



The International Centre
RESEARCHING CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, VIOLENCE AND TRAFFICKING



Submission to the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, on care and recovery of child victims

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About the International Centre

The International Centre: Researching Child Sexual Exploitation, Violence and Trafficking is an academic centre located within the Institute of Applied Social Research at the University of Bedfordshire in the UK.

The International Centre is committed to increasing understanding of, and improving responses to, child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking in local, national and international contexts.

Achieved through:

- academic rigour and research excellence
- collaborative and partnership based approaches to applied social research
- meaningful and ethical engagement of children and young people
- active dissemination and evidence-based engagement in theory, policy and practice

Staff at the International Centre work collaboratively in teams with internal and external staff on applied research, evaluation, consultancy and training. We prioritise a focus on children and young people's participation, taking this seriously in all aspects of our work.

Based on your experience, what elements are necessary for a comprehensive and rights-based care and recovery system of child victims of sale and exploitation, including sexual exploitation?

Learning from the International Centre's extensive research and evaluation on care and support for children and young people affected by child sexual exploitation (CSE) in the UK highlights a number of principles and elements that are important for ensuring effective, rights-based support for children across the globe. These have been summarised under the following headings and are outlined in detail below:

- 1. Providing 'accessible' persistent support to marginalised children and young people**
- 2. Establishing a relationship of trust with an adult with specialist knowledge of CSE**
- 3. Establishing safety through relationships**
- 4. Recognising children and young people's own agency and upholding participatory principles**
- 5. Compassionate non-judgemental approaches to young people**
- 6. Providing inclusive, sensitive and non-discriminatory services**
- 7. Promoting creative methods to engage and support young people**
- 8. Taking a holistic approach delivered through multi-agency working**

1. Providing 'accessible' persistent support to marginalised children and young people

*"you can't do nothing straight away can you? It takes time, but you need encouraging don't you? You need to be pushed a little bit, a little bit more each time. But not too hard though because then people f*** off – just carry on with what they're doing."* (Beth, 19 in Warrington, 2013)

"They make you feel wanted - at home. If you ask for more help, they'll give you it and they'll not make you feel awkward for asking for it... They make you feel like you're not putting anyone - what's the word? - you're not putting anyone out. So you're not wasting anyone's time or anything. They're always there for you. They make that clear for you. They don't make you in an awkward position." (Alice, 15 in Warrington, 2013)

- We know from extensive research that many children and young people affected by CSE and trafficking have a history of poor relationships with helping professionals and may have complex or chaotic lives. In this context supporting children to access support must mean more than referring a child to a service and making a professional available.

- In a study mapping current responses to CSE across London, survey respondents identified a number of challenges in working with CSE victims including the challenges of getting young people to access support and/or remain engaged with services (Beckett et al, 2014).
- Accessibility must therefore mean professionals being persistent, proactive and creative in their approach to engaging children and young people. This is supported by findings from a two year evaluation of Barnardo's services - a leading provider of support to children and young people affected by CSE and trafficking in the UK. who describe an approach of assertive outreach: *"Establishing and maintaining contact ... through a range of methods, including regular texting, calls and cards, arranging to meet on the young person's 'home ground' or at venues where they feel comfortable. The steady persistence of workers is eventually understood as being a genuine demonstration of concern and an indication of reliability. Such persistent engagement techniques are particularly important to counteract the influence of, often equally persistent, abusive adults"* (Scott and Skidmore, 2006: 48). Pearce and Patel (2004) also highlight a commitment to continuing to reach out to young people even when they reject support – *"the times that the young women were most in need were often the times that they had rejected support"* (2004:90).
- Other characteristics that can make services more accessible to children and young people include ensuring that services are perceived by young people to be flexible and responsive - allowing children and young people to 'drop in' and come back if they do disengage (Jago et al, 2011; Scott and Skidmore, 2006; Taylor-Brown et al, 2002), together with safe, warm, friendly and welcoming services and spaces (Smeaton, 2013).
- Young people with experience of CSE have spoken about the need to let children and young people engage with services when they are ready and that this process of engagement should not be forced – *"Services shouldn't force you to talk about stuff if you're not ready"* (AYPH, 2014).

