'It's not on the radar'

The hidden diversity of children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation in England
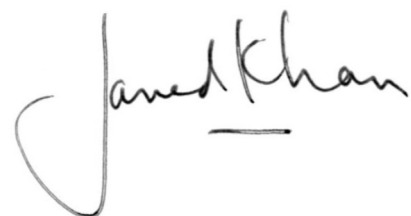
Carron Fox

Foreword

Child sexual exploitation knows no boundaries. Any child, regardless of where they live, their cultural, ethnic and religious background, their sexuality or gender identity, can become a victim of this horrific crime.

I welcome recent political leadership and media attention on this vital issue. However, in many cases victims are portrayed as almost exclusively white, female and heterosexual. This is of course, far from a true reflection of those at risk. Evidence from our own frontline services, as well as academic research, clearly shows that boys and young men; children identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans; and children from ethnic monitories are at risk. We also know that some children are particularly vulnerable to being sexually exploited, such as those with a disability.

This report highlights the diversity that exists among children and young people. It does not attempt to cover all aspects of identity, as that would just not be possible. What it does try to do is stimulate thought and discussion. Anyone reading this report, particularly frontline practitioners and professionals, should consider a child at risk of sexual exploitation as an individual, with his or her own, often complex identity, rather than dismissing the possibility of risk because the child does not fit a pre-conceived stereotype of a 'victim'.

Barnardo's has been supporting vulnerable children for the last 150 years. We have always been at the forefront of confronting challenges head on and finding new, innovative ways to keep young people safe, and help them forge a positive future. Child sexual exploitation is one of the most significant issues in child protection today. We must all work harder to spot the signs, intervene early, and step in as soon as we can. By improving our understanding of children at risk, including their diversity, we can move closer to our goal of a society where all children, regardless of their background or identity, are better protected.

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Child sexual exploitation (CSE) can affect all children – including those with disabilities – regardless of gender identity, sexuality, ethnicity, faith or economic background. Nevertheless, public and professional perception often stereotypes victims of CSE as white girls from disadvantaged backgrounds who are assumed to be heterosexual. While some victims and children at risk do meet this description, assumptions can prevent the identification of other children who do not fit the stereotype.

In 2015, a series of four roundtables was held with experts in the fields of CSE and diversity to discuss how the two areas connect. The roundtables focused on:

- boys and young men
- lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and questioning (LGBTQ) young people
- disability[1]
- ethnicity and faith.

Bringing together the findings of the roundtable events and additional research, *'It's not on the radar'* explores how perceptions of sexual exploitation can affect the identification of and response to CSE.[2]

Understanding CSE and the different methods that perpetrators use to exploit must be considered in parallel with the fact that children are not defined by one aspect of their identity. A victim of sexual exploitation may have multiple identities and, for example, be male, gay, come from a faith group that does not tolerate homosexuality and have a disability. What makes a young person vulnerable to sexual exploitation is very individual, and while an identity alone may not result in vulnerability, all aspects of a child's identity must be considered when identifying and raising awareness of CSE.

Due to the complex identities of individuals, there are many themes that cut across all four areas. For example:

- A young person's chronological age may be different from their developmental age, or apparently at odds with their experience of relationships, for example if they have a learning disability or come out as LGBT in their late teens or early twenties.

- Young people and professionals may normalise abuse experienced through CSE, either because of lack of knowledge about CSE or because it is viewed as 'normal' for, or by, the network or group the young person has been exploited in.

- The lack of sex and relationships education affects all young people, regardless of their identity, although some children – such as those with learning disabilities or those who are LGBTQ – are less likely to receive any, or relevant, sex and relationships education.

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[1]   Learning/developmental disabilities and learning difficulties were also included in the umbrella term 'disability', although it is recognised that this includes many different conditions.

[2]   This report does not attempt to cover all aspects of diversity and recognises that other issues may not be addressed.

There are a number of factors that are relevant to particular 'groups' of children and young people addressed in this report. The roundtable events identified the following key findings:

Key findings

Boys and young men:

- Societal values regarding masculinity and perceptions of males as perpetrators are seen to mask the fact that boys and young men can be victims too.

- Males seem to find it particularly hard to disclose abuse.

- Fear of being labelled gay, particularly in communities where there is homophobia, can prevent disclosure.

- There is too little recognition of the fact that a male can be both a victim and a perpetrator.

- Boys can be sexually exploited by peers, particularly in gang situations.

- Research has found that male and female CSE victims share certain common traits but also exhibit significant differences in terms of, for example, disability and youth offending rates.[3]

- It might be assumed that young men engaging in sex are doing so because they are highly sexualised, gay or bisexual, and not because they are being exploited.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and questioning (LGBTQ) young people:

- LGBTQ young people may feel isolated and believe there will be a lack of acceptance by other people regarding their sexuality and gender identity. They may seek support via adult-orientated groups, online or, in the case of boys and young men, in public sex environments such as 'cottages' or 'cruising grounds'.

- There is little in the way of educational resources or general information that provides advice to LGBTQ young people about what a healthy relationship is.

- Societal attitudes towards sexual relationships among lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people can result in unhealthy or unsafe sexual relationships being accepted as 'normal'.

- Professionals should only share information about a young person's sexuality and gender identity if the young person has agreed that they can do this. Agreement should also be reached on those individuals with whom this information may be shared.

- Possible sexual exploitation in lesbian and trans relationships should be given equal consideration as sexual exploitation within male gay relationships.

- LGBT communities might be reluctant to talk about or acknowledge CSE for fear of exacerbating homo/bi/transphobia.

Ethnicity and faith:

- Community and faith groups are not homogenous and there can be a diversity of cultural and religious practices within communities.

- Victims of sexual exploitation come from all ethnic backgrounds, regardless of how conservative or 'protected' children may appear.

- Cultural and religious views and practices, particularly those that prize a female's virginity or a male's heterosexuality, may prevent victims from speaking out due to a fear of retribution or rejection from families.

- Access to communities should be via a broad range of stakeholders, rather than solely through male religious leaders, and particularly through those with child-centred perspectives.

- Working with groups that are committed to child protection and to opposing violence and abuse, such as women's organisations and others not often associated with CSE, could enable better identification of victims.

Disabilities:

- Children and young people with a disability are three times more likely to be abused than children without a disability.[4] Within this group, children with behaviour or conduct disorders are particularly vulnerable.

- Children and young people with disabilities are often over-protected and not informed about sex and relationships.

- The transition from children's services into independent living is a particularly vulnerable time for young people with disabilities.

- Learning difficulties or delayed development may be a consequence of trauma or sexual abuse.

- A lack of diagnosis and assessment for learning disabilities can result in a child's behaviour being misunderstood, and exclusion from school. This can lead to the child being vulnerable to CSE.

The true scale of sexual exploitation is unknown, and it is recognised that that while not all children and young people will be victims, all must be given the confidence and resilience to identify risky relationships and develop healthy ones. No child is ever to blame for their abuse, regardless of their actions, and adults must be aware of the issue and confident to identify and respond, regardless of the sexuality and gender identity, ethnicity, faith or disability of the child concerned.

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[4] Miller, D; Brown, J (2014) *'We have the right to be safe': Protecting disabled children from abuse.*

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[3] Cockbain, E; Brayley, H; Ashby, M (2014) *Not just a girl thing: A large-scale comparison of male and female users of child sexual exploitation services in the UK.*

Chapter one: Introduction

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) can affect all children – including those with disabilities – regardless of gender identity, sexuality, or ethnic, faith or economic background. Nevertheless, public and professional perception often stereotypes victims of CSE as white girls from disadvantaged backgrounds who are assumed to be heterosexual. While some victims and children at risk do meet this description, assumptions can prevent the identification of other children who do not fit the stereotype.

This report draws on four roundtable events held by Barnardo's and the Home Office in 2015. These events brought together experts on CSE and specialist charities to explore what is known in relation to all victims of CSE, and how services can better prevent CSE and offer support to all victims. The four areas of focus at these roundtables were:

- boys and young men
- lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and questioning (LGBTQ)[5] young people
- ethnicity and faith
- disability.[6]

This report does not attempt to present all the available evidence on victims of sexual exploitation or diversity, but highlights some existing evidence and provides a summary of the discussions. Below are some of the key issues and recommendations made:

- Professionals must look beyond stereotypes and ask the right questions. This could be as simple as questioning why a 12–year-old boy is 'hanging out' with a grown man and thinking: 'If this was a girl, would I think the same way?'

- Information on relationships, including education within schools, must go beyond portraying heterosexual relationships as the only type of relationship, and beyond only biological sex education. There should be more focus on healthy relationships and how young people can protect themselves and identify abusive relationships, regardless of who is in the relationship.

- Organisations working on CSE should reach out to those that support diverse groups to share knowledge about CSE and learn how to work with different communities.

- There is a lack of information about CSE and diversity and a need for professionals to gather information on their local areas so they can gain a better understanding of the demographics of those affected by CSE locally.

- Professionals should be monitoring for sexuality and gender identity. This means that they should be supported with training, if necessary, to ask children and young people questions about their sexuality and gender identity. This training should highlight the possibility that a young person might be questioning, as well as the importance of being open to the language and terms they use.

This first chapter defines child sexual exploitation and outlines some of the current stereotypes of CSE victims. It concludes by exploring how children's and young people's identities can be multi-layered, and by recognising the diverse ways in which they may experience vulnerability to CSE.

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[5] While it is recognised that Q is often used to represent 'queer', in this report, it represents 'questioning'. Trans is 'an umbrella term for people whose identity differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. People under the trans umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms – including transgender'. Stonewall (2015) *Trans people and Stonewall: Campaigning together for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans equality.*

[6] Learning/developmental disabilities and learning difficulties were also included in the umbrella term 'disability', although it is recognised that this includes many different diagnoses.

What is child sexual exploitation?

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a form of child sexual abuse. It covers a wide range of situations where children are manipulated and coerced into sexual activities by a perpetrator in exchange for something. The perpetrator may be much older than the victim, or could be their peer. The Department for Education, along with the NWG Network, developed the following definition:

Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the Internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them 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.[7]

While it is recognised that all those under the age of 18 are children, this report uses the term 'children and young people' throughout. This is in recognition of the substantial developmental differences between a child and a young person – even though there is not a definitive age at which a child becomes a young person.

