

'Not a world away'

The sexual exploitation of children and young people in Northern Ireland

Believe in children



Barnardo's
Northern Ireland

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List of abbreviations

ACPC	Area Child Protection Committee
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CEOP	Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre
CJI	Criminal Justice Inspectorate (NI)
CRC	(United Nations) Committee on the Rights of the Child
CSE	Child sexual exploitation (risk assessment coding category)
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DHSSPS	Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (NI)
HSC	Health and Social Care
LAC	Looked-after child/children
MVPLO	Missing and Vulnerable Persons Liaison Officer
NI	Northern Ireland
NRM	National Referral Mechanism
OFMDFM	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (NI)
PPS	Public Prosecution Service
PPU	Public Protection Unit (PSNI)
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
RCPC	Regional Child Protection Committee
RQIA	The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority
RSHO	Risk of Sexual Harm Order
SA	Sexual abuse/assault (risk assessment coding category)
SBNI	Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland
SERAF	Sexual exploitation risk assessment framework (Wales)
SOPO	Sexual Offences Prevention Order
UK	United Kingdom
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNOCINI	Understanding the Needs of Children in NI (assessment framework)
YLT	Young Life and Times (Survey by ARK)

Participant types

Contributions by the 110 professional interviewees are arranged according to the following 10 categories:

- PSNI
- other criminal justice
- Trust management
- fieldwork (HSC Trust)
- residential (HSC Trust)
- health (HSC Trust)
- Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA)
- voluntary care/aftercare
- voluntary therapeutic
- voluntary youth support.

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Foreword



Barnardo's Northern Ireland is very pleased to be publishing what I believe to be landmark research into the sexual exploitation of children and young people within Northern Ireland. Our staff have been working with young people abused through sexual exploitation over the last decade and have seen, time and time again, the devastating impact that sexual exploitation has on their lives. We are therefore very grateful to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for providing the support and funding to undertake research into this issue, in order to inform future responses to it.

The research confirms what we have long suspected; child sexual exploitation is occurring in villages, towns and cities across NI, mostly behind closed doors. It affects both young females and young males, most frequently those in their early teenage years. Unsurprisingly, those with existing vulnerabilities experience a disproportionate risk, with abusers seeking to exploit their unmet needs as a means of entrapping them into abusive situations.

Some of the statistics and stories contained within this report are shocking and upsetting; however, they reflect the reality of what these young people are experiencing. Whilst it might be difficult to accept, we need to open our eyes to the realities of this abuse. As adults, we have a responsibility, whether as professionals or as members of the public, to acknowledge that child sexual exploitation exists within NI and to make every effort to protect our children and young people from what is simply an unacceptable crime and assault on their young lives.

I urge the relevant bodies to consider their role in preventing and responding to this form of abuse and call upon them to enact the recommendations contained within this report, without undue delay.

Lynda Wilson, CBE
Director, Barnardo's Northern Ireland

Chapter one: Context

1.1 Background to the research

Although the sexual exploitation of children and young people has previously been identified as an issue of concern within Northern Ireland (NI), little has been known about the scale and nature of the issue, or indeed ‘what works’ in preventing and responding to it. This has inevitably limited the degree to which we can effectively protect children and young people from this form of sexual abuse.

In 2009, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) provided the Barnardo’s Safe Choices service with funding to undertake exploratory research into this issue, with a particular focus on the risks present for children in or missing from care in NI. The research was undertaken over two years from summer 2009 to summer 2011. This report presents the key findings of the work.

1.2 Structure of the report

Chapters one and two of the report set the context of the research. This chapter presents the aims and objectives of the work, a brief review of the existing body of sexual exploitation literature within the United Kingdom (UK) and an overview of the legislative and policy context within which the research occurred. Chapter two outlines the methodology employed within the research and the sample of participants and cases included within it.

Chapters three to five present the quantitative findings of the research and a brief discussion as to the significance of these in relation to the extent of sexual exploitation among different populations of young people within NI. Chapter three presents information on reported cases of concern within a sample of 1,102 young people known to social services.

Chapter four presents assessed levels of risk within the same group, calculated on the basis of a sexual exploitation risk assessment model from Wales. Chapter five considers risk within the wider youth population, presenting findings on self-reported experiences of sexual exploitation by the 786 16-year-olds who completed the 2010 ARK Young Life and Times (YLT) Survey.

Chapters six to eight present findings from the qualitative aspects of the research, namely interviews with professionals and young people, and case file reviews. Commentary on the significance of these findings is woven throughout the chapters where relevant. Chapter six considers the different types of sexual exploitation known to be occurring within NI. Chapter seven presents information on the types of people perpetrating this abuse and the types of young people affected by it. Chapter eight explores the adequacy of current responses to the issue, highlighting both examples of promising practice and areas in which further progress is required. Chapter nine concludes the report with a brief synopsis of the key findings of the work and a series of recommendations on the way statutory bodies within NI can better respond to this issue in the future.

1.3 Aims and objectives of the research

The overall aim of the research was to increase knowledge and understanding of the sexual exploitation of children and young people in NI, in order to aid better prevention of, and responses to, the issue in the future. Specifically the research sought to:

- source and collate information on the ‘known’ extent and nature of the issue
- identify the risks for children in or missing from care (the predominant clientele of the

service conducting the research and a known high-risk group)

- explore stakeholder views on how statutory services can better respond to incidences of known or suspected sexual exploitation.

Secondary research objectives were to:

- identify examples of promising practice in relation to protecting children and young people from sexual exploitation
- identify areas for further research
- increase awareness of the issue of sexual exploitation through the conduct of the research.

1.4 Definition of sexual exploitation

The definition of sexual exploitation used within the research was based on that adopted by the National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People. It is also in line with that used in statutory safeguarding guidance on the issue in England and Wales (DCSF 2009; Welsh Assembly 2010). It is an umbrella term that covers a number of different possible scenarios affecting both males and females. Common to all are some form of exchange and an imbalance of power:

Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse¹ in which children or young people are exploited, coerced and/or manipulated into engaging in some form of sexual activity in return for something they need or desire and/or for the gain of a third person. The ‘something’ received by the child or young person can include both tangible items such as food, somewhere to stay, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes or money and more intangible ‘rewards’ such as perceived affection, protection or a sense of value or belonging. Fear of what might happen if they do not comply can also be a significant influencing factor.

Sexual exploitation can manifest itself in many different forms, including grooming, abuse by an individual who has established a ‘seemingly consensual’ relationship with a child or young person, informal ‘introductions’ to other (potential) abusers and the formal prostituting of the child. Children and young people can also find themselves exploited through the production and distribution of sexual images or through exposure to such images. Common to all these scenarios is an imbalance of power in favour of the abuser and some degree of coercion, intimidation, exploitation, violence and/or enticement of the child or young person (adapted from National Working Group definition/DCSF 2009 Guidance).

For the purposes of the research and this report, children and/or young people are defined as those under 18 years of age. Although other forms of sexual exploitation are recognised to exist among adults, when the term is used within this report, it refers only to the sexual exploitation of children and young people, as given in this definition.

1.5 Summary of existing sexual exploitation research

A significant body of UK research evidence has emerged in relation to the sexual exploitation of children and young people within the last decade.² While the space restrictions of this report do not permit the inclusion of a full review of this literature, a number of key emerging themes are highlighted below, as context for the findings of this research.

While recognising that many different forms of sexual exploitation exist (as in the definition in section 1.4), research repeatedly observes that the clandestine nature of the

1 The sexual exploitation of children and young people falls under the definition of sexual abuse contained within Co-operating to Safeguard Children (DHSSPS 2003) and the Area Child Protection Committees’ Regional Policy and Procedures (ACPCs 2005) – forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities.

2 While a small number of studies have included NI within their remit, most have focused on what is known about the issue in England, and to a lesser extent, Scotland and Wales.

abuse makes it difficult to determine the actual numbers of children and young people affected by it. Studies repeatedly identify a failure to systematically recognise those at risk of sexual exploitation, with one study by Harper and Scott (2006) estimating that some areas were under-identifying numbers of young people at risk by as much as 80 per cent. Identified reasons for this include variable levels of awareness among practitioners, inadequate intelligence gathering and information sharing, low levels of reporting by young people and the absence of adequate standardised recording systems (Harris and Robinson 2007; CEOP 2011).³

Research also repeatedly shows that, although no young person is immune from sexual exploitation, particular life experiences are associated with increased risk (Scott and Skidmore 2006; Clutton and Coles 2007; Pearce 2009). These include:

- prior (sexual) abuse or neglect
- family dysfunction (domestic violence, family breakdown, parental drug or alcohol misuse etc)
- being in care (multiple placement moves, rejection, lack of positive attachments, peer introductions to exploitative adults etc)
- going missing or running away from home or a care placement
- substance misuse
- disengagement in education
- social isolation and/or low self-esteem.

While the presence of one or more of these factors may increase vulnerability to sexual exploitation, they are not the actual cause of it. Nor is any factor a definite determinant of subsequent abuse. It is the interplay of these and other factors, together with exposure to someone who would take advantage of these vulnerabilities and inadequate

protective structures to mediate against this risk, that culminate in a young person being abused through sexual exploitation (Melrose 2004; Creegan et al 2005).

Most identified cases of sexual exploitation relate to adolescents. A recent report on localised grooming across the UK identified 14 and 15 years as the most common ages at which concerns about a child being sexually exploited first come to the attention of agencies (CEOP 2011). This is not to say that concerns did not exist prior to this, or that younger children are not also at risk. Barnardo's reports children as young as 10 being referred to its specialist sexual exploitation/missing support services across the UK (Barnardo's 2011).

Although both males and females are known to be at risk of sexual exploitation, significantly higher proportions of females (at least four times that of males) were identified across the wide range of studies reviewed. All note, however, that these gender differences are probably affected by lower levels of awareness of risk among males and additional barriers faced by males in disclosing (Palmer 2001; Harper and Scott 2006; Barnardo's 2011).

The body of research evidence highlights that cases of sexual exploitation present a number of unique challenges to professionals trying to identify and respond to risk. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Sexual exploitation is often only one of many presenting issues of concern. Other issues such as drug or alcohol misuse, offending behaviour or absconding, can cloud identification of sexual exploitation and create difficulties in providing appropriate responses to it (Clutton and Coles 2007; Pearce 2009).

³ The references cited here and throughout the rest of the report are examples of relevant work, rather than comprehensive lists.

- Many young people will not see themselves as victims and will therefore not want to be 'rescued' from their abuser(s). This can be because of an emotional attachment to their abuser and/or because they feel they are in control of the situation, 'choosing' to use their bodies to obtain money, drugs or other things they need. While not denying the agency of the young person, there is an onus on professionals to consider the views of young people in the light of the wider context of personal and structural vulnerability, a power imbalance in favour of the abuser and a frequent absence of other viable alternatives. An attempt to exercise agency within a structure of constraint should not be misinterpreted as negating the need for protection and support (Calder 2001; Melrose 2004; Coy 2008).
- Many young people who have been sexually exploited can, as a result of their chaotic backgrounds and experiences of abuse, be difficult to work with and resistant to social work support. They can present as 'streetwise' or 'problematic' rather than as in need of support. They can miss appointments. They can refuse to engage with, or be abusive to workers. It is important that such behaviours are not misinterpreted as a young person not being in need of or deserving support (Ayre and Barrett 2000; Pearce 2009).

As a result of these and other issues (e.g. resource constraints, lack of professional awareness), research indicates that adolescents experiencing sexual exploitation have historically been, and in many cases continue to be, less effectively protected within statutory safeguarding structures than babies and young children. They can be viewed as less deserving or less in need of protection. Some can even be viewed as bringing the abuse upon themselves,

through their perceived 'provocative' or 'delinquent' behaviour. The body of research evidence concludes that there needs to be a greater shift in thinking to acknowledge that adolescents, even those who appear streetwise and in control, can also be victims of abuse as a result of their social, economic and/or emotional vulnerability (Calder 2001; Melrose 2004; Harper and Scott 2006; Pearce 2010).

The body of research evidence also clearly indicates that an effective response to the issue of sexual exploitation requires a multi-faceted, multi-agency approach that proactively addresses three core areas: the prevention of sexual exploitation, the protection of sexually exploited young people and the prosecution of abusers. Dedicated senior-level sexual exploitation coordinators and co-located inter-agency models of response are identified as particularly effective mechanisms for driving forward such a response. Clear inter-agency protocols, statutory performance indicators and reporting obligations are also identified as key elements of ensuring a consistent and effective strategic approach (Harris and Robinson 2007; Jago and Pearce 2008; Jago 2010).

1.6 Identification of sexual exploitation within NI literature

Although never the sole focus of the work, the sexual exploitation of children and young people in NI has been identified as an issue of concern in a number of different reports during the past 10 years.⁴ These include a statutory inspection of child protection services (DHSSPS 2006), a report on pathways to secure accommodation by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA 2011) and a number of children's rights reviews (NICCY 2008; Save the Children and Children's Law Centre 2008). The issue has also been highlighted in research into

⁴ Its existence and impact have also been identified within numerous guidance and strategy documents, as outlined in section 1.8.

young runaways (Raws 2001), human trafficking (Dudley 2006; Martynowicz et al 2009), residential care (Kilpatrick et al 2008), secure accommodation (Sinclair and Geraghty 2008) and adult prostitution (Department of Justice 2011).

These reports collectively reveal that sexual exploitation has been an ongoing issue of concern within NI throughout the last decade, both in terms of its existence and in terms of the adequacy of responses to it. They identify a number of different types of sexual exploitation within NI, including organised abuse through prostitution, 'self-organised' exchange of sex for money or other goods, trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, inappropriate 'relationships' with older males and Internet exploitation (Raws 2001; Dudley 2006; Montgomery-Devlin 2008; Martynowicz et al. 2009).

While acknowledging risk across the youth population, many of these reports identify children in care (most notably those in residential units) to be at particular risk of sexual exploitation. A number of different reasons are noted for this, including increased individual vulnerability, heightened risks associated with going missing and the specific targeting of this population by abusers (DHSSPS 2006; NICCY 2008; Save the Children and Children's Law Centre 2008; RQIA 2011).

A failure to adequately protect, on the part of statutory bodies, is also identified as a significant contributory risk factor for some young people in care. A 2006 inspection of child protection services in Northern Ireland highlighted a number of different shortcomings in this regard, including inconsistent application of the Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) policy and procedures, inadequate management of absconding behaviours, a disjunction between

risk assessment and subsequent care planning, failure to deter 'risky individuals' associating with children in residential care, a failure to investigate allegations of abuse in the absence of a young person's complaint and an associated failure to pursue third-party complaints in such situations (DHSSPS 2006). A 2008 review of the use of secure accommodation in NI (Sinclair and Geraghty 2008) also raised concerns about statutory responses to absconding and associated risks (including that of 'inappropriate relationships with older people'). Particular concerns were raised about the crisis management response observed, the fragmented nature of support services and the appropriateness of secure accommodation as a response to absconding and other concerns (short-term benefits but limited ability to bring about lasting behavioural change). A 2011 RQIA report on 10 young people's pathways to secure accommodation also highlighted some difficulties in the delivery of therapeutic support to, and the effectiveness of protective strategies for, some of the young people in their study, including those at risk of sexual exploitation.

A number of initiatives have been introduced in recent years that have begun to address some of these concerns. These include the introduction of regional guidance on responding to young people who go missing, the funding of a specialist support service for children missing from care, an enhanced role for senior social work practitioners and the establishment and work of the Public Protection Units (PPUs) within the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). However, while such developments are to be welcomed, there remain a number of key areas in which further progress is still required. These are explored further in Chapter eight.