2. Establishing a relationship of trust with an adult with specialist knowledge of CSE

"You feel that you may never fully trust again" (What Works For Us?, 2011:15).

"If you tell an adult something then they kind of decide what's going to go on next... then police get involved and everything – and you might not want that –if you tell someone you've got to tell half a dozen other people and you have to tell it over and over again. If it goes to court then you've got to say it in court and it's really hard"(Alice, 15 in Warrington, 2013:149).

"Young people often believe that they are better off looking after themselves due to poor experiences of parental or adult support, and therefore need to see that their support worker is genuine and will walk that extra mile for them before they are willing to engage" (Sheffield LSCB, 2009: 15).

“ [the service] is more a social thing rather than coming to go to clinic or helping you get away from a pimp or going to drug clinic places, it’s more social, you know, I’ll have a coffee or something, you’ve built up that friendship and that trust between you” (Taylor-Brown et al, 2002:15).

“I just used to wish someone would take me under their wing. I contacted Social Services and I tried to get them to help but they just took me straight home. I don’t think they really listen anyway” (Taylor-Brown et al, 2002:15).

- As noted above many children and young people affected by CSE and trafficking have a history of poor relationships with helping professionals and have developed a lack of trust in adults. Their avoidance and disengagement from professionals should be viewed as a reasonable reaction and, in fact, a highly adaptive coping strategy for children and young people living in highly unsafe and unpredictable worlds (McKenzie-Mohr et al, 2012) and victimised by abusive adults. Given these circumstances, it can take a substantial period of time for workers to engage and build trust with children and young people affected by CSE.
- It is recognised to be critical that children affected by exploitation should have access to a relationship with a key, consistent professional, who is on their side and by their side (Berlowitz et al, 2013; Foley et al., 2004; Clutton and Coles, 2007; Smeaton, 2013). This person should be able to offer the child or young person long-term support (over months or years) in accordance with an assessment and regular review of their needs. Exploitation can have profound and far reaching impacts on children and young people and can rarely be addressed through short term interventions.
- Building the trust to enable a young person to have this relationship is paramount (Pearce, 2013; Berlowitz et al, 2013). This is seen as the ‘primary task’ when working with trauma survivors (Herman, 1997).
- Young people time and again talk about the importance of “*honest, trustworthy, transparent services*” (Warrington, 2103:128). In this context honest and trustworthy are associated with consistent and reliable support (professionals delivering what they have committed to deliver) and sharing personal information appropriately. This means ensuring that information is shared on a ‘need to know basis’ when critical to maintaining a child’s safety. This also means that wherever possible the child or young person is kept informed about these processes and offered a chance to provide consent for information to be shared. Transparency means being supported to understand the services, professionals and decision-making processes around their care; recognising the boundaries of confidentiality and their entitlements and supporting them to have realistic expectations of what support is available and when.
- Workers who have specialist knowledge and training of CSE and understand the dynamics and consequences of CSE on a child or young person are better placed to respond to these challenges appropriately.

3. Establishing safety through relationships

“It’s more safety. Like back then I’d walk out, be gone for about four days, so now it’s more safety, people ask me where I’m going” (Shuker, 2013:73).

- For children and young people affected by CSE safety is key.
- Safety is multi-faceted for children and young people affected by CSE, it includes providing short-term physical safety and longer-term relational security through the development of positive trusting relationships (Shuker, 2013).
- Through the development of positive relationships, carers such as specialist foster carers, can help keep young people physically safe by employing a range of safety strategies including applying boundaries consistently, removing or monitoring access to technology where this facilitates exploitation, and monitoring the young person’s relationships (Shuker, 2013).
- Safeguarding mechanisms, such as restricting movement and access to the internet is often interpreted by young people as unfair. Carers, through their expressions of care, understanding and through sensitive communication may be able to counter-balance these negative feelings (Shuker, 2013).

