

# **Sexual Exploitation: ‘Internal Trafficking’ of Children and Young People at risk in the North East and Cumbria<sup>1</sup>.**



**Final Report to the Northern Rock Foundation**

**March 2010**

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<sup>1</sup> Since the publication of this report Barnardo's prefers to describe the issue of 'internal trafficking' as 'complex or organised forms of sexual exploitation'.

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost I would like to thank all those professionals who agreed to be interviewed, and who subsequently gave up their time, sharing thoughts and feelings about their work with children at risk of sexual exploitation. Simply put without their willingness to share personal experiences this report would not have been possible. Many personal contributions from individual police officers, professionals in specialist services and other agencies were candid, passionate and sincere. In my opinion these individuals are a credit to their organisations, and are personally commended for their commitment to safeguarding and protecting the children and young people they encounter in their everyday working life.

Additionally, I would like to thank Barnardo's SECOS Children's Services Manager Wendy Shepherd. Wendy has inspired, and without falter provided the ongoing mentoring support necessary to jump the many hurdles this project has encountered; I wish to extend gratitude to all SECOS staff, including case managers and administration. Similarly, I would like to thank Barnardo's Policy and Research Unit Assistant Director Julie Harris. Again without Julie's guidance, expertise and ongoing encouragement this report would not have been possible. Thanks to Barnardo's Assistant Directors Sandra Egleton and Jacqui Sirs. Both have provided resolute support where processes have required negotiation with commissioners and senior staff across a range of disciplines.

I also would like to thank a number of other equally important people who have lent commitment to this project. These include Cullagh Warnock from the Northern Rock Foundation, and all members of the Foundations' Sexual Exploitation Reference Group. Group members have contributed to the project on both a practical and academic level, and have offered ongoing support. Final thanks to Malcolm Stone and Maureen Wales for the office space and additional support across the life of the project

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## Forward

When we think of trafficking for sexual exploitation, we tend to focus on children and young people being brought into the UK from abroad. This report, however, contributes to our understanding about the grooming and trafficking of children and young people for sexual exploitation within the UK. This is an area about which we still know relatively little and so the information in this report is enormously valuable to both practitioners and policy makers. The case studies in the report provide an insight into the realities of what happens to some of our most vulnerable children and young people, without this knowledge services in the region will always struggle to respond effectively. The report recommendations are pragmatic and achievable; they focus on increasing awareness of this issue and building on existing good practice. Northern Rock Foundation is very pleased to have funded the team at Barnardo's North-East to undertake this work and will continue to take an interest in this area as there is still much more to understand.

Penny Wilkinson  
Chief Executive  
Northern Rock Foundation

## **Executive summary**

This summary details a study exploring the internal trafficking of children and young people for the purpose of sexual exploitation across the North East and Cumbria. The project was funded by the Northern Rock Foundation, and took place across a 16-month period beginning in August 2008. The project was undertaken by Barnardo's Sexual Exploitation of Children Out-reach Service (SECOS).

### ***Aims and objectives***

The main aims and objectives of this project were to highlight:

- *What factors make children and young people vulnerable to sexual exploitation within the region*
- *What factors facilitate the internal trafficking of children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation within the region*
- *What range of sexually exploitative activities children and young people within the region are engaged in*
- *What levels of professional awareness, range of interventions, gaps in provision and models of practice exist among agencies engaging children and young people at risk*

### ***Defining the problem***

Alongside other agencies Barnardo's has continued to build a picture of child sexual exploitation across the UK. This has entailed gathering information, to assist child protection and law enforcement agencies in safeguarding victims and disrupting offenders. However, as far as identifying internal trafficking, as a distinct form of child sexual exploitation within the UK evidence has remained limited. This is due to a range of factors including a lack of consensus regarding

how 'internal trafficking' should be defined and understood across agencies. Subsequently, while combing key elements of the UN anti-trafficking 'Palermo Protocol', and the Sexual Offences Act 2003, the following working definition was used to guide this project:

*'The transportation, or the intent to transport (including the recruitment, transfer, harbouring or receipt of) a child under age of 18 within the UK for the purpose of sexual exploitation, or the committing of an offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, taking into account the following: The intention to commit a sexual offence or, in handing over a child to a third party, the belief that the third party is likely to do so, is sufficient without the sexual offence actually taking place; the consent of the child is irrelevant; this activity is often characterised by deceit, coercion, violence and in all cases the trafficker will have power over the child by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources'*

### ***Why is this study important?***

In 2009 the DCSF published guidance suggesting Local Safeguarding Children Boards in England should assume child sexual exploitation to be a problem for their area. Prior to, and since this publication, several local studies have offered insight into the nature of sexual exploitation, and how particular groups of children and young people remain at risk across the North East. Additionally ECPAT UK (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes) have reported on how international 'trafficking' of children, for a range of purposes including sexual exploitation, has led to several unaccompanied foreign minors arriving in the region. Prior to this project, a study exploring the nature and scale of internal trafficking across the North East and Cumbria has remained outstanding ([www.dcf.gov.uk](http://www.dcf.gov.uk)).

## **Methodology**

The project used semi-structured interviews and case study collection forms as the primary method for gathering information. Interviews were undertaken with professionals across a range of disciplines. Participants were professionals employed within the following agencies: Northumbria, Durham, Cleveland and Cumbria Police; Specialist Child Sexual Exploitation Services; Child sexual abuse services; Rape Crisis Services; Women's Refuge Services; Community-based youth and out-reach services; Young People's Housing and Supported Accommodation Providers; Young People's Drug Support Services; and Community-based Black Minority Ethnic Youth Projects.

## **Findings**

*'I think at first I used to be a bit naïve...I always thought trafficking was people from sort of East European countries...being brought in [to the UK]...that they were quite young...they [become] involved in prostitution...I never really thought it affected young people [born] in Britain...but of course it does happen...maybe it's just something we were not aware of...'*

Interviews highlighted 15 cases where professionals were aware of children and young people who met the project definition of having been 'internal trafficked' across the study area. Of the fifteen cases a total of fourteen (n=14) were described as female, and 'White British'. One (n=1) young person was described as 'Czech Republic'. The mean average age of those children and young people identified within case studies was sixteen. Cases were identified within six (n=6) of the twelve regional Local Safeguarding Children's Boards.

Factors identified as contributing to vulnerability to internal trafficking included: poor family relationships, experience of childhood sexual abuse, experience of domestic violence, learning difficulties, low self-esteem, care background,

parental mental health and addictions, and personal drug and alcohol use. Interviews highlighted barriers to identifying children and young people at risk such as: varying professional knowledge and attitudes toward the problem, organisational culture, no formal ethics approval process for externally commissioned research into the topic, a lack of lead professionals across safeguarding agencies.

Best practice models identified included partnerships between police, health, social care, and specialist voluntary sector missing/sexual exploitation services. Professionals suggest services need to be preventative, and children's awareness about risk should be raised early within families and schools. Specialist workers suggested the need to be '*honest*' and '*realistic*' about what could be done for service users, given the complexity of their lives, background and range of presenting needs. Interviewees highlighted the skills needed to engage children at risk including being '*patient*', and '*tenacious*'. Staff knowledge, training, and ability to recognise internal trafficking from a child protection perspective was emphasised.

### ***Recommendations***

*Schools* might consider how staff and parents may access training on internal trafficking. Training should be far-reaching and include guardians, foster carers, residential care workers and supported lodgings providers offering support to children in need, and those 'looked after'. Schools may wish to consider how pupils might be educated on the topic. For example through resources used by specialist services, and the DVD 'My Dangerous Lover boy' developed by the UK Human Trafficking Centre ([www.ukhtc.org.uk](http://www.ukhtc.org.uk)).

*Local Safeguarding Children Boards* need to continue developing awareness of incidence, and the evolving nature of the problem. This can be achieved through: working within DCSF guidance frameworks; developing staff training on



identifying signs, symptoms and indicators of internal trafficking, using specialist service training and briefings provided by the UKHTC; developing multi-agency Protocols to respond to missing children, and assist in developing a cross agency culture characterised by co-ordinated and 'common language' approaches to tackling internal trafficking.

*Health services* by working within DCSF guidance frameworks may wish to further develop awareness of the impact of sexual exploitation and/or internal trafficking. Services may consider developing their child protection procedures to respond to children identified as victims with relevant safeguarding, police and other law enforcement partner agencies. By working in partnership with internal and external researchers health services may wish to support the development of knowledge regarding the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation in their area.

*Police* may wish to consider how learning from such forces as Lancashire Constabulary and Derbyshire Police Authority, who both have multi-agency, police-led specialist Child Sexual Exploitation Units, might contribute to a more preventative approach to law enforcement/police practice across the region; including developing a formal police referral system, and regional approach to 'problem profiling' of internal trafficking cases through analysing and linking incidents across LSCB areas.

*Specialist Sexual Abuse/Exploitation Services* may wish to consider how they can work together to agree a common criteria/definition to identify children victims. This may assist in establishing a 'common language', across agencies. Across the safeguarding sector a consistent criterion to identifying cases of internal trafficking would help build a reliable profile of incidence on a regional basis which could be shared with the UKHTC.

*Future research* proposals should be designed and negotiated in partnership with statutory agencies, with the appropriately designated senior staff member and/or via the chair or key representative of the regional Director of Children's Services Network Group. Any future study may wish to consider how methods designed to identify incidence of the sexual exploitation of boys and young men might be developed; and/or how evidence regarding the sexual exploitation of black and ethnic minority groups might be gathered.

***'The challenge previously was we didn't know much about this...the challenge now is how do people want to do this?'***

# 1 Introduction

This report summarises a project exploring the internal trafficking of children and young people for the purpose of sexual exploitation across the North East and Cumbria. The project was funded by the Northern Rock Foundation (NRF), and informs their Safety and Justice Programme.<sup>2</sup> The project took place across a 16-month period beginning in August 2008. The project was designed and undertaken by Barnardo's SECOS (Sexual Exploitation of Children Out-reach Service) based in Middlesbrough on Teesside.

## ***What are the aims and objectives of the project?***

The main aims of this project were to highlight:

- *What factors make children and young people vulnerable to sexual exploitation within the region*
- *What factors facilitate the internal trafficking of children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation within the region*
- *What range of sexually exploitative activities children and young people within the region are engaged in*
- *What levels of professional awareness, range of interventions and models of practice exist among agencies engaging children and young people at risk*

The objectives were to: identify the support needs of children at risk; highlight existing services; gaps in provision; and barriers to accessing support. It was also anticipated that practitioners' involvement in the project would act as a

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<sup>2</sup> The Northern Rock Foundation Safety and Justice Programme invests in a range of community-based projects seeking to address the impact of domestic abuse and sexual exploitation across the region

catalyst to increase professional awareness of child sexual exploitation across the region.

### ***Why is this study important?***

In 2009 the Government published guidance<sup>3</sup> highlighting how all Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB's)<sup>4</sup> in England should assume child sexual exploitation to be a problem for their area. Prior to, and since this publication, several local studies have offered insight into the nature of sexual exploitation in our region, and how particular groups of children and young people remain at risk across the North East.<sup>5</sup> An additional report commissioned by ECPAT UK<sup>6</sup> has highlighted how the international 'trafficking' of children, for a range of purposes including sexual exploitation, has led to a number of unaccompanied foreign minors arriving in the region.<sup>7</sup> Adding to growing national evidence regarding

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<sup>3</sup> Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation. [www.dcsf.gov.uk](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk)

<sup>4</sup> LSCB's were established to replace Area Child Protection Committees. LSCB's have a wide ranging remit which includes developing local inter-agency protocols and procedures for the prevention of abuse and protection of children. LSCB's responsibility for protection of children trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation has been established through the Government's Staying Safe Action Plan published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

<sup>5</sup> Crawley et al (2004) Taking Stock: Children and young people at risk of, or involved in abuse through prostitution within Stockton-on-Tees. [www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)

Davis et al (2005) Child Sexual Exploitation through Prostitution: Newcastle-upon-Tyne. [www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)

Hartworth, C (2009) Sex Work in Northumberland and Tyne and Wear. [www.nr-foundation.org.uk](http://www.nr-foundation.org.uk)

<sup>6</sup> ECPAT UK (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes) is a children's rights coalition of UK-based charities at various times including Barnardo's, The Children's Society, NSPCC, Save the Children, Jubilee Campaign, The Body Shop Foundation, UNICEF, Anti-Slavery International and World Vision UK etc. ECPAT has undertaken a significant amount of research into child trafficking, and is one of the leading international children's rights campaigners against child sexual exploitation. The work of ECPAT has led to a range of legal reforms, policy developments and initiatives in the UK. Among the resources developed by ECPAT is an e-learning tool on child trafficking for professionals. [www.ecpat.org.uk](http://www.ecpat.org.uk)

<sup>7</sup> Candappa, M (2007) Child trafficking in Newcastle. [www.ecpat.org.uk](http://www.ecpat.org.uk)

trafficking of children from abroad, concern has also been raised about the 'internal trafficking' of UK born/resident children for the purpose of sexual exploitation within Government safeguarding guidance.<sup>8</sup> Prior to this project, a study exercise exploring the nature and scale of internal trafficking across the North East and Cumbria has remained outstanding.

