Group Toolkit format. For the period July – September 2012, the majority of children were referred by statutory agencies, with almost two-thirds coming from the Police, but with 18% also coming from parents or carers. In terms of ethnicity, 85% were classed as being White British, with a further 13% being classed as Asian. The majority of those children referred, i.e. 83%, were living at home, with 15% living in children's homes or foster homes. In terms of age at referral, 6% were aged under 12 years (a critical age under the terms of the Sexual Offences Act 2003) and a further 79% aged 13 – 15 years, a key age range for children targeted for CSE purposes, with 15% being aged 16 or over. This data suggests that ENGAGE is working with a diverse population of children at risk, of or experiencing, CSE in terms of age, ethnicity, residence and referral source.

#### **Conclusion:**

It is clear from this overall evaluation, that the PSWs, provided by PACE, makes a positive difference to the families affected by CSE. Through PSW support, parents have felt enabled to support their child, throughout the investigation and to the point of prosecution. All four parents interviewed were adamant that, without the constancy of support, they would not have been able to go through the ordeal



### Data on characteristics of children referred to ENGAGE for July – Sept 2012

The PSW role makes a unique contribution to multi agency CSE working and one which is valued highly by other members. A model of practice is being developed which has led to a cultural shift within these and other teams. Parents in these four team are no longer seen as necessarily responsible for the young person being lured by other adults, but as individuals who want to do everything they

can protect their son or daughter. As such, the CSE teams bring parents on board to protect the young person. So parents are valued and seen as an essential part of the safeguarding process. These four teams have moved away from a traditional child protection model focus to one which emphasises safeguarding using family and parental resources; families feel valued and respected in the process.

Specifically, a PSW in a CSE team enables:

- Families to engage with the Police and Children's Services, because of the trust they place in the PSW;
- Parents to feel supported and as a result they become partners in protection;
- Parents to share information, which frequently progresses a case, sometimes to the point of prosecution;
- Information to become intelligence, which is then used to map and target offenders;
- Parents and the young person to attend court in the full knowledge of what will happen and are prepared to give evidence;
- Attendance at court has led to convictions, providing some closure for the victims and family and safeguarding other young people in the process.

The targets set by PACE for the funders have been exceeded and in the process some innovative best practice for CSE work has been developed. In relation to Court work, the model of wrap-around support for one family during a lengthy court case is to be replicated in future CSE work in Lancashire. This model has been outlined in the PACE publication, in an attempt to share best practice nationally (CROP 2013). The PSWs have also linked parents with the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England (OCC), ensuring that their voice is heard and represented in their documentation and guidance. Finally, the Crown Prosecution Service, are taking into consideration the learning from one court case, in their review of cross-examination practice. Some aspects of the PSW work could be formalized to ensure that all agencies have the same understanding of their role. The PSW is valued for their capacity to gather information from a parent; given that the information may be used by the Police, it is important that any information sharing is carried out in line with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998. The work of the PSW in each team is slightly different; this has come about as the teams have evolved, however PACE may wish to consider how they would like the PSW role to be defined in future. This seems particularly critical in

relation to whether to focus on lower risk preventative work of high intensity support limited to a few families. This would need to be discussed further, before any attempt could be made at national roll out of a PSW role. The issue of capacity is a feature of this evaluation; the PSW work hard and are extremely committed, but the sustainability of such intense and demanding work must be considered.

Although only four parents were interviewed for this evaluation, it is significant that all of them were unanimous in their praise and thanks for the work that the PSW has done with them. In no uncertain terms, each of the parents made it clear that without the input of a PSW, they would not have been able to manage as a family. It was significant that only four parents wanted to participate in this evaluation. In future PACE may wish to consider how it engages parents in a qualitative evaluation soon after the end of a trial, in order to prevent these experiences being lost. The

It is difficult to abstract PACE's contribution to MAT and to identify it as being distinctively and solely 'PACE' work. However, each team noted that they could not achieve the same outcomes without PACEs involvement, especially in the domains of information gathering and court support. It should also be noted that the outcomes PACE PSW achieves in Lancashire are because of its contribution to multi-agency team work; it is the synergy that makes the positive difference.

## **Appendix A:**

Case examples where a PSW has made a difference:

### **Scenario 1**

A female aged 14.8 months was sexually exploited by a male aged 17. Her parents attempted to intervene and raised concerns with school and the Police. These concerns were not acted upon until the young person disclosed that she had been raped and was referred to the CSE team. The perpetrator was sentenced to 14.5 years. Child is no longer at risk.

### **Scenario 2**

A 40 year old man was convicted, given a suspended sentence and name added to Sex Offenders register, after the parent contacted the Police. Her daughter aged 11 years and 11 months was in contact with an adult male. Fortunately the CSE team intervened before they met so it was a non-contact incident involving online grooming and obscene images. Child is no longer at risk.

### **Scenario 3**

A female aged 12 was groomed and sexually exploited by a group of men over a period of 3 years. The mother supported her daughter, via PACE, to go to court on three separate occasions leading to convictions against a number of men. Child is no longer at risk.

### **Scenario 4**

A PSW became involved with a family, known to Social Services, at the request of the child's support worker. The young person was being sexually exploited by a group of males unfortunately the parents blamed the young person and they tried to protect their younger children by asking her to leave frequently. The PSW managed to support the parents to the point where their attitudes changed towards their daughter. Unfortunately the young person's behaviors escalated to such a degree that she was placed in care. From there she went on to supported living where she was tracked down again by the men who exploited her.

### **Scenario 5**

2 sisters aged 15 & 16, one diagnosed with a Learning Disability, were groomed and sexually exploited by a male traveller. Three workers were allocated to this family, one for each child and the PSW for the parents. After much discussion, including an internal meeting with the parents a collective decision was made not to prosecute as it was *in the best interests of the child...it would be too traumatic of the child*. This is an example of how parents can shape the decision making process. *Prosecution is the icing on the cake but it is not the be all and end*

*all of what we do.* The child is no longer at risk.

#### Scenario 6

*The PSW did a lot of work with a female who was a constant worry to us, she was a CSE victim but she was not engaging and she did a lot of work and as a result the intelligence/referrals about the young person stopped. The PSW worked with parent and gathered information which led to an arrest but no prosecution; however Section 2 notice was served. Child is no longer at risk.*

#### Scenario 7

The PSW worked with a girl, aged 14, and her mother, as the father works abroad. The girl was displaying sexualized behavior and associating with a number of adult males. The PSW worked with the mother on some of these issues to reduce the risks.

#### Scenario 8

The CYP worked with a young person who was a looked after child in residential care, after making a disclosure of familial rape, involving the mother's new partner. Unfortunately the mother blamed her daughter and suggested that she had 'targeted' her new boyfriend. The CYP asked the PSW to become involved to support the mother. The PSW managed to change the mother's perception about events which resulted in the case going to Court. The family are now reunified and the young person is back at school and less vulnerable. The child is no longer at risk.

#### Scenario 9

A young person was found by the Police in a car with a man. This discovery caused a strain on on family relationship and the parents felt like they had lost their daughter. The PSW became involved and the parents began to feel supported by the strategies put in place. Despite initially being at high risk of CSE, the young person now attends college, has made a new set of friends and her behavior has changed for the better. The child is no longer at risk.

#### Scenario 10

Five young women under 16 were groomed by a Local authority dance teacher (aged 23). He impregnated one and then made her abort. There was a lot of investigative work done the team with the PSW and the dance teacher was convicted and sentenced to 10 years. One parent went public with this case, exposing the details of how the man groomed their 14 years old daughter and estranged her from her family: *He taunted her parents over the internet, telling them he was the only family their daughter needed* (Chadderton, 2010) .

### Scenario 11

A young person at some risk of CSE was staying with her grandmothers, with parents visiting. The young person did not want to engage with any CSE services but was happy for her parents to. Over a weekend, the PSW received texts about the young person going missing. This was followed up with a visit and led to a disclosure from the young person. If the parent had not texted the PSW, then it would not have been known that the child was missing because the grandmother did not report it.

### Case Scenario 12

A 14 year old girl started to spend time with a crowd of 'Asian' males. There was conflict between the daughter and her mother (who was a single parent) and the young person did not want any intervention. The PSW worked with a CSW for 7 months to gain the confidence of them both. Gradually the young person began to trust the workers and ultimately this led to a disclosure. Whilst there was a police investigation there was not enough evidence to prosecute.

### Case scenario 13

A 14 year old girl met a 24 year old male and they began a relationship. When the young person went missing from home, the Police searched for the girl and found her being sexually exploited in a hotel. The man was convicted and given a prison sentence of 2 and a half years. Since then he has served a further sentence after trying to reestablish contact with the young person. The role of the PSW was to support the parent over a period of 9 months whilst the Court case was being pursued.

### Case Scenario 14

A 13 year old male met a 23 year old male on the internet. They began communicating and in the end the adult male came to the area, met the family, groomed the family and began a secret relationship with the young person. Somehow the adult male ended up living in the boys family home, without the parents being aware that a sexual relationship was taking place. The PSW supported the parent by advising safeguarding solutions, providing emotional support arranging court visits and supporting the parent through the ABE. The case went to court and ultimately the man was convicted and sentenced to 7.5 years and made to sign the sex offenders register for life. The young man has managed to successfully exit the exploitative relationship and is now doing well.

### Case scenario 15

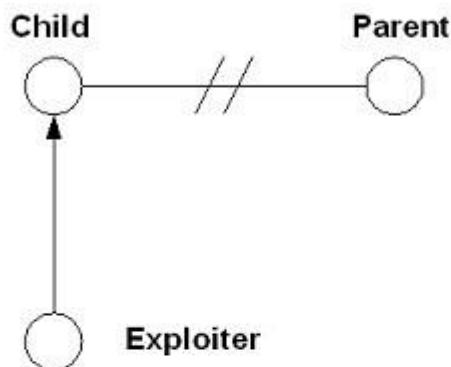
A 14 year old female had a sexual relationship with a 17 year old male, who

became violent . The mother did not want any statutory involvement and was reluctant to involve the Police. The PSW spent time supporting the mother and realized that she was worried that her daughter might run away if she did anything. In the end, they agreed to Police involvement and an abduction notice was served. The relationship ended and the young person was protected from further abuse.

## Appendix B : Relational Model, the impact of grooming on family relations

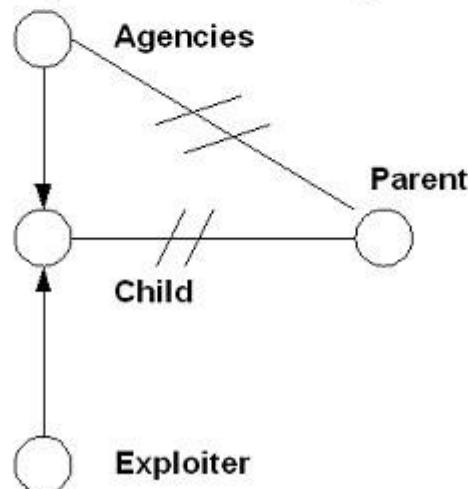
### **1: The Grooming Process:**

**The exploiter breaks the child's relationship with their parent(s), in order to control the child for the purposes of child sexual exploitation.**



### **2: Traditional Child Protection Model:**

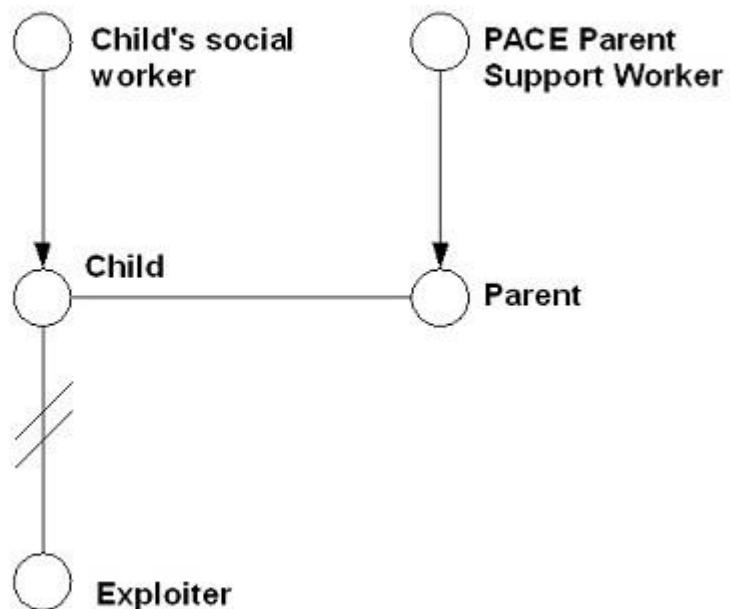
**Once involved, agencies focus attention on the child, but often tend to reinforce the breakdown of the relationship between child and parent.**



**Diagram One: Distinctive Features of the Relational or Holistic Approach to Working with Families Affected by Child Sexual Exploitation**

### **3: The Relational Model:**

**The PACE Parent Support Worker works as an integral part of a multi-agency specialist CSE team, to support the parent(s), rebuild their relationship with the child and end the sexual exploitation.**



**Diagram One (continued): Distinctive Features of the Relational or Holistic Approach to Working with Families Affected by Child Sexual Exploitation**

## Appendix C : Interview Schedules

### Interview Schedule for Parents

<b>Research Question:</b>	
<b>Phases</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<p>Introduce self &amp; why we are doing research</p> <p>Thank them for agreeing to see me/us</p> <p>Remind them of right to withdraw/ confidentiality Be clear that the interview is being recorded</p>
<b>Consent</b>	Ask them to sign the consent form, checking if they have any queries
<b>Introductory phase</b>	<b>Can you tell me how you found out about CROP?</b>
<b>Main body of interview</b>	<p><b>What work has the parent support worker from CROP undertaken with you and your family?</b></p> <p><b>Did this support lead to any changes in your situation?</b></p> <p><b>Can you tell me about your experiences of the prosecution process?</b></p> <p><b>What role did the family support worker play during the prosecution?</b></p>
<b>Overall question</b>	<p><b>What has been the impact of CSE on you?</b></p> <p><b>And your child?</b></p>

Concluding questions	<b>Overall can you tell me what did you find most helpful from the CROP family support worker?</b>  <b>Overall can you tell me what did you find least helpful from the CROP family support worker?</b>
closure	<b>Is there anything else that you would like to mention? Is there anything that you would like to ask me?</b>  Thank them for their participation

### Interview Schedule for professionals

<b>Research Question: Parents as partners in safeguarding children</b>	
<b>Phases</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	Introduce self & why we are doing this research Thank them for agreeing to see us  Remind them of confidentiality  Be clear that the interview is to be recorded electronically
<b>Consent</b>	Ask them to sign the consent form, checking if they have any queries
<b>Introductory phase</b>	<b>What is your role within X team?</b>  <b>How does the team operate on a day to day basis...? (referrals, case working etc)</b>  <b>What are the team's objectives?</b>

<b>Main body of interview</b>	<b>Can you describe to me when you have worked with Parent Support Worker (PSW) to improve the safety of the child?</b>
	<b>Can you tell me if you have received information from the parents (either directly or through the PSW) and what information was given?</b>  <b>Can you tell me what (if any) information have you as an agency shared with a parent?</b>
<b>Overall question</b>	<b>Can you tell me about what impact CSE has on parents...family relations</b>  Prompt –could you say more about this...(response dependent)  <b>Do you think involving families has had an impact on prosecution rates?</b>  Prompt –could you say more about this...(response dependent)
<b>Concluding questions</b>	<b>Finally, what if any evidence do you have of a child exiting CSE ?</b>  <b>Prompt: what helped with this?</b>
<b>Closure</b>	<b>Is there anything else that you would like to mention? Is there anything that you would like to ask me?</b>  <b>Thank them for their participation</b>

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The EU Strategy towards the Eradication of THB 2012-2016 recognises the role the internet plays in recruitment of victims. In order to mark the Seventh EU Anti-Trafficking Day, the Lithuanian Presidency and European Commission organised in Vilnius on 18 October 2013 a conference entitled '*Exploring the Links between the Internet and Trafficking in Human Beings: Cyberspace for Prevention, not Recruitment*'. On this occasion, experts, governments, law enforcement, national rapporteurs or equivalent mechanisms, civil society organisations and academics, as well as the private sector and the media met in order to discuss the role of the internet in the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings. Here, the gender dimensions of trafficking were clearly articulated and discussed in the context of the internet. In taking this focus on cyberspace and trafficking forward, the gender dimensions of the relationship between technology and trafficking are researched through the example of sexual exploitation in which the overwhelming majority of victims were women and girls (96 %) and comprised the most widespread form of trafficking, exploitation (62 %). This focus enables inquiry into the many ways that the internet and dark net have become critical tools in the perpetration of trafficking in human beings and opened up new human technology relations. Traffickers use websites to advertise their victims, extending the role of the pimp on the street to the pimp online. Trafficked women use the internet and social media to identify 'clients' on mainstream web-sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and MySpace and an increasing number are also forced to offer sex on-line. However, the internet and technology also offers the potential for prevention of THB in the future by changing the digital image of THB and by harnessing technology towards demand reduction, by offering escape routes and sources of support and by opening up new methods of disruption for law enforcement and civil society actors.

The last decade has seen the increasing importance of the role that technology plays in the trafficking of women and girls for the purposes of sexual exploitation (Europol 2014). The digital world of ubiquitous computing encompasses most gender-based violence in some form, ranging from virtual rape to the solicitation and stalking of women and girls both on and offline. Over the last decade, the use of digital technology has rapidly expanded both the opportunities for, and the scale of, trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation (Europol 2014; Hughes 2001, 2014;

Leary 2014; Sarkar 2015). The internet has become an essential component in the procurement, demand, and business dealings of traffickers and in the detection of women and girls who have been trafficked (Sykiotou 2007; Latonero 2011, 2012).

Despite a large proportion of activity occurring in the online domain, trafficking is still primarily presented as an offline crime that is facilitated and extended in scope and reach by digital technologies. As such, it is more often understood as a cyber-enabled crime in contrast to a cybercrime, a term that refers to crime targeted at computers or information systems or crimes that use these means as a primary tool (European Commission 2013). This may be because, in the majority of cases, the act of sexual exploitation is perpetrated offline, though even this is now transformed by internet pay-per-view sex sites (Europol 2014; Leary 2014). However, an approach that artificially divides the offline and online elements of trafficking of women and girls for the purposes of sexual exploitation will work against its reduction and prevention and will not protect victims. In cyberspace, women and girls become informational objects, no less real than their embodied offline personas, and they are targeted as such by traffickers and consumers of sex who are also online. Europol (2014: 70) refer to a 'blurring (of) the line between the online and 'real world' crime' yet the distinction between on/offline still influences the ways in which such crimes are monitored and investigated. For example, Leary (2014) conducted a comprehensive review of judicial opinions between 2000-2012 in the United States and found 78 % of 700 cases of child sex trafficking involved technology. However:

While that figure includes a role in either the perpetration of the crime or the investigation of the crime, rarely did law enforcement use technology to investigate a child sex trafficking event where no technology was used in its perpetration (Leary 2014: 309).

The division between on/offline sexual exploitation is not limited to law enforcement but is replicated through the multitude of civil society actors who offer support to victims so that, if trafficking is understood as perpetrated through technology, responsibility for its investigation is often deferred to law enforcement specialists (May- Chahal et al. 2014). Yet almost every case of trafficking in this context will have some online presence; whether that is through the business transactions of traffickers, the purchase of encryption software and false documents, the creation of web services to meet demand, or the use of mobile phones by all concerned, including almost all women and girls who are trafficked (Sarkar 2015; Europol 2014). Bifurcation of on/offline dimensions of trafficking in the micro-practices of investigation and victim support reduces opportunities to become more effective in tackling the problem. It also has the effect of making the trafficking of women and girls invisible in EU cyber security

policy (European Commission 2013).

The approach taken in this review is to understand trafficking as a complex adaptive system, ontologically changed by the digital world, which includes a wide spectrum of actors and activities across digitally connected spaces and time. This system is a critical component of the social organisation of gender relations across the globe, of which Europe is a major part. Gender is as present online as it is off it, though this is rarely recognised in any of the literature on technology and trafficking. Adopting a gendered digital world lens opens up many possibilities with regard to the prevention of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.

The literature reviewed in this paper falls broadly into three types:

- research and theoretically informed literature on the trafficking of women and girls for the purposes of sexual exploitation that mentions digital technologies as relevant to this activity;
- technologically informed research that positions trafficking as relevant to its application in the digital world; and
- technology research that holds some potential to develop a gender sensitive response to trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation in the digital world.

Research in the first category is more likely to be developed from a feminist/gender theory perspective, whereas the second two categories have a tendency to report research from a gender-neutral perspective. The findings from this review are summarised under four key themes:

*Digital world identification of sexually exploited women and girls* reflects much of the technology development in the field that is focused on victim detection. It aims primarily to free women and children from trafficked situations but also to prosecute perpetrators and, in some countries, those who benefit from the services of trafficked women and girls;

*The digital world trafficking sexual exploitation nexus* focuses on trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation in the context of connections and ties between different forms of trafficking, crimes, state, NGO and civil society actors in the digital world;

*The sexual exploitation trafficking system digital world image* refers to some of the many different objectifications of trafficked women and girls for the purposes of sexual exploitation online and explores their utility, particularly for the anti-

human trafficking movement and the victims of such trafficking, but also for consumers of sexual services offered by trafficked women and girls;

*Technical work on tracing traffickers' activities online with respect to open source intelligence and privacy* identifies key themes in the technical literature that may assist in the identification and prevention of trafficking women and girls for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

### **Digital World Identification of Exploited Women and Girls**

The largest catalyst for technology development to combat trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation appears to be victim identification. Several papers put forward different uses of technology to enhance the detection of women and girls who are trafficked.

Some of these detection methods are unspecified, and referred to simply as 'technological advances'. Law enforcement in Europe and the United States are recognising 'digital evidence' as crucial to their detection work (Europol 2014; Kimberley and boyd 2014). In addition to technologies designed to identify victims at borders such as holographic interferometry methods to analyse the authenticity of documents (Greičius et al. 2014) and infra-red imaging (Biemann 2005), there are those that mine cyberspace for identification data. For example, detection of illegal pornography may provide indications of potential trafficking victims. Hu et al. (2007) target the detection of pornography, but do so with reference to illegal or offensive activity — whether the authors suspect that pornography is illegal, or target illegal pornography particularly but work with proxy data, is unclear. Their method addresses not only image recognition, but also the text processing of suspected pornographic web content, combining this information in their classifier. Their contour-based detection method appears to perform better than region-based skin detection, specifically with regard to false positive rates including bikini or face-focused images.

Victims of trafficking will have little access to privacy and opportunities for seeking help themselves even with access to technology such as mobile phones. Mitchell and boyd (2014) found 14 % of 144 investigators from Internet Crimes against Children (ICAC) had seen cases where victims of child sex trafficking were able to use technology to contact help (13 %), find services (11 %), escape (8 %), or find shelter (6 %). There does not appear to be parallel research for adult women. However, Sarkar (2015) reports on technology use following interviews with traffickers (N=64), trafficked women (N=97) and 'clients' (N=85) through field surveys in five countries, two of which were EU Member States (Hungary and the United Kingdom). Each of these groups utilised technology in several different ways but, in terms of detection, over 90 % of traffickers used prepaid mobile phones that allowed anonymous contact

with 'commissioning agents' (relatives, friends, and community members who procured the women) while changing phones regularly to avoid detection themselves. 92 % of traffickers used online sites to advertise their business and attract women under spurious pretexts such as marriage brokering or employment. Buyers of trafficked women were also found through the internet with payment transferred electronically to the trafficker. So, both traffickers and users of women victims of trafficking find what they are looking for though online sources. As for the women and girls who were trafficked, all had a mobile phone (even though only a third had this before being trafficked) and 83 % had unlimited internet access which they used to identify clients and establish contact. For over half the women (54 %), Facebook was the most commonly used social networking platform and over 80 % used this, along with Twitter and LinkedIn to communicate with clients, surfing these sites for 4 to 6 hours a day. There is no reference made in this study to women using their phones or internet access to seek help to escape their situation and it is noted that phone use was 'dictated by their captors' (Sarkar 2015).

Emms et al. (2012) discuss similar challenges faced by victims of domestic violence with regards to privacy (from the abuser) of their activities to seek support. They highlight this as a major barrier to social inclusion of victims and discuss the limitations of existing privacy modes (e.g. private browsing) in this regard. They propose a variety of solutions to support victims. QR codes can be embedded in otherwise everyday objects such as postcards to enable access to suitable support websites. Location-based URLs can be used so that the victim may access a support service from a particular location but the browsing history is irretrievable away from that location. Other proposals by the authors include history sanitisation agents on computers and phones, secret graphical gateways on otherwise unsuspicious (to an abuser) websites and single use URLs whereby particular codes available to victims can unlock hidden web pages for support services (with the public URLs only showing unrelated content). The effectiveness and consequences of extending such innovative practices to assist women and girls who are victims of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation requires further research.

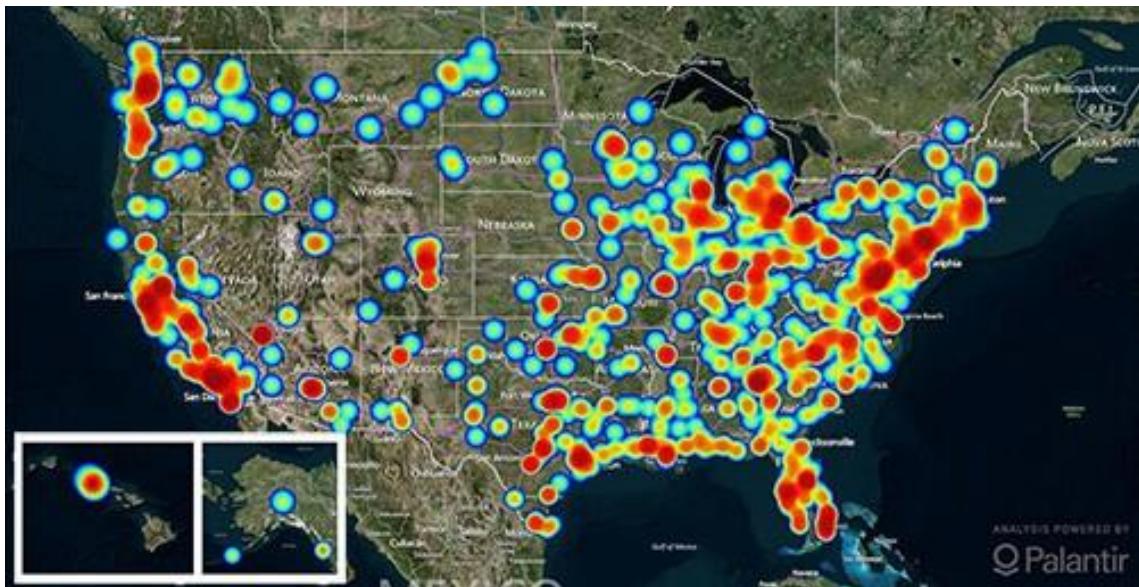
Digital technology is enabling a new approach utilising 'big data' analytics to harvest data for producing 'hot spot' maps to support detection primarily in the United States (Figure 9.1). The Polaris project is funded by Google under its ideas programme (<http://www.google.com/ideas/projects/human-trafficking-hotline-network/>) working in partnership with Liberty Asia, La Strada International, and Palantir Technologies who have donated data integration software and a data analytics platform. This project aims to:

Use data to find out where and how traffickers operate so that we can put them out of business, keep them from harming more people, and help survivors find the services they need.

**Figure 9.1 Map of hotline and publicly available data on trafficking in the United States**

<http://www.polarisproject.org/what-we-do/data-analysis-program>

The Polaris Project website reports that this use of technology has enabled detection of 19 724 cases of trafficking and 17 345 victims and survivors have been



identified in America. The majority were female adults (see Table 9.1).

**Table 9.1 Demographics of trafficking cases identified through signals to the Polaris project (NHTRC, 2014)**

Identity Category	Number	%
Female		84.4
Male	2 847	15.4
Transgender	38	0.2
Adult	11 859	66.4
Minor	6 014	33.6

To give some measure of annual activity, in the period from January to December 2014, 5 049 unique cases of trafficking were identified through 24 062 signals (hotline calls, emails and texts). Of these unique cases, 3 598 (71.4 %) concerned trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, of which females made up 90.3 % and adults 61.2 %. All these data refer to trafficking in the United States, of which 36.6 % was internal in 2014. Very few victims came from European Member States (Spain 3, Romania 6, United Kingdom 5), whilst 16 came from Russia and 7

from Ukraine. Polaris have announced that they are extending their data analytics to Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Greece, Moldova, Poland, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine over the next year.

Despite the finding that sexual exploitation is overwhelmingly gendered, in the majority of cases there is no reference to gendered solutions on any of the websites; rather the focus remains on the gender-neutral concept of human trafficking. Nevertheless, this approach does seem to encourage women's help seeking and assist in the detection of some of those who are trafficked for sex.

### **The Digital World Sexual Exploitation Nexus**

Several writers refer to a nexus, however, there appears to be a lack of agreement about which nexus should be the priority in the digital world. Is the nexus greater than the sum of its parts and what is/are the nexus/nexa with the greatest potential for digital technology development that will effectively combat sexual exploitation trafficking?

Hughes (2014: 6) concludes that 'gender, sexual exploitation and digital technologies, converge to create enhanced victimization'. She proposes that, rather than focusing research on the three areas as separate, the three together create a nexus that requires further research. In contrast, earlier work focused on the 'migration-security nexus' (Ross 2007) that binds trafficking for sexual exploitation with other legally contested mobile flows such as arms and drugs trafficking and those associated with terrorism. The former would encourage digital technology research and solutions that are targeted to both gender and sexual exploitation specificities that aim to enhance the security of vulnerable women and children. The latter has the effect of flattening women, children, sexual exploitation, guns, heroin, body parts, their traffickers, consumers, law enforcement and anti-traffickers as actors (Latour 1989) in a commodities market network that includes digital technologies, leading to research that aims to enhance the (cyber)security of states and their publics, in the hope that one or more unwanted activities are stopped or reduced. The application of technology to understanding trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation opens up the important issue of privacy rights. For example, Musto and boyd (2014) provide a critique of the trafficking technology nexus, exposing the unintended consequences of private sector, NGO, and law enforcement partnerships in the field. Based on a series of interviews with law enforcement exploring their use of technology in suspected trafficking cases, it is argued that technological solutions place prostitutes/sex workers and trafficked women under increasingly intrusive surveillance without consent.

Europol (2014) identify emerging elements of cybercrime, many of which apply to the trafficking of women and girls for the purposes of sexual exploitation. The EU is

identified as a key target for cybercrime due to relative wealth and connectivity, which also makes it a target for sexual exploitation. Cyber activity reduces effort and risk for the cyber-criminal and trafficker alike. The trans-national nature of trafficking, as with cybercrime, creates challenges for law enforcement, particularly in securing and analysing electronic evidence that is constantly shifting and changing in form and location. A 'digital underground' is led by market forces and open to the highest bidder for 'crime as a service' and 'dark nets' (internet spaces not accessible through search engines such as Google) offer high levels of anonymity to traffickers. Cyber-crimes are so pervasive that the law enforcement focus is on dismantling criminal infrastructures (of which trafficking might comprise one part) and disrupting key services which would have some impact, albeit unknown and unquantified, on the trafficking of women and girls.

With the exception of Hughes (2014) (who presented at the EU Anti-Trafficking day in Vilnius) we have found no research that takes the digital/Commercial Sexual Exploitation/gender nexus forward. However, a theoretical model recently proposed by Blair (2014) develops the nexus approach to human trafficking with an emphasis on 'nexus peering', combining data from a wide range of different sources in a secure, trusted cloud based system. This work does not include a gendered analysis but may have some potential if one is applied. Blair takes 19th Century slavery as analogous to modern day trafficking and draws on the 'Boxer Model' to identify the conditions that lead to the suppression of an illegal market (for example, the conditions that led to the end of the Atlantic slave trade). These conditions can be applied to the present with cyberspace described as the 'new Atlantic' which includes positive transaction costs and a domestic commitment (support for suppression). It is proposed that the anti-human trafficking (AHT) movement is insufficiently coordinated or motivated to collaborate (see also Thakor and boyd 2013), whereas the trafficking movement is technologically ahead, highly adaptable and converges to meet demand. Blair (2014) proposes the solution is to direct anti-trafficking funding and action to create an AHT 'synthetic market' underpinned by a 'three tiered data ecosystem' for the effective abolition of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation (see Figure 9.2). This data ecosystem depends on 'dynamic ontology' and 'nexus peering' (both digital technologies developed by Palantir that enable enhanced extra-large scale data sharing and depend on data reciprocity for successful implementation (all parties who share data will benefit in some way from it, hence the recommendation that funding be targeted to encourage collaboration).

**Figure 9.2 Natural market, NGO scramble ‘anti-market’, synthetic market (Blair, 2014)**



Critically, much as the earlier slave trade, Blair maintains that the contestation of trafficking also depends on strong social movement support. The present search retrieved websites of Abolitionist movements that have mobilised around the general issue of human trafficking. Those identified include: Abolish Slavery (<http://abolishslavery.org>), the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (Castla) (<http://www.castla.org/homepage>), the Coalition to Abolish Modern Day Slavery in Asia (CAMSA) (<http://www.camsa-coalition.org/en/>) and New York's New Abolitionists (<http://www.newyorknewabolitionists.com>). Most AHT organisations have a digital presence with web pages that present facts about human slavery and trafficking, contact details, 'about us' pages, and information for donations/funding. With the exception of CAMSA, all those identified above are based in the United States and their websites do not appear to reference each other. Social network analysis could identify how connected such AHT agencies are within the trafficking system and, thus, how far away they are from becoming the 'synthetic market' proposed by Blair. The sexual exploitation of women and girls is featured on all sites but often indirectly, as part of the wider problem of human slavery. Victims' stories and accounts of rescue operations are presented alongside stories of trafficking for domestic labour and other forms of human slavery involving boys and men. Whilst most of these narratives are about women and girls some of the sites are careful to present a distinction between women who 'choose' to be sex workers and those who are trafficked. *Abolish Slavery*, for example, runs a documentary on their front page that reveals a 'sting' operation in Thailand where frequent reference is made to women who 'choose' to do sex work (21st Century Sex Slaves Documentary Human Trafficking | Extraordinary Documentary HD at <http://abolishslavery.org>). An exception is *New York's New Abolitionists* whose supporters provide general AHT statements but also include gender-specific messages that contest prostitution as a choice. Thus, the Internet mirrors policy debates concerning the different ways in which trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation should be addressed.

### **The Sexual Exploitation Trafficking System Digital World Image**

Techniques used in the production of victimizing images might have paradoxical effects and even contributes to the objectification of women as they capture women's bodies within stereotypical representations of femininity and hence, demarcate the limits within which women can be imagined as active agents... The representation of trafficking relies on an extremely simplistic dualism that sets apart young and innocent victims from malevolent traffickers who lure them into migrating abroad. (Andrijasevic, 2007).

As the AHT movement has grown the images available online have proliferated, but a cursory search of Google Images using terms such as 'Sexual Exploitation' or, alternatively, 'Trafficking' support Andrijasevic's claim. Many of the images are of very young girls representing the simplistic dualism she describes, although primarily they picture the victim rather than the trafficker. The majority link to NGO websites and act as vehicles to promote public support to the charity or organisation concerned. There is arguably a need to disrupt this imagery of the innocent victim (as the realities of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) clearly do), to situate the image in the everyday contexts of those who may become victims. Biemann (2005: 182) attempts to do this through her film 'Remotely Sensed', which reflects her interest in how 'satellite visions of globality are producing a sexual economy in which it has become thinkable to reorganise women geographically on a global scale'. In the film, satellite views of CSE trafficking routes and border crossings are overlaid with the narratives and images of women who have been trafficked (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYQCF1I55OQ>). The details of their movement, where and how their journey begins, and the electronic record of mobilities through ports and across borders, to destinations previously unknown and not anticipated, renders a more authentic account. However, the video clip, post-dated 2013, has only had 2 005 views to date (10.5.15) and is clearly not being accessed by the volume of women and girls who may be vulnerable.

Websites advertising sex workers are a further manifestation of the digital image in the sexual exploitation trafficking system. Several authors make reference to attempts to regulate websites, citing the example of the taking down of Craigslist and Backpage in the United States. Thakor and boyd (2013) maintain that such websites have emerged as 'new battleground spaces' where longstanding disagreements amongst AHT organisations are played out, but which have dubious impact on reducing or preventing trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Primarily, this can be explained by crime displacement theory, which predicts that if a crime is stopped in one space it will most likely move to another if the motivation for the crime remains. Some would argue that it is better to keep the crime in view, rather than drive it to the 'dark net' (Heil and Nichols, 2014). As one AHT activist in Thakor and boyd's study noted:

And so, I guess my fear about restrictions on technology or closing down certain websites is 'Are we just building our freeway around the issue and not actually tackling the issue?' (Thakor and boyd, 2013).

Wang et al. (2012b) present an approach to combating the sexual trafficking of children through examination of open sources such as classified advertisement sites and bulletin boards. They examine such resources for evidence of trafficking networks and introduce techniques to search for victims under aliases and misspelt names. Though the authors do not present an evaluation, they discuss ongoing trial deployment, highlighting challenges specifically related to anonymising the toolkit's interactions with sites to prevent counter-intelligence, and with scaling their approach to wider monitoring. Romaniuk (2000) approaches the same problem from a different angle, applying intelligent agents to identify missing children on the internet by connecting information in open databases of missing children with web crawling and IRC chat monitoring. The approach was partially implemented as the SADIE system, which outlines a high-level mechanism for multiple data source integration, but leaves many implementation matters unresolved. The proposed ecosystem of agents dealing with specific data sources appears flexible, but the exact means of calculating results' similarity to a short query — a very key detail for any of the agents — is left unspecified. A common theme to both these sexual anti-trafficking technologies is the integration of information from multiple sources, although the approaches appear to focus on different sources for their information.

### **Technical work on tracing trafficker's activities online with respect to open source intelligence and privacy**

Much of the literature explored thus far has focused on victim identification and networks against trafficking in human beings (THB). While there is a growing body of technical literature on tackling the originators of sexual exploitation on the internet, particularly of children (see, for instance, [Rashid et al. 2012] for a survey and [Rashid et al. 2013; Peersman et al. 2014] for more recent advances), there is a lack of technical literature on tackling the traffickers of women and girls for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

Drawing on Ihde (1991) and Bakardjieva (2005), sexual exploitation trafficker-technology relations will be of four different kinds. Two of these have no need to understand how the technology is working: these use open source technology to extend human practices ('embodiment relations' such as advertising women for sex — traffickers and those who buy sex through websites, for example, know what they want to use the technology for), and uses that 'other' the technology ('alterity' relations where the technology is positioned as an 'other' to be mastered — traffickers find new uses for technology). Uses that enhance traffickers' knowledge/understanding ('hermeneutic relations' — traffickers and

those who use trafficked services can find new ways to connect to women and girls and each other) can require technical knowledge (e.g. software design), though not necessarily. A fourth category, 'background relations' (Ihde, 1991), described by Bell (2007) as equivalent to plumbing or wiring, has little relevance to the user but provides the infrastructure to make existing and emergent crimes possible. In this domain, traffickers require sophisticated technical capacity, which they can now access through purchase, force, or exchange. Here, we cover these four uses by reviewing relevant technical work on trafficking as well as general work on open source intelligence that may hold promise with regards to disrupting trafficking networks.

### **Web mining trafficker networks**

Marjuni et al. (2009) attempt to extract crime information (Who, Where, When, How, What, Why) from chat logs, drawing on published examples of sexual abuse from adult dating and scam interactions as their data source. Tokenisation and part-of-speech tagging of the data is discussed. Classification accuracy results for their crime information categories are also presented, though how these results were derived is unclear. While mining instrumental crime information, as would fit the given categories, could well prove useful to investigators (and also potentially to those investigating trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation), the paper does not present a coherent solution for this purpose.

Frank et al. (2010) examine the structure of online child exploitation networks, building networks of websites based on their links and a set of predefined 'bad' keywords, with the ultimate goal of identifying the major nodes whose removal would most disrupt online exploitation. They demonstrate their deployment on four networks crawled from websites identified through search results, identifying the key nodes through the top 10 values for severity of content as identified through keywords. They also find that centrality (how key nodes collect together) does not correlate with severity of content, but severe websites were highly linked to each other, suggesting scope for targeting sub-networks of the most extreme material where law enforcement resources are scarce.

Peng and Wang (2008) provide a case study where link analysis — with links in the form of webpage co-occurrence — is used to trace a notorious violent criminal, producing link charts for known members of his gang and related individuals. The method presented relies on Google search results to identify relevant web pages, which may lead to narrowed results due to personalisation if countermeasures are not taken. Hosseinkhani et al. (2012) provide a review of web mining for input into criminal network analysis. They propose a framework which integrates the identification of crime hot spots and criminal communities into the workflow of a web crawling agent. Detail on how the more relevant tagging modules will be implemented is omitted. Tseng et al. (2012) focus on term networks, presenting a

novel algorithm for key term extraction, and presenting a case study similar to that of Peng and Wang (2008) where news related to a particular gangster was gathered and mined to describe relationships between gangsters. This term model appears more powerful than simple entity co-location, but the study only demonstrates simple relationships that could be found through more traditional means.