1.7 Existing prevalence data

Prevalence data on sexual exploitation is not routinely collected within NI at present. Statistics on sexual offences against children are available, but they do not distinguish between those occurring within the context of sexual exploitation and those occurring in other contexts. They are also only a partial representation of the issue as they record only those cases brought to the attention of the authorities, which are known to be only a small proportion of the true extent of the issue (Allnock 2010). In spite of these limitations, they still provide useful contextual information for this research:

- PSNI statistics reveal that 56 per cent of all victims of sexual offences within NI are under 18 years of age (PSNI 2011). Looking specifically at the experiences of adolescents, PSNI statistics report a total of 613 recorded sexual offences against 12 to 17 year olds in 2010-11 (PSNI response to data request).
- Provisional statistics from the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) reveal that prosecutorial decisions were made on 77 different suspects in 2010-11 under Part 3 of the Sexual Offences (NI) Order (offences against children). Of these, 57 were prosecuted through the courts and 20 received a diversionary course of action (PPS response to data request).
- NI Courts Service data for 2009 reports 879 convicted charges of sexual offences against children under 18, against 91 different offenders, across both the Magistrates' Courts and the Crown Court. Provisional data for 2010 indicates 651 convicted charges against 81 individuals (NI Courts Service response to data request).⁵

Statistics on child protection also offer useful context for this research. However, as with the sexual offences statistics presented above, they do not differentiate between sexual exploitation and other forms of sexual abuse. Official statistics reveal that 416 children were on the child protection register for reasons of sexual abuse within NI, as of 31 March 2010 (DHSSPS 2010a).⁶ It is important to note that these figures only include cases that are known to statutory bodies and have reached a certain threshold. Research shows that the majority of sexual abuse is never reported: a large-scale study by the NSPCC found that 72 per cent of sexually abused children did not tell anyone about their abuse (Cawson et al 2000). Follow-up research in 2009 found that 1 in 9 of the 1,761 young adults (aged 18 to 24) surveyed said they had experienced some form of contact sexual abuse during childhood (NSPCC 2011).

Reporting requirements under Schedule 5 of the Children's Homes Regulations (NI) 2005 provide further insights into reported risk of sexual exploitation within the sub-population of children in care. Under these regulations, children's homes are required to notify placing Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts of incidences of known/suspected involvement in sexual exploitation. Two HSC Trusts responded to a data request to provide statistics on such incidences – one reported 36 incidences relating to seven different young people over one year (1 January to 31 December 2010); the other reported seven incidences relating to six young people within an equivalent period (1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011).

Discussions with a few staff in a number of the HSC Trusts indicated that data about sexual exploitation may not always be routinely reported and collected as required in the Children's

⁵ The three sets of statistics cannot be viewed comparatively given the different recording procedures (by victim, suspect or offence) and the different timeframes covered by the data.

⁶ Half (n=208) were also registered for reasons of neglect and/or physical abuse.

Homes Regulations. These individuals observed that where absconding was also an issue, cases may be recorded as this and not also as a separate incident of sexual exploitation. Examination of the incident log for absconding provided by one of the HSC Trusts, cross-referenced with the incident log for sexual exploitation concerns, would support this assertion. This is something that requires redress, as failure to independently record concerns about sexual exploitation is masking the true extent of the issue.

1.8 Policy/legislative context of sexual exploitation within NI

The Westminster government and NI Executive have made a number of different commitments in principle to protecting children and young people within NI from sexual exploitation. Some are specific to this issue; others are part of a wider commitment to safeguarding children and promoting their welfare. These are briefly outlined below as context for both the practice of the research and the findings subsequently presented within the report.

1.8.1 International commitments

The UK government has signed or ratified a number of different international conventions and protocols that place upon it obligations to protect children and young people from sexual exploitation and abuse. These include:

- the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – articles 34 and 35 stipulate a specific right to be protected from all forms of sexual exploitation, sexual abuse and trafficking (ratified December 1991).
- the Optional Protocol to the UNCRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (ratified December 2009).
- the Council of Europe

Convention on the Protection of Children and Young People against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (signed in May 2008; not yet ratified).

Unfortunately the obligations contained within these documents have not yet been fully realised. Commenting in 2002 and 2008, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) specifically identified sexual exploitation as an area in which the government was failing to deliver upon its commitments under the UNCRC. It called upon the government to take further action, specifically in relation to gaps in data collection and the treatment of victims (CRC 2002, 2008). Although some progress is observable in relation to the latter, further progress is still required within both fields.

1.8.2 The welfare of the child

The main piece of legislation governing the care, protection and upbringing of children within NI is the Children (NI) Order 1995. It covers both public and private law, addressing a wide range of issues, including services to children in need, child protection and looked-after children (LAC) away from home. The welfare of the child is given primacy within the Order, which forms the basis of a series of subsequent policy documents, as outlined below.

The 2006 10-year strategy for children and young people within NI, *Our Children and Young People: Our Pledge*, progresses the government's commitment to promoting the welfare of the child. The strategy establishes six high-level outcomes that all children and young people in NI should be able to enjoy. These include living in safety and living in a society that respects their rights. Though not specifically mentioned within this high-level document, this clearly includes the right to be protected from

sexual exploitation (OFMDFM 2006). Relevant commitments made within the accompanying action plans (OFMDFM 2007, 2008) include the introduction of new sexual offences legislation, the establishment of new safeguarding structures, the development of a common assessment model (UNOCINI), the development of best practice in the use of special measures within the criminal justice system and the development of pre-trial therapy for victims of sexual abuse.

1.8.3 Safeguarding

The more specific issue of safeguarding children and young people from sexual abuse has received considerable attention in recent years within the legislative and policy arena within NI. Safeguarding structures have been, and continue to be, undergoing considerable change, with the HSC Board and Trusts bedding into their new roles and the ongoing transition from a Regional Child Protection Committee (RCPC) and Trust Child Protection Panels to the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) and local Safeguarding Panels.⁷ A number of the key policies and procedures in relation to the safeguarding of children and young people and the investigation of abuse are also in the process of being reviewed at present. It is anticipated that as the new structures become established, further review and revision will follow.

NI does not yet have specific supplementary guidance on child sexual exploitation, as has been introduced in England and Wales in the last few years. In the absence of such a document, the principles and procedures for responding to such cases are primarily those outlined within Co-operating to Safeguard Children (DHSSPS 2003; under review), the Protocol for Joint Investigation by Social Workers and Police Officers of Alleged and Suspected Cases of Child Abuse (Health and Social Services

Boards et al 2004; under review) and the ACPCs' Regional Child Protection Policy and Procedures (ACPCs 2005).⁸

These documents specifically address a number of issues of particular relevance to this research, with specific reference to the commercial sexual exploitation of children, the risks associated with communications technology, and organised abuse. Some of the important principles and patterns of risk contained within these are:

Principles

- multi-agency responsibility for prevention, identification and response
- the importance of prevention and educative work
- the primacy of the welfare and safety of the child
- the principle of victimhood – a child cannot consent to be sexually exploited
- a recognition of the dynamics of grooming and dependence on an abuser
- the need for support and effective rehabilitation for victims of abuse
- a responsibility to investigate and prosecute those who coerce, exploit and abuse children in this manner.

Patterns of risk

- children of both sexes are affected
- particularly vulnerable young people include those estranged from families, those in (residential) care, those going missing, those disengaged from education, those with childhood experiences of abuse and those with drug/alcohol misuse
- much of the abuse occurs behind closed doors (off street).

While the recognition of the existence of sexual exploitation and the complexities inherent within it are to be commended, the types of sexual exploitation covered by these documents need to be extended to

⁷ As established under the Safeguarding Board Act (NI) 2011.

⁸ Additional guidance on dealing with sexual exploitation, in situations where children are also going missing from their home or placement, is provided in Regional Guidance on Police Involvement in Residential Units/ Safeguarding of Children Missing from Home and Foster Care (HSC Board and PSNI 2009; under review). This is outlined further in section 1.8.7.

include the full range of sexually exploitative situations that have subsequently been identified to be occurring within NI. The language used to describe situations of sexual exploitation also needs to be reconsidered. Phrases such as ‘children involved in’ or ‘opportunities to escape’ do not adequately reflect the abusive and coercive nature of these circumstances, or the fact that it is not the children’s responsibility to extricate themselves from these situations. The current and anticipated reviews of these documents offer an opportunity to address these limitations.

Further important commitments to the safeguarding of children and young people are contained within the more recent DHSSPS (2008a) Standards for Child Protection Services document.⁹ Of particular relevance to this topic are:

- a requirement that there be agreed inter-agency arrangements in place for the protection of children who have been abused or neglected, those living away from home, those who are exploited (including those exposed to child/human trafficking) and those exposed to potential abuse on the Internet (standard four)
- the need for staff to have sufficient training, knowledge, skills and experience for working with child protection and high-risk situations (standard seven)
- a requirement for appropriate systems to collate and analyse information on unmet need and critical incidents, in order to identify high risks requiring action (standard seven).

Specific guidance on safeguarding looked-after children was issued by DHSSPS in September 2010. This is aimed at addressing the issue of dual process between the looked-after and child protection systems and clearly states that, with the exception of predefined exceptional circumstances,

looked-after children should not be subject to a separate child protection plan (DHSSPS 2010b). The HSC Board was reviewing the practical implementation of this guidance at the time of writing, following some initial operational difficulties.

1.8.4 Sexual violence and abuse

The issue of sexual exploitation also falls within the wider issue of sexual violence and abuse, as defined within the 2008 regional strategy on this issue (DHSSPS 2008b). The strategy contains a specific section on the sexual exploitation of children and young people but, as per the documents previously outlined, it does so within a narrow framework of commercial sexual exploitation (online images of sexual abuse, commercial sex industry and trafficking). The strategy observes that:

There is increasing professional concern that some vulnerable children and young people are being lured or forced into sexual exploitation. As such, it can be particularly difficult for these children and young people to seek support. Government is therefore committed to ensuring that services are developed to provide specialist support and to make information available about the services on offer and how these can be accessed. In addition, work needs to be done to increase understanding amongst professionals about the needs and issues facing children involved in sexual exploitation. Much can be learned from the work carried out by the Barnardo’s project ‘Beyond the Shadows’,¹⁰ working with children who have been victims of sexual exploitation (DHSSPS 2008b:99)

Prioritising the needs of victims/survivors is a strong theme throughout both the strategy and the associated action plans, in terms of increasing confidence in the criminal justice

⁹ The issue of child sexual exploitation is also referenced within OFMDFM’s (2009) Cross Departmental Statement on the Protection of Children and Young People by the NI Executive, but this does not introduce any significant new commitments not already covered.

¹⁰ Predecessor to the Barnardo’s Safe Choices service.

system and the provision of quality support services to victims. The strategy also recognises the need for a more robust approach to dealing with offenders through, among other things, legal reform on sexual violence and abuse (see section 1.8.5)

1.8.5 Criminal and civil legislation on sexual offending

New legislation was introduced in 2008 to strengthen the criminal justice response to sexual offending against children. The Sexual Offences (NI) Order 2008 establishes a series of offences against children under the age of 16 (Part 3, articles 16 to 22). These include:

- sexual activity with a child
- causing or inciting a child to engage in sexual activity
- engaging in sexual activity in the presence of a child
- causing a child to watch a sexual act
- sexual offences against children committed by children or young persons
- arranging or facilitating commission of a sex offence against a child
- meeting a child following sexual grooming.

The Order also introduces additional specific offences, with higher maximum penalties, for the abuse of children under 13 years. Under the new Order, a child under 13 can never be argued to have consented to sexual activity; nor is there any defence of believing the child was of an older age.

While the legal age of consent is established at 16 years, the Order recognises that children aged 16 and 17 still require more protection than adults in a number of specific areas: abuse of a position of trust, familial sex offences, indecent photographs and abuse of a child through prostitution or pornography. These offences

therefore apply to acts against all children under the age of 18.

The law also provides for a number of civil remedies that can be used in cases of sexual offending. The PSNI can apply to the courts for a Sexual Offences Prevention Order (SOPO) to prohibit an offender's actions, after conviction of a sexual offence; the specific prohibitions contained within the Order can be determined according to the needs of the individual case. A Risk of Sexual Harm Order (RSHO) can also be used to place prohibitions on the actions of individuals who are believed to pose a sexual risk to another. Unlike a SOPO, these orders do not require a prior conviction. A RSHO can be applied for when there is evidence that a person aged 18 or over has, on at least two occasions, committed one of the following acts and there is reasonable cause to believe that an Order is necessary to protect a child/children from that individual:

- engaged in sexual activity involving a child or in the presence of a child
- caused/incited a child to watch a person engaging in sexual activity or to look at a moving or still image that is sexual
- given a child anything that relates to sexual activity or contains a reference to such activity
- had sexual communication with a child.

1.8.6 Children in care

Children in care are widely recognised to experience multiple forms of disadvantage compared to their non-looked-after peers (DHSSPS 2007; Coman and Devaney 2011). This includes greater risk of sexual exploitation (DHSSPS 2003; NICCY 2008).

The key pieces of legislation governing the admission of children into care, their care once in the system and their transition out of

it are the Children (NI) Order 1995, the Children (Leaving Care) Act NI 2002 and the Children's Homes Regulations (NI) 2005. A central theme throughout all of these is the statutory duty to safeguard and promote the child's welfare. This theme was further developed in both the Care Matters (DHSSPS 2007) and Families Matter (DHSSPS 2009) strategies, that together committed to supporting families, maintaining children within home environments (wherever possible) and improving the life outcomes of children in and leaving care.

Care Matters acknowledges children in care to be one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society. It identifies that they are more likely to be teenage parents, become unemployed or homeless, spend time in prison, experience mental health difficulties and have poorer educational attainment (DHSSPS 2007). However, in spite of previous recognition of the issue in other policy documents, there is no explicit reference to the increased risk of sexual exploitation.

Care Matters outlines a commitment to improving these outcomes, to ensuring safety, stability and security, and to listening to the voice of the child. Specific pledges made within this include:

- strengthening support to families and children where there is a risk of the children being taken into care, while ensuring that they are properly protected
- ensuring that children who come into care are in appropriate and stable placements
- ensuring that HSC Trusts have the necessary arrangements in place to act as corporate parents for children in care
- ensuring that the welfare of the child is always paramount and overrides all other considerations,

and that this principle remains at the heart of any strategies, policies, procedures or services to safeguard these children (DHSSPS 2007).

1.8.7 Children missing from care/home

Going missing is known to be associated with increased risk of sexual exploitation (HSC Board and PSNI 2009). Regional guidance was introduced in 2009 with the aim of improving statutory responses to this issue, both for children in care and those living at home. This guidance introduced a tiered response system, based on the assessed level of risk, in an effort to focus statutory resources on the more 'in need' cases. 'Suspected or confirmed sexual exploitation' is noted as justifying immediate coding at the highest level of risk. The protocol outlines the procedures to be followed by both the PSNI and HSC Trusts when children go missing and upon their return (HSC Board and PSNI 2009). Some operational difficulties were reported in relation to the protocol, which has now been reviewed. The revised version was due for publication at the time of writing, but is not yet available.