### ***Scope and structure of this report***

Section 1 of this report provides an introduction to understanding and defining the problem(s) of child sexual exploitation and internal trafficking. Section 2 highlights the methods used to gather information, and describes the limitations of this project. Section 3 outlines the project findings. Section 3 brings together professional views regarding: attitudes, awareness, and experience of child sexual exploitation and internal trafficking; the risk factors, indicators and range of needs associated with child victims; insight into the nature of child sexual exploitation across the region; and factors facilitating the movement of child victims between towns and cities. Section 4 provides a sample of specialist services identified as 'models of best practice' across the region. Section 5 provides a summary of the key learning drawn from the findings of this project. Section 6 offers some recommendations for practice, service development and future research.

### ***Understanding child sexual exploitation***

In order to clarify the scope of this report it is important to explore what is meant by the terms 'child sexual exploitation' and 'internal trafficking'. Traditionally child sexual exploitation has been understood within the context of the casual and/or

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<sup>8</sup> Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007) Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked. [www.dcsf.gov.uk](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk)

commercial abuse of children and young people through prostitution.<sup>9</sup> However, there has been a significant shift in professional attitudes and awareness regarding what constitutes child sexual exploitation. This is due to the complex range of sexually exploitative activities coming to the attention of specialist services more recently. The term 'child prostitution' narrows such a diverse range of activity down to a single, discreet phenomenon. Subsequently, the term has come to be considered unhelpful within the specialist sector, as it obscures other forms of sexual exploitation; which research suggests will require very different health, social care and law enforcement responses.<sup>10</sup>

Recent literature has continued to highlight the complexities of child sexual exploitation, and how this can be understood as a fluid, ambiguous process; within which those at risk may not necessarily identify themselves as victims.<sup>11</sup> In developing an understanding of the complexities of child sexual exploitation, research highlights it is important to acknowledge the broader personal, social and economic influences impacting on victims. For example, how exploitation may involve victims 'swapping' sex to meet basic needs such as warmth and shelter due to homelessness; and/or to gain access to drug and alcohol due to addictions; for financial gain to pay debt/subsidise basic living costs; and/or to secure close relationships to meet both physical and emotional needs.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Harper, Z, and Scott, S. (2005) Meeting the needs of sexually exploited young people in London. [www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)

<sup>10</sup> Harris, J. (2007) Tipping the iceberg: A pan Sussex study of young people at risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking. [www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)

<sup>11</sup> Stacey, L. (2009) Who's Child Now? Fifteen years of working to prevent the sexual exploitation of children in the UK. [www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)

<sup>12</sup> See Davis et al (2005) Child Sexual Exploitation through Prostitution: Newcastle-upon-Tyne. [www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)

## ***Defining child sexual exploitation***

The most common cited definition of 'child sexual exploitation', encompassing those broader issues associated with the problem, has been developed by the National Working Group for sexually exploited children and Young People (NWG).<sup>13</sup> The NWG definition has been endorsed by the Government, and currently informs UK safeguarding guidance.<sup>14</sup> Subsequently, this definition has been adopted as a guide for this study:

*'[The] sexual exploitation of children under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where children (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (for example, food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of performing sexual activities and/or another performing sexual activities on them. Child sexual exploitation can occur through use of technology without the child's immediate recognition, for example persuasion to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phone with no 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'*

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<sup>13</sup> The NWG is a multi-agency consultation group consisting of professional members from a range of academic/research institutes, voluntary and statutory services etc. The group share knowledge and expertise, and provide advice and guidance to Government, statutory safeguarding agencies, and other Non Government Organisation providers who are engaging children at risk. [www.nationalworkinggroup.co.uk](http://www.nationalworkinggroup.co.uk)

<sup>14</sup> HM Government (2006) Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

## ***Child trafficking***

The most often cited and internationally accepted definition of 'child trafficking' comes from the '*United Nations Protocol*' supplementing the '*United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime*'.<sup>15</sup> The UN Protocol commonly described as the '*Palermo Protocol*' states children under 18 represent a 'special case' where human trafficking is concerned. This is due to children below age 18 being considered unable to give fully informed consent to their movements by an adult across national or international borders for the purpose of exploitation.

## ***Child Exploitation On-line Protection Centre***

Affiliated to the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA),<sup>16</sup> the multi-agency law enforcement Child Exploitation and On-Line Protection Centre (CEOP) was established in 2006. In June 2007 CEOP completed a scoping study into the scale of child trafficking within the UK.<sup>17</sup> The study identified 330 suspected and confirmed cases of child trafficking, with the majority of victims originating from China and Africa. Although not identified in the 2007 study, a subsequent CEOP report<sup>18</sup> highlighted how children born and/or resident within the UK, had been targeted by networks of locally resident men and moved between towns and cities for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Exploring child trafficking trends the

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<sup>15</sup> United Nations (2006) Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially woman and children.

<sup>16</sup> SOCA is an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body sponsored by, but operationally independent of the Home Office. As an intelligence-led agency SOCA has law enforcement powers, and working across both UK borders and internationally, prioritises tackling crime involving human trafficking and people smuggling; as well as Class A drug supply, major gun crime, money laundering, computer-based and other forms of series fraud etc. Human trafficking and people smuggling are considered by SOCA to refer primarily to organised immigration crime. [www.soca.gov.uk](http://www.soca.gov.uk)

<sup>17</sup> CEOP (2007) A Scoping Report on Child Trafficking in the UK. [www.ceop.gov.uk](http://www.ceop.gov.uk)

<sup>18</sup> CEOP (2009) Strategic Threat Assessment: Child Trafficking in the UK. [www.ceop.gov.uk](http://www.ceop.gov.uk)



2009 CEOP report highlighted how, the grooming and movement of UK born/resident children for the purpose of sexual exploitation has begun to be commonly described as ‘internal trafficking’.

### ***Understanding internal trafficking***

A briefing provided by the Coalition for the Removal of Pimping (CROP)<sup>19</sup> highlights how ‘internal trafficking’ usually involves the exploitative activities of connected groups of men. These groups of men often share a range of diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Victims appear to be predominantly white British females aged between 11 and 17, although females described as from ‘mixed race’, and of ‘Asian’ origin have also been identified.<sup>20</sup> The recruitment of victims is described within the CROP briefing as a method following the elaborate stages of the grooming process. While initially posing as ‘boyfriends’, perpetrators may target and approach victims in known areas where young people congregate; such as bus stations, car parks, shopping centres, fast food outlets and taxi ranks etc.<sup>21</sup> Using flattery, gifts and other forms of coercion, potential victims are treated as ‘grown up’, while the perception of a friendship is instilled. Often a sexual relationship will develop. This will be paralleled by a process of manipulation through, for example coercion into drug use, enticement to go missing from home for short periods, and subsequent encouragement of family estrangement.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Coalition for the Removal of Pimping (2006) Trafficking in our midst: Parallels between international trafficking. [www.crop1.org.uk](http://www.crop1.org.uk)

<sup>20</sup> CEOP (2009) Strategic Threat Assessment: Child Trafficking in the UK. [www.ceop.gov.uk](http://www.ceop.gov.uk)

<sup>21</sup> Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation. [www.dcsf.gov.uk](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk)

<sup>22</sup> The link between sexual exploitation and children going missing from home or care is well established. Consistent with national guidance Police and Children’s Services within all Local Authorities should have a protocol for the recording and assessment of risk where a child is reported missing.

The latter stages of the 'recruitment' process will involve 'boyfriends' playing on a young person's feelings of loyalty, guilt, shame and fear to create a dependency. There may also be threats of violence and subsequent withdrawal of affection. CEOP describe how once victims have developed relationship dependencies, there is a 'weaning off' stage.<sup>23</sup> This involves introduction to a wider network of abusers consisting primarily of older men, who may be local or resident in towns and cities across wider geographical areas. While it has been inferred that the movement of group members between networks has involved illicit activities including drug dealing and gun running, there remains a gap in knowledge as to whether money or goods are used in exchange for the recruited children being introduced into the scenario.<sup>24</sup> While victims communicate limited awareness of money or other goods being exchanged, the motivation behind the recruitment and introduction of female victims into networks appears to be primarily a source of easy access to sexual services for connected groups of men; rather than a lucrative form of pimping by those initially acting as 'boyfriends'.<sup>25</sup>

### ***The UK Human Trafficking Centre***

The UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) is a multi-agency intelligence and law enforcement agency comprising staff from Police, Children's Services, the Crown Prosecution Service, the UK Borders and Immigration Agency and SOCA. The UKHTC was established following Operation Pentameter.<sup>26</sup> Since

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<sup>23</sup> CEOP (2009) Strategic Threat Assessment: Child Trafficking in the UK. [www.ceop.gov.uk](http://www.ceop.gov.uk)

<sup>24</sup> Ibid (2009)

<sup>25</sup> Anecdotal to the profile of recruiting perpetrators being younger men, the UK Human Trafficking Centre has highlighted one case involving a 13 year old girl who was recruited by an 18 year old female who introduced the girl to her 'boyfriend'. The 13 year old began going missing from home, later admitting to her parents she had sex with the man aged 28 she considered her boyfriend. The 13 year old went on to describe how she had been taken by her 'boyfriend' between towns and cities, imprisoned in properties, and subjected to prolonged physical and sexual violence by other men. [www.ukhtc.org.uk](http://www.ukhtc.org.uk)

<sup>26</sup> Pentameter provided the first national police-led initiative aimed at identifying victims of human trafficking within the UK. Involving all 55 UK police forces, statutory and voluntary agencies and

Pentameter the UKHTC has established a strategic sub-group to specifically tackle the problem of internal trafficking. The UKHTC subsequently confirmed internal trafficking as a UK domestic problem following Operation Glover.<sup>27</sup> In January 2008 the UKHTC launched a national public awareness campaign introducing the 'Blue Blindfold' brand.<sup>28</sup> The brand aims to raise public awareness about the diverse nature of human trafficking; including the message that internal trafficking of both foreign and national children is happening within local communities.

### ***The UK Action Plan on Tackling Human Trafficking***

The work of the UKHTC internal trafficking sub-group, alongside the necessary action needed to address the needs of those foreign child victims trafficked from abroad, has been acknowledged within the revised 2008 UK Action Plan on Tackling Human Trafficking. The Government published the first UK Action Plan in 2007.<sup>29</sup> Within the current UK Plan the targeting and movement of children, in and throughout the UK for the purpose of sexual exploitation, is applied to two

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international parties, Pentameter took place across a 3-month period in 2006. In total 84 victims, including 12 children aged between 14 and 17 years, were identified as having been trafficked for exploitative purposes. Pentameter 1 and later Pentameter 2 found victims where characteristically young women from Eastern European and Asian countries. At that time the term 'internal trafficking' was used on reporting the findings of Pentameter to describe the process whereby children arriving in the UK were moved across regional borders for the purpose of sexual exploitation, domestic servitude and other forms of abuse. [www.pentameter.police.uk](http://www.pentameter.police.uk)

<sup>27</sup> In 2006 Sheffield Local Authority Sexual Exploitation Service (SLASES) identified a pattern of local young girls who were regularly going missing from home. After the UKHTC launched Operation Glover to analyse the information provided by SLASES they identified 33 UK born teenage girls aged between 12 and 15 who had been victimised. Following Operation Glover charges brought against perpetrators included child abduction, and in the case of one male, imprisonment based on 4 counts of sex with a minor involving vaginal and anal rape. Other serious assault and drug related charges were upheld, and subsequently five men were made the subject of deportation procedures.

<sup>28</sup> [www.blueblindfold.co.uk](http://www.blueblindfold.co.uk)

<sup>29</sup> The UK Government signed up to the 'Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings' in 2007. Subsequently, the Government published the 'UK Action Plan on Tackling Human Trafficking'. This is a document which is constantly revised and updated as actions are completed, and new trends and concerns come to the attention of police and other UK law enforcement agencies. [www.crimereduction.gov.uk](http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk)

distinct groups. These include those foreign children who have been trafficked into the country then moved between UK regional borders; and those UK born and/or resident victims who have been targeted in local areas and moved between towns and cities.