Barnardo's work on sexual exploitation

Barnardo's has been supporting victims of sexual exploitation since 1994, and now delivers specialist services in more than 47 locations across the UK. In 2014–15, Barnardo's worked with nearly 3,200 children and young people, which was an increase of 49% on the year before. Every year, Barnardo's conducts a survey of its CSE services, and through collecting this data and working closely with the services, it is able to track trends and gather information[8] about, for example, various aspects of the diversity of services users. However, as it is apparent that this is only one part of the picture, Barnardo's organised the roundtables to get a more holistic view and start a conversation with other organisations working with children and young people.

Perceptions and stereotypes of victims

The widespread reports of sexual exploitation from well-publicised trials, such as those following the investigations in Rotherham, Rochdale, Peterborough, Oxford and Bristol, all appear to illustrate one particular form of sexual exploitation. This model involves a group of men who generally know one another, or who are networked and organised, sexually exploiting young girls.[9] In most of these cases, it was reported that the girls were white British and the majority of the males were of Asian origin, which has led to intense media attention around so-called 'Asian grooming gangs'.[10] However, what is often not highlighted in the media is that this is just one form of sexual exploitation, and that not all of the victims were white British or all of the offenders Asian. According to the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England (OCCE),[11] 13 models[12] of exploitation were identified during an inquiry into sexual exploitation in gangs and groups.

While the OCCE's report does not cover all models of sexual exploitation – omitting, for example, those perpetrators who offend by themselves both offline and online – it does illustrate that the model of sexual exploitation most often seen by the public is only one of many. The variations should always be considered by frontline professionals when investigating concerns of sexual exploitation.

What is clear from Barnardo's practice of supporting victims of sexual exploitation over the last 20 years is that there are multiple models of exploitation and victims are not solely white British, but are found in all communities throughout the UK. Additionally, victims may be female, male or transgender and they may be heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual or transsexual.

Further, it cannot be assumed, for example, that males who are sexually exploited by other males must be gay. Research into CSE can help to identify group-level patterns in sexual exploitation, which are useful in informing evidence-based policy and practice. Nonetheless, when dealing with individual victims, it is important to recognise that each case is unique, and that individuals must be treated as such.

> 'The Asian young man was 13 when he went out on a date with a man who was 10 years older than him. They had a 'relationship' for two years and he was being picked up from school for lunch every day. He was 13 years old and nobody saw or did anything. It was only when the boyfriend wanted him to have sex with his pal for money – that's when it changed, and up until that point, he was his boyfriend. He's just not visible, no one is looking at those young men.'[13]

The risk of stereotyping people affected by CSE is that it can prevent the identification of victims. If frontline professionals focus on the CSE model prevalent in the media, such as groups of offenders, or the more 'traditional' boyfriend/girlfriend model, those who are being exploited using different models may not be recognised. Boys may not be identified because their abuser is a female; boys who are gay may not be identified because of assumptions about what is appropriate in gay relationships; girls who are lesbian may not be identified because their abuser is seen as their 'girlfriend' or friend; and young people living at home may not be identified because they have a supportive family. This latter case is particularly relevant in relation to the increase in sexual abuse and exploitation linked to technology, whereby some young people can be groomed online yet have no other vulnerability besides their youth.[14]

Layering of victims' identities

While the roundtables concentrated on four areas that represent the diversity of victims, it is clear that people, including victims of CSE, do not fit into such precise categories.

7   HM Government (2009) *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation: Supplementary guidance to Working Together to Safeguard Children.*
8   While this data is collected, it should be noted that it is not collected for all cases for various reasons, including the young person not wishing to disclose their sexuality.
9   The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre's *Threat assessment of child sexual exploitation and abuse* (2013) refers to this type of exploitation as Type 1: Group offending targeting victim vulnerability.
10   For further discussion of the racialised portrayals of CSE, see Cockbain (2013) Grooming and the 'Asian sex gang predator', *Race and Class*, Vol 54(4).
11   Berelowitz et al (2013) *'If only someone had listened': The Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups – final report.*
12   Intra-gang initiation of males; offline sole perpetrators linked to a network; network connected to transport hubs; online sole perpetrator linked to network; linked to intra-familial abuse; linked to child prostitution; organised crime groups and networks; peer-on-peer; inter-gang exploitation as punishment, retribution or threat; inter-gang set ups; intra-gang disorganised and opportunistic; intra-gang punishment for males; and intra-gang punishment for females.
13   Unless otherwise stated, all quotes are from people attending the roundtables, including the title. Some quotes have been slightly changed to keep them brief or remove duplication. When this has been done, care has been taken to preserve the meaning of the original words.
14   Palmer, T (2015) *Digital dangers: The impact of technology on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people.*

'Sean describes himself as "autistic, gay and from the traveller community". Due to harsh attitudes against homosexuality, he was isolated from the traveller community, and further isolated due to his autism. Sean had a very violent father, which had resulted in Sean's mother leaving. He kept his sexual orientation a secret as he knew what the reaction from the community would be. After a very violent episode with his dad, Sean went online to meet men. He met a man who promised to look after him and invited Sean to stay with him. Sean knew that if he left the community, he would be unable to return, but he ran away to stay with the man. Sean was raped by the man, so he ran away, and was homeless. Having autism made living on the streets even harder; Sean's mental health was poor, and he contemplated suicide.'[15]

This case study clearly illustrates how one person can fit into multiple 'categories' – being male, gay, having a developmental disability[16] and coming from the traveller community. Each layer of his identity creates additional complexity in understanding how he came to be exploited. However, this understanding is necessary to ensure that the right support is provided that will enable his recovery and meet his particular needs.

A child's or young person's vulnerabilities can relate to many things – from questioning their sexuality and taking risks to find out more, to cultural or religious practices or beliefs that may prevent them from disclosing abuse or seeking help due to fear of the repercussions, such as juju ('black magic') and protection of honour. It was noted in a roundtable that: 'Identity is very multi-layered and children don't fit into boxes, into learning disability, or LGBT or cultural background or any of those things. Actually the way those different characteristics interact adds even greater levels of complexity.'

'I also think for minority ethnic children there's another layer, you were saying... about honour-based violence and increasingly we're wondering about FGM as well as the way of controlling sexuality and trying to normalise an exit route in incredibly abusive ways, so that compounds vulnerability again when you have more than one vulnerability which is actually fairly standard yet you know, kind of, rescue from one form of abuse links straight into another.'

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[15] Sean's case was discussed at the roundtable and is also documented in Smeaton, E (2013) *Running from hate to what you think is love: The relationship between running away and child sexual exploitation.*

[16] The National Autistic Society refers to autism spectrum condition (ASC) as a 'lifelong developmental disability'. While it is recognised that ASC is a developmental disability, it is included in the term 'disability' in this report for ease of reference.

Chapter two: Diversity of victims

The following section relates directly to each of the roundtables, drawing out some of the main points that were made by participants.

(A) Boys and young men

Key findings:

- Societal values regarding masculinity and perceptions of males as perpetrators are seen to mask the fact that boys and young men can be victims too.

- Males seem to find it particularly hard to disclose abuse.

- Fear of being labelled gay, particularly in communities where there is homophobia, can prevent disclosure.

- There is too little recognition of the fact that a male can be both a victim and a perpetrator.

- Boys can be sexually exploited by peers, particularly in gang situations.

- Research has found that male and female CSE victims share certain common traits but also exhibit significant differences in terms of, for example, disability and youth offending rates.[17]

- It might be assumed that young men engaging in sex are doing so because they are highly sexualised, gay or bisexual, and not because they are being exploited.

Invisibility of boys and young men affected by CSE

Boys and young men affected by sexual exploitation are often a hidden group. Participants in the roundtable linked this invisibility to societal attitudes that frequently do not associate boys and young men with sexual violence victimisation, and to barriers to males disclosing abuse.

The roundtable found that those working with, or researching, boys and young men in relation to CSE have seen a perception that boys were either the perpetrators of abuse, or were 'lucky' to be having sex, regardless of the person they were having sex with. Societal attitudes linking 'being a man' and being masculine to having sex were thought to be widespread, meaning that boys and young men having sex with an unsuitable 'partner' might not be seen as potential victims. One attendee noted that a social worker, after realising that a boy was a victim of sexual exploitation, said: 'If this was a girl we would never have considered closing [the case] but because it's a boy, we have.'

It was suggested that despite the gender-inclusive term 'child sexual exploitation', professionals and the public tend to associate CSE with girls only. One agency that works with offenders noted that a paper going to their board on their approach to CSE did not explicitly refer to boys, although the majority of those they worked with were boys. One respondent said: 'When you're talking about this around the staff table, are you all genuinely thinking about the full diversity, or are you thinking: "Girls. Oh yes, and boys", because if you're thinking: "Oh yes, *and* boys", [that] has got to stop.'

In 2014, Barnardo's, NatCen and University College London (UCL) carried out research into the sexual exploitation of boys and young men.[18] This research included a rapid evidence assessment of existing literature,[19] interview-based primary research with practitioners from agencies working with victims of male sexual exploitation,[20] and an analysis of more than 9,000 users of Barnardo's

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17 Cockbain, E; Brayley, H; Ashby, M (2014) *Not just a girl thing: A large-scale comparison of male and female users of child sexual exploitation services in the UK.*
18 McNaughton Nicholls, C; Harvey, S; Paskell, C (2014) *Gendered perceptions: What professionals know about the sexual exploitation of boys and young men in the UK.*
19 Brayley, H; Cockbain, E; Gibson, K (2014) *Rapid evidence assessment – the sexual exploitation of boys and young men.*
20 McNaughton Nicholls, C; Harvey, S; Paskell, C (2014) *Gendered perceptions: What professionals know about the sexual exploitation of boys and young men in the UK.*

services, both male and female.[21] The comparative analysis carried out by UCL identified both similarities and statistically significant differences between males and females affected by CSE.[22] For example, it was found that:

- male service users were 2.6 times more likely to have a recorded disability than female service users (35% compared with 13%)

- youth offending rates were high: 48% of male service users and 28% of female service users had a criminal record; the figure for girls was particularly high when compared with baseline figures for youth offending in the general population

- the age of referral to Barnardo's services was slightly lower for boys than for girls

- 80% of male service users were referred to Barnardo's services due to going missing; going missing was the most common referral reason for girls too, but girls were also more frequently referred due to other concerns (such as inappropriate relationships)

- there were no significant differences between the genders in the sample in terms of factors such as ethnicity and proportion of 'looked after' children.

