

Reading List

Early Identification of Exploitation

Key Findings

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)

- Good practice in the identification of CCE and risk of CCE involves the sharing of information and intelligence between local partners
- Practitioners having strong knowledge of their local area as to identify patterns in friendships, families and school links can be key
- Mapping meetings and frameworks to share intelligence and understand relationships and patterns in local communities is also important for earlier identification of children and young people at risk of criminal exploitation¹
- Different forms of exploitation often occur simultaneously and share characteristics which can pose as a barrier to identification and prevention. Developing a coherent framework that addresses common factors can help enable a consistent response to different forms of exploitation²

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

- While research identifies a set of 'risk indicators' to aid identification, such as unexplained gifts/money or going missingⁱ, it's important to note that these indicators are not exhaustive and not exclusive to what CSE might look like and it can occur without these risk indicators being present³
- More effective forms of risk assessments move away from a 'tick box' approach to take a more holistic form which allows for professional judgement and the inclusion of children and young people's voices⁴
- Families, schools, and frontline services such as GPs and social care play important roles in early identification and in detecting warning signs of CSE⁵
- The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse has a number of briefings focused on these areas. In terms of early identification, a common message is the importance of strategic information and intelligence sharing⁶, and multi-agency working across services, schools, health care and the police^{7, 8, 9}

Key Findings

- Some groups of children and young people are at heightened risk of experiencing sexual abuse (such as children with disabilities) or not being identified early by professionals (such as boys or children from Black and other ethnic minority backgrounds)¹⁰. There is consequently a lack of evidence on early identification or best practice in identifying CSE and CCE amongst these groups.

ⁱ See Beckett, Holmes and Walker (2017) pg. 26 for a comprehensive list of risk indicators

Key research on this topic:

Citation	Evidence type	Summary
<p>The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2020). It was hard to escape. Safeguarding children at risk from criminal exploitation.</p> <p>Available here</p>	<p>Report</p>	<p>The national review aims to identify what might be done differently by practitioners to improve approaches to protecting children who are threatened with violence and serious harm by criminal gangs.</p> <p>The review saw examples of good practice in the way local partners shared information and intelligence and some practitioners knew their local area well so could identify friendship patterns, families who knew each other, and school links. Such detailed knowledge helped practitioners identify risk early on and act on it.</p> <p>Practitioners felt that information sharing was crucial, particularly soft intelligence from police. Gang matrices were often used and there were a number of mapping meetings and frameworks used to share intelligence, understand relationships between children, and to gain a better understanding of patterns in the local community. Practitioners felt this was effective in enabling earlier identification of children at risk of criminal exploitation.</p>
<p>NSPCC CASPAR Briefing (2020). Safeguarding children at risk from criminal exploitation: it was hard to escape. Findings from a review by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel of 21 cases involving teenagers from 17 local areas in England who died or experienced serious harm where criminal exploitation was a factor. NSPCC</p> <p>Available here</p>	<p>Briefing</p>	<p>The briefing gives an overview of the review (outlined above). Key findings include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Use of effective practice</u>: practitioners are not always confident about what they can do to help children and young people they know are being drawn into criminal exploitation. While there are a number of approaches taken across England, there is little evidence of what works and no central point where evidence is evaluated or disseminated. • <u>Trusted relationships</u>: despite a number of practitioners being involved in young people's lives, from the perspectives of young people, practitioner involvement was on the surface of their lives. Building a trusted relationship between children and practitioners is essential to effective communication and risk management. • <u>Responding to the 'critical moment'</u>: professionals reported that there are critical moments in children and young people's lives when a decisive response is necessary to make a difference to their long-term outcomes. These critical moments include the point at which they are excluded from school, when they are physically injured, and when they are arrested. More evidence is needed about those key moments so that interventions can be tested.
<p>Firmin, C., Wroe, L. and Lloyd, J. (2019). Safeguarding and exploitation – complex, contextual and holistic</p>	<p>Briefing</p>	<p>Policy, research and practice identify similar behaviours that may feature as a symptom or indicator of child sexual exploitation (e.g. displaying behaviours categorised as 'risky' such as going missing; displaying behaviours categorised as 'suspicious' such as acquisition of material items of money; changing relationships especially with controlling or significantly older adults; decline in physical or mental health; and services/parents experiencing new challenges in</p>