One of the options open to authorities when children go missing is the use of Recovery Orders to facilitate their return. Article 69 of the Children (NI) Order allows for the granting of a Recovery Order where a looked-after child under the age of 18 is abducted, has run away or is missing, and an individual is suspected to have 'knowingly and without lawful authority or reasonable excuse' induced, assisted or incited them to run away or stay away from the person responsible for their care (Article 68). If granted, a Recovery Order authorises the PSNI to enter premises to search for children and remove them, should the person not willingly produce them. Article four of the Child Abduction (NI) Order 1985 provides the legal basis for dealing with missing children outside

the care system. This attracts higher tariffs but only applies to children under the age of 16.

Separate procedures for dealing with trafficked children who go missing from care are outlined as part of the recently introduced Working Arrangements for the Welfare and Safeguarding of Child Victims of Human Trafficking (DHSSPS and PSNI 2011) and the UK government's strategy on human trafficking (Home Office 2011), which establish a framework for the support and rehabilitation of child victims of trafficking, including those trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

The issue of missing children received renewed attention when a proposed Private Member's Bill was tabled in the NI Assembly in 2010. This was intended to place a duty on DHSSPS to develop a strategy and action plan for preventing, protecting and safeguarding runaway and missing children and young people. It also proposed a duty on HSC Trusts and the PSNI to record statistics on missing incidences of children in care, beyond that currently existing under the Children's Homes Regulations (NI) 2005 (NI Assembly 2010). While the bill never progressed, a Strategic Action Plan on Children Missing from Home or Care was produced by the HSC Board in August 2010. The preamble to this Action Plan states that:

All instances of running away brought to the attention of Trusts should be taken seriously and acted on. Looked-after children are particularly vulnerable and may be targeted by those wishing to abuse and exploit them. These children depend on the Trust to act as their 'corporate parent'. A care-placement where the child or young person feels safe and secure, and where their concerns are taken seriously, is likely to be the most effective way of reducing the likelihood that

they will be motivated to run away. However, it may be necessary to take extra measures to make sure that they are effectively safeguarded and protected from exploitation (HSC Board 2010:3)

Specifically addressing the issue of sexual exploitation, it further recognises that:

Children [can] go absent or missing following grooming by adults who will seek to exploit them sexually. The supply of drugs and alcohol or the offering of gifts may be used to entice or coerce children into associations with inappropriate adults. Both girls and boys are at risk of sexual exploitation and those living within residential units are particularly vulnerable to being targeted in this way. Encouraging children to run to disrupt their placement is often part of the abuse... Some of these individuals actually target these children for the purpose of exploiting their vulnerabilities and as a result serious offences may be committed against these children (HSC Board 2010:3-4)

The Action Plan highlights the importance of a coordinated multi-agency response to dealing with this issue. It specifically commits to:

- collate existing baseline information
- implement revised Untoward Incident reporting mechanisms between HSC Trusts and the HSC Board
- synchronise data collation between the HSC Board and the PSNI, and improve strategic oversight of the issue of missing children
- complete revision of the missing children guidance, provide joint training for the PSNI and social workers, and implement the revised protocol
- establish a Safe Choices working group as a sub-committee of the

RCPC to provide strategic oversight for safeguarding children at risk of sexual exploitation.¹¹

Considered collectively, the documents and legislation outlined above afford considerable attention to the issue of sexual exploitation. However, while they provide a useful starting point for addressing the issue, a number of important gaps remain in terms of our understanding of sexual exploitation and the translation of these commitments and principles into practice. The transition to new safeguarding structures, and the continued work of the Children's Services Improvement Board, offer a unique opportunity for a thorough review of these systems and protocols and the development of new fit-for-purpose responses to the sexual exploitation of children and young people in NI.

¹¹ A 2011 update on the Action Plan reports that most of these actions are now in progress.



Chapter two: Methodology

2.1 Introduction

A multi-method approach was adopted within the research that combined both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. Further to secondary data collection and a policy/literature review, the four key elements within this were:

- practitioner risk assessments
- case file reviews
- interviews with professionals
- interviews with young people.

The findings of a complementary piece of work funded by Barnardo's NI – questions on sexual exploitation placed in the ARK 2010 YLT Survey – are also incorporated into this report. Further detail on each of these elements is presented below, together with an overview of the sample/participants within that element of the research.

2.2 Practitioner risk assessments

The data collection tool used to capture prevalence data was an adaptation of an existing sexual exploitation risk assessment framework (SERAF) developed by Barnardo's Cymru (Wales).¹² The original version of the tool has been widely used within Wales both to determine prevalence and to inform practice, and it is the recommended tool for assessing risk of sexual exploitation within the 2008 All Wales Child Protection Procedures.

The risk assessment tool was distributed to social workers across the five HSC Trusts within NI for completion on identified young people on their caseload (see below). Two main types of prevalence data were collected via the assessments they completed: (1) numbers of known cases of concern and (2) assessed levels of risk across the entire sample. The latter was determined on the basis of information provided in three vulnerability/risk indicator

sections taken from the original risk assessment tool. Information on cases of known concern was gathered from an additional distinct section (B) inserted into the tool solely for the purposes of this research. Information provided by social workers in section B was analysed separately and did not influence the assessed levels of risk in any way.

Given that the primary focus of the research was on the looked-after population, HSC Trust social work staff were asked to complete sexual exploitation risk assessments on all looked-after young people aged 12 to 17 years inclusive (excluding those receiving short-term respite care only). Risk assessments were requested on the entire population, rather than only those known to be at risk of sexual exploitation, in order to decrease the bias of the sample and facilitate calculation of prevalence rates within the population. Adopting this approach also facilitated inclusion of high-risk cases that might not yet have been identified.

Widening the focus slightly to consider the risks which other (non-LAC) young people known to social services might face, staff were also asked to complete risk assessments on all young people on their caseload who fulfilled any of the three additional inclusion criteria noted below:¹³

- relevant or qualifying child, aged 16 or 17, who has left care on or after their 16th birthday
- non-LAC child, aged 12 to 17 inclusive, placed on the child protection register in the last 12 months
- other 'at risk' child, aged 12 to 17 inclusive, in receipt of support from an adolescent/intensive support team.

A total of 1,102 completed risk assessments were returned from across

¹² An annotated blank copy of the risk assessment can be found in Appendix one.

¹³ HSC Trusts provided the researcher with an anonymised list of cases fulfilling each of the inclusion criteria at an agreed point in time. Following data cleaning and organisation, the researcher provided each social work team with a list of cases for which they should complete risk assessments. Cases were only ever identified by SOS-CARE ID so as to protect the identity of participants.

the five HSC Trusts. Three-quarters of all returns related to cases included under the looked-after inclusion criterion. The majority of the remainder related to cases included under the child protection criterion, with only a small number included under only the left care or intensive support criteria.

Data from the completed risk assessments were entered into SPSS Version 19 and analysed in order to identify overall risk levels and patterns of vulnerability. Comparisons were made using inferential statistics, primarily chi-squared tests. Those with a p value <0.05 are reported as significant.

Given the time delay between the draw down from the original population by the HSC Trusts and the completion of all risk assessments (up to four months in some HSC Trusts), some information about young people, such as age or LAC status, had changed when the assessment occurred. All subsequent analysis is based on young people's status at the point of assessment, as described by the social worker completing the risk assessment.

Each social work team that completed risk assessments received a risk report in return, identifying the assessed level of risk for each individual case at the point of assessment. Mindful of the need to support workers following identification of risk, Barnardo's Safe Choices practitioners were available to offer specialist advice and support where concerns were identified. A number of social work staff across the HSC Trusts availed themselves of this, both in terms of consultancy/advice for staff and direct work with the young people identified as experiencing or being at risk of sexual exploitation.

2.3 Case file reviews

A total of 29 individual case file reviews were conducted as part of the

research.¹⁴ The cases to be reviewed were purposively selected from the sub-sample of known/high-risk cases identified within the risk assessments, to ensure inclusion of the different types of sexual exploitation identified and different types of young people affected by this (gender, age, placement type etc).

Anonymised data was gathered on vulnerability/risk factors, patterns of behaviour associated with known/suspected sexual exploitation and responses to these risks. Gathering such information via case files negated the need to ask young people to talk directly about their personal experiences, given the potential upset/trauma associated with this. The findings of the case file review are integrated into the qualitative sections of the report.

2.4 Interviews with professionals

A total of 110 professional representatives from both the statutory and voluntary/community sector participated in individual or group interviews for the research. This included representation from a broad spectrum of disciplines, including social care, health, policing and justice, youth work and education.

Potential interviewees were initially identified via the Research Advisory Group and senior HSC Trust staff. Subsequent interviewees were identified via snowball sampling. Interviews were semi-structured but, given the exploratory nature of the research, were organised around broad themes for discussion rather than a set of predetermined questions.¹⁵ Interviews lasted an average of 45-60 minutes and yielded a broad and rich body of qualitative data that was subsequently thematically analysed using NVIVO Version 2.0. The findings are presented throughout the qualitative sections of the report.

¹⁴ One of the last planned reviews fell through and time constraints meant a replacement could not be organised.

¹⁵ A copy of the themes for discussion is available on request, as is a copy of the young people's materials.

All interviewees consented for the information they shared to be used in the research, as long as it was not personally identifiable or traceable back to them. Contributions are therefore presented by participant type, without reference to the HSC Trust, Policing District or geographical area in which they were based.¹⁶ An additional level of anonymity was granted to all participants with reference to information shared around paramilitary involvement in cases; in an effort to allay anxiety about sharing such information, this is presented without any reference to source.

2.5 Interviews with young people

A small number of interviews were conducted with young people aged 14 or above who were identified as having been at risk of or having experienced sexual exploitation. Although there were many ethical and safeguarding considerations inherent in undertaking this phase of the work, it was felt that it would yield unique insights that could not be sourced in any other way. This proved to be true in practice. Although only five young females participated in this phase of the research, the information they shared was honest and insightful and offers invaluable learning for how we can better identify and respond to this issue.

A number of different safeguards were set in place in order to ensure that the welfare of young people was paramount at all times. Informed consent was obtained prior to interview and again before the interview commenced. As with professional participants, young people had the opportunity at the end of their interview to withhold consent for parts of the interview that they would prefer not to be used. All discussions were conducted individually, although some of the participants availed themselves of the opportunity to have a supporter present with them. In each case, this

was the Safe Choices practitioner who had first approached them about the research. Interviews took place at a time and location suitable to the young person. The atmosphere was kept informal and questions and breaks were encouraged.

Vignettes were used to allow participants to offer informed comment on third-person scenarios, rather than requiring them to share details of their own personal experiences. That said, all of the young people chose to share from their own experience (to a greater or lesser extent) at some stage of the interview. This was sensitively and appropriately managed during the interview. Participants were also fully debriefed at the end of their interview and an agreed worker maintained contact with them in the days and weeks that followed to ensure that no adverse impact ensued.

2.6 Young Life and Times Survey data

As an accompaniment to the main DHSSPS-funded research, Barnardo's NI funded a series of questions relating to sexual exploitation in the ARK 2010 YLT Survey. This was distributed to all young people in NI who were on the child benefit register and had turned 16 in February/March 2010. The survey achieved a 21 per cent response rate, yielding a total of 786 responses.

All questions were accompanied by a set of predetermined responses from which the participants were asked to select their answers. This included an 'other' response option where young people could insert their own response should the predetermined options not apply. ARK coded all responses into an SPSS database and provided the researcher with a dataset for analysis. The findings of this analysis are presented in Chapter five of the report as an insight into the risks that the wider youth population is facing.

¹⁶ No quotations are included from the Barnardo's Safe Choices service, given that this is the service conducting the research.

2.7 Ethics/governance

The planned research was reviewed by experienced sexual exploitation researchers in England and Wales and by a local Advisory Group consisting of representation from DHSSPS, the HSC Board, an HSC Trust, RQIA, the PSNI, Queen's University of Belfast, the National Children's Bureau NI and Barnardo's NI.

The ethical protocol followed in the research was developed in accordance with the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care in NI (Research and Development Office 2006) and Barnardo's Statement

of Ethical Research Practice. The research was granted full ethical and governance approval from the Office for Research Ethics Committees NI and all five HSC Trust Research and Development Offices.

2.8 Sample overview

This section of the report presents further details on the sample on which the quantitative analysis presented in Chapters three and four is based. A total of 1,102 completed risk assessments were returned from across the five HSC Trusts. This represented an overall response rate of 65.4 per cent (see Table one).

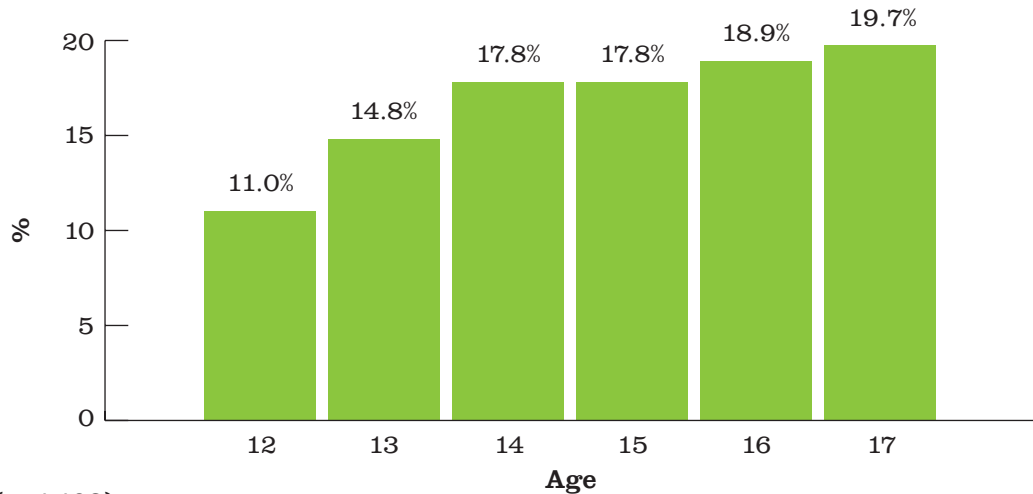
Table one: Completed risk assessments by HSC Trust

HSC Trust	Number of actual returns from Trust	Trust response rate (actual returns as % of potential returns from that Trust)	% of Overall Returns by Trust
Belfast	239	53.4	21.7
Northern	237	75.7	21.5
Southern	215	73.1	19.5
South Eastern	222	59.2	20.1
Western	176	68.7	16.0
Unknown (missing data)	13	n/a	1.2
Total	1,102	65.4	100.0



There was an approximately equal gender split in the 1,102 cases returned, with 52.1 per cent of returns relating to females and 47.9 per cent relating to males. There was also a wide distribution of ages, as illustrated in Figure one.

Figure one: Total sample by age



There was very little variation within the sample in terms of ethnicity, with 95.1 per cent of all cases described as white. The numbers were too small within the other categories to offer any further comment.

The religion of just under half of the sample (49.1 per cent) was noted to be Roman Catholic. A further 46.5 per cent were noted to be Protestant, with the religious status of the remaining 4.3 per cent¹⁷ noted as other (1.7 per cent), none (1.6 per cent) or unknown (1.0 per cent).

Just under three-quarters (70.7 per cent; n=779) of all returned cases were looked after at the point of assessment.¹⁸ This equates to 67.2 per cent of the overall 12-17-year-old LAC population and, as such, offers confidence in the conclusions drawn in this report.¹⁹

At different points throughout the report, the experiences of the LAC returns (n=779) will be contrasted with those of the non-LAC returns (n=259).

