



Child Sexual Exploitation in the North East and Cumbria



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Acknowledgements

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About the authors

Barefoot Research and Evaluation is a social research organisation specialising in work with vulnerable and at-risk groups. Dr. Christopher Hartworth, who set up Barefoot Research with Joanne Hartworth in 2003, has 20 years' experience of research and evaluation, beginning in developing countries in poverty alleviation programmes and continuing in the North East of England in work with disadvantaged communities. Joanne has a first class honours degree in Sociology, is a qualified teacher and an accomplished project manager.

More information: www.barefootresearch.org.uk

About Northern Rock Foundation

This report takes an overview from a series of studies funded by the Northern Rock Foundation through its Safety and Justice Programme. The Foundation was keen to understand how issues of sexual exploitation affected both adults and children across the North East and Cumbria. Feedback from stakeholders across the region suggest both statutory and voluntary sector agencies have found the report findings helpful in identifying both areas of unmet need and examples of local expertise and good practice. The Foundation's Trustees were prescient in identifying these issues as of pressing concern. Findings from the reports also helped direct the Foundation's grant-making and a number of services and interventions also received funding directly, thus providing targeted support to some of the most vulnerable adults and children in the region. Other studies can be found at www.nr-foundation.org.uk/sexual-exploitation.php.

More information: www.nr-foundation.org.uk

Foreword

Northern Rock Foundation has been an independent funder focused on specific issues as they impact on communities in the North East and Cumbria. When Trustees commissioned the first study looking at Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) – in 2006, looking across Northumbria – the concept was relatively unknown. Whilst it is good to see the growing public awareness of this issue since then, it is disappointing to note that – as the researchers suggest – it may have become harder, rather than easier, to research and understand CSE at a local level.

Independent funders occupy a unique place in the wider social policy arena and are often able to resource work and commission research that other agencies are unable to. The Foundation was always careful to not only commission research to identify unmet need, but also to work with voluntary sector organisations to provide services to support those affected. We are pleased to see some of those services now leading the field in the development of national responses.

As we, as a sector, look ahead and consider next steps it is clear from this paper that whilst we understand reasonably well the factors which lead children to be vulnerable to exploitation, we still need far more information about what motivates, helps and hinders the perpetrators.

Cullagh Warnock & Penny Wilkinson

Northern Rock Foundation

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Executive summary

i. Executive summary

We have been researching the sexual exploitation of both adults and children in the North East and Cumbria since 2006. The studies have been commissioned by Northern Rock Foundation's Safety and Justice for Victims of Abuse Programme and included studies in County Durham, Cleveland, Cumbria and Northumbria Police Force Areas. Their objective was to identify the characteristics and examine the extent of exploitation and also included research into adult exploitation. The findings from the studies served a number of purposes including supporting the Foundation's Safety and Justice grant programme, informing local statutory policy and services and ultimately attempting to improve awareness of, and provision for, exploited children and adults. When we started there were few places in the North East where there was any awareness of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), with the exception of Newcastle and Middlesbrough.

Our research, which took a knowledge mapping approach, found incidents of CSE in every local authority area across the North East and Cumbria; CSE was a consistent and repetitive finding involving both female and male children, (to a ratio of approximately nine to one) and taking place with children between 12 and 17 years old. Based on our research, we identified a total of 310 females and 41 males who were victims of CSE. The numbers involved in the different local authority areas varied between a low point of 12 children in North Tyneside to a high point of 52 in County Durham. In the main body of the report we present our findings on: patterns of exploitation in the region, including online grooming and off-street exploitation; venues associated with CSE; exploitation and exchanges of resources; and the service response. We also discuss in detail the process of the research, some of the barriers and the methodology which led us to our findings.

We found that CSE takes place despite a range of preventative, supportive and enforcement measures. We suspect that the more sophisticated these become, the lower the incidence of exploitation, as seems to be the case in Middlesbrough. Thus, the extent of CSE can be mitigated but not eradicated, as a result of the complex array of push factors (which are related to poverty, family relationships and education).

Therefore, the task of statutory agencies is to ensure that targeted services are in place, are accessible and responsive. There are also implications on universal services; of raising awareness, increasing capacity and ensuring everyone plays a role in good relationship education and identifying incidences of exploitation. However, statutory agencies must be careful that the safeguarding mechanisms do not become bureaucratic, service led and ineffective.

Services must also strive to remain open and transparent. The last study we completed in Teesside indicated there may be a move towards protectionism once again (with the exception of Middlesbrough). In all our studies we used a knowledge mapping approach to data collection, which entailed identifying and interviewing a number of organisations and collating their knowledge. However, the last study has been the most difficult and we believe this is due to the level of national attention which has been focused on CSE as a result of the uncovering of exploitation in British cities, such as Oxford, Rochdale and Bradford and in the light of the Jimmy Saville child abuse. Instead of making the issue easier to talk about, as one would expect, it has made it more difficult and more hidden as areas are scared of being branded 'the next Rochdale'. As a result of this, there was a resounding silence from some of the statutory authorities in the region who are responsible for ensuring the safety of children when we approached them about the research.

Barnardo's continue to innovate and lead the way in CSE work in the North East and already their children's Independent Sexual Violence Adviser or ISVA service has become an incredibly important and valuable service for victims across Teesside. In fact, it is difficult to comprehend that situations exist in other areas across the North East and Cumbria where children's ISVAs do not exist: if we want to bring the perpetrators to justice and support victims in the process, then we need such a service across the entire region.

Finally, a note on ethnicity: our research has found that the perpetrators of exploitation come from all ethnicities including White British and Asian, with the former in the greater numbers. Whilst there is certainly an ethnic dimension to exploitation as has been shown both in our region and elsewhere, we must tackle our own cultural failings as well as those of others. It is time that we developed a better understanding of why people exploit others, regardless of which ethnicity they belong to, and what to do about it.