Technical approaches have also been proposed to analyse data from social networks in order to uncover potential criminal networks. Lauw et al. (2005) describe attempts to discover the social networks of criminals by mining spatio-temporal events such as web usage. A detailed explanation of the problem and algorithmic approach are given, and the theory is validated against a data set collected from a university campus' wireless network. Barbian (2011) theoretically demonstrates a means of detecting hidden friendships — relationships in a network that are not formal connections. While their system appears technologically sound and has potential in terms of developing valuable intelligence tools to identify and disrupt trafficking, the way in which these could be scaled up and applied in this context would require further research.

Al-Zaidy et al. (2012) describe the process of mining and analysing criminal networks from collections of unstructured text documents. The method relies on the recognition of named entities and the detection of prominent communities of connected names. Their approach was validated in a case study from a real cybercrime investigation, with an instant messaging database provided by law enforcement and their investigation being compared to an expert's manual analysis of the chat logs. It is notable that the analysis was guided by the researchers' own identification of suspicious information — while fully automated analysis is not necessarily desirable, for purposes of evaluation it is necessary to distinguish the performance of the support tool from the performance of the authors.

Wang et al. (2012c) use Twitter as a source of general crime prediction, drawing on automatic semantic analysis, event extraction and geographical information systems to map crime hotspots. In an evaluation of actual hit-and-run crime data, their system outperforms a baseline uniform model. While there may be scope for improvement in the predictive technique, more interesting developments are likely to be found in modification of the model for deployment on a streaming Twitter feed. Wang et al. (2012a) do so, using Twitter data to model criminal incidents geographically. They apply a spatio-temporal generalised additive model to a combination of geographical and demographic features of an area and textual features extracted from the Twitter feed of a news agency, evaluating their performance against actual crime incidence rates. Their analysis shows that the textual features provided by the Twitter data improve prediction accuracy as compared to the previous model using only geographic and demographic information.

### **Other approaches**

Web mining tools have been deployed to crawl targeted sites advertising sexual services. Silva et al. (2014) crawl six specified sites daily (Backpage, Cityvibe, Eros, Humaniplex, MyRedbook, and SugarDaddyForMe) and use natural language processing and data linking techniques to identify geographic data at three levels (city/neighbourhood, metro area, and region). No evaluation is given and the tools have been designed to focus on children only so the potential to expand to adult women who may be trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation is unknown.

Organised crime groups involved in trafficking have adapted easily to new technologies that reduce risks to them (of detection and prosecution) whilst still retaining high profitability (Europol, 2013). A key problem facing law enforcement in identifying and investigating the trafficking of women and girls is addressing what has come to be known as 'hidden crime'. Crime, as a service offered through the internet, is proliferating rapidly (Europol, 2014), hosted on the 'dark net' in communities of peer to peer networks facilitated through TOR and similar software products that allow anonymity. Activities cover different elements relevant to traffickers, including virtual financial services and money laundering, web design, hacking and 'specialised criminal market places' that offer forged identity documents and encryption devices to anonymise demand for sexual exploitation (Europol, 2013; 2014). Breaking anonymity and tracking such hidden services supporting the trafficking of women and girls is a major challenge. One study, presented by Dudas (2013), was retrieved that may have potential for doing so, albeit in a limited way. This focuses on the detection and analysis of 'dark networks', with specific interest on visualisation tools for handling networks parsed from Twitter and placed by geo-location. No formal evaluation is provided, but the author discusses trial usage on real networks of interest.

Internal organisational data may be harvested to better effect. For example, data are constantly accumulated through law enforcement investigations but may not be efficiently connected. Johnson et al. (2012) look at relationships between unstructured law enforcement texts (emails) and use these to help augment information of interest, analysing the semantic relatedness of documents and linking identified entities. A demonstrative application is presented, acting on a sanitised corpus of real law enforcement emails. Given appropriate consideration of scalability and the lack of law enforcement resources to combat trafficking, this tool would appear to be an impressive resource for augmentation of police intelligence. Research that explores how an approach could be extended to the wider AHT networks (as noted by Blair, 2014) in order to synthesise knowledge rapidly may have potential to enhance prevention.

### **Key thematic questions addressed by an ‘expert evidence’ Sexual Exploitation Trafficking Futures workshop**

The review suggests several possibilities for considering future research directions that will lead to effective actions in combating trafficking women and girls for the purpose of CSE. Three theme question areas were proposed as starting points for an interdisciplinary workshop (inviting technologists, social scientists, law enforcement, policy actors), which considered the gender dimensions of trafficking, technology priorities, and research for future resilience:

Should big data analytics be gendered in more meaningful ways to enable gender sensitive analysis and actions, and if so how? For example, many women victims refer to difficult care responsibilities such as being single parent mothers bringing their children up in poverty, and to the lure of certain types of jobs (escorts, domestic labour, bar and restaurant work). Their shopping patterns and movements may be gendered making them more vulnerable to trafficker identification; can this kind of data be reflected back to potential victims to present more authentic images of their vulnerability, or to THB organisations to enhance detection of vulnerability at earlier stages of the trafficking journey?

What are the implications (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) for the Polaris project to extend in- to Europe and EU Member States? Can/should more be done to develop digital world abolitionist movements focused on the trafficking of women and girls for the purpose of sexual exploitation in Europe? How are European AHT movements coordinated and networked, as evidenced through social network analysis, and if insufficiently networked should this be improved to promote a ‘synthetic market’?

Web-mining approaches generally appear to suffer from a lack of rigorous evaluation. Could identification of a means of better evaluating the performance of information-gathering agents such as these help focus research efforts?

#### **Theme 1: Digital world identification of sexually exploited women and girls**

The workshop confirmed the centrality of the internet for recruitment of victims and the selling of their services. Escort websites were a particular target for law enforcement attention; identifying victims through data analytics of images, phone and contact details and credit card or other financial information. The need for multi-disciplinary teams that include forensic profiling, technical and policing expertise in key areas such as financial investigation was emphasised. Some national law enforcement agencies have such resources; however, at the regional level this multi-disciplinary approach may be less comprehensive. The participants acknowledged that fragmented approaches and insufficient resourcing within the regions could act as a barrier to identification and intervention. These conditions imposed particular

limitations on the capacity of relevant actors to recognise trafficking situations and victims of trafficking, or to share information between agencies in support of formal victim identifications.

It was also noted that websites that rate prostitutes/sex workers may be a source of open source intelligence data for victim identification, particularly where women and girls are moved or re-trafficked but also where descriptions such as 'she wasn't very happy' or 'she had bruises' might indicate the need for further investigation. Workshop contributors also described how these sites could be successfully used as a resource for 'crowd-sourcing'; identifying data and related intelligence from the public regarding trafficking situations. In the Netherlands, for example, 'consumers' of sexual services who use such rating websites are routinely prompted to anonymously report identifying information to law enforcement authorities for investigation. All categories of actors in the trafficking system increasingly have an online presence (victims, traffickers, 'customers' and facilitators) that leave digital traces. There is potential to develop analytic software tools that can connect these data traces and assist in identifying those involved although the design challenges are not insignificant.

A dominant theme in discussions was the tracking of financial gain or exchange in digital environments. It is clear that further research on this element of the trafficking system is urgently needed, particularly in-depth analysis of actual cases to identify the financial processing mechanisms that could then be matched by advances in digital forensics analysis. Financial investigations were recognised as labour and time intensive, involving different law enforcement specialisms and investigator training. They also require close cooperation with private sector financial institutions such as banks, Visa, MasterCard, PayPal and Western Union in order to identify and block accounts and stop malicious transfers. Such action is supported by the EU Directive (2011/36/EU), including Article 7, which states that with regard to THB offences 'Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that their competent authorities are entitled to seize and confiscate instrumentalities and proceeds' <sup>4</sup> Europol (2015) have noted the need for cooperation with financial institutions and money service businesses that are 'most at-risk' of being exploited by organised crime groups through money laundering activities linked to the proceeds of THB

Regional differences across EU Member States create both challenges and potential preventative directions. The variation in age limits across Europe for both sexual consent and prostitution/sex-work were seen as a challenge in victim detection online. Software has been produced that can identify images of sexually exploited children on- line and in peer to peer networks (Rashid et al. 2012) but the identification of adults in situations of sexual exploitation is far more complex since, in some Member States, they will be working legitimately. A raising of the age limit

for prostitution/sex-work could make some victims of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation more identifiable online using software tools, while diminishing the vulnerability of children to re-trafficking and sexual exploitation as they move into adulthood, although this would require further research. Language also varies across websites with many being country- and language-specific in targeting consumers of prostitute/sex-worker services. However, the same trafficked women and girls may appear on websites in several countries under different names. Thus, language synthesis is key to the development of appropriate forensic soft- ware tools. Moreover, it was suggested that wider application of image analysis strategies used in other law enforcement domains (e.g. child sexual exploitation) could support digital world identification of trafficking victims and the criminal networks that support their exploitation. While the same trafficked women and girls may appear on websites delivered in different languages across a range of countries, the same images are generally used for a specific girl's 'avatar', with multiple identities often controlled by the same organisers between sites. Thus, our law enforcement contributors proposed that by interrogating image data, e.g. searching by image using crawler systems, it would be possible to form linkages between escort sites and other online platforms offering sexual services so as to understand the organisation of these networks, identify new trafficking victims, potential trafficking routes and other intelligence in support of intervention.

A recent report of research conducted by Thorn and Bouche in the United States was made available to the work- shop. This identifies a significant change in recruitment and grooming practices in the trafficking of women and girls for the purposes of sexual exploitation. The younger the victim the more likely it is that they will meet their controller online, with the mean age of victims being 16 (Thorn and Bouche, 2015). Furthermore, victims increasingly appear to have unmonitored access to technology and the internet (supporting findings by Sarkar, 2015) and use mainstream websites such as Facebook and MySpace. This opens up possibilities for prevention in terms of awareness raising and the potential to disrupt through key messages and links to safe exit strategies. For ex- ample, based on its survey of survivors of child sex trafficking, Thorn has pioneered the 'BeFree' texting helpline in the United States, which offers victims a more discreet and effective way to access assistance than traditional telephone hotlines. However, the psychological strength of grooming practices cannot be under-estimated, with romance being a recurring feature similar to some of the dynamics operating in romance scams online (Whitty and Buchanan, 2012).

### **Theme 2: The digital world and trafficking for sexual exploitation nexus**

Is greater collaboration in cyberspace a feasible goal? Who would be the key collaborators in the EU? Could funding or legislation lever such collaboration in the EU?

The call for improved EU collaboration in tackling cyber-enabled trafficking of women and girls was a clear theme in the workshop. Participants had experience of collaboration on government and civil society platforms with reference to child sexual exploitation and it was felt these should extend to adult trafficking and human slavery. An EU collaborative platform could encourage greater coordination within the NGO sector and between NGOs, law enforcement, and key players in the online industry such as the operators of escort sites and social media companies, which currently occurs on a project to project basis. The participants maintained that greater interdisciplinary integration between law enforcement, NGOs, and other stakeholders within EU-sponsored platforms and networks (such as Empact (142), NREMS and the EU Civil Society Platform against THB) would promote closer cross-stakeholder collaboration in combating cyber-enabled trafficking for sexual exploitation, both at the level of the regions and across EU Member States.

### **Theme 3: The sexual exploitation trafficking system digital world image**

Discussion under this theme strongly supported the review findings that the digital world image of sexual exploitation works to reinforce a 'simplistic dualism' of the innocent female victim and a brutally forced trafficking situation. Anti-trafficking organisations could use their websites more effectively to play an important role in combating the trafficking of women and girls. The way in which many are currently depicting the trafficking of women and girls for the purposes of sexual exploitation represent stereotypical images that emphasise disempowered victims. Whilst this can be an accurate description, these images may not be helpful to victims and could be more effective if they change to promote a more empowering message that reflects the complex realities of the trafficking system. Images and promotional material could also be targeted at users with greater attention on reducing demand. The participants proposed that a major aim of such messaging should be to promote awareness and recognition of trafficking situations amongst victims or others who might encounter them, particularly those situations which may be more nuanced than this 'simplistic dualism' suggests, and to encourage attendant reporting and identification.

Blocking websites is sometimes proposed as a method to reduce demand and

deter users of women and girls who are sexually exploited. A concern regarding displacement was identified in the review and in the workshop, with reports that demand does not reduce but merely moves elsewhere. In a practical context, the taking down of websites is becoming increasingly difficult in cloud computing environments where hosts can move rapidly. Counter to these arguments, the workshop consensus was that it was preferable from a law enforcement perspective to keep websites used to advertise women and girls who were trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation in view. This allows access to large amounts of data that can be used to identify and protect victims as well as to track traffickers. Furthermore, as Sarkar (2015) and Thorn and Bouche (2015) found, the most frequently used websites are Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, for which a 'take-down' response is not feasible. It may be that pressure to cooperate within an anti-trafficking coalition could emerge from placing greater emphasis on 'the exploitation of the prostitution of others' or, at the very least, on providing services that aid and abet the prostitution of others with particular reference to these sites.

#### **Theme 4: Technical work on tracing trafficker's activities online**

In addition to the measures proposed to improve data analytics and digital forensics for financial investigations, proposals were also made regarding the potential of leverage analytics to reduce demand. Where victims of the trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation can be identified, clear messages could be encoded in the click business to alert customers of prostitution/sex-workers to the possibility that they are exploiting victims further. Proposals were put forward to take an economics of information security approach to encourage research and collaborative action that will disrupt or disturb the trafficking market and considerably increase the cost to both the traffickers and consumers of trafficked sex.

One notable proposal advanced by the workshop stakeholders concerned the development of a European coalition of stakeholders to combat the commercial viability of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. In the CSE domain, coalitions such as the US Financial Coalition Against Child Pornography and the European Financial Coalition Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Online have achieved significant international successes in their fight against the online sexual exploitation of children by joining forces to take action on the payment and ICT systems that are used to run these illegal operations. However, no equivalent mechanism exists to identify and disrupt the financial flows and payment-processing mechanisms that underpin cyber-enabled trafficking for sexual exploitation. The participants maintained that a comparably-constituted European programme,

comprising key actors from law enforcement, the private sector and civil society could similarly compromise the market for cyber-enabled sex with trafficked women and girls by working together to directly target the revenue streams of traffickers, controllers, and other financial beneficiaries of these crimes.

## **SUMMARY OF THE GENDER DIMENSIONS**

The analysis of the gender dimension of trafficking in relation to technology identifies several different issues. The purpose of addressing them here is to make observations on the contribution of attention to gender to the more focused question of what works to eradicate trafficking in human beings from a technological perspective.

The digital world image of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation is deeply gendered. Trafficked women are advertised on websites as escorts and as prostitutes/sex workers. Their gender is clearly visible and the majority are women selling sex to men. Men and boys are also advertised and a group that are considered additionally vulnerable by law enforcement are LGTBI young men and women. Gender disaggregated data is provided by tip lines (such as the Polaris project) and these show that the majority (over 80 %) of victims accessing the internet and mobile contact points are adult women.

Gender equality principles do not appear to feature explicitly in the technological dimensions of trafficking. The review found no evidence of a disproportionate focus on male or female victims when technologies are applied by law enforcement agencies. However, the digital world image of trafficked women and girls for the purpose of sexual exploitation plays on gender stereotypes and women are far more frequently portrayed in these images as forced victims. Women are not encouraged to feel or be empowered to escape from trafficked situations, but rather their victim status is reinforced.

The EU Cybersecurity Strategy emphasises the importance of protecting the same fundamental rights that apply offline. However, the focus on fundamental rights within the strategy is on freedom of expression, privacy and surveillance and censorship. Articles 1, 4 and 5 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union are not referred to directly. Article 1 maintains that human dignity is inviolable. A much more gendered approach to cyber-enabled crime is needed within the cybersecurity policies of the EU; one which recognises the way in which human dignity and trafficking are gendered and how cyberspace extends the reach of trafficking and the depth of violations of fundamental rights.

Intersecting inequalities are evident in cyberspace as they are in the offline world. Firstly, considerable emphasis and resources have been deployed to address the

trafficking of children. This is partly because children are easier to detect in cyberspace (through image and text analysis) and also because the crime of sexual exploitation is clearly defined in relation to minors as consent is not possible. Technology-enabled practices to prevent the trafficking of children for the purposes of sexual exploitation are, therefore, far in advance of such practices as they might apply to women. The intersection of age and gender could be reframed as a positive element if the age of prostitution/sex-work was raised. If, de facto, it was not possible for women to consent to sex work before the age of 21, technologically enabled tools designed for minors could be extended to include young women.

Workshop participants also emphasised the vulnerability of two further intersecting groups: women and girls with learning disabilities and LGTBI young people, both of which have been identified through their online profiles as being vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Gender expertise is underdeveloped in the technology field. Some gender tracing expertise exists in the field of natural language processing and image analysis but this is mainly held by technical specialists in universities rather than by law enforcement agencies (both regional and European) or NGO's. Technology is often assumed to be gender neutral despite the fact that there are known gender differences in access to and use of cyberspace and also that informational traces are gendered in some contexts.

A growing problem is identifying victims in what is referred to as 'non-location bound prostitution' (National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children [Netherlands], 2013). Speaking from the perspective of the Netherlands (see Chapter 6), she recommends that: new methods should be developed and experts in electronic media should be hired. One instrument that could help in this respect is a multimedia covenant (similar to the covenant on erotic advertisements), requiring sex businesses to give their licence number and the address of their establishment in advertisements. This instrument is only useful, however, if the information can also be verified. Another idea might be to require these sex businesses to have a permanent telephone number, which is also used by clients. (NRM7, recommendation 29).

In this model, we would add that such experts in electronic media must be aware of the gender dimensions of trafficking in order to utilise the full range of tools that would aid detection.

The gender balance in decision-making that contributes to policies and expert groups on cybercrime, cyber-enabled crime and cyber security is not transparent. Many committees give organisational rather than individual membership. However, the major focus of committees working in this area is on protecting

legitimate market interests and, whilst this is of central importance, it does mean that illegal markets, including those involving the trafficking of women and girls for the purposes of sexual exploitation, are marginally addressed in a cybersecurity context.

Technical competence in relation to combating trafficking of women and girls for the purpose of sexual exploitation is primarily understood as a law enforcement responsibility, located in home affairs and with Europol. As a topic it does not feature strongly in cybersecurity policy which is more appropriate to the expansion in both the trafficking market and in developing policies to combat trafficking. This is particularly relevant to tracking and disrupting financial flows connected to these growing markets.

The advertising of trafficked women intermixes with advertising for prostitution/sex work on many websites. Keeping these and other linked websites in view and mining them for data that indicates trafficking, force and coercion can aid in detection of victims but privacy and other fundamental rights are also a consideration that requires further research.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Sexual exploitation trafficker-trafficked gender technology relations are primarily 'embodiment relations', using technology to extend human practices. As such they are intrinsically gendered. The workshop reinforced the finding of United States research (Thorn and Bouche, 2015), that traffickers use the internet and social media as tools to groom and recruit victims. Approximately 75 % of known traffickers are male (Eurostat, 2015) and grooming techniques are likely to be similar when applied to both adult women and children. Tools have been developed to enable the detection of age, gender and deception in online environments, primarily for detecting the grooming of children. Such tools may, with further research, be extended into detecting grooming for trafficking. This will require close collaboration with law enforcement and NGO's to begin to build profiles of cases that have been proved and to develop a very detailed anatomy of the trafficking of women and girls. Traffickers also use web- sites to advertise their victims, extending the role of the pimp on the street to the pimp online. The majority of victims of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation are female. They primarily use the internet and social media to identify 'clients' on mainstream websites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and MySpace. An increasing number are also forced to offer sex online.

More could be made of 'hermeneutic relations' for victims; providing opportunities for them to search and learn how to empower themselves and break free from their trafficked situation. 'Background relations' are clearly needed by traffickers to gain

access to financial services, cryptocurrency transactions, website hosting arrangements and specialist services to forge identities. The gender dimension is less relevant to the technical expertise required in this domain but that does not mean it is insignificant. Background relations fall under the policy domain of cybersecurity where the fundamental rights of women to human dignity and the prohibition of forced labour and trafficking in human beings become reduced priorities in the context of financial security, privacy, data protection and the free market. Yet these are exactly the cyberspaces that enable the trafficking of women and girls for the purposes of sexual exploitation to flourish. In the context of emerging technology and the trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation we conclude with the recommendations that follow.

A gendered approach to cyber-enabled crime is needed within EU cybersecurity policies; cyber security policy is not gender specific and, therefore, not able to address gender equality in relation to issues such as trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation that differentially impact women, girls, men and boys.

The primary focus of fundamental rights within the European cyber security strategy is on freedom of expression, privacy, surveillance and censorship. Article 1, 4 and 5 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights are not referred to directly. A gendered approach to cyber-enabled crime would enable recognition of the way in which violations of human dignity are intrinsic to trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation and how cyberspace extends the reach and the depth of violations of the fundamental rights of women and girls.

Understanding intersecting inequalities in the digital world can strengthen prevention. There are many intersections between age and gender in trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Girls who have been sexually exploited are known to transition into adult sex work and age assessments are a key focus for first responders. Cyber-enabled anti-trafficking measures and actions at the European and Member State level have been disproportionately focused on minors in comparison to adult women. This is primarily because sex with a minor is de facto illegal and thus easier to trace through digital methods. A policy of no consent to prostitution/sex work before the age of 21 would enable extended deployment of technology tools. Ethical and legal considerations would require careful consultation and further research.

There is some evidence from NGO's and law enforcement that women and girls with learning disabilities and LGTBI young people may be more vulnerable to trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation (143). Civil society actors working with vulnerable adults and children should therefore be educated on the signs of grooming and exploitation and NRM procedures.

The technology field must develop gender expertise. Technical specialists are primarily in universities and technical resources are limited in law enforcement (both regional and European) and NGO's. Technology expertise is often assumed to be gender neutral but in the field of anti-trafficking it is essential to take a gendered perspective to technical development. Greater collaboration is required between women who have been victims of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation and technical specialists, to enable the co-production of technical tools.

Measures should be taken to strengthen the gender balance in cybersecurity decision-making. The gender balance of decision-makers contributing to policies and expert groups on cybercrime, cyber-enabled crime, and cyber security is not transparent. Often, committee members represent organisations and industry and individuals are not named. Cybersecurity committees focus on protecting national security and legitimate market interests; illegal markets, including those involving the trafficking of women and girls for the purposes of sexual exploitation, are marginally addressed.

Joining up the gender dimensions at the EU policy level will aid prevention. Technical competence in relation to combating the trafficking of women and girls for the purpose of sexual exploitation is primarily understood as a law enforcement responsibility, located in home affairs and with Europol. It is not a clear priority in cybersecurity policy, which misses the expansion in the trafficking market that is highly relevant to tracking and disrupting financial flows connected to these growing markets.

## APPENDIX: METHODS AND SEARCH STRATEGY

The following search terms were applied to databases (see Table 9.2) accessible through the Lancaster University Library that are recommended for structured and systematic review on social justice topics (SCIE 2010):

[Traffick\* & Technology]  
& [Women] OR [Child\*]  
[Traffick\* & Internet] &  
[Women] OR [Child\*]

Exclusion criteria:

- outside the last 10 years unless mentioned in the bibliography of recent articles and offering different information;
- those where technology and/or internet are not included in the subject terms;
- not available in an English language version.

The technical search triangulated the general search on CSE, trafficking, and gender violence (various search terms that would capture these topics) with a search on technical approaches used to support law enforcement. Search terms here included 'crime', 'police', and 'law enforcement' combined with more focused terms:

- artificial intelligence;
- data fusion;
- data mining;
- information fusion;
- natural language processing machine learning; and
- social network analysis text mining.

Databases searched were IEEExplore, the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) Digital Library, SpringerLink and ScienceDirect

**Table 9.2 Search results**

Database	Traffick*	AND Technology	AND Internet	AND Women	OR Child*
Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)	2 236	58	90	14	22
British Education Index	13	0	0	0	0
CINAHL	701	2	13	1	3
Proquest Dissertations and Theses	3 334	149	154	37	45
Medline	30 606	1 081	1 117	7	6
PsycINFO	2 957	112	484	14	47
Web of Science	4 230	59	62	9	22
ZETOC	24 735	160	7	2	2

Walby, S., Towers, J., Francis, B., Shire, K., Kelly, L., Apitzsch, B., Armstrong, J., Balderston, S., Fish, A., Hardaker, C., Kirby, S., May-Chahal, C., and Palmer, E. (2016). Study on comprehensive policy review of anti-trafficking projects funded by the European Commission. HOME/2014/ISFP/PR/THBX/0052. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

This is an abbreviated version, which focuses on the author's contribution in a co-written chapter. The full document is available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/study\\_on\\_comprehensive\\_policy\\_review.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/study_on_comprehensive_policy_review.pdf)

## A: VICTIMS: IDENTIFYING, PROTECTING AND ASSISTING VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING

### Introduction

The first Strategic Priority of the EU Anti-Trafficking Strategy is focused on victims: victims are at the centre of the EU Anti-Trafficking Strategy. The difficulty of identifying victims is acknowledged, but the range of potential opportunities for intervention is also identified. The Strategy prioritises the identification of victims so that they can access the protections to which they are entitled, including addressing the five broad needs of: respect and recognition, assistance, protection, access to justice, and compensation. The Strategy also recognises the important role of victims in bringing traffickers to justice...

**The EC has published Guidelines for the identification of victims of trafficking in human beings**, addressed in particular to border guards and consular services (European Commission, 2013b), which aim to improve coordination and coherence in the area of victim identification, and facilitate the work of front-line officials.

A specific handbook on the identification of child-victims of trafficking/children at risk at airports has been developed by FRONTEX (FRONTEX, 2015).

The Anti-Trafficking Directive sets out a series of beneficial provisions for the assistance, support and protection of victims. More specifically, protection of child victims of trafficking is a specific focus premised on the recognition of the particular vulnerability of children to trafficking.

The EU Strategy recognises that comprehensive child-sensitive protection systems, ensuring interagency and multidisciplinary coordination, are crucial to meet the needs of child victims of trafficking. In line with the **EU Anti-Trafficking Strategy, FRA and the European Commission published "Guardianship for children deprived of parental care: A handbook to reinforce guardianship systems to cater for the specific needs of child victims of trafficking" (2014)**. This handbook offers standards

for guardianship practice so that responsible national authorities can be better equipped to deal with the specific needs of child victims of trafficking.

The Anti-Trafficking Directive 2011/36/EU details the additional protections for child victims in Articles 13, 14, 15 and 16. These Articles address the specific needs of accompanied and unaccompanied children as victims of trafficking in assistance, support and protection measures and for their protection in criminal investigations and proceedings.

A child is any person below 18 years of age.

Article 2 of Directive 2011/36/EU on trafficking in human beings states that:

*(6) 'child' shall mean any person below 18 years of age;*

Article 2 of Directive 2012/29/EU on establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime states that:

*(c) 'child' means any person below 18 years of age;*

Despite the clarity of the above definitions, age is a contested issue in both a physical and linguistic sense (Breuil, 2008). Many children are subject to age determination procedures to formally document their age.

The language used to describe young people who are potentially subject to trafficking is ambiguous across the funded projects with a tension between the legal and social concept of a child. Many funded projects on child trafficking targeted adolescents but were ambivalent as to how this group could be linguistically defined.

The Anti-Trafficking Directive Article 16 charges Member States to take the necessary measures to ensure that, where appropriate, a guardian is appointed to unaccompanied child victims of trafficking. FRA (2015) has identified that currently the appointment of Children's Guardians is variable across the EU with the diversity of practice at every level being striking. Two funded projects further examined the challenges of fully implementing guardianship systems (although only one of these funded projects was completed at the time of analysis). The conclusion was that systemic reform of guardianship systems is needed to meet the challenges posed by child trafficking, arguing that a pre-condition of any protective work with a child migrant/possible victim of child trafficking is a cultural context in which such children are welcomed as children. Moreover, the project argued, the role of Guardian is to "stand on the side of the child", not just to follow procedure and act as a "bridge" between the child and other institutions.

#### **Contribution of Funded Projects:**

More than a third of the EC funded projects in the Trafficking Projects Data Set were identified as relevant to an analysis of victims, including children as victims (or

potential victims) of trafficking. Two-thirds of these funded projects had start dates which were before the EU Anti-Trafficking Strategy was published.

The EC funded projects made a contribution to the development of current National Referral Mechanisms (NRM) and whether they are yet able to deliver the intended outcomes for victims, work effectively across all forms of trafficking, identify children effectively and ensure they are referred into the additional protections to which they are entitled. In the funded projects there was some exploration of the kinds of mechanisms which might be appropriate for identifying children, with several funded projects highlighting the need for adaptions to current NRM models to achieve the child specificity required. Although, from the funded projects, not much comparative evidence is available about how the different models work or whether they, in practice, ensure victims are accorded rights.

National Referral Mechanisms (NRMs) are a formal victim identification process in some Member States. In order to access their rights as victims of trafficking, victims must be formally identified. The most recent GRETA (2015) report found weak identification processes in most Member States, with rights not being upheld consistently. In particular, the area all Member States needed to improve was with respect to the specificity of children. The funded projects focus particularly on identification of victims of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation; this may in part be an artefact of the period in which the funded projects were contracted and delivered. There have been examples of funded projects on labour exploitation from the start of the period covered by the Data Set (2004), and more recently (since 2010) a focus on the identification of victims of labour exploitation and child victims of trafficking.

The funded projects question the focus on training border guards as an 'early' identification strategy. The focus on 'early' identification of victims has led to the identification of training for border staff as a priority. However, the majority of funded projects on the identification of victims found that this is one of the least likely places for effective identification, since the exploitation element of trafficking will rarely have taken place at this stage in the process. Moreover, several funded projects identified the systemic problem that the focus of border staff and law enforcement is on criminality, not the identification of victims.

A good practice, commended by several funded projects, is instead to build identification into the mainstream operations of labour inspectors, trade unions, health and safety and fire inspections, and in health settings. In particular the funded projects identified cooperation with labour protection, and two funded projects also involved developing awareness within trade unions. These sites are predominately important for the identification of victims of labour exploitation, other sites for the identification of victims of other forms of exploitation, especially

sexual exploitation (over two-thirds of victims in 2010 to 2012 (Eurostat, 2015)) are also needed, including civil society and non-governmental organisations working with women and children and with victims of sexual exploitation.

Two funded projects developed promising practice on identifying victims in detention centres. Given that trafficked persons, including children, have been identified in detention centres and prisons contravening the non-criminalisation principle, pro-active screening, including inspectors and expert non-governmental organisations, is recommended (European Migration Network, 2014).

Arguably, the funded projects which were able to demonstrate some of the most consistent identification involved specialist (and often gender specific) non-governmental organisations which work with victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation using an outcomes-focused approach. For example, beginning with outreach and harm reduction services that gain trust and confidence and create a space that encourages victims to disclose. Thus strengthening the role of civil society and non-governmental organisations throughout the identification process is extremely important.

A number of funded projects raised a question on the over reliance on indicators for identification. For example, one funded project argued that comprehensive indicators are not possible since means and forms of exploitation are constantly changing. Thus indicators should act as a prompt to professional curiosity and an alert to place most emphasis on those sectors where trafficking is known to be taking place, such as the sex industry, tourism and agriculture for example. This was in contrast to several other funded projects (and the practice in some Member States) where indicators appear to function as a checklist. There is a concern that narrow definitions based on static indicators can result in professionals looking for 'perfect victims' of trafficking and that this may account for some of the under-identification.

Around one quarter of the funded projects in the Trafficking Projects Data Set, contracted by DG DEVCO, DG HOME and DG JUST, were on 'child trafficking'.

The funded projects focussing on the role of child protection systems indicate limited success of these systems to protect child victims of trafficking. One major concern identified was that national child protection policies are not always fully implemented as a result of lack of coordination and/or decentralised Nation States. This creates further challenges when cross-border and trans-national protection is required. Thus greater coordination at the national, as well as trans-national levels are still needed.

A number of funded projects explored aspects of safe returns and reintegration for child victims, with three considering intra-EU mechanisms. Integral to the process is the correct identification of child victims and the challenges of keeping them safe in

non-secure facilities once they have been identified. One funded project analysed practice in three source and three transit/destination countries. This found that only Italy had a developed reintegration program. Fewer than 50 children achieved voluntary repatriation - at the child's request and when it was agreed to be in their best interests. In addition, a six-country analysis highlighted the problem of child victims being criminalised and found only Sweden operated a system of compensating child victims of trafficking.

One the funded project conducted a detailed analysis of domestic and EU law, policy and practice and case-based studies of 97 children and 30 stakeholders. This highlighted multiple barriers to the safe return of children from France and Greece to Romania and Bulgaria. Challenges included: limited understandings and scepticism of what practically will happen to the child when they are returned to country of origin; multiple ways in which children are returned; complex national, EU level and cross border procedures and delays of years before children are reunited with their families. Of specific concern was the lack of assessment undertaken about the possibility of familial involvement in the trafficking of a child which presents a genuine risk for re-victimisation. For example, one funded project in India noted that some girls refused to provide a family address, but did not reflect on whether this might be due to abuse in the family or because family members were implicated in the trafficking. Funded projects also described a multiplicity of instruments governing return procedures, rather than being able to identify legal clarity on durable solutions. For example, one funded project recommends EU streamlining of legal instruments for durable solutions/safe return to enable a more harmonised response. A recent survey of nine EU countries found that the meaning was unclear and that only Belgium had incorporated durable solutions into domestic law (Arnold, 2015).

The DG DEVCO funded projects on child trafficking considered the role of community and civil platforms in the reintegration of child victims. An emerging theme from many of these is that identification and support processes are much clearer for third party national children. One funded project considered on what basis decisions about safe returns are made, with particular reference to the need for child-specific information on country of origin.

Whilst EU legislation provides for certain protections for victims of trafficking and includes additional protections for children as well as the mechanism through which victims of trafficking should be identified and referred into those protections, the EU Anti-Trafficking Strategy further recognises the need for victims themselves to be informed of the rights they hold as victims of trafficking. Sixteen funded projects in the Trafficking Projects Data Set contribute to the provision of rights information to victims, including some funded projects with a focus on the right to medical treatment, and one which specifically focused on medical treatment after trafficking

for the purposes of organ removal. Eight funded projects included a focus on the production of guidance, manuals and training on legal advice and access to justice for trafficking victims.

The corpus thematic analysis demonstrated that whilst many funded projects discussed their aim to be 'victim-centred' in applications and grant agreements, fewer demonstrated the delivery of a victim-centred approach in final reports and monitoring. Overall, few funded projects directly involved victims themselves in the construction or governance of the funded project and few developed resources based on victim input.

One of the most valuable and innovative funded projects produced a brochure for children identified as vulnerable to being trafficked entitled 'It's cool to know more', along with training for staff and resident girls in institutional care. The project identified the difficulty of providing vital contact information to children at risk and the inherent danger for children in holding such support information so they innovatively addressed this by producing belts and cosmetic bags which included hidden helpline numbers.

Overall, funded projects on the provision of information for children appear to produce more accessible materials and demonstrated greater involvement and participation of children. Despite the inherent practical and ethical difficulties of involving child victims of trafficking (IOM, 2005), a number of the funded projects successful managed this in ways which were creative, respectful and in line with the UNCRC 1989. In doing so, these funded projects highlighted that children are often use to making difficult choices and some to acting autonomously.

Fewer funded projects focused on institutional responses to the prevention of child trafficking, those which did centred on developing child protection systems to incorporate trafficking and guardianship. For example one funded project supported sharing practice between the UK and Lithuania and Bulgaria on the role of local Safeguarding Children Boards, developing local protocols, Local Authority children's social care, as well as Education and Health services. Another funded project identified problems with current guardianship systems; and one funded project developed a method and guidance for using Child Notices across borders.

### **Next Steps on Victims**

The Anti-Trafficking Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings Article 11 provides for:

*Assistance and support based on an individual needs assessment and should include at least appropriate and safe accommodation, material assistance, medical treatment, psychological assistance, counselling and information, translation and interpretation services.*

The funded projects in the Trafficking Projects Data Set have not yet sufficiently engaged with this individual needs assessment requirement or the longer term re-integration of victims. Thus assistance and support are still a relevant focus for the development of the post-2016 EU anti-trafficking policy framework.

Given the length of time that Court proceedings, medical treatment and asylum claims take and the lack of provision beyond the minimum reflection period in many Member States, extending the current minimum 30 days rest and reflection period for trafficking victims and provide a right to residence for child victims to help prevent re-trafficking should be investigated within the further development of national and transnational referral pathways.

There is a concern with return and reintegration procedures and processes, especially in relation to children. Arguably, fast-track methods of return are not in a child's best interest. An emerging theme from many of the funded projects on child trafficking which also contributed to the development of return and reintegration processes is that identification and support processes are much clearer for children that are non-EU nationals. In addition, the implications of family involvement in child trafficking are not yet fully understood; including the implications of returning children to their communities of origin. Thus developing and strengthening effective protection systems for children as potential and actual victims of trafficking, including through the return and reintegration process needs further work in the post 2016 anti-trafficking policy framework.

The EU Anti-Trafficking Strategy encourages the recognition of child trafficking as part of the responsibilities of national child protection systems. Evidence from the funded projects and other actions suggests this should be strengthened in the development of the post-2016 anti-trafficking policy framework to explicitly include child trafficking in definitions of child maltreatment with stronger links into national child guardianship processes. Achieving consensus of what constitutes child protection is fraught with challenges within a familial context (May-Chahal et al., 2006) and becomes more complicated when abuse by someone outside of the family home is considered. Definitions of child maltreatment refer obliquely to 'exploitation'. At present, child trafficking is not identified within international definitions of child maltreatment, although recent work acknowledges the vulnerability of separated children (European Commission, 2015).

The funded projects suggest that a shift from 'early' identification to 'pro-active' identification would be more effective. In particular, targeting sectors (the sex industry, agriculture, fisheries, tourism) and locations (such as detention centres) where trafficked victims are often found along with identifying and resourcing new partners to develop creative routes for identification, including migrant worker or

refugee organisations and diasporic community groups, along with civil society and non-governmental organisations.

Thus the EC funded projects make a significant contribution to the objectives of the EU Anti-Trafficking Strategy on victims. The funded projects which sought to establish NRMs and TRMs between particular countries suggest some ways forward in developing national and transnational referral pathways, especially highlighting the need for more coherence and coordination at national as well as international levels. Funded projects on the best ways of identifying victims cross over significantly with the further development of referral pathways such as NRMs and TRMs, and so also provide some valuable insights. One is a shift from 'early intervention' based on borders to concentrating identification efforts at sites where the process of exploitation is more likely to have occurred. The funded projects also identify the potential of currently under-utilised sites for identification, intervention and prevention such as diaspora communities and migrant organisations.

Children are interwoven throughout this, with the issue of child specificity in formal and informal identification processes highlighted by the funded projects, along with specific issues on child protection systems, return and reintegration and Guardianship systems, which are the specific focus of a number of funded projects. These consistently find that the mechanisms for identifying trafficking victims are not yet sufficiently child specific, and that child protection systems do not yet sufficiently address child trafficking. These findings make clearly visible the necessity of a continuing focus on child specificity in future for the development of the post-2016 EU anti-trafficking policy framework and of the inclusion of child trafficking in other EC actions which address issues concerning children generally.

The funded projects highlight the complexity of reaching victims with accessible information about their rights and provision of assistance, demonstrating that this may be better achieved directly or through inspectors, civil society and non-governmental organisations and health organisations that identified victims come into contact with, rather than relying on border control and criminal justice agencies. The funded projects suggest that those materials co-produced with victims themselves are among the most accessible.

The future anti-trafficking policy framework should also address and aim to prevent the re-victimisation of trafficking victims in the criminal justice and asylum systems. An Independent Complaints Mechanism and right of appeal with regard to national referral decisions and state detention of asylum seekers (many of whom may have been trafficked) is required. Some funded projects identified trafficked victims in detention centres, often having been criminalized and awaiting deportation. While some funded projects demonstrate good practice in identifying these victims and halting deportation proceedings, there has not yet been any funded projects on

whether or how criminal convictions of trafficking victims, given while the person was under control of the traffickers, have been successfully set aside after the person has been identified as a victim of trafficking.

The analysis of the funded projects has shown the need for additional information in a number of areas which could be usefully addressed in future knowledge building.

According to the EC Progress Report on the fight against trafficking in human beings, over half of the EU Member States<sup>22</sup> have formalised National Referral Mechanisms (NRMs) which should coordinate the actors involved in identification, assistance, protection and reintegration. Those EU Member States report broad participation in these systems, including by national ministries (health, justice, social affairs, employment, etc.), law enforcement authorities, border guards and consular services, civil society organisations, service providers and labour inspectorates. Other EU Member States<sup>23</sup> have not formalised such mechanisms, but have working/informal arrangements in place or are working on the development of referral pathways. A number of EU Member States<sup>24</sup> have not yet developed a national referral mechanism.

Careful consideration of how to manage child victims of trafficking who may be exploited in multiple ways is needed. Actions to address primary prevention in source countries, both EU Member States and third countries need to be strengthened in line with the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005) Article 5 '*take specific measures to reduce children's vulnerability to trafficking, notably by creating a protective environment for them.*' Further knowledge on what works to prevent children being vulnerable to trafficking, including the role of public institutions and the complex interaction of multiple social issues is needed.