<p>approaches. <i>Research in Practice</i></p> <p>Available here</p>		<p>engaging the young person). It is essential that these behaviours are not view as reliable indicators upon which to build a 'checklist' for identification. Instead, the focus should be on whether a multi-agency workforce is equipped to identify these behaviours as potential indicators of abuse and then work within effective local strategies, service design and policies to address them.</p> <p>As different forms of exploitation often occur simultaneously and share causes, characteristics, methods and associated behaviours this can pose as a barrier to identification, prevention and responding effectively. Developing a coherent framework that addresses these common factors is one pathway to enabling consistent responses to different forms of exploitation, preventing one form being addressed at the expense of others.</p>
<p>NSPCC Caspar Briefing (2022). A summary of the child sexual exploitation by organised networks investigation report. An overview of key findings and recommendations outlines in the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse investigation report into child sexual exploitation by organised networks. <i>NSPCC</i></p> <p>Available here</p>	<p>Briefing</p>	<p>Heightened risks of sexual exploitation are identified for specific groups of children including children in out of area placements, boys and young men who are often overlooked, and children with disabilities.</p> <p>Sexually exploited children are likely to be in contact with schools and frontline services including social care, GPs, and hospitals meaning these professionals play an important role in early identification and in detecting early warning signs. However, often professionals lack the skills needed to identify child sexual exploitation leading to a delayed response.</p> <p>While screening and risk assessments are often used to identify and assess children at risk of experiencing harm, concerns are raised around assessment 'checklists' limiting the space for professional judgement and curiosity. More effective forms of risk assessments are those that move away from a 'tick-box' approach and take a more holistic approach which allows for professional judgement, exploration and discussion of risks, and inclusion of the child's voice.</p> <p>Outreach work, such as youth services, was found to play an important role in providing support to children at risk of or experiencing sexual exploitation.</p> <p>There are some positive examples of contextual safeguarding being used to consider wider risk factors for child sexual exploitation, but the evidence base for this is currently limited and this strategy should not detract from the child's needs.</p>
<p>Eaton, J. and Holmes, D. (2017). Working effectively to address child sexual exploitation: Evidence scope. <i>Research in Practice</i></p>	<p>Evidence review</p>	<p>This evidence scope aims to support local areas in the continual development of child sexual exploitation services by reviewing and critically appraising relevant evidence. It highlights limitations to indicators of risk, as indicators that practitioners and parents are warned to look out for are not indicators of <i>potential</i> risk, but evidence of harm <i>already</i> occurring. This results in sexual exploitation being identified too late and long after early disruption of the sex offender or preventative work with children can achieve impact.</p>

<p>Available here</p>		<p>To support the identification and assessment of risk in sexual exploitation it is common for assessments to explore the history, experiences and context of a child. Establishing a clear chronology, from the child's perspective, can give crucial insight into the behaviours, coping mechanisms, experiences and perceptions of the child. If practitioners rely only on linear risk assessment processes or apply generic assessment without critical analysis, then they may lose the 'individuality' of that young person and fail to recognise their specific circumstances, realities and individual needs</p> <p>Strategic information sharing procedures have enabled better safety planning for children already being exploited, as well as the early identification of young people at risk of exploitation. Close consultation between agencies is also required to achieve consistent inter-professional responses to the identification and management of CSE and to establish preventative interventions. Schools and health services are crucial for the early identification of risk. Parents, families and the wider community can also play a crucial role in safeguarding and in the identification of sexual exploitation.</p>
<p>Beckett, H., Holmes, D. and Walker, J. (2017). Child sexual exploitation. Definition and guide for professionals. <i>University of Bedfordshire and Research in Practice</i></p> <p>Available here</p>	<p>Guide for professionals</p>	<p>Boys and young men are likely to be overlooked in instances of CSE and are less likely to disclose abuse than their female peers. Similar identification issues have been highlighted in relation to children and young people from black and other ethnic minority communities.</p> <p>Indicators of CSE may be explained away as young people simply 'being a teenager', or seen as acts of deviance or defiance, rather than being recognised as potential indications of underlying vulnerability or harm. This is complicated by the fact that many of the identified 'risk indicators' of child sexual exploitation – such as secrecy, drug or alcohol use, or changes in behaviour or emotional wellbeing – can be hard to differentiate from general adolescent behaviours or could be explained by other issues. It's important to exercise professional curiosity and look beyond presenting behaviours to identify underlying causes or vulnerabilities.</p> <p>Online child sexual exploitation can be particularly challenging to identify and respond to. Children and young people, and perpetrators, are frequently more familiar with, and spend more time in, these environments than parents/carers and professionals who can struggle to remain up to date with the latest sites and potential connection points.</p> <p>Parents and carers have a critical role to play in helping to protect children and young people from child sexual exploitation as they are well placed to support early identification and can help educate children about sex, healthy relationships and abuse, enhance resilience, provide a safe base and ensure open channels of communication.</p>

