Child sexual exploitation

Introduction

* Safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation * defines child sexual exploitation (CSE) as:

"Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (such as food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities".\(^1\)

CSE can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example, being persuaded to post sexual images on the Internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability.

Barnardo's has identified three different models of activity which are not exhaustive, and show a spectrum of exploitation.\(^2\)

1. Inappropriate relationships usually involving one perpetrator who has inappropriate power or control over a young person.
2. 'Boyfriend' model of exploitation and peer exploitation.
3. Organised/networked sexual exploitation or trafficking young people.

CSE tends to be a hidden activity and much more likely to take place in private residences than visibly on the streets. It is unclear how many people are affected by CSE nationally or locally. Nationally there were 2,409 confirmed victims of CSE in either gangs or groups during the 15-month period from August 2010 to October 2011, although this is thought to be a substantial undercounting. In the year to March 2011, at least 16,500 children nationally displayed three or more signs or behaviour indicating they were at risk of CSE.\(^3\)

Sexual exploitation can have a serious impact on the life of children and young people and the health impact on victims of child sexual exploitation are broad:\(^4\)

- Long-term sexual, physical and psychological harm.
- Developing drug and alcohol misuse habit.
- Increased sexually risky behaviour (in some cases leading to teenage pregnancy or forced miscarriages).
- Domestic servitude, neglect and violence.
- Self-harm and suicide.
Vulnerable and at risk groups

Any child or young person may be at risk of sexual exploitation, regardless of their family background or other circumstances. This includes boys and young men as well as girls and young women. However, some groups are particularly vulnerable to CSE and typical vulnerabilities include:

- Living in a chaotic or dysfunctional household (including parental substance misuse, domestic violence, parental mental health issues and criminality).
- History of abuse (including familial child sexual abuse, risk of forced marriage, risk of honour-based violence, physical and emotional abuse and neglect).
- Recent bereavement or loss.
- Gang association either through relatives, peers or intimate relationships.
- Attending school with young people who are sexually exploited.
- Learning disabilities.
- Unsure about their sexual orientation or unable to disclose sexual orientation to their families.
- Friends with young people who are sexually exploited.
- Homelessness.
- Lacking friends from the same age group.
- Living in residential care.
- Low self-esteem or self-confidence.
- Being a young carer.

Technology forms part of most people’s lives, especially those of young people. As a result it has been rare to identify cases of CSE where the use of technology has not been a factor. Information technology is having a direct impact in a multitude of ways on the means by which people are able to sexually exploit children.

What is the evidence base?

The Office of the Children’s Commissioner’s inquiry in to CSE in gangs and groups identified 9 essential foundations of effective practice for safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation:

1. Focus on the child.
2. Gaining a child’s confidence.
3. Effective leadership.
4. Strategic planning.
5. Everyone on alert.
6. Spotting the warning signs.
7. Joined-up working.
8. Early identification and pre-emptive action.
A briefing by Barnado’s for local authorities outlined the key components of effective local action on CSE:

- Raising awareness.
- Understanding what is happening.
- Developing a strategic response.
- Supporting victims of exploitation.
- Facilitating policing and prosecutions.

The Children’s Commissioner study of gang-associated sexual violence towards, and exploitation of, young people in England recommends:

- Every school, education and health provider, youth service and other relevant universal service needs to promote understanding of healthy relationships, the concept of consent and the harm caused by rape and sexual assault.
- Every school and education provider must develop and implement whole school approaches to address all forms of sexual violence and exploitation, including sexualised bullying and coercive behaviour.
- All ‘Ending Gang and Youth Violence areas should profile their street gangs with reference to sexual exploitation, identify girls and women associated with gang members, and link strategies that tackle serious youth and/or gang violence with those combating child sexual exploitation.
- Every local authority with a gang-affected neighbourhood – as part of their multi-agency gang work – should have trained and supported mentors and advocates to support young people who are at risk of becoming, or are, gang involved or affected by gang-associated sexual violence or exploitation.

**Local picture**

It is nationally recognised that it is difficult to provide an accurate estimate of an issue and activity likely to be greatly under identified and under reported. Using information from a range of sources across the borough, Luton is starting to build a picture.

In the eleven months to end of February 2015, Children’s Social Care had 99 assessments undertaken following referral that had CSE as one of the presenting factors (4.6% of all assessments). Three quarters (75%) of children and young people were female and 65% were aged 11-16 years. Just over half of the assessments resulted in a strategy discussion, whilst 5% were stepped down to early help or other services, and 16% of children became children in need (eg. in receipt of children’s social care services). Only 5% resulted in no further action due to assess level of risk, which is a much lower proportion than the proportion of all assessments for any reason, which result in no further action.