4. Recognising children and young people’s own agency and upholding participatory principles

“We should be part of the decision-making. We’re certainly capable of doing that but I think society tends to think you lose your brains or something when you become a prostitute.” (Taylor-Brown et al, 2002:18)

“They explain what sexual exploitation is and help you get through it, but they help you kind of find your own way of dealing with it and– I don’t know, it kind of calms you down in yourself and you have a chance to talk about it without you feeling crappy – because you’ve got a chance to make some input.” (Scarlett, 16 in Warrington, 2013)

“I feel like my experiences give me something to bring to a group and I see my experiences as a strength now. Before I saw what I had been through as a weakness – a horrible part of my life. Well it is still a horrible part but now I can use my experiences for good..... I’ve gone from the person who is coming here to ask for help for me, to someone who’s coming to help other young people.” (Maisy, 18 in AYPH Be Healthy¹).

- In cases of exploitation, evidence from research highlights that children’s rights to be involved in formal decision-making about their own care (both as individuals and a constituent group) has often been overlooked by practitioners (particularly within social care and the police) struggling to reconcile children’s agency and victimhood simultaneously (Brown, 2006; Warrington, 2013; Beckett and Warrington, 2015). The

¹ <http://www.ayph-behealthy.org.uk/case-studies/>

consequence is children and young people feeling disempowered and excluded by services nominally there to protect them and aid their recovery.

- The tendency to focus on the minimisation of risk in responses to individuals affected by exploitation, overlooks a parallel need to focus on opportunity, resilience and young people's futures.
- It is critical that professionals working to support child victims of exploitation avoid replicating or mirroring the problematic power dynamics inherent in abuse, offering children a role in decision-making processes, safe choices and supporting their sense of control and self-efficacy. A recent (2013) England wide inquiry into CSE in gangs and groups, led by the children's Ombudsman (Office of the Children's Commissioner for England) highlighted the importance of involving children in decisions about their care and protection as a key principle of effective practice (Berlowitz et al, 2013). This principle is supported by evidence from a range of research and evaluation evidence undertaken by the International Centre and other national bodies (Shuker, 2014; Warrington, 2013; Jago et al. 2011; CEOP, 2011; Clutton and Coles, 2007; Brown, 2006)
- At an individual level, key aspects of this support include: enabling children to express their circumstances and needs and using this to inform the nature of support they receive; providing support that children and young people can choose to engage with on a voluntary rather than compulsory basis; involving children and young people in formal decision-making processes where-ever possible either directly or through the use of independent advocates and in line with their evolving capacity; ensuring that children and young people are kept fully informed about decision-making processes, prepared for and supported to meaningfully contribute to them (either in person or through an advocate) and supported to understand and make sense of professional decisions where they are not in line with their own wishes. Keeping children fully informed about professional roles and decision-making has been identified by children and young people as a key aspect of supporting their sense of control and self-efficacy (Beckett and Warrington, 2015; Warrington, 2013).
- Services must also commit to working with and supporting young people's own agency – adopting a 'strengths-based' and 'empowerment' approach (Ungar, 2004) which facilitates young people's own protective mechanisms; helping them to understand the dynamics and nature of healthy and abusive relationships, identifying and supporting their access to protective resources and engaging them in alternative diversionary activities that foster positive self-identity.
- In addition children and young people affected by exploitation should be supported (in line with their capacity and wishes) to contribute to the development of relevant specialist services and inform related policy and guidance locally and nationally.

5. Compassionate, non-judgemental approaches to young people

“[The service] doesn’t judge me and there’s a place for me and I know that no matter what I say it won’t go no further. We can all sit together and talk and we can all do things, it’s really good. It is very good to know that somebody is there for you” (Taylor-Brown et al, 2002:10)

“They don’t say “well you shouldn’t be doing that”, it’s none of that you know. They listen to you and try and help and see different ways of looking at things and everything. And they are right chuffed [pleased] if you succeed as well. Genuine as well” (Taylor-Brown et al, 2002:10).