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Section one

Section one: the research

We have been researching the sexual exploitation of both adults and children in the North East and Cumbria since 2006. The studies have been commissioned by Northern Rock Foundation's Safety and Justice for Victims of Abuse Programme and included studies in County Durham, Cleveland, Cumbria and Northumbria Police Force Areas. Their objective was to identify the characteristics and examine the extent of exploitation and also included research into adult exploitation¹. The findings from the studies served a number of purposes including supporting the Foundation's Safety and Justice grant programme, informing local statutory policy and services and ultimately attempting to improve awareness of and provision for exploited children and adults. When we started there were few places in the North East where there was any awareness of CSE, with the exception of Newcastle and Middlesbrough (which was also a result of research). The Children's Society² recently said:



'The growing awareness nationally, and the local learning that began with the Barefoot research but is most recently coming from a large scale police operation across the area, has meant that the issue of Child Sexual Exploitation now has a strong profile strategically within local authorities who are seeking to ensure that they have a sufficiently robust response in place ... the current landscape with regard to responding to Child Sexual Exploitation is unrecognisable to the position seven years ago.'

The question to answer now from the presentation of this cumulative knowledge is: what do we have to do to progress addressing the problem? In our conclusion we offer some suggestions.

¹ These reports can be read on the Foundation's or Barefoot Research's websites: www.nr-foundation.org.uk/sexual-exploitation.php; www.barefootresearch.org.uk/publications/library

² Richard Haigh, CSE National Lead, The Children's Society, Pers. Comm, October 2014.

Section one

Box 1.0 Defining Child Sexual Exploitation

This definition of Child Sexual Exploitation was created by the UK National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People and is used in statutory guidance for England:

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' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child Sexual Exploitation 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 because 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.

1.1 Origins of the research

In 2006, we started conducting research in the Northumbria Police Force Area on what we initially intended to be studies of adult exploitation and exchange; looking at the extent and characteristics of local sex markets. However, it soon became clear that people under the age of 18 years old were also involved in the same practices that we were researching. The origins of the study came from a number of disparate and unconnected reports from frontline community-based professionals concerning prostitution during a piece of action research for the community safety partnership in Newcastle upon Tyne, which took place between 2004 and 2006. Although outside the remit of the piece of action research (we were measuring the impact of Safe Newcastle's community safety initiatives on local communities), we considered these reports worthy of more detailed investigation.

Although Safe Newcastle lacked the resources at that time, Northern Rock Foundation, with whom we had an existing relationship, was interested in commissioning research into sex markets in the Northumbria Force Area to inform their new Safety and Justice for Victims of Abuse programme.

1.2 Reasons and objectives

There were several reasons behind the research. The first of these was to provide evidence and inform Northern Rock Foundation's new Safety and Justice for Victims of Abuse programme. NRF was an intelligent funder that worked in many ways to relieve poverty and suffering, including commissioning research in order to identify need and points of intervention, and encouraging the voluntary sector to respond. Our research played an important role in this process as it related to abuse and exploitation and the development and funding of projects in the North East and Cumbria. Another key reason was to influence statutory policy and provision; to raise the issue as a priority and to assist in the development of services. Thus, the research was pragmatic and was aimed at improving services for vulnerable children and adults and it was this objective which informed its development, timescale and methodology.

The objective of the research was to create a snapshot of the extent and characteristics of sexual exploitation in a particular local authority area. We were interested to find the numbers of those involved and themes associated with exploitation, for example, whether it was related to substance misuse, homelessness or exploitation by another. In order to fulfil these objectives, we developed a specific methodology which is presented in the following section.

We initially embarked upon collecting information about adults but during the early stages of the research, agencies were telling us of people who were under the age of 18 years old. As such we collected that information and this altered the audience for the research. When an individual is under the age of 18 years old and is exchanging sex for resources or are themselves exchanged for the purposes of sex, it is understood to be a form of exploitation and abuse.

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When they are an adult, exchanges are considered to be through choice and driven by free will, although our findings would disagree. In order to explain this, we use terminology which presents that abuse and exploitation and not that of choice.

In each of the areas we aligned ourselves with a local statutory agency or partnership to provide a legitimacy to the research and to ensure that the findings had an impact in policy and service delivery. In the first study, this was Safe Newcastle, the community safety partnership; the second study was Durham and also Darlington's Drug and Alcohol Action Team; the third study was Cumbria Drug and Alcohol Action Team (with support from the Director of Public Health and Children's Services); and the fourth study was Durham and Tees Valley Probation Service (for the adult exploitation study) and Barnardo's (for the CSE study). This gave the studies a local mandate and helped with both access to key agencies and with dissemination of findings. These alignments were negotiated by the Principle Investigator from Barefoot Research and Evaluation.

1.3 The methodology

We developed a simple methodology to carry out the research; one which would not take too long, as we knew individuals were being exploited that needed support; and one which was not overly academic and would get lost in a lengthy academic process. The aim of the research was always to improve services for vulnerable adults and children by providing information to enable policy and project planners to respond to needs more effectively.

In order to collect the data we conducted a mapping of the knowledge of frontline professionals working for agencies we judged to be likely to come into contact with those involved with prostitution or exchanges of sex. This was based on the premise that frontline professionals knew about the survival strategies and/or lifestyle practices of their clients. The better the relationship that exists between professional and service user, the better that knowledge is and those services generally depended upon the fostering and existence of good relationships. The professionals we interviewed came from agencies such as those shown in table 1.0. In the five areas, we interviewed 555 professionals from 203 organisations such as those listed.

We engaged with these via focus group interviews, often using team meetings, and individual in depth interviews.