A focus group discussion was held with frontline Barnardo's practitioners to consider the research findings. Participants suggested that boys are less likely to be identified as victims of sexual exploitation – although, when they are, they have often already been abused, or are at higher risk than girls who may be identified earlier in the grooming process. The research carried out by NatCen noted that: 'Professionals working with sexually exploited boys and young men found that they were more likely to express their anger and trauma externally and be labelled as 'aggressive', 'violent', or an 'offender', whereas girls are more likely to internalise their distress.'[23] This external reaction to trauma was seen as a likely reason for male victims of sexual exploitation to end up in the criminal justice system, where they would be viewed as criminals rather than victims of abuse.

> 'Obviously if it happened to a person they'd be too embarrassed to say this happened to me... Cos like a boy got assaulted by another boy like, obviously sexually, he would never report it cos he'd be like, obviously you're always gonna be labelled as like a homosexual... you might feel sorry for him yeah, but you'd think like how didn't you defend yourself, you're supposed to be a man... So it's not worth it, they'd just keep it to themselves.'[24]

Under-reporting of male victims of CSE

In a recent report[25] reviewing the response to CSE in Rotherham, it was noted that there was a relatively low number of cases involving male victims of sexual exploitation. This supports the above evidence about low disclosure rates by boys, but the report also highlights how professionals were unaware that boys could be possible victims of sexual exploitation, or did not view it as a problem if a boy had been sexually abused.

The report notes that in 2007 there was a criminal conviction against a man for sexually abusing 80 boys and young men. After the trial, social care 'considered only two of the ten victims to meet the threshold for social care, although many had been raped and at least one was suspected of being involved in abusing other child victims.'[26]

While the report looks at the failings of statutory agencies in relation to victims of sexual exploitation, including females, it supports the views raised at the roundtable that male victims of sexual exploitation are often not viewed as such – or, if they are, the abuse is not seen to be as serious.

As well as boys and young men being exploited by older perpetrators, evidence from the Office of the Children's Commissioner[27] indicates that males can also be victims of sexual exploitation by their peers, particularly in gangs. However, this is often not reported – something often attributed to feelings of shame and stigma. This research found that while most incidents of sexual exploitation and violence were perpetrated by young men in gangs against gang-associated young women, males are also subjected to sexual exploitation, including 'incidents of rape, forced stripping and non-consensual recording of sexual activity, used both as a means of initiation into a gang and as a means of humiliating a rival gang member'.[28] The report also found that 'participants expressed abhorrence and/or condemnation of the act because of the perceived associations with homosexuality that was deemed to be unacceptable within the hyper-masculinity culture of the gang'.[29]

As well as the sexual violence associated with the above, the most common form of sexual exploitation and violence was in the form of pressure applied to males to take part in group-based sexual activities. Whether they wanted to participate or not, they did so out of fear or because of expectations. Set against this background, it is easy to understand why young men may not report violence, including sexual violence, that has been perpetrated against them.

Boys' and young men's experiences as both victims and perpetrators

While both males and females can find it difficult to report abuse, it was suggested in the roundtable that boys face the additional challenge of thinking that they will be seen as a perpetrator, even if they have been a victim in the past.

One participant of the roundtable stated: 'I think the real issue in terms of one of the reasons that boys don't disclose is because they see this correlation that if you're a boy and you've been affected by sexual abuse, you will grow up to be a perpetrator... I knew there was no way I was going to sexually abuse a child, but that's what the papers say, and that's what everyone says happens when you're a male that has gone through abuse, that you just go on to it.'

In order for males to feel they can disclose abuse, it is essential that an open dialogue is had, that the person making a complaint is listened to properly and that no assumptions are made about future offending.[30]

While by no means all CSE victims will go on to offend, it was noted in the roundtable that some victims start to play an exploitative role in the abuse of other children. This can be manifested in various ways. For example, they may be forced into a perpetrator role by their original abusers or choose this pathway (albeit in the context of a constrained set of choices) in order to protect themselves from abuse. A clearer recognition of the issue and how it applies to male as well as female victims is vital in order for children and young people to get the support they need. Roundtable participants suggested that the situation was currently especially dire for males who played a dual victim/perpetrator role, as the focus of interventions tended to be on their offending rather than their victimisation.

[21] Cockbain, E; Brayley, H; Ashby, M (2014) *Not just a girl thing: A large-scale comparison of male and female users of child sexual exploitation services in the UK.*
[22] Ibid.
[23] McNaughton Nicholls, C; Harvey, S; Paskell, C (2014) *Gendered perceptions: What professionals know about the sexual exploitation of boys and young men in the UK.*
[24] Beckett, H with Brodie et al (2013) *'It's wrong... but you get used to it': A qualitative study of gang associated sexual violence towards, and exploitation of, young people in England.*
[25] Jay, A (2014) *Independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham.*
[26] Ibid.

[27] Berelowitz et al (2013) *'If only someone had listened': Office of the Children's Commissioner's inquiry into child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups – final report.*
[28] Beckett, H with Brodie et al (2013) *'It's wrong... but you get used to it': A qualitative study of gang associated sexual violence towards, and exploitation of, young people in England.*
[29] Ibid.
[30] Grubin, D (1998) *Sex offending against children: Understanding the risk.* Police Research Series Paper 99.

> 'There were two boys, 15 and 16, who were used for the front end of grooming; they were being required to behave as boyfriends to draw [girls] into the net and the older men were behind, waiting to prey upon the girls. These boys were both from Muslim backgrounds and what the men did was made them have sex with each other, and then they filmed them having sex and, given the particular taboos around homosexuality in the Muslim community, that was really powerful in terms of controlling those boys and maintaining the level of fear and power over them.'

The issue of victims who have a dual victim/offender role is clearly a very difficult one to tackle – and one that has not been widely addressed to date. Some notable exceptions include recent research into internal trafficking of British girls for sexual exploitation.[31] The challenge it raises has also been documented in research on CSE involving groups and gangs more generally, where 'there are often blurred boundaries between young people's experiences of being either a victim or a perpetrator of sexual violence, with many young people (including young men) experiencing both. Parallels can be seen with other forms of peer-on-peer sexual violence in this regard'.[32]

Another attendee stated: 'There is absolutely no recognition of CSE in relation to boys in the secure estates at all. There is an assumption that girls in the secure estates, by and large, have some kind of history of sexual abuse; even when questions aren't asked, there is an assumption about that. The assumption around boys is that that is simply not the case at all.' This is a particular concern given the close association between CSE and youth offending documented in recent research.[33]

> 'A lot of boys of our [CSE service] current caseload – about a third of them – are involved in the youth offending system. Not all of them, but a small amount, have made disclosures. At the start, people said they were fine, these were signs of youth offending behaviour, but they are identical to grooming, but sometimes professionals are very quick to say it's just youth offending.'

(B) Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and questioning (LGBTQ) young people

Key findings:

- LGBTQ young people may feel isolated and believe there will be a lack of acceptance by other people regarding their sexuality and gender identity. They may seek support via adult-orientated groups, online or, in the case of boys and young men, in public sex environments such as 'cottages' or 'cruising grounds'.
- There is little in the way of educational resources or general information that provides advice to LGBTQ young people about what a healthy relationship is.
- Societal attitudes towards sexual relationships among lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people can result in unhealthy or unsafe sexual relationships being accepted as 'normal'.

- Professionals should only share information about a young person's sexuality and gender identity if the young person has agreed that they can do this. Agreement should also be reached on those individuals with whom this information may be shared.
- Possible sexual exploitation in lesbian and trans relationships should be given equal consideration as sexual exploitation within gay relationships.
- LGBT communities might be reluctant to talk about or acknowledge CSE for fear of exacerbating homo/bi/transphobia.

Risks of exploitation for LGBTQ young people

Being LGBTQ does not make someone inherently vulnerable to CSE. However, research carried out by Donovan[34] highlighted numerous factors that may result in LGBTQ young people becoming victims of sexual exploitation. These factors were discussed during the roundtable on lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and questioning (LGBTQ) young people that was held as part of the work on diversity, but also at an event held by Barnardo's on the issue in September 2014.[35]

The discussions and research indicate that some LGBTQ young people may become vulnerable to being exploited because they feel isolated and believe that others will lack acceptance of their sexuality and gender identity. They may also seek advice or support by either going online or attending adult gay clubs, particularly in more rural areas or in communities where being LGBTQ is considered unacceptable. In situations where young people, including LGBTQ young people, are looking to strangers for support, they are open to being exploited, have less control over the relationship and the type of sex they have, and can be influenced into believing that their abusive relationship is normal. LGBTQ young people can be particularly vulnerable to being influenced as there are few educational resources or general information that shows what a healthy gay relationship is, with most materials depicting heterosexual relationships.

> 'The other aspect about coming out that can impact on young LGBTQ people is that again if they live in an area where they don't see very much evidence of what it is to be LGBTQ and what they see or have experienced is homo/bi/transphobia, if they are then groomed, we would call it grooming; they might call it the best thing that has ever happened to them because somebody has accepted them for who they are, maybe even celebrated with them, that they have come out, and may also have convinced them that they are in love or that they have found somebody who really understands them, who is not problematising their identity and, conversely, is celebrating their identity.'

The difficulty for some LGBTQ young people in finding sexual partners and relationships in similar safe spaces to those that are available to heterosexual young people can also make them vulnerable. This lack of safe spaces, coupled with little advice on LGBTQ issues, raised concerns among the roundtable attendees. Without advice and safe spaces, LGBTQ young people can be heavily influenced by exploitative adults, including those they meet online,[36] resulting in them having unsafe sex or being pressurised into doing things they feel unsure about. This may particularly be the case where an LGBTQ young person is forced into marriage and seeks risky sexual encounters outside of the marriage.

