

## SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE LOOKED AFTER AND ACCOMMODATED IN GLASGOW

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### **SUMMARY**

The scoping study was commissioned to provide an estimate of the prevalence and risk of sexual exploitation amongst the looked after and accommodated population in Glasgow. Primarily, it is designed to provide a baseline for future research, policy and practice developments to begin identifying young people's pathways into exploitation and more effective and appropriate models of care across all vulnerable groups.

The study focused on the looked after and accommodated population of children and young people as they may be at particular risk because of their existing vulnerabilities and complex needs. A group of 39 young people were identified from the 168 children and young people looked after away from home in provided and purchased children's units in mid 2012. A two-stage process of case file analysis identified those cases where there were 'warning signs' and 'strong indicators' of risk of sexual exploitation – indicating that 33% of children and young people were at substantial risk / harmed through sexual exploitation.

Vulnerability and risk were key elements in the histories and present circumstances of the young people, contributing to a complex and challenging assessment and intervention process for all agencies involved in supporting the young people. While information was collated and shared, and risk factors generally identified, there was variability in relating and assessing these factors to the risk of, or experience of, sexual exploitation. The risk factors were often referred to in isolation of the overall context and circumstances of the young people. Multi-agency input and support was apparent, but also accompanied at times by uncoordinated responses when faced with complex and challenging behaviours and circumstances.

Framing recommendations based on a small-scale local scoping study utilising single agency records designed to estimate the prevalence of sexual exploitation is problematic. However, the indicative findings of this work indicate that recommendations for policy, practice and research within a Glasgow framework may help in developing future responses.

- Repeat the scoping study, utilising the indicator matrix, on other vulnerable / at risk groups to better ascertain the prevalence of sexual exploitation in the city.
- Provide specific multi-agency training for managers and front line workers around the issues of sexual exploitation.
- Ensure that practitioners are familiar with the potential indicators of vulnerability, and specific risk factors of sexual exploitation.
- Ensure that practitioners and managers are more 'proactive' in identifying concerns rather than waiting for children and young people to 'disclose'.
- Ensure that services / VYP processes are not concluded or withdrawn because a young person is 'not engaging'.
- Develop a tool for practitioners that provides an evidence based resource for workers to more readily identify the risks associated with sexual exploitation. Drawing on the indicators utilised for this scoping study this development could incorporate a traffic light system of concerns.
- Rewrite the Vulnerable Young Person sexual exploitation guidance incorporating recent evidence, practice knowledge and research and ensure that the guidance is consulted when there are concerns around the issue of risk of sexual exploitation.
- Establish a child sexual exploitation working group to adopt a strategic overview of policy, practice and research into all forms of exploitation. (Merging with the already well established child trafficking sub group of the Child Protection Committee VYP may be a possible way forward – looking at child exploitation overall).
- Commission further research and practice developments to inform and implement best practice models. Ensure that future policy and practice developments are located in a robust monitoring and evaluation framework.
- In a collaborative, action research process between practitioners, managers and researchers monitor the 13 cases identified as 'high risk' over the next 12 months to provide comment on assessment, intervention and outcomes.

***“Child safeguarding boards need to be much more proactive, social workers and police need to look for signs of exploited kids, not just wait for them to come forward, and the courts need to understand that these are not sexually active young women but damaged girls.....” (Ahmad 2012)***

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## BACKGROUND

The issue of sexual exploitation of vulnerable young people is increasingly attracting political, media and academic focus, brought starkly to the fore in the public spotlight by the media reporting of the Rochdale cases (Rochdale LSCB 2012), emerging allegations about Jimmy Saville, and the recent publication of the Office of the Children's Commissioner in England (Berelowitz et al 2012). The National Action plan in England and Wales (Department for Education 2011) stated that local authority areas should assume that sexual exploitation is in their areas, and a recent Scottish review (Brodie and Pearce 2012), indicated that experiences south of the border are likely to be replicated in Scotland. The Scottish review found that establishing the prevalence of sexual exploitation is difficult due to the hidden nature of the problem, limited awareness, differential application of policy and differing definitions applied by young people, parents, carers and professionals (Brodie and Pearce 2012).

While the definition for sexual exploitation contained in the England and Wales guidance is now generally highlighted as a comprehensive definition, its wide scope may still cause confusion and raise questions when young people present with complex issues and histories:

***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 (Dept of Children and Families 2009).***

In Scotland and Glasgow concerns about sexual exploitation are not new; in 2003 there was recognition by the then Scottish Executive that vulnerable young people, both boys and girls, were being sexually exploited across the country, although there was also an acknowledgment that the numbers involved was not known (Scottish Executive 2003). Glasgow Child Protection Committee multi-agency guidance was first published in 2001, at a time when multi-agency working groups were meeting in the city to discuss the issues. The guidance was reissued in 2006 (Glasgow CPC 2006) for workers to provide an updated framework to assist practitioners in assessing and safeguarding children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation. This guidance was located within the overall vulnerable young person procedures (VYP)<sup>1</sup> and was recognition that the sexual exploitation of children and

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<sup>1</sup> Children and young people in Glasgow may be managed under the Vulnerable Young Persons Procedures if child protection procedures are not appropriate or the young person is vulnerable to exploitation or harm.

young people was child abuse. It also provided a list of potential indicators for practitioners to refer to and identified areas in the city where there were concerns about young people congregating and accompanying risk of exploitation.