- Victims of exploitation commonly express emotions of self-blame and shame and experiences of stigma. These feelings may be particularly acute for certain groups whose victimisation is significantly under-acknowledged (e.g. boys and young men).
- These feelings are compounded when victims are not believed by professionals or encounter judgemental attitudes which may attribute blame to them for the harm or abuse suffered or demonstrate a lack of empathy and compassion (Warrington, 2013; Pearce, 2013; Beckett and Warrington, 2015).
- Across a series of recent investigations, inquiries and serious case reviews which tackled professional and organisational failings in response to CSE, professionals’ attitudes have repeatedly been identified as one of the most significant blocks to children receiving appropriate protective responses (Jay, 2014; Oxfordshire LSCB, 2015).
- It is vital that children and young people have access to professionals who are equipped to understand and respond appropriately to their circumstances, particularly where they do not present as a ‘typical’ victim. Professionals supporting children and those responsible for their assessment and referral must demonstrate empathy and non-judgemental attitudes.

6. Providing inclusive, sensitive and non-discriminatory services

- Within the UK , there is evidence to suggest that certain group are under-represented among service users including boys and young men; children with learning disabilities or physical disabilities; young people from Black and Minority Ethnic Communities and LGBTQ young people (Lilywhite and Skidmore, 2006; Ward and Patel, 2006; Pearce, 2009; Jago et al., 2011).
- Recent research shows that we are not clear on whether the impact of CSE is the same or different for males and females and therefore it is not clear whether different types of services are required (Brayley et al, 2014).

- More needs to be done to ensure that services are gender-sensitive and accessible to children and young people’s diverse needs and circumstances. Where necessary services should be tailored offering for example single-sex support and services.

7. Promoting creative methods to engage and support young people

“I think that they should be able to help young people through arts and crafts, as well, because I know from my own experience I find it hard to talk to people, but I find it easier to write it” (Taylor-Browne et al, 2002:32).

“Sometimes it might be easier or better to be given a choice of ways to express yourself –like being asked if you want to draw or write rather than just talk” (AYPH Be Healthy Project).

- Creative programming can be a key part of trauma-informed programming (McKenzie-Mohr, et al, 2012).
- Young people affected by CSE have identified the unhelpful ways that professionals have attempted to engage with them which include *“being asked loads of questions and when you say you don’t know they keep asking you more about the same thing or saying ‘but why?’ even when you’ve told them you don’t know why”* (AYPH, 2014). The arts provide a way for young people to ‘speak’ without having to talk.
- Creative and participatory arts-based approaches may be a promising pathway into engaging with and supporting young people (Cody, 2015).

8. Taking a holistic approach delivered through multi-agency working

- An effective response to CSE requires a simultaneous focus on prevention, protection and prosecution as well as a wider contextual approach to safeguarding.
- Care and recovery are often compromised by the inability to intervene in the contexts where young people are being abused.
- For example young people may be relocated for their own protection, but the school in which they were abused will receive little attention, remaining a culture in which abusive behaviours have been normalised by staff and students. In such instances young people’s recovery is informed by the idea that their own behaviour, and in this instance location, required an intervention and not necessarily what was done to them (MsUnderstood project²).
- Research shows a need for breaking down silos, improving information sharing within and between different disciplines, and developing joint strategies focused on prevention, protection and prosecution. This includes a) identify young people at risk; b) engage with

² <http://www.msunderstood.org.uk/index.php?id=3>

the young people through assertive, therapeutic outreach; c) identify and disrupt potential perpetrators; d) prosecute abusers.