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<sup>22</sup> Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, UK.

<sup>23</sup> Austria, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Sweden.

<sup>24</sup> Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands.

Palmer, E., and F, Marian. (2016) I have my life back; recovering from child sexual exploitation. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(4), pp.1094–1110. *British Journal of Social Work*. First published online April 20, 2016 doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcw020

### **Abstract**

Despite intense focus on child sexual exploitation (CSE) in the UK, little is known about how and why some young people manage to recover from sustained exploitation by multiple perpetrators. Using thematic analysis, three published memoirs by young people (female) about their sexual exploitation by groups of men in the UK are analysed for insight into what contributes to positive short and long-term outcomes. Despite the populist nature of the publications, the memoirs offer an important insight into young people's understandings of their exploitation. The rich detail inherent to memoir exposes the complexities and dilemmas faced by the young people and the professionals involved. Being listened and believed by family and professionals is the most significant aspect to positive adaptation post exploitation in these accounts. However, the dynamics of grooming and the nature of contemporary social work intervention and investigation render disclosure difficult. As these accounts illustrate, CSE is characterised by uncertainty and complexity and this is the domain in which social work needs to intervene more successfully to support young people.

### **Introduction**

Since 2010, a number of memoirs based on young people's accounts of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) have been published. We consider what three of these books add to social work understandings of how young women manage and mediate trauma and recovery in the context of CSE. Little is known about the long-term impact of CSE despite its prevalence. CSE has become a significant child abuse concern over the past two decades in the United Kingdom (UK), and beyond (Office Public Management, 2015) with international calls to end sexual exploitation (UNICEF, 2008). In England high profile criminal cases, Serious Case Reviews (SCR), (i.e. Derby, 2010; Rochdale, 2013; Oxford, 2015) and independent inquiries (Jay, 2014; Coffey, 2014) has prompted national examination of the issue (OCC, 2012; Berelowitz et al., 2013; HoC, 2013). In response the Government has issued further policy guidance (DoE, 2011; DoE, 2012; DfE, 2014) and increased CSE related inspections through Ofsted (2014).

The first account The End of my World was published in 2010 however the publicity surrounding the Rochdale case (2012) led the author Emma Jackson to update it under the new title of Exploited in 2012. In Exploited, Emma recounts her childhood leading to the key event, when, aged 13, Emma is raped by an 'Asian' man [her terminology] named Tariq, with other men taking photos in a park. After months of sexual exploitation and experiencing death threats and a gun being held to her head,

Emma tells her parents who inform the Police. In *Girl A* (2013), we read of a similar account of repeated rape and assaults by Asian men, disclosures and missed opportunities. The protagonist is Hannah and the events take place in Rochdale. The third account, *Stolen*, recounts the experiences of Katie, the youngest victim at 13. By her own description she presents as more vulnerable, experiencing bullying, parental separation, early onset of puberty and a burgeoning sense of not fitting in. All three manage to exit CSE with informal and professional (but limited social work) support. Both Hannah's and Katie's exploitation results in successful criminal convictions.

Populist memoirs of trauma and recovery are a best-selling genre in which an adult's account of their abusive childhood is recounted (Ardell, 2007; Bates, 2012). Our selected texts offer the young person's account of their experiences of sexual exploitation through a life story perspective; experiences which they locate within the context of familial and peer networks and the environment in which they live and in which they are exploited. What emerges from these accounts is that recovery is mediated by the experiences during and post exploitation but that it can lead to positive adaptation (Kelly, 1988). It is rare to have near contemporaneous accounts from victims of sexual abuse (Horvath et al., 2014). The first memoir was published in 2010 and the relative immediacy to real time events is part of its appeal. The timing and marketing of these accounts must be situated within the context of media coverage of young women being abused by groups of men. The publication of these books can be seen as an attempt by publishing houses to capitalise on this national interest as much as providing these young people with the opportunity to give voice to their own stories, to name and make sense of their experiences.

### **Background literature**

CSE is a major public concern in the UK, with estimates from the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England (2012) indicating that at least 16 500 young people may be victims. Definitional uncertainty characterizes CSE despite the lengthy definition developed by the National Working Group and endorsed by the Government in their supplementary guidance (DCSF 2009). The uncertainty arises from the many permutations and forms of CSE; from the lone perpetrator recruiting on the internet, to sexual assault by young men at parties (Melrose, 2013) to groups of men who act collectively to groom young girls. The current definition is not all encompassing because acts of CSE are both part of the safeguarding arena but also that of gender based violence (Brayley & Cockbain 2014). The form of CSE encountered in these texts, a loose network of men raping and sexually assaulting young people, shares many similarities with contemporary concerns and strategies to eliminate violence against girls and women (Home Office, 2015).

Prevailing attitudes and understandings of sexual violence are the lens through which public discussion and responses are mediated and young women make sense of their experiences (Kelly, 1988; Warner, 2009). The media reporting of CSE has contributed to a stereotype, in which young white females, often thought to be in care, are exploited by 'Asian' men (Cockbain, 2013). Available national data suggests a more nuanced reality with victims and perpetrators from all ethnic groups (CEOP, 2011; OCC, 2012). Gohir (2013) found that the exploitation of BME girls, in this instance, young Muslim women, occurs but is more hidden. The exploitation of young men is also less well understood or recognised (OCC 2012). Being in care, or having previously been in care, does appear to be a factor (OCC, 2012) although young people in parental care are also vulnerable. Young females in residential care seem to be particularly at risk (Coy 2009) with a study in Northern Ireland indicating that over forty percent were at risk of sexually exploitation (Beckett, 2011).

Few research studies in the UK explore how young people cope with the consequences and impact of CSE (Taylor-Brown, 2002; Pearce, 2002, Pearce, 2009; Sanders et al., 2009; Dodsworth, 2012; Dodsworth, 2014). The DCSF (2009) supplementary guidance on CSE only dedicates two paragraphs out of 97 pages to long-term support needs. They stress the need for the young person to develop a "meaningful relationship with appropriate adults" (DCSF, 2009, S.6.41). This is reinforced in the 2011 and 2012 Government Action Plan on CSE. Whilst the impact of exploitation will be unique to each young person, it is likely that they will experience a range of physical, psychological and health needs both during and after the exploitation (DfE, 2011; Jay, 2014). Some young people may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or ongoing mental health difficulties (Hossain et al., 2010; DoH, 2014). Given that non-school attendance is a primary indicator for CSE (Scott & Harper, 2002; DCSF, 2009) young people may lack educational qualifications. Without re-engagement with education, future employment options will be limited but research indicates that it is challenging to reintegrate young people into formal education (Scott & Skidmore, 2006). As Jay (2014, p. 43) emphasises the potential impact is "devastating" across all domains and can lead to significant socio-emotional problems in adulthood.

### **Methodology**

Following the six-stage process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), three published memoirs were examined using thematic analysis. The principal focus is what the texts can contribute to understandings of how young women recover after being subject to CSE. Close and repeat reading of each book was followed by initial coding; each researcher coded independently although some *a priori* categories had been agreed. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), researcher judgement is used to decide what a theme is; our thematic coding is informed by our previous practice as child protection social workers and our continued registration. Adopting a flexible

approach, we added and refined themes as the coding continued to a point where three main themes had been identified in relation to the idea of recovery. The process of grooming, disclosure and investigation are linked by the need to be heard and believed; the personal, professional and public acceptance of the nature of the exploitative experiences has to occur to allow space for 'recovery' to commence.

Non-fiction in the form of memoir offers a different kind of knowledge for social workers, as it can "illustrate the density of the sequences of cause and effect in individual lives" (Thomson et al., 2002, p. 336). The benefits of memoir to social work study have recently been established with social work book groups, where students learn about the *quality* of lived experiences (Scourfield and Taylor, 2014). Our choice of thematic analysis as the method for analysing these books was driven by an interest with how young people give meaning to their experiences. However these meanings are themselves shaped by broader social discourses and each author presents their account within certain socio-cultural parameters. Bruner (2004) argues that the nature of autobiography is to shape what is remembered, that language has the power to 'structure' our perceived experiences. A particular feature of the populist memoir is that it reverses Bruner's (2004) dictum that autobiography makes the ordinary strange; here we examine accounts whose strangeness is belied by the ordinary way in which they are told.

### **Limitations**

Populist memoirs, as a source of data, are potentially problematic. First, they have a predetermined narrative template. Each book follows a similar pattern beginning with the author's happy childhood, then their introduction to and abuse by a network of men whilst they are still under the age of 16, their attempts to break free from their exploitation and the investigation and support process. Second, there are important questions about authenticity; how much of what is written is an accurate account of the events? This operates at two levels; can accounts based on memory be accurate (Thomson et al., 2002; Bruner, 2004) and are they actually fictitious? (Bates, 2012). Contextual evidence supports the authenticity of the texts; Emma gave evidence to a Home Office Select Committee (HOC 2013) and Hannah's account can be read in tandem with the SCR (Griffiths, 2013). Finally, two of the young people were assisted by a ghost-writer, which may dilute authenticity as there may be aspects of the text that represent different agendas other than the stated aim to raise awareness. For instance, in one book the ghost-writer is also a tabloid newspaper journalist. Drawing on the work of Bruner (2004) we acknowledge that memoirs are always modulated by socio-cultural context and cultural memory; that is part of their power.

### **Findings**

The memoirs support and confirm much of what is already known about CSE, in particular the push and pull factors and vulnerability factors in relation to the child,

their family and the environment. However they also contribute to our understanding of how young women cope and move on from CSE. These texts illustrate that recovery is a 'non-linear process' (Banyard and Williams, 2007). In fact, what we learn is that recovery is a misnomer; what occurs is a gradual adaptation to their altered circumstances, and is subject to fluctuation. Coping with the after effects of the abuse varies depending on time, context and social situation. Documented in these accounts, are some of the short and long term consequences of their exploitation; confusion, post-traumatic stress disorder, social isolation and suicidal thoughts. However, their desire for age appropriate experiences, despite the above, is striking. They return, with some difficulty, to school or college, apply for University and think about their futures. They meet young men of their age and have consensual sexual relationships, which for Emma leads to the prospect of her own family. A key feature of recovery as it represented by these young women is its variability and fluctuating nature. There can be no simple return to 'normal', pre-exploitation life; a new normal must be worked out but one which is safe (Berelowitz et al., 2013).

### **Resilience**

Drawing on work about CSA, it is suggested that a combination of resilience (individual traits) and protective and compensatory factors (family and environment) provide the foundation for recovery (Marriott et al., 2011). Resilience theory (Rutter, 1987) is a model already applied in the field of CSE to account for young people's varying strategies and exit routes from CSE (Pearce, 2009; Dodsworth, 2012; Dodsworth, 2014). Less well acknowledged is how small acts of defiance during the exploitation provide an important reference point later on; they are indicators of what Hauser and Allen (2006) call 'resilient development'. The authors recall the small steps they took towards reclaiming their self-esteem (e.g. reapplying their makeup after an assault) Later, the gestures are bigger as they begin to say no to the perpetrators; they challenge and refuse them despite knowing that such defiance could lead to further physical assaults; Emma's refusal to get into a car is later punished by anal rape. They mimic their perpetrators behaviour with peers, become challenging and defiant at home and at school. Emma develops a hard aggressive demeanour, noting, "I got some power" (Jackson, 2012, p. 218) and experiences a rush in refusing her abuser on one occasion. Such behaviours, whilst deviant, allow the young women to experience a form of power in situations where they lack control (Bottrell, 2009) and suggest the possibility of positive outcome.

### **Re-framing abuse**

Encapsulated by the phrase "getting my life back", each author documents how they make changes to their lives in a slow and unsteady way. The notion of turning points (Rutter 1987) or 'critical moments' proves significant as they write of gaining new perspectives on their experiences. Each narrator reframes their experiences, which

ultimately leads to relocating responsibility back with the perpetrators with Hannah noting, “he must have known I didn’t like it” (Girl A and Bunyan, 2013, p. 91).

Throughout each book, we are taken on a journey that explores these young women’s developing understanding of themselves as victims of rape and abuse, which is pivotal to their ‘recovery’. Hannah rejects the label ‘prostitute’ early on noting that “ Escort girls want to do it – and have the choice to do it...But for me it was rape because I did not want to do it ”(Girl A and Bunyan , 2013, p. 139).

Hannah’s self-belief is evident; as she repeatedly states that she never wanted sex with any of these men and never felt any attraction to them.

### **Grooming**

These accounts remind professionals about the dynamics and depth of the grooming process whilst illustrating how difficult it can be to intervene. Social isolation and the gradual erosion of relationships with parents is central. Information elicited about home life and relationships is manipulated to create or magnify rifts between parent and child, fuelling conflict and challenge. This strategy interacts with parental assumptions that attribute this conflict to adolescence. For Hannah family conflict eventually means she leaves the family home for what is a private fostering relationship. Isolation from family and peers is further compounded by the abuse itself. The CSE ensures they spend little time at home, when they do they are physically and emotionally exhausted. Shame about what is happening to them and fear of being found out adds to this emotional distance. However the bonds are strong enough for each girl to respond to threats about family members. Complying with the perpetrators demands become a way of them protecting their families: Katie comments after being multiply raped that “ I reminded myself I was doing this to protect mum ” (Taylor and Clark, 2013, p. 191).

All the perpetrators use similar tactics of flattery, friendship, gifts and significantly alcohol and drugs. There is more to these ‘gifts’ than instilling indebtedness; alcohol is introduced early on, to the young people, to help them to relax and to feel ‘grown up’. During the early stages, all three think that it is brilliant (‘wicked’) to be given free alcohol and/or cannabis as it sets them apart from their peers. Moreover, the pleasurable sensory aspects are enjoyed; the warmth, laughter and the relaxation that it induces: “I don’t think I’d ever felt so alive, so happy as if my heart would burst” (Jackson, 2012, p. 92). It is rarely acknowledged how powerfully these offerings affect young people’s decision making; Emma describes how the ‘boredom’ of life without them results in her making contact with a ‘friend’ who takes her to a house to ‘chill’ where she is once again multiply raped. So the impact of alcohol and drugs is multiple; it dulls their memories whilst also confusing their understanding about choices and consent. Recognising the contradictions is important as young people may assume a causal relationship between their choices and what happens to them; this needs to be debunked.

Alcohol misuse contributes to a profound uncertainty about what constitutes a healthy relationship and often sex is equated with affection. This uncertainty is reinforced by the response of their rapists, who talk and cuddle them as if nothing has happened after each assault. Repeated victimization by a large group of men normalizes the abuse although the young people ultimately know it is not 'normal'. In addition, they make the young women question their version of events, is calling it rape a lack of understanding on their part? "It was as though he didn't know he'd done anything wrong. I couldn't get my head straight ...was it rape or wasn't it?" (Girl A and Bunyan, 2013, p. 63). Calling the rape 'sex' and his asking to see her again constantly confuses Hannah; "I even found myself wondering if this was what actually people meant by sex" (Jackson, 2012, p. 187). Such responses, unfortunately, reinforce the elements of doubt that all three express; doubt over consent (Coy et al., 2013) and confusion over what is 'normal' in a relationship. An awareness of this confusion is important for social workers as it helps to explain why young people might be so hesitant about sharing their story and why they might then be questioned about their choices.

### **Disclosure(s)**

Tucker (2010) found that young people often feel disbelieved when they report abuse and neglect to professionals and identified a number of typical responses; being judged, practitioner uncertainty, and minimisation. In Girl A, the relationship between Hannah, Children's Services and the Police is permanently soured when they do not believe her. Both services question the credibility of her story, with the Police Officer asking her if she really did it for the money and the social worker recording that it was a 'lifestyle choice'. This latter statement, documented in the SCR (Griffiths, 2013), has caused public and parliamentary outrage (HOC, 2013). This is an example of the behaviours of the sexually exploited young person being seen as problematic, rather than the abuse itself (Warner, 2009). These texts also suggest that uncertainty over agency and socio-cultural norms about sex can create a mind-set where a professional may feel that the young person has chosen to behave this way (Griffiths, 2013; Jay, 2014). Part of the issue is a consequence of not listening to young people's stories fully; they may have chosen to meet and drink with these men, but they did not choose to be abused by them.

**The evidence from these memoirs reinforces a key finding of recent inquiries** into CSE (OCC, 2012; Berelowitz et al., 2013; Jay, 2014) that the way services respond to young women influences their willingness to disclose. Many young people are 'institutionally ignored' in their bid to seek support in leaving exploitative situations. They are disbelieved, or not considered to meet the thresholds for statutory intervention (Berelowitz et al., 2013). Moreover, poor initial professional intervention makes it much harder for the young women to trust formal support again. Being believed is central to these accounts. Indeed each author seeks acknowledgment of

their experiences; they want and need to be believed by family, professionals, police, courts and ultimately the public (jurors). Recovery here is helped and hindered by the responses of others.

Attempts to disclose are physical and behavioural as much as verbal. As the exploitation increases in frequency, the authors describe physical deterioration; being tired during the day, hungry, unwashed. They begin to be argumentative at home, challenging at school, getting into fights with peers and running away. Hannah goes as far as smashing the counter of a takeaway in a bid to be noticed and arrested to avoid further exploitation. The young people assume that their physical and behavioural changes will be noticed and questions asked and when they are not it further compounds their isolation. Indeed it is indicative of a tendency for family members and professionals to problematize their behaviour, and attribute it to 'adolescence' without questioning what is underneath; their behaviour is a consequence of the abuse not a cause of it. Any mismatch between physical and behavioural indicators and what the young person need to be explored further, especially when the behaviours and physical signs so closely resemble the indicators of CSE (DoE, 2009). At no point should any professional think that a young person is choosing to be exploited (Griffiths, 2013; Jay, 2014).

Multiple disclosures are a feature of two of the accounts and illustrate that disclosure is a process and not a one off event (Kelly, 2005; Pearce, 2011). Hannah reflects on what else she would need to do or say to be taken seriously and rescued; she writes of feeling 'betrayed' by social services when they do not respond with careful thought or concern. Hannah cannot understand why being repeatedly missing from home is not investigated but instead dealt with as if it was a routine matter. Statutory guidance from the DfE (2014) now stipulates return from home interviews and safe and well checks but can it does not address the increasing powerlessness that social worker can feel when a young person repeatedly puts themselves at risk. Yet unhelpful responses lead the young people to loose all trust in social workers indefinitely, creating challenges in any post abuse investigation and support work. These testimonies remind social workers and the Police to respond to young people as individuals and not as routine matters.

Two factors motivate full disclosure in these books. First, is the development of trust with individuals, who makes themselves available repeatedly and do not judge the young person for returning to their exploiters. This is a model of assertive outreach that is used by many projects that support young people at risk of CSE (Pearce, 2009). Hannah tells a sexual health worker after months of engagement and encouragement and Katie tells a school counsellor. Second, each girl reaches a 'critical moment' (Thomson et al., 2002) in which they are conscious of making a decision, seeking help and reclaiming control despite the perpetual threats of violence and intimidation. These critical points are extreme in Katie and Hannah's

cases they are linked to their sixteenth birthday and the perpetrator's belief that they will be free of parental control. They are aware that unless they can escape they will be subject to a lifetime of abuse. Emma's 'last straw' comes when she is forced to take a pregnancy test in a public toilet, which makes her feel 'like an animal' (Jackson, 2012, p.228). Following the pregnancy test she is threatened with gang rape as her 'birthday present'. All three reached a point where they feel they have nothing more to lose.

The rich detail of these texts highlights why disclosure may be so hard, both for the victim and for the professional. There is an ambivalence in their accounts that is linked to notions of shame, guilt and uncertainty. They have absorbed and internalised social norms about behaviours which prevent them from being open about their abuse (Coffey 2014). The shame they feel is twofold. They express beliefs that when it comes to rape, women are rarely believed and often regarded as culpable, which is compounded by multiple abusers (Coy et al., 2013). For instance, Katie wants to tell her mother but does not do so because of her fear that "she would be disgusted with me. She would call me a dirty, little slag and she'd be right" (Taylor & Clark, 2013, p210). Emma is also aware that at school she is being pointed at and laughed at (Jackson, 2012. p. 207). Hannah's impulse is to run to her parents but the shame stops her (Girl A. & Bunyan, 2013.). Key family members unintentionally reinforce these feelings. Hannah makes several references to her father telling her that her drinking would put her in positions where she would end up being raped. All three are attuned to strong cultural messages and assumptions that hold women and girls accountable for acts of sexual violence (Coy et al., 2013).

All three mention another stigma; a concern that they will be viewed doubly negatively as victims of abuse because the perpetrators were 'Asian' men. Media coverage of specific cases of CSE involving white girls and Asian men has led to a pervasive stereotype (Cockbain 2013; Coffey 2014). This coverage has argued that 'political correctness' has hampered investigation and intervention. The collective professional refusal to acknowledge what was happening is attributed by Hannah to a fear of being labelled racist. However other stereotypes are evident in all three books. Passing comments about the "Asian community" being one big family where everyone knows each other illustrates a lack of understanding about the diversity of the different communities within the British Asian population. References to forced marriages, the practice of marrying young girls 'back home' [e.g. Pakistan] and a view that white British young people are promiscuous recur repeatedly. The fear of people's reactions to them having 'sex' with Asian men further delays disclosure. Emma and Hannah both mention acquiring a negative reputation amongst peers for having 'sex' with Asian men and Katie terminates a pregnancy in fear that the child might be mixed race and that she would be found out'

## **Investigation**

The process of disclosure and investigation takes months (for Emma) to years (for Katie and Hannah) and occurs in a piecemeal fashion. The toll of the investigative process is immense. They repeatedly experience a range of emotions such as doubt and uncertainty as the minutiae of their abuse is examined by the Police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). For Hannah this self-doubt is reinforced after the CPS decide not to prosecute; she wonders why she bothered to tell anyone “so that the people in suits and the people with social –work degrees could throw it back in my face” (Girl A & Bunyan, 2013, p241). All three locate the power with the Police and CPS during this process, commenting on their uncertainty about how the case is progressing and why certain decisions are made. In effect, the process contributes to re-traumatization as each narrator documents their loss of control over the situation. Hannah describes her depression, suicide attempts and descent into heavy drinking. Both Emma and Katie are diagnosed with PTSD during this time.

Despite being prepared for the adversarial nature of Court, two authors comment on the effect of being disbelieved during their trials. These cases occurred before the revisions to the CPS Guidelines (2013) on prosecuting child sexual abuse. Whilst protections are in place such as video recording and screens they are repeatedly questioned on their versions of the events. They experience multiple defence barristers asking similar questions, having their credibility tested and their behaviours reframed to imply they consented to sex. High profile cases such as in Rochdale have led the CPS to issue guidance (CPS, 2013), which stipulates attitudinal changes to victims; potential contradictions and inconsistencies are to be understood as symptomatic of abuse and exploitation , not of being an unreliable witness. It is the credibility of the account, not the victims that should be the focus and it advises that prosecutors must be mindful of the indicators of CSE in making decisions about victims.

In two texts the conclusion of the trial is a demarcation point . For Hannah, the guilty verdicts, mark the moment she ‘gets her life back’ as she thanks the jurors “twelve ordinary wonderful people for believing her” (Girl A and Bunyan 2013, p323). A successful outcome does not bring instantaneous relief for Katie as only three out of six of the men involved were found guilty. This causes further anger: “these men could have spared me further trauma by admitting their guilt, but they were arrogant and refused” (Taylor and Clark, 2013, p. 271). Memories of the abuse reoccur in the “darker moments” (Girl A and Bunyan, 2013, p. 340) as they begin to work out how their past will shape their futures. Emma, who is much older at the time of writing her book has reached a point where she is able to advise other young survivors of abuse “the experience doesn’t have to define them” (Jackson, 2012, p297). This sentiment illustrates the view of Kelly (1988) that coping with sexual violence may result in permanent and positive changes in attitudes and behaviour.

### **Insights for social work practice**

Responses to CSE are changing globally, nationally and locally in response to high profile cases and growing professional and public awareness of the issues involved (Office Public Management 2015). At a national level media reporting, Inquiry reports and SCRs have detailed the many ways in which professionals, including social workers, have failed to comprehend the experiences and needs of sexually exploited young people. This is shifting although change remains patchy (Ofsted, 2014; OCC, 2015), however according to Ofsted (2014) social workers are listening to young people and representing their views well. Such changes have taken place since the CSE detailed in these books and partly in response to the cases that they describe. Despite such changes, more needs to be done. These books provide insights into young people's experiences that remain relevant to social workers and can assist them with their reflexive practice.

### **Intervention and responses that hinder recovery**

Social workers need to understand the experiences and needs of sexually exploited young people (Berelowitz et al, 2013). All three accounts detail the complex decision-making and fluid dynamics of telling someone about CSE. Often their distress was conveyed in changes in their behaviour (aggressive, challenging, secretive); physical deterioration (they became, unkempt, dirty, smelly); emotional and psychological deterioration and socially isolation (withdrawn, self-harming, despairing). These signs were misread and/or misconstrued by families and professionals. After her arrest for breaking a glass counter, Hannah did tell the police about the abuse she was experiencing but she was not believed, was held to be culpable and her complaint was not acted on. For all three the 'telling' was not an end to the abuse and the failure to protect them or prosecute their abusers compounded their sense of hopelessness and despair. It reinforced the power of their abusers and the hold they had over them. Negative interventions or responses add to the trauma these young people experience, prolonging the abuse and influencing future telling (Cossar et al, 2013). These accounts remind social workers that young people are vigilant to language and actions that infer blame or lack of respect (Tucker 2010) and that often social workers are not adults they want to tell.

### **Intervention and responses that can help recovery**

CSE has significant short and long-term physical, emotional and psychological consequences for young people but positive post-exploitation life is a possibility with support (Pearce, 2009; Jay, 2014). Professional interventions and responses are critical in helping victims to talk about the abuse and develop coping strategies. Social workers need to continue to demonstrate care and professional curiosity, and avoid pathologising them. Young people require the support and understanding of key people, family and professionals, to help them begin to deal with the impact of CSE. A central aspect of the grooming process is to disrupt family relationships and

isolate the young person. There is a need for social workers to provide family interventions that repair and strengthen relationships between young people and the significant adults in their lives. Social workers are aware of the importance of direct work with young people and the importance of relationship building. The external environment and internal organisational pressures are not always conducive to promoting this and young people often complain about staff turnover (Ofsted, 2014). Building good integrated services is likely to help with capacity in this area as other agencies may be better placed to take on this work.

Professionals need to acknowledge the coping strategies employed by these young people, even if they can be perceived as 'negative', recognise they have strengths and that their global life experiences defines them, not just the abuse. They have hopes for their future and expectations of 'normality'; the desire to move beyond abuse. For Emma, Hannah and Katie that entails being partners, mothers and achieving educational and employment success. Despite the outward indicators of returning to normal, social workers should need to be alert to how young people internalise their experiences. Each describe how their experiences made them feel different from their peers (more serious/less carefree/mature/older somehow). The process of coping with their experiences is dynamic, not linear. Social workers need to remain alert to changing pressure points that may diminish the young person's ability to cope at specific times e. g. the investigation and trial. Likewise, a conviction may help but this is not the end of the recovery process for young people. They are likely to require long-term flexible support that can increase and decrease according to their needs. Accessing such services remains a key obstacle to increasing young people's capacity to cope with CSE. Post-abuse abuses counselling and support services remains scant and the current working practice of CAMHS is not flexible enough to meet their needs (Jay, 2014).

### **Conclusion**

This article has considered three published accounts of CSE using thematic analysis. The memoirs are rich in detail about all aspects of the grooming, disclosure and the investigative processes. A striking feature is the complexity and confusion that surrounds understandings of CSE by all involved; multiple factors coalesce to the point that uncertainty prevails. CSE needs to be acknowledged as complex child abuse phenomena (Stevens and Cox, 2008) and one which results in systemic challenges for social work intervention and practice. The need to be heard and believed is presented in these books as central to the young people being able to move on post-abuse; their return to safer lives occurs in tandem with professional and public recognition of their abuse. All three test out partial disclosure with their families and professionals but find themselves repeatedly not being believed, as the lines between 'normal' teenage behaviour, consent and risk repeatedly blur. These authors have important perspectives which can further the social work knowledge

base, particularly in relation to the short and long term value of listening and taking seriously young people's accounts of abuse. Empirical research in this area is needed to further understanding about the outcomes for young people who are subject to CSE especially as they transition into adulthood. Recovery, as it is represented by these young women, is not a linear process; it is intimately linked to what has happened and how those events are remembered and understood by them and by others they come into contact with.

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**Disclaimer:** This Rapid Evidence Assessment is prepared at IICSA's request. The views expressed are those of the authors alone.

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

This report considers the evidence about children's characteristics, vulnerabilities and resilience to online-facilitated child sexual abuse (CSA). Online-facilitated CSA refers to the process of establishing/building a relationship with a child either in person or using the Internet or other digital technologies to facilitate *either online or offline* sexual contact with that child.

The report has been commissioned by the Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA or 'the Inquiry'). The aim of 'the Inquiry' is to investigate whether public bodies and other non-state institutions have taken seriously their responsibility to protect children from sexual abuse in England and Wales, and to make meaningful recommendations for change, to help ensure that children now and in the future are better protected from sexual abuse.

The Inquiry has launched 13 investigations into a broad range of institutions. One of the investigations focuses on the institutional responses to child sexual abuse and exploitation facilitated by the Internet. This is referred to as the internet investigation. The internet investigation is exploring the nature and extent of the use of the internet and other digital communications technology to facilitate child sexual abuse. This report answers the primary question: what is known about the characteristics, vulnerabilities and on- and offline behaviour of victims of online-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation?

### Method of data gathering and analysis

A Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) methodology was used, which involves gathering data in the form of academic papers, reports and other relevant information within a relatively short timescale. The aim is to produce an overview of the current state of evidence on a selected topic. Whilst methodological rigour is important, the search methodology is not as extensive as a systematic review; this is one of the limitations

to an REA. It was agreed that a wide range of research would be included: quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods and reviews. However, some data sources such as books and research over 10 years old were excluded.

The stages of this REA included development of a search strategy, searches of 22 academic databases and publisher repositories and a call for literature. Subsequent, blind double coding of studies ensured quality assurance. Research that was of poor methodological quality was eliminated from the study. 6620 references were initially identified and, of these, 73 papers and reports were found to meet the research quality criteria and to be relevant to the overarching and sub research questions (see Findings below).

### **Overview of the research**

Research has been undertaken mainly in the UK, Europe, the United States of America and Canada. Predominantly the research found was quantitative in nature including two large-scale and longstanding projects i.e. EU Kids Online overseen by the London School of Economics and the work of the Crimes Against Children Centre at the University of New Hampshire, USA. Much of the quantitative and qualitative research involves children and young people as research participants; however, the capturing of their thoughts and experiences of sensitive topics remains a challenge.

An important finding in this REA is the under reporting of young children who are subject to online-facilitated child sexual abuse (hereafter CSA). This finding has emerged from comparing the studies of internet content and reported cases, although it is not referred to in the research studies themselves and no explanation is recorded. We might hypothesise that it is in part due to the fact that infants and very young children may not understand what is happening to them or be able to verbalise their experience (NICE, 2017) but this is clearly an area for further research.

Second, there is a significant variation in definitions and concepts utilised in the research that makes direct comparison problematic. Each of the key terms are open to variation both within a single country and internationally. One example, online-facilitated CSA, is also described in the literature as sexual solicitation, luring or grooming even though there are differences between each of these terms. Such differences highlight the challenges in considering research from other countries and any translation of findings to the English/Welsh context must be done with caution.

A third finding is that much research examined for the REA is unclear about whether the 'perpetrator' is an adult or a child. If it was the latter, then again there was a lack of specificity about whether the child was a peer (in same age range) or if an older child was targeting a much younger child.

Fourth, online-facilitated CSA overlaps with many complex behaviours and social phenomena that are not fully understood including:

- Children's access to adult pornography and what effect this may have on them;
- Relationships, if any between viewing adult pornography and peer to peer behaviour both within and out with intimate relationships in childhood;
- Whether 'sexting' in some circumstances is an extension of standard adolescent sexual development or a new phenomenon;
- The relationship between cyberbullying and/or online harassment in online-facilitated CSA.

Moreover, online CSA is embedded in a set of contested socio-cultural norms including:

- Gender differences and patriarchy;
- Diversity and equality;
- Early sexualisation;
- Legality of choosing to share self-generated sexual content/material involving children.

Finally, it is important to recognise that the majority of children continue to use the Internet without experiencing harm. Even when children are exposed to unwanted online sexual content or are approached by unknown individuals, most children have a set of successful coping strategies. In managing unwanted experiences, many children develop important digital skills that contribute to their overall resilience.

## **Findings**

The overarching question that this research seeks to answer is:

### **What is known about the characteristics, vulnerabilities and on- and offline behaviour of victims of online-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation?**

The REA enables conclusions to be drawn with varying levels of confidence and to identify gaps in research evidence.

#### ***What do we know and can be confident about?***

- Girls are more likely to be victims of *reported* online-facilitated CSA;
- Adverse childhood experiences such as physical and sexual abuse and exposure to parental conflict makes children more vulnerable to online victimisation;

- Above average internet use increases vulnerability when interacting with other characteristics, such as having a disability or low self-esteem;
- In approximately one quarter of reported cases, the perpetrator is a family member.

***What can we be less confident about?***

- Depending on the data source, 11-14 is the age group most vulnerable to online-facilitated CSA but this may be because adolescents are more often sampled in research studies;
- Risky online behaviours, such as sharing personal information and arranging to meet unknown contacts offline, may increase chance of online-facilitated CSA;
- Some platforms may enhance vulnerability but these change over time as children migrate to new platforms;
- Vulnerability is diverse and influenced by social factors such as gender and culture although the extent of this influence is unclear. For example, boys and girls appear to be vulnerable in different ways, as are disabled children and children living in varying cultural contexts;
- Boys and transgender children are also victims and may be over represented for specific types of online-facilitated CSA and child sexual exploitation (CSE);
- Between a third and a half of victims may already know the perpetrator.

***What don't we know?***

- How ethnicity, culture or global region of residence is associated with victimisation for online-facilitated CSA and CSE;
- Differences in victim characteristics between peer and adult perpetrated online-facilitated CSA and CSE;
- How and if victim characteristics have changed in a rapidly changing online environment;
- How to identify when a child/young person becomes 'situationally' vulnerable.

To facilitate more specific analysis, the main research question was followed by a number of subsidiary questions; these proved challenging to answer as there is not a tailored literature or research base that directly addresses these questions. This meant that data had to be extracted from studies that had a relevant but wider remit.

**Are there any distinguishing characteristics or factors that make children either more vulnerable, or more resilient, to online sexual victimisation, including victimisation by peers?**

The distinguishing characteristics that contribute to children being more vulnerable are not linear, but accumulative. These characteristics include:

- A history of child maltreatment, especially physical and sexual abuse and parental conflict;
- Disability, with a particular research focus on children with learning disabilities;
- Social isolation, from family, peers and community;
- Exploring sexuality online especially for Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans (LGBT) young people;
- Children from higher income households, but may be less important as online access becomes more widespread;
- Amount of time spent online;
- Participating in risky offline behaviours such as early use of alcohol and drugs, delinquency, non-school attendance and early sexual intercourse.

Distinguishing characteristics that contribute to children being more resilient are:

- Male sex;
- Being older (15 plus);
- Psychological characteristics such as having a 'sensation seeking personality' or high self-efficacy.

**Is there any research that has tried to establish vulnerability profiles or typologies, based on children's characteristics and behaviours?**

There are few attempts to develop typologies, which may reflect the diversity of different forms of online-facilitated CSA and CSE and the diversity of victims and survivors. We found no typologies of victims of online-facilitated CSE but include some attempts to categorise the relationship between internet use and risk and also self-generated sexual content in Section 5.

**Is there a relationship between 'sexting' and/or production of self-generated sexual material and sexual extortion or online sexual solicitation?**

- Sexting is poorly defined but tends to include the intentional sharing of images, video or textual messages with sexual content to another, who is usually but not always a peer;
- Prevalence rates for sexting across retrieved studies vary from 15% to 48% of the sampled child population;
- Girls feel under more pressure to send self-generated sexual content and appear to be more harmed by it if the image is shared again;

- There is no established causal relationship between sexting and online-facilitated CSA. Limited evidence found in this REA indicates that perpetrators will encourage children to send them self-generated sexual content/material and some may then use this to threaten the child into sharing further images/live webcam footage or to meet in person;
- The minority of children who send sexual images in exchange for money or material goods are often subject to child sexual exploitation both on and offline;
- Online-facilitated child sexual abuse is perpetuated through the extraction of self-generated images and videos from their original source.

**What are the characteristics and vulnerabilities of victims of transnational online child sexual abuse, where either the victim or the perpetrator is based in England and Wales?**

None of the retrieved studies addresses transnational online-facilitated CSA, where either the victim or perpetrator is based in England and Wales.

**Research gaps**

**In light of the evidence in this report, the following research gaps were identified:**

- a. Most studies that collect data on characteristics and vulnerabilities are cross sectional studies, taking data from a single time point. There is a lack of research evidence on longer-term changes in characteristics, vulnerabilities, resilience and impacts. There is also a gap in understanding specific impacts for sub groups such as children with a disability, ethnic minority children, looked after, migrant and asylum seeking and LGBT children, all of whom may be at greater risk;
- b. No research was found on the under reporting of the on and offline sexual abuse and exploitation of very young children;
- c. Many studies fail to clearly delineate the age of the perpetrator, in particular making the distinction between child and adult explicit. Thus, a research gap is understanding any differential characteristics, vulnerabilities, resiliencies and impacts between child on child and adult to child CSA;
- d. No studies collect data into online resilience based on a valid resilience scale. It is therefore difficult to compare resilience in the context of online-facilitated CSA and other forms of abuse or trauma;
- e. Data on sexting is complicated by varying definitions and lack of information on national or cultural location. It is also lacking technical analysis to aid the

- assessment of the extent to which apparently self-generated sexual content/material involving children is truly so and not the result of grooming or coercion;
- f. there is an absence of typologies of victims of online-facilitated child sexual exploitation (CSE), that includes children who appear to be most vulnerable i.e. children who are being or have been sexually abused, homeless children, missing from school, migrating or seeking asylum and 'looked after children'.

## Introduction

The aim of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA or 'the Inquiry') is to investigate whether public bodies and other non-state institutions have taken seriously their responsibility to protect children from sexual abuse in England and Wales, and to make meaningful recommendations for change, to help ensure that children now and in the future are better protected from sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse (CSA) involves forcing or enticing a child or young person under the age of 18 to take part in sexual activities. It includes contact and non-contact abuse, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse including via the internet.

The Inquiry has launched 13 investigations into a broad range of institutions. The investigations will give a voice to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, enable the Inquiry to understand how institutions have failed to protect children from sexual abuse and make practical recommendations to ensure better institutional protection for children in the future.

One of the investigations focuses on the institutional responses to child sexual abuse and exploitation facilitated by the internet. This is referred to as the Internet Investigation.

This report informs IICSA's investigation into the Internet and Child Sexual Abuse. The Internet Investigation is exploring the nature and extent of the use of the internet and other digital communications technology to facilitate child sexual abuse; the adequacy of government policy and statutory and regulatory frameworks to protect children from sexual abuse facilitated by the internet; and the response of law enforcement agencies, the criminal justice system and the technology industry (including internet service providers, providers of online platforms, and other relevant software companies) to child sexual abuse facilitated by the internet.

Rapid Evidence Assessment<sup>25</sup> methodology was applied to examine research on the overarching question it seeks to answer; that is, **what is known about the characteristics, vulnerabilities and on- and offline behaviour of victims of online-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation?** This question is addressed through examining four data sources. Research that provides data on:

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<sup>25</sup> See

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140305122816/http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/networks/gsr/resources-and-guidance/rapid-evidence-assessment/what-is>

- Distinguishing characteristics or factors that make children either more vulnerable, or more resilient, to online sexual victimisation, including victimisation by peers;
- Vulnerability profiles or typologies, based on children's characteristics and behaviours;
- Self-generated sexual material, including the relationship between 'sexting' and/or production of self-generated sexual material and sexual extortion or online sexual solicitation;
- The characteristics and vulnerabilities of victims of transnational online child sexual abuse, where either the victim or the perpetrator is based in England and Wales.

## **Background**

The background to this study includes the increasing concern about children's early exposure to sexualised images, advertising, language and behaviours both on and offline. Often referred to as premature sexualisation, the concerns are based on a belief that exposure to sexualised images, including adult pornography, may affect how children understand themselves and others and influence their future sexual relationships. Two thirds of 15-16 years olds have seen pornography online with a clear gender distinction emerging with far more boys choosing to do so (Martellozzo, Monaghan, Adler...and Horvath, (2016). This study based on a mixture of online forums, online survey and focus groups with children and young people also finds that a 'substantial minority' of children and young people want to copy pornographic acts (Martellozzo, et al., 2016). Moreover, young people attribute sexist attitudes and expectations within their own relationships to viewing pornography (Coy, Kelly, Elvines... Kanyeredzi, 2013). The early sexualisation of children and young people is part of the context in which children may become victims of online child sexual abuse.