Since the original Glasgow guidance was published there have been a number of investigations, reports and papers seeking to conceptualise and address the issue of child sexual exploitation and inform policy and practice with suggestions for effective interventions (Rochdale LCB 2012; Barnardo's 2011; DCSF 2009; Brodie and Pearce 2012). These reports present a comprehensive overview of the present knowledge base and also discuss models of best practice. Readers are referred to the various papers and reports referenced in this document for a comprehensive background and conceptual overview of the issues of sexual exploitation of vulnerable young people.

## Models of exploitation

There is no single model / explanation of sexual exploitation that can assist practitioners in contextualising assessments and intervention; reflecting the complexities of the issue and the often varied definitions contained in agency guidance. Barnardo's (2012) identified a number of possible models that may begin to highlight various forms of exploitation:

- Older boyfriend / girlfriend
- Trafficking and moving children around
- Loose networks
- Organised gangs
- Peer abuse and exploitation
- Technology – internet and social media to exploit

Despite the introduction of local and national practice guidance, and the emerging research, there has not been a consistent collation of information in relation to the numbers of young people who are at risk, or have been sexually exploited. The prevalence or estimates of numbers is not known, either locally or nationally (Brodie and Pearce 2012; Scottish Parliament 2012). The Howard League (2011) suggested the exploitation of girls and young women especially is “large, hidden and growing”, although also reported that relatively few people have been charged with offences and there is a gap between the reports and official statistics. Previous work in Glasgow and the surrounding area (Dillane et al 2005) and Scotland (Munro 2004; Creggan 2005) identified the sexual exploitation of vulnerable young people as a widespread concern amongst the looked after and accommodated population potentially affecting between 32% and 90% of this group.

In 2011 the University of Bedfordshire published a report commenting on the responses of local child protection partnerships in England and Wales to sexual exploitation. This report identified a number of key findings, many of which are pertinent to Scotland and to the present Glasgow scoping study:

- ✚ Child sexual exploitation is a form of child abuse requiring a conceptual shift in responses to protect children outside the home.
- ✚ LSCBs are failing to safeguard young people from sexual exploitation

- ✚ Isolated pockets of good practice have been developed across the country
- ✚ Awareness raising and training is piecemeal and inadequate
- ✚ Child sexual exploitation takes place in many ways such that there is not one model of how young people are sexually exploited
- ✚ A high proportion of sexually exploited young people 'go missing' and some are moved within the UK to be sexually exploited
- ✚ Research is needed to identify the needs of sexually exploited boys and young men, and of young people from BME communities
- ✚ Current thresholds for child protection procedures are too high
- ✚ A disproportionate number of sexually exploited young people are looked after by the local authority, and a disproportionate number are placed in residential care: unsafe accommodation increases vulnerability to sexual exploitation
- ✚ Sexually exploited young people, including those living with their families, had a number of associated problems
- ✚ Criminality may be an indicator of child sexual abuse; sexual exploitation of young people in gang-affected neighbourhoods may not be recognised and child protection and community safety strategies are rarely 'joined up'
- ✚ Despite the police taking a lead in a small number of areas, LSCBs are not proactive in disrupting and prosecuting offenders
- ✚ Few cases come to court and victims' experiences of the court processes are negative
- ✚ Data is not being collected on the nature and prevalence of child sexual exploitation, despite data collection being intricately linked to awareness raising

(adapted from Jago et al 2011)

The challenges for practitioners (and researchers) in identifying and responding to sexual exploitation are substantial, especially how to identify young people early enough to prevent the exploitation, estimating prevalence and risk, and intervening effectively (Lebloch and King 2006). Creegan et al (2005) identified five basic elements for effective responses:

- Early intervention – as soon as concerns are identified
- Safe accommodation – at the lowest level of physical security necessary
- Continuity of care – stability is paramount with risks managed within the community where possible
- Intensive support – addressing key areas of need and vulnerability
- Multi-agency collaboration

The present scoping study was commissioned and designed to provide an estimate of the prevalence and risk of sexual exploitation amongst the looked after and accommodated population in Glasgow. It is not designed to provide definitive comment on individual cases, agency responses and 'what works', although some comment is provided in these areas as a basis for future work in the area. Primarily the present study is to provide a baseline for future research, policy and practice developments as further developmental work is required to begin identifying young people's pathways into exploitation and more effective and appropriate models of care across all vulnerable groups.

## METHODS

Framing a robust methodology and focus for the present work is complicated by the fact that, despite the Child Protection Committee guidance published in 2006, there has been no attempt to centrally collate figures in Glasgow to begin estimating the extent of the problem. As there are indications that the looked after and accommodated population of young people may be particularly at risk because of their existing vulnerabilities and complex needs this group of young people was identified for this initial scoping study.

The present study aims to:

- Identify the extent of sexual exploitation in the looked after and accommodated young people population in Glasgow
- Identify possible barriers to identification
- Provide recommendations for future multi-agency responses

## Ethical consideration

Investigating the issue of sexual exploitation is fraught with considerable ethical and methodological dilemmas and quantifying the extent of the problem is particularly problematic because of its hidden nature and practical constraints in undertaking research (Melrose 2002). This scoping study was undertaken as part of the ongoing professional development remit of the social work child protection team in Glasgow, following recognition of concerns raised in the city about sexual exploitation of young people. As an audit of present cases to inform future practice the work was governed by the ethical approval guidelines and process of Glasgow City Council social work department.