Subsequently, a potentially confusing cross over has emerged between these two distinct, yet related victim groups. Nevertheless, recent Government guidance<sup>30</sup> details the importance of inclusion of both victim groups within the UK Action Plan. The Government guidance describes the 'three phases' in the child trafficking process. These three phases, it is suggested, might equally apply to both children trafficked internationally into, and through the UK, and those already resident who are targeted and moved internally:

*'There are three phases in the trafficking process: the recruitment phase, the transit phase and the destination phase...traffickers might be part of a well organised criminal network, or they may be individuals involved in only one phase of the various stages'*<sup>31</sup>

The 'three stages of the trafficking process' arguably provide the rationale for safeguarding agencies to consider treating cases of internal trafficking very seriously; not least because the potential psychological effects on victims due to family estrangement, abduction, transportation across regional borders, and possible imprisonment in unfamiliar surroundings, will be similar to those experienced by victims trafficked from abroad. Nevertheless, there remains speculation regarding the usefulness of the term 'internal trafficking' within the safeguarding sector. Whilst no less serious than trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation of children from abroad, as with 'child prostitute' it is argued by some that the term 'internal trafficking' is unhelpful.

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<sup>30</sup> DCSF (2007) Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked. [www.dcsf.gov.uk](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid (2007, p.9)

## ***Critical debate***

Specialist NGO's across the UK have for some time been aware that, while often random and opportunistic, the sexual exploitation of children can entail organised criminal activity involving the movement of victims across regional borders. A 2007 national study of Barnardo's Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Services reported some young people accessing support were routinely going missing from their locality.<sup>32</sup> Anecdotal evidence provided by young people accessing these services indicated they had been groomed by perpetrators, transported between towns and cities, and subsequently introduced to wider networks of men for the purpose of sexual exploitation. However, the study highlighted how victims disclosing their experiences were not always alert to the fact they had been sexually exploited. Where victims had reported being targeted, moved and introduced to wider networks of men, similar to cases of international trafficking, stigma, fear, loyalty, problems identifying perpetrators, and the often sketchy evidence provided by victims, had led to low level statutory social work intervention, and police investigation.

Subsequently, whilst sharing many similarities with child trafficking from abroad, it is evident that the movement of children between town and cities for the purpose of sexual exploitation is not a new phenomenon. Commentators agree the recruitment activity involved in internal trafficking of UK born children does have some of the process hallmarks of international trafficking.<sup>33</sup> However, despite the importance of acknowledging the similarities, there is an argument to suggest that the 'trend' toward 'internal trafficking' may have involved some re-constructing of the sexual exploitation phenomena, prompted by the current Government's interest in tackling the international human trafficking problem, for political expedience.

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<sup>32</sup> Marie, A. and Skidmore, P. (2007) A summary report mapping the scale of internal trafficking in the UK based on a survey of Barnardo's anti-sexual exploitation and missing services. [www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)

<sup>33</sup> CEOP (2009) Strategic Threat Assessment: Child Trafficking in the UK. [www.ceop.org.uk](http://www.ceop.org.uk)

### ***The Sexual Offences Act 2003***

Presently, most cases where children are identified as having been trafficked into the UK from abroad will likely be investigated by SOCA. CEOP have argued, despite the similarities, cases of internal trafficking of UK children should continue to be dealt with via local police law enforcement teams, using the framework of criminal offences presented within the Sexual Offences Act 2003.<sup>34</sup> The Sexual Offences Act 2003 introduced specific criminal offences to prevent children under the age of 18 being sexually exploited through prostitution and/or pornography. Sections 49-60 of the Act make it an offence to incite child prostitution and/or pornography, and/or to facilitate the movement of a child internally within the UK, or outwardly across international borders for the purpose of sexually exploitative activity. Section 58 specifies that internal trafficking within the UK is punishable by up to 14 years in prison.

CEOP suggest that the term 'internal trafficking' skews an already complicated issue by focussing on the 'movement' element rather than the 'abuse' element of

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<sup>34</sup> Currently Lancashire Constabulary and Derbyshire Police Authority are the only two UK police forces who have dedicated staff situated within multi-agency investigative units established to tackle child sexual exploitation. The Engage Team is led by police officers from Lancashire Constabulary and social workers from Darwin Borough Council's Children's Services. Engage also have dedicated youth and sexual health workers, as well as staff from specialist services provided by charities including Barnardo's, Life Line and Brook. The Engage Team uses their range of expertise to identify offenders and provide protection and support to victims and their families. Since being established in March 2008 Engage have received referrals in relation to 180 children at risk, and more than 25 individuals have been charged with child exploitation offences under various legislation including the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Engage have been recognised nationally as a model of best practice for their pioneering work in identifying, and combating child sexual exploitation; receiving an award by a judging panel in the national Tilley Awards run by the Home Office. The Tilley Awards recognise innovative crime fighting projects where police, safeguarding agencies and other community-based organisations are successful in working together to combat local crime problems. Similar to Lancashire Derbyshire's' Child Exploitation Investigation Unit have adopted a police-led, multi-agency approach to investigating all serious sexual assaults on children, and has been successful in identifying, and investigating over 165 cases of sexual exploitation within the 12 month period up to April 2009. Most recently an article published within The Journal of Homicide and Major Incident Investigation (Autumn 2009) has identified a series of case studies where the Derbyshire Exploitation Unit have used a range of tactics to identify perpetrators of sexual exploitation, disrupt offending activity through the use of Abduction Notices and Harboursing Offences etc, as well as secure convictions for a range of offences including those under the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

child exploitation. Subsequently, there is some contention that the terms 'internal trafficking' or 'trafficking within the UK for sexual exploitation' could be used interchangeably, or in some cases in exchange to describe the more complex activities involved in 'child sexual exploitation'. Again, as previously with the term 'child prostitute', by narrowing a definition to reflect a single phenomenon, i.e. in the case of 'internal trafficking', the 'movement' factor, will act to further obscure the more generic and diverse nature of child sexual exploitation activity.

### ***Identifying internal trafficking***

Alongside the work of agencies such as the UKHTC, CEOP, CROP and CTAIL<sup>35</sup> etc, Barnardo's have continued to build a picture of child sexual exploitation and trafficking across the UK. In a recent report the evolving nature of the problem, and an increased awareness of the movement of victims between towns and cities, has been identified through a series of case studies gathered from specialist services.<sup>36</sup> Researchers argue gathering such information, which identifies problem areas and victim/perpetrator profiles etc, assists law enforcement agencies in disrupting offenders, and is therefore an essential aide to tackling the problem.<sup>37</sup> However, as far as identifying internal trafficking, as a form of sexual exploitation with a distinct set of indicators, information about the actual scale and nature of the problem within the UK remains limited.

This is due to a range of factors including lack of wider professional awareness leading to poor identification, limited incidence recording and information sharing

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<sup>35</sup> CTAIL is the NSPCC's National Child Trafficking Advice and Information Line (0800 107 7057). The aim of CTAIL is to provide expert safeguarding advice, guidance and training to professionals working with children suspected of having being trafficked. [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

<sup>36</sup> Stacey, L. (2009) *Who's Child Now? Fifteen years of working to prevent the sexual exploitation of children in the UK.* [www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)

<sup>37</sup> Jago, S, and Pearce, J. (2008) *Gathering evidence of the sexual exploitation of children and young people: A scoping exercise.*

across LSCB's. In addition, despite acknowledgement of the phenomenon by statutory bodies and law enforcement agencies such as the UKHTC and police, poor identification of the problem remains allied to the fact there is no official definition. In order to address these issues Barnardo's have developed an 'identification tool',<sup>38</sup> to aide its services in more clearly identifying cases and determining whether internal trafficking is a problem for their area. The aide also aims to establish a 'common language', for information gathering and sharing across agencies. Barnardo's suggest the tool will provide an effective means of supporting police, and other safeguarding partners in the advocated best practice process of intelligence gathering, investigation, disruption and prosecution of perpetrators and the support of victims.<sup>39</sup> While combining key elements of the 'Palermo Protocol', and the Sexual Offences Act 2003, Barnardo's suggest the following 'definition tool' acts as a means of identifying children who have been trafficked within the UK for the purpose of sexual exploitation. It is this definition which has guided this project:

*'The transportation, or the intent to transport (including the recruitment, transfer, harbouring or receipt of) a child under age of 18 within the UK for the purpose of sexual exploitation, or the committing of an offence under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, taking into account the following: The intention to commit a sexual offence or, in handing over a child to a third party, the belief that the third party is likely to do so, is sufficient without the sexual offence actually taking place; the consent of the child is irrelevant; this activity is often characterised by deceit, coercion, violence and in all cases the trafficker will have power over the child by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources'*

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<sup>38</sup> Harris, J. (2009) Unseen Traffic: Identifying the trafficking of children within the UK for sexual exploitation. [www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk) (Unpublished)

<sup>39</sup> See Jago, S, and Pearce, J. (2008) Gathering evidence of the sexual exploitation of children and young people: A scoping exercise.



In identifying cases of trafficking in the UK for the purpose of sexual exploitation the following indicators must be present:

*‘Evidence of transportation to other locations/travel beyond the child’s local area of residence; or Evidence of the intention to transport; and the involvement of a third party, or more; or Evidence of informal networks; or Links to criminal networks’* Other indicators which may be present include: *‘Going missing and not returning (in the case of children arriving from abroad); or going missing for periods of time, and returning, possibly on a regular basis’*.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Harris, J. (2009) Unseen Traffic: Identifying the trafficking of children within the UK for sexual exploitation. [www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk) (Unpublished)

## **2 Methodology**

### ***Research management***

This project was designed as a small-scale exercise to offer insight into the nature and scope of internal trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation across the North East and Cumbria. The project was guided by a steering group comprising of Barnardo's SECOS Project Manager, a Barnardo's researcher based in the North East region, and the Assistant Director/Lead for Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking within Barnardo's Policy and Research Unit. The group met several times across the life of the project to agree aims, objectives and study methods, discuss emerging issues and tackle problems encountered.

### ***Study area***

This project took place across the North East and Cumbria. The region is a large, diverse geographical area consisting of densely populated towns and cities, rural areas with market towns, and more sparsely populated villages and hamlets. The region has a mix of both multi-cultural populations, and areas dominated by majority populations. The region is made up of demographic areas across which both affluence and poverty are present. The project area combined 12 LSCB areas including: Northumberland, Newcastle, Gateshead, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Sunderland, Hartlepool, Stockton, Darlington, South Tees, Durham and Cumbria.

### ***Locating the field***

Prior to undertaking 'field work' several preparatory project activities were undertaken. These included a 'desk top' review of all regional Children's Trust's

'Children and Young People's Plans'<sup>41</sup>. The purpose of this was to identify local policies, procedures and partnerships providing targeted services for vulnerable groups including children at risk of sexual exploitation. Additional pre-field work activity involved discussion with several Local Authority Children's Services Child Care Team Management, and Leaving Care Team groups. Discussions were also held with senior LSCB members across several Local Authorities. The purpose of this was to introduce the study topic to a selection of statutory services, and gather preliminary anecdotal information about professionals' awareness of the nature and incidence of child sexual exploitation activity in their area.

### ***Negotiating the field***

It had initially been intended that this project would be a regional study involving the recruitment of social workers from Children Services and Leaving Care Teams etc. Therefore, prior to gathering information outside of informal discussions, a letter informing of the study proposal was forwarded to all Directors of Children's Services across the region. The letter described the nature of the study, and how information would be gathered, stored, analysed and disseminated. It was made clear that all data would be collected with the consent of participants, IT password held and published confidentially. It was further made clear that individual local authorities would not be identified within the final report. However, where identified by the research process, any problems and/or safeguarding issues pertaining to particular areas would be reported back to Directors of Children's Services as appropriate<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> Children's Trusts bring together a range of organisations formalising partnership work undertaken by statutory and voluntary agencies within Local Authorities. Based on a mandate set out in the Children Act 2004, Children's Trusts are required to work at all levels from planning to delivery of services for children and young people to assist them in achieving the five outcomes: *stay safe, be healthy, enjoy and achieve, achieve economic well-being and make a positive contribution*. Children and Young People's Plans chart Children's Trusts' priorities, and how they intend to improve outcomes for children and young people in their area.

<sup>42</sup> Throughout the life of this study safeguarding concerns were discussed as part of the ongoing research process with all participants. It had been agreed with all participants that any

## ***Ethical considerations***

In response to being informed of the study proposal a meeting was arranged with the Director of Children's Services, acting as research governance lead for the North East Regional Directors of Children's Services Network Group. The meeting was also attended by the study commissioners, the lead researcher, and the management representative for North of Tyne Primary Care Trust Research and Development Team. Within the meeting concerns were raised by the acting Director regarding the level of information required from Children's Services to inform the study, and the methods for gathering, analysing and reporting on such information. Subsequently, it was agreed the methodology should be subject to the scrutiny of a formal Research Ethics Committee.