Table 1.0
Organisations interviewed for the research

• Asylum seeker and refugee services
• BME services
• Central government representatives
• Child protection nurses
• Children’s services, including looked after children and leaving care services
• Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships
• Drug support agencies, including harm minimisation and treatment services
• Housing and accommodation providers
• Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered services
• Local Safeguarding Children Boards
• Police
• Services for sex workers and children who are sexually exploited
• Services for victims of rape
• Sexual health services including Genito Urinary Medicine clinics and contraception services
• Social services
• Teenage pregnancy services
• Youth and community services, including outreach

We asked professionals a series of questions about their knowledge of exchanges of sex and exploitation amongst their client group. They were asked how many people they were aware of who were involved, what type of exchanges or exploitation happened and how they knew this. We only counted people as being involved when the professional had direct experience of working with that person.

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We then documented that knowledge that related to the professional's direct client group (e.g. young people, drug users, asylum seekers, etc.). In many cases we did not document credible reports of sex work and exploitation as those reports related to clients who did not 'belong' to the professionals who were questioned. We did not document gossip, rumour or anecdote.

The relationship between researcher and interviewee (frontline professional) was fundamental to this research: in a short period of time, the interviewee must feel comfortable and confident enough to be able to talk about an extremely sensitive issue. The research 'space' was created from a number of cumulative ingredients, which included:

- A credible funder, who demonstrated their commitment to the area by funding voluntary sector support projects and the wider social welfare sector.
- The researcher going through the appropriate senior management levels, contacting the workers chief officer, and seeking permission to talk to the worker (this entailed information provision and explanation to those senior levels).
- Credible reasons for the research and robust research credentials, having received ethics clearance and other permissions and presenting safeguarding and confidentiality agreements.
- Research skills of: sensitive and empathetic interviewing, being sensitive to interviewees' verbal and non-verbal cues, knowing when to lead and when to ease off; and knowledge of the sector, to enable preamble discussions demonstrating a shared knowledge and thereby creating a comfortable discussion space.
- Allowing interviewees to see their own transcripts, allowing them to verify their testimonies.

The research used 'snowballing techniques', i.e. asking professionals who else they thought we should talk to, and in this way we covered the majority of relevant people. We had confidence with this approach as, towards the end of the research in each area, people were mentioning the same set of names so we felt we had covered most agencies and had arrived at 'data saturation'.

Many professionals were also approached both on the telephone and in person who had no knowledge of sexual exploitation or sex markets and essentially proved to be 'blind alleys'.

In the first four studies the results of the research is presented in one report: the first half focusing on adults; and the second half focusing on CSE. For the final study in Teesside, it was requested by Barnardo's and the police to produce two different reports as they did not want to confuse the issue of prostitution with CSE, as they had campaigned so long for them to be considered as two different issues. The findings of the research as they relate to people under 18 have received significantly more attention. The issues however are intrinsically linked: people become involved in prostitution as adults often because they have been exploited as children, particularly those adults who are involved with survival sex. By presenting both issues in one report, it allowed local authority agencies to make the connection between adult and child. However, we could also understand the requirement of presenting separate reports and this is how we have presented the summary reports (this and the adult summary).

1.4 Gatekeepers and permissions: resistance to the research

For the children's elements of the study, there has been considerable preparatory work carried out seeking permission to enable the researcher to interview frontline professionals. This consisted of seeking permission from a series of gatekeepers including senior managers within local authorities, including Director of Children's Services, National Health Services (NHS) management, Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCBs), voluntary and community sector organisations and police.

There were several instances where access to services was denied or more recently, approaches were stonewalled, despite repeated attempts.. There were attempts by several Directors of Children's Services to block and discredit the findings and methodology and blacklist Barefoot Research and Evaluation from carrying out research of any other nature in the North East.

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We suspect this was due to our main conclusion in 2006/07 report that children and young people continued to be exploited despite being known about by statutory services, implying that statutory mechanisms were inadequate to end exploitation or help young people exit situations of exploitation. As a result of this, we were very careful about our research process and scrutiny of methodology. We sought and obtained permission from a series of research governance bodies including: the NHS Research Ethics Committee; Barnardo's Research Ethics Committee; the Primary Care Trust's Research Management and Governance Unit; the County Durham and Darlington Foundation NHS Trust's Research and Development Review Board; and the Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Trust. We also published a paper on methodology in a peer reviewed journal to demonstrate via peer review, the value and strength of the methodology.

There were other local authorities however that were very cooperative and welcoming with a desire to know more about local situations of adult exploitation and CSE, notably Cumbria and Darlington. The willingness/eagerness to want to know about situations which are often difficult to hear about is a measure of integrity and commitment to addressing the needs of constituents or service users. Conversely, agencies who do not want to know, are in denial and/or disruptive, demonstrate a commitment to the status quo, which is one of continuing exploitation. Areas remain hidden only when they are not investigated and talked about.

Over the years since the start of the research we have noted a change in the ease with which we have carried out the research. The most recent study in Teesside was the most difficult of all the studies we have carried out because of the silence we received from statutory services whose permission we needed to speak to statutory children's services. We believe this is due to the level of national attention which has been focused on CSE as a result of the uncovering of exploitation in British cities, such as Oxford, Rochdale and Bradford and in the light of the Jimmy Saville child abuse enquiry. Instead of making the issue easier to talk about, as one would expect, it has made it more difficult and more hidden as areas are scared of being 'the next Rochdale'. In the beginning and up to and including the Cumbria study which took place in 2011, we found professionals who welcomed the opportunity to talk about an issue that they felt no one was paying sufficient attention to. Now it seems, many professionals are reluctant to raise it as an issue.

1.5 The essential role of Northern Rock Foundation in the research

It has been key to the success of the series for them to be supported by a supportive and independent funder. This has enabled:

- The research to take place: there were senior figures from local authorities and regional government who did not want the research to take place.
- The findings to be published: at least two of the five studies would have been buried.
- The research organisation to withstand external pressures and organisational bullying: the responses from senior figures were so strong at one point, that we took legal advice supported by the Foundation.