The latter category includes young people in the sample who are known to social services but not (at that time) in the looked-after system. It excludes those who are 16 or 17 and have left care (n=29) and those for whom this information was missing (n=35).

While not in care, all young people in the non-LAC sample had involvement with social services at the point of assessment. Wider inferences cannot therefore be drawn for the general youth population.

The vast majority (90.3 per cent) of the non-LAC cases were residing at home at the point of assessment. Only 10.9 per cent of the looked-after cases were in equivalent placements, with the vast majority being in non-familial foster care (41.8 per cent), kinship foster care (19.9 per cent) or residential care (19.7 per cent).

The vast majority (93.8 per cent) of cases had been known to social services for a year or more at the point of assessment: 52.6 per cent had been known for six or more years, 39.2 per

¹⁷ Percentages have been rounded up/down to one decimal place throughout the report. Consequently they do not always tally to exactly 100 per cent.

¹⁸ This includes both those on interim/full care orders and those who were voluntarily accommodated.

¹⁹ Comparison with DHSSPS data confirms that the sample is largely representative of the overall LAC population in terms of gender, age and placement type.

cent had been known for ten or more years. Just over one-fifth (21.1 per cent) were on the child protection register at the point of assessment.

Almost one in six cases (15.6 per cent) was described as having a learning disability; 2.9 per cent were described as having a physical disability. Almost one in seven (13.6 per cent) was involved with the youth justice service at the point of assessment.²⁰

More than half of the overall sample (56.4 per cent) were involved with some form of support service at the point of assessment. The types of service most commonly identified within this were a counselling or therapeutic agency (23.2 per cent), an education support service (15.3 per cent) and a youth/family support service (11.4 per cent).



²⁰ Higher rates of both learning disability and youth offending were noted within the LAC populations (17.5 per cent had a learning disability, compared to 10.0 per cent of the non-LAC population. 15.4 per cent were involved in youth offending compared to 7.5 per cent of non-LAC population).

Chapter three: Reported cases of sexual exploitation

Key findings

The findings below relate to a sample of 1,102 cases. All are known to social services; the majority (70.7 per cent) are looked after:

- Social workers identified sexual exploitation to be an issue of concern for almost one in seven young people in the sample (13.3 per cent; n=147).
- Cases of concern were identified in all five HSC Trusts, but identification rates ranged from 9.2 per cent to 18.0 per cent across different Trusts.
- Sexual exploitation was identified as an issue of concern for more than four times as many females as males (21.3 per cent versus 4.9 per cent).
- The vast majority (88.0 per cent) of young people were under the legal age of consent when concerns about sexual exploitation were first identified. Most were aged 12-15 years, with 14 years the most frequent age at which concerns were first identified.
- Sexual exploitation was identified as an issue of concern for 33.1 per cent of those involved with the youth justice system at the point of assessment, compared to 10.2 per cent of their peers with no such involvement.
- Rates of sexual exploitation within the LAC sample varied by placement type, with sexual exploitation identified as an issue of concern for 40.5 per cent of LAC in residential care, compared to 10.7 per cent of those in at-home placements and less than 5 per cent of those in non-familial or kinship foster care.
- Sexual exploitation was identified as an issue of concern for almost two-thirds (63.6 per cent) of young females in residential care.
- Seven different types of sexual exploitation were identified in the risk assessments. Three were particularly prevalent: the 'party house' scenario (n=63), sexually exploitative relationships (n=35) and abuse through prostitution (n=24).
- The vast majority (94.7 per cent) of known abusers were male.
- Most cases (91.2 per cent) involved adult abusers. However, 23.7 per cent of sexual exploitation cases involved some degree of peer exploitation (solely peer exploitation in 8.8 per cent of cases; both peers and adults exploiting in 14.9 per cent).
- Concerns often continued over a prolonged period – 46.7 per cent of cases were noted to last at least a year; 16.8 per cent were noted to last three or more years. More prolonged abuse was observed among females than males.
- In 49.1 per cent of the LAC cases where this could be calculated, concerns about sexual exploitation emerged after entry to care. In half of the remaining cases, concerns from the pre-care period continued after entry into care.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data gathered from section B of the risk assessment tool, cases of known or suspected sexual exploitation as reported by social workers. As noted in Chapter two, this section was inserted into the original tool as a stand-alone addition in order to gather data on known levels of concern. It does not influence the risk scores presented in the next chapter, nor is it influenced by them.

When interpreting the results below, it should be borne in mind that the figures presented include only those cases where social workers have identified sexual exploitation to be an issue of concern. As highlighted previously in Chapter one, evidence from other studies strongly indicates that such counts are usually an underestimation of the full extent of the issue.

The statistics presented below are drawn from an analysis of 1,102 completed risk assessments. Most (70.7 per cent; n=779) relate to children in care; the remainder relate to those known to social services for other reasons (left care, child protection or intensive support; n=288) or those for whom LAC status was unknown (n=35).

3.2 Extent of sexual exploitation

Sexual exploitation was identified as an issue of concern in 14.7 per cent of all cases. In the vast majority of these (13.3 per cent; n=147), this related to known or suspected sexual exploitation of the young person by others (hereafter referred to as sexual exploitation or CSE – child sexual exploitation – cases). In a small number (1.4 per cent; n=15) the concern related to the risk this young person posed to

his/her peers (hereafter referred to as ‘risk to others’).

It is of note that social workers had originally reported sexual exploitation to be an issue of concern in 24.3 per cent of all cases, but upon further investigation²¹ it transpired that some of these cases were more likely²² to be other forms of sexual abuse (7.5 per cent) or sexual assaults (2.1 per cent), rather than sexual exploitation as defined in this research. These cases were recoded accordingly²³ and are referred to throughout this analysis as ‘other form of sexual abuse/assault’ or ‘other SA’ cases where shorthand descriptions are used.²⁴ Where there was any doubt as to whether a case was sexual exploitation or another form of sexual abuse/assault, it was coded as the latter so as to ensure that the count of CSE cases was not inappropriately inflated. While this runs the risk of excluding some valid cases where sexual exploitation is an issue of concern, it increases confidence in those that are included in the final count.

3.3 Risk to others

Before proceeding with the analysis of the CSE cases, brief consideration is given to the small group of young people (1.4 per cent; n=15) identified as posing risk to others. Having not been included as a question within the data collection tool, these cases cannot be taken as any kind of definitive count of the extent of the issue. They do however raise a number of interesting observations, most notably:

- all cases noted as posing risk to others were male
- three-quarters were looked after, with half of these living alongside other (vulnerable) young people in residential units

21 In approximately one-third of the ‘yes’ cases, the information provided in the initial risk assessment was not sufficient to determine the appropriate coding; follow-up requests for information were made in each of these cases, which were coded on the basis of subsequent information provided.

22 In some cases, social workers were not aware of the full context of the incident and could therefore not determine if the case was sexual exploitation or another form of abuse/assault.

23 The exclusion of these cases from the CSE count should not be taken as any comment on the seriousness of these cases. The categorisation is simply a definitional one.

24 The 75.7 per cent of cases where no concern was noted are referred to throughout the rest of the report as cases of no noted concern.

- almost half were noted to have a learning disability
- just over half were noted to have been sexually abused themselves.

While included under the category ‘risk to others’, it should be acknowledged that this does not negate the possibility that some of these young people may also have been sexually exploited themselves.

3.4 CSE cases – who is affected?

3.4.1 By HSC Trust

Sexual exploitation was identified as an issue of concern for young people across all five HSC Trusts. Statistically significant differences were however observable within this, with the South Eastern HSC Trust reporting sexual exploitation to be an issue of concern for 18.0 per cent of returns and the

Belfast HSC Trust reporting similar concerns in only 9.2 per cent of returns. The Northern, Southern and Western HSC Trusts reported sexual exploitation to be an issue of concern in 12-13 per cent of cases.

Mindful of the possibility that these differential rates may in part be due to the second-level coding applied within the research, the figures were considered alongside those for ‘other form of sexual abuse/assault’. While overall rates of concern for both categories were largely similar in four of the HSC Trusts (between 21 and 27 per cent), Belfast’s rates were still much lower (13.8 per cent). This pattern is atypical of that reported in official child protection statistics for those aged 12 and above across the five HSC Trusts (DHSSPS 2010a). The reasons for this therefore require further investigation.

Table two: Categorisation of cases by HSC Trust

HSC Trust	Overall no. of returns	Cases of known concern (%)	Other form of sexual abuse/assault (%)	Risk to others (%)	No noted concern (%)
Belfast	239	9.2	4.6	0.0	86.2
Northern	237	12.2	8.9	1.3	77.6
Southern	215	12.1	14.0	1.9	72.1
South Eastern	222	18.0	8.1	1.8	72.1
Western	176	13.1	14.2	2.3	70.5

Notes: n=1,089; 13 cases are excluded because of missing data

3.4.2 By gender and age

Just over four-fifths of all identified CSE cases were female (83.0 per cent; n=122); just under one-fifth were male (17.0 per cent; n=25). Cross-referenced with the gender breakdown of the overall sample, statistically significant differences emerge between the genders, with sexual exploitation identified as an issue of concern for 21.3 per cent of females compared to 4.9 per cent of males. Statistically significant gender differences were also observable within the ‘other SA’ category although

these were less pronounced (11.9 per cent female versus 7.5 per cent male).²⁵ These gender differences mirror those of previous studies on sexual exploitation (Pearce 2002; Scott and Skidmore 2006) and those observed in more general police statistics relating to sexual offences against children (Bunting 2008).

As previously recognised in other studies, lower identification rates of sexual exploitation (or indeed any form of sexual abuse) among

²⁵ Gender differences were slightly more pronounced within the sexual assault cases (74 per cent female; 26 per cent male) than the other sexual abuse cases (61 per cent female; 39 per cent male).

males does not necessarily equate with lower rates of experience. As discussed further in section 7.5 of the report, practitioners can be less inclined to identify risk within males. It is also widely acknowledged within the research literature that males are less likely to disclose sexual exploitation, or even to view what is happening to them as this (Harper and Scott 2006; Barnardo's 2011).

Statistically significant differences were also apparent in relation to age, with sexual exploitation identified as an issue of concern for 19.7 per cent of 16-17 year olds, 14.6 per cent of 14-15 year olds and 3.2 per cent of 12-13 year olds. While at first glance, it may appear that sexual exploitation is only an issue of concern for the older age groups, it should be noted that these figures include both past and present cases. Over one-fifth of the 14-15 and 16-17 year old cases related to past concerns, which obviously occurred at a younger age.

Age at first concern is therefore a measure of interest. The vast majority (88.0 per cent) of young people for whom such information was available were under the legal age of consent when concerns about sexual exploitation were first identified. As illustrated in Table three, most of them were between 12 and 15 years, with 14 being the most common age at which concerns were first identified.



Table three: Age at first concern about sexual exploitation

Age at first concern	Frequency	%
Under 5	4	3.4
6–10 years old	4	3.4
11 years old	4	3.4
12 years old	15	12.8
13 years old	19	16.2
14 years old	31	26.5
15 years old	26	22.2
16 years old	12	10.3
17 years old	2	1.7

(n=117)

3.4.3 By looked-after status and placement type

Although slightly higher rates of concern were reported among looked-after young people (13.7 per cent) than their non-LAC peers (11.2 per cent), the difference was not statistically significant. This is probably due in part to the composition of the sample, which included a very high proportion of looked-after children. It is also probably due in part to the recognised high-risk nature of the children included in the non-LAC sample (placed on the child protection register within the last year and/or in receipt of services from an intensive support team).

Statistically significant differences were however observable between looked-after children in different placement types. Over half (56.1 per cent) of all the LAC cases for whom sexual exploitation was identified as an issue of concern came from residential care. This equates to a rate of 40.5 per cent within the residential cohort, compared to 10.7 per cent in at-home placements and less than 5 per cent for non-familial (4.4 per cent) or kinship (4.6 per cent) foster care.²⁶ Females in residential care emerge as at particular risk,

²⁶ Rates of sexual exploitation across these four placement types were cross-referenced with the age profile within each to check if age differences accounted for the differential rates, but this was not the case. Sexual exploitation was also identified as an issue of concern for 36.8 per cent of those in secure accommodation and 23.1 per cent of those in semi/independent living arrangements, but the sample sizes were too small to permit any comparative comment.

with sexual exploitation identified as an issue of concern for 63.6 per cent of this group (n=49; one-third of all CSE cases).

Where possible within the group of looked-after young people for whom sexual exploitation was identified as an issue of concern, the timeframe of the onset of concerns was cross-referenced against that of their entry into care. In half (50.9 per cent) of the 57 cases where this could be determined, the concerns were reported to exist prior to their entry into care; in over half of these cases, the concerns continued while in care. For the other half (49.1 per cent), concerns around sexual exploitation emerged after entry into care. This, and the findings above in relation to risk within residential care, raise important questions as to whether entry into care is a protective measure or a risk factor in itself – this is discussed further in section 8.3.4 of the report.

Sexual exploitation was also an issue of significant concern among young people who had left care, with concerns reported for one-quarter (24.1 per cent) of this group. Although the small sample size (n=29) limits the inferences that can be drawn from this data, the information provided by professionals within interviews also identified this grouping as particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

3.4.4 By involvement with the youth justice system

Statistically significant differences were apparent in relation to involvement in youth offending, with sexual exploitation identified as an issue of concern for 33.1 per cent of those involved with the youth justice system compared to 10.2 per cent of those with no involvement at the point of assessment. While it can be determined that the two issues occurred concurrently in two-thirds of the cases exhibiting both,

whether there was any direct link between these or whether one had a causal effect on the other cannot be determined from this present research study.

Information shared in the professional interview strand of the research supported the co-existence of both sexual exploitation and youth offending. However, although some interviewees shared experiences of young people being ‘persuaded’ to engage in criminal acts by the individuals exploiting them, no clear conclusions could be drawn from this element of the research as to the overall relationship between offending and sexual exploitation.

3.5 Nature of sexual exploitation

The term ‘sexual exploitation’ is an umbrella term that encompasses a number of different possible scenarios. In order to better understand the type of scenarios occurring within NI, an attempt was made to sub-categorise the CSE cases into different types of sexual exploitation, on the basis of free-text information provided by social workers. Cases were organised into seven further categories, but the variable levels of information provided did cause classification difficulties in some cases. All have been classified within the ‘best fit’ category on the basis of the information that was available and as such are an accurate representation of what was reported. It is however acknowledged that were further information available, this may have changed the coding of some cases, particularly between categories four to seven.

The seven categories identified within the 147 sexual exploitation cases are briefly presented below. Further description and case studies of the different categories, drawn from the qualitative phases of the research, can be found in section 6.4.²⁷

²⁷ With the exception of forced marriage and ‘other individual in the community’, which did not emerge as significant issues of concern within the qualitative data.

1. **Trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation** (one female case trafficked from abroad).²⁸ A small number of other trafficking cases were also identified but not specifically linked to sexual exploitation.
2. **Forced Marriage Protection Order** (two female cases). No further information was available.
3. **Internet grooming/exploitation** (four cases). Any case noted to have started online was included in this category. While the numbers within the category are lower than anticipated, there were many other cases where new technologies were used as part of the ongoing exploitation (exchanging sexual images or recording sexual activity on mobiles, for example). This form of sexual exploitation also had a more significant profile within the qualitative aspects of the research, and as such is discussed further in section 6.4.5.
4. **Abuse through prostitution** (24 cases; 16.3 per cent). This includes all cases where an exchange of sex for money, goods or the discharge of a debt (as per the legislative definition) was specifically commented upon by the social worker completing the assessment, whether as a one-off incident (e.g. sex for a taxi ride or cigarettes) or as an ongoing issue of concern (e.g. regular third-party-facilitated abuse through prostitution).