As this was an audit of present and open cases, rather than a retrospective analysis of cases, the action research component of the work facilitated feedback mechanisms to staff during and after the research process. Managers and front line staff were afforded the opportunity to comment on the initial findings in respect of their cases and to have their views incorporated in the final report. Details of the indicators contained in case files were provided to managers to action any practice concerns if they considered children and young people required additional responses.<sup>2</sup>

## Sample

Taking into account the existing knowledge base, and needing to identify a sample and investigate in a timeframe to meet local policy imperatives (Scott and Harper 2006), it was decided to sample a number of children from Glasgow's looked after and accommodated population who were residing in Glasgow city council provided accommodation between April and June 2012. Such a contemporary sample meant that findings could be highlighted as the situation at present, amongst current looked after children, rather than a retrospective analysis.

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<sup>2</sup> Comments were received in relation to 2 cases. While 1 of these questioned inclusion in relation to 'no evidence of sexual exploitation' it remains in the category of 'significant risk' as the case files had the number of 'indicators' present for inclusion.

In the time period identified 1659 children were looked after away from home by Glasgow City Council, the vast majority in foster placements. From this population further purposive sampling of children living in council run accommodation and recorded as 'short term placements' on the central database identified 39 children who were looked after and accommodated in Glasgow provided accommodation at mid year 2012. This represents 23% of children accommodated in provided and purchased units (excluding secure accommodation) and provides a reasonable sample from which to extrapolate the findings to all those accommodated in units.

Generalising the findings to all children looked after and accommodated by Glasgow is more debateable as it is not known if the profiles of children accommodated in foster and other placements mirrors those accommodated in units. While it is likely that the findings of this study are applicable to children and young people looked after and accommodated in residential units further work is required to make more general comments about risks to other vulnerable populations in the city.

## **Indicators of sexual exploitation**

The initial phase of the work involved designing a data collection tool for use in Glasgow that was informed by the developing evidence base of risk factors consistently linked to concerns around child sexual exploitation. Indicators were adapted from a number of previous tools (Durham LSCB undated, Leicester LSCB 2011; DCSF 2009; Clutton and Coles 2007); indicators which CEOP (2011) identified as being useful in assessing risk of sexual exploitation. While the indicators are widely referred to across the UK, there are no 'tools' that have been rigorously evaluated to provide a robust, valid and reliable assessment of the risk, or previous/ ongoing occurrence of sexual exploitation.

The indicator matrix developed for the scoping study aimed to identify both vulnerability factors and risk factors. Lebloch and King (2006) define vulnerability factors as those social, environmental and family circumstances or experiences that make some children more likely than others to be exposed to risk of, or actual sexual exploitation. They define risk indicators as particular behaviour that is worrying, problematic or dangerous and likely to require further investigation and assessment, and which should alert professionals to the possibility of a child being sexually exploited. The 'risk factors' utilised in this study are defined as 'warning signs' and 'strong indicators' and are detailed in appendix 1.

## **Phase 1 screening**

The first phase of the work was an initial screening of electronic case files looking at entries dating back two years from September 2012. Two members of the social work child protection team viewed the Carefirst records of all 39 children and recorded indicators identified in these electronic records on the data collection matrix (appendix 1). This initial screening phase was designed to identify those young people where potential vulnerability indicators and 'risk factors' of child sexual exploitation were apparent in electronic case files. While this approach does not preclude the fact that indicators may have been recorded elsewhere, or not recorded, it has proven effective in previous work looking at



particular issues in at risk groups in Glasgow and found to be sufficiently robust as a screening process.

## **Phase 2**

Where three or more of the 'risk factors' were identified, a second phase of the work commenced - reading social work paper files. Cases not progressing to the second phase cannot be considered to be free of risk – merely that risk indicators were not identified in the screening exercise.

While the major method of investigation was a case file analysis the current status of the children - presently looked after and accommodated - necessitated an action research feedback loop to professionals and managers to permit a fluid approach to the study, and changes to practice as the work progressed (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000; Spalding 2009). In conjunction with the social work child protection team, feedback was provided to senior managers and practitioners following initial analysis of the data, with specific reference to individual cases where 'risk factors' were identified, to allow for practice developments where necessary.

## **Limitations**

Whilst a robust methodology was implemented to address the aims of the study there are a number of limitations inherent in the design of a small scale scoping study to investigate prevalence in a short time scale to inform local policy and practice (Brodie and Pearce 2012; Scott and Harper 2006). Primarily it is a study utilising single agency records, on a specific, albeit highly vulnerable population and findings may not be applicable to all children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation. Specific demographics of victims and suspected perpetrators are not included to maintain confidentiality. The work is based on indicators, which although used extensively in other investigations and local safeguarding children board areas are not a validated tool for assessing risk of sexual exploitation. Finally, the views of young people have not been included in the study, an area of investigation that should be incorporated in future work as it is known that young people's definitions of exploitation and their experiences may differ from professional perceptions. Despite the inherent limitations of a small scale scoping study in one urban area, the robust nature of the methodology and case file analysis can provide some indicative data regarding the nature and extent of sexual exploitation in a particularly vulnerable group of young people.