As there was no formal ethics approval process within Children's Services for independent social care studies,<sup>43</sup> it was agreed the research proposal should be amended to include the recruitment of NHS professionals to the study. It was then agreed the study proposal should be submitted to an NHS Research Ethics Committee for approval via the Integrated Research Application System.<sup>44</sup> It was further agreed no formal research activity would be undertaken across regional health and statutory services until a approval from North of Tyne was granted.

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safeguarding issues in relation to children and young people would be passed for further investigation/assessment to the relevant local authority or police. No immediate safeguarding concerns were identified.

<sup>43</sup> The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) is the UK's national leadership association for Directors of Children's Services. The ADCS provide members with a range of support services including advice around policy, practice, powers, responsibilities and accountability. The ADCS have a Research Group allied to their Standard, Performance and Inspection Policy Committee. The Research Group advises the ADCS on research related issues, and considers approvals of study proposals seeking to undertake research within Local Authority Children's Services. Where study proposals seek to involve 4 or more Children's Services' Departments proposals can be submitted to the Research Group for a critical appraisal. In contrast to the lengthy NHS ethics approval process, the ADCS Research Group aim to reply to study applications within 4 weeks of submission.

<sup>44</sup> The IRAS is an online application system for approval of health and social care research within the UK. All studies requiring NHS ethics approval must be registered via the IRAS.

### ***Ethics approval issues***

Following a submission of the study proposal to County Durham & Tees Valley 2 Research Ethics Committee (REC), with amendment to the study proposal,<sup>45</sup> a 'favourable' ethical approval was secured. However, a separate application for access to health professionals within North of Tyne Primary Care Trust (PCT) was subsequently refused. This refusal was made on the grounds that completion of interviews and/or case study forms was beyond NHS staff capability due to the level of staff pressure described by the PCT as present within current services. As a result this project has been limited to gathering information from professionals outside of health and statutory social care.

### ***Data protection and informed consent issues***

The North East Directors of Children's Services/North of Tyne Primary Care Trust Research and Development Team raised some further issues in relation to the methodology underpinning the initial research proposal; particularly in relation to matters of data protection and the protection of the anonymity of service users. The North East Directors of Children's Services/North of Tyne Primary Care Trust Research and Development Team felt the initial study proposal did not offer sufficient protection in these areas. To take the initial proposal forward it was felt there would have needed to be agreement from the families involved; even if that consent was given there were further concerns at the proposal meeting regarding the vulnerability of such families and whether they could truly give informed consent. Also, given the very small numbers of cases, a concern was raised regarding the difficulty for the research to be presented in such a way that they could not be identified.

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<sup>45</sup> It had initially been proposed that, in order to reflect the 'child's view', service users within Barnardo's Sexual Exploitation and Missing Services should be consulted to inform the study. However, the REC did not agree this was necessary to meet the aims and objectives of the study. Subsequently, in order to secure a 'favourable' ethical opinion, an amendment to the proposal meant the intention to recruit Barnardo's service users to inform the study was removed.

### ***Semi-structured interviews***

The primary method of formal information gathering for this project involved the use of semi-structured interviews. Interviews were undertaken with a small targeted group of professionals employed across a wide range of agencies including police, specialist child sexual exploitation services, child abuse and rape crisis services, substance misuse services and community-based youth projects etc. Interviews followed a consistent line of questioning, and were designed to elicit professionals' knowledge and understanding of child sexual exploitation and internal trafficking; professional opinions on what makes children and young people vulnerable to sexual exploitation; how professionals' employing agency identify and respond to the problem; what barriers victims accessing support services experience; and what professionals understood about, and considered to be existing models of best practice across the region.

### ***Group discussions and case study collection***

As part of the project process a series of group discussions were also held by researchers attending regional missing, sexual exploitation and trafficking reference groups. Additional group consultations were held with a selection of community-based youth and supported accommodation projects, and specialist child sexual exploitation services teams. In order to gather quantitative data highlighting the risk factors associated with victims and their background characteristics, a small number of case study forms were completed. The case study forms were designed to gather background information pertaining to victims such as age, gender, range of needs etc, and identify 'indicators' of sexual exploitation and internal trafficking. The forms allowed professionals the opportunity to provide information regarding case scenarios known to them, as well as outline agency responses where children had been identified as at risk. To further inform the project researchers attended scheduled meetings with the

UKHTC internal trafficking sub-group, and the Blackpool Awaken Project.<sup>46</sup> Subsequently, information for this project was gathered from a wide range of professionals. Professionals recruited for the purpose of this project were employed within the following agencies:

- Northumbria, Durham, Cleveland and Cumbria Police
- Specialist child sexual exploitation services
- Child sexual abuse services
- Rape crisis services
- Women's refuge services
- Community-based youth services, and out-reach support
- Young people's housing and supported accommodation providers
- Young people's drug support services
- Community-based Black Minority Ethnic young people's project

### ***Participant sampling***

In order to identify those professionals who took part in the project a 'purposeful sampling' approach was adopted. This entailed targeting professional participants based on specific selection criteria. These criteria included: participants' professional role, ability and willingness to take part in the project; the type of service participants were employed in; and the nature of support employing agencies provided to children and young people at risk. The process of gathering information also involved a 'snowballing approach'. This entailed

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<sup>46</sup>Similar to the Engage Team, the Awaken Project is also a groundbreaking specialist Child Sexual Exploitation Unit developed by Lancashire Constabulary. The team is co-located at Blackpool Central Police Station, and is a multi-agency partnership including police, children's services, health and education etc. Awaken have adopted a similar approach to the work of Derbyshire's' Child Exploitation Unit, and have been responsible for a series of offender identification and disruption activities. As well as having established a comprehensive database mapping local 'hotspots', known offenders, addresses and patterns of offending activity, Awaken have issued around 100 Child Abduction Notices, and secured in excess of 30 convictions for a range of sexual offences against children.

asking professionals agreeing to take part in the project to identify other colleagues in their own and/or other agencies with whom we should consult.

### ***Formal recruitment processes***

Prior to undertaking semi-structured interviews preparation involved making contact with service managers and supervisors to introduce the project aims and objectives. To assist with this process written information and consent forms were adopted. These forms presented an overview of the project, explained why it was important, and what would be expected of professionals undertaking interviews. This formal recruitment process, although lengthy and involving considerable negotiation with many senior 'gatekeepers', proved particularly worthwhile given the findings professional interviews produced. Despite the small sample, it was felt the range of themes, issues and debates to emerge from those interviews secured led to a reasonable point of 'saturation'; i.e. where it was felt no significantly different or anecdotal information was being gathered.

### ***Study limitations***

It is assumed the information provided by professionals who took part in this project was trustworthy and accurate. However, findings of this project cannot be generalised to other regions, and/or otherwise be seen to represent the actual nature and scale of the problem across the study area. This is due to limited agency access, the small number of professionals interviewed, and the limited numbers of case studies identified. Research indicates child sexual exploitation is a notoriously clandestine activity.<sup>47</sup> Therefore it cannot be assumed all children at risk across the region are known to safeguarding agencies. Subsequently, children may be at risk outside of the knowledge of safeguarding professionals and are therefore excluded from the findings.

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<sup>47</sup> Harris, J and Robinson, B. (2007) Tipping the Iceberg: A pan Sussex study of young people at risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking. [www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)



# 3 Findings

The total number of professionals recruited to inform this project approximated 200. Of those professionals approximately 40 undertook formal, semi-structured interviews. A further 16 professionals both from within, and outside of the interview group completed case study forms.

## ***What do professionals understand about the problem?***

Semi- structured interviews began with an exploration of the concepts of child sexual exploitation and internal trafficking. In some cases this element of the project acted as an awareness raising process for professionals. However, primarily in response to being asked to explain the concept of ‘child sexual exploitation’ professionals described the various stages of the grooming process; including targeting of victims by perpetrators, manipulative/coercive activity facilitated by the imbalance of power present, and subsequent descriptions of how victims often exchanged sex for money, gifts, drugs and/or alcohol etc.

In contrast, responses to understanding the concept of ‘internal trafficking’ were mixed. Of those who understood the concept some thought the term was useful, while others indicated it detracted from the wider issue of child sexual exploitation. In some cases professionals either misunderstood, or were not aware of the concept at all. Subsequently, it was found professional awareness of internal trafficking could be rated along a continuum. This continuum ranged from a ‘high-level of awareness’, through ‘reasonable awareness’, to ‘limited or no awareness’ at all. The following quotes represent professional views regarding understanding and attitudes toward the topic of this project:

*‘[Child sexual exploitation involves] an exchange for sexual acts, money, gifts or goods...alcohol...basically it is where there is an imbalance of*

*power...usually the person exploiting is...adult, in a much stronger position economically, socially [in terms of] maturity...the young person...is targeted, groomed [then there is an exchange]...sometimes for [sexual] favours or just somewhere to stay...<sup>48</sup>*

*'[Sexual exploitation] is about young people getting into a situation after being targeted, coerced and groomed [in local areas]...when it turns into internal trafficking it's about being taken somewhere else, it might even be just a group of [the perpetrators'] friends round the corner...[or] somewhere [further afield]...the adults will know it's organised...and will have arranged it...and [the adults] are expecting young people to be brought to them [for sex]...<sup>49</sup>*

*'[In terms of internal trafficking it's about] exploiting young people under age 18...moving children around...children [who are] taken from one local area to another...but we would not normally view this as 'internal trafficking'...where 'internal trafficking' is concerned you will find [professional agencies] are all measuring something different...in a police head I would unpick [the] definition, and interpret 'internal trafficking' as 'abduction', 'fraud', 'deception'...'threat...of violence' these sorts of things...we would dissect this, not call it 'internal trafficking'...[for us] it's about a detailed set of circumstances...' <sup>50</sup>*

*'The trafficking of young people in the North East...is an extension of the whole range of sexually exploitative relationships [young people are involved in]...the term 'internal trafficking' does not really add anything in terms of understanding or addressing the issue of sexual exploitation...' <sup>51</sup>*

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<sup>48</sup> Special Sexual Exploitation Services Practitioner

<sup>49</sup> Special Sexual Exploitation Services Practitioner

<sup>50</sup> Police Sergeant

*'I have never seen a definition of the term ['internal trafficking'] but I have an understanding about the movement of children...mainly children who are being exploited by adults...there was one case...victims were [moved from one location and] found [in another area] across the region...'<sup>52</sup>*

*'I think at first I used to be a bit naïve...I always thought trafficking was people from sort of East European countries...being brought in [to the UK]...that they were quite young...they [become] involved in prostitution...I never really thought it affected young people [born] in Britain...but of course it does happen...maybe it's just something we were not aware of...'<sup>53</sup>*

*'[The term 'internal trafficking']...is invaluable, we need to distinguish from external trafficking...people being brought into the UK...[we need] to look at the local problem...where children are at risk in the area they live...without doubt we need [terminology]...to widen safeguarding commitments...to encourage practitioners to look closer to home...'<sup>54</sup>*

*'I don't like the term [internal trafficking]...it neutralises it...there is no sense of [sexual] exploitation, who it happens to, where, how. [The term] 'internal trafficking' adds a layer of confusion...it's OK for professionals [familiar with the concept]...but no good if you are trying to use it to inform the public...'<sup>55</sup>*

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<sup>51</sup> Specialist Sexual Exploitation and Missing Project Worker

<sup>52</sup> Police Detective Inspector

<sup>53</sup> Community-based Young People's Housing Support Worker

<sup>54</sup> Police Officer

<sup>55</sup> Women's Refuge Manager

### ***What factors make children vulnerable to sexual exploitation?***

Professionals were asked to describe what they felt made children vulnerable to sexual exploitation. A common theme to emerge was the wide range of social and psychological ‘problems’ experienced by those at risk. Consistently professionals mentioned victims known to them as having: poor family relationships; experience of childhood sexual abuse; experience of domestic violence; learning difficulties; low self-esteem; a care background; parental mental health and addictions; as well as personal drug and alcohol use. Homelessness, and/or insecure living arrangements such as Bed and Breakfast were also identified as vulnerability factors. Professionals additionally described how ‘*learned behaviour*’ and children’s ‘*belief system’s*’, led them to engage in ‘*risky lifestyles*’. A key theme was children often remained unaware they were at risk, or were being exploited.