Although the numbers are too small to draw any significant inferences from the data, a number of interesting patterns can be observed:

- abuse through prostitution was noted as a factor in proportionately twice as many

male as female cases (28.0 per cent versus 13.9 per cent)²⁹

- three-quarters of the cases involved young people who were looked after
- the young person was also involved with the youth justice system in three-fifths of these cases.

5. **Party house scenario** (63 cases; 42.9 per cent). This category included all other cases in which a young person was being exploited by more than one individual within the community. The information provided suggests that most of these cases fit, or are akin to, the 'party house' scenario of abuse (befriend, groom and establish dependence, provide drugs and alcohol, bring to a party or introduce to a wider network of friends, sexually assault or coerce into sexual activity). Many of these cases also involved an exchange of sex for money, goods or the discharge of a debt, but unlike the previous category, in which the nature of the exchange was generally apparent upfront, in these cases 'payment' or 'trade off' was usually demanded or forcefully taken retrospectively.

Some of the young people in this category were also reported to be in sexually exploitative relationships with older adults (usually males). This is a frequently recognised method used to draw young people into this form of abuse. These cases have only been counted once to avoid double counting and have been included in this category to reflect the multi-faceted nature of the abuse.

Although significance testing was not possible due to the small numbers within some of the categories, the data suggest that females were more likely to experience this form of sexual

²⁸ Cases of local children that also fit the definition of trafficking were identified in the qualitative phases of the research. These are explored in Section 6.4.6.

²⁹ The male sample size was however much smaller than the female sample (25 male versus 122 female cases).

exploitation than males and that looked-after young people were more at risk than their non-LAC counterparts.

6. **Sexually exploitative relationships**³⁰ (35 cases; 23.8 per cent). The key distinguishing feature of these cases is that the young person believes the abuser to be their boyfriend or girlfriend, perceiving him/herself to be in a consensual romantic relationship with this individual. The perception and motives of the abuser may be many and varied.

Information on age difference was available for 21 of these cases; in two-thirds of them the abuser was an adult five or more years older than the young person. In five cases, the exploitative partner within the relationship was a substantially older young person.

As highlighted previously, all cases of sexually exploitative relationships that were the direct route into subsequent abuse by others have been counted in the category above. Only cases with no reference to subsequent associated abuse by third parties have been included in this category. This classification has been made on the basis of information provided at the point of assessment, but this does not preclude the possibility that grooming for third-party abuse may subsequently ensue. Indeed, findings from the qualitative phases of the research indicate that this may be a strong possibility.

7. **Sexual exploitation by other individual in the community** (18 cases; 12.2 per cent). In some ways the final category is a 'catch all', including any remaining cases of abuse by an individual not previously categorised. Many of the cases related to grooming and subsequent abuse by friends

of the family, neighbours or other individuals in the community.

Though the young person may have developed some form of attachment to their abuser in these cases, they did not in any way perceive them to be their boy/girlfriend, as in the category above.

3.6 Status of concerns

Social workers noted that sexual exploitation was a confirmed issue of concern in one-third (32.4 per cent), and a suspected issue of concern in two-thirds (67.6 per cent) of the 147 sexual exploitation cases.³¹ The fact that concerns were described as suspected rather than confirmed in the majority of cases is unsurprising, given the recognised difficulties in evidencing these types of offences. It does not in any way undermine the seriousness of the concerns.

3.7 Duration of concerns

Information on duration of concerns was available in 107 cases – this was calculated from age at first identified concern to point of assessment and includes those cases where concerns were still ongoing – for these cases, the eventual duration of concerns may be noticeably greater than that recorded here.

In almost half (46.7 per cent) of cases, concerns were noted to last at least a year; in 16.8 per cent, they were noted to have lasted three years or more. Ongoing concerns lasting more than a year were significantly more likely for females than males (52.3 per cent versus 21.1 per cent). The extended period over which concerns were observed was also identified as an issue of concern in the qualitative phases of the research. This raises important questions as to the adequacy of current responses, as discussed further in Chapter eight.

³⁰ Where the term 'sexually exploitative relationship' is used throughout the remainder of the report, it refers only to this type of relationship where the young person perceives the abuser to be their boy/girlfriend.

³¹ No clearly discernible patterns were observable in relation to type of sexual exploitation and status of concerns.

3.8 Identity of abusers

In the vast majority (94.7 per cent) of cases where the gender was known, the abuser was male. In a further 1.5 per cent of cases, both male and female abusers were identified. In the remaining 3.8 per cent, the abuser was female; in each of these cases the young person being exploited was male. Male abusers were reported to be exploiting both male and female young people.

The vast majority of identified abusers were 18 or older. In 76.3 per cent of cases, all known abusers were adults. In a further 14.9 per cent of cases, social workers reported both adults and other young people to be exploiting the victim. Concerns in the remaining 8.8 per cent of cases related solely to peer exploitation.

Some cases provided further information on the identity of abusers and the methods employed in the exploitation. The observations noted below in relation to this may also relate to other cases that did not provide such information, so should not be taken as indicating prevalence across all CSE cases. They do, however, offer some interesting insights as to how young people may end up sexually exploited and who is perpetrating the abuse:

- A family member explicitly facilitated the sexual exploitation of the young person in seven cases; abusers met the young person through a family member in a further thirteen cases.
- Abusers were already known for sexual offences in 16 cases; all were adult males. Five other abusers were known to the police for other offences.
- Sexual exploitation was noted to be linked to accessing drugs or alcohol in 19 cases – qualitative data would suggest that this is prevalent in the vast majority of cases.

3.9 Responding to identified concerns

Joint Protocol Investigations were initiated in response to concerns in 42.8 per cent of CSE cases. Child protection case conferences were convened in 52.6 per cent.³² Although the small numbers of cases in some categories do not allow for significance testing, it appears that these formal processes may be initiated more frequently in certain types of cases (i.e. cases of sexual exploitation by other individuals in the community) than others. This is something that merits further investigation.

Due to the variable levels of information provided within the open-ended questions on responses and outcomes, no definitive numbers can be provided as to the types of responses that are most frequently employed. What we do know is that the range of responses reported as being used includes:

- referral to Barnardo's Safe Choices Service³³ (17 cases)
- therapeutic/CAMHS response (25 cases)
- other support for the young person (33 cases)
- risk strategy/safety/planning meetings (29 cases)
- brought into care (28 cases)
- referred to secure accommodation (34 cases)
- change of placement (24 cases)
- police investigation (34 cases)
- harbouring notices³⁴ (7 cases)
- other formal restriction – RSHO, SOPO, exclusion order (6 cases).

When asked what the outcomes of such actions were, only 39 cases included specific comment on an investigative outcome – 11 stated that the case was proceeding to prosecution, 17 stated that an investigation was ongoing and the remaining 11 stated that the investigation was stopped because the young person would not cooperate and/

³² This figure is probably affected by differential policies on dual process at the time of assessment.

³³ Barnardo's Safe Choices service is a specialist service working in the field of missing children and sexual exploitation.

³⁴ See section 8.4.5 for an explanation

or make a complaint.³⁵ The process of prosecuting abusers is explored further in section 8.5 of the report.

Higher proportions of cases (n=95) included comment on the level of ongoing risk, as a response to questions about outcomes. Of these, 29.5 per cent (n=28) noted the risk to be substantially reduced by the point of assessment. A further 10.5 per cent (n=10) noted some degree of improvement but still ongoing risk, but the majority (60.0 per cent; n=57) reported continued risk at the same or greater level. In two of these cases, other young people were noted to have been exposed to risk as a result of the ongoing risk experienced by this young person. These findings raise significant questions as to the effectiveness of current responses to sexual exploitation. This is discussed in much greater depth in Chapter eight of the report, which highlights both examples of promising practice and areas for improvement, as identified in the interview and case file review elements of the work.

³⁵ Nine other cases noted that the young person would not make a complaint/cooperate but did not comment on how this affected responses/outcomes.



Chapter four: Assessed levels of risk

Key findings

The findings below relate to a sample of 1,102 cases. All are known to social services; the majority (70.7 per cent) are looked after:

- Almost one in five (17.9 per cent) of the overall sample was assessed to be at significant risk of sexual exploitation, on the basis of information provided by social workers about recognised vulnerabilities/risk indicators present in young people’s lives.
- More females than males were assessed to be at significant risk of sexual exploitation (21.7 per cent versus 13.9 per cent).
- Risk of sexual exploitation increases with age: 26.7 per cent of 16-17 year olds were assessed to be at significant risk compared to 17.5 per cent of 14-15 year olds and 6.1 per cent of 12-13 year olds.
- Higher levels of risk were observable among looked-after young people, 20.3 per cent of whom were assessed to be at significant risk of sexual

exploitation compared to 10.8 per cent of their non-LAC peers.

- 53.3 per cent of looked-after young people in residential care were assessed to be at significant risk of sexual exploitation, compared to 10.7 per cent of LAC living at home, 7.8 per cent of those in a kinship foster placement and 6.5 per cent of those in non-familial foster care.
- 54.5 per cent of young people involved with the youth justice system at the time of assessment were assessed to be at significant risk, compared to 12.0 per cent of those who were not.
- Over a third (37.6 per cent) of all significant risk cases had not been identified as cases of concern.
- One in five of the overall sample had been missing overnight or longer within the last year – this rises to three out of five for the residential care population. There is a noted association between going missing and risk/experience of sexual exploitation, with rates of going missing four times more prevalent among CSE cases.

4.1 Assessing risk of sexual exploitation

In addition to capturing data on the number of cases where sexual exploitation had already been identified as an issue of concern by social workers, the research also sought to capture data on levels of risk across the 1,102 cases returned. While no child or young person is immune from risk of sexual exploitation, both research and practice evidence indicate that particular experiences and/or behaviours are associated with increased risk. The risk assessment tool employed within the research uses the presence or absence of these

factors to determine levels of current risk.

On this basis, social workers were asked to indicate whether a series of underlying vulnerabilities and risk indicators were present in each individual risk assessment they completed. Risk scores and associated risk levels were calculated from the information provided. The categorisation of risk scores/levels was as follows:³⁶

0-5	No current risk
6-10	Mild risk
11-15	Moderate risk
16 or over	Significant risk.

³⁶ Further information on the scoring system is included in the risk assessment in Appendix one. Further information on the associated risk categories can be found in Appendix two.

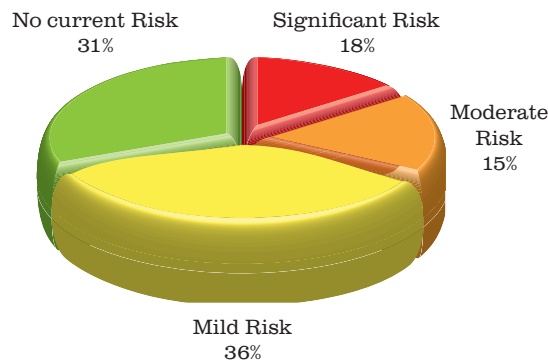
In interpreting the results presented below, it is important to note that the risk assessment tool only measures current risk at the point of assessment. Risk may increase or decrease as circumstances change, often significantly within a short period. Social workers were advised of this when given risk reports for their caseloads and advised to continue to monitor for any changes. It is also important to note that the figures presented below relate to risk of sexual exploitation rather than known experience of the same. While there is considerable overlap between the two categories, care must be taken not to inappropriately conflate them. As before, the quantitative results presented below relate only to young people known to social services, as per the inclusion criteria of this element of the research.

Sections 4.2 to 4.4 consider overall levels of risk within the sample, identifying patterns within this by gender, age and other relevant demographic features. Sections 4.5 to 4.7 consider patterns of risk in relation to individual vulnerabilities and risk indicators within the assessment tool. These are presented in three sections, as per the original assessment – underlying vulnerabilities, moderate risk indicators and significant risk indicators.

4.2 Assessed levels of risk within the overall sample

Approximately one in five (17.9 per cent; n=197) of the overall sample was assessed to be at significant risk of sexual exploitation.³⁷ A further 14.7 per cent were assessed to be at moderate risk, with 36.7 per cent and 30.6 per cent falling into the mild and no current risk categories respectively (Figure two).

Figure two: Total sample by category of risk



(n=1,102)

There was a wide range of scores within the significant risk category, ranging from 16 to 63.³⁸ The most frequent score (the mode) was 18. The average value of all scores (the mean) was 27.3; the middle value (median) was 24.

4.3 Particular 'at risk' groups

Considering the assessed levels of risk against the demographic features of the sample, the data reveal that some groups of young people experience higher levels of risk than others. Statistically significant differences were observable within the highest category of risk in relation to age, gender and looked-after status, with:

- 21.7 per cent of females assessed to be at significant risk compared to 13.9 per cent of males
- 6.1 per cent of 12-13 year olds, 17.5 per cent of 14-15 year olds and 26.7 per cent of 16-17 year olds at significant risk
- 20.3 per cent of looked-after children at significant risk compared to 10.8 per cent of their non-LAC peers.

These patterns mirror those found in Wales, where the risk assessment tool was first developed (Clutton and Coles 2007). They also mirror findings of other studies into the

³⁷ The percentages of young people falling within the significant and moderate risk categories are comparable to the figures in the 2007 pilot SERAF study within Wales (18 per cent significant, 15 per cent moderate). That study had a higher percentage of young people in the no current risk category (51 per cent), but this may be because their sample included 10–11 year olds and young people from a broader range of statutory teams (asylum, youth offending, duty and assessment). See Clutton and Coles (2007) for further information on the Welsh study.

³⁸ The maximum possible score is 65 if all underlying vulnerabilities and risk indicators are present at all possible points in time.

issue, based on other methodological approaches (Harper and Scott 2006; Coy 2008, 2009).

Further statistically significant differences were observable within the LAC returns, between young people in different placement types. More than half (53.3 per cent) of LAC young people in residential care were assessed to be at significant risk of sexual exploitation compared to 10.7 per cent of those living at home, 7.8 per cent of those in a kinship foster placement and 6.5 per cent of those in non-familial foster care. High levels of risk were also observable among those residing in secure accommodation at the time of assessment (all at significant risk) and those in semi/independent living placements (50.0 per cent at significant risk) but the sample size is much smaller in both these categories.³⁹

Twice as many of those on the child protection register at the time of assessment were assessed to be at significant risk, compared to those not on the register (30.4 per cent versus 14.8 per cent). However, an absence of information on reasons for registration and differential 'dual process' policies across the HSC Trusts at the time of assessment limit the inferences that can be drawn from this data.

A statistically significant association was identified between offending and significant risk of sexual exploitation, with 54.5 per cent of those involved with the youth justice system at the time of assessment falling within the significant risk category compared to 12.0 per cent of those who were not. Whether involvement with the youth justice system was directly related to experience of sexual exploitation cannot however be determined from the data.

The proportions of young people assessed to be at significant risk also varied by HSC Trust, ranging from 12.1

per cent in the Belfast HSC Trust to 22.1 per cent in the South Eastern HSC Trust.⁴⁰ As with the differential rates of known concerns previously highlighted in section 3.4.1, this is something that requires further investigation.