		<p>Sets of 'risk indicators' have been developed to try to aid identification of child sexual exploitation. These commonly include factors such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unexplained money or gifts • Going missing (for short or long periods) • Being distressed or withdrawn on return • Disengaging from existing social networks • Secrecy around new associations • Additional mobile phones or concerning use of technology • Sexual health problems • Disclosure of rape/sexual assault (and reluctance to report) • Changes in temperament/emotional wellbeing • Drug or alcohol misuse • Secretiveness • Unexplained physical injuries <p>Whilst it is important for professionals and parents/carers to be aware of and alert to these indicators, it is not an exhaustive list and there is no definitive interpretation of what these indicators might look like – for example, what constitutes concerning use of technology or online forms of harm. It is also important to realise that these indicators are not exclusive to child sexual exploitation and that it can occur without any of these risk indicators being obviously present.</p>
<p>Radford, L., Allnock, D. and Hynes, P. (2016). Preventing and responding to child sexual abuse and exploitation: evidence review. <i>Unicef</i></p> <p>Available here</p>	<p>Evidence review</p>	<p>Identifying children living with, or at risk of, sexual abuse and exploitation is challenging due to a number of factors, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • barriers to disclosure by children • lack of awareness, understanding and recognition of sexual abuse and exploitation • professionals' lack of skills and training in identification • poor information sharing by agencies • a policy or cultural context that does not support identification and child protection responses <p>A range of responses has been taken to improve identification of children who are sexually abused or sexually exploited. These include training those who work with children to be alert to the signs of sexual abuse and exploitation; introducing methods to 'screen' for sexual abuse; introducing assessment methods, particularly risk assessments, to identify children most likely to be vulnerable; improving data sharing and guidance for multi-sectoral methods of working together; and developing reporting and referral pathways.</p>

		<p>Sexually exploited children may be identified more proactively through social welfare workers who can search their own client base to identify those likely to be vulnerable. Searching for indicators of sexual exploitation in case records, for example, may identify children at risk or, alternately, it is recognized that parents and family members may have some knowledge of what is happening to the child.</p> <p>A co-ordinated approach is crucial because the needs of sexually exploited children and young people are multi-dimensional and not likely to be met by one sector alone.</p>
<p>Sharp-Jeffs, N., Coy, M. and Kelly, L. (2017). Key messages from research on child sexual exploitation: Social Workers. <i>Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse</i></p> <p>Available here</p>	Briefing	<p>Key messages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working closely with specialist services and families provides more opportunities to disrupt sexual exploitation in the early stages • Prevention and disruption also needs to focus on perpetrators – it’s important for social workers to be part of local multi-agency forums on sexual exploitation so intelligence can be shared
<p>Sharp-Jeffs, N., Coy, M. and Kelly, L. (2017). Key messages from research on child sexual exploitation: Professionals in school settings. <i>Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse</i></p> <p>Available here</p>	Briefing	<p>Key messages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All schools (including alternative educational settings such as Pupil Referral Units and Short Stay Schools, colleges and post-16 training) should assume that child sexual exploitation is an issue that needs to be addressed • All schools are ideally placed to deliver information to students about child sexual exploitation through preventative education that delivers knowledge and challenges attitudes • Staff within the school community should be trained to spot potential ‘warning signs’ of CSE and to feel confident to begin conversations based on their concerns • Multi-agency links mean that schools can be part of developing a protective community network which holds perpetrators to account
<p>Sharp-Jeffs, N., Coy, M. and Kelly, L. (2017). Key messages from research on child sexual exploitation: Multi-agency working. <i>Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse</i></p> <p>Available here</p>	Briefing	<p>Key messages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting sexually exploited young people and disrupting perpetrators are complex processes that require appropriate interventions from a range of stakeholders • Multi-agency approaches enable organisations to contribute their specific role whilst also developing shared perspectives and approaches to protecting young people • When accompanied by multi-agency commitment to shared outcomes, advantages of close working arrangements include: sharing expertise; establishing shared expectations and approaches; facilitating information sharing to safeguard young people; sharing resources; and sharing intelligence to disrupt perpetrators
<p>Sharp-Jeffs, N., Coy, M. and Kelly, L. (2017). Key messages</p>	Briefing	<p>Key messages:</p>

<p>from research on child sexual exploitation: Staff working in health settings. <i>Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse</i></p> <p>Available here</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sexually exploited young people may access a broad range of healthcare in different settings, so it is vital that health care staff are curious about sexual exploitation and ask questions to establish what is going on.• All health workers – irrespective of their role – should see beyond clinical needs by taking a holistic approach and considering what sits behind the presenting issue.• It is important to create an 'invitation to tell' for young people, by making them feel cared about and building trust• Health care staff should engage in multi-agency work to protect young people, identify patterns in abuse and disrupt perpetrators
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Appendix 1 – Methodology