Without the Foundation's support, we may have been forced to withdraw from the research. It was also key that Barefoot Research and Evaluation was unaffiliated and had total independence: we were not the provider of other services to local authorities and so could not be threatened with severance; neither were we part of a larger organisation, such as a university, who may have judged the reputational risk to be too high. In other words, the funder and the research organisation provided a unique configuration to enable the research to be successfully implemented. We were also not known and had no stake in the CSE thematic area, so had no vested interest in finding evidence of CSE; we were truly neutral.

1.6 The presentation of findings

As stated, the objectives of the research were to feed into and improve local services. At the beginning of the research in each locality, we agreed with our local partner, for example the Drug and Alcohol Action Team (see section 1.1.2), that they would receive the detailed draft of the research report first, along with NRF. They would use this report as a basis upon which to plan and develop local strategy and services. We also agreed with those partners at the start of the research that a version of the report would be prepared, minus names identifying local areas, people or any other identifying information, which could be distributed as the public version and put onto websites. In this way we were able to provide useful information for planning and raise/contribute to a public debate on the issue of exploitation.

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1.7 Conclusion to section one

The research on CSE in the region has been difficult at times but it has been worthwhile as it has helped improve services for vulnerable children. It has also demonstrated that research underpins knowledge and action; it has led to change. An important impact has been creating a strategic response and an investment in CSE services from statutory agencies. This has occurred in areas where the research was both welcomed, such as Cumbria, and resisted, such as County Durham. It also led to investment in voluntary sector support projects, including Barnardo's hub and spoke model, SafetyNET and The Children's Society. In addition to this level of change and investment, the process of the research had impact in itself. The data gathering period of the research raised CSE as a common issue across the professional domains. In doing so, it allowed frontline professionals to raise it as a concern and give it attention which it had not had in the past. This has had a liberating effect as professionals had previously nowhere to go with their knowledge.

Section two

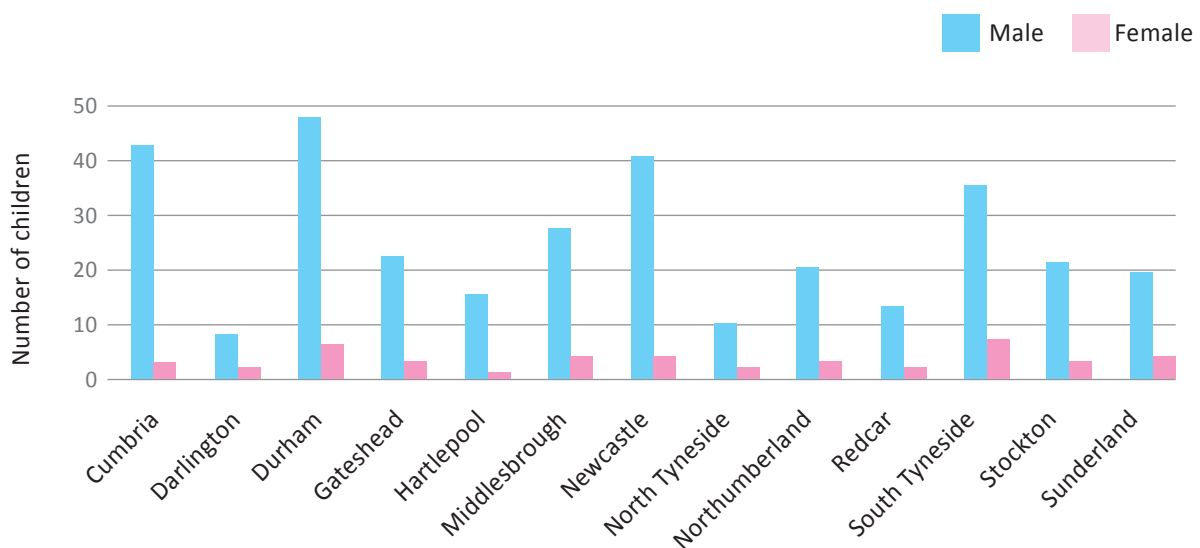
Section two: Findings

It is not the intention to repeat the findings of the individual studies here³, instead we will look at regional prevalence, and the similarities and differences between areas.

2.1 Extent of CSE

We found incidents of CSE in every local authority area across the North East and Cumbria; CSE was a consistent and repetitive finding involving both female and male children, (to a ratio of approximately nine to one) as can be seen in figure 2.0, and taking place with children between 12 and 17 years old. Based on our research, we identified a total of 310 females and 41 males who were victims of CSE. The numbers involved in the different local authority areas varied between a low point of 12 children in North Tyneside to a high point of 52 in County Durham.

Figure 2.0 Incidents of CSE in the North East and Cumbria⁴



³ Again, which can be read on the Foundation's or Barefoot Research's websites: www.nr-foundation.org.uk/sexual-exploitation.php; www.barefootresearch.org.uk/publications/library

⁴ The data has been extracted from each individual area report. The research in each individual area was presented as a snapshot, i.e. extent and theme in the most recent financial year which corresponded with the fieldwork. Those individual reports were published between 2006 and 2015 and so situations in some of those areas may have changed since the research took place. For example, in 2006, we calculated that there were 45 children who were sexually exploited in Newcastle. Current (2015) police estimates of numbers involved are significantly higher than this. However, presenting our figures is useful as an exercise to demonstrate extent of CSE across the region, even if they are conservative estimates.

Section two

2.2 Patterns of exploitation

The exploitation which took place across the North East and Cumbria took many forms and included:

Online grooming and exploitation

Barnardo's CSE specialists and the police reported increases over the last two years in the number of cases of online grooming across the region. This form of CSE cuts across social class, with the victims coming from deprived and non-deprived neighbourhoods, and with no dominant ethnicity of the perpetrator. There was considerable discussion amongst those interviewed about the prevalence and reach of social media and risk of exploitation. The CSE specialist workers in Teesside reported that cases of online grooming now dominate new referrals. Other findings and observations about social media are presented in box 2.0.



"The smartphone apps encourage exploitation and make it so much easier."