Age and gender, i.e. being young and female, were commonly described as key vulnerability factors. Additionally, victims were often described as ‘*adolescent*’, but at a point in their development where they sought affection, and wanted to form sexual relationships while being viewed as more ‘*grown up*’. Subsequently, many professionals described these individuals as an ‘*easy target*’ for older men wanting to sexually exploit them. Some victims were described as experiencing peer pressure to engage in sexual activity. Some young people were considered to be seeking ‘*kudos*’ within peer groups; this being achieved through their association with older men. The following quotes highlight the range of vulnerability factors described:

*‘Apart from the fact [victims] are female...early childhood abuse, domestic violence, lack of parental relationships...a lack of [safe] relationships with adults, and there is a culture among [some] young people that it is cool to*

*have an incredible sexual CV...[subsequently] boundaries between acceptable sexual activity and exploitation are blurred...<sup>56</sup>*

*'[Victims] are [often] at a point in their development where they want to be grown up, perpetrators prey on young people's desire to be grown up, buying mobiles etc...then sex is introduced...to some young people an older 'boyfriend' is a status symbol...<sup>57</sup>*

*'Young people are bereft, seeking self-esteem, [and] will strive to fill this [void] somehow...[they will] respond to [offers of] 'love', 'affection', in an effort to fill the vacuum...there is excitement attached to these [exploitative] relationships...for young people with [abusive] histories the 'excitement', pushes away the need to reflect and look inward...where young people have longstanding stress [they] need drama...no drama [in their] lives is a frightening thing...<sup>58</sup>*

*'[Some children]...are not aware they are being sexually exploited...view it as 'normalised' behaviour...lack of awareness can arise due to previous [childhood] relationships where boundaries between children and adults have been blurred...[abusive relationships in adolescence] may be a continuation of previous patterns of 'skewed' relationships...emotions [and relationships with older men] may be misinterpreted as love rather than sexual exploitation...it's only when young people begin to be [internally] trafficked that they may think something is wrong...<sup>59</sup>*

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<sup>56</sup> Woman's Refuge Manager

<sup>57</sup> Specialist Sexual Exploitation Worker

<sup>58</sup> Specialist Sexual Exploitation and Missing Service Case Manager

<sup>59</sup> Young People's Housing Support Service Manager

### ***What factors facilitate the movement of victims between towns and cities?***

Professionals were asked to describe what they felt were the main factors facilitating the movement of children between town and cities. A key theme to emerge was children and young people were often involved with men living in local areas, who were connected both socially and culturally to wider networks of men living in elsewhere. In many cases there was evidence to suggest some parents, because of their own vulnerabilities around drug and alcohol problems and experience of childhood abuse for example, were unaware and/or complacent about the involvement of their child with older men. In one case a mother was described as facilitating the movement of her child by providing the transport to take her to various addresses to meet men outside the local area. The recruitment by, and company of female peers was described by some professionals as making young people feel 'less scared', and more willing to be taken to unknown addresses outside of their home town. The follow quotes highlight some of the themes identified regarding victim coercion and movement processes:

*'The networks are already set up...usually it's minimised...they [perpetrators] say it's OK...come and meet my friends...if they [victims] are taken further afield it's treated like a trip out, a little holiday...it's not seen [by victims] as we see it, as internal trafficking...and it's not seen as exploitation...it's played down...[by perpetrators who say] what are you girls worried about, we are just going to see my friend...they might have been introduced to other friends so it becomes OK to meet his friends...'<sup>60</sup>*

*'...it is likely these men will have links [with other men] based on their common culture...networks will have been [established and] maintained... [and where] dispersed...networks are social and cultural into which young*

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<sup>60</sup> Specialist Sexual Exploitation Service Practitioner

women are [recruited and] 'woven' as men travel to visit each other...and 'share' young women...<sup>61</sup>

'It's opportunistic, [perpetrators] have got a car, and a kids 12 or 13...she's in the car...but what do you define it as 'abduction? [Perpetrators] might have said we are going for a drive... [And the young person thinks] shit what am I going to do...have their choices been taken away? A couple of kids have been taken to different parts of the country on drug runs, a couple of vulnerable things who won't get spotted...[so yes] we've had a couple of cases of internal trafficking...but it's quite hard [to define]...we need to get used to using the word..<sup>62</sup>

'...kids we work with...it happens to [them] because we've got a close town [radius]...[travel to other towns] ...it's about a 4 mile journey...and ...[with] this internal trafficking...[men] they'll pick...kids up in the park...take them to a house [in this town], or [that town]...it's about these men having access [to other areas]...because they are isolated [from mainstream communities], they tend to know everybody in their [own] community...they've got strong links with people in [other areas]...we had a lot of young people taken to...[a particular perpetrator] friendship area...[but] what happens if police identify a perpetrator [because of friendship networks]...he's got a quick escape route... because there is a family member in [other] areas...<sup>63</sup>

'This is a similar phenomenon to that in other parts of the country [it's not just happening in the North East]...networks are primarily social and cultural, not set up primarily for exploitation...[networks] are loose and

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<sup>61</sup> Specialist Missing Project Lead Professional

<sup>62</sup> Specialist Sexual Exploitation Service Assertive Out-Reach Worker

<sup>63</sup> Specialist Sexual Exploitation Service Assertive Out-Reach Worker

*shifting...not rigid or organised...[they're] based on social allegiances and family ties...they are not based on money...<sup>64</sup>*

*'[Men] are linked together, living in close proximity...a lot of the young people are linked together...when we ask 'who went first' [to a particular address]...they say 'so and so took me'...when [children are] visiting houses they think 'so and so is doing it as well'...it makes them feel better about themselves... [But] they are regularly missing overnight...and we will pick that up as an indicator...<sup>65</sup>*

*'...[One] girl's mother come from a similar background...had been in care...[the mother] normalised [her daughter's] behaviour when she was running away, [going missing], not going to school, smoking cannabis, [the mother] met the [older] boyfriend, said 'this man is OK'...'He's a bit older, but at least she is not roaming the streets'...she condoned it...<sup>66</sup>*

### ***What range of sexually exploitative activity are children engaged in?***

In responding to questioning around the nature of sexually exploitative activity professionals tended to refer directly to cases they were aware of. Often professionals described where children and young people were being groomed, and coerced into performing sexual acts for rewards such as cigarettes and alcohol. Professionals described 'hotspot' areas located across towns and cities within the region where victims were being targeted for exploitation including rented residential properties, fast food outlets, taxi ranks, car parks and bus stations etc. In several cases, professionals described where victims had

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<sup>64</sup> Specialist Sexual Exploitation and Missing Service Lead Professional

<sup>65</sup> Specialist Sexual Exploitation Service Practitioner

<sup>66</sup> Specialist Sexual Exploitation Service Assertive Out-Reach Worker



actively sought to gravitate to particular ‘hotspot’ areas, and/or encourage sexual activity which involved both individual and groups of connected older men.

Some professionals described incidences of sexual exploitation involving older, female peer coercion into ‘selling sex’ for money, and coercive sexual activity among peers groups; particularly where younger adolescent girls were exchanging sex with older teenage boys in order to gain kudos among peers, and access to alcohol etc. A key finding regarding same sex exploitation, or the internal trafficking of boys and young men, was limited to anecdotal evidence with no actual case studies being highlighted. The following quotes provide insight into the nature of sexual exploitative activity highlighted:

*‘We started to get information from Community Safety Officers and the Enforcement Team about...[perpetrators] encouraging young girls to go into their houses to drink and smoke [cannabis]...not going to school...giving oral sex [to men in exchange] for cigarettes and alcohol...’<sup>67</sup>*

*‘This young girl was 14...and she was friendly with another girl who was going into the home of an adult woman... [the older woman] was in a relationship...[he] had links, and this girl was told if she went to [another city] there would be plenty of business for her...at this point she was placed into foster care for her own safety...but she ran away...’<sup>68</sup>*

*‘In the main our [experience of] risk is around congregation points...[where] young people gather to socialise and drink...young girls attract older boys and vice versa...alcohol is a major factor...[these two] peer groups tend to find each other...it is the ‘norm’ for older [teenage young people] to have girls 16ish...[but] it is rare to have males older than*

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<sup>67</sup> Specialist Sexual Exploitation Service Practitioner

<sup>68</sup> Specialist Sexual Exploitation Service Boys and Young Men’s Assertive Out-Reach Worker

*the twenties...and we have no evidence of same sex exploitation...or girls being passed on...but we cannot rule [either activity] out...we did have one incident regarding suspicion that a 15 year old girl was being groomed by workers from a fast food chain...<sup>69</sup>*

*'We have a car park [belonging to a fast food franchise] where young girls hang around...and there are men coming across [from a different region] in cars....and taking them down country lanes and having sex...and they get cigarettes, alcohol...and then return them to the car park...I have reported it to the police...but they don't accept this is going on...<sup>70</sup>*

### **What barriers to accessing services do children at risk experience?**

Professionals were asked to describe what they felt were the barriers to victims accessing services. Several key themes to emerge were agencies not 'accepting' or 'taking ownership' of cases, gaps in local provision, lack of professional knowledge about the problem and/or inability to access specialist agencies. In several cases referrals from specialist services were described as not having been viewed as a priority by police and/or statutory agencies; this was due to a range of issues variously described as due to '*organisational culture*', '*professional hierarchy*', and/or where cases were not viewed as '*meeting appropriate criteria or thresholds*' for statutory intervention. Some professionals described how many children and young people, with a history of statutory involvement, had developed a mistrust of agencies they viewed as '*in authority*', and/or as '*the enemy*'.

Negative professional attitudes toward young people, children's fear of consequences, stigma, victims' involvement in crime and illegal drug use were

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<sup>69</sup> Police Officer

<sup>70</sup> Manager Specialist Child Sexual Abuse Service

also described as barriers. Where victims had been referred to specialist services, long waiting lists and high case loads often presented a specific barrier to receiving support. Information provided to agencies by victims about their experiences was often described by professionals as 'sketchy', or lacking in clarity; leading to poor formal reporting and lack of agency responses. Again in many cases young people were described as not being aware they are being sexually exploited. The following quotes highlight some of these key themes:

*'Ownership is key to identifying and investigating incidence [of internal trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation]...if you don't [acknowledge and] own it, it falls through the gaps...our business is 'problem profiling'...we question what is the problem, and who's problem is it? [As far as internal trafficking is concerned] it's where... [Victims] are trafficked to? Or trafficked from? Where forces cross area commands, it's seen as a different business [there is no] regional investigation [protocol]...we don't share resources and will not investigate for another police force...'<sup>71</sup>*

*'I think [professional] attitudes are a big barrier... [and] how does a child say I'm being sexually exploited...that's another barrier, [the] huge, massive, stigma...and [some] people don't give a shit because they're seen as scummy little kids, when they go to services, mother's been involved with that social worker, Gran's been involved...and also it's recognising [sexual exploitation]...[and] how does a 15 year old lad walk into a place and say 'help, I'm being sexually abused'...'<sup>72</sup>*

*'Kids being sexually abused, they just see it as having always happened to them...you try and put a child protection referral in for a 16, or 17 year old... there is a protocol...we have the meeting, [but Children's Services]*

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<sup>71</sup> Police Sergeant

<sup>72</sup> Specialist Sexual Exploitation Service Practitioner

say 'there is no further role for us'... and they leave you to get on with it...<sup>73</sup>

'We [can] talk about a referral [related to] any child abuse concern...[but it] boils down to individual understanding of definitions...or thresholds...in different Local Authorities levels of [response to] referrals vary, based on subjective understanding of what constitutes abuse...where internal trafficking is concerned you will find we are all measuring something different...<sup>74</sup>

'Young people aren't aware they are [being] exploited... [They] view it as 'normalised' behaviour... [Based on] previous experience [and] where boundaries between children and adults [are] blurred... [Sexual exploitation] is a continuation of 'skewed' relationships...emotions are misrepresented as love... [it may be only] when young people start to be [internally] trafficked that they might think something is wrong...<sup>75</sup>

'Very few incidents are reported to the police. In the case of those that are young women are typically viewed as not being very reliable witnesses because of their lifestyles...[and because] they often get information wrong, and are confused about names and places, and because of issues around 'consent' [to sex], and the fact that they often return to sexually exploitative situations...<sup>76</sup>

'It's very frustrating because young people won't talk to us about their problems... [and] we haven't got a service to send them to...there is loads

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<sup>73</sup> Specialist Sexual Exploitation Service Practitioner

<sup>74</sup> Police Sergeant

<sup>75</sup> Young People's Housing Support Service Manager

<sup>76</sup> Special Sexual Exploitation and Missing Service Practitioner

*of criteria to negotiate access [to Children's Services]...but social workers tell us it's not their role, sometimes the young people don't want to come to the [Children's Services] office [anyway]...and we can't talk to them at home [because they don't want their parents to know]...<sup>77</sup>,*

*'Waiting lists [for specialist services]...the 'pull' of [abusive] networks young people are part of [is great]...the times services operate, and the [service provided] do not provide [suitable] alternatives to what networks are providing...interventions are not offering alternate lifestyles...and [some] services are not based around the [range of] issues...<sup>78</sup>*

### **What are the gaps in services?**

Among those gaps commonly cited by professionals were a lack of locally-based specialist services, lack of professional skill in identifying and engaging children at risk, no lead professionals within statutory services dedicated to tackling child sexual exploitation, a lack of multi-disciplinary approach, services operating from a re-active, rather than pro-active stand point, and a lack of targeted services for particular vulnerable groups including boys and children from ethnic minorities.