It was also noted that young men may feel pressurised into having sex to 'prove' that they are gay. An appropriate professional response may also be lacking due to an assumption that a young man having sex with men is gay, rather than a willingness to explore whether there may be other

[31] Cockbain, E; Wortley, R (2015) Everyday atrocities: does internal (domestic) sex trafficking of British children satisfy the expectations of opportunity theories of crime? *Crime Science*, Vol 4(1), pp 1–12; Cockbain, E; Brayley, H; Laycock, G (2011) Exploring internal child sex trafficking networks using social network analysis. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, Vol 5(2), pp 144–157; Brayley, H; Cockbain, E; Laycock, G (2011) The value of crime scripting: Deconstructing internal child sex trafficking. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, Vol 5(2), pp 132–143.
[32] Beckett, H with Brodie et al (2013) *'It's wrong… but you get used to it': A qualitative study of gang associated sexual violence towards, and exploitation of, young people in England.*
[33] Cockbain, E; Ashby, M; Brayley, H (2015) Immaterial boys? A large-scale exploration of gender-based differences in child sexual exploitation service users. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*; and Cockbain, E; Brayley, H; Ashby, M (2014) *Not just a girl thing: A large-scale comparison of male and female users of child sexual exploitation services in the UK*; and Cockbain, E; Brayley, H (2012) Child sexual exploitation and youth offending: A research note. *European Journal of Criminology*, Vol 9(6).

[34] Donovan, C (2014) *The Ace Project: Developing an agenda for change in the north east and beyond on young LGBTQ people and CSE.*
[35] The September event was attended by voluntary agencies and experts working with LGBTQ young people. A copy of the report, *The sexual exploitation of LGBTQ young people: Key themes from a roundtable discussion*, is available from Barnardo's.
[36] Palmer, T (2015) *Digital dangers: The impact of technology on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people.*

reasons, such as being a victim of sexual exploitation. Additionally, it is sometimes assumed that gay young people may have sex at a younger age as part of 'exploring' their sexuality, rather than as a result of exploitation. Professionals must ensure that their response is based on the needs of the individual rather than on preconceived ideas about what is 'normal' for a young person who has a sexuality or gender identity other than heterosexual.

Young people's identification as LGBTQ

While supporting those who are at risk of, or victims of, sexual exploitation, professionals often work alongside the family to build protective factors around a young person to keep them safe. However, where the young person is LGBTQ, the family themselves may be a risk to the young person because of homo/bi/transphobia. In these situations, it may be appropriate not to inform the family about the young person's sexuality or gender identity, in order to keep them safe. This may particularly be the case where there is a risk of honour-based violence or forced marriages.

Professionals at the LGBTQ roundtable debated whether it was appropriate to ask about a young person's sexuality, or whether this is an invasion of privacy. Many participants expressed the opinion that asking such questions is a necessity, as it could give the young person the confidence to disclose to someone who they realise will not judge them.

It was also agreed that all young people, not just those who are thought to be LGBTQ, should be given the opportunity to describe their sexuality and/or gender identity. Monitoring for sexuality and gender identity is crucial to developing an evidence base and practitioners should be supported with training, if necessary, to ask children and young people questions about their sexuality and gender identity. This training should highlight the possibility that a young person might be questioning, as well as the importance of being open to the language and terms they use.

The issue of 'coming out' was seen as a difficult one for some LGBTQ young people. Often, it is not a one-off event, but a process that can take time and involves the young person exploring their identity. While this may be a complicated time for many young people, examples given in the roundtable discussions indicated that coming out can be further complicated by the advent of the Internet and young people exploring their sexuality and/or gender identity online.

In two cases that were discussed, young people were groomed at a key time in their 'coming out' journey. In the first case, the online groomer alternated between pretending to be male and pretending to be female, which 'left the young person feeling very, very confused and unwilling, or unable is probably far better, to talk about that for a very long time, and the impact that had on them and their identity'. In another example, a straight boy was groomed by a man, which impacted on his understanding of himself.

'He oscillated dramatically and both of those boys were quite young so they were being groomed at a time when their sexual identity was forming… Whether it was their self-determination about being gay or whether their sexual identity then became a legacy of their abuse forever and they couldn't own that for themselves as something they had chosen.'

Based on the responses of agencies working with young people, it was evident that little information is known about lesbian young women being sexually exploited. This is an area that is not often considered by professionals. For example, Nicola (see below) who was repeatedly going missing, was found by the police at the house of an older woman who was sexually exploiting her. No questions were asked as to why the girl was at the house. Had this been a house belonging to an older male, it is likely that the response would have been different.

'Nicola, a white lesbian, was 13 or 14 years old when she met a woman nearly 15 years older who became her 'best friend'. They both hung out in the town centre and the park, drinking and smoking spliffs with other young people. Gradually they became friends and soon Nicola was spending a lot of her time at the woman's home, drinking, smoking and taking drugs, all of which the woman paid for. Nicola really liked the woman and felt she had found a special friend who understood and cared about her, spoilt her, and treated her like an adult, not a kid. When the woman began occasionally locking Nicola into the flat she explained it was so that nobody would find Nicola – who should have been in school. The woman even showed Nicola a hidey hole under the bed where Nicola could hide in case the police came to look for her (Nicola was reported missing regularly by her parents by now). Things changed when the woman expected Nicola to kiss and have sex with her in return for all of the money she had spent on providing drugs, cigarettes, and alcohol. Nicola didn't feel she could say no.'[37]

As well as not considering older women as potential abusers, it was thought that in lesbian relationships, the exploiter is more likely to keep the victim away from the LGBT social scene than a male exploiter would. This could make it harder for the young person to see that they are a victim, or for professionals to question the relationship.

'Gay women disappear. They become a lot more isolated and actually I would go so far as to say that a lot of the really sort of controlled, controlling relationships that young women have found themselves in, they are so disturbing because these women have been extracted completely from any kind of scene and are just isolated and it is just them and the other person, they become just everything very, very easily.'

Gendered differences in LGBTQ relationships

The stereotypical way in which male and female gay relationships are viewed (males as being 'open' and out on the 'scene', and females being 'closed' and in relationships) appears to be played out in the way males and females meet. Mobile phone apps like Grindr make it easier for men to meet for sex, while at cruising spots phone numbers may be handed around. One roundtable participant noted: 'I think all that is part of creating sub-cultures, and I think for some gay men, younger men, who get caught up in that, I think that is a real challenge for practitioners as it is difficult to find young men at risk.'

One challenge is that some of the victims[38] feel that they may be taking advantage of the exploiter, as they may be getting money, a bed for the night, and taken for a drink in return for sex. This may make it more difficult for them to understand that they are being exploited. In contrast, it was thought that there was less pressure on girls to have sex in lesbian relationships: 'I think there is something gendered going on there, about attitudes to what sex means and where you get sex. So there is Pink Sofa [an app] for women to meet other women, and they do have sex, of course they do, but it's quite a different feel to Grindr.'

This gendered difference in gay relationships should be better understood by frontline professionals to ensure they are targeting prevention and intervention work in the most appropriate and effective way.

37   Donovan, C (2014) *The Ace Project: Developing an agenda for change in the north east and beyond on young LGBTQ people and CSE.*
38   The roundtable referred to these victims as males but, due to a lack of information, is it difficult to know whether this also applies to females.

'The way in which I think gay women are marketed to is incredibly different to gay men. If you take something like Grindr, that is about sex, it is about hooking up, there is a whole bunch of c**k pictures available, you know, within seconds and you know how far away they are from you. On the female equivalent apps of those, there is no nudity whatsoever, it's not allowed, it's relationships, it's about finding a wife, that's the kind of way it's marketed, it's in a very, very different way and women respond to it in a very different way. So, just even in itself it is interesting, and what is attracting the men and what is attracting the women needs to be looked at.'

While LGBTQ young people may be unwilling to talk about their sexuality and gender identity, it was also discussed at the roundtable that LGBT communities as a whole might be unwilling to discuss or acknowledge CSE because of fears about a homo/bi/transphobic backlash. The wider context in relation to LGBT communities was thought to be important, as homosexuality was illegal in the UK until 1967, with gay men being criminalised and forced to undergo medical treatment to 'make them straight'. Before homosexuality became legal, LGBT communities, mainly led by men, championed the right to have sex and found ways to have sex and meet other gay men – for example, in public sex environments – that would otherwise be impossible. The history of police criminalising men for having sex may make members of the LGBT community feel that by openly talking about CSE, they are opening themselves up to criminalisation once again.

(C) Ethnicity and faith

Key findings:

- Community and faith groups are not homogenous and there can be a diversity of cultural and religious practices within communities.

- Victims of sexual exploitation come from all ethnic backgrounds, regardless of how conservative or 'protected' children may appear.

- Cultural and religious views and practices, particularly those that prize a female's virginity or a male's heterosexuality, may prevent victims from speaking out due to a fear of retribution or rejection from families.

- Access to communities should be via a broad range of stakeholders, rather than solely through male religious leaders, and particularly through those with child-centred perspectives.

- Working through groups that are committed to child protection and to opposing violence and abuse, such as women's organisations and others not often associated with CSE, could enable better identification of victims.

Diversity within ethnic and faith groups

Victims of sexual exploitation come from all ethnic and faith backgrounds. 'Ethnicity' refers to a group of people whose members identify with each other through a common heritage, such as a common language, culture (often including a shared religion) and ideology that stresses common ancestry and/or endogamy (the practice of marrying within a specific ethnic group, class or social group).[39] Religion refers to a belief system that forms attitudes and behaviours and may also impact on one's identity over a period of time.[40]

During the roundtable, the intricacies of these terms and others, such as 'community' and 'culture', were discussed, as they are often loaded with preconceptions. For example, it is often assumed that people within a 'community' are all the same, rather than being individuals who may share some of the same ideas and practices. Similarly, the word ethnicity is often used in relation to ethnic

minorities, without acknowledgement of the fact that everyone comes from an ethnic group, including white British people.

In relation to white ethnic groups, it was discussed that young people are often referred to as 'Eastern European' when they come from many different countries in the region, including Lithuania, Moldova, Romania and Poland, with numerous different languages and cultures. One attendee commented: 'We have many examples of where people talk about Eastern Europeans as perpetrators and as victims. And without exception, when questioned in more depth, what they were always talking about was Roma. Roma from Romania or Lithuania, Latvia or wherever.'

The same issue of assuming that all people from the same continent or region are similar is also seen throughout the reporting of sexual exploitation (referring to groups of people as Asian or African), particularly in relation to perpetrators.