CSE specialist worker

The 'boyfriend' model

There were a reports from across the region about the connections between exploitation and Asian males, mostly those from South Asia and Iraq/Kurdistan. There were reports concerning a range of different circumstances from Pakistani people that work in and owned take-aways, taxi drivers and Kurdish men working in car washes. Exploitation by Asian males often takes the form of the boyfriend model of grooming. This relates to a common method of grooming where generally a young female is deceived into believing that she is in a mutual relationship of love with an older male, who then goes on to exploit the female, in conjunction with other abusers. There was also organised grooming, with the same males associated with different young White British females who were then passed on to other groups in other areas.



“There were some Kurdish men who were hanging around and were always seen with care leavers ... we knew that some of the girls were being exploited.”

Young persons housing worker

Peer-to-peer grooming

We found evidence of this method of exploitation in all areas in the region. It is one of the most well known and widespread routes into CSE, through young people encouraging other young people into exploitative situations. This model was often used in residential local authority care homes to encourage young people into situations of exploitation. This model includes taking young people to parties where exploitation takes place, taking others to meet specific individuals or otherwise enticing other young people into CSE. There was also incidents of adult females grooming younger females into situations of exploitation.



“She would abscond and go to [name of area] and she would take her friend with her it wasn't long before she was involved too.”

Young persons drug and alcohol worker

Older males

There were many reports about exploitative relationships between significantly older males, often from 40 years old and above, and the exploitation of children. These reports mostly related to specific individuals, who would be repetitively associated with young people, both males and females, and where it was known that substances, commonly alcohol, was being exchanged for sexual activities. There were also reports related to particular localities in both rural and urban areas where there were commonly associations between much older males and young females.



“The majority of our girls are going out with men their fathers' age ... we've got desensitised to it”.

Neighbourhood youth worker

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Street-based exploitation

We found instances of young people under 18 years old who were being exploited in street-based environments, such as outside of pubs and clubs and other venues. In the 1990s this was an issue of significant concern to agencies specifically in Teesside and this led to the formation of Secos. Although the situation in Teesside has dramatically changed to the extent that members of the public will no longer see children on the streets in situations of exploitation, there were still reports of a small number of individuals including males and females between the ages of 16 and 18 years old. This also occurred in other areas across the region. Other agencies made reports of young males under the age of 18 who were being exploited in and around certain pubs and clubs.



“They are selling sex in the bars, for money, drinks and drugs.”

Young persons sexual health worker

Off street exploitation

Exploitation which took place in houses included young people who exchanged sexual activities for all of those resources are shown in figure 2.2 and specifically including accommodation. There were also hotspots, such as local parks and certain areas in urban locations which have been described as ‘hostile’ places for girls and young women who are blatantly approached by men, asking if they want to go for a ‘session’ or a ‘party’. Off street exploitation also includes the small number of young people who were reported to be working in brothels.



“We were working with two females aged 15 and 17, who were exchanging sex for accommodation in [name of the area]. They were alternately sofa surfing or homeless and were known to be exchanging sex with people staying in the [name of bed and breakfast].”

Young persons housing worker

2.3 Perpetrators and ethnicity

We found exploitation that was carried out by all ethnicities across the North East and Cumbria. There were patterns that were evident that connected ethnicities with different socio-economic locations and CSE such as Asian males associated with take-aways/restaurant and taxis; Eastern Europeans and Iraqi Kurds and car washes and town centres; and White British and poor housing. The significance of these were simply places dominated by males from specific ethnicities. There also seemed to be patterns of cultural exploitation which were again evident across all ethnicities, for example, the exploitation by older White British males (in their 30s and 40s) on deprived housing estates and serial grooming perpetrated by younger Asian males (in their 20s).

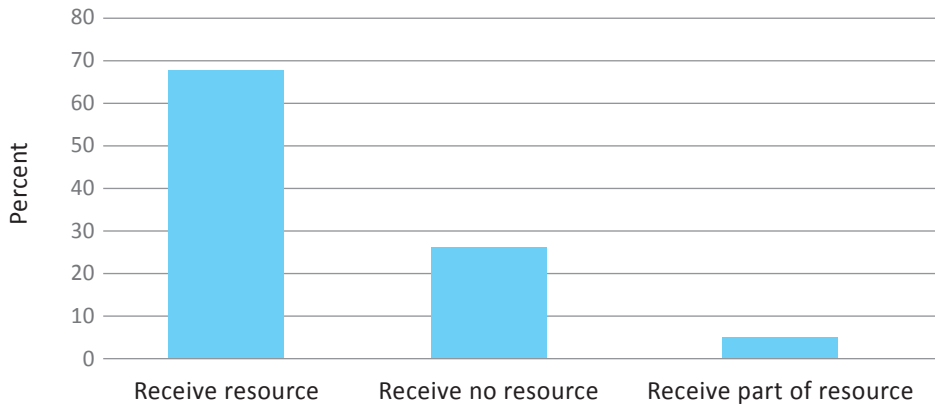
There is a risk that media attention over recent years on Asian males has detracted attention from exploitation by other ethnicities. For example, on Teesside, referrals into one Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing and Trafficked or VEMT group concerned exclusively Asian males; it is unlikely based on our experience that White British males would not have been involved in local CSE. What is clear from our research is that work needs to be done with all young males about relationships, abuse and exploitation to prevent them from becoming the perpetrators of the future.

2.4 Exploitation and the exchange of resources

We must be careful with the language we use in this section to ensure we do not imply control and consent in place of exploitation by adults. The patterns discussed above can be broadly separated into three: those who receive a resource as part of the exploitation, e.g. vodka, accommodation, cigarettes; those whose exploitation is managed or overseen by another but who still receive some of the resource, in the same way as pimps act in an adult context, e.g. sex for money or drugs; and those who are exploited totally by another person, e.g. a perpetrator taking a victim to party where they are abused by other males, and the victim receives no resources. Although, there are of course grey areas between these, we can estimate the proportions across the region, shown in the following figure.