## **FINDINGS**

Between the dates identified (April to June 2012) for the study 1659 children and young people were identified on the Carefirst electronic database as being looked after and accommodated away from home – 785 girls and 874 boys. The children were accommodated in:

Type of placement	Nos
Foster care provided placement	933
Foster care purchased	322
Children's Unit provided	126
Children's Unit purchased	39
Secure Unit	23
Special provision purchased	46
Other	170

Table 1 – looked after and accommodated children placements

Of the cases identified in 'Children's Unit provided accommodation' a further selection was made for inclusion in the study by the descriptor 'planned short term' placements. While this does not represent a random selection of children accommodated by Glasgow City Council it is a purposive selection (n=39) representing 24% of all those children accommodated in units by Glasgow (20% if secure units are included).

The sample comprised:

Age	Nos	Females	Males
12	2	20	18
13	3		
14	9		
15	7		
16	12		
17	5		

Table 2 – LAAC sample ages and gender

## Prevalence

13 (33%), [11 females; 2 males] of the original sample were identified using the 'child sexual exploitation potential indicators' (appendix 1) as being at significant risk / harmed through sexual exploitation. The prevalence of risk of sexual exploitation has been identified previously in Scotland where Dillane et al (2005) identified a similar level of exploitation following interviews with looked after and accommodated young people in the Glasgow area. Cregan et al (2005) identified between 40% and 90% of young woman in secure units as being at risk.

Age	Nos
12	1
13	1
14	1
15	3
16	5
17	2

Table 3 – 'high risk' group

26 children were classified as 'lower risk' in that they were perhaps vulnerable to the possibility of sexual exploitation because of their personal histories and circumstances but there were no indications of heightened risk by present or recent behaviours. The 'lower risk' group had two or less of the 'risk factors' identified (see appendix 2)

The 'high risk' group were identified by the presence of at least three 'strong indicators' in electronic and paper case file analysis. Table 4 below indicates the specific combination of 'warning signs' and 'strong indicators' identified for each of the 'high risk' group.

Child		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
A	F		x	x	x	x			x	x			x		x		x	x
B	F			x				x	x	x	x		x					
C	F							x			x		x		x			x
D	F				x			x	x		x	x	x	x	x			x
E	F		x	x		x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x			x
F	M		x			x			x	x	x	x			x			
G	M					x	x	x			x		x		x			x
H	F								x				x	x				x
I	F			x						x	x		x		x			x
J*	F	x	x			x					x				x			
K	F			x				x	x	x					x		x	x
L	F		x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
M	F		x		x			x			x	x	x		x			x

Table 4 – indicators for children at 'high risk'

\* This young person was included in those considered to be most at risk because of the particularly young age and the presence of three other warning signs

1. Recurring or multiple sexually transmitted infection
2. Sexually risky behaviour (multiple partners)
3. Significantly older girl / boy friend (sexual relationship)
4. Entering or leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults / known child sexual exploitation perpetrators
5. Associating with other young people who are known to be sexually exploited / clipping (money then run)
6. Returning after having been missing looking well cared for in spite of having no known base
7. Physical injuries / symptoms of sexual / physical abuse with no adequate explanations
8. Has money, expensive clothes, mobile phones or other possessions with plausible explanation
9. Missing long periods (2+ nights) with no known home base
10. Located / seen in a place known to be used for sexual exploitation (hot spots, flats, cars, houses etc)
11. Being taken to clubs / hotels / houses and engaging in sexual activity
12. Discloses sexual / physical assault
13. Discloses sexual / physical assault – followed by refusal to complain or withdrawal of complaint
14. Reports from reliable sources suggest likelihood of sexual exploitation
15. Abduction / forced imprisonment
16. Paid / given money for sex
17. Under 16 and meeting adults to engage in sexual activity

Following a cross checking / consultation exercise with Service Managers and staff involved with the cases, the findings indicate that a third of the cases in the sample were at

significant risk of sexual exploitation, and in many cases the existence and combination of specific 'strong indicators' suggest they have probably been exploited. Explicit disclosures by young people of sexual exploitation were not identified in the case files, although the police had been involved in a number of cases. One case had been part of a substantial police / social work investigation in the city.

## Vulnerability

Not surprisingly, vulnerability and risk, beyond sexual exploitation, were key elements in the histories and present circumstances of all the identified cases, contributing to the extremely complex task of assessing ongoing concerns. Following phase 1 of the work the group of young people identified at 'high risk' of sexual exploitation recorded a mean number of indicators of 18, compared to the 'lower risk' group who had a mean of 6.<sup>3</sup> In nearly all factors, except education, the 'high risk' group displayed a higher incidence than the 'lower risk' group and in relation to *evidence of substance use* and *unexplained relationships with older adults* all the higher risk group displayed these indicators. *Relationships with older adults* is perhaps the more interesting as only one of the lower risk group displayed this. While this was not initially included as a 'warning sign' or 'strong indicator', the findings suggest it should perhaps be included in the risk factors as a 'strong indicator'.

## Analysis of risk

The GIRFEC (Getting it Right for Every Child) process (Scottish Government 2008) focussing on the holistic assessment of all a child's circumstances was evident in the case files. This approach facilitated the collating of a substantial amount of information for each young person, from numerous agencies involved. All of the case files and assessments recognised that the past and present circumstances of the young people presented vulnerabilities and risks, which contributed to an extremely complex and challenging assessment process for all agencies involved in supporting the young people.