On the subject of faith, it was noted that while a young person may come from a Muslim, Sikh or Christian background, it does not mean that they are practising that religion, or indicate how strongly their family adheres to the beliefs or practices of their religion. What is clear is that children and young people can be victims of abuse regardless of their background. It is important to challenge the perception that some children are 'safer' than others due to their conservative or protective family environment, and that abuse of children as a result of cultural or traditional factors can be ignored because 'that's their own affair'.

'In terms of the work I'm doing around forced marriage and sexual abuse, nobody will talk to me at all, it's simply an impossibility. I'm really concerned about what's going on in there. For me, the big message is that there are some children who are being sexually exploited by some people in every single community.'

The ethnic diversity of victims of CSE

While media reports tend to focus on victims who are white British, there are many sources that clearly indicate that victims from all ethnic origins are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, as they are to sexual abuse in general.[41] For example: the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England's inquiry into gangs and groups[42] found evidence of sexual exploitation among black British communities; the Muslim Women's Network works with Asian women from many different heritage backgrounds who have been sexually exploited; and the Jay report cites various police investigations that involved young people from different ethnic origins, including Operation Retriever in Derby, where 27 victims were identified, of whom 22 were white, three black and two Asian.[43]

In Barnardo's child sexual exploitation services in 2014–15, the majority of victims (64%) were white British; 4% were white – any other background; 1% white – Irish; 3% Pakistan Asian; 0.5% Asian – Indian; 3% mixed/multiple – white/black Caribbean; and 0.5% mixed/multiple white/black African.[44] As a rough comparison, in 2011, 86% of the population of England and Wales were white and, of these, 80.5% were white British.

This data from Barnardo's services, together with the above research and other evidence sources, clearly indicates that victims are not only white British, but come from many different ethnic backgrounds, although the exact nationality is often not known due to the way in which data is recorded. However, these top-level statistics do not accurately reflect regional variations, as some services will have higher numbers of black and minority ethnic (BME) young people compared with the population of the immediate area around the service. This may indicate particular issues, such as deprivation, marginalisation or exploitation networks, resulting in a high number of young people becoming victims of sexual exploitation.

39   Murray, A (2011) *Training toolkit for professionals engaging with minority ethnic culture and faith (often socially excluded) communities, groups and families to safeguard their children*. London Safeguarding Children Board.
40   Ibid.
41   It is interesting to note that in the reports cited on victims who were 'non-white', they are categorised in a wider group, for example 'Asian'. This may be because the exact heritage of the young person may not be known or because the data is not available.
42   Beckett, H with Brodie et al (2013) *'It's wrong… but you get used to it': A qualitative study of gang associated sexual violence towards, and exploitation of, young people in England*.
43   Jay, A (2013) *Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham 1997–2013*.
44   This is not an exhaustive list of the ethnicity recorded for the service users but it highlights the common ethnicities.

Lack of recognition of CSE victims in some communities

While the media have emphasised the ethnicity and faith of perpetrators,[45] there has been little focus on the identity of the victims, particularly those not involved in large court cases.[46] By not fully understanding and raising awareness of the fact that victims can be found anywhere, children and young people are not being identified or communities made aware of sexual exploitation. Research by the Muslim Women's Network, *Unheard voices*,[47] gathered evidence from 35 case studies of Asian and Muslim girls who have been victims of grooming gangs. The majority of the victims had been interviewed through community support organisations, and 'there was a general consensus amongst the people interviewed that front line professionals were failing to identify many cases involving BME victims'.

'One of the local Pakistani women's groups described how Pakistani-heritage girls were targeted by taxi drivers and on occasion by older men lying in wait outside school gates at dinner times and after school. They also cited cases in Rotherham where Pakistani landlords had befriended Pakistani women and girls on their own for purposes of sex, then passed on their names to other men who had then contacted them for sex. The women and girls feared reporting such incidents to the Police because it would affect their future marriage prospects.[48]

The key finding of *Unheard voices* was that Asian/Muslim female children and adults can be vulnerable to being groomed and sexually exploited, and are vulnerable to perpetrators from their own communities. This was based on evidence that the vast majority of offenders were from the victims' own communities. The research also found that Asian/Muslim children and adults have 'specific vulnerabilities associated with their culture which are exploited and also constitute a barrier to disclosure and reporting'.[49]

The Jay report reached a similar conclusion, stating: 'One of these myths was that only white girls are victims of sexual exploitation by Asian or Muslim males, as if these men only abuse outside their own community, driven by hatred and contempt for white females. This belief flies in the face of the evidence that shows that those who violate children are most likely to target those who are closest to them and most easily accessible.'[50]

The Home Affairs Select Committee[51] quotes witnesses saying that there were 'cases of groups of Asian men grooming Asian girls but these do not come to light because victims are often alienated and ostracised by their own families and by the whole community, if they go public with allegations of abuse'.

This supports discussions at the roundtable that found that girls and women of Indian and Pakistani heritage who have been sexually abused or exploited are less likely to report their abuse because of concerns about their marriage prospects, or becoming victims of honour-based violence within the family. In such communities where girls become vessels for the 'honour' of the family, there is an emphasis on the girls' virginity and an expectation that a child will 'police' his or her own actions in such a way that they safeguard the father's and family's honour. In such situations, speaking out about abuse could affect a young person's safety, whole future and security.

Challenges for young people in reporting CSE

Victims of CSE who are supported by Barnardo's report that it can be harder to seek help for abuse in some communities due to cultural norms, religious beliefs or language barriers. A particular challenge is that boys and young men in some ethnic or faith groups are not able to seek help. Sean's case study, described earlier in this report, illustrates how he was made vulnerable to sexual exploitation because he was gay and from a community that does not condone homosexuality.

L and M[52] were from a minority ethnic community and part of a group of children identified as at risk of sexual exploitation. The children, who all attended the same school, were reported to be getting into cars with strangers, and getting paid in return for performing sex acts. 'Child L and Child M had frequent missing episodes and their families struggled to report them missing. This was partly because of language difficulties, but also because of cultural factors.' In this case, it was noted that it was difficult for authorities to support the children and their families due to cultural and language barriers, particularly when there was no disclosure. However, 'the Police and social care workers in the CSE team were acutely aware of these difficulties and worked hard to overcome them'.[53]

Accessing and supporting all victims of CSE

Getting access to some communities can be very difficult for professionals, and there is often an assumption that community engagement should take place through male 'community leaders'.[54] The Jay report found: 'There was too much reliance by agencies on traditional community leaders such as elected members and imams as being the primary conduit of communication with the Pakistani-heritage community. The Inquiry spoke to several Pakistani-heritage women who felt disenfranchised by this and thought it was a barrier to people coming forward to talk about CSE.'[55]

This was also the view of participants at the roundtable, who felt that community or religious leaders were not always the best conduit to access the community. Such leaders are often older men who were thought to gate-keep access to the rest of the community and 'close ranks' if they felt threatened from outside. Some participants cited the biraderi system, which involves tight networks between predominantly Pakistani 'clans', as an example of men ensuring that victims of CSE did not speak out publicly and so risk the honour of the family and community. To enable proper access to the community and possible victims, therefore, professionals should directly engage with a broad range of people in the community, and not solely with self-appointed leaders.

'And yet the way the State engages with them is that the first people they go to is community and religious leaders when they're trying to tackle this issue and anything to do with minority communities. And therefore they become the gate-keepers and so women's voices are not heard. They don't go directly to the women to ask them what they think and what would they want and give them the financial and moral support that they need to be empowered to deal with it.'

As well as cultural boundaries and expectations that prevent speaking out, there are also traditional practices in some communities that can pressurise victims of sexual exploitation to not speak out. One example raised during the roundtable was juju ('black magic'), which is used

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45 Cockbain (2013) Grooming and the 'Asian sex gang predator'. *Race and Class*, Vol 54(4).
46 In general, there is limited information available on child sexual exploitation and minority groups.
47 Gohir, S (2013) *Unheard voices: The sexual exploitation of Asian girls and young* women.
48 Jay, A (2014) *Independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham, 1997–2013*.
49 Gohir, S (2013) *Unheard voices: The sexual exploitation of Asian girls and young women.*
50 Jay, A (2014) *Independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham, 1997–2013*.
51 Home Affairs Select Committee (2013) *Child sexual exploitation and the response to localised grooming. Second Report.*

52 L and M were subject to a case review.
53 Jay, A (2014) *Independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham, 1997–2013*.
54 Further information about victims in minority communities and how access can be gained is available in the University of Bedfordshire's evaluation of the Families and Communities Against Sexual Exploitation (FCASE) project: D'Arcy, K; Dhaliwal, S; Thomas, R with Brodie, I and Pearce, J (2014) *Families and Communities Against Child Sexual Exploitation (FCASE): Final Evaluation Report.*
55 Jay, A (2014) *Independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham, 1997–2013*.

to ensure that victims of sexual exploitation, often in the context of trafficking, do not leave their traffickers. In this case, the victims, often from Central and West Africa, are made to take an oath promising that they will not try to escape or report their traffickers. Often, when the oath is taken, the victim's hair and nails are used to create a 'spell', to convince them that if they report their traffickers, the spell will be broken and they or their families may die: 'When they do get here, they don't need chains to hold them or lock the doors; just leave them and they still remember the oath they took so they're not going to run away. This makes them very prone not only to sexual exploitation but also to extreme abuse and harm.'

This also demonstrates the connections between CSE and other manifestations of violence and abuse, and the need for agencies to link with organisations specialising in forced marriage, FGM, honour-based violence and witchcraft to be better prepared to respond to the multiple issues that may arise.

(D) Disabilities

Key findings:

- Children and young people with a disability are three times more likely to be abused than children without a disability.[56] Within this group, children with behaviour or conduct disorders are particularly vulnerable.

- Children and young people with disabilities are often over-protected and not informed about sex and relationships.

- The transition from children's services into independent living is a particularly vulnerable time for young people with disabilities.

- Learning difficulties or delayed development may be a consequence of trauma or sexual abuse.

- A lack of diagnosis and assessment for learning disabilities can result in a child's behaviour being misunderstood, and exclusion from school. This can lead to the child being vulnerable to CSE.