4.4 Link between known concerns and risk of sexual exploitation

As might be expected, the majority (65.1 per cent) of the 147 CSE cases identified in Chapter three registered significant risk at the point of assessment. The fact that the remainder did not does not in any way undermine the seriousness of the concerns that existed. In the vast majority of these cases, the lower risk score is because the risk indicators associated with the exploitation ceased to be present more than 12 months ago (the timeframe of the moderate and significant risk indicators included within the tool).

Of more interest is the fact that in 37.6 per cent of the cases assessed to be at significant risk of sexual exploitation, the risk assessment noted that sexual exploitation had never been identified as an issue of concern for the child. While inclusion in the significant risk category does not necessarily equate with actual exploitation, it does signify serious risk of the same. The disparity between the two categories may therefore potentially indicate a degree of failure to identify risk that, if the case, must be redressed.

4.5 Analysis of underlying vulnerabilities

In an effort to inform the targeting of future preventative work, stratified prevalence data were gathered to identify which, if any, of the underlying vulnerabilities appeared more closely related to risk or experience of sexual exploitation. The same process was completed in relation to moderate

³⁹ Unless specified otherwise, subsequent placement comparisons within LAC returns include only the four larger sub-samples – residential, at-home, kinship and non-familial foster care.

⁴⁰ Rates of significant risk in the other Trusts were as follows: Northern (13.9 per cent), Western (17.5 per cent) and Southern (20.5 per cent).

and significant risk indicators (see sections 4.6 and 4.7 below). When interpreting the data presented in relation to each of these three sections, it should be borne in mind that the nature of the relationship cannot be determined on the basis of the information available – i.e. did the presence of the factor contribute to the (risk of) sexual exploitation, or occur as a result of

it? Nonetheless, the data present some interesting findings that can inform future identification and assessment of risk.

Underlying vulnerabilities were recorded if present at any point in the child's life. Table four presents the prevalence rates of each underlying vulnerability factor across the overall sample.

Table four: Underlying vulnerabilities (overall prevalence rates)

Underlying vulnerability	%
Emotional neglect by parent/carer/family member	83.1
Breakdown of family relationships	80.4
Lack of positive relationship with a protective/nurturing adult	61.6
Family history of domestic abuse	59.2
Family history of substance misuse	58.5
Family history of mental health difficulties	57.0
Low self-esteem	56.2
Unsuitable/inappropriate accommodation/placement	38.0
Isolated from peers/social networks	37.7
Physical abuse by parent/carer/family member	34.6
Sexual abuse (known or suspected)	22.4

(n=1,101)⁴¹

4.5.1 Underlying vulnerabilities by gender and age

The vast majority of underlying vulnerabilities were present in approximately equal proportions among males and females. Only two showed a significant association by gender: rates of sexual abuse, and isolation from peers and social networks. Rates of sexual abuse were twice as high among females as males (29.1 per cent versus 15.4 per cent). Conversely, isolation from peers and social networks was higher among males than females (43.0 per cent versus 32.7 per cent).

Prevalence rates increased significantly with age in five of the underlying vulnerabilities: physical abuse,

sexual abuse, breakdown of family relationships, low self-esteem and unsuitable accommodation/placement. Emotional neglect and lack of a positive relationship with a protective/nurturing adult also increased with age, but the differences were not statistically significant.

4.5.2 Underlying vulnerabilities by LAC status and placement type

Unsurprisingly, the majority of underlying vulnerabilities had significant associations with LAC status, with higher prevalence rates among looked-after children than their counterparts not (currently) in care. All but two of the underlying vulnerabilities were also significantly associated with placement type, but

⁴¹ One case did not provide any information on vulnerabilities and risk indicators and has therefore been excluded from this analysis.

different vulnerabilities were more prevalent in different placement types. Of particular interest within this are the disproportionately high rates of low self-esteem (85.5 per cent), social isolation (55.9 per cent) and sexual abuse (36.2 per cent) among those in residential care.

4.5.3 Underlying vulnerabilities by risk level and sexual exploitation status

Five of the eleven underlying vulnerabilities were noticeably more prevalent among those in the significant and moderate risk categories than those in the mild or no current risk categories. The same five vulnerabilities were also more prevalent among both CSE cases and 'other form of sexual assault/abuse' cases than those for whom no such concern was noted. These were:

- sexual abuse (known or suspected)
- physical abuse by parent/carer/

- family member
- unsuitable/inappropriate accommodation or placement
- low self-esteem
- isolation from peers/social networks.

No such patterns were observable with regard to the other six underlying vulnerabilities. While it is not known whether these factors increased vulnerability to sexual exploitation or arose as a result of an experience of it, the relationship is something that merits further investigation.

4.6 Analysis of moderate risk indicators

All moderate risk indicators were recorded if present within the year prior to assessment. Table five presents the prevalence rates of each indicator across the overall sample.

Table five: Moderate risk indicators (overall prevalence rates)

Risk indicator	%
Expressions of despair	36.0
Disengaged from school/college/training/work	31.6
Staying out late	29.1
Alcohol misuse	23.5
Use of a mobile phone that causes concern	19.7
Drugs misuse	16.7
Peers/siblings who have been sexually exploited	12.4
Disclosure of sexual/physical assault, followed by withdrawal of allegation	9.2
Multiple callers (unknown adults/older young people)	9.0
Use of Internet that causes concern	7.5
Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)	2.1
Living independently and not engaging with worker	2.0

(n=1,101)

4.6.1 Moderate risk indicators by gender and age

Seven of the twelve moderate risk indicators were significantly

associated with gender. Six of these (staying out late, STIs, multiple callers, peers/siblings who have been sexually exploited, use of a

mobile phone that causes concern and disclosure of assault) were more prevalent among females than males. One (drug misuse) was more prevalent among males than females.

The prevalence rates of all but one of the twelve moderate risk indicators increased progressively across the three age bands (low to high). For nine of these indicators, this was a statistically significant difference. The one exception to the linear pattern of increase by age was peers/siblings who have been sexually exploited, which was most prevalent among the 14–15-year-old age band.

4.6.2 Moderate risk indicators by LAC status and placement type

Five of the moderate risk indicators⁴² were present in approximately equal proportions within LAC and non-LAC cases. One (disengagement from education/training/work) was greater among the non-LAC population (35.9 per cent versus 29.4 per cent) but the difference was not statistically significant. The remainder were more prevalent among the LAC population, but only one of these (use of a mobile phone that causes concern) had significant association; this was present in 22.3 per cent of LAC cases, compared to 12.0 per cent of non-LAC cases.

All moderate risk indicators, where analysis was possible, showed a significant association with placement type, with the exception of use of the Internet that causes concern. In all these cases, the prevalence rates were substantially higher in residential care than the other three main placement types. Particular patterns of concern noted in relation to those in residential care include:

- half (50.7 per cent) reported to be misusing drugs, compared to under 10 per cent of young people in the other three main placement types

- more than half (57.9 per cent) reported to be misusing alcohol (compared to 15 per cent or under in other placements)
- three-quarters (75.0 per cent) reported to have expressions of despair (one-quarter or less in other placements)
- two-thirds (67.1 per cent) disengaged from education (26 per cent or less in other placements)
- one-fifth (20.4 per cent) reported to have disclosed then subsequently withdrawn an allegation of sexual or physical assault, compared to 6.5 per cent of those in foster care and under 3 per cent of those in kinship or at-home placements
- half (49.3 per cent) identified as having use of a mobile phone that causes concern, compared to under 15 per cent in the other three placement types.

This pattern continues with regard to the significant risk indicators (see section 4.7.3 below) and mirrors that found in other studies in terms of greater prevalence of known risk indicators within the residential care population (McNeish and Scott n.d.; Wade 2008). While the quantitative data gathered within the research cannot shed light as to the reasons for this pattern, this was addressed within the qualitative aspects of the research in terms of whether risk was due to the actual experience of residential living and/or the background and characteristics of the young people placed there. As subsequently discussed in section 7.4, both appear to be contributory factors.

High prevalence rates of moderate risk indicators were also observed among those in secure accommodation, and to a lesser degree those in semi/independent living, but the small sample sizes exclude these from statistical comparisons. Rates for those in secure accommodation

⁴² These were: expressions of despair, alcohol misuse, use of Internet that causes concern, disclosure of sexual/physical assault followed by withdrawal of allegation and living independently and not engaging with worker.

were actually higher for 10 of the indicators than for the residential population, with 95 per cent and 85 per cent having misused drugs and alcohol respectively in the past year, 75 per cent having disengaged from education, 30 per cent having disclosed a sexual/physical assault and 70 per cent having use of a mobile phone that causes concern. This is unsurprising, however, given the admission criteria for secure accommodation.

4.6.3 Moderate risk indicators by risk level and sexual exploitation status

All but three of the moderate risk factors were at least twice as prevalent within CSE cases as either cases of no noted concern or those for whom another form of sexual abuse/assault was identified. The other three – expressions of despair, peers/siblings who have been sexually exploited and use of the Internet that causes concern – were also all more prevalent among sexual exploitation cases, but the difference was less pronounced between the CSE cases and the ‘other SA’ cases.

While one would expect prevalence of risk factors to increase through the low to high-risk categories given the basis on which risk scores are calculated, the difference in prevalence rates between the significant risk category and even the next category down was at least double in all but four moderate risk factors – the same three cited above and disengagement from school. As before, while the causality of the relationship cannot be determined on the basis of the information available at this point, the patterns highlighted merit further investigation.

4.7 Analysis of significant risk indicators

Significant risk indicators were recorded for two different periods for the purposes of scoring: six months or less prior to assessment and 6-12 months prior. The proportions noted within each are presented in Table six. For the purposes of analysis, these categories were collapsed into one category of ‘present at any point during the year prior to assessment’ (second column of Table six).⁴³

Table six: Significant risk indicators (overall prevalence rates)

Risk indicator	Present <1 year (%)	Present <6 months (%)	Present 6-12 months (%)
Missing overnight or longer	21.4	16.3	13.2
Older ‘boyfriend’/relationship with controlling adult	9.7	7.3	6.0
Emotional abuse by that controlling adult	8.7	6.6	6.0
Physical abuse by that controlling adult/physical injury without plausible explanation	3.9	2.2	2.8
Entering/leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults	6.8	5.8	4.0
Frequenting areas known for on/off street sex work or ‘party houses’ operated by adults	6.1	5.1	3.1
Unexplained amounts of money, expensive clothes or other items	4.7	3.9	2.6

(n=1,101)

⁴³ All cases were only counted once, whether present in one or both of the original categories, hence the rate in column two is lower than the totals of columns three and four.

The most prevalent significant risk indicator within the overall research sample was 'periods of being missing overnight or longer'. Given the particular focus of the research on links with going missing from care, this indicator will be analysed separately from the rest.

4.7.1 Missing overnight or longer

Just over one-fifth of the sample (21.4 per cent) was reported to have been missing overnight or longer during the year prior to assessment. Statistically significant differences were observed in relation to gender, with 24.7 per cent of females missing overnight or longer compared to 17.9 per cent of males. Significant associations were also observable in relation to age, with 5.4 per cent of 12-13 year olds, 20.4 per cent of 14-15 year olds and 33.9 per cent of 16-17 year olds having been missing overnight or longer within the year prior to assessment.

Young people within the looked-after system were significantly more likely to have been missing overnight or longer within the last year than those not (currently) in the care system (23.4 per cent versus 14.3 per cent). Although this may in part reflect lesser reporting of incidences among those outside the care system, particularly high rates of going missing from care placements is identified as an issue of concern in many other studies (McNeish and Scott n.d; Biehal and Wade 1999; Malloch and Burgess 2011).

Significantly higher rates of going missing were observed within residential care than other placement types. Three-fifths (59.2 per cent) of young people in residential care were reported to have been missing overnight or longer within the past year. This compares to a rate of 20.2 per cent among those living at home, 8.4 per cent of those living in a kinship placement and 6.5 per cent of those living in non-familial foster care.

Missing overnight or longer was over four times more prevalent among the 147 sexual exploitation cases (67.1 per cent) than cases of other sexual abuse/assault (16.0 per cent) or cases of no noted concern (13.8 per cent). It was also present in 86.3 per cent of the significant risk cases compared to 26.5 per cent of those in the moderate risk category and only 5.2 per cent of those in the mild risk category. While the nature of the relationship cannot be determined on the basis of the information collated within the risk assessments, it is apparent that there is a strong relationship between risk/experience of sexual exploitation and going missing. This is explored further in section 7.4.4.

4.7.2 Other significant risk indicators by gender and age

With the exception of unexplained amounts of money/goods, all other significant risk indicators were significantly more prevalent among females than males. The differences were particularly stark in relation to having an older boyfriend/relationship with a controlling adult (17.0 per cent female versus 1.9 per cent male), entering/leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults (10.7 per cent versus 2.7 per cent) and frequenting party houses/known sex work areas (9.1 per cent versus 2.9 per cent).

A significant linear increase from the 12-13-year-old age group through to 16-17 year olds was also observed across all other indicators. For each of these, the main point of difference was observed between 12-13 year olds and 14-15 year olds, with less of a rise between 14-15 and 16-17 year olds.

4.7.3 Other significant risk indicators by LAC status and placement type

Although four of the remaining significant risk indicators were more prevalent among LAC cases than non-LAC cases, only one (entering/leaving vehicles driven by unknown

adults) reported a statistically significant difference (8.6 per cent versus 2.3 per cent).

Significant associations were however observable in all significant risk indicators in relation to placement status within the LAC population. As before, the highest prevalence rates were observed within the residential population. Considering the specific risks within this population:

- One-quarter (25.0 per cent) were noted to have an older boyfriend/relationship with a controlling adult, compared to 7.1 per cent or less of those in the other three main placement types.
- 28.9 per cent were observed entering/leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults compared to 2.4 per cent or less of those in kinship or non-familial foster care or at-home placements.
- Approximately one-fifth were noted to have unexplained amounts of money (17.1 per cent) or to be frequenting party houses or known sex areas (20.4 per cent), compared to 2.4 per cent or less of those in any of the other three main placement types.

4.7.4 Other significant risk indicators by risk level and sexual exploitation status

As expected, all significant risk indicators were more prevalent among CSE cases than those of 'other form of sexual abuse/assault' or 'no noted concern':

- Just over half (52.7 per cent) of CSE cases were noted to have an older boyfriend or a relationship with a controlling adult compared to 9.4 per cent of 'other SA cases' and 2.4 per cent of 'no noted concern' cases.
- 37.0 per cent were observed entering/leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults compared to under

5 per cent of 'other SA' cases and 'no noted concern' cases.

- One-third (32.9 per cent) were known to be frequenting party houses or known sex work areas, compared to under 4.0 per cent of 'other SA' and 'no noted concern' cases.
- 22.6 per cent had unexplained money/goods compared to 5.7 per cent of 'other SA' cases and 1.6 per cent of 'no noted concern' cases.

As expected, all significant risk indicators were also more prevalent among the higher categories of risk, with percentages in the significant risk category largely mirroring those of the CSE cases cited above.