*'[Some] services are not geared up to meet the needs [of victims]...so they slip through the net... [Some professionals] don't know how to deal with them.....there probably are young boys involved [in sexual exploitation], but if there aren't the resources to look for it and identify it, then it won't get seen...if we aren't doing assertive out-reach, we need to link in with services that are...<sup>79</sup>*

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<sup>77</sup> Special Sexual Exploitation and Missing Service Practitioner

<sup>78</sup> Police Detective Superintendant

<sup>79</sup> Specialist Sexual Exploitation Service Boys and Young Men's Worker

*'I think young men and young women are very different...because when you talk about sexual exploitation there is a view that it only affects women...but it's men who can be affected as well...I would like to think most [youth] projects are approachable...and there is actually access [to services] for both men and women...but I do know men find it difficult to access services...'*<sup>80</sup>

### **Case studies**

The number of case studies gathered for the purpose of this project totalled fifteen (n=15)<sup>81</sup>. All case studies concerned females aged between fourteen and eighteen described as *'heterosexual'*. The mean average age of those children and young people identified within case studies was sixteen. Of the fifteen cases a total of fourteen (n=14) were described as *'White British'*. One (n=1) young person was described as *'Chec Republic'*. Of the total number of case studies all individuals were identified as living in separate locations within six (n=6) of the 12 LSCB areas targeted for this project. Thus often several cases were identified as originated within one particular LSCB area. Of the fifteen cases thirteen (n=13) were described as having been moved, i.e. internally trafficked, within and/or from one LSCB area to another. One (n=1) was described as *'suspected'* to have been internally trafficked. One (n=1) was described as having been sexually exploited without any evidence of internal trafficking. Where victims had been described as *'internally trafficked'*, in seven (n=7) cases perpetrator networks were described as *'informal'*. In four (n=4) cases perpetrator networks were described as *'formal/criminal'*. In three case (n=3) the nature of networks were described as *'unknown'*.

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<sup>80</sup> Community-based Young People's Housing Support Worker

<sup>81</sup> Reference to case studies identified here is provided for illustrative purposes only. Due to difficulties with access to health and social care professionals the number of cases identified is limited, and therefore does not reflect the prevalence of child exploitation across the study area.

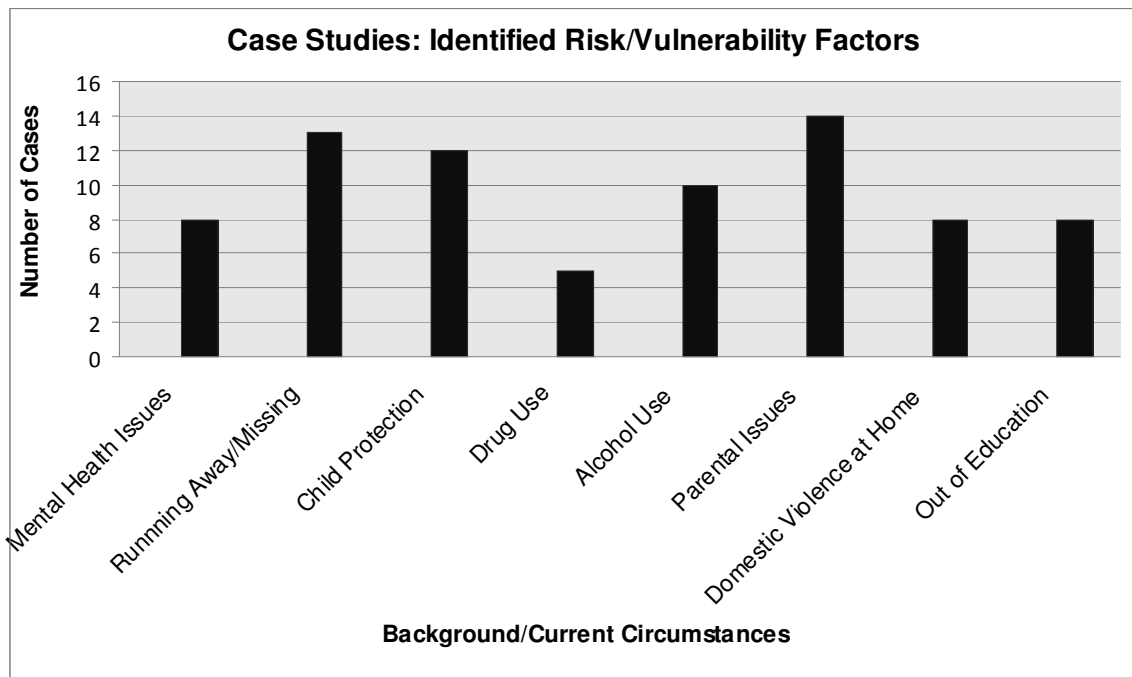
In terms of ‘victims’ awareness’ of having been sexually exploited a total number of twelve (n=12) were described as ‘not aware’. Two (n=2) were described as ‘aware’, while one (n=1) interviewee was ‘not sure’ if victim was aware or not. All case studies (n=15) were described as known to have been reported as ‘missing’. Police responses to missing reports were variably described as having resulted in a range of actions including two (n=2) Abduction Orders being sought with regard to separate, unrelated incidents. One (n=1) police response resulted in the arrest of three men. In two cases (n=2) emergency multi-agency strategy meetings were held, but those victims concerned were unwilling to offer evidence/co-operate with the outcome of procedures. The outcome of three (n=3) police responses to individuals as ‘missing persons’ was ‘not known’. In ten (n=10) cases victims were described as having ongoing ‘protection needs’.

**Summary of key findings**

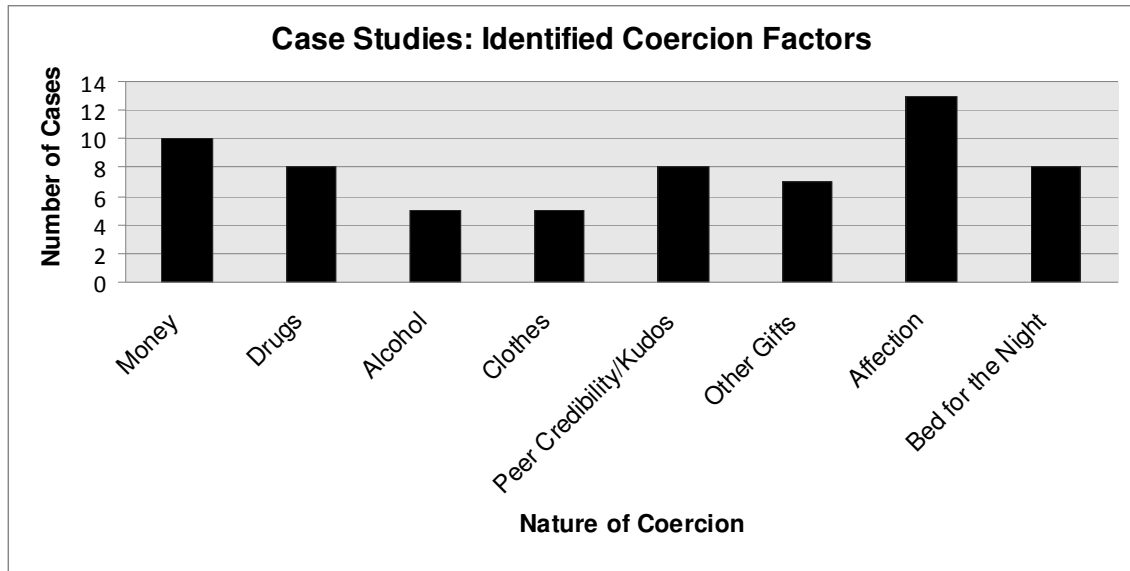
The following graphs provide an illustrated summary of case study key findings.

**Graph 1:** Case studies highlighting: *Background and risk factors associated with children and young people identified as vulnerable to sexual exploitation*

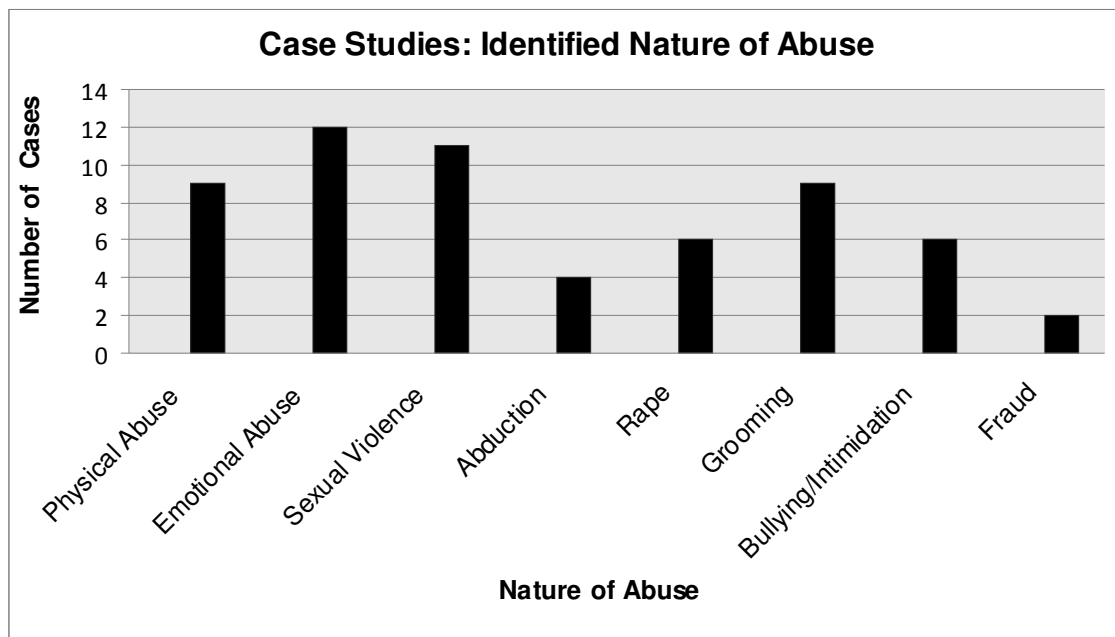
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**Graph 2:** Case studies highlighting: *The nature of victim coercion into sexually exploitative activity:*