Children go online to engage in communication with their social networks of family, friends and peers (Davis, 2009; Sheldon, 2009; Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, and Ólafsson, 2011a++; boyd, 2014). Online technologies continue to develop to make such communication easier and more varied than it has ever been. It has always been the case that children communicate with friends but the Internet has widened these networks exponentially (Mesch and Talmud, 2010). In this expanding arena, friendship takes on new meanings; existing friendship networks extend to the acquaintances of others, intimate personal details can be shared with people who have only just made a connection, children can establish friendships online that do not continue in other contexts.

In 2016, 12-15 year olds in the UK spent an average of 20 hours and six minutes online per week and 72% had a social media profile (OfCom, 2016). Internet use amongst younger children is growing; in 2016, 3-4 year olds spent an average of 8 hours and 18 minutes online, up from 6 hours and 48 minutes in the previous year. The internet is a necessary and positive experience for many children, greatly expanding educational and social experience. At the same time, the internet can pose risk of harm including online-facilitated sexual abuse and exploitation. Understanding what might make children vulnerable and resilient to sexual abuse and exploitation online is therefore critical. As in the offline world, what is understood as sexual abuse is dependent on interpretation across time and space. What a child considers acceptable to them in the present may change when they examine activities retrospectively as an adult (Wattam and Woodward, 1996) and what is considered as harmful online by a child from one cultural or geographical context may not be so in another (Livingstone, et al., 2011a). This means that context is an important component in understanding the meaning and consequences of harmful behaviours.

EU Kids Online (Hasebrink, Livingston, Haddon and Ólafsson 2009+) have classified new risks that have been introduced by the online environment: *content risks* describe the receipt of risky material, e.g., pornographic images or videos, whether mass-produced or created by the sender. There have always been content risks but the internet has expanded their scope, scale and accessibility. Pornographic material is both readily available and frequently presented to children in the form of pop-ups or links from sites popular with young people; *contact risks* involve an online party attempting to get the child to participate in risky interaction, whether online or offline. The internet extends contact risks because the range of potential contacts (both perpetrators and victims) has greatly extended covering a much wider population nationally and internationally; and *conduct risks*: where the child himself/herself is perpetrator of conduct that may lead to risk to others is expanded in relation to online-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation.

May-Chahal, Mason, Rashid...Greenwood, (2014) proposed a fourth category of *normative risk* following a school based study with children aged between 11-17 (N=785). It was found that certain criteria were used to determine identity in online decisions regarding the age and gender of people who approached them. These mirrored normative criteria that also apply offline. For example, content was categorised in terms of what boys and girls normally talk about, such as boys talk about sport, girls talk about shopping. A second normative device was to categorise age and gender according to the way people talk, for example, 'they used slang such as soz which I associate with a younger person' (May-Chahal et al., p 604). These strategies work offline because there is a visual correlate but online, where the visual correlate can be absent or potentially false, they resulted in correct identification of age and

gender of correspondents only 16% of the time. These normative decision making criteria therefore expose children to risks of deception.

Research retrieved in this REA reinforces the findings of Webster, Davidson and Bifulco (2014) who propose three dimensions to children's vulnerability to online sexual grooming: sexual, cognitive and social. Sexual vulnerability refers to the sexual features or markers attended to by the online "groomer" including the persistent online use of sexually explicit language, conversations about sex on social networking sites (SNS) and pictures of young people in a state of undress. Two features, naivety and/or the desire to be taken seriously as a sexually mature, person underpin this vulnerability. Cognitive vulnerability refers to features that indicate a young person may be open to sexual grooming through the way they are thinking. For example, some boys and girls are reported to be '*intrigued by the idea of contact with an older man*' (Webster, Davidson, Bifulco and Grove-Hill 2010, p19), or children may be vulnerable because they think of themselves in a negative way through having low self-esteem. Finally, with regard to social context, as with offline sex offending, children targeted are those who appear to be isolated or lonely or have problematic parent relationships (Webster et al., 2014).

Perpetrators do not always need to conceal their identities or ages in order to gain online and offline contact as children freely engage with them knowing they are an adult (Taylor, 2010). Such risky behaviour is explained through theories of online disinhibition (Suler, 2004) and deindividuation (Zimbardo, 1969). In particular the concepts of dissociative anonymity and invisibility, loss of individual responsibility and sensory overload can contribute to disinhibition to established behavioural norms and predispose some young people to take risks online in an environment where they feel they cannot be identified (Webster et al., 2014). Opportunities to experiment with identity have opened up like never before; children can be adults, boys can be girls and vice versa along with many other identity possibilities. For example, 40% of children admit to making false claims about themselves online (Livingstone and Bober, 2004) and various individual examples demonstrate highly adventurous and potentially dangerous masquerading (Hernwall, 2005).

Furthermore, children and young people are living in a digital world where on/offline distinctions do not represent separate social spaces (May-Chahal, et al., 2014). The online environment now mediates almost all child activities, such that analysing online/offline distinctions in child abuse becomes almost impossible. Over the last decade, for example, the use of digital technology has rapidly expanded both the opportunities for, and the scale of, trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation through false adverts for work, bitcoin payment which is harder to trace and the production of false documentation (Europol, 2014; Hughes; 2014; Leary, 2014; Sarkar, 2015; Walby Apitzsch, Armstrong...Tunte 2016a). The Internet has become an essential component in the procurement, demand and business dealings of sex

traffickers and in the detection of children who have been trafficked for the purposes of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation (Sykiotou, 2007; Latonero, 2011; 2012).

Despite child sexual abuse activity occurring in the online domain, it is still primarily presented as an offline crime that is facilitated and extended in scope and reach by digital technologies. In part, this is because in the majority of cases the act of sexual assault or exploitation is perpetrated offline, though even this is now transformed by Internet pay per view sex sites (Europol, 2014; Leary 2014). However, an approach that artificially divides the offline and online elements of child sexual abuse will work against its reduction and prevention and will not protect victims. Europol (2014) refer to a ‘blurring (of) the line between the online and ‘real world’ crime’ (p70) yet the distinction between on/offline still influences the ways in which such crimes are monitored and investigated.

Consequently, a definitional challenge for the present study therefore was what counted as online-facilitated child sexual abuse and/or exploitation. The following definition guided our search and analysis:

### **Definition of a child**

The definition of a child in the present study is in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in Article 1; that is, anyone under the age of 18. Many studies in general refer to young people who may be any age between 16 – 25; hence, ECPAT<sup>26</sup> International (2016) recommend that this term should be used with caution. Thus, where the ages of children under 18 were not clearly identified in data collection, those studies were excluded from analysis. Variations in the age of consent – excepting those applying the UNCRC definition – are particularly key in relation to some online activities including sexting and self-generated sexual content. This study does not consider the legal implications of self-generated sexual material but notes that guidance from UKCCIS<sup>27</sup> indicates that young people “need education, support or safeguarding, not criminalisation” (2017, p8).

### **Definition of Online-Facilitated Child Sexual Abuse**

Child sexual abuse (sexual abuse of children involving force or enticement to take part in sexual activities) where the online environment is involved at any stage of the offence. This includes both:

- The production, preparation, consumption, sharing, dissemination or

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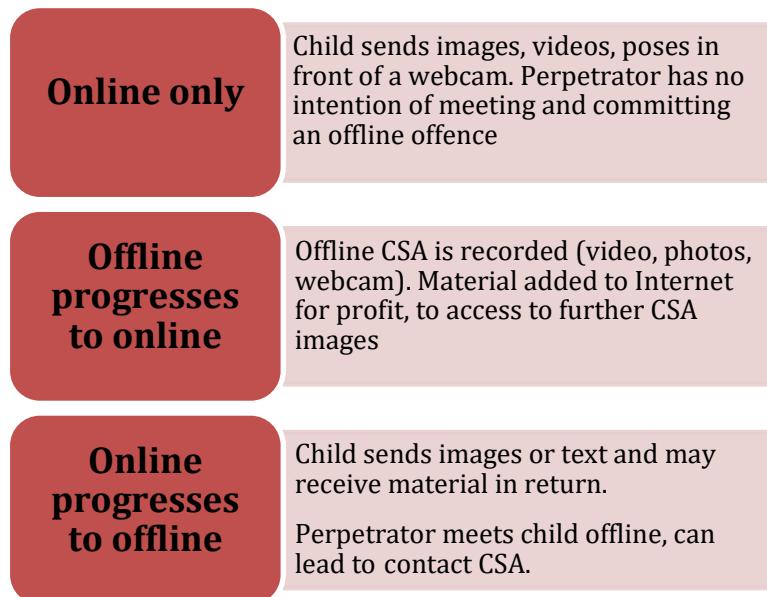
<sup>26</sup> End Child Prostitution and Child Trafficking; an international NGO network dedicated to the fight against sexual exploitation of children.

<sup>27</sup> UK Council for Child Internet Safety

- possession of child sexual abuse material;
- The solicitation of children for sexual purposes of children (sometimes called 'grooming'), whether or not this results, or is intended to result, in a contact offence. (ECPAT International, 2016).

This REA found three interlinking forms (Fig. 1) of online-facilitated sexual abuse, all of which can be for commercial gain or for the exchange of something of value, though might not be, depending on perpetrator motivation.

**Figure 1: Forms of Online-Facilitated Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)**



### Perpetrator Types

A major challenge in the research reviewed was the lack of clarity about who was being defined as a perpetrator. In particular it was often unclear if another child or peer was being described or if it was an adult, and whether the child or adult was known or previously unknown to the child prior to meeting online. In relation to adults, three main categories appear in the research:

1. **Unknown Adult:** Adult is a stranger and adopts a scattergun approach to contact children and young people online to see who responds (described in Katz, 2013+; Whittle, Hamilton-Giachritsis, and Beech 2015+);
2. **Adult known to the Child:** Adult is acquainted with the child, often in a semi-professional capacity, lives locally or the adult may have sexually abuse the child off line (Wolak and Finkelhor, 2016+). They target them specifically online. This can include men pretending to be women online (Leander, Christianson, and Granhag, 2008++; Whittle, et al., 2015+) or adults who encourage children to perform online sexual acts to get better grades at school (see Mishna, McLuckie and Saini 2009+);

3. **Adult is a Family Member:** Adult is a member of the family/ extended family, such as a father posting sexualised images and sexual abuse of his 8 year old daughter online (Leonard 2010-; Wells, Mitchell, and Ji, 2012++).

The REA also examines victim characteristics and vulnerabilities in so-called 'peer on peer' abuse. As a term, 'peer on peer' abuse is complicated because it includes several different sub-groups including children and young people who sexually offend against their peers as well as young people who specifically target much younger children. The term 'peer on peer' can obscure the distinction between 'true' (same-age) perpetrators and victims on the one hand, and adolescent perpetrators of CSA against very young victims on the other. These distinctions are difficult to make as the online environment changes the meaning of relational terms. For example, terms such as 'friend' and 'boyfriend'; some 'boyfriends' maybe older children or young adults, some 'friends' may be friends of friends or may never have met face to face.

For the purposes of this review, four categories of peer sexual abuse were noted, some of which dovetail with understandings of adolescents with sexually harmful behaviours.

1. Adolescents who sexually offend against other children both on and offline (Belton and Hollis, 2016-; Smith et al., 2016; Stevens, Hutchin, French, and Craissati 2013++) which includes:
  - a. Peer on peer (age range >5 years)
  - b. Those who specifically target infants and young children;
2. Adolescents who access use/ and or reproduce child sexual abuse images but do not engage in contact offences (Beier et al., 2016-; Belton and Hollis, 2016-) which includes:
  - a. Peer on peer (age range >5 years)
  - b. Those who specifically target infants and young children;
3. Peer on peer abuse within what are described in research as 'dating' or 'romantic' relationships (Barter, Stanley, Wood...Hellevik 2015+; Stanley Barter, Wood, ...Överlien, 2016+; Zweig, Dank, Yahner and Lachman 2013++);
4. Online bullying between children and young people that includes an element of sexual victimisation amongst peers (Cooper, Quayle, Jonsson, and Svedin, 2016+).

### **Report structure**

The report addresses each element of the main question thematically. The first section reviews the nature of the research. The second section presents research relevant to characteristics and vulnerability, which maybe short or long term, situational or behavioural. Resilience has been interpreted broadly in the third section since few studies focus directly on it. Rather, the research reports on whether or not victims feel harmed, coping strategies and environmental factors that

make harm less likely. In the fourth section, the focus is on self-generated sexual content/material involving children including sexting. Finally, the small amount of research that considers victimisation typologies is summarised in Section 5.

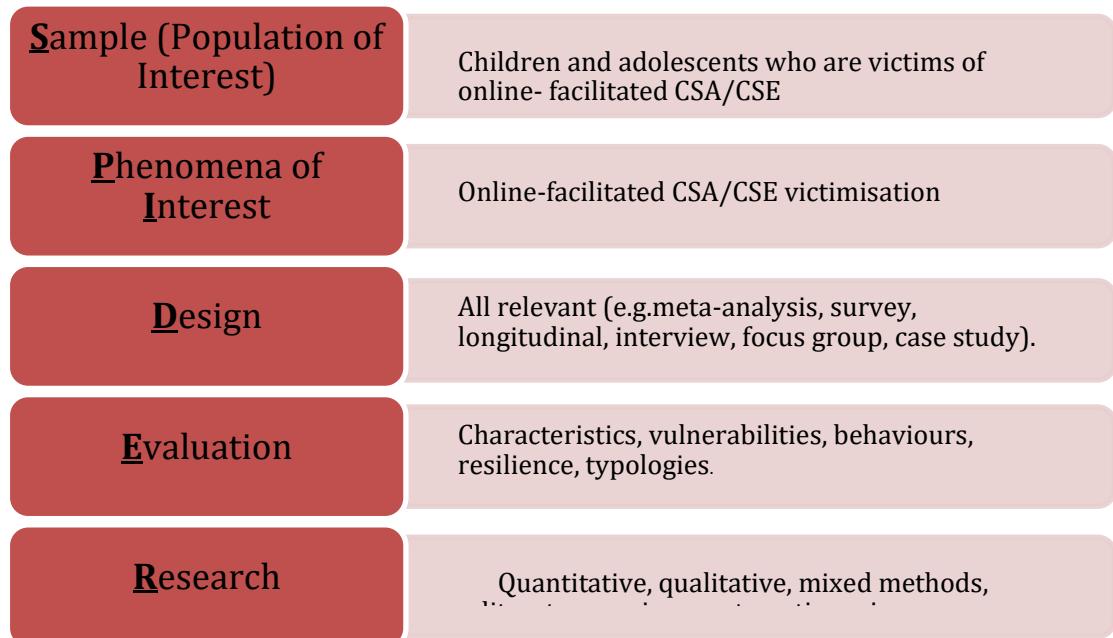
## Methodology

Following a competitive tender procurement process, the Department of Sociology at Lancaster University were commissioned to undertake a Rapid Evidence Assessment (hereafter REA). An REA gathers, analyses and reports on as much literature as possible within a specified period to inform policy development. The REA guidance and toolkit issued by the Government was followed in this project (GSRC, nd). A limitation in an REA is time (both time to carry out the project and time limits placed on relevant research to be included); decisions have to be taken at key points as to where to limit searches given the time restraints. These decisions have been noted in detail in the methodology.

When conducting an REA, it is important to ensure that the terms used to search the literature properly reflect the research questions. One way of doing this is to fit the research questions into a framework. REA's often adopt a PICO (Population, Intervention, Control and Outcome) model to guide search terms and retrieval decisions (Richardson, Wilson, Nishikawa and Hayward, 1995; GSRC, nd).

Populations are defined for the search terms, only research that reports on interventions with that population comparing them with groups who do not get the intervention (control groups) and assessing differences in outcomes. Given the nature of the data, which included little on interventions or control groups, it was considered unlikely that a great deal would fit into the PICO methodology. The SPIDER framework (Cooke, Smith, Booth, 2012) offered greater relevance to the IICSA research questions as they are directed at characteristics, vulnerabilities, resilience and behaviours. This framework is derived from the PICO model but allows inclusion of a broader spectrum of research without compromising quality assessment (Cooke et al., 2012). Population of interest remains similar but is renamed 'Sample' and 'Phenomena of Interest', which can then include such categories as CSA including CSE, replaces 'Intervention'. Control (or comparison group) is substituted with 'Design' since comparison is only applicable where two interventions are being assessed, whereas design can include comparative methods but also several others. The descriptor 'Evaluation' replaces 'Outcome' to enable inclusion of a range of different findings. Finally, a descriptor of 'Research' is added to generate a means of capturing the breadth of methods that may form part of the data set (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: The SPIDER framework applied to Online-facilitated CSA**



### **Pilot Search**

Two specialist librarians (Caroline Gibson and Tanya Williamson) conducted a pilot to test the search strategy to ensure that a manageable number of relevant results could be achieved (Appendix A). The aim was to maximise the number of relevant articles and research papers retrieved. Our search strategy was made up of a number of search strings, each of which are key terms that are searched for individually and together to build up to a sensitive and specific overall search. The pilot results illustrated the power of key words in the right search order to influence outcome. For example, the number of results retrieved from combining the Sample, Phenomena of Interest and Evaluation strings returned 1588 but when combined with the 'Design' string this reduced to 78 results. The design category was removed at this stage as it was limiting the results far too drastically. After some testing we also added solicitation/ blackmail/extortion to the sample as this found new and relevant results.

For some databases the search strings were too long e.g. JSTOR, ATM digital. Other databases place a limit on number of wildcards (a way of truncating a search term so that all the possible variations of that word are searched for e.g. child\*, sext\*) and Boolean operators (AND/ OR) that can be used. Such restrictions led to the development of bespoke search strings for these databases (See Appendix C). One platform would only allow a single study to be extracted at a time; we therefore limited of results to the first 50 searches on the database.

### **Sources and Grey Literature:**

A range of databases was searched including social science, humanities, historical and technical databases/sites (see Appendix C). The latter were included based on previous experience of searching for data on trafficking and technology (Walby et al., 2016a). For example, technology databases contain accounts of research that reports on technology linked behaviour of children that might place them at risk or increase their resilience. Other papers were also hand searched to identify additional references not already picked up by the database searches.

Grey literature, such as reports, conference proceedings and government publications, was accessed through online searching in national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Research Councils, English and Welsh Government and European Union websites. In addition, the Inquiry requested that a call for literature be issued (Appendix D). Key academics and other figures known for their work in online abuse were e-mailed individually to see if they had any pending relevant articles/articles in press/conference presentations and reports.

In total 51 individuals or agencies, and one network were contacted with a request for literature. Ten individuals replied, some with further information and others who did not have anything additional to contribute (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Response from Call for Literature**

Response	Number
Did not respond	41
Responded but had no further information	5
Responded with further information	5
Responded with further information that was relevant	4
Responded with further information that was relevant and new to research team	1

### **Final Search**

Following the pilot, one specialist librarian ran a complete search of the relevant databases with the bibliographic results imported into EndNote<sup>28</sup>. To maintain

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<sup>28</sup> Endnote is a reference management software package, used to save and manage references.

quality assurance, a second specialist librarian re-ran and checked the search. It was not until this second search had been conducted that duplicate papers were removed from the results. A detailed breakdown of returns per database can be found in Appendix C.

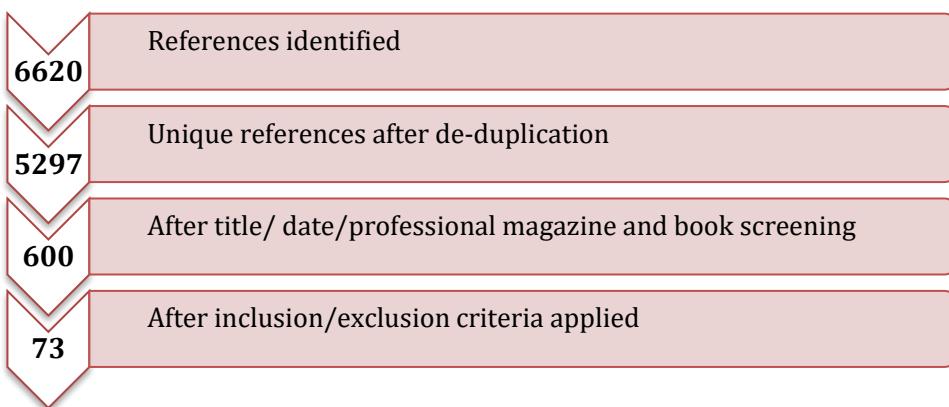
Given the volume of data (N=5297), the citations were then imported into 'Covidence' for ease of management. Covidence is software that assists the process of systematic reviewing. The program enabled all the researchers to screen titles and abstracts independently, affording the opportunity for all data to be either double- or triple-blind coded. Double blind coding involves two reviewers scoring a piece of research without knowing what the other person has scored; in this way, bias is reduced. This was followed by a double blind coding of the remaining references on a full-text basis, applying the agreed inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Appendix E). The team discussed any coding disagreements before making a decision to include or exclude.

Each study to be included was critically appraised based on EPPI criteria for methodological rigour (internal/external validity, ethics, clarity of reporting, conflict of interest) and significance to the research question(s) subject to data extraction. Studies were appraised as belonging to one of four groups represented symbolically as follows:

- ++ Rigorous study, method and analysis clearly articulated, discussion supported by results/findings, highly relevant to research question;
- + Good study, most aspects of method /analysis explained, relevant to research question;
- Limited study, some parts of method or analysis not fully explained, or only partially relevant;
- Poor study, key aspects of method/analysis not explained, or not relevant to research question.

Summary data was recorded on a form (Appendix G) and the quality of the research was analysed using extraction sheets for quantitative, qualitative and secondary review data (Appendix H). Of the total 5297 unique references, 73 were finally included in the analysis (See Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Number of included sources for final review**



### **Challenges and Limitations**

There were a number of challenges encountered during the REA. First, the number of studies of potential relevance retrieved after the exclusion criteria were applied ( $N=600$ ) and the management of such a large number within the confines of an REA. Secondly, the difficulties in disaggregating data relating to online-facilitated CSA/CSE from internet harassment and bullying research. Thirdly, lack of definitional clarity meaning that very few studies compare the same phenomena.

### **Synthesis**

Two of the reviewers read all full reports. The data was summarised descriptively and synthesised qualitatively. Reviewers extracted data that addressed each element of the research question. For example, research that contained findings on sexual solicitation and self-generated sexual content/material involving children, or where characteristics that heightened vulnerability or resilience were recorded. No studies directly addressed the overarching research question and themes were identified only through careful extraction of data from studies that had some data relevant to the subsidiary questions.

### **Ethics**

The project was granted ethical approval by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Lancaster University Management School Research Ethics Committee (ref: FL16159) and by IICSA's own internal Research Ethics Committee<sup>29</sup>. Whilst much of the data for the REA is in the public domain, it was possible that non-published data would be shared with us through the call for literature. With this in mind, specific

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/research-seminars/research>

restrictions were placed on the call for literature and safeguards were put in place in case an individual sent in a non-anonymised personal case study.

## Section 1: Overview of Retrieved Studies

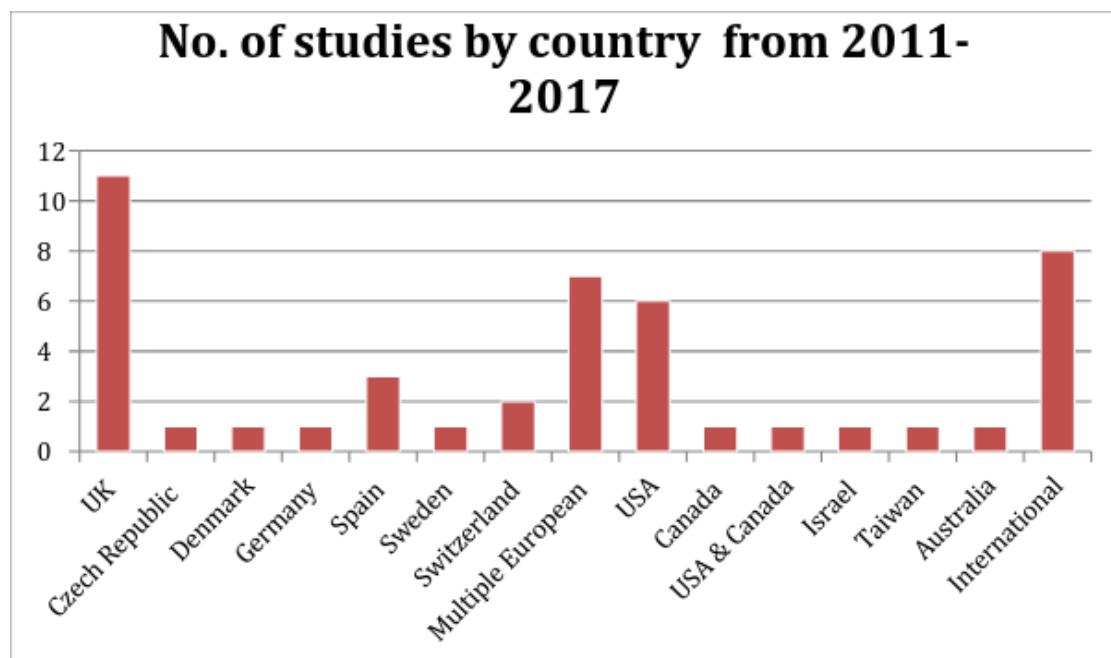
All the studies included in this REA that address the question in relation to characteristics, vulnerabilities and resilience are summarised in Table 3. Brief details of the author, date, country in which the study was conducted, research design, sample characteristics and measure used to collect data on online-facilitated CSA are provided, along with the assessment of quality based on the EPPI criteria as described above.

The research literature comprises quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods and technical research. Randomised control trials, quasi-experimental design, case control or evaluation studies are rare in the field. The primary data available to answer questions concerning the relationship between online-facilitated child sexual abuse and/or child sexual exploitation and victim characteristics, vulnerability, behaviours, resilience, sexting and self-generated sexual content is therefore only able to demonstrate associations. Although significant relationships may be found between variables, using statistical tests (such as age or gender, sexuality or socio-economic status (SES)), these relationships are limited, firstly by the number of variables measured and secondly, they do not provide evidence of a causal relationship.

Even where a characteristic or factor is statistically significant, it may not be causal. For example, a consistent finding is that girls are more likely to be victims of online-facilitated CSA than boys are but this does not mean that being a girl causes them to be more vulnerable. In this example, we know that boys and transgender children can also be vulnerable. Thus, some factor other than gender could be causing that vulnerability. We know that girls are also more likely to be sexually abused or exploited offline (Radford, Corrall, Bradley...Collishaw, 2011++). The internet reflects and extends the offline world in many respects and, in this case, it is more likely to be gender relations in wider society that influence how women and girls are perceived and treated and therefore increase their vulnerability (Walby et al., 2016a). A further significant influence at the societal level is that of culture. Across Europe and beyond there are significant variations in the legal age of consent. These domestic laws are complicated when applied in practice, with frequent successful claims being made that the perpetrator thought the victim was older than she or he actually was (Kelemen and Johansson, 2013).

Online-facilitated child sexual abuse (CSA) which can include child sexual exploitation (CSE) has been studied extensively over the last decade in many countries. In our retrieved studies, there is an over representation of studies from the Global north and far fewer from developing countries and Middle and South East Asia (Table 2). This finding may be an artefact of our search. Although we did not specify country as a search term, we did limit retrieved studies to those printed in English.

**Table 2. Number of studies by country from 2011-2017<sup>30</sup>**



Included studies use quantitative, qualitative, reviews and mixed methods designs. The final data set contains; large-scale national and international surveys focused on internet use in the general child population, (such as the EU Kids Online and Youth Internet Safety Surveys (YISS) (see below for further details)). It also includes large and small-scale secondary analyses of law enforcement and non-governmental organisation (NGO) data (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Wolak and Turner, 2011b +; Palmer 2015- ) and smaller scale qualitative studies of in depth interviews with victims (e.g. Quayle, Jonsson and Lööf, 2012+; Whittle, Hamilton-Giachritsis and Beech, 2013+). Many of the sources collected data either prior to or during 2010 and are thus somewhat dated in a fast changing online environment. Access, devices, online platforms, content and behaviours have all changed significantly over the last seven years. Use of mobile phones, for example, has transformed where and how children go online, with many more children now going online at a younger age, for lengthier periods and often away from adult supervision (OfCom, 2016).

Certain characteristics, such as age, gender and socio-economic status (SES) may indicate vulnerability. Different understandings of vulnerability influence the theoretical positioning and design of included studies. Some presume that all

<sup>30</sup> This time frame was chosen to follow on from the data in Ainsaar and Lööf (2011, eds.) literature review

children are vulnerable, a position related to their age and dependent status as being under 18. According to this interpretation, framed by the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the Child (1989), children require protection because of their innate vulnerability. This position would classify all sexual acts consented to under the age of 16 (in the UK) and all unwanted sexual acts and content experienced online under the age of 18 as *a priori* CSA. Others argue that a universal application of vulnerability to all children renders them passive and ignores their 'agency' (James and Prout, 2000). This position would take account of the child's response to unwanted sexual acts and content online and may not include them within a definition of online-facilitated CSA if they do not lead to harm. Furthermore, vulnerability can be widely interpreted and is a fluid, not a fixed, phenomenon. It can include factors at the level of the individual, as well as familial and environmental influences that "might threaten or challenge healthy development" (Daniel, et al., 1999, p73).

### **Overview of Main Data sources**

Some studies provide more detail of relevance to the IICSA questions than others do. More details about these studies are provided here.

The EU Kids Online project issued a number of reports based on a survey of a random stratified sample of 25,142 children aged 9-16 years across 25 European countries, including the UK (Hasebrink, Görzig, Haddon...Livingstone, 2011++). Their research consisted of a specially developed and piloted survey instrument used for individual interviews at home with children and young people and their parents (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, and Ólafsson, 2011b). Sensitive questions were self –completed by children either online or by pen and paper and included questions about on and offline risks and online harm. The authors of this study note a number of limitations including interviews at home with parents in the house (Livingstone et al., 2011b). Moreover, despite the random stratified sample from each country, it is noted that the most socially excluded children may not have been included (Livingstone et al., 2011b). The project was extended to include a further eight countries during 2011-2014 and a qualitative interview study was added to the design (Tsaliki, Chronaki, and Ólafsson, 2014++).

Exposure to sexual content and the harm caused by this content was included in the EU Kids Online survey. Three questions were relevant to this REA: whether the child had received a sexual message (15% had done so), or had seen sexual images (14% had this experience) and whether they were upset by either of these (4% were). Details of the sender, whether adult or child, were not collected. These questions do not map directly onto the definition of online- facilitated CSA adopted in the REA but it is clear that a proportion of those experiencing sexual content and feeling upset, at a level of severity that lasted a 'couple of months or more' would constitute children

encompassed by the definition used in this review. The EU Kids Online project also considers risk of harm by various groupings of vulnerability that they categorise as: children who have some psychological difficulties, children from a minority or discriminated against group and disabled children (Livingstone, et al., 2011a ++). The risk of harm considered covers a spectrum of online activity and behaviours, but includes those that can be linked to online grooming, such as meeting a contact offline who was initially met online.

A second group of survey studies were the Youth Internet Safety Surveys (YISS-1, YISS-2 and YISS-3) conducted in the United States (US) between 1999 and 2010 (Mitchell, Jones, Finkelhor and Wolak 2013++; Tynes and Mitchell, 2014+). Parents and children in households selected through random digit dialing (N= approximately 1500 for each wave) responded to a telephone interview. The interviewers spoke first to the parent(s) and with their consent went on to speak to the child. The interviewers asked to speak to the child alone and this question was repeated during the interview. The authors do not acknowledge this as a limitation but clearly parental presence and consent may have influenced children's responses.

Limitations that were identified include the reduction in participation rates over the decade, partly due to more people using mobile phones rather than landlines, and the potential impact of changing meanings of online interactions over time.

Unwanted solicitation of children for sexual purposes in the previous year was measured through three screener questions to the children: In the past year, did anyone on the Internet ever try to get you to talk about sex, ask you for sexual information about yourself, or ask you to do something sexual, 'when you did not want to' (Jones, Mitchell and Finkelhor, 2011, p180++). Similar to EU Kids Online, distress was measured on a scale asking if the child was 'upset or afraid' by the experience (range 1-5). Children who responded 'very' or 'extremely' to any of the screener questions were grouped as 'solicited youth' and their characteristics analysed compared with those who were not solicited.

Alongside survey studies, Police investigative files provide a rich source of data, although they only include those cases where a perpetrator or an offence has been identified and are not representative of all victims and survivors. The largest study of this kind is the National Juvenile Online Victimisation study (N-JOV) in the US (Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak, 2011a++). Data was collected as follows:

- An initial postal survey was sent to a representative sample of "law enforcement agencies" (N=2598) which reported involvement in 3,322 arrests meeting the initial criteria for "internet facilitated child sexual exploitation";
- Cases were then followed up with telephone interviews (N=1,063), sampled on volume of cases dealt with and type of case. To be included, a case had to involve a child 17 years or younger who had been sexually abused or

exploited (or an attempt had been made to do so) during 2006, where money was exchanged (this excluded solicitation of children for sexual purposes through gifts or other means) and the internet played a role in the crime. Where there were multiple victims (30% of cases) the primary victim was selected for analysis (most seriously victimised or the youngest where victimisation was similar);

- Two main categories emerged: profiteering (selling child sexual abuse images or selling the child for sexual abuse) and purchasing (buying CSA images or CSA directly);
- In the case of child sex abuse images, victims were unknown and although 316 victims were identified only 37 fitted the criteria so that victim data reported here relates only to child sexual exploitation involving exchange for money;
- The same methodology was applied in the National Juvenile Prostitution Study (N-JPS) (Wells, et al., 2012++), which identified young people involved in 132 cases of CSE.

There are far fewer qualitative studies that are relevant to the research question. Methods used include individual interviews (Quayle et al., 2012+; Whittle et al., 2013+), focus groups (Kolpakova, 2012+; Smahel and Wright, 2014++) and online diary recording (Wisniewski, Xu, Rosson...and Carroll, 2016+) or a mixture of methods (e.g. Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone and Harvey, 2012+). Most of the qualitative studies examine the issue of online CSA from a child or young person's perspective. Two distinct groups can be identified. First, studies that explore young people's general experiences and attitudes to online use including unwanted sexual exposure online. Interestingly, several of these studies ask young people to talk in the third party, so that they are recounting the experiences of their friends not their own direct experience; it is unclear how this affects the data. The second group, are children who are known to be victims and survivors of online-facilitated child sexual abuse through records held by Police or therapeutic services. Approaches include individual interviews, where children often talk very frankly about their experiences (Quayle et al., 2012+; Palmer, 2015-; Whittle et al., 2013+) or retrospective analysis of 'victim' accounts in investigative records (Leander et al., 2008 ++; Katz, 2013+).

Several reviews have been included in this REA, but others were excluded (despite being seemingly relevant) as a result of their search strategy and analysis being entirely absent or of poor quality. There were three systematic reviews relevant to some elements of the research question (Jones, Bellis, Wood...Officer, 2012 ++; Klettke,, Hallford and Mellor, 2014++; Mishna, Cook, Saini, Wu and MacFadden, 2011++). Ainsaar and Lööf's (2011, eds.+) literature review of online behaviour related to child sexual abuse has a similar scope to this REA and as such provided a useful starting point. The review is based on a database of 218 publications (in 2011)

from across Europe as part of the ROBERT<sup>31</sup> project. One advantage of the scale of their project is that publications other than those in English have been included. Ainsar and Lööf (2012, eds.) note an increase in literature covering this subject from 2007, which is the start date of this REA.

Finally, there are studies that identify victim characteristics in relation to self-generated sexual content. The majority of these assess the prevalence, characteristics and experiences of children who send and receive such content (Jonsson, Priebe, Bladh, and Svedin. 2014++; Klettke et al., 2014++). Self-generated material covers a wide range, including 'sexting' content sent between young people with mutual consent as well as content that may be coerced; the true extent of which is not known from analysis of the images. Few studies analyse the characteristics of children featured in the content itself, with most technical studies collecting data on hashtags and image characteristics (camera properties, facial recognition and features of the environment) particularly where this content has been extracted and transferred from source into websites and other online platforms, such as file sharing sites for commercial or exchange purposes. An exception is the study carried out by the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF, 2015++) that assessed 3803 images and videos collected from the Internet over a three-month period in 2014.

Although the research questions included transnational CSA we found no studies that focused specifically on victims of this form of abuse. This does not mean that these victims were not present in the studies under review, but in all studies on victims reviewed, data on the location and nationality of the perpetrator was lacking. Some studies mention that perpetrators may be in different countries to the victim and others study children in countries where the perpetrator may be from the UK (e.g. Wachs, Vazsonyi, Wolf and Junger, 2016+). We only know this from the rare comments of victims in the qualitative studies, or from our wider knowledge of offline facilitated CSA which focuses on perpetrators and case reports that suggest UK nationals have sexually groomed children from low income countries such as the Philippines for live streaming or commercial gain (UNICEF, 2017). The nature, extent and characteristics of victims in online-facilitated transnational CSA is therefore a serious research gap given the far reaching global links that the Internet provides.

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<sup>31</sup> ROBERT: Risk Taking Online Behaviour Empowerment through Research and Training. Details available at <http://childcentre.info/robert/about-the-project/>

**Table 3: Summary of Included Studies on Characteristics of Victims of Online-facilitated Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation**

(Note; blank spaces occur where the data was not mentioned or unavailable)

Authors	Date	EPPI	Country	Data Source	Method	Sample size N =	Gender	Age	Measure
Ainsaar and Lööf (eds)	2011	+	Europe	NA	Literature Review	218 included studies	NA	NA	NA
Barter, Stanley, Wood...and Hellevik	2015	+	Bulgaria, Cyprus, England, Italy and Norway	School sample across countries (45 schools)	Survey administered at school	4,564 subsample of 3227	Approx 50% across sample	14-17	Intimate partner violence and abuse in young people's relationships
Baumgartner, Valkenburg, and Peter	2010	++	Holland	Random sample of panel	Online Survey	1765	49% female, 51% male	12-17	Risky sexual behaviours and sexual solicitation online; comparing adult and juvenile populations
Beier, Oezdemir, Schlinzig... Hellenschmidt	2016	-	Germany	Self-selecting	Case Study	49	1 female, 48 male	12-18	Children with a sexual preference for children

Belton and Hollis	2016	-	UK	NA	Literature Review	NA	NA	NA	Sexually harmful behaviour in children
Brown, Brady, Franklin, Bradley...and Sealey	2016	+	International	NA	Rapid Evidence Review	NA	NA	NA	CSA and CSE
Carrick-Davies	2011	+	UK	Young People in PRU Referral Units and	Focus Groups and interviews	3-7 in each 4 focus groups		15-17	Online risks to young people in PRU's
Chang, Chiu, Miao, Chen, and Chiang	2016	++	Taiwan	Probability-proportionate-to-size sampling method results in sample of 26 schools	Self-administered questionnaires undertaken twice (2010 and 2011)	2315		15-16	Survey based on YISS and Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System
Cooper, Quayle, Jonsson, and Svedin	2016	+	International	NA	Literature Review	88 records	NA	NA	NA
Dank, Lachman, Zweig and Yahner	2014	++	USA	Cross sectional sample of 7 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> grade young people in American schools.	Paper survey on a single day at school	5 647	52.3% female, 47.2% male	12-19	Mixture of validated and non-validated measures

									exploring teen dating violence incl. cyber abuse
Davidson, De Marco, Bifulco... Puccia	2016	+	England, Ireland and Italy	Industry Case studies Stakeholder interviews Police Survey <b>Young People Survey</b> In depth interviews with young people	Mixed methods	1166	837 female, 239 male	Cohort of 18- 25	Non- validated measure but available for scrutiny
Edinburgh, Blabobil, Harpin, and Saewy	2015	++	USA	Children attending a Chil Advocacy Centre for sexu exploited runaway adolescents	In depth forensic interviews and self-report survey	62	55 female, 7 male	12-17	Mixture of measures incl. UCLA PTSD Trauma screen Child's Report of Parenting Behavior Inventory, support and control subscales

Franklin, and Smeaton	2017	+	UK	Young people and Professionals	On line surveys and and interviews	27	20 female, 7 male	12-23	At risk on online CSE
D'Haenens, Vandoninck and Donoso	2013	++	25 European countries incl. UK	Random stratified survey sampling of some 1,000 children (9-16 years old) per country	EU Kids Online methodology	571, a subsample of 25, 142		9-16	Multiple measures used and raw data available
Hasebrink, Livingstone, Haddon and Ólafsson	2009	+	25 European countries incl. UK	Random stratified survey sampling of some 1,000 children (9-16 years old) country	EU Kids Online methodology	25, 142	50%		Multiple measures used and raw data available
Hasebrink, Görzig, Haddon, Kalmus and Livingstone	2011	++	25 European countries incl. UK	Random stratified survey sampling of some 1,000 children (9-16 years old) country	EU Kids Online methodology	25, 142	50%	9-16	Multiple measures used and raw data available
Helweg-Larsen, Schütt and Larsen	2012	++	Denmark	Nationally representative sample	Multimedia computer-based self-interviewing program	3707	1832 female, 1875 male	14-17	Conflict Tactic Scale, ADHD SDQ and non-validated measures

Holt, Bossler, Malinski and May	2016	++	Kentucky, USA	One suburban school	Online Survey Instrument available in school	439	50.1% female	13-18	Non-validated survey
Internet Watch Foundation	2015	++	UK	Proactively sourced content from search engines, historic IWF data and leads from public	3 month analysis of young people produced sexual content	3,803 images and videos	Of under 15: 630 female, 47 male, 10 both sexes	667 <15 3136 16-20 years	NA
Jones, Bellis, Wood... Officer	2012	++	International	17 studies	Systematic Review	NA	NA	NA	NA
Jones, Mitchell and Finkelhor	2011	++	USA	Random digit dialing across national sample of households	Three national telephone surveys	4561	51% male	10-17	YISS 1, YISS 2 and YISS 3
Jonsson, Priebe, Bladh, and Svedin.	2014	++	Sweden	Random stratified sample	Paper survey at school	3,288	54.2% female, 45.8% male	16-22, mean age 18.3	Baltic Sea Regional Study of Adolescent's Sexuality with added questions about the Internet.