Chapter five: Young Life and Times Survey data

Key findings

- 786 16-year-olds completed the 2010 YLT Survey.
- One in nine reported previous experience of an adult trying to groom them. Clear gender differences were apparent within this, with one in seven females (15.1 per cent) and one in 23 males (4.3 per cent) reporting experience of this.
- One in 15 respondents said they had been given alcohol or drugs and been taken advantage of sexually while under their influence. Almost twice as many females as males reported experience of this (7.7 per cent versus 4.3 per cent). These incidents were most frequently perpetrated by peers, with 69.4 per cent perpetrated by someone two or fewer years older/younger than the victim.
- One in 20 respondents said they had been offered something (money, drugs, place to stay etc) in return for taking part in some form of sexual activity. Most (61.8 per cent) did not tell a parent or anyone else in authority that this had happened to them.
- Most incidents occurred when under the legal age of consent, across each of the categories above.
- The survey findings reveal that risk is present both online and in local communities. The initial approach in grooming cases occurred online in only 27.4 per cent of cases; the rest occurred in face-to-face settings.

5.1 Introduction

As previously described, Barnardo's NI funded the inclusion of a series of questions in the 2010 YLT Survey. The survey was distributed to all young people in NI who turned 16 in February or March 2010 and yielded 786 responses (a 21 per cent response rate). Analysis of respondents' answers yielded some very interesting insights into experiences of grooming and other forms of sexual exploitation within the general youth population. These findings are presented below.

The YLT findings differ from those presented in the previous two sections in a number of different ways. The questions asked differ, as does the age of the young people under discussion. The perspective being reported also differs – while the data in previous sections was drawn from social workers' perspectives on risk and experience, these data relate to young people's self-reported experiences.

Direct comparisons cannot therefore be made. The small sample sizes of the 'yes' cases within each category should also be borne in mind when interpreting the data.

5.2 Overview of respondents

All respondents were aged 16. Just under two-thirds (63.6 per cent) were female; the remaining 36.4 per cent were male. Respondents came from both urban and rural settings and a range of self-reported socioeconomic groupings. Four-fifths identified themselves as part of either the Catholic (42.2 per cent) or Protestant (37.4 per cent) communities; one-fifth (20.4 per cent) identified with neither.

5.3 Experiences of grooming by adults

Respondents were provided with a definition of grooming and asked a series of questions on the basis of this.

Grooming is when someone tries to build a relationship or gain the trust of a young person with the aim of getting them to take part in some kind of sexual activity, such as sending or viewing sexual images, sexual conversations or some kind of sexual touching. The relationship will usually appear friendly and harmless at first, because of the clever tricks used to gain the young person's trust but eventually the person will ask, or even pressure, the young person to take part in some kind of sexual activity.

When asked if they thought any adult had ever tried to groom them (irrespective of whether or not anything sexual happened in the end) one in nine respondents (11.1 per cent; n=84) said that this had happened to them on at least one occasion.

The vast majority (85.5 per cent) of reported experiences of grooming came from female respondents, with only 14.5 per cent coming from males. Cross-referencing these cases with the total numbers of males and females within the sample, a much higher prevalence rate can be noted among females, with one in seven (15.1 per cent) reporting experience of this compared to one in 23 males (4.3 per cent).

Young people who reported experiences of grooming (n=84) were asked a series of additional questions about their experiences. All subsequent information within this grooming section relates to this sub-sample of respondents.

Almost half (45.2 per cent) of those who reported experience of grooming said this had happened on more than one occasion.⁴⁴ Three-quarters (74.6 per cent) said that they were under the legal age of consent when this first happened; 15.6 per cent were aged under 13 years (Table seven).

Table seven: Age when grooming first experienced

Age	Frequency	% of grooming sub-sample
Under 13 years	13	15.6
13 years	11	13.2
14 years	15	18.1
15 years	23	27.7
16 years	21	25.3

(n=83)

Two-fifths (40.0 per cent) of the respondents who knew the age of the person who tried to groom them⁴⁵ said this person was 10 or more years older than them. A further 20.3 per cent said the person was 5 to 10 years older than they were at the time. In the vast majority (93.8 per cent) of cases where the gender of the groomer was known, this individual was male. Only five young people (all male) reported experience of grooming by a female.

Respondents who had experienced grooming were asked to share how the adult first made contact with them in these situations. Just over one-quarter of respondents (27.4 per cent) reported that first contact was made online. First contact was made in person in the remainder of cases, most frequently when hanging around in communities (17.9 per cent), through a friend or sibling (16.7 per cent) or when at a pub/club (16.7 per cent).

Respondents were also presented with a series of possible outcomes and asked to tick all that applied. The majority (63.1 per cent) reported that they did not engage in any form of sexual activity as a result of the grooming, either because they refused a request to do something sexual or because they stopped contact before such a request was made. One-quarter (25.0 per cent) did however end up having some form

⁴⁴ 35.7 per cent said an adult had tried to groom them two to five times; 9.5 per cent said this had happened more than five times. Although the intent behind the question was that each reported incident would relate to a different individual, it cannot be determined if every respondent interpreted it this way.

⁴⁵ Respondents who had experienced more than one attempt at grooming by an adult were asked to answer this and subsequent questions with reference to their first experience of this.

of sexual contact with the groomer: 11.9 per cent reported engaging in sexual texts, emails or conversations, 8.3 per cent said they sent or received sexual images and 11.9 per cent said they had some form of face-to-face sexual contact.⁴⁶

5.4 Taken advantage of when under the influence

All respondents (n=786) were asked whether anyone (adult or young person) had ever given them alcohol, solvents or drugs and then taken advantage of them sexually while they were under the influence of this. One in fifteen (6.5 per cent; n=49) stated that this had happened to them.

As with grooming, the vast majority (75.5 per cent) of these reported experiences related to females. Cross-referencing these cases with the gender breakdown of the sample reveals that 7.7 per cent of female respondents and 4.3 per cent of male respondents reported this experience.

Two-thirds (66.0 per cent) of those individuals who had been given substances and then taken advantage of sexually while under the influence of these had experienced this when under the legal age of consent, most frequently aged 14 or 15. In contrast to the grooming cases, these incidents tended to be perpetrated more by peers than older adults, with 69.4 per cent of respondents saying that the person who did this to them was of a similar age (two or fewer years age difference) and only 4.1 per cent saying it was by someone five or more years older than them.

5.5 Sexual activity in exchange for...

All survey respondents were provided with a list of variables (see Table eight) and asked if they had ever been offered any of these things in return for having

sex or taking part in any other form of sexual activity. Just under one in twenty (4.7 per cent; n=37) stated that they had been offered one or more of these things in return for some form of sexual activity. This included both males and females.

Table eight: Sex in exchange for...

What offered	Frequency	% of overall sample
Drugs, alcohol or solvents	23	2.9
Money or gifts	13	1.7
Somewhere to stay/hang out	17	2.2
Something else	7	0.9

The vast majority (80.0 per cent) of young people who experienced this were under the legal age of consent at the time. The source of the offer came from both peers (45.5 per cent) and adults (five or more years older in 39.5 per cent of cases). In the vast majority (85 per cent) of cases, the person proposing the exchange was male. As with the grooming cases, first contact was most frequently made in person, the most common methods being through a friend or sibling (30.3 per cent), at a house party (24.2 per cent) and hanging around the community (15.0 per cent). Contact was first made online in 18.2 per cent of these cases.

Young people who reported having been offered sex in exchange for something were asked if they ever told a parent or anyone in a position of authority that this had happened. The majority (61.8 per cent) said they did not. One-fifth (20.6 per cent) did however tell their friend or boy/girlfriend.

⁴⁶ Sufficient information was not available to include the remaining 11.9 per cent, who opted only for the 'other' response in these categories. A number of respondents had more than one of these forms of sexual contact, hence the proportions of the final three categories total more than 25.0 per cent.



Chapter six: Nature and extent of sexual exploitation

Key findings

- There has been increasing identification of sexual exploitation in recent years, but professionals believe that what we currently know is still ‘only the tip of the iceberg’. The clandestine nature of the abuse and young people’s reluctance to report make it difficult to identify cases of concern.
- Six main types of sexual exploitation were identified within the qualitative phases of the research – abuse through prostitution involving third-party gain, other abuse through prostitution, the ‘party house’ model, sexually exploitative relationships, Internet exploitation and trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation.⁴⁷
- Interviews and case file reviews reveal there to be significant variation between and within these strands in terms of aspects such as the level of organisation, the number of abusers, the number of victims, victims’ perceived ‘relationship’ with their abuser and the currency of exchange.
- Case studies of sexual exploitation shared by interviewees included both children in care and those outside the care system. While the former were more heavily represented, this may in part be due to the particular focus of the research.
- Qualitative findings indicate that many young people who have been sexually exploited have experienced more than one type of sexual exploitation during the period of their abuse.
- In many of the cases included in the qualitative phases of the research, the abuse was noted to have occurred over a prolonged period.

6.1 Introduction

The findings from the qualitative elements of the research are presented across the next three chapters of the report. This chapter considers the challenges inherent in identifying sexual exploitation and the different forms known to be occurring in spite of these challenges, across both the LAC and non-LAC populations. Chapter seven presents what is known about the types of people perpetrating the abuse and the kinds of young people affected by this. Chapter eight presents stakeholder views on current responses to the issue and how we might better respond in the future.

All three chapters integrate data from three different elements of the research: professional interviews (n=110), case file reviews (n=29) and

interviews with young people (n=5). While the number of young people participating in the research is small compared to the other elements of the work, their contributions are given prominence within the text wherever relevant, given the unique and invaluable insights they offer.

Unless specified otherwise, all contributions in the next three chapters are drawn from the professional interview phase of the research. Where information is sourced from young people’s interviews or case file reviews, this will be clearly identified.

6.2 Identifying sexual exploitation

A common theme in the existing body of evidence about sexual exploitation is that the issue is, by its very nature, extremely difficult to identify and

⁴⁷ Section 6.4 outlines how these relate to the types of sexual exploitation identified in the quantitative phases of the work.

evidence (Ayre and Barrett 2000; Clutton and Coles 2007; CEOP 2011). Professional interviewees in this research identified the same to be true within NI. A number of different factors were identified as contributing to this, including the 'off-street' nature of much of the abuse, the sophisticated grooming methods used by abusers and a general reluctance among young people to disclose.

Interviewees reported very few known cases of 'on street' exploitation, noting that most incidences occur behind closed doors, most often in abusers' homes or party houses. The vast majority of communication was also observed to occur under the radar, with mobile and/or Internet technology used to groom young people and subsequently control contact. Residential childcare professionals reported many examples of young people in their units who were apparently settled for the evening, leaving suddenly after receiving a text or call, often to be picked up by a car or taxi nearby. They also reported that additional mobile phones were often given to young people by abusers, solely for this purpose, and that when one was confiscated or lost, another would quickly appear in its place.

Professionals also noted the identification of sexual exploitation to be complicated by the infrequency with which young people directly disclosed their experiences of abuse.⁴⁸ This could be because the abuser is providing them with something they need and are unable to get elsewhere (somewhere to stay, a sense of belonging, affection, drugs, money etc). It could also be because time spent with the abuser is preferable to the other options available to them; this aspect was particularly highlighted with reference to children in some residential care placements and those with difficult family situations at home.

Reporting rates are also affected by the fact that many young people do not view themselves as victims, or realise they have anything to report. This was observed to be particularly pertinent where the young person believes the abuser to be their boy/girlfriend or where they are getting something tangible in return. It was also often the case where the young person's prior life experiences had led them to expect little else, or where friends and associates were also having similar experiences. Fear of the abuser was also noted to be a significant deterrent to reporting in a number of cases, in terms of threat to the young person and/or others they care for:

There is a huge fear factor with a lot of our young people. We've had situations where they have said 'but he will come here, or he has threatened this and he has done this'. 'If you go to the police and he knows you've been to the police, I'm dead' is a frequent one (fieldwork)

They were taken to a mock shooting where they thought somebody had been shot and they were told they were part of it now... They were terrified. In my experience the kids were so damned intimidated. What had been done to them was psychologically quite clever because they were brutalised (residential)

Young people's reluctance to report can also be tied in with fear of getting into trouble for having done something they shouldn't have. Identified examples of this ranged from having lied to parents about where they were meant to be through to fear of criminal charges where they had been drawn into some form of illegal activity as part of the exploitation. Case studies of the latter, identified by professional participants, ranged from petty theft through to enforced sexual abuse of younger children in more organised abuse rings.

48 Many will however indirectly disclose through behaviours and seemingly 'throw away' comments.

Asked how cases were recognised in the absence of a disclosure by the victim, professionals identified two other main sources of information: reports from other young people and, more often, observations by parents/carers or residential staff. Participants with experience of the latter were asked to share the type of things that had raised concerns for them. The key indicators of concern identified by these individuals largely mirror those identified elsewhere (Creegan et al 2005; Holden et al 2005; DCSF 2009). These were:

- sudden changes in behaviour or demeanour
- accessing drugs or alcohol without money to pay for them
- unexplained money or goods
- multiple mobile phones
- new social networks
- unknown older associates
- being collected or returned in unknown cars
- being discovered in unfamiliar areas
- periods of being missing (short or long)
- secretiveness about whereabouts and/or associates
- arriving back in different clothing
- receiving calls/texts on mobile phones and leaving soon after
- emotional state upon return – unkempt, agitated, disoriented, hungry, distressed etc
- disclosure of unprotected sex or rape, but reluctance to notify police or go through a formal interview.

It is important to note that not all situations that exhibit one, or even several of these indicators will necessarily be sexual exploitation. A number can also be associated with other behaviours such as drug dealing or even drug misuse. However, where a number of these factors co-exist, both the learning from this research and that of other previous work suggest that this may be an indication

that sexual exploitation is occurring (Scott and Skidmore 2006). Proactive consideration should therefore be given to this possibility, taking into account the nuances of the particular case. Care must also be taken not to rule out the possibility of sexual exploitation where the presence of such factors is not apparent, as it has been known to occur on occasions without anyone identifying any of these accompanying risk indicators.

Many of the professionals who identified these indicators of risk honestly reflected that some were identified with the benefit of hindsight. A number regretfully reported having missed the significance of these factors at the time, having been unaware of what to look for and/or too busy ‘fire-fighting’ individual issues. All such professionals noted that they had learnt from this and were now more proactive in identifying and responding to risk. These honest reflections highlight the importance of professional awareness and training, and the necessity of ensuring that all professionals are familiar with indicators of risk. This is particularly pertinent given the low likelihood of young people directly disclosing abuse.

6.3 Extent of sexual exploitation in NI

In spite of all of the aforementioned challenges to identification, virtually every professional interviewed could share examples of known or suspected cases of sexual exploitation within NI. Although none could offer any definitive count of the extent of the issue,⁴⁹ there was a firm consensus that (a) sexual exploitation does exist throughout NI; (b) it has existed for some time; and (c) what we are aware of is only ‘the tip of the iceberg’:

It is always increasing. It’s something our officers are having to deal with more every day (PSNI)

49 This is unsurprising given the absence of any existing statistical count, the clandestine nature of the issue and the associated difficulties in identifying and evidencing it.

I have no doubt that it is happening across the board. I've seen it for the past 20 years. It's still going on, but by its very nature it's so hard to quantify (other criminal justice)

While noting sexual exploitation to be a growing problem in recent years, participants could not definitively comment on whether this reflected increasing numbers of cases or simply better awareness and identification of a problem that has always existed. This cannot unfortunately be determined at this point, in the absence of baseline data. Many interviewees, from across a range of sectors, recognised the absence of such data as an issue requiring redress, welcoming the contributions that this research could make. Given the exploratory nature of the work, the research should however be viewed as a starting point, rather than an end in itself, in this regard. It is important that data are systematically collated on an ongoing basis, so as to monitor the extent and nature of the issue and identify any patterns within this. This should, in turn, inform responses to the issue.