- A commitment to focusing on prosecution means making ‘child-centred’ justice a reality. Currently engagement in criminal justice processes is inherently difficult for victims and witnesses of child exploitation, many of whom experience significant distress and risk re-victimisation during the process. Examples of effective support for young victims and witnesses include the provisions of specialist independent advocacy³; effective identification and assessment of victims vulnerability at their initial contact with the criminal justice system (CJS); understanding and application of ‘special measures’ for appropriately capturing evidence from vulnerable victims and witnesses and recognition that while prosecution might be the ‘end point’ for professional agencies, it is rarely so for victims and witnesses whose vulnerability often increases after a case has ended. It is therefore vital that longer term specialist support covers the period before, during and after court.

Many of these principles embody what may be described as ‘trauma informed approaches’. Trauma-informed services adapt to the needs and experiences of the young person, recognising their victimisation and making changes that help the young person to engage with the service (Macy and Johns, 2010).

Such approaches are grounded in creating safety and trust, promoting control, building resilience and empowerment, and prioritising self-empathy and self-care. ‘Symptoms’, for example anger and estrangement are framed as coping strategies and the focus of such responses is not on delivering specialised therapeutic responses by highly trained staff, but on working from a set of principles grounded in a strengths-based framework (McKenzie-Mohr, *et al*, 2012). Although there is little research around the effectiveness of ‘trauma-informed’ responses - or the models and methods for applying such responses in the context of children and young people affected by CSE - the approach is considered to be ‘promising’ when working with homeless youth (McKenzie-Mohr *et al*, 2012) and survivors of trafficking and related sexual violence (Macy and Johns, 2010).

How do you ensure that the views and needs of children are duly taken into account in the design and provision of care and recovery services?

Hearing and responding to the views and needs of children and young people affected by CSE should not be an ‘add on’ or one off event but should be integral to the design and provision of services.

Children and young people affected by CSE, as individuals, should be involved in the everyday decision-making about their personal care and recovery. These same young people should also be provided with the opportunity to take part in collective decision making about wider issues of service design, governance and policy – locally, nationally and internationally. This could involve for example feeding into consultations about service or policy development; designing and delivering training, interviewing new staff members,

³ For example UK ISVA Scheme See www.thesurvivorstrust.org/isva/ for more information

young people producing with their own ideas for interventions and activities and young people developing their own awareness raising resources for practitioners and young people.

That said it is important to create spaces in which young people can make *informed* contributions about what is required to design and deliver services. Asking young people questions about policy and service development in the absence of any knowledge about how these things work can limit their extent to offer practical recommendations. To address this policy workshops and conferences can be facilitated for young people in order to engage them in shaping national policy debates on child protection, children's rights and inequality (see [MsUnderstood](#) for examples). This also means that meaningful collaborative work with children and young people requires a longer term investment – recognising the role of on-going training and development.

For this all to happen it is important that care and recovery services build a culture of participation which means:

- Recognising participation as an integrated value based approach (rather than a discrete additional activity)
- Planning and prioritising this work
- Properly resourcing these activities in terms of time and money
- Training and supporting staff to build their skills in participatory facilitation and engagement
- Ensuring that participation is ethical and child protection mechanisms have been fully thought through
- Ensuring that services are equipped to adopt an advocacy role supporting and challenging others (practitioners, policy makers,) so that children's views and needs are placed at the centre of decision-making around care in all contexts.

We therefore hope that the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, in her presentation to the 70th session of the General Assembly on care and recovery of child victims will:

- ***Draw attention to the importance of involving young people in decision-making and listening and responding to the views of children and young people affected by CSE***
- ***Recommend that all states provide services to young people that are accessible and non-discriminatory and provide support through flexible, non-judgemental and creative child led approaches***
- ***Highlight the importance of young people having access to a positive and safe relationship of trust with an appropriate adult who can offer them specialist support***
- ***Value the need for and use of creative methods to engage and support young people, and recognise the need for a holistic approach delivered through multi-agency working.***

Short films providing an overview of the on International Centre's research in this area <http://www.beds.ac.uk/intcent/films>

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