Katz	2013	+	Israel	Investigative interviews	Exploratory	20	19 female and 1 male	11-14	Online-facilitated CSA
Klettke, Hallford and Mellor	2014	++	International	8 databases	Systematic Review	NA	NA	NA	NA
Kolpakova (ed)	2012	+	7 European countries including the UK	Young people who were considered to be at increased risk	Focus groups	27 focus groups			Online-facilitated CSA
Kopecký, K. Hejsek, L. Kusá, J... Marešová	2015	-	Czech Republic	Sample of record via counselling centre	Textual analysis	267 records			Online-facilitated CSA
Leander, Christianson and Granhag	2008	++	Sweden	Pre-determined sample	Analysis of Police interviews and chat log	68	100% female	11-19	Online-facilitated CSA
Livingstone Haddon, Görzig, and Ólafsson	2011 a	++	25 European countries incl. UK	Random stratified survey sampling of some 1,000 children (9-16 years old) per country	EU Kids Online methodology	25,142		9-16	Multiple measures used and raw data available
Livingstone Haddon, Görzig, and Ólafsson	2011 b	++	25 European countries incl. UK	Random stratified survey sampling of some 1,000	EU Kids Online methodology	25,142		9-16	Multiple measures used and

				children (9-16 years old) per country					raw data available
Livingstone and Görzig	2014	++	25 European countries incl. UK	Random stratified survey sampling of some 1,000 children (9-16 years old) per country; subsample for the study is older	EU Kids Online methodology	18,709	50% split	11-16	Multiple measures used and raw data available
Lobe, Livingstone, Ólafsson and Vodob	2012	++	25 European countries incl. UK	Random stratified survey sampling of some 1,000 children (9-16 years old) per country	EU Kids Online methodology	25,142	50%	9-16	Multiple measures used and raw data available
Martelozzo, Monaghan, Adler...Horvath	2016	+	UK	Nationally representative sample	Focus groups Online Survey Online discussion forum	34 1001 40	47% female 52% male 1% non-binary	11-16	Survey questions in appendix
Mishna, McLuckie, and Saini,	2009	+	Canada	Posts from children & young people to free 24 hour, national, bilingual phone and web	Exploratory	364	269 female 75 male	6-24. mean = 14.5	Child victims of Internet/mobile and/or sexual victimisation

				Counselling referral and information service					
Mishna, Cook, Saini, Wu and MacFadden	2011	++	International	Systematic review of effectiveness of cyberabuse interventions	Systematic Review	NA	NA	NA	NA
Mitchell, K. J., Finkelhor, D., and Ybarra, M.	2007a	++	USA	Random digit dialing across national sample of households	One national telephone survey	1501	47% female, 53% male	10-17	YISS 1
Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak,	2007b	++	USA	Random digit dialing across national sample of households	Two national telephone surveys	1500	50% female and male	10-17	YISS 1 and 2
Mitchell, Finkelhor, and Wolak	2007c	++	USA	Random digit dialing across national sample of households	One national telephone survey	1500	50% female and male	10-17	YISS 2
Mitchell, K., Wolak, J., and Finkelhor, D.	2008	++	USA	Random digit dialing across national sample of households	One national telephone survey	1500	50% female and male	10-17	YISS 2

Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones and Wolak	2010	++	USA	Stratified sample of law enforcement agencies	Mail and telephone survey	2322 arrest cases with SNS	NA		National Juvenile Online Victimization (N-JOV) Study
Mitchell, Jones and Finkelhor	2011 a	++	USA	Stratified sample of law enforcement agencies	Wave 2 data, which surveyed arrests in 2006 for internet-related sex crimes against minors	569 arrest cases	NA	13-18	National Juvenile Online Victimization (N-JOV) Study
Mitchell, Finkelhor, Wolak...Turner	2011 b	+	USA	Nationally representative sample via random digit dial (RDD)	Telephone survey	4046	49% female, 51% male	2-17	National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSEV) using JVQ
Mitchell, Jones, Finkelhor and Wolak	2013	++	USA	Random digit dialing across national sample of houses	Three national telephone surveys	Subsample 620 sexually solicited youth	70% female, 30% male	10-17	YISS1, YISS 2 and YISS 3

Mitchell, Ybarra and Korchmaros	2014	++	USA	Harris Poll Online (HPOL) opt-in panel ( $n = 3,989$ respondents) and referrals from GLSEN ( $n = 1,918$ respondents).	Self-administered online survey	5542	Data presented by sexual orientation	12-17	Teen Health and Technology Online Survey
Mohler-Kuo, Landolt, Meidert, Schönbucher, and Schnyder	2014	++	Switzerland	National random stratified sample	Survey using a self-reported computer-assisted questionnaire on a laptop in school	6787	3236 female, 3551 male	13 to 20 but: 97% 14-16	Newly developed Child Sexual Abuse Questionnaire (CSAQ)
Montiel, Carbonell and Pereda	2016	++	Spain	Stratified randomized national sample		3897	2049 females, 1836 males	14-16.9 years	Juvenile Online Victimization Questionnaire
Mueller - Johnson, Eisner and Osbuth	2014	++	Switzerland	Probability Proportion to Size (PPS) cluster sampling via schools and regions	Survey using a self-reported computer-assisted questionnaire on a laptop in school	6749	52.2% males	mean age was 15.41 years	Newly developed Child Sexual Abuse Questionnaire (CSAQ) and Juvenile Victimization

									Questionnaire
Normand and Sallafranque St	2016	-	International	International literature	Literature review	NA	NA	NA	Risk to youth with intellectual disability to online abuse
Palmer	2015	-	UK	Survey data from 15 Barnardo's services  Interviews with 34 staff, 11 young people, 8 parents and carers	Surveys and interviews	NA	Not given	Not given	Online CSE
Priebe, Mitchell and Finkelhor	2013	++	USA	Random digit dialling of households	Survey	1,560	50% split	10-17	YISS 3  At risk on online CSE
Quayle, Jonsson, and Lööf,	2012	+	Sweden, UK, Germany, Italy, Denmark and Russia		Semi structured interviews, coded thematically	27	82% female	12-18	Victims of online-facilitated sexual abuse
Quayle and Newman	2016	++	Canada	Online reports from the public to a national help	Content analysis	264	207 female 34 male. Rest unknown	9-17 with mean of 13.47	'Luring' or online grooming

Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone and Harvey	2012	+	UK	From 2 high schools in London	Focus groups, interview and online ethnography	35	17 female, 18 male	12-13 and 14-15	Interview schedules available
Shannon	2008	+	Sweden	Cases from 14 out of 21 Swedish Police Areas	Case file analysis	315 cases	90% female	<18	NA
Smahel and Wright	2014	++	Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and the United Kingdom.	School based sample	56 focus groups and 114 interviews	378	185 female, 183 male	9-16	Common topic guide with lists of questions was used across the nine countries
Staksrud, Ólafsson, and Livingstone.	2013	++	25 European countries	3 stage random probability clustered sample	EU Kids Online Methodology	25,142	50%	9-16	Multiple measures used and raw data available
Stanley, Barter, Wood...Overlien	2016	+	Bulgaria, Cyprus, England, Italy, Norway	Non-random sampling	Paper survey administered at school Individual interviews	4564	67 female, 24 male	14-17 13-19	Mixture of measures new and previously used by authors to

						91			explore Intimate Partner Violence
Stevens, Hutchin, French and Craissati	2013	++	UK	Non-random sample: all those referred to a treatment centre	Case file analysis using checklist	184	100% male	10-21, mean 16.07	Children with sexually harmful behaviour
Tsaliki, Chronaki and Ólafsson	2014	++	25 European countries	EU Kids online and Net Children Go Mobile reports	Comparative analysis	NA	NA	9-16	EU Kids Online and Net Children Go Mobile
Tynes and Mitchell	2014	++	USA	Random digit –dialling fo national telephone survey	National telephone sur	1560	50% male	10-17	3 <sup>rd</sup> YISS
Valkenberg and Peter	2011	+	International	NA	Review	NA	NA	NA	NA
Villacampa and Gomez	2017	+	Spain	Regional stratified schoo sample	Survey administered at school in 2015	489	50.1% female 49.9% male	14-18	Inspired by YISS; 44 item questionnair e
Wachs, Vazsonyi, Wolf and Junger	2016	+	Germany, the Netherlands, the USA and Thailand	School sample but unclear how they were selected i	Survey either administe online or via paper in	2,162	54.6% female	11-19	Mixture of validated and new

				each country	classroom				survey instruments
Walker, Sanci, and Temple-Smith	2013	+	Australia	Purposive sampling through recreation, health and education	Individual interviews; inductive approach	33	18 females, 15 males	15-20	Sexting
Wells, Mitchell and Ji	2012	++	USA	Cases reported to law enforcement	Exploratory Analysis	312	91% female, 9% male	69% <15 31% 16-17	National Juvenile Prostitution Study (N-JPS)
Wells and Mitchell	2014	++	USA	Random digit dialling across national sample of households	National telephone survey	1560	50% female	10-17	YISS 3
Whittle, Hamilton-Giachritsis and Beech	2013	+	UK	Victims of confirmed internet CSA	Semi-structured interviews	8	6 female, 2 male	13-18	Online-facilitated CSA
Whittle, Hamilton-Giachritsis and Beech	2014	+	UK	Victims of confirmed internet CSA	Semi-structured interviews	8	6 female, 2 male	13-18	Online-facilitated CSA
Whittle, Hamilton-Giachritsis and Beech	2015	+	UK	Victims of confirmed internet CSA	Semi-structured interviews	3	3	12-14	Online-facilitated CSA

Wisniewski, Zuleyka, Rosson...Carroll	2016	+	USA	Sample achieved via e-mail, to school, community and one database	Thematic coding of online diary entry	68	42 females, 26 males	13-17	Online risk
Wilkinson, Whitfield, Hannigan, Ali and Hayter	2016	+	International	NA	Meta ethnographic analysis	4 studies included	NA	NA	Sexting
Wolak, Mitchell and Finkelhor	2007	++	USA	Random digit dialling across national sample of households	Two national telephone surveys	1500	49% female, 51% male	10-17	YISS 1 and YISS 2
Wolak and Finkelhor	2011	++	USA	Sexting cases referred to Police between 2008-2009	Case file analysis	550 cases			Sexting
Wolak and Finkelhor	2016	+	USA	Self-selecting sample from Adverts on Facebook	Online survey	1631	83% female	18-25	Sextortion
Zweig, Dank, Yahner and Lachman	2013	++	USA	Convenience sampling from 10 schools in 3 North east states of the US	Paper and pencil survey administered at school	5647	52% female, 47% male	12-18	Mixture of newly created and adapted measures

## Section 2: Characteristics and Vulnerabilities

This section assesses the research to identify characteristics and factors that individually or in combination increase vulnerability to online-facilitated CSA and CSE. They include findings on; age, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, psychological factors, poly-victimisation and accumulating risk, living in care, internet usage and risky online behaviours. We also include a short commentary on Routine Activity Theory proposed by Holt, Bossler, Malinski and May (2016++); one of the few attempts to theorise vulnerability beyond analyses of correlated factors.

Findings on the age of victims are mixed. School based and random probability population samples are already limited by age in their sampling procedures, with the result that studies involving children under 11 are rare, apart from the EU Kids Online project which deliberately included children aged from 9 upwards (Livingstone et al., 2011a ++). In general, older adolescents (14-17) appear to experience more online-facilitated CSA including CSE than younger adolescents (12-14) (Baumgartner, Valkenburg and Peter, 2010++; Montiel, Carbonell, and Pereda 2016++; Tynes and Mitchell, 2014++). These ages reflect the age groups in the sample at the time the data was collected. However, Wachs et al. (2016+) found no significant differences in age for those who had online contact with an adult who was sexually grooming them and those who did not (Mean=14.2 v Mean = 14.6), and nor did Villacampa and Gomez (2017+).

**Age characteristics from CSA images:** Older children are more likely to send and receive self-generated sexual content including sexual images (Hasebrink et al., 2011++; Klettke et al., 2014++).

IWF (2015++) note that determining the ages of children from images over 16 is challenging, widening the category to 16-20 in their assessment to ensure inclusion of 16-18 year olds. A key finding was a significant difference in the severity of content involving children between 15 year old and under and those aged 16 and above (to 18). 17.5% of the images and videos retrieved involved children under 15 and almost half (46.9%) of this content was classified as in categories A or B<sup>32</sup>. For those over 16, just over a quarter (27.6%) was in category A or B. Thus, in this sample, younger children were more frequently the victims of severe online-facilitated CSA. Furthermore, 42.5% of the total Category A and B content was of children under 11.

IWF (2015++) analysis of images found that 'all of the content assessed as depicting children aged 15 years or younger had apparently been harvested from its original upload location and collected on third party websites, meaning that control over its

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<sup>32</sup> See glossary

removal or onward distribution had been lost' (p4). The circumstances (whether it was self-generated or not) in which material was originated could not be identified. However, 85.9% (n=573) of images or videos of children under 15 were created using a webcam and laptop and 'the children depicted could often be seen moving their laptop or typing on the laptop keyboard whilst the content was being created' (IWF, 2015, p16++). It should be noted that this migration from source signals a key feature of some online-facilitated CSA in that it continues the virtual sexual exploitation of a child for an indefinite period.

The analysis of webcam content in the IWF (2015++) study found that the time taken for children to engage sexually online was 'extremely short'. Although no temporal measure is given, they suggest this may reflect a change in online grooming behaviour, as in some instances children were sharing sexualised content with someone they had not interacted with before. In their study of what they term 'Sextortion', Wolak and Finkelhor (2016+) find that young people share images more quickly with newly acquired online contacts than they would do with someone they were in a relationship with. 27% of respondents in their study shared an image within one day of establishing a new online contact, compared to only 2% of those who knew the perpetrator in person. Although their sample was made up of self-selecting 18-25 year olds, the majority were teenagers who were asked to reflect back on their experiences when younger. CEOP (2013) notes that a key difference between on and offline grooming for CSA is both method and timescale; sexual grooming online occurs much faster, with perpetrators threatening children to comply almost as soon as contact is made. This difference is attributed to the "availability of thousands of potential victims online at any one time" combined with "the investment of small amounts of time by perpetrators" (CEOP, 2013, p 10).

Other technological features thought to contribute to the expansion of online grooming for CSA are:

1. Rise in accessibility and ownership of smartphones and tablets (IWF, 2015++);
2. The 'darknet', through which internet use can be hidden (CEOP, 2013);
3. Peer to Peer sharing; where large files of images (still and moving) can be shared via a decentralised network (CEOP 2013);
4. Larger screens and higher processing power of devices such as laptops make webcam easy to use (IWF, 2015++);
5. Developing distribution techniques; live video streaming of child sexual abuse, especially but not exclusively from resource poor countries (CEOP, 2013);
6. Technology allows a perpetrator to hide their true identity, both in relation to age and gender (Wolak and Finkelhor, 2016+);
7. Perpetrators can stalk victims online and threaten to share information and images publically (Wolak and Finkelhor, 2016+).

**Reported cases:** Although it is likely that younger children experience severe online-facilitated CSA they are less likely to be reported. Research on police cases, although limited by the fact that the data only represent cases where the police and other agencies have been involved, find a higher representation of adolescent children. Such studies are both large and small scale with samples ranging from 20 to 569 (see Table 3). Whilst sampling methods vary, the sampling frame is not stratified by age, gender or ethnicity in advance. Cases are usually sampled by type (e.g. suspected child sexual abuse) or period of interest (e.g. between 2010 and 2011). This important finding regarding the under reporting of young children has emerged from comparing the studies of internet content and reported cases, although it is not referred to in the research studies themselves and no explanation is recorded. We might hypothesise that it is in part due to the fact that infant and very young children may not understand what is happening to them or be able to verbalise their experience (NICE, 2017) but this is clearly an area where data is lacking.

In the US, the NJOV study found 71% of victims of online CSA were aged 12 and over (Mitchell 2011a++). Likewise, in Shannon's (2008+) study of 315 Police reports in Sweden over 60% of the victims were aged between 11-14. Shannon also notes that: the youngest group of victims (aged under 13) are subject to more Internet only contacts (44%) and fewer crimes committed at an offline meeting (8%). Katz, (2013+) in her analysis of investigative transcripts from cases (n=20) of online-facilitated CSA in Israel found that all were aged 11-14. During the investigative interviews, eight of the 20 children stated that they had met the perpetrator offline, which had resulted in sexual assault and or rape.

**CSE:** Amongst cases of CSE in the National Juvenile Prostitution Study (N-JPS) there is a significant difference in age between those whose exploitation involves the Internet in some way and those where it does not, with children under 15 more likely to be recruited and/or 'advertised' online than those aged 16-17 (Wells, et al., 2012++). The authors suggest that 'younger children' can be hidden in vague advertising online whereas it is much harder with offline street based exploitation to hide the age of the children.

### **Gender**

Several European and US studies report that girls are significantly more likely to be victims of online-facilitated CSA and CSE than boys (Baumgartner et al., 2010 ++; Davidson, DeMarco, Bifulco...and Puccia, 2016+; Helweg-Larsen, Schütt and Larsen, 2012++; Mitchell et al., 2013++; Mohler-Kuo, Landolt, Maier...and Schnyder 2014 ++; Tynes and Mitchell, 2014++; Wachs et. al. 2016 +). Although these cross-sectional

studies<sup>33</sup> cited above consistently find girls are at heightened risk of online sexual solicitation there are exceptions. For example, gender differences are not as significant in Asian samples (Wachs et. al., 2016+; Chang, Chiu, Miao...and Chiang, 2016++). Measures used to define online child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation vary across studies and there are clear indications that victim gender characteristics differ depending on the type of victimisation experienced. EU Kids Online reports 15% of 9-16 year olds had received a sexual message with gender differences described as 'negligible' but boys were more likely to have seen sexual images online. Of those children who experienced sexual content 25% were upset by it (4% of the total) and girls were 'more upset' (Hasebrink et al., 2011++) although this distinction disappears in relation to offline contact. Montiel et al. (2016++) find that in Spain, girls are significantly more likely to be victims of online grooming (24.2% v 9.4%, p <.05) and sexual pressure online (14.6 v 9.6, p <.05) but there were no gender differences in exposure to sexual content or sexual coercion. Gender differences in the data is tentatively attributed to popular stereotypes, which reinforce male aggression and violence and female passivity. In contrast, in one Spanish region, Villacampa and Gomez (2017+) report no significant gender differences in online grooming where the adult perpetrator specifically tried to get the child to talk about sex. However, girls were significantly more likely to be victims of grooming which commenced with them talking about themselves. The authors do not offer any explanation for this difference.

**Transgender:** US studies indicate that the risk of receiving unwanted and distressing sexual advances online is significantly higher for transgender young people. In one study, 45% of transgender young people experienced this in contrast to 11% for boys and 19% for girls who do not identify as transgender (Mitchell, Ybarra and Korchmaros, 2014++). Research on cyber dating abuse, which included being pressured into sending sexual images, supports this finding with rates of 56.3% for transgender young people in comparison to 23.3% v 28.8% (p<0.01) for others (Dank, Lachman, Zweig, and Yahner, 2014++).

***Self-generated sexual content/material involving children:*** Findings on gender differences for self-generated sexual content/material involving children are mixed. In a systematic review, Klettke et al. (2014++) report that:

- six out of the twelve studies they retrieved find no correlation between self-generated sexual content and gender;
- three find girls are more likely to send sexual content than boys;
- two find boys are more likely to receive such content.

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<sup>33</sup> i.e. those that collect data at a specific moment in time and consider two or more variables to determine patterns of association

However, girls are significantly over represented in self-generated sexual content found online (80.4% v 19.6%) (IWF, 2015++).

**Reported cases:** Analyses of police files also find that victims are more likely to be female. In Sweden, Shannon (2008+) analysed the data of 315 sexual offence reports held by the Police with 358 young people affected, of whom 92% were female. In the US National Juvenile Online Victimization (N-JOV) study, 82% of victims of Internet facilitated sex crimes where the child could be identified (N=316) were female (Mitchell et al., 2011a++). However, case data collected from the police inevitably misses a large proportion of victims, particularly boys. If boys are less likely to admit being upset by experiencing sexual content online (Hasebrink et al., 2011++), it maybe they are less likely to disclose online-facilitated CSA where they are victims. This should not be taken to mean that boys are not victims. For example, one of the N-JOV cases:

*'(I)nvolved a 32-year-old male offender who police found had established and was operating his own for-profit C[hild] P[ornography] website. They discovered more than 300,000 images of boys and more than 6,000 images of girls engaged in sex acts and various states of nudity on his several computers. The offender was not found to have produced the images' (Mitchell et al., 2011a, p 56).*

According to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) males account for a higher proportion of online sexual extortion than other CSA types (NCA, 2016+). In Spain, García, López and Jiménez (2014+) find boys are significantly more likely to be exposed to unwanted 'strong sexual content' (45.1% v 31.0%). Similarly, boys in Taiwan are significantly more likely to be exposed to unwanted 'online pornography' (25.8% v 19.1%) and here unwanted online sexual solicitation was also more frequent for boys (15.9% v 10.2%) (Chang et al., 2016++). This is an unusual finding and as the authors note it stands in contrast to other studies. The increased frequency of online unwanted experiences is attributed to boys' higher usage of internet chatrooms and online games; further research is necessary to determine if there is a cultural aspect to this gender difference.

### **Ethnicity**

The review identified little published evidence that met the quality criteria on the ethnicity of victims of online-facilitated CSA, either in terms of basic data collection or as a specific thematic feature. An exception is the study by Tynes and Mitchell (2014++), which found no significant differences in rates of solicitation of children for sexual purposes between black and non-black young people in YISS 3. Where ethnicity is recorded in other studies, it is difficult to estimate its relevance beyond the country in which data is collected. For example, the N-JOV study (Mitchell et al., 2010+) identifies 84% of cases where the CSA offence was internet-facilitated (n=

316) as 'non-Hispanic white', 5% as 'Hispanic white', 3% as 'non-Hispanic black', 4% as mixed race or other, 1% as Asian and 1% as 'American Indian or Alaskan Native'. Similarly, in the EU Kids Online study, being of minority ethnic identity varies across country. Thus, findings on ethnicity are unlikely to translate in the same way in other national contexts such as the UK.

***Self-generated sexual content/material involving children;*** Klettke et al (2014++) report three studies that found black and African American children are more likely than white or Latino children to send self-generated sexual content, although this is not supported by YISS 3 (Tynes and Mitchell, 2014++). However, it is notable that most of the self-generated content harvested from websites in the IWF study (2015++) appeared to involve children and young people described as 'from overseas'. This assessment was based on analysis of principally video content where background items, regional accents and explicit references make it possible to determine geographic location (IWF, 2015++). It has also been found that male immigrant children in Sweden were more likely to engage in "risk-taking sexually in both online and offline environment" (Jonsson et al., 2014++, p 187). The authors speculate that male migrant children may be more risk-taking sexually, although it may be the only way for these children to earn money to survive. The online CSA of migrant and refugee children is under researched despite a substantial body of literature on trafficking of children for sexual exploitation.

## **Disability**

Children with a disability have been identified as being more vulnerable than the general child population to sexual abuse offline (Stalker and McArthur, 2009). A systematic review of 17 included studies between 1990-2010 provides a pooled estimate of 13.7% for the prevalence of sexual violence offline for disabled children (Jones, Bellis, Wood... and Officer, 2012++). This compares to rates of 5% for sexual abuse, 6.1% attempts to coerce or force a child into CSA and 10.8% experiencing unwanted sexual exposure in the general UK child population (Radford et al., 2011++).

Research included in this REA indicated that disabled children may be at higher risk for online-facilitated CSA and that gender differences may be reversed; disabled boys may be at equal or greater risk (Mueller-Johnson, Eisner and Osbuth 2014++). Several tentative explanations are offered to account for this finding including that physical disability renders boys more vulnerable, whereas girls are seen as vulnerable a priori. An alternative explanation relates to the perpetrator who often is a peer; within this context "male-on-male sexual bullying [may be] reflective of dominance-related strategies to gain status within the peer group" (Mueller-Johnson et al., 2014++, p3198). Mohler-Kuo et al. (2014++) examined lifetime and past year sexual online victimisation in a sample of physically disabled (self-defined) Swiss

schoolchildren. All had higher prevalence when compared to non-physically disabled children but physically disabled boys were significantly more at risk: lifetime rates for males were 17.26% v 9.08% for females (OR 2.19, past year OR 2.01). Disabled children in the EU Kids Online study (comprising 6% of the sample<sup>34</sup>) found meeting new online contacts offline more upsetting and were also at heightened risk for seeing or receiving sexual content (Livingstone et al., 2011a++).

**Online-facilitated CSE:** Franklin and Smeaton (2017+) have produced the first study in the UK to identify and explore support services for children and young people with learning disabilities who are at risk of CSE. Adopting a mixed method approach, the authors surveyed all Local Authorities in England, interviews with 34 professionals and 27 children and young people. Whilst online risk emerges as a theme it is not extensively explored; the focus is on off line CSE. Findings about online risk are tentative; young people said that they use the Internet to relieve social isolation suggesting that this may put them at greater risk of online grooming. Heightened vulnerability to online-facilitated CSE is attributed in part to a lack of recognition by adults and society as a whole that children with learning disabilities have developing sexual needs, which contributes to “over protection, disempowerment, social isolation” in their lives (Franklin and Smeaton, 2017+, p476).

**Explaining disability as a vulnerability to online-facilitated CSA:** Kolpakova Ed (2012+) found disabled children had poorer skills relating to risk-management online. Moreover, they also find that disabled children are more likely to be socially isolated. As part of the ROBERT project spanning seven European countries, focus groups were held with children who were deemed vulnerable. Ten of the 27 focus groups involved disabled children<sup>35</sup>, ranging from 13-to 18+. Kolpakova et al., (2012++) finds that disabled children could give an account of how to keep safe in the off-line world but could not conceptualise what this might look like online. The implication is that children with disabilities may be at greater risk to online-facilitated CSA and CSE.

In contrast, Normand and Sallefranque (2016- ) hypothesise that greater parental and carer involvement in learning disabled children’s lives may instead be a protective factor. Their aim was to explore this and other hypotheses regarding ‘online sexual solicitation’ via a literature review. Whilst they found 57 papers related to online sexual solicitation, only two of those referred to children with learning disabilities and only one paper was based on empirical data (i.e. Wells and Mitchell, 2014). Consequently, most of their arguments regarding the vulnerability of

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<sup>34</sup> This compares with 6% in the general child population (ONS, 2014)

<sup>35</sup> These included physical disabilities, global developmental delay, down syndrome, dyslexia, learning difficulties (dyslexia), ASD, hearing-impairment.

children with learning difficulties in this paper are based on inferences from the literature regarding sexual abuse in general (not online).

### **Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) young people**

Studies explore whether LGBT young people may be at greater risk of online grooming with the hypothesis that it might be safer to explore sexuality online rather than off-line. This assumption manifests in the review of Barnardo's services for children at risk of CSE (Palmer, 2015 -). Support workers have identified a rise in the number of young gay males using their services after online contacts have resulted in abuse; suggesting that young gay males go online for social interactions and positive sexual identity confirmation that is much harder to source offline (Palmer, 2015-). Kolpakova et al. (2012 +) caution against such assumptions. Findings from five focus groups with LGB young people as part of the ROBERT project indicate that the sample had a good understanding of potential risk and employed a number of strategies to help them 'test' the identity of an online contact before they agreed to meet up in person.

However, as Staksrud, Ólafsson, and Livingstone (2013++) report, digital competence does not reduce risk of online-facilitated CSA for children in the EU Kids Online study and it is likely that increased exposure including talking about sex online will increase the vulnerability to online-facilitated CSA for LGBT young people. In a US study of cyber dating abuse (CDA), including sexual abuse, Dank (2014++) found being a victim of CDA in the total sample (n=3745) was 26.3% but was significantly higher for lesbian, gay and bisexual young people in comparison to heterosexual young people (37.2% v 25.7% p<0.01). A further US study finds that LGB youth are significantly more likely than heterosexual boys and girls to receive unwanted and distressing sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and sexual comments or gestures online. 42% of lesbian/queer girls, 41% of bisexual girls and 30% of gay/queer boys reported this, compared with 4% for heterosexual boys and 12% for heterosexual girls (Mitchell et al., 2014++).

### **Psychological Factors**

Psychological characteristics may make children more vulnerable to harm. The psychological factors that are most frequently explored in relation to online-facilitated CSA are depression, sensation seeking<sup>36</sup> and self-efficacy. For example, YISS 2 found that children who scored higher on a scale for depression were at higher risk of unwanted exposure to sexual content online (OR 2.3) (Wolak et al., 2007++).

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<sup>36</sup> Sensation seeking is defined as "the need for varied, novel and complex sensations and experiences and a willingness to take physical and social risks for the sake of such experience" (Zuckerman, 1979, p10).

Whilst victims of solicitation of children for sexual purposes were significantly more likely to score highly on a range of psychosocial factors as those measured by the Child Behaviour Checklist<sup>37</sup> (Mitchell, Finkelhor and Ybarra, 2007a++).

Participation in risky online behaviours is associated with solicitation of children for sexual purposes in several studies (Baumgartner et al., 2010++; Hasebrink et al. 2011++; Mitchell et. al. 2007a++). These include posting or sending personal information to people only met online, adding online only contacts to address books and talking about sex

The EU Kids Online project does not operationalise a definition of CSA/CSE and instead measures harm from experiences of unwanted sexual content or receiving unwanted requests for sexual information. The authors maintain a 'vulnerability' hypothesis was confirmed by their data;

*'(T)hat children with certain demographics (younger age, girls) and psychological features (high psychological difficulties, low self-efficacy and sensation seeking) have a more difficult time in coping with the risk they encounter and are more likely to experience harm'* (Hasebrink et al., 2011++, p52).

High scores in sensation seeking, being older and self-efficacy were associated with encountering more sexual content online. Hence, within our definition of CSE/CSA these psychological characteristics could also be interpreted as further increasing vulnerability even though the child does not acknowledge being harmed at the time.

Palmer (2015 -) likewise finds that there are three new groups of children who can be considered more vulnerable to online grooming; children with disabilities, children with mental health problems and children testing out their sexuality. Caution should be exercised in interpreting this body of evidence, which consist of a commentary on snapshot data from September 2014, as there is little detail on methodological approach or analysis. This data includes the finding that Barnardos

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<sup>37</sup> The Child Behaviour Checklist is a validated measure containing empirically based syndrome scales based on factor analyses coordinated across the forms.

- Anxious/Depressed
- Withdrawn/Depressed
- Somatic Complaints
- Social Problems
- Thought Problems
- Attention Problems
- Rule-Breaking Behavior
- Aggressive Behavior (<http://www.aseba.org/schoolage.html>)

have supported 259 children for support with CSE with an online component; the majority of whom were female (234). Moreover, Barnardos staff also note that they are supporting new groups of children and young people, those whom have never been known to support services before (Palmer, 2015-).

### **Looked after children**

Surprisingly there is a paucity of data on the experiences of looked after children/children in state care and online-facilitated CSA. Both studies that are included are tangential. Brown, Brady, Franklin and Sealey, (2016+) establish that living in residential care renders some children and young people more susceptible to offline CSE. Far less is known about the relationship, if any, between living in residential care and increased risk of online-facilitated child sexual abuse or exploitation. There are several reasons why young people in care might be more vulnerable; they have experienced adverse life circumstances leading to being in state care, they may be looking for someone to connect with who understands them and they are less likely to be supervised when online. One European study found that children who were currently living in residential care were less able to describe the behaviours of an individual who might pose a risk online in comparison to other distinct groups of vulnerable children such as those with disabilities and LGBT young people (Kolpakova, 2012 +). In particular, Kolpakova (2012+) noted that males might be more vulnerable as in their sample, they were more willing to meet unknown online contacts off-line.

### **Homeless and runaway children**

In a mixed methods study of sexually exploited runaway adolescents aged between 12-17 years seen at a Child Advocacy Centre (N = 62, 55 girls and 7 boys) in the US, Edinburgh (2015++) found many of the children were advertising sexual services on websites such as Backpage. Other studies of trafficking, including child victims, similarly note the use of mobile phones and websites such as Facebook and LinkedIn to advertise sexual services (Walby et al., 2016a). This online activity clearly increases the vulnerability of a child to further sexual exploitation.

### **Socio-Economic Status**

Relationships between socio-economic status (SES) and online-facilitated CSA and CSE have been analysed in both European and US research. Across Europe, the evidence suggests that children from higher SES groups may be more likely to experience unwanted sexual contact or exposure (Hasebrink et al., 2011++). In the US, the N-JOV study in the US found that 62% of victims of all forms of reported internet-facilitated child sexual abuse lived in households with incomes over \$20,000. A further analysis of victims where SNS were involved found they were more likely to live in suburban or urban areas with both biological parents in higher

income households ( $p<0.01$ ) (Mitchell et al., 2010++) than those without SNS involvement. All three YISS surveys included SES measures, but the analysis indicates that SES is not significantly associated with online-facilitated CSA and CSE. The YISS note that higher income households are overrepresented in their survey sample. This overrepresentation is likely to be an artefact of device availability and access to the Internet, which is a criterion for inclusion in many of the studies under review (Hasebrink et al., 2011++; Jones et al., 2012++). As device access and use has increased across all socio-economic groups since these studies were conducted any conclusions from these findings are limited.

### **Relationship to perpetrator**

As is the case in the context of offline CSA, victims of online-facilitated CSA identified in law enforcement cases are likely to know the perpetrator of the abuse. The N-JOV study (Mitchell et al., 2011a++) found that the perpetrator was known to the child in over half of cases, either as acquaintances (27%, including neighbours, teachers, family friends) or family members (26%). The study did not explore the difference between victims of online and offline CSA. However, this analysis was included in the N-JPV study (Wells, et al., 2012++) finding that online-facilitated 'juvenile prostitution' (CSE) cases were more likely to involve perpetrators who were family members or acquaintances (26% v 5% of non-online-facilitated cases). It is not clear from these studies whether the family member was also a member of the victim's household.

In a sample of UK, Irish and Italian adults, 15% ( $n=169$ ) were solicited online by someone they did not know during their childhood (Davidson et al., 2016+). 19% ( $n=214$ ) of the total sample were solicited by someone met online, and in addition to those not known, perpetrators were described as:

- a 'boyfriend/girlfriend at that time' (16%  $n = 183$ );
- a 'friend/acquaintance from school' (8%  $n = 93$ );
- a 'friend/acquaintance from somewhere else' (9%  $n = 104$ );
- 'someone else the respondents were interested in' (12%  $n = 140$ );
- someone else the respondents 'knew' (6%  $n = 71$ ).

Girls were significantly less likely to know the perpetrator than boys, which may suggest that boys are more suspicious of online strangers, lending support for tailored gender sensitive e-safety initiatives.

### **Poly-victimisation**

The majority of children will experience at least one adverse life event during their childhood. For example, in the US National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence

(NatSCEV) study, 70% of all children sampled were victims of peer and/or sibling abuse including bullying and 59% had been exposed to community violence (Mitchell et al., 2011a++). This compares with 63.2% and 66.5% respectively in the UK (Radford et al., 2011++) using similar measures. Thus, victimisation research finds that many children are likely to experience at least one form of victimisation. However, approximately 20% of children will experience multiple forms, referred to as poly-victimisation (Finkelhor, Ormrod and Turner, 2007). This term conceptualises the multiple and accumulative stressors that some children experience with evidence “that victimisations create vulnerability for other victimisations” (Finkelhor et al., 2010, p. 291). Primarily a concept used in America, several studies have considered if experience of previous victimisation, both online and offline, increases the risk of online-facilitated CSA and CSE.

Previous history of adverse childhood experiences (ACE)<sup>38</sup> does feature in the backgrounds of children who are subject to online-facilitated CSA and CSE in the US. Wolak et al., (2007++), in an analysis of the YISS 2 data, find that 37% of their sample (n=1422) report peer or other interpersonal victimisation in the past year. For victims of unwanted exposure to sexual content online this was 42% compared with 31% for those with no exposure ( $p < 0.5$ ). The relationship between previous history of physical or sexual abuse was not significant. However, the limited time frame of events in the past year is worth noting as it does not include any previous/historical episodes of abuse. Arrest data from a nationally representative longitudinal study of policing agencies does find that factors such as a history of physical or sexual abuse are significantly higher for victims of CSE ( $p < 0.001$ ) (Mitchell et al., 2011a). Victims were significantly more likely to report other forms of abuse from the same partner including non-sexual online dating abuse, sexual coercion, psychological abuse or physical violence ( $p < 0.001$ ). Finally, the NatSCEV study found 96% of victims of online abuse (including solicitation of children for sexual purposes) had experienced multiple forms of victimisation, as measured by the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire, concluding that online victimisation may be part of a ‘generalised vulnerability’ (Mitchell et al., 2011a++, p133).

European research lends support to this theory. Wachs et al. (2016+) tested whether ‘cyberbullying’ made children more vulnerable to online grooming. Results revealed significant direct effects of online bullying victimisation on the likelihood of having

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<sup>38</sup> This term originated in the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, which has followed child maltreatment victims since 1997 (see The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study". *cdc.gov*. Atlanta, Georgia: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention. May 2014).

experienced online grooming victimisation in the past ( $p < .001$ ) and on self-esteem ( $p < .001$ ). Poly-victimisation was also the most significant risk factor for school children in Spain (Monteil et al., 2016) and physically disabled children in Switzerland (Mueller-Johnson, 2014++).

### **Accumulative and situational vulnerability**

The direction of the relationship between poly-victimisation and online-facilitated CSA is not clear from research; whether prior victimisation predisposes towards a vulnerability to future abuse or whether it indicates an underlying vulnerability caused by some other factor.

One of the challenges is that these factors can accumulate over a significant period of time (a childhood) but only interact in harmful ways later on. Moreover, on occasions the trigger event can appear to be relatively insignificant (such as an argument with parents) but renders the child vulnerable at that moment in time; the implication being that predicting which children may be more vulnerable to online CSA is challenging. Research based on interviews with children and young people who were subject to online-facilitated CSA illustrate the challenges well.

Quayle, et al., (2012+) interviewed 27 children subject to offline sexual abuse because of online interactions. The young people were aged between 12 -18 and 82% were female. A common narrative is of a young person who is feeling vulnerable and isolated, often with a history of abuse, who uses the internet like many other children and young people to shape their sense of self. However, these young people also use online communication as a form of comfort, to 'self-soothe' (Quayle et al., 2012+, p37). After an online exchange, that is generally perceived positively, the young person meets the perpetrator. At this point, for nearly all, the situation moves out of their control and they are sexually abused.

A group of papers based on one study highlight the nuances and intricacies of individual cases of online-facilitated CSA (Whittle, et al., 2013 +; Whittle, et al., 2015+). Whittle, et al. (2013+) and Whittle et al., (2015 +) explore the accounts of victims (n=8) of online-facilitated CSA through individual interviews. The sample is drawn from cases known to CEOP<sup>39</sup> and in six of the eight cases, a perpetrator had been charged and convicted. The interview data was used to hypothesise about the risk, vulnerability of the young people who became victims and to gather their views on the process and its impact on them. The research is significant in that it tracks the process of solicitation of children for sexual purposes from the perspective of the young person and explores how they made sense of it. Each young person's experience is quite different as summarised below (see Table 4). Blank spaces occur

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<sup>39</sup> Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre

when the data could not be attributed a specific child; however, all the young people experienced online solicitation for sexual purposes.

Of significance, is that each of the girls involved perceived the perpetrator to be their "boyfriend". Such beliefs are also common in offline accounts of child sexual exploitation (Palmer and Foley, 2016). In relation to the young people's accounts, Whittle, Hamilton-Giachritsis and Beech (2014+) find that three children in the study sample (n=8) had good historical and current relations with parents but that "*this relationship was temporarily jeopardised prior to the offence (sometimes due to illness, bereavement or work)*" (Whittle et al., 2014, p1188). The hypothesis is that this situational vulnerability can lead the child to act or respond in atypical ways and thus to become vulnerable to being groomed online.