Section two

Figure 2.1
Exploitation and resources



As can be seen, in around two thirds of the cases in the North East, the young person received the resource as part of the exploitation. The second category, which accounted for around 27% of all cases, the victim received no resources. It was this category which consists of those victims who have been groomed and who often fall under the 'boyfriend' model of CSE. The smallest category are those who have received part of the resource, commonly connected to opiate-related substance misuse.

“They all said that the first time [they had sex for money] was the worst, but then it got easy.”

CSE specialist worker

“We work with girls and try to help then see that drinking a bottle of vodka and having sex with four of your boyfriend’s mates is not a very equal relationship.”

CSE specialist worker

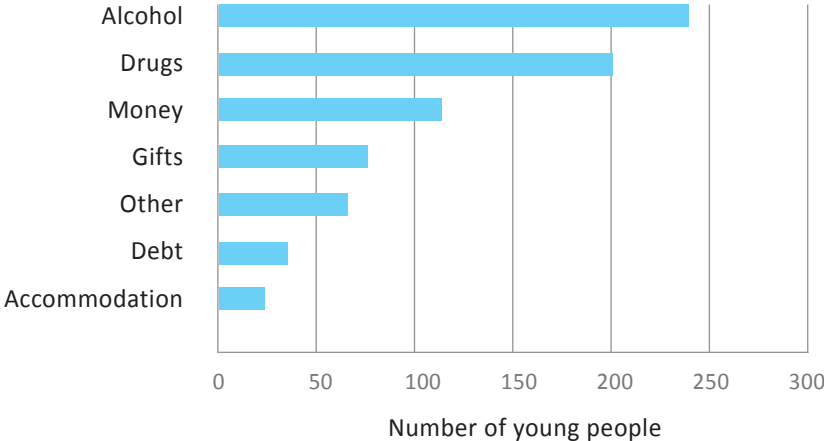
“We had a 17 year old [female] who was exchanging sex for money for drugs from her boyfriend’s flat and he was acting as her pimp.”

Young persons housing worker

The grooming patterns of exploitation were mostly found in the region’s urban areas of Middlesbrough, Newcastle and a small number in Carlisle, whereas the exchanges for resources were much more frequent and happened everywhere.

The currency of exchange in those young people who received the resource as part of the exploitation, ranged from money to accommodation, with the most dominant currency of exchange being alcohol. Figure 2.2 presents those currencies and the numbers involved across the region. The types of drugs exchanged ranges from cannabis to cocaine, with the most common drug being Mephedrone or MCAT, which is an amphetamine-based psychoactive substance. This, and alcohol, is the drug of choice at ‘parties’ where exploitation occurs. Opiate-based drugs were a relatively small proportion of the drug total, compared to the currency of adults. Money is the currency of exchange in over 100 cases, which indicates a connection between adult prostitution and individuals under 18. This is corroborated by our adult exploitation research, which showed many people becoming involved from 14 years old upwards.

Figure 2.2
Exploitation and currency



The category of gifts include a range of items including clothes, mobile phones and jewellery. The category of other again includes a range of resources and includes tattoos, rides in cars and protection.

“Once the money runs out [with which to buy drugs] and they’ve run out of things to sell, they then exchange sex.”

Young persons drug and alcohol worker

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2.5 Locations and venues associated with CSE

Parties

There were a number of reports of children and young people attending houses where there were a number of older males, who were generally non-White British. The highest reported incidents of these parties was in Northumbria and Cleveland Force Area, but there were isolated reports in other areas across the region. The children are given alcohol and other substances, commonly MCAT, and sexually abused. Peer to peer, 'boyfriend' grooming or trafficking (i.e. the practice of taking children and young people from one location to another) commonly takes place prior to these parties.



"Once a girl arrives at a party it can be almost impossible to leave, she can get trapped by her "friends" and the men."

CSE specialist worker

Take-aways

There are perennial connections between the night time economy and, in particular take-aways and the sexual exploitation of young people. There were reports of children in all local authority areas who were known to be exploited by people who both owned and worked in take-aways. There were further reports of exploitation being carried out by pizza delivery drivers.



"Girls would go into a room at the back, they get food, cigarettes and alcohol and the people that work there would have sex with them."

Young persons drug and alcohol worker

Car washes

We found connections between people that work in car washes and the sexual exploitation of children on Cumbria, Northumbria and Teesside. Young people were exploited by people that worked in individual car washes and also some appeared to be moving people between areas via the car washes. For example, it was reported that girls were taken from the car wash in Hartlepool to Middlesbrough and Stockton to go to parties. Similarly, girls were known to travel from Stockton to the Hartlepool car wash.




"A 14 year old female, exchanging oral sex for alcohol and cigarettes with staff at a carwash."

Neighbourhood youth worker

Travel, transport and trafficking


Young people are exploited in their own locality and are also being moved between areas for the purposes of exploitation. There were reports from other agencies about the movement of children and young people both within and between local authority areas.

 "Children are passed around by their boyfriends/pimps ... there was a 16 year old girl from Middlesbrough who used to travel with her boyfriend up to Newcastle."

Young persons housing worker

Public environments


We found evidence of exploitation taking place in and around pubs, clubs and other public locations, such as car parks, public parks, public toilets. We found evidence of young males associated with exploitation in and around bars and young females in street locations. For example, one agency reported:

 "She was on [name of location] and I said to her, I thought you didn't do this anymore, and she said she had to cos she was rattling."

Neighbourhood youth worker

Prisons

There were a number of reports of associations between vulnerable young females, a number of whom had learning difficulties and Schedule One offenders (under the Sex Offenders Act 1997, these are offenders who pose a risk to children), many who have spent time at HMP Northumberland. It was reported that offenders in prison often get names, addresses or phone numbers from other offenders when they are in custody. If 'boyfriends' are in prison, then the females are free to be contacted; addresses are then passed between prisoners.