At 24 February 2015, 77 children were recorded as currently at risk of CSE on the children’s social care database. These would be children who have been the subject of a risk assessment or referred to Child Sexual Exploitation Panel (CSEP). Analysis of the same information as at 7 October 2014 (76 children), 26% were children in need, 21% were looked after or cases closed and 16% care leavers.
The CSEP is a multi-agency meeting (statutory and voluntary sector agencies, ie housing, health, substance misuse providers, and criminal justice services involved in supporting children and young people who are or might be at risk of organised CSE) operating across Bedfordshire and acts as a mechanism for referring and acting upon cases of suspected sexual exploitation. There were a total of 63 cases heard by the Bedfordshire CSE between January and September 2014 covering Luton and Beds. Almost half (31) of these related to Luton (determined by home address of victim). A large number of organisations contributed towards these referrals, including youth offending, health, and police; however the main sources of referrals in Luton were children’s services and school/s colleges (7 each).

Owing to low numbers, it is not possible to identify hotspots of activity, however there is an identified vulnerability linked to looked after children and those in foster or care homes. There have been a number of offenders involved in exploitation on more than one occasion, either operating alone or as part of more organised groups.

The Council participated in an Ofsted thematic inspection in October 2014. This highlighted that a lot of work had been done in Luton. However, to further progress there is a need to: continue joining up our services and develop our workforce (knowledge of our social workers and developing use of enforcement processes).

What is being done locally?
Preventing CSE and intervening to protect and support victims can only be effective through effective multi-agency and partnership working. The Council and partner agencies recognise the risks posed by organised CSE and within neighbouring authorities such as Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough.

Service developments have, and will continue to be informed by the recent Ofsted Thematic Inspection on CSE and the commissioned National Working Group Review on CSE, which is due to be reported on in 2015.

CSE is a potentially significant issue for Luton due to factors including deprivation, an international airport, major road links and lastly the availability of cheap rental properties available across the town.

A draft Sexual Exploitation Strategy (covering both children and adults) and detailed strategic action plan has been developed and shared with the Pan-Bedfordshire Missing Children and CSE Strategic Group, which is accountable to the Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and The Luton Safeguarding Children Boards.

This strategic group supports and fulfils the Board’s statutory responsibility to co-ordinate, monitor, and evaluate the effectiveness of local arrangements to safeguard missing children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation, gangs, forced marriage, trafficking and female genital mutilation. The work of this group is supported by operationally by CSEP, where cases are reviewed following a single assessment and the completion of the Pans Beds CSE risk assessment tool.

A key priority contained within the strategic action plan is to ensure that the workforce, across the partnership, is sufficiently equipped, through professional knowledge, with skills and support to
safeguard young people and adults, ably assisted by the right tools, resources and performance management systems.

The risk assessment in relation to CSE, was originally developed in relation to the CSE guidance in 2009 and updated by research undertaken by the University of Bedfordshire in 2012 and further updated in 2015. The tool is a guide to aid professional practice covering:

- Risk levels.
- Risk Indicators.
- Evident behaviours.
- Actions required.
- Pathways to referral/action.

A further intelligence mapping exercise across the authority and development of a performance management tool that sit alongside the Luton Sexual Exploitation Strategy and action plan will enhance the understanding of CSE, which will be completed in 2015 and provide supporting evidence for further enhancing our performance measures.

**Perspective of the public/service users**

The takeover day in 2012 which explored sexual exploitation found young people felt they needed to understand more about healthy relationships and this type of education should begin in primary schools. Young women felt a lack of confidence to say ‘no’ to sex and this was linked to low self-esteem.

**Priorities**

1. Ensure there is a clear governance structure relating to CSE across the borough and pan Bedfordshire.
2. Develop a coordinated approach to the collection and collation of information locally to better understand CSE in Luton and update the sexual exploitation action plan accordingly
3. Implement the CSE Action Plan to ensure all relevant strategic documents and polices relating to safeguarding of children include risk of CSE.
4. Reduce and prevent the incidence of child sexual exploitation by raising awareness and improved communication across all agencies and in the wider community.
References


v Children’s Commissioner. “I thought I was the only one. The only one in the world.” The Office of the Children’s Commissioner’s Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups Interim report Nov. 2012. Available from: http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications/content_636


viii Children’s Commissioner. “It is wrong… but you get used to it”. A qualitative study of gang-associated sexual violence towards, and exploitation of, young people in England. Available from: http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications/content_745