While comments in case files and reports reflected this complexity it was apparent that practitioners faced dilemmas in assessment and analysis when confronted with potentially conflicting, uncertain, or no 'evidence', and perhaps a fear of labelling the young person as sexually exploited (Lebloch and King 2006). Child protection is increasingly undertaken in a policy framework that is increasingly reliant on evidence and clear assessments (Barry 2007), when what constitutes evidence is not always clear.

For example, the following extracts from files reflect the difficulties:

*"There are ongoing concerns as to how YP funds YP lifestyle, for example how YP manages to stay away for up to a week without any income. YP refuses to disclose details about this, adding simply that friends look after YP"*

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<sup>3</sup> After phase 2 case file reading 'high risk' group mean number of indicators was 22

*“There is no evidence that YP has been involved in such exploitation, however the amount of time YP spends unaccounted for and without enough money is an area of concern”.*

A factor preventing clear statements in case files about potential risks may be the belief that without ‘evidence’ and / or disclosure from the young people assessments could not be completed:

*“YP has refused to divulge any information to professionals about where YP is and who YP is with. This increases the concern as no assessment can take place about YP safety”.*

In most, if not all, cases it was apparent that Glasgow CPC guidance and indicators, or emerging research regarding potential exploitation, is not routinely consulted or referred to regarding this group of young people. Nationwide, CEOP (2011) identified that practitioners are not always aware of the signs and symptoms of sexual exploitation, nor always aware of the vulnerabilities and experiences of victims. This is reflected in the present scoping study where there appeared to be considerable variability in awareness and practice regarding analysis and assessment of the cumulative factors indicating risk, with some reluctance to name the specific risks in case files.

However, despite reticence in many files about recording ‘sexual exploitation’ and potential difficulties in recognising the signs, some case files did contain clear references - highlighting the variability in practice.

*“YP is involved in sexual exploitation, risk taking behaviours, being involved in gangs, regularly absconding and generally being extremely vulnerable”.*

*“Concern was expressed at potential risk of sexual exploitation through being missing and these associations”.*

Within these dilemmas about evidence and certainty are questions about a young person’s agency and ability to make choices, even within the constraints of the choices available to them (Lowe and Pearce 2006). It is generally accepted that young people cannot consent to their abuse and exploitation, although this is complicated by the fact they often do not realise they are being abused because they have been manipulated, rather than explicitly coerced (DCSF 2009; Jago and Pearce 2008). It has been highlighted that for some young women especially there are huge complexities in understanding young people’s agency and decision making and some level of ‘choice’ and self determination may be present, even if this is constrained by circumstances (Lowe and Pearce 2006; Coy 2008; Pearce et al 2003). Labelling young people as ‘victims’ in all circumstances may further alienate them and negate their agency and decision making, which for those looked after and accommodated may already be an issue (Coy 2008). These issues reinforce the complex nature of assessment and analysis for professionals and in such circumstances:

*“Identifying young people at risk relies on practitioners’ awareness of the issue, their proactive work to identify indicators of risk, their preparedness to work with*

*situations where sexual exploitation is indicated rather than definitely known to be occurring.....” (Scott and Harper 2006:320)*

These situations are part of the complexity of assessment and analysis for professionals, especially when listening to what children and young people say is central to any assessment. There was evidence in files of the views of children being taken account of - gathered through various mediums including Viewpoint questionnaires and ‘having your say’ forms. However, while welcomed as a positive, where young people do not disclose, or acknowledge abuse/exploitation, this can unintentionally silence discussion about the possibility of sexual exploitation.

Reflecting these issues, in a number of cases the ‘risk’ was attributed to the young people placing themselves in risky situations because of their behaviour and choices they were making.

*“Putting herself at risk while out in the community by approaching older males”*

*“YP is not at risk of exploitation but there is concern about the influence of YP peers and about YP making poor choices”*

*“Concerns that she is either putting herself at risk of being exploited or that she is exploiting someone herself”*

In circumstances where there may be little clarity, the language used in case files and reports may convey a particular perspective that, perhaps inadvertently, pathologizes young people. For example, *“known to associate with older men”* having *“an attraction to older men”* and *“known to go with older males”* may not convey the exploitative nature of the relationships and reinforce the perception of choice and agency when the young people’s agency may be limited by their circumstances and vulnerability. Additionally, while referring to ‘older men’ there was little or no indication in case files of their ages – the CEOP (2011) report found that half of suspected abusers are under 25, indicating that age differences are likely to be 10 years or less. In such circumstances case files may indicate these contacts as ‘consensual relationships’ and ‘boyfriends’ or ‘girlfriends’ – sometimes because young people identify them as such.

Lebloch and King (2006) have also found that in relation to sexual exploitation there is often misinterpretation of related risk factors and behaviour - hanging about with gangs and older men, drinking and substance use, rather than being part of the grooming process and / or a result of threats, are interpreted as the young people putting themselves at risk through their behaviour. Emerging evidence is highlighting the close relationship for many young people between offending, sexual exploitation and being involved in gangs (Brodie and Pearce 2012; Pearce and Pitts 2011). University College London (UCL) (2011) identified that nearly 40% of child sexual exploitation victims were involved in offending (as offences recorded by Youth Offending Teams), with aggression and dishonesty offences being the most common. While no clear pathways were identified regarding cause and effect the UCL findings indicated some reluctance to report exploitation if involved in offending perhaps because of questions about credibility of victims in these circumstances.