**Table 4: Examples of features of online-facilitated CSA from victim accounts**

Gender	Age – at time of contact	Online	Offline	Perpetrator details
Female	12	Spoke first online	Met offline within days led to multiple episodes of sexual intercourse	Male, 28 years old, who lived nearby
Female	12			Male, aged 17, case treated as 'sexting'
Female	12			Male
Female	13			Male
Female	14	Sent sexual photos after a few months	Met in his home town, ran away together for a week, 1 episode of CSA	Male, 49 years old
Female	14	Spoke for several weeks online. Shared sexual photos and videos	Met and had sexual intercourse on 2 occasions	Male, aged 20
Male	13	Sent semi-naked photos		Same male in both cases but masquerading as female online. Known to both boys offline.
Male	14	Sent semi-naked photos		

(Source: Summarised from data in Whittle et al., 2013 and Whittle et al., 2015)

In Shannon's (2008+) study this situational vulnerability does not emerge until the

young person find themselves in an offline situation from which it was impossible to escape. Based on analysis of Swedish police reports of sexual offences committed against children under 18 where they met the perpetrator online (n=315), Shannon provides rich detail of how this vulnerability emerges off-line;

*"these children had most commonly sneaked out of the house, run away, or lied to their parents about where they were going, and they had often agreed to meet the perpetrator in another town, which they were not familiar with, and where there was nobody they could turn to for help" (Shannon, 2008+, p176).*

Of note in the study is the different responses of those who arrange to meet a perpetrator offline; some walked away at the last minute without contact, others made contact. Of those who met a perpetrator, most (no exact figures given) were sexually assaulted at that first meeting usually whilst they were under the influence of alcohol given to them by the perpetrator. Few studies have explored in detail what makes a young person change their mind and walk away from a potentially dangerous situation when they agree to meet someone offline.

### **Internet Use**

Certain online behaviours are associated with higher rates of online-facilitated CSA and CSE. However, many of these behaviours occur within a broader context of children and young people's positive and healthy internet use (Hasebrink et al., 2011++; Baumgartner et al., 2010++). Several studies highlight the role of the internet as a legitimate or important space to develop new friendships and for some, romantic relationships for young people (Carrick-Davies, 2011+; Kolpakova, 2012 +; Mishna et al., 2009+; Stanley, 2016+; Baumgartner et al., 2010). Adopting a participatory approach, Carrick-Davies (2011+) explores risks that vulnerable young people, excluded from schools and being taught in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), encounter online and through their mobile phones. Mixed methods, including an online survey tool with PRU staff and four semi-structured focus groups with young people aged between 15-17, explored general online experiences. The children did not mention online grooming in their discussions although they did refer to concerns about harassment. The frequency and intensity of online use by these young people is particularly striking: *"mobile communication is now the single most important activity many vulnerable Y(oung) P(eople) rely on to give them identity, connection and a sense of community"* (Carrick-Davies, 2011+, p 2).

One question is whether different ways of using the internet may make some children more vulnerable to online-facilitated CSA and CSE. A number of factors are relevant; device type used to go online, location where device is used and then the different platforms used by children and young people. Perpetrators in 28% cases

(n=1,631) asked young people to switch to different platforms to interact further (Wolak and Finkelhor, 2016).

### **Time online**

OfCom (2015) report that in the UK children 8-11 spend an average of 11.1 hours per week online and that this increases to 18.9 hours for 12-15s. Time spent online and the number of activities children participate in online may be an indicator of vulnerability. Victims of solicitation for sexual purposes are likely to spend more than 2 hours per day on the Internet than other children (13% v 45%) (Mitchell et al., 2013++). Hasebrink et al. (2011++) put forward a 'usage hypothesis', which was confirmed in their data;

*'(T)hat those who use the internet more and in more ways as measured by places used, number of activities online, minutes of use and risky online activities (such as adding people to an address book who had not been met face-to-face) would also experience more sexual content online'*

(Hasebrink et al., 2011, p48).

This content may be more or less harmful but includes content that fits within our definition of online-facilitated CSA and CSE. Similar findings regarding higher than average internet usage and online-facilitated CSA and CSE vulnerability are reported in single country studies including Denmark (Helweg-Larsen et al., 2012++), the US (Mitchell et al., 2007b++), Switzerland (disabled children only) (Mueller-Johnson et al., 2014++) and Taiwan (Chang et al., 2016++).

None of the retrieved studies examined interaction effects between time spent online and other vulnerabilities.

### **Platform type**

Both chat room and SNS use are significantly higher for solicited young people ( $p < .001$ ). However, cases initiated in chat rooms have decreased between 2000 and 2010 (64% v 16%) while SNS cases have increased significantly (0% to 58%,  $p < .001$ ). This reflects a broader change in internet activity by children (Mitchell et al. 2013++). YISS found no significant difference in internet use for children who had unwanted exposure to sexual content across several measures, with the exception of use of file sharing programs to download images from the internet (OR 1.9) (Wolak et al. 2007++). No further information on these programs is provided.

Some online platforms have also been associated with vulnerability. The YISS study finds that children who frequently use chat rooms and SNS may be more vulnerable to online-facilitated CSA and /CSE than those who do not (Mitchell et al., 2007a++). The same study finds that email, instant messaging and blogging are also significantly associated with higher risk. Villacampa and Gomez (2017+) distinguish between

vulnerability to being groomed by a peer, which is significantly associated with SNS use rather than chat room use (55% v 27%) and grooming by an adult. An important gap in research is the increasing use of applications (apps) to access online content and activities. These are potentially a high-risk platform for online-facilitated CSA, owing to geolocation features, ease of access and mobile use, yet are under-explored in any large-scale survey in relation to children and young people. A few studies are beginning to emerge with college students that reveal the popularity of dating apps and the heightened risk of sexual abuse in encounters first established online (Choi, Ha Wong and Tak Fong, 2016).

Staksrud et al., (2013++) propose a complex relationship between internet use and harm that may be mediated by digital skills and the design or affordances (such as privacy settings) of different platforms. Logistic regression analysis of the EU Kids Online dataset finds that children who use SNS encounter more sexual content risks and are also more likely to meet up with someone they first met online. Those with higher levels of digital competence are also more likely to experience sexual content risks. This may change with rapidly changing levels of digital skill development since this data was collected.

Where the sexual content, request or meeting first occurs seems to influence the degree of harm felt by children. A child is significantly more likely to be upset meeting a new contact offline if the first contact was by email and more likely to be upset receiving requests for sexual information initiated in a gaming website ( $p < .05$ ). No explanation is offered for this (Staksrud et al., 2013++) but it may be that at the time of data collection contact through these activities was made by more aggressive perpetrators (that adults were more likely to use email, for example) or alternatively, that children did not expect sexual solicitation in these activities.

1% of children in the EU Kids Online data set participated in a SNS. It is within this context that some children freely share personal information, including to new and unknown contacts and this may make them more vulnerable. That is, the more children engage in risky behaviour online, the more they may encounter online-facilitated CSA and CSE. Such risky behaviour includes talking about sex online, posting or sending personal information including photos and videos and adding people they first met online to their friends list and all are significantly related to online-facilitated CSA and CSE ( $p < .001$ ) (Mitchell et al., 2007++). The EU Kids Online study measures three elements of risky behaviour; the display of address and phone number on SNS profiles, having more than 100 contacts and making an SNS profile public. Having a public profile was only found to increase the probability of meeting new online contacts offline, whereas the other behaviours (i.e. having more than 100 contacts and displaying contact details on SNS profiles) increases the probability of seeing and receiving sexual content and meeting someone offline (all  $p < .05$ ) (Staksrud et al., 2013++). Since this study was completed the average number of

friends in SNS has grown; for example, in the US the average number of friends for children aged 12-17 on Facebook in 2014 was 521 (Statista, 2017). This therefore weakens claims of contacts being a risk factor and future analysis may be improved by a focus on the nature and type of connections.

### **Using the internet to access adult pornography**

Children are exposed to adult pornography online. This includes children who actively seek adult pornographic material and those who are unintentionally exposed (through pop ups or friends sending links to sites). Martellozzo, Monaghan, Adler...Horvath (2016+), in their recent study of experiences of children in the UK, finds that children were as likely to find pornography by accident as to find it deliberately. It is predominantly boys who actively seek adult pornography online (Martellozzo et al., 2016+) aged 14-16 (Smahel and Wright 2014++) or 14-17 (Stevens, 2012++). This finding is consistent across a 5-country European country study (Stanley et al., 2016+). However, the rates of exposure to online adult pornography vary between boys in each country and the lowest rate was found in England at 39% (Stanley, et al., 2016+). These findings must be set within a developmental context; the internet has not caused them to seek out adult pornography but provides a different and easier medium to do so. Of interest to this REA is whether the viewing of adult pornography affects or influences children and young people to sexually coerce other children and young people? Stanley et al., find that "regular viewing of online pornography was associated with a significantly increased probability of having sent sexual images/ messages" (Stanley et al., 2016, p.4+) although there is no explanation given for this finding. As the authors acknowledge, a definition of adult pornography was not offered to the research participants so the data could include children seeing either adult pornography or child sexual abuse images.

### **Meeting someone offline**

According to Hasebrink et al. (2009+), meeting a contact made online in the offline world is the least common but arguably most dangerous risk. Data from the EU Kids Online project reveals considerable consistency in the figures across Europe; around 9% (1 in 11) online teens went to such meetings, rising to 1 in 5 in Poland, Sweden and the Czech Republic. Children most likely to meet an online contact offline scored higher on self-efficacy and sensation seeking measures, participated in riskier online and offline behaviours, and had parents who placed fewer restrictions on their internet activities. Rates were similar for boys (9%) and girls (8%) but differed significantly by age (2% of 9-10 year olds v 16% of 15-16 year olds) (Staksrud et al., 2013++). 11% of those who met such a contact face to face were upset by it, two thirds of these contacts were with a child of their own age, and 'a few said something sexual happened' (Livingstone et al., 2011a++, p27).

Quayle and Newman (2016++) find that a third of all requests from perpetrators to victims were to meet offline but that only 7.83% result in contact. This finding is based on analysis of public reports about suspected grooming and trafficking to a Canadian helpline. Contact does not necessarily lead to sexual assault but it is at this point children and young people are at their most vulnerable. Age and identity deception is not always a feature of these relationships, which children believe to be genuine (Whittle et al., 2015+). Even though children are often aware of the potential risk of meeting a stranger, the grooming process can be so successful that it reduces this sense of risk: '*he was such a nice person that they did not believe it could be dangerous to meet him*' (Shannon 2008+, p175).

### **Relationship between offline and online experience**

A number of behaviours in young people are considered to indicate heightened risk of harm to child development such as early use of alcohol and drugs, delinquency, non-school attendance and sexual intercourse (with multiple partners). The evidence on the relationship between offline behaviours and being a victim of online grooming is unclear and never presented as causal although some correlations can be identified. Wolak et al. (2007++) found significant associations between rule breaking behaviour (as measured by the Child Behaviour Checklist) and wanted exposure to sexual content online ( $p<0.5$ ).

Risk migration is the term coined by Livingstone et al. (2011a++) to describe the interrelationship between on and offline risks. They note that of children and young people who use the internet (n 25,142), those who saw sexual content online (14%) or received sexual messages (15%) were more likely to be exposed to a range of offline risk behaviours. These included being in trouble with teachers or the police, being drunk and having sexual intercourse.

### **Theoretical approaches**

The majority of theoretical approaches were inductive and very few papers attempt to explain vulnerability deductively by testing out a specific theory. The most common approach is to conduct multi-variate and logistic regression or factor analyses on cross-sectional or longitudinal survey data to explore a range of characteristics associated with the likelihood of risk of online-facilitated CSA. Whilst this is helpful, it does not explain why these factors may emerge as increasing the probability of online-facilitated CSA and CSE, leaving researchers to hypothesise possible causes. Inductive research is also limited by the variables selected for measurement; vulnerability is thus arrived at retrospectively. The deductive method begins with a theory and tests it out.

One of the few deductive examples in our data set was Holt et al. (2016++), who offer a variant of routine activity theory by combining routine activity theory with

Gottfried and Herschi's (1990) theory of crime. In this framework, firstly, 'a motivated offender, suitable target, and lack of capable guardians must converge in time and space for crime to occur' and secondly, it is theorised that 'individuals with low self-control make impulsive decisions that increase exposure to motivated offenders, decrease the utility of guardians, and generally increase their vulnerability of victimization' (Holt et al., 2016++, p 109-110). The theory was tested on a sample of school children in Kentucky (n=439) and found some support. Increased exposure to opportunistic perpetrators and low self-control (using a validated measure) increased being asked to talk about sex online. The presence of peers who tried to get the child to talk about sex was a significant predictor for victimisation. Gender differences remained significant throughout and separate models were therefore developed for boys and girls. Girls were more likely to be victimised if they had a SNS profile and peers who viewed sexual materials online. Boys were more likely to be victimised if they viewed sexual materials and posted pictures of themselves online. The significance of guardian or computer mediation disappeared at this point although had been shown to reduce risk marginally in the initial analysis. This theory begins to identify how girls and boys appear to be differently vulnerable as it suggests that girls are more likely be victimised in the context of peer relationships, whereas boys may be more vulnerable to opportunistic perpetrators who observe sexual behaviour and content generated by the victim.

#### **Summary of the evidence on characteristics and vulnerabilities**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Findings</b>
<b>What do we know and can be confident about?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Girls are more likely to be victims of reported online-facilitated CSA</b></li> <li><b>Although younger children (9-11) are less likely to experience online-facilitated CSA and CSE it might be of a more serious nature and more upsetting when they do</b></li> <li><b>Approximately one quarter of reported cases involve a family member as the victim's perpetrator</b></li> <li><b>Offline victimisation from a range of adverse child experiences makes children more vulnerable to online victimisation</b></li> <li><b>Certain characteristics make children more vulnerable to online-facilitated CSA; having psychological difficulties</b></li> <li><b>Above average internet use increases vulnerability when interacting with other characteristics</b></li> </ul>

<p><b>What can we be less confident about?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Boys and transgender children are also victims and may be over represented for specific types of online-facilitated CSA and CSE</li> <li>● Vulnerability is diverse; boys and girls are vulnerable in different ways, as are disabled children and children living in varying cultural contexts</li> <li>● Between a third and a half of victims may already know the perpetrator</li> <li>● Some platforms may enhance vulnerability but these change over time as children migrate to new platforms</li> </ul>
<p><b>What don't we know?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How ethnicity, culture or global region of residence may be associated with victimisation particularly for transnational online-facilitated CSA and CSE</li> <li>● Differences in victim characteristics between peer and adult perpetrated online-facilitated CSA and CSE</li> <li>● How victim characteristics and vulnerabilities have changed in a rapidly changing online environment</li> <li>● How different sources of vulnerability interact</li> <li>● How to identify when a child/young person becomes 'situationally' vulnerable</li> <li>● Which children and what contexts increase vulnerability to transnational online-facilitated CSA (where either the victim or the perpetrator is in the UK)</li> </ul>

### Section 3: Resilience

Resilience in its conventional meaning is the capacity to return to a steady state after experiencing a negative event (Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker, 2000). In relation to child abuse, it does not mean that a child is not harmed but rather, having experienced harm, it does not have continuing adverse impact. It differs from primary prevention, which is directed at stopping an incident of online-facilitated CSA from occurring in the first place. In the included research, resilience to harm from online-facilitated CSA was most frequently analysed in terms of 'not being bothered' or 'distressed' by potentially harmful sexual content or online solicitation for sexual purposes and by mediating factors such as parenting quality, parent mediation of online activity and levels of social support.

#### **Resilience develops in response to exposure to online risk**

Many children show resilience to a broad spectrum of online risk, of which exposure to sexual content or sexual solicitation is a small part. These broader risks include cyberbullying, online harassment, and what Wisineiski et al. (2016+) call 'information sharing breaches', when a child shares information about another without consent. Children and young people employ a range of strategies to deal with different threats and risks, enabling them to develop a portfolio of online skills. In Wisineiski et al. (2016+) American study focusing on experiences and responses to different forms of online risk, children adopted a range of active strategies including 'laughing' about unwanted content and simply deleting it. Sixty-eight children aged 13-17 recorded their weekly online experiences for eight weeks. The diary was pre-coded so that participants had to select if their risk experience(s) online were about information sharing problems, online harassment, sexual solicitation and exposure to sexual content. The researchers analysed the results looking for risk levels, how children managed the risks they experienced and what helped them cope. Only three of the sample sent sexual messages. However, 28% noted at least one sexual solicitation in the period (it is unclear if this was from a peer or an adult). Two girls (14 and 15 years) were asked for offline meetings, one of whom met the individual, was given alcohol and then sexually assaulted (Wisineiski et al., 2016+).

Developing digital skills and literacy enables most children to manage a degree of risk online (Livingstone and Görzig, 2014++; Ringrose et al., 2012 +; Wisniewski, et al., 2016 +). This includes the risk of being exposed to unwanted sexual content, being approached by a stranger online to become 'friends', requests to send sexual images and requests to meet offline. Children and young people cope with these risks in a number of ways. A distinction is made between active and passive coping strategies. Active coping strategies involve blocking and deleting contacts that children no longer feel comfortable with and telling someone about their experience. Passive coping strategies include stopping online use or avoidance, a strategy

adopted by 18% - 25% of children in the EU Kids Online study (D'Haenens, Vandonink and Donoso, 2013++). The strategy adopted may depend on the type of risk experienced: the YISS 3 study found young people who reported sexual solicitation were more likely to use active coping strategies whilst those exposed to sexual material used passive strategies (Priebe, Mitchell and Finkelhor, 2013++). They also found that young people who described themselves as very upset or embarrassed were more likely to disclose serious sexual solicitation to their parents. Other than being upset, being female and living with both biological parents, few other characteristics were found to be predictive of disclosure. However, it is not clear how effective telling others was in reducing the harm and building resilience.

Certain psychological characteristics are associated in research with the likelihood of successfully negotiating online risks, including that of a sexual nature. Children, but especially girls are noted to develop resourceful ways of managing the continuous sexualised pressure both on and off-line such as; lying about having a boy/girlfriend, delaying and deferring requests, and being assertive (Ringrose et al., 2012+). These methods resonate with the concept of self-efficacy (a belief in one's ability to successfully accomplish a task or goal), which was identified by Hasebrink et al. (2011++) as promoting resilience. Self-efficacy was one of the psychological variables explored by Hasebrink et al. (2011++) using a four item scale adapted from Schwazer and Jerusalem (1995). They find that there is no gender difference in relation to self-efficacy and children who meet an online contact offline. The potential for harm in such situations is more likely to result from being younger, having lower levels of self-efficacy and if the child already has 'psychological difficulties' (measured by Goodman's Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire).

Another psychological characteristic associated with high internet use and positive exposure to risk is 'sensation seeking' behaviours. Sensation seeking behaviour is characterised by children and young people who seek out new experiences, take risks [on and offline] and are disinhibited (Livingstone and Görzig, 2014++). An analysis of the EU Kids online data tested whether sensation seeking provided resilience to harm from receiving sexual messages on the basis that sensation seekers may find these experiences 'more pleasurable' (Livingstone and Görzig, 2014++). Some support for sensation seeking as a protective factor was found, but this reduced when gender (being female), age (being younger) and psychological difficulties were included.

### **Does all high-risk content cause harm?**

Resilience strategies also vary depending on the emotional response to the risk. EU Kids online have adopted a model distinguishing between risk of seeing or receiving sexual and unwanted content online versus risk of being harmed by it. Children who are younger and female are more likely to experience distress whereas older children

tend to show more resilience (Hasebrink et al., 2011).

### **1. Not bothered**

In the EU Kids Online data, the more likely a child was to see sexual images the less likely they were to be bothered by it (Lobe, Livingstone, Ólafsson and Vodeb, 2012++). This may be because some children seek out explicit sexual images as a way of experimenting and learning about sex. Other studies reinforce the hypothesis that children are not always bothered by exposure to sexual content online (Smahel and Wright, 2014++; Wisniewski et al., 2016+).

### **2. Actively seeking out new 'risky experiences'.**

Studies by Quayle et al .2012+, Wisniewski et al. 2016+ and Whittle et al. 2013+ all find that some of their sample seek sexual content or contact online. For some young people this appears to be no more than a curiosity about sex (Quayle et al., 2012+). Significantly, other young people can be distinguished by the fact they actively seek high risks experiences online (Wisniewski, 2016 +). In the context of this study, high-risk behaviours include sharing sexual images online and engaging in sexual contact off line. However, other studies suggest a link between high-risk off line behaviours and high-risk online behaviours. Livingstone et al. 2011a++ define this process as 'risk migration'. The direction of this migration is not clear.

### **3. Offline contact within the context of a perceived 'relationship'**

Within the research, another profile emerged of young people who claim to share sexualised images and even meet someone offline out of choice (it is often unclear if this is a peer or an adult). There are multiple aspects to consider in balancing a child's right to 'agency' versus their right to be protected. Quayle et al. (2012+) find that a few of their sample had chosen to meet offline to have a sexual encounter; more often this was an actual exchange, with a young person asking for money in return for a sexual act. Far more of the young people in their study shared images and met offline in the context of what they understood to be a developing romantic relationship.

### **Prevention messages may promote resilience**

The three waves of the YISS study show a significant decline in solicitation of children for sexual purposes over the last decade and an increase in children disclosing solicitation incidents to friends. This leads the researchers to speculate that prevention messages may have had an impact; in 2005, 38% of victims had received preventative education from schools and 27% from law enforcement whilst in 2010 this had risen to 59% and 49% respectively. However, there is little evidence for this claim. A systematic review of programmes aimed at preventing cyber abuse found only three interventions meeting robust evaluation criteria (i.e. using pre-/post-test measures and control group participants who did not receive the prevention campaigns) since 2000 (Mishna, et al., 2011++). Two of these were aimed at

preventing risk online including sexual victimisation risks. Both were associated with an improvement in internet safety knowledge but had no effect on risky behaviour (Mishna et al., 2011++).

### **Digital skills**

Staksrud et al., (2013++) in an additional analysis of EU Kids Online, explore whether digital competence affords resilience from harm. They find a complex relationship; children with higher levels of digital skills encounter more risks online but, contrary to their hypothesis, this does not reduce the amount of harm they experience. However, harm appears to be related to platform; those who receive sexual messages from a gaming platform are more likely to be upset by it, as are children who meet online contacts through email and then go on to meet them offline. The authors propose that advising SNS users to ensure they 'really know' their contacts, keep their profile private and not display personal information would reduce risk.

### **Technology driven resilience**

Research by Rashid et al. (2013) resulted in the development of software to identify deception by adults grooming children online. The program uses Natural Language Processing to detect age and gender in computer mediated communications. The tool was successfully adopted by law enforcement and used to aid investigations of possible grooming offences. Applications are beginning to appear in mainstream use. For example, "tootoot"<sup>40</sup> is a reporting platform designed for children to use in schools that encourages them to message any worries about bullying and unwanted behaviours online. These technology driven approaches may help to make children more resilient by giving children tools that enable them to protect themselves from harm or to report to others more easily. However, as with most prevention initiatives, they have yet to be rigorously evaluated.

### **Gaps in the evidence: What cannot be answered or addressed**

Several validated scales are used to measure resilience, such as the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (Liebenberg, Ungar, and Vijver, 2012). However, we found no evidence of the application of such scales in the research reviewed here. Conclusions about resilience are therefore necessarily tentative, arrived at from a synthesis of the findings from the included studies. Future research might consider application of existing scales to explore resilience more comprehensively and enable analysis of a wider range of factors that might mediate the risk of online-facilitated CSA. However, current scales were developed to measure resilience in the offline

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<sup>40</sup> <https://tootoot.co.uk/>

environment and further work is required to establish their relevance and validity in testing resilience in online activities and contexts.

#### **Summary of evidence on resilience to online-facilitated CSA**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Findings</b>
<b>What do we know and can be confident about?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Children develop their own strategies to cope with online-facilitated CSA. If they succeed this is likely to be related to psychological characteristics such as sensation seeking and self-efficacy, although these are not guaranteed to offer resilience</li><li>● The more upset or distressed a child is by online-facilitated CSA the more likely they are to tell others; usually friends or parents</li><li>● Children are unlikely to tell others if they are embarrassed or afraid</li></ul>
<b>What can we be less confident about?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Prevention programmes may help to improve Internet safety knowledge but may not reduce risky behaviour</li><li>● Technology driven approaches may increase resilience in online environments</li></ul>
<b>What don't we know?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● What works in building resilience, for whom, when and how?</li></ul>

#### Section 4: Self-generated sexual content/material involving children

This section addresses the relationship between self-generated sexual material and online-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation. Self-generated sexual material potentially comprises a wide range of media including:

- Still photographs, including those that are time limited and disappear from the receiver very quickly (i.e. 30 seconds);
- Videos, taken on the phone or via webcam;
- Blogs;
- Vlogs (video blogs);
- Avatars;
- Text messages;
- Emails.

Self-generated sexual content/material involving children can include posing partially undressed, naked, or exposing genitals, masturbation and live webcam recordings of sexual intercourse, or other sexual acts (Jonsson, et al., 2014++). According to Smahel and Wright (2014++) such sexual communication is not commonly perceived as problematic by young people; in fact it may be done intentionally for amusement. However, Ringrose et al. (2012+) and Stanley et al. (2016+) both highlight the gender norms that make girls and young women feel pressured to comply with requests for sexual talk and images both on and offline as part of their everyday negotiations with friends and peers.

Such activities are also covered by the term 'sexting', of which there is no single agreed definition. There are several components to the concept of sexting. First, it involves the intentional sharing of sexualised images of the self with another or receiving such electronic communication (Klettke et al., 2014++). The phenomena occurs between peers, irrespective of whether they have any form of intimate relationship. Some authors limit sexting to just the sharing of images or videos whilst others include text messages of a sexualised nature (Klettke et al., 2014++).

'Sexualised' is not always clearly defined, with the IWF (2015++) stating that it must include nude or semi-nude images or 'erotic' communication. This communication can be limited to just cellular phone use (Klettke et al., 2014++) or via the Internet (Kopecký, Hejsek, Kusá...and Marešová, 2015-) and SNS. Walker, Sanci and Temple-Smith (2013+) note that sexting is not a term used by young people and that there is no single word that captures a growing phenomenon. Moreover, the idea of 'voluntary sexual exposure' (Jonsson et al., 2014++) is complicated by the age of the child and their developmental level; a child may choose to share an image of themselves without realising what the online consequences of this might be. Finally sexting is not gender neutral; according to several studies girls face considerable pressure to share sexual images (Cooper, et al., 2016+; Ringrose et al., 2012+; Walker et al., 2013 -; Wilkinson , Whitfield, Hannigan...Hayter, 2016 +).

Several literature reviews explore the phenomena of 'sexting' (Cooper, et al., 2016+: Wilkinson et al., 2016+). A systematic review of empirical and non-empirical studies into young people and 'sexting' found 88 studies from 2009 to 2014. The search criteria extend beyond a focus on under 18's to include up to 25's. In relation to the focus of REA, they find that sexting can move from consensual to non-consensual amongst peers and that some 'vulnerable<sup>41</sup>' children "may unwillingly become the victims of unwanted sexual solicitations or exploitation" (Cooper et al., 2016+, p 712). As this research includes 'young adults', findings need to be considered with caution, although the authors' suggestion that sexting should be understood within adolescent social and digital development resonates across the age groups.

Wilkinson et al. (2016+) conducted a meta-ethnographic synthesis on five research papers on sexting, with a view to informing health care practitioners about the phenomena. There is little in their analysis that directly addresses solicitation of children for sexual purposes although they do establish 'costs and benefits' of sexting as one of their core four themes.

### **Prevalence**

Sexting behaviours appear to be on the increase amongst peers. Random probability samples from the US between 2009-2012 give a mean prevalence rate of receiving sexually suggestive texts of 15.64% (Klettke et al., 2014++). This is similar to the rate found in the EU Kids Online study during the same period (2009-10) for receiving a sexual message<sup>42</sup> (15% of 9-16 year olds). It is not clear if these sexual messages are from peers or adults (Hasebrink et al., 2011++).

The Safeguarding Teenage Intimate Relationships (STIR) project found just under half of a pan European sample (n= 3277) of 14-17 year olds in a boyfriend or girlfriend relationship sent and received sexts (Stanley et al., 2016+), illustrating that sexting is a normalised and reciprocal activity within some peer relationships. As a multi country study, there were national differences so the English sample (n=401 girls and 323 boys) reported the highest rates (44% of girls and 32% of boys sent sexts and 49% of girls and 47% of boys received sexts). Approximately three quarters of those sending also received sexts, confirming that sexting is often a mutual peer activity. Higher rates found in the STIR project suggest that the sending and receiving of sexual messages and images may be increasing, although their sample only included teenagers in dating relationships. As part of a study into young people's use of pornography, Martolazzo et al. (2017) asked their sample why they take and share nude or semi-nude photos of themselves; 69% wanted to take such photos and 20%

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<sup>41</sup> Understood in this study as having a history of child abuse, depression, social isolation or lack of family and community/peer support

<sup>42</sup> In this study sexting is limited to the sending of sexual messages and does not include images

did not. Again, a gender difference is apparent with girls sharing images because they have been asked to whereas boys choose to share their images.

### **Request for images from adults**

Despite the growing body of research on sexting very little makes an explicit link between sexting and online-facilitated CSA. This distinction is complicated by definitions of choice and coercion as well as a lack of clarity in some studies as to whether they are referring to peer exchange or the sharing of sexualised images by a child with an adult. In two of the included studies, children and young people reported that they were asked to produce and share sexual images, usually in response to a perpetrator's request (Leander et al., 2008 ++; Quayle and Newman, 2016++). Leander's (2008++) detailed analysis of police interviews and records of chat logs between one perpetrator and multiple female victims (n=68), aged between 11-19 at time of contact, demonstrate a gradated response. This research analyses a high profile single case in Sweden, in which a male perpetrator groomed girls online masquerading as a female recruiter for a modelling agency. Although the study focuses on the discrepancies in victim accounts (despite online evidence confirming contact/ self-generated material being shared), the relevant data for this REA concerns the range and frequency of the behaviours of the young people involved, including:

- The majority of victims discussed sexual preferences (84%);
- The possibility of meeting up (65%);
- Sent nude photos (40%);
- Participated in websex (28%);
- Took clothes off in front of a live webcam (19%).

There is also a discrepancy between what a perpetrator requests and what sexualised behaviours the child or young person is prepared to engage in. Quayle and Newman's (2016++) study of public reports to an online site, found that 93.37% of perpetrators (both young people and adults) requested images from a child/young person. A third of the sample, received a request to meet offline although actual contact was recorded in 7.38% (n=13).

For some children, image sharing was understood to be part of a developing romantic relationship (Whittle et al., 2015 +). In contrast, others have told researchers that they experienced image sharing as threatening and that they felt under pressure to comply with requests to share images (Quayle and Newman, 2016 ++; Stanley et al., 2016+). In a sample of 7<sup>th</sup> (age 12) to 12<sup>th</sup> (age 17) grade school students Zweig et al. (2013++) found that females were twice as likely as males to experience what the authors term "online sexual dating abuse" (i.e. peer-on-peer online-facilitated CSA in the context of a relationship) (15% v 7%).

Research indicates that the production of self-generated sexual images can also be part of an exchange/ transaction. Nine children were offered money for sexualised images or offline sex in Quayle and Newman's (2016++) study; in one of these cases it was the child, aged 13 who was offering sexual acts in return for money. Wells et al. (2012++) note in their US study that in their sample (n=14) it was family members and adults in a child's life that were making such requests. These authors also note that another manifestation of this 'exchange' includes, in one case, siblings who advertised their younger sibling for child sexual exploitation (Wells et al., 2012). In instances of CSE, children may provide sexual images to secure off-line meetings for financial gain, as noted by Quayle et al., 2012+; Quayle and Newman 2016++). Despite the apparent exercise of agency in such situations, these children remain vulnerable to sexual abuse and violence.

### **Sexting and sexual extortion**

Even where sexting is consensual, it may have negative consequences that are not anticipated and may then become non-consensual. For some children and young people the consequences of images generated within an intimate relationship being shared is of great concern. Images can be saved by the recipient and used to humiliate and shame the sender as a form of revenge and to gain peer approval and status (Cooper et al., 2016+). Walker et al. (2013) note images being posted on SNS such as *Rate my Girlfriend*. Klettke (2014++) reported one study (the AP-MTV survey, 2009) that found 17% of those who received sexts passed them on to someone else and 14% of those who had sent a sext suspected it would be shared without their permission. In the STIR project 9-42% of girls and 9-13% of boys reported their partners had shared their self-generated images; the range represents the differing experiences of young people across four of the five countries in the study. Whilst it is unclear from the data whether these images had been shared with consent or not, the likelihood is the latter given that in England 97% of girls report a negative impact (impact data for boys not given) (Barter et al., 2015+). This study and many others report that there can also be considerable coercion and sexual abuse within peer relationships (Ringrose, et al., 2012+; Stanley et al., 2016+; Zweig et al. 2013++).

The evidence to support the hypothesis that children and young people who have shared an image feel pressured to share more is mixed. Whilst there is evidence that this occurs within peer relationships (Ringrose et al., 2012+; Walker et al., 2013+; Wilkinson et al., 2016+) there is limited data on unknown individuals making such requests of children and young people. Kopecký et al. (2015-) suggest that this is a strategy used by adult online groomers. Images are initially acquired and shared consensually and then the adult goes on to demand more explicit images under threat of humiliation if the child does not comply. Quayle and Newman (2016++) note a range of threats to pressurise children into complying with their demands in

nearly 25% of their sample; threats included image sharing, hacking child's computer or threatening suicide. Overall, this is an evidence gap.

### **Sexting and Online-facilitated Child Sexual Abuse**

There is limited evidence in the studies under review to indicate a causal link between sending and receiving sexual messages and online-facilitated CSA. With the exception of a few small scale qualitative studies, no research in our sample clarifies the relationship between receiving self-generated sexual content, or sexually suggestive messages and being coerced into actually doing something following the requests, either online or offline. The STIR project identifies associations between sending sexts and experiencing interpersonal violence and abuse (including sexual abuse) but details of the association between sexting and sexual violence or exploitation specifically are not given (Barter et al., 2015+).

### **Summary of evidence on sending and receiving self-generated sexual images and messages (sexting)**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Findings</b>
<b>What do we know and can be confident about?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Sexting between peers is experienced by between 15-48% of children in the UK</b></li><li><b>Self-generated sexual content/material involving children is more likely to be positively received, tolerated or deleted by boys</b></li><li><b>Negative impacts are more likely to be experienced by girls</b></li><li><b>Online-facilitated child sexual abuse is continued through the extraction of self-generated images and videos from their original source</b></li></ul>
<b>What can we be less confident about?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Between 17-48% of self-generated material will be shared with a third party</b></li><li><b>A significant proportion of images and videos hosted on websites and in online peer to peer networks is self-generated and migrated from source</b></li></ul>
<b>What don't we know?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>The extent to which sexting and self-generated sexual content lead to offline child sexual abuse</b></li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The characteristics and vulnerabilities of children who are the subject of self-generated sexual content/material involving children that becomes abusive</li> <li>● The characteristics and vulnerabilities of children who are the subject of self-generated sexual content/material involving children that leads to sexual exploitation and sexual extortion</li> <li>● Why boys appear to be more resilient to negative consequences</li> <li>● How much apparently self-generated material is truly self-generated and not the result of grooming or coercion</li> </ul>
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## Section 5 Typologies

Typologies can help to identify differences between children that do not rest on single characteristics, enabling more tailored, sensitive and specific interventions. Single characteristics that are associated with online-facilitated CSA victimisation are inevitably general (age, gender, SES, ethnicity and so forth). Identifying which child may be vulnerable and under what circumstances is important. As noted in Section 3 most studies are inductive. The few studies that offer typologies of victims refer to these as profiles. They analyse data to identify latent factors that provide an insight into different behaviours that might heighten risk of online-facilitated CSA. These find distinct clusters around internet use and behaviour patterns as described in Section 2 that could aid the development of more targeted prevention strategies.

### Risk Taking Profiles

Victim profiles are presented by Davidson et al. (2016+, n=1166) through a cluster analysis of all the childhood characteristics and childhood online behaviours of young adults in their sample. Patterns of internet use, gender differences, offline and online risky behaviours and experience of sexual solicitation combine so that all respondents were found to belong to one of four distinct types. They were:

- *The adapted adolescent* (46%). Few with this profile reported online requests for sexual information. They are not aggressive to others and although they have a slightly higher propensity to share videos online, these are not identified as having sexual content and are more likely to be linked to social media activity.
- *Inquisitive non-sexual* (26%). Have higher risk taking online, lower offline and most likely to be male. Online risk taking includes visiting adult pornographic sites, downloading illegal material (e.g. unlicensed music videos) and sharing information with strangers. They are least likely to engage in sexting or to receive sexual solicitations.
- *The risk-taking aggressive adolescent* (8%). Most likely to take risks on and offline, to be harassed and to harass others, to receive sexual solicitations and send sexts. Offline risks included truancy and school exclusion, drug and alcohol use, problems with authority and the highest level of on/offline aggression to others.
- *Inquisitive sexual* (20%). Most likely to be female. Watched less adult pornography than the inquisitive non-sexual but were more likely to send sexts and receive sexual solicitations. They were also highly likely to meet up to engage in sexual activity with peers.

### Use and Risk Profiles

Children use the internet for many different reasons but they do not all use it in the same way. The EU Kids Online study examined how children across 25 European

countries, including the UK, used the internet (time spent, activities and risky behaviours online) and their experiences of online risks (whether they had been exposed to or received requests for sexual content and how upset they were by it). Six different clusters emerged that reveal how children's use can be profiled according to what they do online (school work, gaming, social networking, blogging and so forth) and how they do it (frequency, alone or in groups). These clusters indicate how some children take risks (as described in Section 2) but risky behaviours do not always result in harm. As noted earlier, harm was measured through a question asking whether the child had been 'bothered', felt 'uncomfortable or upset' at seeing sexual content or receiving requests for sexual information.

- *'Low use/learning oriented'* – younger, limited online use mainly for schoolwork or watching videos, the news or reading. Indicators of risk are low but highest likelihood of harm for sexual content and meeting offline.
- *'Low use/social networking site oriented'* – similar to 'low use/learning oriented' but less likely to use the internet for schoolwork and more likely to visit SNS. Far more likely to meet new people but less likely to be upset by this.
- *'Moderate use'* – older than low use clusters (+1.5 years), likely to participate in more internet activities and spend more time online. All risk indicators are higher than low use clusters.
- *'Diverse and risky opportunities'* – average age 13.4 years with the largest number of risky activities and range of activities online, including the more creative, less popular activities, such as blogging and vlogging. This group have the highest level of risk experiences and the lowest likelihood of finding them harmful.
- *'High use/entertainment oriented'* – average age 14 and more likely to be male. This group are online for the longest but do less; watching videos and playing games alone are the main activities with a high likelihood of risk experiences.
- *'Focused social web use'* – more likely to be female, to visit SNS and on average 14.2 years old. They also post photos or music, write blogs or diaries and do instant messaging. The likelihood of risk experience is high and they are likely to be harmed by these experiences

(adapted from Hasebrink et al., 2011++).

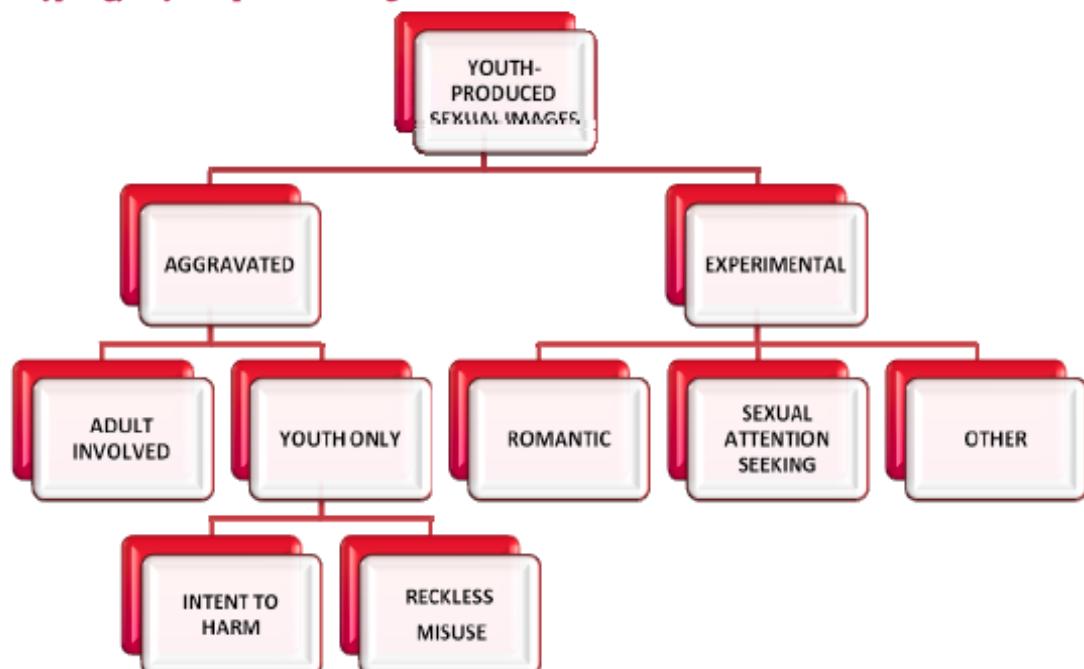
The two profiles most vulnerable to harm are the first and last: those with low use, mainly for learning purposes, and those who use the online environment for focused social web use. This latter group includes a variety of activities that extend social networking into more extensive sharing of personal information (posting photos and videos, writing blogs and diaries). Although the first group may not often encounter sexual content or requests, they are ill prepared for them when they do. The latter

group, however, do not seem to be protected by their heightened digital skills although the reasons for this are not clear (Staksgrud et. al., 2012).