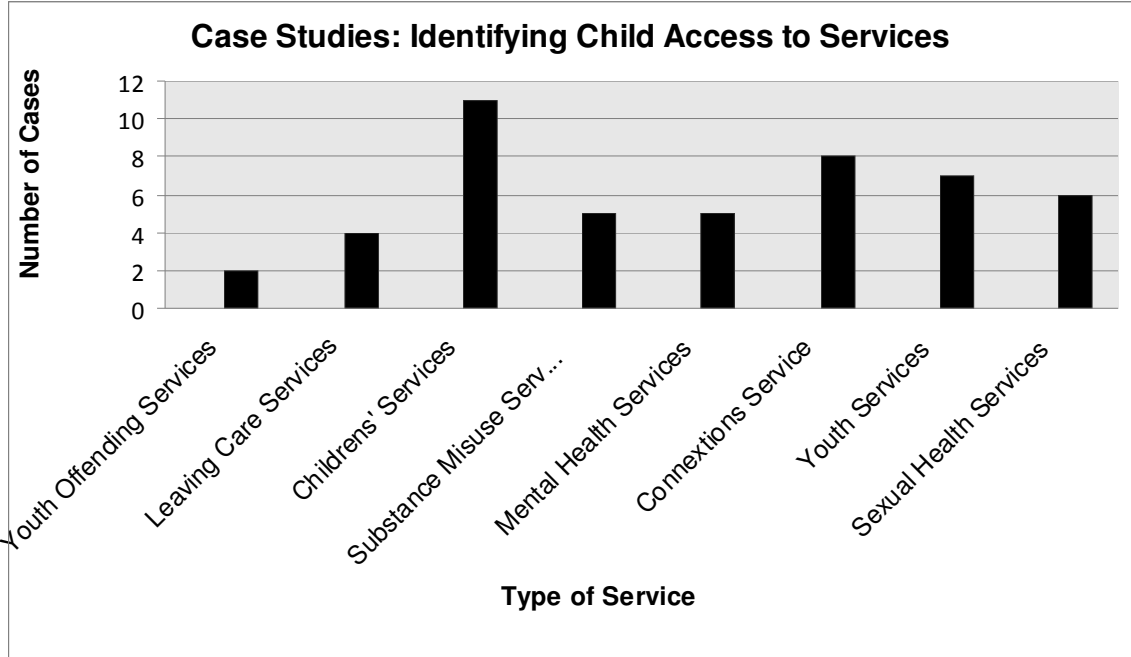


**Graph: 3** Case studies identifying: *The nature of abuse experienced by victims:*

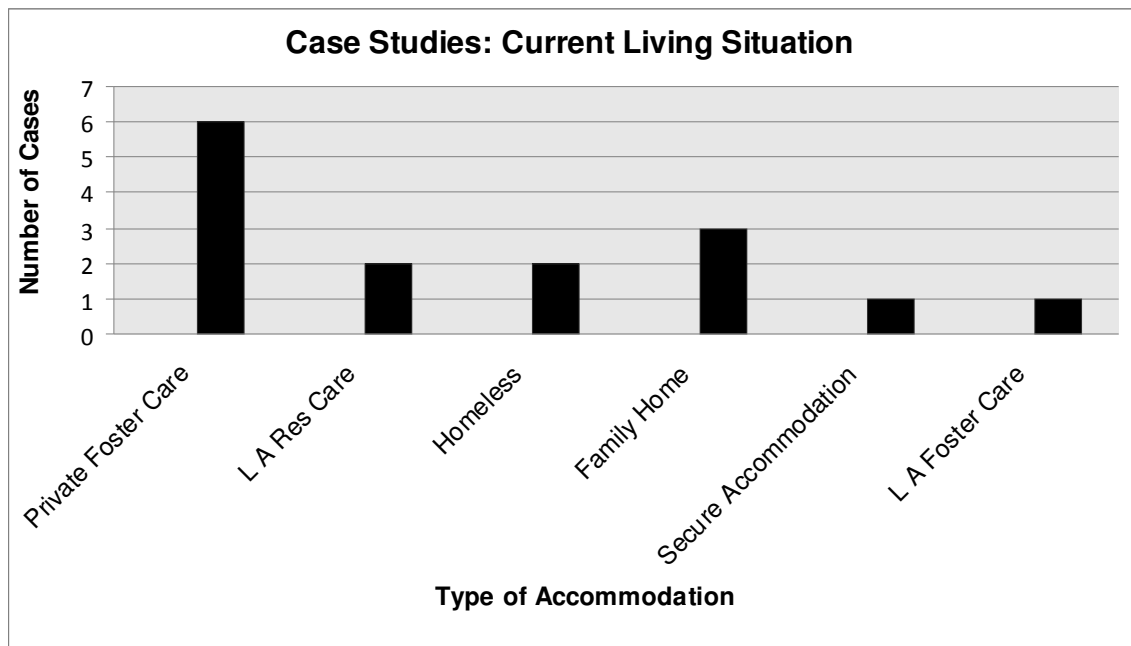




**Graph 4:** Case studies highlighting: *The range of children and young people's services currently/formerly accessed by victims:*



**Graph 5:** Case studies highlighting: *Current living situation of victims identified:*



## ***What Works?***

Having discussed some of the key themes emerging from case studies professionals were asked to describe what they felt was the most appropriate approach to working with children at risk. Consistently professionals responded by suggesting services needed to be preventative, and children's awareness needed to be raised early within families, schools and colleges. Also, where identified as a problem, interventions were described as needing to involve a multi-agency/partnership approach. Interestingly professionals, particularly those in specialist services, suggested the need to be '*realistic*' about what could be done for service users, given the complexity of their lives, their background and the range of needs they often presented. Many professionals described the range of skills needed to engage children at risk including being '*patient*', '*tenacious*', '*genuine*,' able to provide '*second chances*', and capable of providing '*firm boundaries*'. Several interviewees emphasised the importance of staff knowledge and training, and having the ability to recognise child sexual exploitation from a child protection perspective.

Several professionals described the usefulness of applying theory to practice and recognising the importance of non-time restrained therapeutic approaches. Also of value was an understanding of attachment theory, personal values and how the belief systems of service users and professionals can impact and/or otherwise positively influence working relationships with sexually exploited children. Many professionals described the usefulness of diversionary programmes including facilitating peer group work, residential activities, as well as assisting victims with addressing wider social and economic needs such as housing, training and employment. Additionally, where possible, assisting with family mediation and the development of protective family and social networks were described as essential. Several professionals described the importance of services being '*informal*', and necessarily provided by young people friendly,

community-based service providers. The following quotes represent professionals' views regarding 'what works' in practice:

*'Services need to start earlier...by the time victims reach the point they are groomed it is too late...young people are not comfortable with [formal] services...they won't set foot in a formal setting...providers need to consider 'what does this building look like?'... [Professionals] need to provide firm boundaries...where there are consequences and rewards...to help young people feel they have ownership... [staff] need to engage, demonstrate they want to take care...and to offer a second and third chance...talk to young people in their own language...be warm, resilient, patient...go the extra mile...young people will be watchful to see if someone is a fake...'*<sup>82</sup>

*'Each worker...has different skills...but for me it's about the relationship...how you engage the client...if you can build a trusting relationship...based on honesty, trust...[be a] positive role model...I think you can do almost anything...a lot of [young] people have attachment issues...[have developed a basic mistrust] so it takes a long time...they might disengage...but may comeback...because they trust you...we do a lot of strengths-based stuff, resilience...and solution-focused work...'*<sup>83</sup>

*'[Front line] staff at [the very] least need to have the skills to recognise what is happening...and respond [appropriately] from a child protection perspective...this [will] require staff knowledge and training...'*<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Woman's Refuge Manager

<sup>83</sup> Specialist Sexual Exploitation Service Boys and Young Men's Worker

<sup>84</sup> Specialist Sexual Exploitation Service Assertive Out-Reach Worker

## **4 Models of Best Practice**

### ***Service responses***

The project identified a range of services, partnerships and other related initiatives aimed at supporting children at risk. This section outlines a selection of these services providing key examples of best practice in supporting children who have been sexually exploited across the North East and Cumbrian region.

### ***Barnardo's SECOS (Sexual Exploitation of Children Out-reach Service) Project***

Barnardo's SECOS (Sexual Exploitation of Children Outreach Service) is a community-based project situated in Middlesbrough on Teesside. The SECOS Project was initially developed to identify, and prevent the exploitation of children through prostitution within the red light area of the city. However, SECOS has grown to actively seek to develop intelligence about sexual exploitation including new areas of activity, and is committed to informing, influencing and campaigning on related issues both regionally and nationally. Team members are professionally trained across a range of disciplines including social work, youth work, education, child protection and therapeutic counselling.

Among specialist interventions undertaken by SECOS staff is assertive outreach. SECOS also provide a community-based drop-in service, incorporating advice and practical assistance around a range of issues including housing, benefits, relationships as well sexual health etc. The SECOS holistic approach to supporting children at risk is based on the Barnardo's 4 A's model.<sup>85</sup> Involving four levels of intervention the 4 A's *Access, Attention, Assertive*

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<sup>85</sup> Scott, S. and Skidmore, P. (2006) Reducing the risk: Barnardo's support for sexually exploited young people: A two-year evaluation. [www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)

*Outreach and Advocacy* model aims to reduce incidence of sexual exploitation while identifying protective factors in the lives of children and young people at risk. The model advocates the importance of preventative inter-agency work involving professional awareness raising, training and guidance, and co-ordination of support services where victims are identified.

### ***SCARPA (Safeguarding Children at Risk, Prevention and Action)***

The SCARPA Project is a multi-agency collaboration between Barnardo's, the Children Society and Save the Children. Funded by several charities including Barnardo's, the Children's Society and the Northern Rock Foundation, the aim of SCARPA is to assist young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation and/or trafficking. SCARPA employ a range of targeted identification and prevention approaches including the facilitation of a sexual exploitation practice development group. The group is aimed at training and raising professional awareness across a range of disciplines including health, education and social care etc. Based at the Brunswick Methodist Church in Newcastle city centre, SCARPA undertake direct work with children and young people at risk including individual work, group work, assertive out-reach, while also providing a 'drop-in' facility.

As a community-based resource SCARPA aims to be young people friendly, and accessible, while employing staff skilled in engaging young people. A key objective of staff is to assist children at risk in acknowledging and/or exiting exploitative situations. Based on a 'what works' method of service delivery SCARPA take referrals from partner agencies situated across the North East region, while also encouraging young people to self-refer to the Project. Project workers have case responsibilities which involve planned work with service users based on a needs assessment. SCARPA report to Newcastle Local Safeguarding Board (NSCB), and have recently been involved in the

development of NSCB's 'Missing Children and Young People's Protocol' via the M-SET (Missing – Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking) Group.

### ***M-SET (Missing – Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking) Group***

The M-SET Group is a sub-group of the Newcastle Safeguarding Children Board (NSCB). The Group comprises of a range of statutory agency representatives including Police, Children's Services, Health, Education, the UK Border Agency, and Local Authority Community Safety Officers. Membership also includes senior representatives of SCARPA, the local specialist sexual exploitation and missing service provided by Barnardo's and The Children's Society. The aim of the M-SET Group is to implement and monitor the NSCB strategic plan to improve outcomes for children and young people at risk of harm due to going missing, sexual exploitation and/or trafficking.

The M-SET Group has been responsible for the development of NSCB's Missing Children and Young People's Protocol. The Protocol outlines the roles and responsibilities of partner agencies in relation to safeguarding children and young people at risk, and responding where children living in Newcastle go missing from home, or from local authority care. Based on a risk assessment format, all agencies collaborate to provide a consistent response and agree the most appropriate action where a child is identified as at risk. Categories of risk include high, medium and low. All high risk cases are lead by police, and involve the deployment of police resources. Following a missing episode police submit a child concern notice to Children Services which can lead to a CAF assessment being undertaken.<sup>86</sup> Where a child has been identified as at risk of sexual exploitation and/or has had contact with an adult(s) posing a risk, SCARPA assist in undertaking return interviews and can provide ongoing support. Data

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<sup>86</sup> The CAF refers to the use of a Common Assessment Framework. The CAF was introduced as a standard approach across integrated Children's Trusts to assist front line workers in the early identification, and addressing of child support needs to prevent later, acute intervention in the lives of children and their families.

collection and information sharing between agencies within the context of the M-SET Group is used to develop intelligence in relation to identifying problem areas, perpetrators and children at risk.

### **Safety Net (Carlisle) Advice and Support Centre**

The Safety Net Advice and Support Centre is a registered charity situated in Carlisle in Cumbria. Safety Net work with children, young people and their families where there has been experience of sexual abuse, rape and domestic violence. The service is holistic and provides advocacy and brokerages support to other agencies. Advocacy may involve acting on a young person's behalf where they find it difficult to talk with professionals in authority, within formal meetings and/or where individuals may be giving evidence to police and/or in court as a prosecution witness. Brokerage involves a range of activities including pursuing referrals to children's services, police and other safeguarding agencies where young people under age 18 have experienced sexual exploitation.

The aim of counselling for children and young people is to offer strategies to combat the impact of sexual trauma, and help individuals develop a positive way forward to prevent more serious emotional and behavioural difficulties developing. This is done through providing a therapeutic milieu, the boundaries of which in terms of frequency of sessions, allocation of worker etc are negotiated with individual service users. Safety Net also provides training around child abuse and sexual exploitation to a range of professionals including teachers, health staff, youth workers etc. Recent conferences organised by Safety Net have involved the participation of children and young people in communicating their experiences of what does and does not work for victims of sexual crime, within the Criminal Justice System.

## **South Cumbria Rape and Abuse Service (SCRAS)**

SCRAS is a registered charity which provides a range of counselling services and personal safety programmes for children and young people at risk, or who have experienced rape, sexual abuse and/or incest. Employing a small team of dedicated staff and volunteers, SCRAS operate from community-based centres situated in Barrow and Kendal. Services for children and young people are facilitated by professionally qualified child and youth counsellors who have a background in social work and children's services. Whilst children under age 18 must be formally referred to SCRAS, and be accompanied/supported in attending sessions by a responsible adult, older teenagers can self-refer and choose to attend services alone.

SCRAS operate on the premise that early preventative activity and therapeutic intervention can achieve the best outcomes, in terms of protecting children from abuse, and/or facilitating recovery from sexual trauma. Subsequently, among the services offered is the Protective Behaviours for Young People Programme. The programme facilitators work with small groups of young people in a range of settings including schools. The programme helps young people explore situations in which they may be unsafe, recognising early warning signs and identifying appropriate strategies for self-protection. All services to children and young people are offered free of charge, although there is sometimes a waiting list due to large case loads, and limited financial and staff resources.