 "The girls with learning difficulties get preyed upon and exchanged between them [offenders], when one goes in prison another one comes to become their 'boyfriend'."

Young persons housing worker

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2.6 Characteristics of children and young people

Children and young people who were the victims of CSE came from a range of different backgrounds, including the local authority care system, leaving care, foster homes, from families living in deprived neighbourhoods in the community and from wealthier areas. However, children and young people from the former are disproportionately represented although the increase in online grooming means we may see an equalisation of groups affected over time. A group however over which there was particular concern were children with learning difficulties. There is recent research⁵ and established experience which highlights a heightened vulnerability to sexual exploitation in this group. Based on our figures we would estimate approximately 10 percent of all the young people we identified had learning difficulties.

Our research confirmed the links already made by existing research (e.g. Scott and Skidmore, 2006⁶) between vulnerabilities and CSE. These included connections between dysfunctional family backgrounds, missing from home and mental health issues, substance misuse, homelessness (or insecure accommodation) and CSE. There are numerous examples of this in our research, such as:

“There were 17 and 18 year old sisters, with histories of physical abuse from their biological parents, drug use, parental drug use, unstable care home accommodation, a variety of foster parents and criminal behaviour.”

“The majority of those involved have been raped or abused when they were children”.

“We are working with young people with a long history of alcohol and substance misuse. In some cases they are third generation drug users.”

“The prospects for these young females being exploited is teenage pregnancy and a continuation of the cycle of deprivation and exploitation.”

⁵ Franklin, A., Raws, P. and Smeaton, E. (2015), *Unprotected, overprotected: meeting the needs of young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, sexual exploitation*, University of Coventry.

⁶ Scott, S. and Skidmore, P. (2006) *Reducing the risk: Barnardo's support for sexually exploited young people*, Barnardo's.

2.7 Origins of involvement and trajectories

There was no standard route into Child Sexual Exploitation; some people involved had experienced abusive pasts, some had grown up in care and others had come from affluent areas and professional families. For example:

- 17 year old in foster care, mother is a prostitute, self harms, exchanging sex for alcohol and mephedrone with an older male. It was reported that these exchanges started when she was 13. She was known to have had three terminations, three morning after pills and two STDs and has been in the looked after system.
- Two of the females were from families which had histories of parental substance misuse and chaotic lifestyles. One 15 year old was described to have come from a relatively stable family but was led astray by the other girls.
- 15 year old female who was gang raped when she was 14 years old. It was known that she had grown up in the looked after system and had absconded when she was younger with a 32 year old male and had been exchanging sex for drugs and alcohol with him.
- 16 year old female from [name of wealthy estate in Newcastle] whose parents stopped her allowance after they found out she was spending it on cocaine. She first did it with her dealer to pay off the drug debt and then was doing it for the money for drugs.

However, most of the reports we received concerned excluded and vulnerable young people, often from deprived neighbourhoods. Whilst there will always be individuals who become entangled in exploitative situations with a no real causative factors, there are many others who experience commonalities which have created the push factors. These include: poverty and social exclusion; dysfunctional, broken or poor family relationships; the experience of abuse as a child; and a lack of education about relationships and choices.

Children and young people who are victims of CSE often have poor future trajectories. In the research that we have carried out across the region concerning adults involved in prostitution, many were exploited when they were children, from the ages of 12 to 18 years old. Many developed significant substance misuse problems, were homeless, repeat offenders and had otherwise very poor qualities of life.

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“People have been involved for a long time, but they’re still young, there’s one girl who’s now 22 years old, but she started when she was 14 or 15.”

CSE specialist worker

Breaking the cycle of abuse is well known to be very difficult for those involved and people need a particular level of targeted support.

2.8 Service response

The service response to CSE in the North East and Cumbria has improved considerably since we started the research in 2006. The most noted change is from the police as, in the earlier pieces of research, the response was often reported as being poor. In 2006, we found many reports of an inadequate response to reports of exploitation, for example, that victims would make poor witnesses, that they were well known trouble makers and ‘little nightmares’. Today is a very different situation, with a senior police officer reporting that the threshold for investigation into cases of exploitation has been set “very low.” The police are also working hard to improve reporting and now accept information and reports about exploitation in any form, again, as reported by a senior officer:



“Just as long as we get the information, I don’t care what form it is in.”

As a result of this, reporting from community agencies such as children’s social services, has gone up year on year. Now in Northumbria and Cleveland Force Areas they have comprehensive and permanent CSE teams. Voluntary sector provision has also expanded with Barnardo’s SECOS in Teesside, County Durham and Darlington, The Children’s Society in Tyne and Wear and Safetynet in Cumbria. Barnardo’s SECOS has now become a national model of best practice and plays a major role in local, sub regional and national CSE policy. Secos uses a ‘hub and spoke’ model to deliver its services on Teesside, with the hub being in Middlesbrough and the spokes existing in Hartlepool, Stockton and Redcar and Cleveland (with others in Darlington and Durham) where there is one young persons CSE specialist worker located in each local authority area. The Children’s Society also uses a ‘hub and spoke’ model in Tyne and Wear.

In Teesside since 2012, each local authority area has a VEMT group, which is itself separated into a strategic and an operational group. The function of that group is to identify young people who are at risk of or victims of sexual exploitation. The groups are made up of statutory and voluntary sector agencies including police, children's social care, youth services, educational welfare, housing, sexual health, Troubled Families, and drug and alcohol services. Referrals come into the VEMT group and they are risk assessed as high, medium or low, along with the perpetrator.