Date of literature search: September 2022

Search: EBSCO Discovery Service for Barnardo's

- Search terms: Early identification of exploitation
- Filtered by: 2017-2022
- No relevant results

Search: EBSCO Discovery Service for Barnardo's

- Search terms: Early recognition of exploitation
- Filtered by: 2017-2022
- No relevant results

Search: EBSCO Discovery Service for Barnardo's

- Search terms: Early identification of exploitation
- Filtered by: 2017-2022
- No relevant results

Search: What Works for Children's Social Care

- Search terms: Criminal exploitation AND sexual exploitation
- No relevant results

Search: NSPCC Learning

- Search terms: Exploitation
- Relevant results:
 - NSPCC CASPAR Briefing (2022). A summary of the child sexual exploitation by organised networks investigation report. An overview of key findings and recommendations outlines in the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse investigation report into child sexual exploitation by organised networks. *NSPCC*
 - NSPCC CASPAR Briefing (2020). Safeguarding children at risk from criminal exploitation: it was hard to escape. Findings from a review by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel of 21 cases involving teenagers from 17 local areas in England who died or experienced serious harm where criminal exploitation was a factor. *NSPCC*

Search: Research in Practice

- Search terms: Exploitation
- Filtered by: Children & families; Publication; Report; Research & evaluation case study; Research and evidence review; Research summary
- Relevant results:
 - Firmin, C., Wroe, L. and Lloyd, J. (2019). Safeguarding and exploitation – complex, contextual and holistic approaches. *Research in Practice*
 - Eaton, J. and Holmes, D. (2017). Working effectively to address child sexual exploitation: Evidence scope. *Research in Practice*
 - Beckett, H., Holmes, D. and Walker, J. (2017). Child sexual exploitation. Definition and guide for professionals. *University of Bedfordshire and Research in Practice*

Search: Tackling Child Exploitation

- Search of: Research and Evidence page
- Relevant results:
 - Radford, L., Allnock, D. and Hynes, P. (2016). Preventing and responding to child sexual abuse and exploitation: evidence review. *Unicef*

Search: Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse

- Search of Resources page
- Filtered by: Key messages from research
- Relevant results:
 - Sharp-Jeffs, N., Coy, M. and Kelly, L. (2017). Key messages from research on child sexual exploitation: Professionals in school settings. *Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse*
 - Sharp-Jeffs, N., Coy, M. and Kelly, L. (2017). Key messages from research on child sexual exploitation: Multi-agency working. *Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse*
 - Sharp-Jeffs, N., Coy, M. and Kelly, L. (2017). Key messages from research on child sexual exploitation: Staff working in health settings. *Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse*
 - Sharp-Jeffs, N., Coy, M. and Kelly, L. (2017). Key messages from research on child sexual exploitation: Social Workers. *Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse*

Appendix 2 – References

- ¹ The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2020). It was hard to escape. Safeguarding children at risk from criminal exploitation.
- ² Firmin, C., Wroe, L. and Lloyd, J. (2019). Safeguarding and exploitation – complex, contextual and holistic approaches. *Research in Practice*
- ³ Beckett, H., Holmes, D. and Walker, J. (2017). Child sexual exploitation. Definition and guide for professionals. *University of Bedfordshire and Research in Practice*
- ⁴ NSPCC Caspar Briefing (2022). A summary of the child sexual exploitation by organised networks investigation report. An overview of key findings and recommendations outlines in the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse investigation report into child sexual exploitation by organised networks. *NSPCC*
- ⁵ NSPCC Caspar Briefing (2022). A summary of the child sexual exploitation by organised networks investigation report. An overview of key findings and recommendations outlines in the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse investigation report into child sexual exploitation by organised networks. *NSPCC*
- ⁶ Eaton, J. and Holmes, D. (2017). Working effectively to address child sexual exploitation: Evidence scope. *Research in Practice*
- ⁷ Sharp-Jeffs, N., Coy, M. and Kelly, L. (2017). Key messages from research on child sexual exploitation: Multi-agency working. *Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse*
- ⁸ Sharp-Jeffs, N., Coy, M. and Kelly, L. (2017). Key messages from research on child sexual exploitation: Professionals in school settings. *Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse*
- ⁹ Sharp-Jeffs, N., Coy, M. and Kelly, L. (2017). Key messages from research on child sexual exploitation: Staff working in health settings. *Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse*
- ¹⁰ NSPCC Caspar Briefing (2022). A summary of the child sexual exploitation by organised networks investigation report. An overview of key findings and recommendations outlines in the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse investigation report into child sexual exploitation by organised networks. *NSPCC*