### **Sexting Typology**

A sexting typology has been derived from an analysis of law enforcement case files (Wolak and Finkelhor, 2011). Two types of 'self-generated produced sexual images' are proposed: Aggravated and Experimental. These are further differentiated by intent. Aggravated images may involve an adult or young person in abuse of a child or in the creation or sharing of sexual image without knowledge or permission of the subject. Experimental images, in contrast, are produced voluntarily with consent, in the context of romantic relationships or to gain the attention of others but with no criminal intent (see Figure 1). The typology advances ways of categorising self-generated images and takes account of potential peer and adult coercion in their production, whilst allowing for experimental and consensual production. However, although this model does not account for it, there is a likelihood that many self-generated images which may fit the experimental profile transfer into the aggravated category once they are removed from source and shared online (Cooper et al., 2016+; IWF, 2015++).

**Figure 1. Typology of youth-produced image cases known to law enforcement**

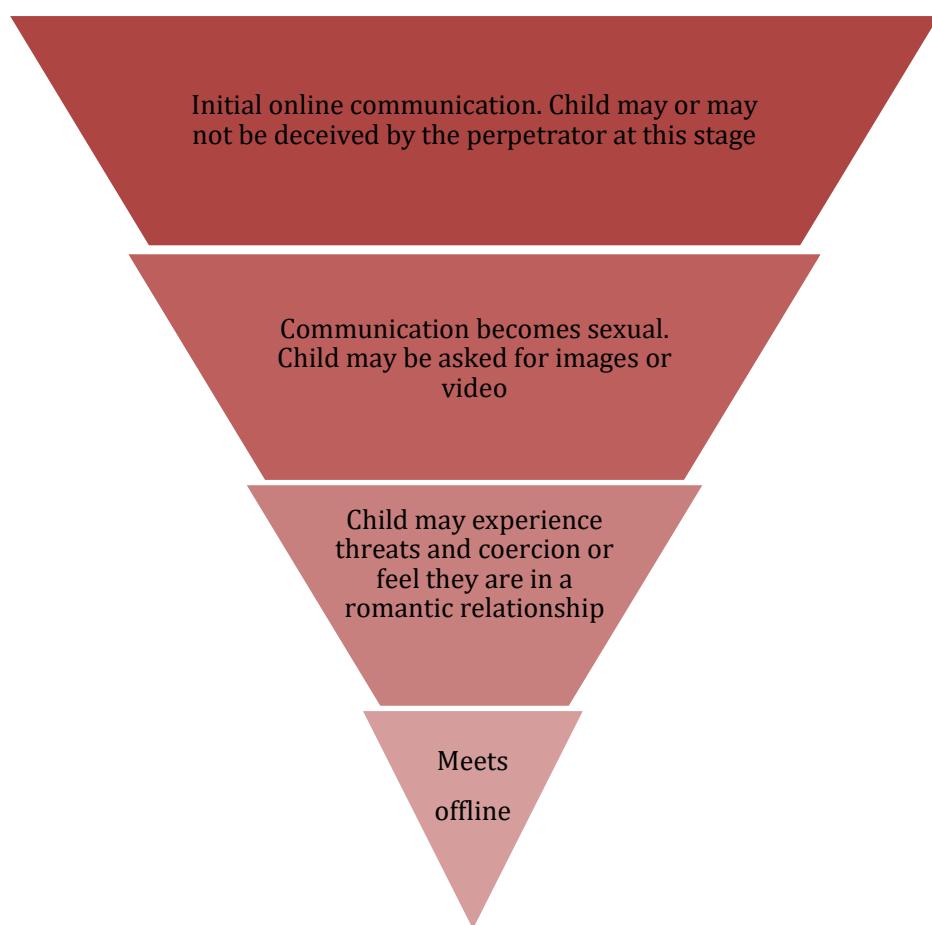


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### Typology of the grooming process from victim perspective

Whilst not a typology, several studies provide information from children and young people about the stages involved in the process of online contact to off line meeting (Katz, 2013+; Kopecký et al., 2015 -; Leander et al., 2008 ++; Quayle et al., 2012+; Quayle and Newman, 2016++; Shannon 2008 +; Whittle et al., 2013+). The perspectives of children and young people, especially those with direct experience, is crucial to further our understanding of online CSA. Moreover, it can guide prevention interventions that help children build resilience to realities of their experiences and to build on typologies of grooming identified in the perpetrator literature (Webster, et al., 2010). At each stage, some children will choose not to engage any further.



### Gaps in the evidence: What cannot be answered or addressed

Generally there is a lack of typologies or models / theories of characteristics of victims of online-facilitated CSA. We have addressed this gap more fully in the conclusion.

### Summary of the evidence on victim typologies

Question	Findings
<b>What do we know and can be confident about?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The majority of children use the internet without experiencing harm; these children could be described as having an 'adapted' profile</li> </ul>
<b>What can we be less confident about?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Profiles of children vulnerable to harm include those with a:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Risk taking aggressive profile</li> <li>Sexually inquisitive profile</li> <li>Low use learning oriented profile</li> <li>Focused social web use profile</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>What don't we know?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typologies of children subject to online-facilitated CSE</li> <li>• How typologies relate to ethnic and cultural differences</li> </ul>

## Conclusion

### **What is known about the characteristics, vulnerabilities and on- and offline behaviour of victims of online-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation?**

Addressing the IICSA questions was challenging. The terms 'online-facilitated child sexual abuse', or 'online-facilitated child sexual exploitation' were not found in the literature. 'Child Sexual Abuse online' is a more familiar description but this fails to address the increasing overlap between online and offline abuse. An emerging descriptor is 'technology enabled', which has been used more often in the perpetrator literature. The team therefore had to decide which parts of the data contained in the 73 included studies would contribute to a better understanding online-facilitated CSA and/CSE in the absence of any study that would directly map on to the research questions. Examples of categories included were exposure to sexual content or requests for sexual information, whether these were wanted or whether the child was upset by this, with each study having slightly different variations in their definitions. The concept of offline-facilitated or even technology enabled was limited either to studies that reported solely on child sexual abuse that occurred online or on whether the child met an online contact face to face (although the sexual element of that meeting was rarely defined). Considering these limitations, our conclusions are presented below.

### **Question 1: What are the distinguishing characteristics or factors that make children either more vulnerable, or more resilient, to online sexual victimisation, including sexual victimisation by peers?**

Most of the studies allowed some conclusions to be drawn in relation to this question (see Box 1), primarily because demographic data was routinely collected. Characteristics and factors are not linear and vulnerability and resilience depend on an interaction of different aspects of the individual child, their immediate environment (including online) and wider social and cultural factors. For example, children of all ages and genders can be victims of online-facilitated CSA. The likelihood that some will be more vulnerable than others depends on an interaction between certain psychological factors (low in self-efficacy, self-esteem, sensation seeking), what they do online (low use or high use) and their offline experiences both past and present (particularly poly-victimisation). Many authors note that risk taking and exploring sexuality and sex are characteristic of adolescence.

In this context, the only certain characteristic that heightens the risk of online-facilitated CSA is the presence of perpetrators online who opportunistically exploit normal child and adolescent behaviours. In the studies reviewed, the way in which online sexual victimisation is measured precludes the possibility of knowing how many opportunistic online contacts from perpetrators result in that contact escalating into online-facilitated CSA or identifying specific characteristics and

vulnerabilities of the victims. Some data is provided on the length of time these sexual solicitations last but more detailed analysis on victim characteristics in these cases is generally lacking. Furthermore, data is provided on meeting contacts offline but only in terms of 'being bothered or upset' which may hide successful grooming where the child does not understand the perpetrator is abusive until weeks, months or even years later.

Gender is the most frequently measured victim characteristic, and studies consistently find that girls are more vulnerable to most forms of online- facilitated CSA than boys are. Boys may be equally or slightly more likely to be exposed to sexual content and solicitations online but are not reported to experience negative consequences as frequently as girls. However, boys and transgender children are also at risk and appear to be more vulnerable to online- facilitated CSA than indicated in studies of offline CSA. Studies that report boys are less likely to be bothered by exposure to sexual content and sexual solicitation do not provide an analysis of cases where they were negatively experienced so we cannot be confident about gender difference in vulnerability and resilience characteristics.

**Box 1:**

What are the distinguishing characteristics or factors that make children either more vulnerable, or more resilient, to online sexual victimisation, including victimisation by peers?

<b>What do we know and can be confident about?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Although younger children (9-11) are less likely to experience online-facilitated CSA and CSE it might be of a more serious nature and more upsetting when they do</b></li><li>• <b>Offline victimisation from a range of adverse child experiences makes children more vulnerable to online victimisation</b></li><li>• <b>Being female and having psychological difficulties increases vulnerability to harm from online-facilitated CSA, although boys are more exposed to certain types of risk (such as viewing sexual images online)</b></li><li>• <b>Above average internet use increases vulnerability when interacting with these other characteristics</b></li><li>• <b>Children develop their own strategies to cope with online-facilitated CSA. If they succeed this is likely to be related to psychological</b></li></ul>
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	<p>characteristics such as sensation seeking and self-efficacy, although these are not guaranteed to stop abuse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The more upset or distressed a child is by online-facilitated CSA the more likely they are to tell others; usually friends or parents.</li> <li>• Children are unlikely to tell others if they are embarrassed or afraid.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What can we be less confident about?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boys and transgender children are also victims and may be over represented for specific types of online-facilitated CSA and/CSE</li> <li>• Between a third and a half of victims may already know the perpetrator</li> <li>• Some platforms may enhance vulnerability but these change over time as children migrate to new platforms</li> <li>• Vulnerability is diverse; boys and girls are vulnerable in different ways, as are disabled children and children living in varying cultural contexts.</li> <li>• Prevention programmes may help to improve internet safety knowledge but may not reduce risky behaviour</li> <li>• Technology driven approaches may increase resilience in online environments</li> </ul>
<p><b>What don't we know?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How ethnicity, culture or global region of residence may be correlated with victimisation particularly for transnational online-facilitated CSA and/CSE</li> <li>• Differences in victim characteristics between peer and adult perpetrated online-facilitated CSA and CSE</li> <li>• How victim vulnerability and characteristics have changed in a rapidly changing online environment</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Characteristics of victims of online-facilitated CSA and CSE where the perpetrator or the victim resides in the UK</b></li> <li>● <b>How different sources of vulnerability interact</b></li> <li>● <b>How to identify when a child/young person becomes 'situationally' vulnerable</b></li> <li>● <b>What works in building resilience, when and how?</b></li> </ul>
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**Question 2: Is there research that has tried to establish vulnerability profiles or typologies, based on children's characteristics and behaviours?**

There are few attempts to develop typologies, which may reflect the diversity of different forms of online-facilitated CSA and CSE and the diversity of victims. We found no typologies of victims of online-facilitated CSE. Some profiles look promising in terms of forming the basis for developing more targeted prevention interventions and aimed at early help. These are listed below as tentative (what we are less confident about) because they rely on two studies (Livingstone et al., 2011a ++ and Davidson et al., 2016+). Neither of these take account of diversity within the profiles. We could find no typologies of victims of online-facilitated child sexual exploitation or transnational abuse where the victim or perpetrator is in the UK.

**Summary of the evidence on victim typologies**

<p>Box 2:</p> <p>Is there research that has tried to establish vulnerability profiles or typologies, based on children's characteristics and behaviours?</p>	
What do we know and can be confident about?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The majority of children use the internet without experiencing harm; these children could be described as having an 'adapted' profile</li> </ul>
What can we be less confident about?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Profiles of children vulnerable to harm include those with a:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Risk taking aggressive profile</li> <li>Sexually inquisitive profile</li> <li>Low use learning oriented profile</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	Focused social web use profile
What don't we know?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typologies of children who are subject to online-facilitated CSE</li> <li>• Typologies of children in transnational online-facilitated CSA and CSE where either the victim or the perpetrator is in the UK</li> <li>• How typologies relate to ethnic and cultural differences</li> </ul>

**Question 3: What is the relationship between 'sexting' and production of self-generated sexual material and online sexual solicitation?**

It is clear from the studies reviewed that there may be a relationship between self-generated sexual content and online solicitation for sexual purposes. However, the relationship is complex (i.e. not linear); the sharing (by self or by another) of self-generated material does not necessarily lead to online-facilitated CSA. A reasonable estimate based on this review would be that approximately one fifth of this material is likely to be shared with a third party, which may then lead to online-facilitated CSA, depending on its trajectory (for example, whether it is harvested by websites hosting child sexual abuse images), or used for sexual extortion to facilitate grooming. There is evidence that all these occur from research with victims and analyses of images but the extent and nature of the relationship is unclear.

**Box 3**

What is the relationship between 'sexting' and production of self-generated sexual material and sexual extortion or online sexual solicitation?

<b>What do we know and can be confident about?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sexting between peers is experienced by between 15-48% of children in the UK</b></li> <li>• <b>Self-generated sexual content/material involving children is more likely to be positively received, tolerated or deleted by boys</b></li> <li>• <b>Negative impacts are more likely to be experienced by girls</b></li> <li>• <b>Online-facilitated child sexual abuse is continued through the extraction of self-generated images and videos from their original source</b></li> </ul>
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<b>What can we be less confident about?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Between 17-48% of self-generated material will be shared with a third party</li> <li>● A significant proportion of images and videos hosted on websites and in peer to peer networks online is self-generated and migrated from source</li> </ul>
<b>What don't we know?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The extent to which sexting and self-generated sexual content lead to offline child sexual abuse</li> <li>● The characteristics and vulnerabilities of children who are the subject of self-generated sexual content/material involving children that becomes abusive</li> <li>● The characteristics and vulnerabilities of children who are the subject of self-generated sexual content/material involving children that leads to sexual exploitation and sexual extortion</li> <li>● Why boys appear to be more resilient to negative consequences</li> </ul>

**Question 4: What are the characteristics and vulnerabilities of victims of transnational online child sexual abuse, where either the victim or the perpetrator is based in England and Wales?**

No research from the victim perspective was found, although there may be evidence in the perpetrator literature. We address this gap in the research recommendations below.

**Research gaps:**

The REA identified a number of areas requiring further consideration and research by the wider research community.

*a) The need for longitudinal survey research*

No single study addresses the REA question and the review conducted here suggests that it is unlikely that any single study could do this given the broad range of behaviours, characteristics and factors involved. This partially explains the broad and fragmented nature of the research literature. Where longitudinal research is commissioned, understanding of vulnerability and resilience to online-facilitated

child sexual abuse would be greatly facilitated if consideration was given to including the following:

- A sufficiently large, representative UK sample of children 0-18 who go online (such as that generated for national victimisation prevalence studies (Radford et al., 2011++)).
- Standardised questions such as the NVQ but with validated supplements that allow a more specific analysis of the role of online interaction in different forms of victimisation. Given the increasing ubiquity of online communication, almost every activity will include an online dimension going forward. Survey data must be able to measure the different online and offline transactions and engagements throughout the child's abusive experiences – from contact to conclusion. It is important to know more about the fluidity of on/offline behaviour and contexts if interventions (technical and human oriented) are to have any chance of being effective.
- Tracking respondents across at least 12 months and include trajectory analysis to enable prediction of the most vulnerable situations, settings, interactions and children.
- Tracking respondents to pick up the different perspectives that children have at the time of first contact or incident through to conclusion; for example, there is insufficient data on the number and proportion of incidents that begin as friendly or romantic contact but that develop over time into an abusive relationship. Following these interactions and perceptions over time would improve on knowledge gained through cross-sectional data that only seeks perceptions of incidents at a single point.
- It would be helpful if future research on the topic could seek to identify:
  - A broad range of victim characteristics including age, gender, socio-economic status, family context, ethnicity and disability;
  - A broad range of potential online contexts including devices used, platforms and activities (e.g. social networking, blogging, vlogging, dating, gaming)
  - Perpetrator age, nationality or language and location wherever possible
  - The nature of abuse (verbal, aggressive, threatening, use of sexual extortion, type of sexual acts, online only, online to offline, offline to online and so forth);
  - Technical, social and human actions the victim took to avoid the situation including reporting and to whom;
  - Attitudes of the victim towards the situation;
  - Technical, social and human factors that helped the victim manage the situation;
  - Impacts over time.

All of these are important features in building resilience to future harm from online-facilitated CSA, yet data is sparse.

*b) Under reporting of very young children*

An important finding regarding the under reporting of young children has emerged from comparing the studies of internet content and reported cases, although it is not referred to in the research studies themselves and no explanation is recorded. We might hypothesise that it is in part due to the fact that infants and very young children may not understand what is happening to them or be able to verbalise their experience (NICE, 2017) but there may be other factors at play. Given that tablet and mobile phone use is on the rise in children under 10, understanding the potential for online-facilitated CSA in this group is becoming urgent. Surveys that rely on parental report for this age range are unlikely to reflect the true extent of vulnerability for very young children. These cases are highly reliant on detection and discovery rather than disclosure, either through technical means (such as the IWF, 2015 study) or through image analysis in the context of police investigations. Understanding the under reporting of young children could be helped through:

- A review of all cases reported to police forces in England and Wales over the last five years, where images or content concerns a victim under the age of 10 years to identify any patterns or trends;
- An analysis of all image content retrieved to identify the ages of children depicted and the types of abuse they may be subject to;

An assessment of the additional costs associated with victim identification in images concerning children under 10 years (and ideally up to 18) including costs for technological support and time costs for follow up with victims and their families has yet to be undertaken.

*c) Resilience*

Several validated scales are used to measure resilience, such as the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (Liebenberg, et al., 2012). However, we found no evidence of the application of such scales in the research reviewed here. Conclusions about resilience are therefore necessarily tentative, arrived at from a synthesis of the findings from the included studies. Future research might consider application of existing scales to explore resilience more comprehensively and enable analysis of a wider range of factors that mediate the risk of online-facilitated CSA. We recommend that resilience research could be directed at online-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation paying attention to the following:

- Sensitive valid scale development. Current scales were developed to measure resilience in individual characteristics and environmental factors offline and further work is required to establish their relevance and validity in testing resilience in online activities and contexts;

- We found no studies that focused on technically facilitated resilience, such as on the effectiveness of stop and report abuse buttons or on blocking and filtering software for the purpose of preventing online-facilitated CSA/CSE;
- We were unable to answer the question of whether prevention programmes for online-facilitated CSA are effective. Some research suggested that they may help to improve internet safety knowledge but may not reduce risky behaviour or risks more generally. More co-designed child user studies would help to identify what would make a difference here;
- In addition to identifying resilience factors (human and technical) evaluation research could assist in testing out different resilience strategies to inform what works in building resilience, for which children (using measures across a range of clearly defined characteristics), under what circumstances.

*d) Sexting*

Evidence on sexting is varied and would be improved if more data was available on the following:

- Agreed definitions of sexting to ensure that studies are measuring similar constructs;
- The extent to which sexting and self-generated sexual content lead to online, offline and online-offline child sexual abuse and exploitation;
- Whilst one study was found in the USA, there are no large-scale studies that can assist in identifying the characteristics and vulnerabilities of children who are the subject of self-generated sexual content/material involving children that leads to sexual exploitation and sexual extortion in the UK
- An assessment of the extent to which apparently self-generated material is truly self-generated and not the result of grooming or coercion, which could be aided through technical analysis.

*e) Typologies*

No typologies or models / theories of characteristics of victims of online-facilitated child sexual exploitation (CSE) were found in the research retrieved for this REA. Longitudinal research would assist with developing such a typology, particularly where CSE is perpetrated within the context of a 'boyfriend' 'girlfriend' relationship. However, it is likely that children most vulnerable to CSE may not be included in random probability sampling. These include children who are homeless, missing from school, looked after children (DfE, 2017) and those migrating or seeking asylum (Walby, Towers, Francis...Palmer 2016b). Where such a study is conducted, we would therefore recommend including a 'top up' sample that includes these vulnerable groups or a separate survey, using snowball sampling, to begin building typologies for CSE. In this context, it will be important to identify how typologies relate to ethnic or cultural differences for children native to the UK and those who migrate to it. There is also a need to understand how changes in sexual attitudes and exposure in wider society impact on online-facilitated CSA.

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## Appendix A

### Pilot Search Strategy: REA Characteristics and Vulnerabilities of Victims of Online-Facilitated Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

- RQ1: What are the **characteristics and vulnerabilities** of victims of online-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation?
  - a. What are characteristics and vulnerabilities of victims of **transnational** online child sexual abuse, **where either the victim or the perpetrator is based in England and Wales?**
  - b. What distinguishing characteristics or factors make children more vulnerable, to online sexual victimisation, **including victimisation by peers?**
  - c. What vulnerability **profiles or typologies**, based on children's characteristics and behaviours, have been developed?
  - d. What are the **on- and offline behaviours** of victims of online-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation?

<u>Sample (Population of Interest)</u>	"child" OR "young" OR "peer" OR "youth" OR "adolescent" OR "minor" AND "sexual exploitation" OR "sexual abuse"
<u>AND</u>	
<u>Phenomena of Interest</u>	"online-facilitated" OR "Internet" OR "game" OR "mobile" OR "smartphone" OR "Facebook" OR "Snapchat" OR "Instagram" OR "WhatsApp" OR "Tumblr" OR "platform" AND "extortion" OR "blackmail" OR "sexting" OR "image" OR "video"
<u>RQ1a</u>	Add OR "Transnational" AND "England" OR "Wales"
<u>RQ1 b</u>	Add "peer on peer"
<u>RQ1 d</u>	Add "offline"
<u>AND</u>	

<u>Design</u> – try with and without	“literature review” OR “systematic review”
<u>AND</u>	
<u>Evaluation</u>	“characteristics” OR “vulnerab*” OR “behavio*” OR “typology” OR “profil*” OR “risk” OR “age” OR “gender” OR “lesbian” OR “gay” OR “trans*” OR “Bisexual” OR “disab*” OR “ethnic*” OR “race”

**Q2: What distinguishing characteristics or factors make children more resilient to online sexual victimisation, including victimisation by peers?**

<u>Sample</u> (Population of Interest)	“child” OR “young” OR “peer” OR “youth” OR “adolescent” OR “minor” AND “sexual exploitation” OR “sexual abuse”
<u>AND</u>	
<u>Phenomena of Interest</u>	“online-facilitated” OR “Internet” OR “game” OR “mobile” OR “smartphone” OR “Facebook” OR “Snapchat” OR “Instagram” OR “WhatsApp” OR “Tumblr” OR “platform” AND “offline”
<u>AND</u>	
<u>Design</u> – try with and without	“literature review” OR “systematic review”
<u>AND</u>	
<u>Evaluation</u>	“characteristics” OR “behavio*” OR “resilience” OR “typology” OR “profil*” OR “risk” OR “age” OR “gender” OR “lesbian” OR “gay” OR “trans*” OR “Bisexual” OR “disab*” OR “ethnic*” OR “race”

**RQ3: What is the relationship between self-generated sexual material and online-facilitated child sexual abuse and exploitation?**

- What is the relationship between 'sexting' and sexual extortion or online sexual solicitation?

<u>Sample (Population of Interest)</u>	"child" OR "young" OR "peer" OR "youth" OR "adolescent" OR "minor" AND "sexual exploitation" OR "sexual abuse"
<b><u>AND</u></b>	
<u>Phenomena of Interest</u>	"online-facilitated" OR "Internet" OR "game" OR "mobile" OR "smartphone" OR "Facebook" OR "Snapchat" OR "Instagram" OR "WhatsApp" OR "Tumblr" OR "platform"
<b><u>AND</u></b>	
<u>Design – try with and without</u>	"literature review" OR "systematic review"
<b><u>AND</u></b>	
<u>Evaluation</u>	"extortion" OR "blackmail" OR "sexting" OR "image" OR "video" OR "self generated" OR "solicitation"

## Appendix B: CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE REA | Final Search Strategy

Search terms to be applied to 'All fields' in databases where available so that the title, abstract and subject fields within the bibliographic records are searched.

Once the bibliographic records have been exported to EndNote from the native databases, the records from monographs will be removed as these will be clearly identified.

Search String	Keywords/Phrases
#1	child* OR young OR peer* OR youth* OR adolescen* OR minor* OR teen*
#2	"sexual exploitation" OR "sex* abuse" OR extortion OR blackmail OR coerc* OR solicit*
#3	#1 AND #2
#4	victim* AND child sex*
#5	#3 OR #4
#6	online OR technology OR internet OR digital OR cyber OR game OR gaming OR mobile OR smartphone OR Facebook OR Snapchat OR Instagram OR WhatsApp OR Tumblr OR Twitter OR "social media" OR "social network*" OR "file sharing" OR filesharing OR "cell* phone" OR offline OR sexting OR image* OR video*
#7	characteristics OR vulnerab* OR behavio* OR typolog* OR profil* OR risk* OR factors OR attitude* OR resilience
#8	#5 AND #6 AND #7
#9	Limit to 2007-present
#10	Limit to English

## Appendix C: Sample of a tailored search string

Search String	Keywords/Phrases	Number of results	Comments/Observations
#1	child* OR youth* OR adolescen* OR teen*	1,002,054	Removed young, peer, minor
#2	“sexual exploitation” OR “sex* abuse” OR extortion OR blackmail OR coerc* OR solicit*	39,099	
#3	#1 AND #2	24,107	
#4	victim* AND child sex*	10,584	
#5	#3 OR #4	27,421	<b>Superset of Population of Interest</b>
#6	online OR technology OR internet OR digital OR “social media” OR “social network*” OR offline	258,120	Removed facilitated from Online and Technology. Also removed cyber, game, gaming, mobile, smartphone, facebook, snapchat, Instagram, whatsapp, tumblr, twitter, file sharing, filesharing, cell* phone, sexting, image*, video*.
#7	#5 AND #6	1,145	<b>Superset of Phenomena of Interest</b>
#8	characteristics OR vulnerab* OR behavio* OR typolog* OR profil* OR risk* OR factors OR attitude* OR resilience	2,403,667	<b>Superset of Population of Evaluation</b>
#9	#5 AND #6 AND #8	1,017	Of the 821 results if these are limited to English and DOP within last 10 years then there are <b>624</b> results.

#10	"literature review" OR "systematic review" OR "meta-analysis" OR "meta-synthesis"	71,398	<b>Superset of Design</b>
#11	#9 AND #10	25	
#12	Limit to 2007-present	23	
#13	Limit to English	21	

## Appendix D: Record of Databases Searches

DATABASE	HITS	Notes
Academic Search Complete	765	
ACM Digital	56	
CINHAL	230	
Campbell	1	
Cochrane	254	
Directory of Open Access		
EMBASE	623	
Europe Pubmed (last 12 months only)	11	
IEE Xplore	27	
Ingenta	42	
JSTOR	147	
Medline	601	
NHS evidence	6	
PSYCHINFO	1218	
PROQUEST CENTRAL	523	
SCIENCE DIRECT	687	
Web of Science	783	
Taylor Francis J	50	
SAGE	50	Major issue is that we are limited to one export at time
Springer Link	50	
OUP	12	

ZETOC	125	
Website searches:		
NSPCC	5	
Barnardos	5	
JRF	0	
RAND	0	
ESRC	0	
Social Care Online	42	
EU kids Online	50	
Gov.uk	5	
CORE – (first 100)	4	

#### Appendix F: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion/ exclusion criteria		Guidance	Comments
1	<b>EXCLUDE:</b> date of publication before 2007		
2	<b>EXCLUDE:</b> language not English		
3	<b>EXCLUDE publication type:</b> not journal, research report or conference proceeding	Exclude books, dissertation abstracts, professional magazines ad policy and guidance	e.g. Community Care/ Nursing Times etc...
4	<b>EXCLUDE:</b> not about child victims	Exclude if focus is adult perpetrators/offenders	Unless it is child on child offending

5	<p><b>EXCLUDE research type:</b> Not primary research</p>	<p>Exclude descriptive studies, blogs, editorial, commentary, opinion piece of other ephemera.</p> <p>Include quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods</p>	
6	<p><b>EXCLUDE by scope:</b> Not about online-facilitated child sexual abuse/child sexual exploitation and victims living in any country</p>	<p>Must include online-facilitated child sexual abuse</p>	<p>Key is facilitation; abuse may occur off line but grooming occurs online or vice versa.</p>
7	<p><b>EXCLUDE:</b> Not relevant to research question(s)</p>		
8	<p><b>EXCLUDE:</b> Insufficient details to make a decision</p>	<p>e.g. full article etc. not available</p>	
9	<p><b>INCLUDE</b></p>		

## Appendix G: Data Collection Form

Question:

1. Characteristics/Vulnerabilities of victims
2. Resilience Factors to online sexual victimisation
3. Relationship between self-generated sexual material and abuse

<b>Study Details</b>	.				
<b>Abstract</b>					
<b>Sample (Population of Interest)</b>	Child victims of online sexual exploitation				
	Child victims of online-facilitated sexual abuse				
	Other Child victims of Internet/mobile and/or sexual victimisation				
	Sample	N =			
	Gender	FM	M	TRNS	NK
	Sexual Orientation	Straight	LGBT	Mixed	NK
	Ethnicity List using terms in study				
	Age				
	Country				
	Internet				

<b>Phenomena of Interest relevant to research question</b>	Peer to peer	
	Gaming	
	Mobile/smartphone	
	Facebook/Snapchat/Instagram/WhatsApp/	
	Tumblr/Twitter/other (state)	
	Extortion	
	Blackmail	
	Sexting	
	Images	
<b>Design</b>  <b>Method</b>	Video	
	Cross sectional/Causal/Longitudinal Cohort/Case Study/RCT/Experimental/Exploratory/Meta Analysis/Observational/Systemmatic Review/Mixed methods	
	Other -	
	Survey/focus group/questionnaire (online/text/telephone/postal/school/other)/observation /case study/interview (online/phone/face to face) (brief description)	
<b>Evaluation</b>	Vulnerability characteristics/behaviours/typology/protective factors (brief description)	
<b>Research</b>	Quantitative/Qualitative/Mixed Methods/ Other	
<b>Weighting</b>	--/ -/ +/ ++	
<b><u>Narrative summary of findings relevant to REA</u></b>		

## Appendix H: Critical Appraisal for Single Studies (Quantitative example)

Internal validity – sample and approach	Internal validity - performance and analysis.	External validity	Overall validity rating (--/-/+/++)
<p>Clearly focused question or hypothesis?</p> <p>Sample type and size (demographics)</p> <p>How was the sample achieved?</p> <p>Is the sample representative (of what)?</p> <p>Response rate?</p> <p>Adequate description of methodology?</p>	<p>Has the data collection instrument been validated?</p> <p>Possible effects of administration of data collection</p> <p>Quality of statistical analysis (confidence intervals, significance tests appropriate, weighting)</p> <p>Are conclusions commensurate with statistical analysis?</p> <p>Has the study dealt appropriately with any ethical concerns?</p>	<p>Does the study's research question match the REAQ question?</p> <p>Does the study population match at least one of the groups covered by the REAQ?</p>	



Walby, S., Towers, J., Balderston, S., Corradi, C., Francis, B., Heiskanen, M., Helweg-Larsen, K., Mergaert, L., Olive, P., Palmer, E., Stöckl, H., and Strid, S. (2017). The concept and measurement of violence against women and men. Bristol: Policy Press.

My contribution extracted from Chapter 5. Collecting Data

### **Social services**

Social services are concerned with 'safeguarding', which means attempting to prevent the re-occurrence of behaviours and vulnerabilities that led to harm. In particular safeguarding children; violence against adults is rarely a focus for social services. The focus is on children, as victims or as witnesses of violence in a family context. There is some concern when domestic violence affects adults in situations of additional vulnerability, such as those associated with disability, and with FGM. There is little involvement in femicide or rape (other than of children (McMahon and Schwartz, 2011). There is little concern with perpetrators of violence.

This primary concern with safeguarding structures the collection of data: little data is collected on the victims or perpetrators of violence, or on their relationship, unless the 'victim' is a child who has themselves been subject to violence, or has witnessed violence against an adult in their family. When violence is recorded, this is cautious and vague and scales of severity are not used. However, the development of multi-agency working requires the sharing of information, which raises the issue of developing comparable data recommended in the proposed measurement framework.

Domestic violence is not screened for in social work assessments in England and Wales and in the UK there is no requirement for mandatory reporting of domestic violence. In countries where this occurs, it is usually linked to the requirement to report child abuse (Panaiotopoulos, 2011) or child protection concerns (Humphreys, 2008).

Female Genital Mutilation is recently a focus for action across the EU. For example in the UK, the Serious Crime Act 2015 places a duty on professionals to report FGM in those under 18, where it has been either 'visually confirmed' or disclosure made by a young person. Failure to report suspected FGM will result in fitness to practice enquiries by the Health Care Professions Council, the regulatory body for social work in England (Home Office, 2015).

While social work is an example of professional practice that is light in data, there are some attempts to gather this. The Child In Need (CIN) census records reasons for initial contact and assessment. For example in the CIN abuse and neglect, which includes children at risk of domestic violence, is the most frequently noted category

at 49.4% (DfE, 2015). This also collects case closure data on: '3A Domestic violence: Concerns about the child being the subject of domestic violence. 3B Domestic violence: Concerns about the child's parent/carer being the subject of domestic violence. 3C Domestic violence: Concerns about another person living in the household being the subject of domestic violence.'

Gender is not considered to be a significant category and thus data is rarely collected on (even) the sex of the victim. This is usually sometimes justified in the name of gender-neutrality (Coy 2015); but this defence has been subject to much critique (Hicks, 2015).

The narrative component of recording in case files might potentially allow for the mining of relevant data; but this would require the use of concepts and categories in social work professional practice that are not currently deployed.

### **Way Forward: Social Services**

Many challenges exist to the contribution by social services to data collection on violence against women and men, including children. The current purpose of social services does not align with the identification of victims or perpetrators of violence, unless children are victims.

The requirement on social services to engage in multi-agency working in cooperation with other public agencies, including the police and courts, is potentially a driver of change since there is a need to develop meaningful and robust ways to share information. Such sharing requires a common measurement framework.

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**This is a post-peer-review, pre-copy edited version of a chapter published in  
The Child's World, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.**

This chapter explores the intricacies of assessment with asylum seeking, migrant and trafficked children, who are also known as 'separated' children. It complements material covered in chapter 21, on child sexual exploitation. Separated children is an umbrella term used to describe children or young people living in another country without the care of their parents or guardians (SCEP, 2009). As per the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the Child (1989), the term child is used to describe anyone under the ages of eighteen. Separated children across the four nations are entitled to the same services, such as child in need and in need of accommodation<sup>43</sup> and have the same rights in the UK as citizen children. The main agency with responsibility for separated children is Children's Services (or the equivalent), because of their statutory duties to provide accommodation (e.g. in foster care, supported independent living, etc.) for children requiring it (see section *Planning*, below). However, this chapter is written with the needs of a range of professionals in mind, despite the fact that social workers carry out assessments for the provision of key services.

Whilst the assessment process is similar to the assessment of a citizen child, there are two likely differences. First, the child's ability to tell their story may well be diminished by the nature of their experiences; by limited English language skills; their concerns about the future and the possibility that they may have been trafficked (Kohli, 2006a; Pearce, Hynes and Bovarnick, 2009). Second, assessment does not occur in a vacuum; dominant policy and public discourse on migrants and asylum seekers is predominantly negative (Chase, 2010; Wright, 2014). Consequently, practitioners have to navigate a set of dilemmas, within bureaucratic constraints whilst maintaining an open and positive attitude (Chase, 2010; Masocha, 2014; ADCS, 2015).

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<sup>43</sup> Asylum and immigration law are non-devolved matters. However each of the four nations has different legislation regarding safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children (see ch. 2). As such, some aspects of policy and law are common to all four nations but divergence occurs in practice. In particular, Wales and Scotland have established services and changed domestic law to recognise the rights of all separated children.

## Definitions

An **unaccompanied asylum-seeking child** (sometimes referred to as UASC) is someone under the age of 18, who is without the care or protection of an adult and claiming asylum under the UNHCR Refugee Convention, 1951. The right to claim asylum is universal, but claims are only considered when someone cannot stay in their country of origin "*owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted on the grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion*" (Article 1, UNHCR 1951). It is the Home Office, not the Local Authority, who make decisions about whether a child's asylum claim can be granted. They make this decision based on the nature of the claim and on what they know about the country of origin. There were 2,206 applications for asylum by unaccompanied children in 2017; most were male, in the 15-18 years old category and from countries such as Sudan, Eritrea, Vietnam and Iran (Refugee Council 2018). Fluctuations in numbers occur annually due to changing political instability in country of origin, overall migration patterns in Europe and transnational resettlement agreements (e.g. with some separated children at the Calais camp) (ADCS, 2016).

For any practitioner, it is helpful to know enough about the asylum process to understand the agencies and procedures that a child will encounter, although actual immigration support and advice must be via an approved solicitor. Possible outcomes of an application for asylum are;

1. that the child is granted refugee status (rare);
2. the child is refused asylum but given humanitarian protection in the form of leave to remain for 5 years;
3. the child is refused asylum but granted leave to remain as an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child for 30 months or until age 17.5 years (the most common outcome);
4. or is refused asylum and required to return to the country of origin (DfE, 2017).

The prospect of being returned to country of origin at 18 hangs over both the child and those who support them (Chase, 2010; Wright, 2014). Exact figures of 18 year olds returned to their country of origin are not easily obtainable; one NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation) claims that 2,748 care leavers have been returned to Afghanistan and other countries between 2007 and 2015 (Gladwell, Bowerman, Norman et al., 2016). The uncertainty about the future creates further stresses for the child. For all practitioners, the dilemma is supporting a young person to plan for their future in the UK, knowing that they may be voluntarily or forcibly returned to their country of origin at 18 (Chase, 2010; Wright, 2014).

The term '**migrant child**' is complicated by the shifting boundaries between legal and illegal migration (Sigonda, 2011), but it describes children who move across borders. Local authority social workers are likely to receive referrals about migrant children with their families and unaccompanied migrant children from a range of practitioners. Whilst nominally all European Union children have the right of free movement<sup>44</sup> (Cazenave, 2012), any migrant child found in the UK without parental or guardianship care should be assessed. They may be working instead of being in education, living in unsuitable situations, being privately fostered or trafficked. For instance, Roma migrant children have been found in situations of sexual exploitation and forced labour, including begging, pickpocketing, and petty theft (Hurley, John-Baptiste and Pande 2015). Outcomes for migrant children depend very much on the circumstances they were found in. Any consideration of returning the child home must be undertaken carefully with due regard to the fact that their family may have encouraged them to migrate, or propelled them into a situation of trafficking.

**Child trafficking** encompasses the control and exploitation of those under the age of 18. Exploitation is defined in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (2000) Article 3a as "at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs". The European Union expanded this definition to include forced criminality such as begging, pickpocketing and drugs trafficking (EU, 2011).

Child trafficking is a global phenomenon, and in relation to sexual exploitation (see ch. 21), it is thought that Europe has the highest rate in the world (Hughes, 2014). The UK Government has adopted the term 'victim of modern slavery', but the trafficking of children remains the preferred term globally. Exact numbers are impossible to give; it is a hidden phenomenon, and even when trafficking is suspected, children do not self-define in this way (Pearce, et al., 2009). In 2015, 928 minors were formally identified as trafficked (NCA 2016). Child victims of human trafficking are male and female, mostly aged 13 upwards and from a much broader range of countries than unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, countries that include Vietnam, Albania, UK and Nigeria (NCA 2016). Child victims of trafficking require immediate protection and long-term support, with particular consideration given to how to prevent further victimisation (DfE 2017). All of this hinges on the initial identification of suspected trafficking.

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<sup>44</sup> This is likely to cease after Brexit, however the nuances of immigration law relating to EU children are very complex and the advice of an immigration specialist should be sought.

## **Best Assessment Practice (main heading)**

As with any assessment, positive initial engagement is vital (Koprowska, 2010) (see also chs. 5 & 6). When asked what qualities they appreciate in a social worker, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children said that “being kind, friendly and open” were most important (Newbigging & Thomas, 2011, p381). Other findings from this study are that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children want to be matched with suitable foster carers, be given appropriate information, kept informed and be believed. Pearce et al., (2009) illustrate that time and perseverance may well be required to build a good and trusting relationship with a trafficked child.

Practitioners need to be alert to specific challenges, such as a child’s potential mistrust of authorities, uncertainty about the purpose of the support offered and conflation of social workers or other child welfare professionals with immigration officials (Chase, 2010; Dyball, McPhie and Tudor 2012; ADCS, 2015).

Responding to separated children with compassion and not just as a matter of procedure (Masocha 2014) sets the right tone for further engagement and relationship building. In Scotland, this challenge has been overcome in part through establishing a national Guardianship system on a statutory footing. Trafficked and asylum seeking children are allocated a Guardian who ‘accompanies’ them throughout their access to health and social care services. The Guardian “is on the child’s side, can explain what is happening to them, will listen to their views and experiences and speak up for them when needed” (Crawley and Kohli, 2013, p.3).