Risks of CSE for disabled children and young people

According to recent research by the NSPCC, children and young people with a disability are three times more likely to be abused (including sexual, physical and emotional abuse) than non-disabled children.[57] Disabled children at greatest risk of abuse are those with behaviour or conduct disorders, but research indicates that the needs of disabled children are often invisible, particularly in relation to those with learning disabilities that go undiagnosed.[57]

The Office of the Children's Commissioner for England's inquiry into CSE in gangs and groups[58] found that learning disabilities were a typical vulnerability for victims of CSE, while research from the University of Bedfordshire[59] found that 14% of 165 cases in one local authority related to a young person with a learning disability. As mentioned earlier, research by UCL into more than 9,000 Barnardo's CSE service users found that males were 2.6 times more likely than females to have a disability, although 13% of female victims also had a disability.[60] It should be noted that this study addressed disability as a broader category, rather than learning disabilities alone.

The high number of children with disabilities, and particularly a learning disability, found in victim samples across these various studies into CSE indicate that children and young people with disabilities face 'additional barriers to their protection and to receiving support to address CSE'.[61]

There is often a 'perception that young people with learning disabilities don't have a sexual identity, don't have sexual urges, they're not like their non-disabled peers who are exploring sexuality, often in a safe way'. Also discussed was the fact that young people with disabilities can often be viewed as 'unattractive', with no one wanting to have sex with them.[62] Furthermore, there was a view that parents and carers are often over-protective of children with disabilities. Being over-protective due to a belief that the young person is incapable of understanding such a complex subject may result in a lack of provision for or information about sex and relationships. This lack of information may be particularly noticeable in communities where it is forbidden to talk about sex. However, the roundtable heard that young people with learning disabilities can be 'disinhibited sexually' or 'crave intimacy', both of which can result in them becoming vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

'There were real challenges because on the one hand, yes, this young woman had made some bad choices in terms of people she had associated/fallen into associating with and the paralysis that then seems to seize a lot of professionals when they feel that the person is making wrong choices: what can you do about that? I suppose with issues around learning disability, people can again become disempowered because they think: "What influence can I have over the choices that this young person is making?".'

CSE and learning disabilities[63]

Children with learning disabilities who are in care were referred to in the roundtable as a particularly vulnerable group, not only while they are in care, but also when they leave children's services and transition into adult services. This is a time when the support they have been used to often tails off and the new support may not be as robust as that available when they were under 18, or there may be a gap in provision.

'We have a case where a man who, three times in a row, was befriended by women who then used his flat as a brothel and used him for sex as well. And that happened to him once, twice, three times. And he talks about it, he knows about it, there's people around him and then when we find out that it has happened to him a third time you think: "Well, where is safeguarding? Why hasn't that been flagged up?".'

While the other roundtables looked at particular aspects that could make a young person vulnerable to sexual exploitation, it was noted that in the case of learning disabilities or delayed appropriate development, CSE could be a consequence of sexual abuse. One participant said: 'Many, many of the children and adults that we see at X, because we see those that have been most seriously abused and traumatised, their learning disability is often more environmental than anything else, but it is still a learning disability. To have repeated abuse and neglect from a very early age means that you never really catch up and you are learning disabled.

56 Miller, D; Brown, J (2014) 'We have the right to be safe': Protecting disabled children from abuse.
57 Franklin, A; Raws, P; Smeaton, E (2015) Unprotected, overprotected: Meeting the needs of young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, sexual exploitation.
58 Berelowitz et al (2013) 'If only someone had listened': The Office of the Children's Commissioner's inquiry into child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups – final report.
59 Beckett, H with Brodie et al (2013) 'It's wrong... but you get used to it': A qualitative study of gang associated sexual violence towards, and exploitation of, young people in England.
60 Cockbain, E; Ashby, M; Brayley, H (2015) Immaterial boys? A large-scale exploration of gender-based differences in child sexual exploitation service users. Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment; and Cockbain, E; Brayley, H; Ashby, M (2014) Not just a girl thing: A large-scale comparison of male and female users of child sexual exploitation services in the UK.

61 Franklin, A; Raws, P; Smeaton, E (2015) Unprotected, overprotected: Meeting the needs of young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, sexual exploitation.
62 Similar points are made in the research report by Franklin, A; Raws, P; Smeaton, E (2015) Unprotected, overprotected: Meeting the needs of young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, sexual exploitation.
63 Although the roundtable was on disability, the presentation was on learning disabilities. Due to lack of research on young people with disabilities and CSE, this section predominantly focuses on learning disabilities, although organisations present worked in the wider disability sphere. Furthermore, the terms 'learning difficulty' and 'learning disability' are often used inter-changeably and the report reflects this usage.

That also makes you vulnerable to continual abuse and the generational stuff we see constantly, and they are going on to procure others, because that's partly family, normalisation.'

Research into young people with learning disabilities who run away and have been victims of CSE[64] found that some had delayed development due to the trauma of their circumstances and abuse. On referring to the research, a participant at the roundtable stated: 'It can be difficult to unpack the difference between what's trauma-related, what's development-related and what's learning disability. Where there is a specialist CSE professional who has knowledge of working with learning disabilities, autism spectrum conditions, you can achieve some good outcomes.'

While the referral of young people who have experienced sexual abuse or exploitation to a CSE service is often the most appropriate response, in some cases young people are referred to a CSE service because there are no other alternatives available. For example, the roundtable noted that some young men with autism spectrum conditions were referred to CSE projects when there were concerns about their sexual health or inappropriate sexual behaviour. While these young men do require specialist support, a CSE service may not offer the best type of support and can result in referrals being refused and delays in a service being provided.

Regarding professional conduct, at the roundtable it was reported that at a serious case review[65] of victims of sexual exploitation in Rochdale, five of the six young people reviewed had learning disabilities. However, failings on the part of those providing care to the victims included: a lack of early assessments to identify learning difficulties or disabilities; a different understanding of what the disability meant by agencies, resulting in differing support; and a lack of multi-agency working that linked CSE and learning difficulties or disabilities. In relation to the recording of cases of children and young people who had experienced CSE and had a learning disability, research conducted on the issue found that 'only 31% of local authorities/health and social care trusts that reported that they collate figures on CSE stated that the numbers of young people with learning disabilities could be identified'.[66] This clearly shows a lack of adequate recording and monitoring, which compounds the invisibility of young people with disabilities.

The issue of assessments was also linked to educational settings, where children are often not identified as having a learning disability and therefore do not receive the appropriate support. Consequently, a child's behaviour may be seen as problematic and they may be placed outside of mainstream education. Exclusion from education can result in the child receiving no education and lead to them socialising outside of the home, where they are more vulnerable. One participant said: 'Schools, by their response to these young people, not always but often, with young people who have not had an assessment, or are undiagnosed, the school's response is increasing their vulnerability to CSE.' This links back to the need for assessments and a better understanding of a child's behaviour.

[64] Smeaton, E (2013) *Running from hate to what you think is love: The relationship between running away and child sexual exploitation.*
[65] Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Children Board (2013) *The overview report of the serious case review in respect of young people 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6.*
[66] Franklin, A; Raws, P; Smeaton, E (2015) *Unprotected, overprotected: Meeting the needs of young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, sexual exploitation.*

Chapter three: Cross-cutting issues

Children and young people experience a range of vulnerabilities relating to different aspects of their identity. As discussed above, identity can mean many different things to one individual, so areas of vulnerability can overlap. Throughout the roundtables, evidence was heard that related to all aspects of diversity, and this chapter draws out the main themes. These were:

- normalisation of abuse

- developmental age and relationships

- non-identification of victims and vulnerabilities

- schools and sex and relationships education

- youth groups and safe spaces

- stereotypical imagery

- multi-agency working

- data gathering and provision of services.

Normalisation of abuse

When victims of sexual exploitation have been abused, they may believe that abuse is a normal part of a relationship, and so are unable to perceive themselves as victims. This normalisation of abuse was discussed in all the roundtables, not only in relation to how victims perceive themselves, but also in terms of how professionals view the risks to young people. However, it was noted that some characteristics of a young person may exacerbate the normalisation, making young people and professionals more accepting of it. For example, the sexual exploitation of LGBTQ young people was discussed in the context of 'cultural norms' within the LGBTQ 'scene' that are perceived as different from those of heterosexual relationships.

One attendee quoted professionals they work with who say: 'It is very ordinary that older lesbians and gay men will expect to have sex with young people and that that is alright.' Additionally, as highlighted above, young people with learning disabilities may find it harder to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy relationships.

'Sometimes practitioners think that's what young men will do, so they don't problematise hanging around cruising or going to cottages, or going to the scene when they're 13. If it was a young straight woman, we would be thinking: "Ooh, there's something going on there," but when it's a young gay man, we think: "Oh, (a) they're boys so they'll be ok, and (b) they're gay, so that's what they do".'

As well as being told by the perpetrator that the relationship is normal, victims of sexual exploitation may also come from backgrounds where violence and abuse are commonplace, which can normalise the abuse that takes place during sexual exploitation: 'I watched my mum go through a lot of stuff and when I went through it, I thought it's not that bad as my mum suffered, so I must be doing okay. I just did not know any different.'[67]

'What they were saying is that, culturally, it was incredibly difficult because just in your local pub, children will go into the pub when they are 12 or younger and it's quite normal for some men to say: "I'm just waiting for you to turn 13 and I'll be your first." Nobody says anything about that because it's just part of the culture.'

[67] Coffey, A (2014) *Real voices: Child sexual exploitation in Greater Manchester*.

Developmental age and relationships

The real developmental age of a victim compared with their chronological age was discussed in both the disabilities and LGBTQ roundtables. Young people with learning disabilities may be unable to appropriately assess whether the situation they are in is risky and potentially harmful, yet professionals can sometimes judge them on their chronological age rather than looking at their developmental age and their ability to assess situations.

Reference was made to a serious case review which found that one social worker's assessment 'referred to the failure [by the victim] to see the seriousness of becoming pregnant at 13'. The review stated that this perception by the social worker 'represents a significant absence of understanding and analysis as to the implications of her real age, her developmental age, her personal experiences and her learning difficulties, instead viewing her response simply as a failure to take her situation seriously.'[68]

One particular case study mentioned a young woman with a learning difficulty who was receiving support from a CSE service after transitioning to adult services. She had a history of trauma and abuse, and sexual exploitation was 'normal' for her. She ran away regularly and spent nights out on the streets in London. It was difficult for those trying to provide support to her, as she was an adult but developmentally much younger. The young woman wanted to be treated as an adult, but managing her freedom while protecting her from harm made delivering services difficult for professionals.