While some of the young people in the scoping study have clearly been involved in the commission of serious offences of assault and violence, the analysis of this information in case files was rarely considered in the context of the possibility of a reaction to, or in conjunction with their victimisation and sexual exploitation. As young people became increasingly involved in offending behaviour and increased contact with youth and criminal justice the focus of risk assessments moved imperceptibly away from the risks directed at the young people to the risks they posed to others and themselves by their behaviour – ‘putting themselves at risk’.

*“YP continues to engage in high risk taking behaviours in the community and at the unit by displaying physical acts of violence towards staff and community members”*

*“No one at present seems to be engaging effectively with YP to encourage her to reduce her risk taking behaviour”*

Overall, the case file analysis, while limited in its scope, indicates that workers have collated information and identified risk factors but there is substantial variability in relating these factors to the risk of, or experience of, sexual exploitation, instead referring to general concerns about risk. It may be informative to continue with a further piece of work, involving practitioners and managers in an action research collaborative investigation, looking in depth at the 13 cases and undertaking a detailed case analysis and discussion with workers to identify young people’s pathways into (risk of) sexual exploitation and responses to the developing risks. Such an in depth piece of work will allow exploration of the ‘evidence’ and children’s agency and ‘choice’ issues and could inform future training and awareness raising.

## **Multi-agency working and responses**

In responding to identified risks and vulnerabilities it was apparent there was a high degree of collaboration between services in attempting to share information, assess, and manage multiple risk and needs – involving statutory and voluntary agencies and reflecting good practice (CEOP 2011; Creegan et al 2005). Most young people had numerous agencies involved, although it was not always clear what the actual nature of this involvement was, and what they were trying to achieve - raising concerns about an uncoordinated approach to service provision in the face of complex risk and behaviours. This observation is supported by the fact that while 10 (77%) of the young people had, at a minimum, vulnerable young person (VYP) case discussions, only 5, (38%) were case managed under VYP. In line with the VYP guidance the risk factors identified suggest that all 13 ‘high risk’ cases should have been case managed under VYP procedures.

There was, in all cases, clear evidence of information being shared between partners as different agencies passed on their concerns to supervising workers. However, as indicated above, the analysis of this information was not always supported by a clear evidence base in relation to sexual exploitation, or reference to practice guidance. For example, notification of missing child / absconding from residential units to supervising social workers detailed

incidents but rarely attempted to locate them in the wider context of a child's circumstances and the knowledge base around risk of sexual exploitation.

Case records confirmed that many of the young people presented with complex needs and challenged professionals in terms of engagement and moving towards positive outcomes (Lebloch and King 2006). As this work was primarily a time limited scoping exercise to identify the prevalence of sexual exploitation amongst a particular at risk group, and all of the children remained open cases, it is not possible to comment definitively on the success, or otherwise of interventions, although a third of cases reported some reduction in risk after intervention. However, it was not always apparent in case files the exact nature of the intervention and how this had impacted on risk. In most cases, despite support from statutory and voluntary services, it appeared from behaviours and indicators that the risk of sexual exploitation remained, perhaps reflecting the chronic nature of sexual exploitation, linked to wider vulnerabilities and risk, rather than it being an acute episode or event. Further work is required to monitor cases over time – as indicated above this could involve a continuation of this work by monitoring the 13 cases in conjunction with practitioners and managers.

The complexities and challenging circumstances of young people's lives was also reflected in those cases where specialist support and intervention was withdrawn when the young person's engagement / disengagement was problematic. While most children received continued support it was apparent that at least three (23%) young people had some services suspended because of lack of engagement and in a further two cases VYP processes did not appear to be implemented because of lack of engagement. While young people who have been sexually exploited present challenges of engagement and successful interventions (Lebloch and King 2006), the question perhaps needs reframing to ask why services are not able to engage young people with challenging and complex needs, rather than labelling them 'difficult to engage'.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This short, time limited scoping study was designed to estimate the prevalence of risk of sexual exploitation of vulnerable young people in Glasgow and to inform future policy. The work identified that a third of young people looked after and accommodated by social work services in residential units are at significant risk of / harmed by sexual exploitation. It also highlighted the complexities and challenges involved in the assessment and analysis of the often contradictory and unclear information in relation to the potential indicators of sexual exploitation and risk to children and young people.

The complex needs and vulnerability of the young people identified as 'high risk' was clear and in this respect this group exhibited vulnerability and risk factors at a substantiality higher rate than the 'lower risk' group. Multi-agency input to address the multiple risks was apparent, but this was also accompanied at times by uncoordinated responses when faced with extremely complex and challenging behaviours and circumstances.

Although risk was routinely mentioned in relation to potential indicators, and often combined for cumulative risk statements, analysis in relation to the consideration of a



combination of the factors being indicative of sexual exploitation, and clearly recorded in the case files, was sometimes compromised by assessments focussing on factors in isolation, alluding to a general, rather than specific risk. It appeared that workers often struggled how to frame assessments and analyses, with an uncertainty of what constituted evidence (Lebloch and King 2006). While this may be a result of the absence of disclosure and / or clear 'evidence' it was also apparent (supported by subsequent discussion with managers) that the Glasgow CPC sexual exploitation guidance, or research evidence, was not routinely used to aid assessment of risk.