Organisational and bureaucratic pressures can compromise the initial engagement and relationship building stage with separated children (Chase 2010; Newbigging & Thomas, 2011). There is a tension between upholding the rights of separated children and the pressure to conform to organisational timescales (Kohli, 2006a; Pearce et al., 2009). This dilemma is not unique to working with separated children, but is exacerbated by their particular set of needs, and by an unsympathetic policy and public discourse about asylum seekers and migrants. Careful thought is required to achieve a questioning style that conveys openness and warmth; the aim is to increase not diminish trust.

## **Planning (subheading)**

It is likely that practitioners will need an interpreter for the assessment. Working through interpreters raises a set of challenges irrespective of the circumstances and interactions may be taking place that may be difficult to understand. Plan additional time for the assessment (a couple of hours) as communicating through interpreters tends to take longer and can be very tiring for the young person (ADCS, 2015). Aim to use basic language that is easily understood, and avoid agency jargon when communicating with the child and the interpreter. Practitioners also need to think about how to convey warmth and openness to the child when communicating

through a third person (the interpreter). Body language, tone of voice and other non-verbal signals can affect the quality of the interaction (Koprowska 2010). Finally, be prepared to have the assessment report translated into the child's first language.

In planning the assessment, background reading about country of origin is recommended. Childhood is experienced differently across the world; children may have had limited access to education, may have begun work, including undertaking hazardous work at a very young age, and may have experienced chronic deprivation (UNHCR, 2014). These circumstances have to be set within a country's political, economic and social context, and the child may well have also experienced gender, religious or ethnic discrimination. There are some excellent guides by UNICEF<sup>45</sup> that explore what conditions can be like for children. Moreover, every country in the world (except for USA and Somalia) has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, and as a consequence there is regular reporting about conditions and experiences for children across the globe. Referring to such reports, along with those produced by the UK Government<sup>46</sup>, can assist in considering what expectations might be placed on the child dependent on age, gender, disability, religious belief and social position.

#### **An assessment of a separated child should:**

1. Assess and attend to their **immediate needs**: are they tired, hungry and/or confused. Do they understand different professional roles?
2. Consider immediate physical **health** needs and ensure the relevant Looked After Child medical occurs soon.
3. Some separated children may also be subject to an **age assessment** to determine eligibility for Children's Services (for more information see end of chapter).
4. Assess the child's **accommodation needs**. Separated children are normally supported under S20 of the Children Act 1989 in England, S25 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, S76 of the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014 or the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. Separated children are entitled to the same Looked After Child (LAC) planning and support requirements as citizen children (i.e. Care Plan, Health Plan and Personal Education Plan and from 16 years of age a Pathway Plan). 'Safe accommodation' is paramount; for children at risk of trafficking this means a

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<sup>45</sup> UNICEF Child Notices

<sup>46</sup> These country reports are detailed and kept up to date but do not focus specifically on children. See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/country-policy-and-information-notes>

specialist foster placement (Shuker, 2013) and for other separated children, suitably trained foster carers (Wade & BAAF, 2012) or accommodation in a dedicated residential children's home in Northern Ireland (DfE, 2017). For some children more independent living may be appropriate, which will require assessment of living skills if they are over 16 and likely to be placed in semi-supported accommodation.

5. Establish if the child wishes to be part of a **faith** community, or to practice their faith at home. Faith and spirituality are important to many separated children and research has shown how being involved in their spiritual community can strengthen their resilience (Ní Raghlannagh, 2011) (see also ch. 30).
6. Clarify their **immigration** status and offer assistance in finding the child an approved solicitor if required.
7. Many separated children will have experienced **trauma**. Careful consideration should be given to whether psychological support is required. Children have the right to choose if and when to seek support for trauma, and they may prefer to wait until they feel more secure (Kohli, 2006a).
8. Be cautious when asking about a child's **family history**. They may have experienced parental death, rejection or abandonment. Family tracing should always be done with the child's knowledge and consent. Moreover, because of the security issues, **practitioners must not attempt to contact family members**; always go via a recognised service provider such as the Red Cross or Children and Families Across Borders, who will ensure any contact is safe.
9. Acknowledge a child's **strengths** too. Many separated children are noted for their resilience to adverse life situations and their determination to succeed (Hopkins & Hill, 2010; Ní Raghlannagh & Gilligan, 2011)
10. Avoid repeat assessment. Both unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and trafficked children are subject to interviews by a number of agencies, including the asylum application interview.

### **Safety Measures (sub-heading)**

If age is disputed, the Local Authority must give the individual the *benefit of the doubt*<sup>47</sup> and provide services to the child, until their age has been determined (DfE,

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<sup>47</sup> 'Benefit of the Doubt' is applied in the context of unaccompanied minors as per the Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No 6 (2005, p10); *the assessment must be conducted in a scientific, safe, child and gender-sensitive and fair manner, avoiding any risk of violation of the physical integrity of the child; giving due respect to human dignity; and, in the event of remaining uncertainty, should accord the individual the benefit of the doubt such*

2017). The only exception is in rare cases where a person has been assessed as an adult, in which case practitioners must arrange a safe transition to adult services (ADCS, 2015). In relation to suspected child victims of human trafficking, assessment needs to occur as soon as possible in case the child goes missing.

Both trafficked children and unaccompanied minors do go missing from care, and tend to be missing for much longer periods of time than UK citizen children (ECPAT UK and Missing People 2016). A number of safety measures should be considered at this early stage. Foster carers may impose curfews, accompany the child at all times and monitor or restrict mobile phone and Internet use (Shuker, 2013). Measures such as taking a photo of the child (with their consent) and removal of a mobile phone can be experienced as intrusive. The decision to employ such safety strategies should be recorded, as should the reasons for believing that they are necessary. Another approach is to explain about possible risk without frightening the child or young person. Letting a young person know that even if they disappear for a few months they will be welcomed back by the service is important and it is useful to provide them with contact details and the number for the Police.

The assessment of separated children is likely to broaden the range of agencies practitioners will need to work with, to include the Government department that manages border control, the National Referral Mechanism and immigration solicitors. The Home Office has a Children's Champion to oversee work with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and a specialist children's team to manage asylum applications. All agencies working with separated children have the same duty of care to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children, including the Home Office<sup>48</sup>. To clarify working relationships in this sensitive area, the ADCS have produced Joint Working Guidance (2015) and an information sharing proforma for Local Authorities and the Home Office (ADCS, 2015). Social workers are **not** required to share everything they know about the child with the Home Office. The main obligation is to share the outcome of an age assessment if one is required. Practitioners may need to contact the Home Office to determine the immigration status of a child and if they were accompanied or unaccompanied (ADCS/Home Office, 2015). Other useful agencies are local refugee support groups, the relevant national Refugee Council and national legal advice centers such as the Coram Children's Legal Centre for England.

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*that if there is a possibility that the individual is a child, s/he should be treated as such.*

<sup>48</sup> Section 55 of the 2009 Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act

## Professional expectations and values (main heading)

Several research studies point to a perceived reluctance in separated children to disclose information about their past (Kohli, 2006a; Pearce, et al., 2009; Chase, 2010; Kelly, 2011; Wright 2014). Practitioners report being met with silence, or being told a story that they are already familiar with, so that it sounds as if the child is following a script. Indeed, some children are coached to tell a specific story to disguise those involved in their journey to and entry into the UK (Pearce et al., 2009). Lack of disclosure has been viewed critically and with frustration by some professionals (Masocha 2014; Wright 2014). Kohli's (2006a) research with 26 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and their social workers offers one explanation as to this 'silence'. Silence has a number of protective functions; it allows for 'healing' to occur and it can help a child feel safe as they select what information they wish to share. Chase (2010) notes that this 'selective disclosure' extends beyond practitioners to the child's friends and peers. Being unsettled may also reduce the desire to talk about the past and for some their focus is entirely on securing their future.

In relation to child victims of trafficking, disclosure is a continuous process and not a one off event (Pearce et al., 2009). The timing of disclosure is contingent on many factors (trust, feeling safe and secure etc.). Kohli (2006a) proposes a tripartite model of separated children's priorities: they focus on their immediate needs first, followed by their future needs and only then can they attend to the past. Hopkins and Hill (2010) mapped the most common needs of separated children against this model, noting that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children can only attend to their past, their pre-flight experiences and their 'mental health' when their future is stable and secure. The process of gathering information will therefore be piecemeal and occur over time. Whilst other agencies may have information they can share, there should be no expectation of a coherent story from the child in the early stages.

Credibility is an under researched area of practice, even though it features in the accounts of social workers assessing separated children (Pearce et al., 2009; Franklin and Doyle, 2013) and from children feeling disbelieved (Crawley, 2007; Newbigging and Thomas, 2011; UNHCR, 2014). Both sets of perspectives are critical to understanding the claims made about children's credibility that emerge during assessment. From the child's perspective, their ability to give a coherent narrative can be affected by confusion over the purpose of the interview, uncertainty about the question asked, or by attempts to provide the 'right' answer, the one that they think practitioners want to hear. Moreover, memory can be affected by age, developmental stage and by trauma (UNHCR, 2014); the key is not to prejudge their past. From a worker's perspective, uncertainty can arise in response to accounts of childhood and suffering in the country of origin or whilst in transit, especially if the account is delivered in a way that does not meet the worker's social-cultural expectations. Scarce resources, high caseloads and pressures to minimise the

number of children in care are the organisational context in which assessments of separated children take place (ADCS, 2016).

A final challenge can be the difference in perceptions of events. For instance, children who have been trafficked may not see their experiences as exploitative in the context of their socio-economic upbringing and their current limited life choices (Mai, 2011; Pearce, et al., 2009). This does not mean that they are accustomed to abuse, but that they may have been exposed to hardships of a magnitude that is difficult to imagine. In comparison, what they have experienced in the UK may feel like a 'lesser' form of suffering. Being able to accept this is hard. An even greater quandary occurs when a young person states that what they have been through was 'worth it'. The importance of supportive supervision here is self-evident, to avoid any detrimental effect on the assessment process.

### **Specific Procedures (main heading)**

#### **1. Identification as a victim of human trafficking (subheading)**

Social workers and other professionals working with children in routine community-based roles are not required to assess validity of a child's claim for asylum or of being trafficked. There are specific mechanisms in place for this and practitioners' focus should remain child-centered. If there are concerns that a child may be a victim of human trafficking, then practitioners need to refer them to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), as a 'first responder'. Introduced in 2009, the NRM is a European wide remit, to have an individual agency in each country that makes decisions about whether an individual is a victim of human trafficking. To be so defined should enable victims to access specific rights, including the right for a 45-day period for reflection and recovery and a temporary residence permit. In the UK the NRM is subdivided, with the Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Unit taking referrals from the Police and Local Authorities and the Immigration and Visa Service taking the others. Local Authority support for the child should continue irrespective of the formal NRM decision.

#### **2. Age Assessments (sub heading)**

Age assessment is a highly contested area of practice (Crawley, 2007; BASW, 2015). Challenges to Local Authority age assessments have led to over a decade of case law and developing best practice (Brownlees and Yazdani, 2012). In summary, recent Supreme Court decision-making has determined that 'age is an objective fact' (*R (A) v London Borough of Croydon* (2009)). A well-planned and undertaken age assessment

fulfilling all best practice requirements should be robust enough to withstand Court scrutiny; to do so it must be Merton<sup>49</sup> compliant. Meeting these standards involves:

1. Making sure that two social work qualified and age assessment trained staff undertake the assessment,
2. It is recommended that an Appropriate Adult is present too
3. informing the child about the purpose of the assessment,
4. addressing any inconsistencies that cause concern, such as a child or young person giving different dates about an event in the past or being confused about the chronology of events
5. explaining clearly to the child how the decision has been reached and letting them re-clarify information (Brownlees and Yazdani, 2012; ACDS 2015).

Both Dyball, McPhie and Tudor 2012 in Scotland and the ADCS (2015) in England have produced some excellent guidance that can assist social workers through each stage of the process. Expect the assessment to take several sessions and be alert to any unintended stress caused (Dyball, McPhie and Tudor 2012; ADCS, 2015).

### **3. Separated children in private fostering arrangements (sub-heading)**

National and local emphasis on notification of private fostering arrangements<sup>50</sup> may explain the increased awareness of separated children living with 'unknown' or distantly related adults; in 2015, 63% of the notified private fostering situations were children from abroad (DfE, 2015). Assessments of private fostering situations are undertaken either by Children's Services before the placement begins or within seven days of notification. The content of a Private Fostering assessment is prescribed (DfES, 2005) and includes:

1. a visit to the accommodation,

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<sup>49</sup> This refers to a legal judgment in England (*Merton* [2003] EWHC 1689 (Admin)) where the Court gave its approval to an age assessment form developed by the London Boroughs of Hillingdon and Croydon. Since then it has been a requirement that all age assessments are 'Merton' compliant, although further additions have been made to the process of undertaking this assessment.

<sup>50</sup> A private fostering arrangement is when a child (under 16, or under 18 if disabled) lives with an adult who is not their parent, family member or legal guardian, for more than 28 days.

2. ascertaining the views and wishes of the child,
3. obtaining consent to undertake Disclosure Barring Scheme check on all individuals aged 16 and over who live in the household,
4. Clarity over the day-to-day arrangements for the child.

Social workers must visit the child every six weeks for first year of the placement and every 12 weeks thereafter. These assessments may be challenging to complete, as there is often 'intense distrust' of the local authority role and remit (Shaw, Brodie, Ellis &...Willmott 2012, p31). Establishing the reason for the arrangement may highlight that a unaccompanied child has 'overstayed' on either an educational or holiday visa, or may have been placed with these carers to benefit from economic opportunities (Shaw et al., 2012).

### **Conclusion (main heading)**

Separated children are children without parental care in the UK. Their rights are identical to citizen children, but they may have different support needs due to being alone in a new country with an uncertain future ahead. Assessment will take time and has to be built on a foundation of trust and respect. It is a challenging area of practice made more complicated by scarce resources and an unsympathetic climate towards those arriving in the UK. Creativity, patience and the ability to see the child's world are key.

### **Useful tools, guides and frameworks (main heading)**

#### **ADCS Age Assessment Guidance to assist social workers and their manager undertaking age assessments in England (2015)**

Helpful guidance in preparing for an age assessment.

[http://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/Age\\_Assessment\\_Guidance\\_2015\\_Final.pdf](http://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/Age_Assessment_Guidance_2015_Final.pdf)

#### **Age Assessment Practice Guidance: An Age Assessment Pathway for Social Workers in Scotland.**

Helpful guidance in preparing for an age assessment.

[http://www.migrationscotland.org.uk/uploads/files/documents/age\\_assessment\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.migrationscotland.org.uk/uploads/files/documents/age_assessment_guidance.pdf)

**Coram Children's Legal Centre offers excellent practical advice and factsheets.**

<http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com/get-legal-advice/immigration-asylum-nationality/>

### **London Safeguarding Trafficked Children Toolkit (2011)**

This toolkit includes the trafficking risk matrix and a specialist assessment tool and can be used to supplement national guidance.

[http://www.londonscb.gov.uk/files/resources/trafficking/london\\_safeguarding\\_trafficked\\_children\\_toolkit\\_january\\_19th\\_2009.pdf](http://www.londonscb.gov.uk/files/resources/trafficking/london_safeguarding_trafficked_children_toolkit_january_19th_2009.pdf)

### **NRM form for potential child victims of modern slavery**

This web page contains the relevant forms for referring a child to the NRM across the four nations.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-trafficking-victims-referral-and-assessment-forms>

### **UNICEF Child Notices**

Information on what it is like to be a child in a number of countries.

<https://www.unicef.nl/wat-doet-unicef/kinderrechten-in-nl/child-notices/english>

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## **ABSTRACT**

Child trafficking is a significant social problem across the European Union (EU). A discourse has emerged of state services failing trafficked children, who are portrayed as especially vulnerable. Less attention is paid to the socio-political conditions within the EU that result in exclusion. Such exclusion adds to the situational vulnerability that many children on the move experience and it may lead to exploitation. This paper is based on a review of 20 multi-national European Commission funded projects about child trafficking. The projects addressed the child trafficking priorities outlined in the EU Anti-Trafficking Strategy [(2012). Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings 2012–2016, COM (2012) 286, final. Projects were reviewed via in-depth reading. Protective services for children in origin, transit and host countries contribute to the conditions that sustain child trafficking. Systems do not have the capacity to manage the consequences of globalisation. Consequently, exclusionary criteria are applied on the basis of gender, form of exploitation and ethnicity. In this review, being an EU citizen did not result in any guarantees of protection. Better protection requires commitment and investment in preventative programmes.

## **KEYWORDS**

Child trafficking; child protection; children on the move; European Union

## **Funding**

This work was supported by the European Commission under Grant HOME/2014/ISFP/PR/THBX/0052.

## **Introduction**

A review analysing 20 multi-national projects funded by the European Commission about child victims of human trafficking shows a series of structural problems with child protection services. These include: poor identification of child victims, patchy support and lack of coordinated response including few safe returns. Support is limited even when the children are European Union (EU) migrants. Moreover, the child protection system itself can cause further harm and is implicated within the trafficking chain (GATE, 2013). Many of the projects reviewed argue that child protection systems 'fail' child victims of trafficking. In this paper, I argue that many of the problems are due to insufficient funding, lack of political will and

ambivalence about who should protect EU migrant children. Expectations of state protection systems are high both within member states and from the EU.

However, the context of child protection is increasingly dominated by control rather than care (Lorenz, 2017), which clashes with the EU rights-based agenda. A re-orientation of child protection systems to focus on prevention can only occur with sufficient socio-political will.

### **Child Trafficking**

The Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (2000) defines trafficking as the 'recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons' for the purposes of exploitation i.e. 'prostitution ... sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs' (Article 3, UN, 2000). Within the EU, forced labour and begging is conceived as another form of exploitation (CoE, 2005). This is one of the most common forms of child trafficking (2011). A child is anyone under the age of 18 and how the child was recruited, persuaded or forced into the situation is irrelevant to the definition of trafficking. This position is influenced by a protectionist view of children, who by fact of their age and developmental stage are deemed to be 'inherently vulnerable' (UNODC, 2013). However, there is a strong counter narrative in anti-trafficking work that recognises the agency, resilience and resourcefulness of many children (Oude Breuil, 2008; O'Connell Davidson, 2011). In this paper, children are understood to be situationally vulnerable, that is vulnerability arises out of a situation and is not solely embedded in their person.

Empirical literature on child trafficking in Europe is limited (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2005; Gjermeni et al., 2008; Kelly, 2005), with much of the knowledge about the phenomenon stemming from voluntary sector research. The movement of children across Europe is widespread and involves both migrants (EU citizens) and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (hereafter UASC). Some of these children will be victims of trafficking but they can be difficult to identify (Dottridge, 2006; Gallo-way, Smit, & Kromhout, 2015). Patterns vary enormously; some EU countries are mainly source countries for internal and cross-border trafficking and others are entry points for UASC. Some children will be trafficked from the outset, either with or without familial involvement, and others become vulnerable to exploitation as they move within Europe (Dottridge, 2006; Gjermeni et al., 2008). Precise data on the number of trafficked children are still not available (Kelly, 2005), but growth in numbers is attributed to the European migration crisis (EC, 2016). The complexity of the trafficking process and the different ways it is understood by some children (and many professionals) renders identification (Hynes, 2015) and, therefore, data collection problematic (Dottridge, 2006; Kelly, 2005).

### **What is a child protection system?**

Child protection systems, like other aspects of welfare, reflect the social, political and economic conditions of states whilst being influenced by EU requirements. As Kearney (2013) notes, the concept of child protection is rarely interrogated; it is assumed that it is a force for good. Parton's (2006) work has shown how governmental policy, subject to historical, political and economic forces, has shaped the development of what is commonly understood to be child protection in England and Wales. Each country in Europe has its own evolution of child protection services. What is considered to be the threshold for state intervention in family life varies and national context is very specific (Spratt et al., 2015). The dynamic nature of human trafficking has led to a multiplicity of European conventions that set the standards for prevention, protection, prosecution, inter-agency and transnational co-operation and increased knowledge of all forms of trafficking (EU, 2012). The interface between EU requirements and state child protection services is complex. Child protection is a state responsibility, over which the EU has no direct powers (O'Donnell, 2014). Nevertheless, EU recommendations to improve systems for child victims of trafficking, as per the Strategy (2012) led to an EC commissioned overview of national child protection systems in Europe (FRA, 2015a).

The complex structure of child protection is often theorised as a system (Munro, 2012; Wulczyn et al., 2010). According to UNICEF (2008) and FRA (2015a), the core organisational components of such a system include legal and regulatory frameworks; institutions and structures; human and financial resources; information on identification, reporting process, response and coordination; accountability and monitoring; budgeting structures and research and data analysis. How each of these components is interpreted and implemented at a local and national level characterise the whole. In the context of trafficking, taking a systemic approach reveals crucial interactions with other systems including immigration, criminal justice and the labour market. The idea that better services for child victims of human trafficking would be generated by improvements to the whole child protection system is not new (Dottridge, 2006). Improving the system to benefit all children rests on a shared value base, which simultaneously considers the wellbeing of an individual child and all children (Wulczyn et al., 2010).

### **Methodology**

The review contributed to a larger project commissioned by the EU (Walby et al., 2016). This paper focuses on the projects that addressed certain child trafficking priorities outlined in the EU Anti-Trafficking Strategy (2012). These priorities were A3 (a subset of Priority A), 'Identifying, protecting and assisting victims of trafficking'. Children are also specifically identified under Priority E, with a focus on new forms

of trafficking (e.g. begging and forced labour) and specifically vulnerable groups of children i.e. Roma.

A total of 78 projects were initially connected to the A3 Priority. Of these 26 projects considered child trafficking within EU member states and potential and candidate EU countries; the remainder involved overseas projects funded by the EU and are not included in this review. Although child protection was not the stated focus of each of the 26 projects, all acknowledge the significance of functioning child protection systems. Six of the 26 projects were excluded. Four lacked final project documentation and two were funded to run conferences with no printed outputs. The remaining 20 projects covered 20 of the EU-28 countries and are all multinational in design (Table 1). Certain states have been subjected to greater project focus. First are countries that are major European sources of child victims of human trafficking (i.e. Romania, Bulgaria and Slovakia). The second group are common destination countries (i.e. Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden) reflecting well-established migration routes. All of the projects were two years in duration at an average cost to the EC of €423,617 (Walby et al., 2016). The first project started in 2005 and the last were still ongoing in 2016. Each project had different aims and objectives but there are some overarching activities, which reflect the EU strategic priorities (2012), including desk research ( $n = 17$ ), training professionals ( $n = 11$ ), child participation ( $n = 12$ ) and awareness raising ( $n = 12$ ).

### **Findings**

All 20 projects identify child protection systems as central to the protection of child victims of trafficking along a continuum from prevention in the country of origin to post-exploitation support in the destination country. The expectation is that children will be protected throughout. However, child protection systems across the sample consistently fall short of the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989 standards, which is the framework used by most projects to measure outcome. States may have signed and ratified the UNCRC (1989) and other relevant inter-national and EU treaties but they do not necessarily implement the actions in full (GATE, 2013). Most EU member states have national child protection laws, but implementation is variable and occurs at a regional or local level depending on governance structures (FRA, 2015a). Whether national law is comprehensive or piecemeal, overseen by one central government department or cuts across many, the purpose is nominally the same: to ensure children are protected from abuse.

This section focuses on the components of a child protection system that help or hinder support for trafficked children, concentrating on; identification, response and coordination. Identification is problematic across Europe and the consequences can be significant for children. Responses are made up of accommodation services and specific mechanisms to protect trafficked children. Three projects identified ambiguous responses to EU children, which make up the majority of children in need

of care and support in Europe (GATE, 2013; IMPACT, 2014; VICTOR, 2015). Finally, the problems with coordination will be considered, including the communication and actions among multi-agency actors, state institutions and transnational mechanisms. The overall effect is a child protection system that exacerbates harm for many trafficked children, especially Roma children.

### **Identification**

The biggest single problem found in projects was the limited identification of potential child victims of trafficking. Identification means the capacity of relevant actors to recognise and refer suspected child victims to the relevant support services for assessment. Identification is key to all future support and activities to protect the child (Coppola et al., 2014). Explanations for poor identification are well established; children do not self-identify; services assume that it is someone else's responsibility and the distinctions among migration, smuggling, trafficking are often confused. Uncertainty about who may be a potential victim is another critical factor; consequently, much EU funding has been spent on training, conferences and handbooks to improve victim identification (Walby et al., 2016). However, these resources are in need of frequent updating (Save the Children Italia, 2009). Moreover, across Europe, different agencies identify child victims (e.g. in Slovenia, anyone; in Austria, the Criminal Intelligence Service), which further complicates efforts to produce a European-wide guide. Work has been undertaken to develop Standard Operating Procedures. These would be a template that could be updated by a state as indicators, legislation or key information changes (Save the Children, Italia, 2007).

Identification as a potential victim is contingent on low thresholds, which are agreed across agencies. Different thresholds in different services can result in the 'chain of assistance' (Weyler, 2008) being easily broken. Central to identification is recognition that low-risk situations may support child trafficking. Indeed, some projects specifically advocate searching low-level support services for potential victims, e.g. homeless shelters, drop-in centres, free public washing facilities, canteens and temporary accommodation (Degani et al., 2015; GATE, 2013). Even when children are recognised as a potential victim, they may not be supported if they are perceived to be below the threshold for referral, especially if that threshold is active child protection concerns (Hurley, John- Baptiste, & Pande, 2015). Examples include Roma children where there may be uncertainty whether they are genuinely living with their parents or not, and situations where local law does not allow for further investigation if the child is not resident at a permanent address (De Witte & Pehlivan, 2014). Moreover, traffickers manipulate prevailing social norms and will encourage a child into a particular form of exploitation knowing that it is dealt with leniently by the law, as with low-grade criminal activity (pickpocketing, begging) in the UK and the Netherlands (De Witte & Pehlivan, 2014; Hurley et al., 2015).

Finally, for some, cultural bias is at the core of failure to either identify or act on suspicions that a child may be at risk of trafficking; actions such as begging are thus reframed as 'traditional and customary' practice in certain communities (CBSS, 2014a).

Identification is also thwarted by a *professional* preoccupation with the immigration status of the child. The fact of being either a migrant (within the EU), a UASC or being in a country on an irregular basis leads to variations in treatment (CBSS, 2014a). Each 'category' is accorded separate rights in each nation state leading to a concern with immigration status over the needs of the child; this stands in contrast to a rights-based approach in which the category of child takes precedence over all such divisions. The UNCRC (1989), locates the best interests of the child, irrespective of their status, as paramount and requires states to address factors and circumstances that hinder vulnerable groups' access to services and full enjoyment of their rights (CRC, 2013). The best interest principle is key to decision-making for all children, including child victims of human trafficking but is claimed to be poorly applied in Europe (CBSS, 2014a). It stems from Article 3 of the UNCRC:

Article 3 (1) In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

The implication of Article 3 is that a child will be consulted and supported to make decisions that affect their current welfare and future. It applies individually to each child and requires careful assessment. However, there is often a disjunction between the person undertaking the best interest decision with a child and the agency who makes the final decision (CBSS, 2014a). The involvement of children in decision-making is critical.

### **Responses**

The foundation of support for trafficked children is the provision of suitable and safe accommodation. Lack of suitable residential provision is widespread across Europe and contributes to the risk of children absconding (Coppola et al., 2014; CSD, 2013a; GATE, 2013). The situation is made critical by the numbers and very diverse needs of suspected trafficked children, and lack of resources to provide specialist services. Provision is problematic from point of first contact to services post 18. Emergency accommodation is often inappropriate, encompassing as it does temporary reception centres, transit centres, police cells and migrant camps (Degani et al., 2015; Dimitirova, Ivanova, & Alexandrova, 2015; IMPACT, 2014). De Witte and Pehlivan (2014) note that even in the Netherlands, which has a sophisticated anti-trafficking support structure, migrant children who reside in temporary accommodation frequently do not receive protection. Finally, inappropriate, non-child friendly

accommodation increases the vulnerability of any child as it is easier for them to disappear without state services noticing (IMPACT, 2014; VICTOR, 2015). Absence of significant child protection measures increases this risk (Townsend, 2016) although few projects explored this phenomena in detail.

Other projects considered the needs of long-stay children as best met in alternative-family based models rather than in institutional care or half-way houses (CSD, 2013a). Both open and closed (that is a locked facility) forms of accommodation were considered. For the purposes of this review, closed accommodation included detention centres, juvenile justice institutes as well as specialist protective accommodation, such as the NIDOS-protected shelter in Holland (De Witte & Pehlivan, 2014). Children's responses to their care are indicative of their view of its standard. Interviews with migrant children in Greece, found that they left care facilities, as they did not feel safe (IMPACT, 2014). Young people also leave their accommodation because they feel obliged to pay money back to their traffickers or because they prefer more independence (Degani et al., 2015; GATE, 2013).

According to CRC (2005), a guardian should be appointed immediately when a separated or unaccompanied child has been identified; not just in cases of suspected trafficking. Their role is to support and advocate for the child under the terms of Article 3 from point of identification until a 'durable solution' has been found. The appointment of a guardian is variable across the EU and the diversity of practice is striking (Catch and Sustain, 2015; FRA, 2015b). An analysis of guardianship in Cyprus, Greece, Italy and the Netherlands concluded that systemic reform is required to meet the challenges posed by child trafficking (GATE, 2013). They find that the appointment of a guardian is ad hoc and risks becoming another bureaucratic task rather than a genuine support and advocate for the child (CBSS, 2014a; GATE, 2013). No guardian can change the cultural context in which a child is being supported and according to GATE (2013), this is often an unwelcoming one. However, cultural context need not be fixed and part of a guardian's (or a related social professionals' role) is to challenge discriminatory attitudes and conditions.

### **Coordination**

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is a mechanism to assist with the formal identification of victims, although it is used more for adults than children (Coppola et al., 2014). Some EU countries do not operate an NRM, e.g. Italy, Greece (CSD, 2013b). In other states it is decentralised; for instance, the NRM is utilised in Vienna but not across Austria (CSD, 2013b). Finally, in other states, such as Romania and the UK, the NRM exists but it is perceived to be ineffective (Girip & Olaru-Raita, 2014) or not interested in EU nationals (De Witte & Pehlivan, 2014; Hurley et al., 2015). In states, which do have functioning NRM's, the numbers of children who receive formal recognition as a victim of human trafficking are low; creating considerable discrepancy between official statistics and data held by NGO services. In these

same states, only some children acquire formal recognition, with boys, Roma children and children in forced labour often refused (GATE, 2013; Hurley et al., 2015). The EU is developing a Transnational Referral Mechanism for cross-border assistance in trafficking cases, which includes a section on identification. However, these additional mechanisms are problematic in the absence of a fully functioning child protection system.

Evidence from the projects reviewed illustrated the difficulties in guaranteeing safe return and reintegration (CBSS, 2014a; CSD, 2013b; Save the Children Italia, 2009). Arrangements are ad hoc and piecemeal and few safe returns occur (CBSS, 2014a; CSD, 2013b; Save the Children Italia, 2009). One reason is lack of child-focused information about the country of origin. With EU funding, UNICEF developed a template for 'child notices' that detail the conditions for children in their country of origin; the aim is to assist those making decisions about safe returns (Kaandorp, 2015). The Council of Baltic Sea States developed online tools for social workers to assist them in working cross-nationally whilst remaining focused on the child's rights (CBSS, 2014a). Barriers to safe return include professional scepticism about local procedures and facilities in country of origin, the numerous ways in which children can be returned and the complex cross-border policies and procedures (CBSS, 2014a). For some children this entails considerable delay; others, especially Roma children, have their return expedited in unsafe ways (Dimitirova et al., 2015). One specific concern was the lack of assessment undertaken about the possible familial involvement in the trafficking of a child; this presents a genuine risk for re-victimisation. Consequently, very few children are returned.

### **Harmful systems?**

Despite the mandate to protect children from future or further harm, child protection systems can create the conditions for harm manifesting in other ways. Several projects identify the system itself as contributing to the conditions in which child trafficking can thrive (Coppola et al., 2014; GATE, 2013; Wenke, Pàmias, & Costella, 2015). This starts in the country of origin, through absence of protective systems for children. Some projects comment specifically on gaps for Roma children, whose experiences make them at much higher risk of unsafe migration (CSD, 2013a; Dimitirova et al., 2015). These experiences in Bulgaria, Romania and Albania include leaving school early, being left behind by parents who migrate for work, early marriage, no local employment or vocational opportunities and a lack of information about how to stay safe when migrating (CSD, 2013b; REACT, 2011). Harm continues in transit countries due to lack of recognition and limited services and then is perpetuated in the destination country *by concerns of immigration and nationality over the child's rights to be safe*. Consequently, the repeated violation of children's rights creates the conditions in which exploitation flourishes (Coppola et al., 2014).

### **Roma children**

The EU Strategy identifies Roma children as a high-risk group for trafficking. Evidence from the projects reviewed would support this claim. It is estimated that 90% of all street begging in Europe is undertaken by Roma children (Dimitrova et al., 2015) and some begging will be exploitative in nature. However, exploitation, such as forcing a child to beg, in the company of a parent or guardian does not meet the definitional criteria of child trafficking. Consequently, responses are contradictory or absent as the situation is not perceived to be one of trafficking. Several projects outlined the specific socio-economic factors that increase vulnerability for Roma children (CSD, 2013b; Degani et al., 2015). These include systemic poverty, limited access to education, and lack of opportunity in the country of origin (CSD, 2013b; Dimitrova et al., 2015). Other projects also sought to explain specific community characteristics that may have a bearing on child trafficking, such as an expectation that children will actively contribute to household income from an early age (Dimitrova et al., 2015). However, these factors are contested as if broadly applied may lead to stereotyping of Roma communities. Thus, much of the increased vulnerability stems from cultural attitudes and confusion in the receiving countries (Cazenave, 2012; Degani et al., 2015).

### **Discussion**

This review indicates that trafficked children across Europe are not receiving the state care and protection that they, as children, are entitled to. If the core aspects of a child protection system (i.e. identification and referral procedures and suitable accommodation/support) are not in place then any of the additional mechanisms, specific to trafficked children, such as the NRM become difficult to action. Even when children are identified as suspected victims; service provision is limited and discontinuous (Coppola et al., 2014). Sometimes, being identified as a potential victim is inadequate as the threshold for child protection intervention is so high (Hurley et al., 2015). Many or all of the problems outlined above are a consequence of insufficient funding, lack of political will and ambivalence about 'which' children need protection. The need to increase financial provision for support services is noted in many projects (CBSS, 2014a; Coppola et al., 2014; IMPACT, 2014).

Measures to prevent circumstances in which child trafficking occurs are limited (CBSS, 2014a; Dottridge, 2006). Projects and anti-trafficking research rarely address the socio-political causes of disadvantage and exclusion. The preoccupation with identification and risk management, rather than prevention is a core problem of child protection systems globally (CRC, 2013). In order to develop protective systems that function for all children, there needs to be a fundamental shift to re-direct political and social efforts towards prevention (Lorenz, 2017). This also accords with the CRC (2013) and the EU Directive (2011), child protection systems need to be reoriented towards primary prevention. Simple prevention measures include

universal birth registration, free education, stricter control of labour regulations and the criminalisation of the use of services of a trafficked victim (ATPEC, 2010).

Additional measures are those highlighted by CBSS (2014b, p. 5) 'tackling social and economic exclusion and marginalisation, combating corruption, promoting development, peace, stability and the rule of law', which require the development of preventative social and labour policies (Lorenz, 2017).

### **Freedom of movement**

One of the effects of poorly resourced protection systems in countries of origin combined with the right to free movement enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty is child movement (Cazenave, 2012). Requirements vary between EU countries, but children can move within the Schengen area with just a form of identification or for some countries an affidavit signed by the parents (Buzatu, 2015). 'Children on the move' is an umbrella term that encompasses children migrating alone or accompanied and who may be exposed to vulnerable situations during their journey(s) (European Forum on the Rights of the Child, 2013). Living in another country, without parental or primary care-giver oversight increases their situational vulnerability. Such children may become victims of trafficking. However, an overemphasis on potential risk for children on the move precludes discussion of the opportunities that such movement may create. Direct work with children in some of the projects challenges the risk discourse that permeates child trafficking (Coppola et al., 2014; Wenke et al., 2015). As O'Connell Davidson (2013) notes a shift to acknowledging children as more than just victims to be rescued is a necessary one. The notion that children can exercise agency, and are able to make decisions, even if they are not always wise ones is a challenge to systems that are designed to protect. Child victims of trafficking can miss out on protective services because immigration and asylum systems take precedence (Hynes, 2015; O'Connell Davidson, 2011). This review finds that exclusion occurs irrespective of nationality or citizenship status. Being an EU citizen does not, in the projects reviewed, guarantee support and protection from another member state (CSD, 2013b; Degani et al., 2015; IMPACT, 2014). In fact, being an EU citizen may complicate access to support as destination countries have 'no practical means of offering adequate protection to EU migrant children' (Cazenave, 2012 p. 8) partly because there is no specific legislation that governs the return of an EU migrant child. The exclusionary criteria result from stereotypes about trafficked victims of children from certain ethnic communities (i.e. Roma). The belief that child trafficking involves girls trafficked for sexual exploitation has persisted for some time (Dottridge, 2006; O'Connell Davidson, 2013). As some of the projects reviewed show, services struggle to recognise and respond to older children, especially boys and those involved in labour exploitation and forced begging (Dimitirova et al., 2015; Dottridge, 2006). This is despite the EU addition of begging to the definition of trafficking and a specific encouragement to consider 'new forms of trafficking' in the EU Anti-Trafficking Strategy (2012).

There are many possible reasons for poor system interaction but the effect on trafficked children is harmful. Trafficked children may be enmeshed in a multitude of systems including immigration, judicial, labour market and general welfare as well as the child protection system. Moreover, there is no mechanism for keeping the child at the centre of all these systems. Some argue that the very requirement for trafficked children to have specialised services is 'an obstacle to connect with the prerogatives that all policies addressed to children should guarantee the maximum level of rights and welfare' (GATE, 2013, p. 98). Others conclude that specialist anti-trafficking support services are essential but within a broader framework of unconditional support for all children (Degani et al., 2015). Communication between systems at local, national and transnational level still requires improvement (Degani et al., 2015; Dimitirova et al., 2015) despite an ongoing commitment to training and awareness raising (EU, 2011). Training is aimed at border officials, police, child protection services, the judiciary, support services, shelters and respite centres to assist with both initial identification and screening (Save the Children Italia, 2007, 2009; SouthEast SafeNet, n.d.) as well as awareness raising for children and young people to help them improve their own safety skills (Wenke et al., 2015).

### **Market forces**

As O'Connell Davidson (2011) points out, many systems, e.g. immigration control, can cause harm to those trafficked, but State attention is always directed outwards, not inwards. By turning inwards a series of irreconcilable pressures emerge which centre around notions of care and control. Many aspects of state protective services are privatised (i.e. residential care) and NGO's are left to support and protect children in the absence of functioning state systems (VICTOR, 2015). There is a need for better monitoring, quality assurance and evaluation of both privatised and public child protection services (ATPEC, 2010). Moreover, national and transnational systems must co-operate better. Greater co-operation between states is required at a time when supranational institutions are under pressure. As Lorenz (2016) points out, the EU welcomes mobility and free trade but is not able to provide the transnational support structures that are required. Fragmentation of policy and services results in significant gaps between what Lorenz (2016) calls the humanitarian principles of the founding EU charter and the dissolution of member state services under acute stress. Neo liberalism places increasing pressures on welfare regimes and the consequences exclude many (Lorenz, 2016), including children on the move.

### **Way forward**

Child trafficking is a lens through which the failings of support services to manage child protection under intense socio-economic pressure are only too clear. Accounts from child victims, of enduring exploitation in their country of origin, in transit and

finally in the destination country, demand a protective response. Sadly, such a response is rarely forthcoming. Child trafficking in Europe is not solely the domain of criminals but occurs as a by-product of contemporary state mechanisms including child protection, immigration, labour market and criminal justice systems. The interaction of these systems is ad hoc, may cause further harm and the focus on the child is often lost. Unless the role of social work and other support professions is simply to 'smooth over the gaps of built-in contradictions' (Lorenz, 2017, p. 26) then change is required. It is proposed that this change must be grounded in prevention and the child's rights and that the concern is with upholding the dignity of every child not only those who meet specific protective criteria. Child rights are integral to developing preventative socio-economic systems that protect all children.

### **Conclusion**

This review of 20 anti-child trafficking projects in the EU indicates that an overhaul of the aim, purpose and functioning of protective systems is required. Currently, the identification, support and long-term decision-making for child victims of trafficking create problems in the European countries considered. Frequently, these problems are attributed to decision-making based on immigration status although many of the children in these projects were EU citizens. This paper argues that exclusionary criteria are applied to many children and that in the domain of trafficking this includes age, ethnicity and gender. However, the gaps in child protection systems are not specific to child victims of trafficking although their particular plight magnifies them. Better protection is dependent on systems that have the capacity to respond to all children, not to specific groups or particular issues as is acknowledged by UNICEF (2008). Child protection systems should be based on a principle of upholding the dignity of every child whilst having the capacity to respond to all. Such a transformation cannot be achieved without significant political will and resources. So far, the EU has nudged member states to reflect on their child protection systems through the EU Trafficking Directive (2011) and accompanying Strategy (2012) however a bolder commitment to prevention is urgently required.

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