Box 2.0 Northumbria Police and Operation Sanctuary

Northumbria Police started Operation Sanctuary in January 2014, which began as a discrete investigation and has now become the largest ongoing operation Northumbria Police has ever implemented. The origins of Operation Sanctuary came from the approach of two females, aged 19 and 15 years, independently of each other in December 2013, who reported current and historical sexual exploitation. From the investigations into the cases, it soon became apparent the size of the problem and more investigative and support resources were devoted to the operation. Now it has a senior investigating officer who leads a unit with 41 staff, a mixture of uniformed officers, detectives and social welfare workers. Operation Sanctuary has carried out significant work, not just in enforcement and prosecution but also in raising public awareness and engagement work with local communities. This work has had tangible impacts, with successful reports of exploitation coming from hotel and supermarket staff, leading to investigations and positive action. There have already been considerable successes with a number of perpetrators being brought to trial and with specific individuals being responsible for large scale abuse facing long prison sentences for exploitation and trafficking. Operation Sanctuary has now entered a phase two of operations funded in part by the Home Office's Innovation Fund which will see introduction of key voluntary sector social welfare providers that can work with victims and those at-risk of exploitation to support their exit from situations of exploitation and assist with their recovery. Further resources will also be devoted to investigation and preventative work with local communities.

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The police response to Child Sexual Exploitation on Teesside has developed over a number of years and from a series of discrete operations in individual local authority areas into a strategic and coordinated approach with a full-time dedicated CSE team.

Operations have included Destiny, Fibre, Grenadier, Javelin, Puffin and Shield and have been carried out in all local authority areas on Teesside. These operations have focused on a range of CSE types and incidents including organised crime, gangs and drugs, perpetrators from a range of ethnicities including African, Asian, Eastern European and White British, historic and current abuse and individual and group investigations. Operation Pike is the current strategic response to CSE which feeds into the Tees-wide VEMT group.

Barnardo's in Teesside has been a forerunner in CSE work since carried out the first piece of research in 2000 which led to the creation of SECOS. In 2011, Barnardo's were trailblazers by starting the region's first children and young persons Independent Sexual Violence Advocate (ISVA) service to complement their CSE work. After four years, it is expected that there would be a relationship between the ISVA and CSE service, for example: after the completion of a court case, the young person may go on to receive specialist CSE support and education; or there may be movement from the CSE to the ISVA service as a result of disclosures from the young person after they have realised what they have been involved in. However, between 2012 and 2015, there have only been four young people who have transferred between ISVA and CSE services.


A possible explanation for this, is a Catch-22 type situation which prevents a young person receiving targeted support focusing on the exploitation they have experienced if they are involved in a court case/ investigation: a CSE specialist worker is not able to work thematically with a young person if there is an investigation/ongoing court case. This is to prevent claims by defending lawyers that the young person is somehow being coached, which has happened in the recent past (2014) in Middlesbrough. If a young person is not involved in any investigation or court case, then they can receive the full suite of Barnardo's interventions.

If a young person is involved with an investigation or court case, they cannot: receive any awareness raising or education about CSE; engage in any discussions about the sexual exploitation incident(s) that occurred. Instead they are offered non-directed support and befriending. It appears that there is a decision between a) enabling the victim to understand what has happened to them, and attempting to build their resilience and knowledge to prevent this situation arising in the future or b) attempting to bring the perpetrator to justice. It seems that in order to safeguard a child's mental wellbeing after an incident of CSE, the Criminal Justice System needs to look again at its policy and process with regards to what support a child can receive.

Conclusion

3.0 Conclusion

Child Sexual Exploitation takes place in every local authority area in the North East and Cumbria despite a range of preventative, support and enforcement measures being delivered. We suspect that the more sophisticated these become, the lower the incidence of exploitation, as seems to be the case in Middlesbrough (local figures show reducing levels of prevalence). Thus, the extent of CSE can be mitigated but not eradicated, due to the complex array of push factors (which are related to poverty, family relationships and education). As commented upon by The Children's Society⁷:

 'If there are core 'ingredients' in place then it is not a question of if – but a question of where and to what extent Child Sexual Exploitation is taking place. Factors such as the looked after child population, child poverty, a night time economy, a city centre, mixed demographics and many others all combine to create the pockets of Child Sexual Exploitation activity.'

Therefore, the task of statutory agencies is to ensure that targeted services are in place, are accessible and responsive. There are also implications on universal services; of raising awareness, increasing capacity and ensuring everyone plays a role in good relationship education and identifying incidences of exploitation. However, statutory agencies must be careful that the safeguarding mechanisms do not become bureaucratic, service led and ineffective. Remember, this is what we found in the first Northumbria study.

Services must also strive to remain open and transparent. The last study we completed in Teesside indicated there may be a move towards protectionism once again (with the exception of Middlesbrough). In all our studies we used a knowledge mapping approach to data collection, which entailed identifying and interviewing a number of organisations and collating their knowledge. However, the last study was the most difficult and we believe this is due to the level of national attention which has been focused on CSE as a result of the uncovering of exploitation in British cities, such as Oxford, Rochdale and Bradford and in the light of the Jimmy Saville child abuse. Instead of making the issue easier to talk about, as one would expect, it has made it more difficult and more hidden as areas are scared of being branded 'the next Rochdale'.

⁷ Richard Haigh. Pers. Comm, Op. Cit.

As a result of this, there was a resounding silence from some of the statutory authorities in the region who are responsible for ensuring the safety of children when we approached them about the research.

Barnardo's continue to innovate and lead the way in CSE work in the North East and already their children's Independent Sexual Violence Adviser or ISVA service has become an incredibly important and valuable service for victims across Teesside. In fact, it is difficult to comprehend that situations exist in other areas across the North East and Cumbria where children's ISVAs do not exist: if we want to bring the perpetrators to justice and support victims in the process, then we need such a service across the entire region.

Finally, a note on ethnicity: our research has found that the perpetrators of exploitation come from all ethnicities including White British and Asian, with the former in the greater numbers. Whilst there is certainly an ethnic dimension to exploitation as has been shown both in our region and elsewhere, we must tackle our own cultural failings as well as those of others. We have a very good idea of why people become involved in exploitation but a very poor understanding of why people exploit others and what to do about it.

STAIRS