The overriding impression from the scoping study was not that indicators were missed or not recorded, but there had not always been a focussed assessment in relation to sexual exploitation in the context of guidance and ongoing and emerging research. Identifying young people at risk, or being exploited, is contingent on professionals being fully informed and aware of the issues and confident enough in their knowledge base and understanding to name and address the issue in the absence of clear disclosures and 'evidence'. The complexity of the backgrounds and circumstances of the young people, and the resulting risks and needs, coupled with conceptual and practical issues of 'choice' and 'agency', present both young people and professionals with many dilemmas and an absence of clarity which challenge practice and policy decisions. However, the emerging evidence nationwide indicates that responses to date have often fallen short in effectively addressing child sexual exploitation. This scoping study should be considered as the baseline for future research and practice developments in Glasgow to begin effectively addressing the issues.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Framing recommendations based on a small-scale local scoping study utilising single agency records designed to estimate the prevalence of sexual exploitation is problematic. However, the indicative findings of this work, in conjunction with recent UK wide case reviews and the Scotland wide review, indicate that specific recommendations for future policy, practice and research within a Glasgow framework may help in developing responses.

- Repeat the scoping study, utilising the indicator matrix, on other vulnerable / at risk groups to better ascertain the prevalence of sexual exploitation in the city.
- Provide specific multi-agency training for managers and front line workers around the issues of sexual exploitation.
- Ensure that practitioners are familiar with the potential indicators of vulnerability, and specific risk factors of sexual exploitation.
- Ensure that practitioners and managers are more 'proactive' in identifying concerns rather than waiting for children and young people to 'disclose'.
- Ensure that services / VYP processes are not concluded or withdrawn because a young person is 'not engaging'.

- Develop a tool for practitioners that provides an evidence based resource for workers to more readily identify the risks associated with sexual exploitation. Drawing on the indicators utilised for this scoping study this development could incorporate a traffic light system of concerns.
- Rewrite the Vulnerable Young Person sexual exploitation guidance incorporating recent evidence, practice knowledge and research and ensure that the guidance is consulted when there are concerns around the issue of risk of sexual exploitation.
- Establish a child sexual exploitation working group to adopt a strategic overview of policy, practice and research into all forms of exploitation. (Merging with the already well established child trafficking sub group of the Child Protection Committee VYP may be a possible way forward – looking at child exploitation overall).
- Commission further research and practice developments to inform and implement best practice models. Ensure that future policy and practice developments are located in a robust monitoring and evaluation framework.
- In a collaborative, action research process between practitioners, managers and researchers monitor the 13 cases identified as 'high risk' over the next 12 months to provide comment on assessment, intervention and outcomes.

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All web references accessed January 2013

## Appendix 1 - CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION – POTENTIAL INDICATOR MATRIX

Health	
Physical injuries / symptoms of sexual / physical no explanations	
Chronic fatigue	
Sexually active	
Recurring or multiple sexually transmitted infection	
Pregnancy and / or seeking abortion	
Evidence of substance use (drugs or alcohol)	
Sexually risky behaviour (multiple partners)	
Self harming (cutting; overdose; eating disorder)	
Low self image / self esteem	
Significantly older girl / boyfriend (sexual relationships)	
Behaviour	
Volatile behaviour exhibiting extreme mood swings / use of abusive language	
Aggressive / violent behaviour	
Involved in petty crime (shoplifting / stealing)	
Secretive behaviour	
Entering or leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults / known CSE adults	
Leaving home / care setting in clothing unusual for the individual child (inappropriate for age, borrowing clothing from older people etc; overtly sexualised clothing)	
Has money, expensive clothes, mobile phones or other possessions without plausible explanation	
Unusual hours / regular patterns of child leaving or returning to placement	
Change in appearance	
Detachment from age appropriate activities	

Social relationships	
Unexplained relationships with older adults	
Isolated from peers	
Inappropriate use of internet and forming relationships, particularly with adults, via internet	
Phone calls / text messages / letters from unknown / multiple adults	
Adults or older youths loitering outside child usual place of residence	
Associating with other young people who are known to be sexually exploited / clipping (money then run)	
Accounts of social activities with no plausible explanation of the source of necessary funding	
Movement / location	
Missing long periods (2+ nights) with no known home base	
Pattern of street homelessness / unsuitable accommodation	
Gone missing from local authority care	
Placement breakdown	
Persistently missing, staying out overnight or returning late with no plausible explanation or known links	
Returning after having been missing looking well cared for in spite of having no known base	
Having keys to premises other than those known about	
Going missing / found in areas where they have no known links	
Education	
Truancy / suspension / disengagement	
Behavioural - poor concentration or memory, irritable / unsociable / aggressive behaviour in school or placement	