For young people in the LGBTQ 'community', the age of first relationships may be later than it is for their heterosexual peers, particularly if they have taken some time to come out or understand their sexuality. By the time this happens, the young person may be old enough for sexual relationships, but their emotional development and understanding of what takes place in a gay relationship may not be fully formed.

'But outsiders presume [LGBTQ young people] are consenting because they are 18, 19, whatever, when actually it might be much more complicated.'

In addition, an LGBT person of any age who has just come out, or who is in the process of coming out, might be positioned as younger or inexperienced by a partner who is abusive and/or exploitative.

'I did an interview with a 30-year-old man who had just come out and actually he experienced quite a lot of abuse in his first relationship because he didn't know [that the abuse was wrong], he didn't have any gay friends and he had never had a relationship at all, so at 30 he was positioned as younger [chronologically to his abusive but younger partner] and "this is how you do things, this is how we do things", so I think it is really important to think about that, that a young person might be chronologically 25 but in terms of their confidence, or their experience, they might be 16.'

Non-identification of victims and vulnerabilities

As discussed throughout this report, it is critical to better understand how young people become victims of exploitation, what their routes into the abuse were, and whether there are certain factors or traits that make someone particularly vulnerable to CSE. By understanding the causes and correlates of abuse, we will be better able to protect children and young people and prevent their exploitation through early identification.

The roundtables highlighted a number of situations in which non-identification could take place, including:

- Boys having sex with older women or men – 'It remains a prevalent attitude that boys should be grateful, without us thinking those things through, whether it's an older man or older female.'

- Non-recognition of learning disabilities, which can affect a young person's judgement or ability to know when to seek help – 'If a child presented certain types of behaviour, if the child was not disabled, you would think: "What is going on here?" but because the child is disabled, often the assumption can be that it's related.'

- Focusing on one ethnic community to the detriment of others – 'When you go to training now, people say that you need to look for young people from BME communities; they focus on the Asian community in particular as young people not able to come forward. But they're missing African [children] in particular; they're missing out European children in that.'

- Girls being sexually exploited by older females under the guise of being in a lesbian relationship – 'The police did come because she started running away from home, but didn't bat an eyelid because it was two women together.'

'It's almost impossible to find any cases where anybody is actually doing something in terms of enforcement and action where the victims are not white.'

Schools and sex and relationships education

The provision of sex and relationships education (SRE) in schools was seen as critical by participants in all the roundtables. This was not just in relation to the provision of information to children and young people, but also in terms of teachers being able to better understand CSE and feeling more confident of their ability to provide information and support.

'Along with new e-safety sessions that are being incorporated into teaching in schools, SRE, including CSE for young people, should become standard and not an 'extra' to education. Additionally, such information should be available to both boys and girls without the assumption that boys are possible perpetrators and girls victims, as this perpetuates the view that boys cannot be victims.'

In order to help prevent abuse, it is vital that children and young people are equipped with the knowledge of how to spot unhealthy and risky relationships or sexual encounters and feel confident in reporting concerns. The provision of SRE in schools is crucial in getting this information across to all young people. It should include not only facts on the biological aspects of sex, but also: what is appropriate and inappropriate sexual behaviour; what constitutes a healthy relationship or sexual encounter; what is sexual consent; and where children can go to get advice or talk about their worries or problems. Provision of such information should start in primary school and be adapted to the age and needs of the child. In the early years, education need not refer to sex but be about, as a minimum, appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, respect and healthy relationships.

'You have a swathe of very vulnerable kids that might not be getting the support educationally or health-wise, but who need a different kind of sex and relationships education, maybe much more in depth than you might give to those without a disability.'

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68   Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Children Board (2013) *The overview report of the serious case review in respect of young people 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6.*

As well as the importance of young people understanding what a 'healthy' relationship is – in whatever form that relationship takes – it was also noted that the understanding of sexual consent may be different between males and females and should also be clearly taught. The issue of consent and different perceptions was clearly illustrated in the report *Sex without consent, I suppose that is rape*,[69] which found: 'The most significant influence on young people's understanding of consent is constructions of gender, particularly masculinity. All young people referred to the sexual double standard which rewards young men for having sex while passing negative judgement on young women who do so.'

> 'I think [discriminatory attitudes towards women] are really hard to shift, certainly in a core group of boys who may have conservative views on women, and I think in the context of growing religious fundamentalism or orthodox conservative thinking particularly amongst young men, that's becoming more and more hard to shift.'

While SRE is crucial for all young people, the way in which the content is provided, and to whom, is also critical in ensuring that it reaches all young people, rather than only those in mainstream education and from a heteronormative and white British background. For example, research carried out on the subject of learning disabilities and CSE[70] found that children with disabilities are often not provided with SRE as it is presumed that they will not be sexually active or that they need to be protected from the information.

This was further noted by a roundtable participant who had heard that a teacher in a school for children with learning disabilities had said to another teacher: 'We don't really need to worry about [sexual exploitation] so much with our children.' This raises concerns regarding safeguarding within schools, and understanding of sexual abuse and exploitation, and reveals a need for SRE to be delivered to all children, regardless of their learning ability.

Youth groups and safe spaces

The lack of youth clubs and safe spaces for children and young people, caused by funding cuts,[71] was predominantly discussed in relation to LGBTQ young people, but is applicable to all young people. Youth clubs provide a space for young people to not only relax and have fun but also to develop self-esteem, build peer support, receive information on domestic violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, and build resilience and strength in friendships. The emphasis on safe spaces was also noted in the report *Real voices*,[72] which asked young people about whom they would approach if they needed help; all respondents said it would not be the police or schools because they did not trust them. The young people who were interviewed all attended a youth centre and said they would tell their youth worker, 'making it clear they needed someone outside the normal agencies whom they could trust before they would disclose'.[73]

The roundtable on LGBTQ young people particularly recommended the provision of youth work and groups to provide support and safe places for LGBTQ young people. It also advised that the youth work should not depend on sessional and/or part-time youth workers, who might find it difficult to provide support to an individual outside of the group.

However, safe spaces for LGBTQ young people to meet, including youth group settings, are severely lacking and while straight young people may have clubs to go to, including sports clubs,

discos, and so on, the same venues may not feel as comfortable or secure to a young person who is unsure about their sexuality or gender identity, or scared about coming out.[74]

According to an attendee at the LGBTQ roundtable, there are 'two key things that young people want: someone they could trust and talk to, about all sorts of things, and other people that they felt similar to them to be around'. Without such safe spaces, young LGBTQ people may try to access support in places that leave them vulnerable to abuse – such as online.

Stereotypical imagery

The roundtables discussed how images of victims of sexual exploitation are portrayed: a 'normal' model of female victims and male perpetrators, with the presumption that the abuse is heterosexual. Posters, documents and other advice on sexual exploitation and sexual abuse are often aimed at females as victims and males as perpetrators, rather than recognising that all young people can be victims and/or perpetrators.[75] Without seeing information that shows the risk facing all young people, rather than only heterosexual females, young people may be unaware of what an unhealthy relationship is, and may be more likely to be manipulated into abusive relationships. Equally, without having the correct information to identify possible abuse, perpetrators may be able to convince victims that their treatment is acceptable.

> 'If there is nowhere to get that information, if there is a lack of literature, sex and relationships education that is fully inclusive, so that information is not available, [this could result in] people potentially accessing the scene at the wrong time, too early, much earlier than you would expect, and they'll be gaining insights into what they think is usual behaviour to become an LGBTQ person, if that's the only source of information, it is very easy to get a distorted view of what a healthy relationship is.'

Additionally, by not informing the public and professionals about the possibility that victims come from diverse backgrounds, potential victims risk being neither identified nor provided with appropriate preventative advice. An organisation working directly with male victims of sexual exploitation noted that information content focuses predominantly on females. 'This often results in boys/young men believing that CSE issues do not apply to them and that it is an issue for the girls.'[76]

Multi-agency working

CSE as a safeguarding and child protection issue is well established, and over the last few years in particular, statutory and non-statutory agencies have started to work together to provide a holistic response to the problem. However, problems with agencies failing to work together effectively were highlighted in the roundtables and in literature on sexual exploitation, including numerous case reviews,[77] the Jay report[78] and *Real voices*.[79] Agencies working in silos without sharing information is a common criticism, especially as it is important that all the agencies come together to discuss individual cases. It is often only with joined-up working and agencies sharing the 'pieces of the puzzle' that sexual exploitation can be identified. While this is getting better with Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASHs) and statutory agencies starting to employ key CSE workers, it was noted that some agencies are still not joined up, particularly those not often associated with CSE.

69   Coy, M; Kelly, L; Elvines, F; Garner, M; Kanyeredzi, A (2013) *'Sex without consent, I suppose that is rape': How young people in England understand sexual consent.*
70   Franklin, A; Raws, P; Smeaton, E (2015) *Unprotected, overprotected: Meeting the needs of young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, sexual exploitation.*
71   The cut in funding has also resulted in youth groups taking in children and young people from 13 to 25 years of age, which brings with it potential risks due to the differences in age.
72   Coffey, A (2014) *Real voices: Child sexual exploitation in Greater Manchester.*
73   Ibid.

74   It was also noted that, as well as provision of safe spaces, there needs to be a recognition that safety for LGBTQ young people should include an understanding that family and school environments (including the travel to and from school, school corridors and playgrounds) might not be safe, regardless of school policies on diversity and tolerance.
75   While it is recognised that there are some resources on other models of CSE these are not national.
76   BLAST MESMAC, For Schools section: http://mesmac.co.uk/group-work.
77   Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Children Board (2013) *The overview report of the serious case review in respect of young people 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6.*
78   Jay, A (2014) *Independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham, 1997–2013.*
79   Coffey, A (2014) *Real voices: Child sexual exploitation in Greater Manchester.*

For example, in the case of a child victim of CSE who has a parent or carer with learning disabilities, the adult may receive support from an adult service and the child receive support from a specialist CSE service, but the adult services may be difficult to engage with as they are unsure about how to work with the parent to protect the child. Another suggested scenario was where a young person may have a learning disability, yet the learning disability service may be unaware of how to work with someone who has experienced CSE, and the CSE agency supporting the child may not have experience of working with a child with learning disabilities.