### ***The REACH (Rape, Examination, Advice, Counselling and Help) Centre***

The REACH Centre is based in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and is funded by Northumbria Police. REACH provides assistance to women and men over the age of 16 who have been raped and/or sexually assaulted. The Centre is staffed by women, with a range of professional backgrounds including health and social care. Staff are qualified and experienced in counselling, and providing practical



support and advice to individuals in dealing with the effects of rape and sexual assault. REACH can be accessed via self-referral, or referrals are taken from other agencies supporting victims. Victims are supported whether victims wish to report the assault to police, or not. Where they do wish to inform police, staff support is available to facilitate this process.

## 5 Summary and conclusions

This section of the report provides a summary of some key learning in relation to the design, undertaking and findings of this project.

### ***Key learning from the study process:***

- There currently exists no suitably appropriate means of negotiating approval to undertake externally funded research into child sexual exploitation, and related topics within local authority Children's Services across the North East region. The present system of obtaining ethics approval via submission of study proposals to the Durham and Tees Valley NHS Research Ethics Committee (REC), and North of Tyne Primary Care Trust has proved to be an inappropriate pathway. This is due to the limited remit of the REC, and North of Tyne, whose primary role it is to scrutinise proposals from an NHS perspective. Issues around formal ethical approval of research activity targeted outside the NHS and primarily within statutory social care agencies remains unresolved. The lengthy processes involved in the REC and NHS IRAS ethical approval systems would suggest any future research of this nature should take timescales and potential ethics issues into account. Particularly where studies are funded from charitable resources and are time limited.
- A desk top survey of Children's Trusts' Children and Young People's Plan's across the region highlighted how some areas do not explicitly identify children at risk of sexual exploitation as a vulnerable group. This presents a key barrier to stakeholders within Trust partnerships in identifying child sexual exploitation as a problem for their area.

***Key learning from semi-structured interviews and case studies:***

- There appears to be no collective approach to identifying, or seeking to develop a shared understanding as to what constitutes the ‘internal trafficking’ of children for the purpose of sexual exploitation among stakeholding professionals across the region. While there continues to be no ‘common language’ among professionals, barriers to identifying children at risk across wider statutory safeguarding agencies will continue to exist.
- Collective information regarding professional understanding and levels of awareness of the problem within Children’s Services, and NHS services remains outstanding. Subsequently, unless statutory safeguarding agencies work with partner agencies via protocols to actively identify, and commonly respond to incidence of child sexual exploitation and/or internal trafficking in their area, barriers to understanding the scope, nature and how best to respond to the problem across the region will remain.
- With regard to what appears to be the main motivating factors behind the exploitative activity identified within this project, rather than clear evidence of serious organised crime across perpetrator groups, the dominating feature appears to be coercion of victims for the purpose of sexual gratification. These findings are in contrast to some of those national studies identified in the introduction to this report which do highlight incidence of serious organised crime.
- Nevertheless, barriers to identifying incidence of sexual exploitation involving organised crime across the region are identified within this project. For example, where police investigating reported incidence of child sexual exploitation have appeared in some cases to have sought ‘quick wins’ against perpetrators. However, it is important to acknowledge

through pursuing Public Order Offences, or issuing Abduction Notices, disruption techniques may be the only option open to police, especially where strong evidence is lacking.

- There is considerable learning from case studies regarding the nature of child sexual exploitation across the region; while remaining often hidden and difficult to define, identified activity appears to involve primarily socially and culturally connected groups of men targeting vulnerable white British females. Of the sample identified the majority of victims appear to be known to Children's Services, and are living in foster care arrangements.
- While the coercion of white females appears to be most visible, the sexual exploitation and/or internal trafficking of boys and young men remains more clandestine; and therefore barriers to gathering information regarding the nature/scale of the problem across the region are highlighted. In addition, due to the limited knowledge of professionals, and the limited availability of specialist services, barriers to identifying the nature and scale of sexual exploitation of children in minority social groups across the region have also been highlighted.

***Key learning from models of best practice:***

- Specialist services which target children at risk through assertive outreach programmes and then provide ongoing support, offer the most effective way of engaging victims of sexual exploitation. Specialist agencies have provided the lead on development of services in identified 'hot spots' across the region, and continue to undertake practice and research-based activity to develop protocols and progress responses to the issue of child sexual exploitation within LSCB areas.

- Despite statutory duties to provide appropriate responses to children at risk, those specialist services highlighted tend to rely on funding from a range of sources, including local authorities and by charitable trusts and foundations such as the Northern Rock. Due to marginal funding, and subsequent limited staffing capacity, specialist services provided to children at risk are often over subscribed with staff managing large case loads, and service user referral waiting lists.
- All services identified undertake interventions that are child-centred, and designed to give service users power and control over their situation. These services are provided by a group of highly committed individuals, who share a range of knowledge, skills and values necessary for effectively engaging children who have been sexually exploited. The skills required involve understanding the complexity of the lives of children at risk: including the extremely powerful influence past and current life experiences, life stories and family narratives have on victims' existing belief systems and/or life courses.
- It is clear that a multi-agency approach to supporting children at risk of sexual exploitation is most effective. This is due to the wide range of needs presented by victims, and the range of responses needed (i.e. welfare, law enforcement etc) that are beyond the scope of a single agency. This is particularly evident where children are in need of ongoing support from Children's Services<sup>87</sup> due to parental problems, their own

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<sup>87</sup> The Children Act 1989 established the current UK legal framework for Local Authorities to safeguard children and promote their welfare. Through Children's Services the 1989 Act offers potentially wide-ranging support for children known, or suspected to have been sexually exploited and/or internally trafficked. The Act deems a child to be anyone below the age of 18. Where a child may appear 'at risk', under Section 17 of the Act local authorities have a power to undertake an assessment of a child's needs, to determine the level of support they require. Section 20 of the Act gives powers to Local Authorities to undertake a 'voluntary' admission into care, where children are deemed to be 'in need' of accommodation. Section 47 of the Act places a duty on Local Authorities to investigate, and remove to a place of safety if necessary, any child at risk, or suspected to have suffered significant harm including sexual abuse and/or exploitation.

problems and/or where they are identified as at ongoing risk due to continued association with adults posing a threat.

- A model of best practice aligning child sexual exploitation and trafficking to 'Missing Protocols' dictates a consistent, multi-agency response; resulting in the greater likelihood that exploitative activity will be disrupted via police investigation, criminal charges, and/or via ongoing supportive interventions delivered by children's services/specialist staff who can assist victims to exit abusive scenarios.

## 6 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study this section of the report offers some recommendations for service, practice development and future study.

### *Preventative practice and early intervention*

- This study found that many secondary/high schools across the region have designated staff trained in child protection, often with additional access to training for staff and parents via local specialist sexual exploitation services. However, where this is not the case, schools across the region may wish to consider how staff and parents might access, and receive such training; for example within established parent-teacher liaison groups. Such preventative work involving raising awareness about child sexual exploitation and the indicators of risk should be delivered where currently unavailable, and, where possible, provided by specialist services and/or resident designated/trained staff who are trained and expert on the subject.
- Such training should be far-reaching and recipients should include guardians, foster carers and supported lodgings providers who offer support to children in need, and/or 'looked after' children. Key workers of children/pupils who are living in residential care settings should also continue to develop their awareness of risk factors, and the signs and symptoms of child sexual exploitation through professional training. Providers of such training may include LSCB's and/or specialist services.
- Secondary schools may additionally wish to consider how pupils might in future be appropriately educated on the topic of risk of sexual exploitation; for example through resources used and being developed by specialist

services including Barnardo's, the NSPCC, NWG etc, including the DVD, and accompanying pupil/teacher resource pack focusing on internal trafficking, currently being developed by UKHTC, and to be used within PHSE curriculum.

### ***Local Safeguarding Children Board's (LSCB's)***

Local Safeguarding Children Boards across the region need to continue to develop ongoing awareness regarding incidence and the evolving nature of child sexual exploitation in their area; including identifying and providing appropriate responses to incidence of internal trafficking. This can be achieved through:

- Working within the DCSF 'Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation', and 'Safeguarding Children who may have been Trafficked' guidance frameworks
- Further developing staff training on identifying the signs, symptoms and indicators of child sexual exploitation and internal trafficking, using additional mediums such as the trafficking tool kit currently being piloted in 12 local authorities. Use of trafficking tool kit provides the means to refer cases to the National referral Mechanism via the UKHTC. highlighted in this report
- Adopting the M-SET Group approach to developing Protocols for responding to missing children would assist in developing a cross agency culture characterised by consistent, co-ordinated and common approaches to identifying, responding and tackling the problem across the region.
- Working in partnership with internal and external researchers, funders and commissioners to develop study protocols, and undertake scoping and



mapping exercises to identify the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation in their area.

- In line with the *Every Child Matters* agenda, Children's Trusts across the region may wish to consider how they can further use Children and Young People's Plans and the needs assessment as the mechanism for identifying and combating children at risk of sexual exploitation by identifying those groups most vulnerable, and outlining stake holding partners' commitments to both prevention and intervention.

### ***Health services***

Health services engaging children and young people at risk across the region will need to continue to develop understanding of the child sexual exploitation through:

- Working within the DCSF 'Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation', and 'Safeguarding Children who may have been Trafficked' guidance frameworks
- Further developing awareness of the impact and implications of being a child victim of sexual exploitation and/or trafficking through staff training
- Developing existing child protection concern procedures to respond to children identified as sexually exploited and/or internally trafficked with relevant safeguarding, police and other law enforcement partner agencies
- Working in partnership, via PCT Research and Development Teams, with internal and external researchers, funders and commissioners to support the development of study proposals, and undertake scoping and mapping

exercises to identify the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation in their area.

### ***Police***

There are several key individuals across the North East and Cumbrian Police Forces who undertake work around child sexual exploitation. However, this area of work is undertaken within the broad umbrella of the Police Public Protection Unit remit. Therefore, there remain no specific lead professionals for child sexual exploitation across the region. Subsequently, current police responses appear to be localised, and reactive rather than preventative. Police responses to incidents of child sexual exploitation, while often effective in preventing incidence of exploitation, appear to remain inconsistent, and frustrated by barriers such as children's unwillingness to identify perpetrators.

- While effective Police responses to child sexual exploitation are evident across LSCB areas, stakeholders may wish to consider how learning from such forces as Lancashire Constabulary and Derbyshire Police Authority, who both have multi-agency, police-led specialist Child Sexual Exploitation Units, might contribute to a more preventative approach to law enforcement/police practice across the region; including developing a formal police referral system, and regional approach to 'problem profiling' of internal trafficking cases through analysing and linking incidents across LSCB areas.

### ***Specialist service developments***

- Specialist sexual exploitation, rape crisis and child abuse services may wish to consider how they can work together to agree a common criteria/definition to help identify children internally trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation across the region. This may assist in

establishing a 'common language', and culture across NGO agencies which share information about cases with police and children's services. Across the safeguarding sector a consistent criterion to identifying cases of internal trafficking would help build a reliable profile of incidence on a regional basis which could be shared with the UKHTC.

- There remain areas across the region where there is no specialist services established. Stakeholders, including funders and service commissioners, may wish to explore together how existing specialist services can be expanded to address this issue. For example through providing resources to assist the development of existing 'strategically-situated' services to extend their 'out-reach' programmes, and/or to develop further reaching 'hub and spoke' models. These models may involve specialist workers situated in statutory service locations across LSCB areas being seconded to/or employed by existing exploitation services. Additionally, in some cases it may seem appropriate to establish a 'virtual team', or develop a new 'stand alone service' through additional project development.

### ***Non-specialist, community-based young people's projects***

- Community-based young people's projects may wish to consider how existing out-reach programmes, group work, peer education/mentoring programmes, sexual health groups, drop-in facilities and/or any other services they currently deliver can be funded/expanded to undertake development work around highlighting the risks associated with sexual exploitation.
- Such projects may wish to expand further the existing level of awareness among staff through training provided by specialist services such as SCARPA, SECOS and Safety Net etc; and/or through other 'on-line' or

report-based training/briefings provided by NSPCC, CEOP, UKHTC and the NWG etc.

### ***Future research activity***

- Any future research proposal would need to take the limitations of this project into account, and where possible methodologies/access to services should be negotiated in partnership with statutory agencies, with appropriately designated senior staff and/or via the regional Directors of Children's Services (DCS) Network Group. Timescale allowances and funding implications for potentially lengthy negotiation processes should be raised with study commissions/funders from the outset of the research process. DCS Group may wish to pursue the development of an appropriate pathway for ethics approval of future studies targeted primarily at social care staff outside the NHS approval system.
- Any future study may wish to consider how methods designed to identify incidence of the sexual exploitation of boys and young men might be developed; and/or how evidence regarding the sexual exploitation of black and ethnic minority groups might be gathered. Additionally, future studies may wish to explore the profiles of perpetrators of child sexual exploitation across the region.

***'The challenge previously was we didn't know much about this...the challenge now is how do people want to do this?'<sup>88</sup>***

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<sup>88</sup> The Awaken Project