Exploitation	
Located / seen in a place known to be used for sexual exploitation (hot spots, flats, cars, houses etc)	
Being taken to clubs/hotels/houses and engaging in sexual activity	
Discloses sexual/ physical assault	
Discloses sexual/ physical assault – followed by refusal to complain or withdrawal of complaint	
Reports from reliable sources suggest likelihood of sexual exploitation	
Abduction / forced imprisonment	
Paid / given money for sex	
Under 16 and meeting adults to engage in sexual activity	
Family history and relationships	
History of abuse / neglect / domestic violence	
Hostility in relationships to parents / carers / family members	
<span style="background-color: orange; padding: 2px;">Warning signs</span>	<span style="background-color: red; padding: 2px;">Strong indicators</span>
<p>Adapted from                      Durham SCB (undated) <a href="http://www.durham-lscb.gov.uk/documents/Child%20Sexual%20Exploitation/CSE%20Risk%20assessment%20matrix.doc">www.durham-lscb.gov.uk/documents/Child%20Sexual%20Exploitation/CSE%20Risk%20assessment%20matrix.doc</a>                      Leicester SCB (2011)  <a href="http://lscb.proceduresonline.com/pdfs/LSCB%20CSE%20MULTI%20AGENCY%20PRACTICE%20GUIDANCE.pdf">http://lscb.proceduresonline.com/pdfs/LSCB%20CSE%20MULTI%20AGENCY%20PRACTICE%20GUIDANCE.pdf</a>                      DCSF(2009)<a href="http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DCSF-00689-2009">www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DCSF-00689-2009</a>                      Barnardo's(2007)<a href="http://www.barnardos.org.uk/barnardo_s_cymru_sexual_exploitation_risk_assessment_framework_report_-_english_version-2.pdf">www.barnardos.org.uk/barnardo_s_cymru_sexual_exploitation_risk_assessment_framework_report_-_english_version-2.pdf</a></p>	

## Appendix 2 - CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION POTENTIAL INDICATORS by LOWER RISK (n=26) & HIGH RISK GROUP (after phase 2; n=13)

Health	Lower risk	High risk
Physical injuries / symptoms of sexual / physical no explanations	-	8 (62)
Chronic fatigue	-	2 (15)
Sexually active	5 (19)	10 (77)
Recurring or multiple sexually transmitted infection	-	1 (4)
Pregnancy and / or seeking abortion	-	1 (4)
Evidence of substance use (drugs or alcohol)	18 (69)	13 (100)
Sexually risky behaviour (multiple partners)	2 (8)	6 (46)
Self harming (cutting; overdose; eating disorder)	8 (31)	8 (62)
Low self image / self esteem	-	3 (23)
Significantly older girl / boyfriend (sexual relationships)	1 (4)	6 (46)
<b>Behaviour</b>		
Volatile behaviour exhibiting extreme mood swings / use of abusive language	16 (62)	11 (85)
Aggressive / violent behaviour	14 (54)	11 (85)
Involved in petty crime (shoplifting / stealing)	8 (31)	10 (77)
Secretive behaviour	-	6 (46)
Entering or leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults / known CSE adults	-	4 (31)
Leaving home / care setting in clothing unusual for the individual child (inappropriate for age, borrowing clothing from older people etc; overtly sexualised clothing)	-	3 (23)
Has money, expensive clothes, mobile phones or other possessions without plausible explanation	1 (4)	7 (54)
Unusual hours / regular patterns of child leaving or returning to placement	-	4 (31)
Change in appearance	-	1 (4)
Detachment from age appropriate activities	-	-

Social relationships	Low risk	High risk
Unexplained relationships with older adults	1 (4)	13 (100)
Isolated from peers	1 (4)	6 (46)
Inappropriate use of internet and forming relationships, particularly with adults, via internet	2 (8)	7 (54)
Phone calls / text messages / letters from unknown / multiple adults	-	2 (15)
Adults or older youths loitering outside child usual place of residence	-	8 (62)
Associating with other young people who are known to be sexually exploited / clipping (money then run)	2 (8)	6 (46)
Accounts of social activities with no plausible explanation of the source of necessary funding	-	2 (15)
<b>Movement / location</b>		
Missing long periods (2+ nights) with no known home base	-	6 (46)
Pattern of street homelessness / unsuitable accommodation	-	2 (15)
Gone missing from local authority care	12 (46)	12 (92)
Placement breakdown	3 (12)	2 (15)
Persistently missing, staying out overnight or returning late with no plausible explanation or known links	4 (15)	12 (92)
Returning after having been missing looking well cared for in spite of having no known base	-	2 (15)
Having keys to premises other than those known about	-	-
Going missing / found in areas where they have no known links	1 (4)	8 (62)
<b>Education</b>		
Truancy / suspension / disengagement	14 (54)	7 (54)
Behavioural - poor concentration or memory, irritable / unsociable / aggressive behaviour in school or placement	16 (62)	9 (69)

Exploitation	Lower risk	High risk
Located / seen in a place known to be used for sexual exploitation (hot spots, flats, cars, houses etc)	2 (8)	10 (77)
Being taken to clubs/hotels/houses and engaging in sexual activity	1 (4)	5 (38)
Discloses sexual/ physical assault	5 (19)	10 (77)
Discloses sexual/ physical assault – followed by refusal to complain or withdrawal of complaint	-	4 (31)
Reports from reliable sources suggest likelihood of sexual exploitation	-	12 (92)
Abduction / forced imprisonment	-	1 (4)
Paid / given money for sex	-	3 (23)
Under 16 and meeting adults to engage in sexual activity	-	10 (77)
<b>Family history and relationships</b>		
History of abuse / neglect / domestic violence	11 (42)	5 (38)
Hostility in relationships to parents / carers / family members	14 (54)	10 (77)
warning signs	Strong indicator	

Adapted from  
 Durham SCB (undated) [www.durham-lscb.gov.uk/documents/ChildSexualExploitationPotentialIndicators.pdf](http://www.durham-lscb.gov.uk/documents/ChildSexualExploitationPotentialIndicators.pdf)  
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