The same scenarios can be seen for all the issues considered at the roundtables, where agencies working with LGBTQ young people, or children from minority ethnic groups, may not have experience of working with children who have been victims of sexual exploitation. It is vital that the cross-over is made between these agencies so that full support is available. One attendee who has a programme working with 62 local authorities found that some are working well on linking LGBT local youth groups with safeguarding work, while others do not connect this work or see the relevance of doing so. However, the former was seen as a model of good practice and could therefore be replicated elsewhere.

In relation to Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs), it was felt that they do not have sufficient influence to ensure that strategies preventing CSE and supporting victims are delivered at a local level by all the different agencies involved. It was also noted that many voluntary agencies working on specialist issues, such as with minority groups or LGBTQ young people, are often small and have little capacity to work on CSE as well.

‘A real structural problem is that LSCBs don’t necessarily have the levers they need to direct, so they can’t necessarily influence health and wellbeing boards, they can’t influence schools, so you have a strategic plan that says all the right things but there is no delivery landscape for it, there are no levers.’

As well as multi-agency working and educating professionals not usually associated with CSE, agencies need to be more proactive in looking for potential victims and changing the way they work to ensure their services are appropriate for all victims. For example, agencies working with LGBTQ young people have found that services such as sexual health clinics often do not clearly advertise that they are welcoming of LGBT young people, even though they state that they are open to all young people. Making it explicit was recommended. In cases where someone is trans, services may not be clear about whether they accept young people based on their transsexuality or their sex at birth. In such cases, young people may feel it is easier not to engage, to avoid questions and embarrassment.

‘The idea that we need not just to say: “Oh we know young LGBTQ people are, can be, at risk of exploitation,” it’s not just about saying that; it’s about them shifting where you are doing your work, where you’re doing your outreach, where you’re looking for young people and what stories you are listening to and what opportunities you are giving young people to tell those stories of abuse and exploitation.’

Data gathering and provision of services

Contributors to the roundtable discussed the need for better collection, collation and analysis of data on CSE and how it was necessary for local areas to map the issue to better understand it locally. This data gathering can be done through police analysts and services working on the frontline, but it was also recommended that it could be done by being more creative and gathering it from areas not usually associated with sharing data, such as health agencies.

‘We need to look at data a little bit more creatively. So that if people are going to the doctors speaking confidentially, we can still have that data recorded – anonymous data – so we know the prevalence of it. We might not know the individual to work with, but at least we then say: “We know there is a cohort of x number of people here, but we know we’ve got a problem and we can do something about it.” Then we can start looking at areas where they might be offending, the communities. It’s also making sure that part of us have the confidence to share [the information] because if we don’t have that picture, we can’t address it.’

Regarding the provision of services, it was recommended that standard assessments should include all the characteristics of the child. Once a young person has been identified as at risk, or as a victim of CSE, the services provided should be tailored to their needs, with one-to-one work that builds relationships key to keeping young people safe and able to recover.

One attendee, in relation to LGBTQ people, said: ‘A practitioner heard from the young people they support that what they really like is being able to feel as though everything is completely open, so there are no assumptions made… so that even if they aren’t at the stage where they have already identified how they might want to communicate their own identity, it doesn’t feel like there is pressure to do that, but you can seek support from the people that you are working with, to support you.’

Another said: ‘I think asking practitioners to learn how to ask [about sexuality and gender identities] in ways they feel comfortable with and that make the young person comfortable is crucial.’ However, it was also seen as crucial not to pry and ask questions that could be seen as forceful, allowing the young person to open up in their own time instead. As one attendee said: ‘We need to be careful that we don’t add to young people’s problems by pursuing what we see as what things will help us to help them, and that we do hear that.’

It was further noted that monitoring of protected characteristics under the Equality Act should be encouraged so that data can be collected that evidences the needs of groups of children and young people who do not fit the dominant ‘story’ of the heterosexual white girl/young woman being exploited by the heterosexual older man.

Some agencies working in this area for a number of years have carried out evaluations to assess their work, including in terms of the outcomes for victims. Where there have been positive evaluations, this work has been replicated – a process that is vital in developing services with proven positive outcomes for young people. The psychological impact of sexual exploitation, particularly in relation to the role of technology and how it affects a person’s response to trauma, needs to be better understood to inform practice. It was noted that the Department of Health is working on understanding trauma-based psychotherapy interventions and recognises that there is an array of services currently available, albeit limited in their capacity. All agencies should therefore come together to share practice and learning to ensure a holistic approach is provided to victims of CSE.

Alongside raising awareness among children and young people themselves, families and communities must be made more aware of CSE and how they can be a protective[81] factor. This work must be done sensitively, since some young people, such as those who are LGBT, may have been rejected by their families because of their sexuality or gender identity. The Families and Communities Against Sexual Exploitation[82] work carried out by Barnardo's displayed positive results in cases where children and their parents were provided with parallel preventative support to stop the young person becoming sexually exploited. The project also held awareness-raising events within communities that may not have usually been approached, and this is vital to ensure that everyone understands what CSE is and knows where to report it.

Access into communities can be difficult, but there are many small community-based organisations throughout England that could be tapped into, community leaders who could be contacted, and organisations that work with violence against women and girls or specialist issues, such as LGBTQ, that could be met with. By bringing both statutory and non-statutory organisations together, the increased communication should enable children, young people and their families to feel confident that they will be listened to and believed should they need to report, either abuse or concerns.

The roundtables highlighted how young people – and particularly those who have been in conflict with the police or who are wary of social workers – may feel more comfortable seeking help and support in the voluntary sector. They need a reliable, flexible worker who will work alongside them, giving them the opportunity to talk, build trust and start to rebuild their self-esteem and confidence. Fully understanding the young person requires the use of holistic assessments, so that behaviour that may be deemed 'inappropriate' or violent is not taken at face value. This point refers to all frontline professionals, including social workers and the police, and not just specialist CSE workers.

To better understand CSE, local and national data must be routinely gathered. The development of local profiles can help police and partner agencies to develop a clearer understanding of how they can plan and operate to prevent sexual exploitation and target offenders. When developing such plans, consideration should be given to areas that may not usually be included. For example, are there certain clubs, bars or outside places that are known to be frequented by LGBT adults? Are young people also in these environments? Widening perceptions of where CSE can take place is a must for ensuring that all young people are considered. Collectively, we must do better at ensuring that all young people, not just those who are visible or known to authorities, are given the protection and support they need.

Conclusion

Victims of sexual exploitation are individuals, each with their own characteristics and qualities that make them unique. While this is a challenge for professionals who try to identify young people at risk and provide them with support, it is vital that it is recognised. Any child can become a victim of sexual exploitation, regardless of their background or upbringing. While there are factors that make some children and young people more vulnerable than others, as children enter adolescence and take more risks (a natural part of becoming resilient, independent adults), they are more likely to be at risk of sexual exploitation. This is particularly true since the advent of social media and because of the ease with which strangers can become 'friends' with young people.[80]

No child or young person should ever be blamed for their own abuse, yet they must be given the education and skills to be able to keep themselves safe and feel confident in making decisions. The development of materials and advice that is appropriate to the child is vital to ensure that the most relevant information is conveyed. This should take into account their learning ability and age, and should not assume that sexual abuse is heterosexual. If a young male or someone who is questioning their sexuality sees only posters of girls as victims, it is difficult for them to comprehend that they too may be at risk of exploitation and abuse. Similarly, if girls and young women see only warnings about men, it is difficult to comprehend that women might pose a risk to them as abusive or exploitative adults. As well as information that addresses diversity, the provision of safe spaces in youth clubs and other settings, such as schools or even online, could provide an environment where young people can go to reflect, seek advice and meet peers.

80 Palmer, T (2015) *Digital dangers: The impact of technology on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people.*

81 Parents against child sexual exploitation (PACE) is a good example of work with parents whose children have been victims.
82 D'Arcy, K; Dhaliwal, S; Thomas R with Brodie, I and Pearce, J (2015) *Families and Communities Against Child Sexual Exploitation (FCASE): Final Evaluation Report.*

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Smeaton, E (2013) *Running from hate to what you think is love: The relationship between running away and child sexual exploitation.* Barnardo's, London.

The National Autistic Society, What is autism?: http://www.autism.org.uk (accessed 07/03/16).

Annex 1: List of organisations represented at the roundtables

The first roundtable on boys and young men was chaired by Baroness Lynne Featherstone, who was an MP and Minister of State for Crime Prevention at the Home Office at the time, with subsequent events being chaired by a senior leader from Barnardo's. Attendees were invited from both statutory and voluntary organisations. While there were some agencies that worked on both issues, such as boys and young men and CSE, many were organisations that represented diversity but did not necessarily have expertise on CSE. By bringing experts in diversity and experts in CSE together, the roundtables were able to provide discussions between agencies that may not usually meet.

At each roundtable, an expert was invited to present on the issue to provide background and context, but also to generate discussions. The roundtables were conducted under the Chatham House Rule and all quotes are anonymous. The following people presented at the roundtables and reviewed the final draft of the report to ensure accuracy and content.

Presenters

Boys and young men
Dr Ella Cockbain, Research Fellow, Department of Security and Crime Science, University College London

Disability
Emilie Smeaton, Research Director, Paradigm Research

Ethnicity and faith
Dr Sukhwant Dhaliwal, Research Fellow, The International Centre: Researching child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking at University of Bedfordshire

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and questioning young people
Professor Catherine Donovan, Department of Social Sciences, University of Sunderland

Attendees

Africans Unite Against Child Abuse (AFRUCA)

Albert Kennedy Trust

Association of Directors of Children's Services

Association of Independent LSCB Chairs

BLAST Project, Yorkshire MESMAC

Broken Rainbow

College of Policing

Community Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation

Department for Education

Department of Health

Faith Matters

Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities

Home Office

Local Government Association

LSCB Chairs Network

METRO Centre

Metropolitan Police Service

MsUnderstood

NSPCC

NWG Network

Office of the Children's Commissioner for England

Paradigm Research

Probation Service

Respond

Southall Black Sisters

Stonewall

Survivors Manchester

University of Bedfordshire

University of Sunderland

Youth Justice Board

'It's not on the radar'

The hidden diversity of children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation in England

Believe in children
Barnardo's

150 years & always