6.4 Types of sexual exploitation known to be occurring in NI

A wide range of sexually exploitative situations was identified within the qualitative phases of the research. Six key types have been identified within this, for the purposes of presentation. This process was not however without difficulty, due to the complexity of many of the cases and the frequency with which case examples included more than one type. The typology of sexual exploitation presented below should therefore be viewed as a fluid framework of interconnecting strands, rather than six distinct categories of abuse. The six identified strands were:

- abuse through prostitution involving third-party gain
- other abuse through prostitution

- (no known third party)
- the 'party house' model
- sexually exploitative relationships (where young people perceive the abuser to be their boy/girlfriend)
- Internet exploitation
- trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

These strands largely mirror those identified within the quantitative phases of the research. However, the insights offered within the qualitative elements have resulted in the category 'abuse through prostitution' being subdivided into 'abuse through prostitution involving third-party gain' and 'other abuse through prostitution' (no known third party involved).⁵⁰

While most reported cases of sexual exploitation related to abuse by adults, peer exploitation (occurring across all of the above strands, bar trafficking) also emerged as a serious issue of concern among both professional and young interviewees. This corresponds with young people's self-reported experiences, as previously presented in Chapter five, and the findings of other recent studies within the field (Barter et al 2009; Firmin 2010), and is explored further in section 7.3.

Another central theme emerging from the qualitative elements of the research was the frequency with which young people were noted to have experienced several different forms of sexual exploitation, either simultaneously or in succession. Party house scenarios, for example, could also include abuse through prostitution, as defined in legislation.

The prolonged nature of some young people's abuse was also identified as a serious issue of concern. Both the case file reviews and professional interviews included cases where sexual exploitation was known to have occurred over months and years of a young person's life, in some cases

⁵⁰ While featured in the quantitative typology of sexual exploitation, forced marriage was not highlighted as an issue in the qualitative phases of the research. The 'catch all' category of 'sexual exploitation by other individual in the community' did not feature strongly in the qualitative phases either – the one exception to this was a very small number of cases of 'abuse of a position of trust' within a school/youth work environment.

for as long as eight or ten years. The prolonged nature of the abuse, in a number of cases continuing long after statutory agencies became aware of concerns, raises serious questions as to the effectiveness of current responses to the issue. This is discussed further in Chapter eight.

The key attributes of each of the six strands of sexual exploitation identified within the qualitative phases of the work are outlined below.

6.4.1 Abuse through prostitution involving third-party gain

Under Part 3 of the Sexual Offences (NI) Order, it is an offence to abuse a child through prostitution (articles 37-40). This includes intentionally paying for the sexual services of any child under 18, and inciting, arranging or controlling this in any manner. The 'payment' does not have to be in the form of money; it can also include the provision of goods or services (including drugs or alcohol) at a reduced cost or the discharge of a debt. While the language used in the legislation, and thus this report, refers to 'abuse through prostitution' and 'paying for the sexual services of a child', use of these phrases should not be taken as implying that sex with a child is a 'service' that can be purchased; if children cannot consent to having sex, they certainly cannot consent to selling it.

Although very few cases of this nature are recorded within criminal justice statistics, both the quantitative and qualitative elements of this research identified it to be an issue of serious concern, both in terms of an individual paying for the sexual services of a child and a third party arranging or controlling this.

A number of professionals, from across a range of areas within NI, reported cases of third parties selling the 'sexual services' of a child, either with or

without the young person's knowledge. The latter was especially noted to be the case for young people abused following the provision of drugs and/or alcohol as a primer for the abuse:

[Re a young girl abused through prostitution from age 13] She would be missing for weeks at a time and was misusing drugs. She told me that the young ones don't stand in streets, they stay in bed and breakfasts and the pimps bring people to them ... She would have reported experiences like being in places with four different men having sexual relations with her (fieldwork)

We had a very serious case. Two young girls were taken to a house, given alcohol and cocaine, then taken to a hotel room and raped by a steady flow of men who were in the hotel (PSNI)

There was a young person, kept in a house more or less and she was getting income support and the money was being taken off her as she got it, so she couldn't actually do anything. And she was in this house with this woman who made her have sex with men (voluntary youth support)

We had a large-scale abuse enquiry a number of years ago, a child abuse ring. There were what she [one of the victims] deemed to be the 'doers' and the 'watchers'. There were people who came along and they just watched, they paid a sum of money at the door and they were allowed in to view and then there were others who actually physically abused (Trust management)

Most of the identified cases of this type of sexual exploitation related to young people from the care system (particularly those in residential care), although a number of cases related to

their experiences prior to coming into care. A number also related to those with no care experience. Both males and females were noted to be victims of this form of abuse, although more of the case studies shared by professionals related to females.

The vast majority of known abusers across both male and female cases were adult males, but a small number of cases were also identified where a female was paying a young male for sex. A number of females were also noted to be involved in introductions to, and the facilitation of such abuse by males. Both organised groups (some with links to paramilitarism) and individuals working alone were reported to be organising the abuse of young people through prostitution. Two main types of individuals were identified within the latter: ‘boyfriends’ who subsequently became ‘pimps’ and parents or other family members (more than 10 cases of the latter were identified within the research):

That happened to my [15-year-old] friend who lives with her [21-year-old] boyfriend. He owed loads of money and asked her to sleep with his friends to pay off the debt; to sleep with them for money. She told him where to go – ‘are you trying to make a dick out of me?’ She thought at first he was joking but he was serious and said if she didn’t do it, he’d just get someone else who would (young person)

I was 12, maybe a wee bit older, and I remember I was completely blocked and I couldn’t move and my mummy run out of drink and she says to me, there was fellas in the house and she says to one of them to take me up the stairs and she got me to go with this man for a bottle of vodka for her. She just winked at me and she was like, I couldn’t move, I was so drunk like, cos I didn’t think nothin like that would have happened (young person)

6.4.2 Other abuse through prostitution

Not all cases of abuse through prostitution identified within the research involved organisation or control by third parties materially gaining from the transaction. A number of professionals also identified some cases in which the agreement to exchange sex for money or other goods (primarily drugs or alcohol) appeared to involve only two parties, the victim and the abuser:

She met this man outside a pub and she basically offered him a blowjob for a tenner. She took him into an alley way, performed oral sex on him, got a tenner, went to the off licence and bought four litres of cider. Her and her friend decided they wanted to come back to the area where she was from but needed to get a taxi, so again she needed money. So she went to a pub and approached two other men and offered them sex for the price of the taxi home, which she did. On the way home in the taxi she decided she wanted to keep the money she had earned from having sex with the other two so she offered the taxi driver sex for the fare (PSNI)

Some professionals reflected that it could be difficult to see a young person as a victim in cases where they appear to be ‘choosing’ to sell sex, in the absence of any third-party control or threat. Questions must however be asked about what life circumstances and vulnerabilities drive a 13, 14 or 15 year old to view ‘selling sex’ as a valid means of meeting their needs. When consideration is given to the backgrounds of many of these individuals, a very different picture emerges. As the professional who shared the case example above further reflected:

It’s a very, very sad case. That child was never going to be anything other than exploited. She thinks she is in control, that she’s exploiting

them as opposed to them exploiting her but that's how damaged she is. From a very early age she was abused at his [her father's] hands and by the age of nine was being prostituted by him to his friends. Two of her dad's friends are currently serving sentences for her rape. Her coping strategy was alcohol and by the age of 14 she was a confirmed alcoholic. She has been in and out of various residential establishments and secure. She had not a chance, not a chance, and nor will she ever, because she doesn't have the capacity to associate sex with an intimate loving relationship. It's a means to an end for her. That is what she grew up with (PSNI)

The background of the young person in this case was not atypical of others noted to be exchanging sex for money or goods. Many were known to have previous experience of sexual abuse, including abuse by multiple parties, or other experiences of abuse or neglect. Where young people have been through experiences such as these, their decision to sell their bodies cannot in any way be viewed as a free or informed choice. It is more often a means of accessing what they need to block out the trauma of past experiences of abuse and/or cope with present difficulties and constraints. Therefore, while care must be taken not to further victimise young people through invalidating their understanding and perspectives, professionals should not dismiss the abusive nature of such situations just because a young person does. The statutory responsibility to safeguard these young people and uphold the law is not dependent upon their desire to be safeguarded. Child protection policies, both within NI and the rest of the UK, clearly identify young people abused through prostitution (even those who may appear on the surface to be choosing this) as victims of abuse who require safeguarding and support

(DHSSPS 2003; ACPCs 2005; DCSF 2009; Welsh Assembly 2010).

6.4.3 The 'party house' model

The 'party house' scenario was the most frequently identified type of sexual exploitation within both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the research, although in a number of cases this was noted to overlap with abuse through prostitution or pornography, or a sexually exploitative relationship:

There was a guy running parties for sex. What was described to me was someone initially looking after you, taking you out, buying you clothes, looking after you, giving you lots of emotion and care. Then there were parties where other girls were there and it became a going upstairs with one person type thing, but then it came down to being the only girl with four or five men and it became quite frightening. There was also a separate pornography side to it, and they were getting pulled into that as well (residential)

There were two young girls who were victims of sexual assault and it was a woman of about 20 who groomed them. She's a very young looking, lively kind of woman and she gives them cigarettes and lipsticks and befriends these children and then introduces them to horrendous things ... One of the girls was very traumatised because her assault was videoed and posted around various paramilitary groups (health)

The typical party house scenario entails an abuser/abusers making contact with a young person in the community and over time establishing him/herself as their friend or, in many cases, their boyfriend. Once this connection has been made, the abuser typically suggests that the young person come along to a party where they can hang

out and get free access to drugs and/or alcohol. This will all appear harmless and even fun at first. However at some point – sometimes at the first party, sometimes weeks later – the scenario takes a more sinister turn. This can be at the level of pressure to engage in sexual activity (often with multiple individuals) as part of the ‘party’ culture. It can also be at the more calculated level of the abuser ‘collecting on their investment’ through demanding that the young person pay for the drugs or alcohol they have previously received by having sex with them or others. Where the young person refuses such demands, abusers have been reported to use physical force to take what they want. One young person described her experience of this process thus:

They try and act like they’re your best friend and you start tellin them a bit about your past an all when you’ve got drink in you and then they try and like make it out to be that they’ve went through everything you’ve went through and you’re like och, they understand what I’m going through, they’re nice, they’re trying to help me but really they’re only trying to get into your knickers! Like you think social workers don’t understand, so you run to them [abusers] cos you think that they understand and you think that they’re the only person you’ve got, but really they’re not.

They try and make out like it’s a big party and you think this is good craic and then everybody takes meth and drugs an all. And then if you say no to them, they don’t take no for an answer. Or if you say no, they try and act like ‘och, that’s ok, that’s ok, no problem, no problem’ and then you go to the toilet and they put like a wee sleeper in your drink or a wee E or somethin in your drink; they’ll try and make you drowsy and all. That’s what happened me in [names male]’s house. I kept sayin no to him and he kept puttin tablets in

and cos I was blocked I kept lifting the glass and knockin it back. Then I started to feel really sleepy and sick and he was like ‘do you want me to put you into bed?’ and then I can’t remember everything that happened and all I seen was him lying beside me and my jeans was down and all I heard was him sayin ‘did you enjoy it love?’ and I went ‘you’re a sicko’.

The essence of this young person’s experiences is observable time and time again in other examples identified by professionals. Common features identified across such cases include:

- targeting vulnerable young people, particularly those in residential care
- abusers often masquerading as young people’s ‘boyfriends’ in order to entrap them and develop emotional dependence
- an initial feeling of excitement or belonging on the part of the young person, fuelled by a manipulative grooming process
- frequent use of drugs and/or alcohol as an initial enticement and a means of ensuring continued access
- offering young people a place to stay when they abscond from care or home
- encouraging disassociation from other networks (staff, family etc)
- use of mobile phones to arrange abuse
- the co-presence of multiple individuals ready to exploit the young person (potentially at the instigation of a third party for financial gain)
- rape and other serious sexual assaults following provision of alcohol and/or drugs (unprotected sex, anal penetration etc)
- using a young person as a conduit for drawing in other young people.

The abusers making the initial approach to young people were noted to be primarily male, although a couple

of young people and professionals did share examples of females making the initial approach, noting how this could create a false sense of security and safety. Young adult males in their late teens and twenties (some with care experience, some without) were also noted to be a frequent route in. With ready access to drugs and alcohol, money and cars, young people were often flattered by the attention of these (often good looking) young males and initially seduced by the lifestyle they were offering.

Most reported cases involved female victims, although in a small number of cases, young males were also reported to have been present and vulnerable to abuse. Most also related to young people from care, although a number of professionals also identified cases relating to young people from the community (including some not previously known to social services). Professionals working outside the care system noted grave concerns that the scale of this issue among the general youth population was much greater than is currently known. Factors highlighted in support of this included the wide range of backgrounds observable among young people known to be exploited in this way, growing concerns around misuse of drugs and alcohol amongst the general youth population and increased vulnerabilities associated with this.

6.4.4 Sexually exploitative relationships

The pattern of abusers establishing themselves as a young person's 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend' with the express (but hidden) intention of drawing them into abuse by third parties has previously been outlined above. Other sexually exploitative relationships were also identified within the research, where there appeared to be no such intention to groom for abuse by others. These 'relationships' generally involved

young people under the legal age of consent in what they perceived to be consensual sexual relationships with their boyfriend or girlfriend, 10, 20 or even 30 years their senior. While an age gap in a relationship does not always necessarily indicate that a young person is being exploited, where the young person is under the legal age of consent and the age gap is so substantial, it is hard to conceive how such a situation would not be in some way exploitative. Most of these cases related to heterosexual relationships, usually young females and older males. A number of single-sex relationships were, however, also identified within the qualitative phases of the work; all but one of these related to young males with significantly older adult males:⁵¹

My first experience with sexual exploitation was a young girl in the community having a relationship with a much older man, that was approved of by the mother... She was 15 when I met them and he was in his forties... Talking to a number of youth workers in the area and expressing my concerns about younger girls with older males, I got a flood of stories (MLA)

Although tangible goods were part of the currency of exchange in some of these situations, in most others, the returns for the young person were more intangible, relating to attention, affection and/or a sense of belonging. Professionals discussing such cases frequently identified unmet emotional needs within the young people that were drawing them to older individuals who showed an interest in them. Many commented on young girls from dysfunctional family backgrounds forming relationships with father-like figures. A clear power imbalance was apparent within each of the relationships identified as being exploitative, always in favour of the abuser. Many professionals also commented on the similarities with

⁵¹ A few cases of older young people aged 16 or 17 in 'relationships' with children as young as 12 or 13 were also identified – while the age difference was less substantial, the particularly young age of the child was considered enough by the professionals involved to render these situations of concern.

domestic violence observed in these relationships. Abusive relationships were identified as a particular issue of concern for young women in the care of 16 plus teams. Professionals working in this field highlighted particular difficulties in responding to these concerns, given the young person's legal ability to consent to a sexual relationship and the HSC Trusts' more limited protective powers where such a young person was not on a care order.

6.4.5 Internet exploitation

In contrast to the other forms of sexual exploitation previously outlined, Internet exploitation was thought to be more prevalent among young people in the community than those in care. Most cases identified by participants related to young females in the 12 to 15 age bracket, although cases were shared of children as young as 10 being sexually exploited online. No male victims were identified, although this may in part reflect lesser knowledge of risk among this population rather than lesser actual risk.

While participants were clear about the many benefits associated with the Internet, they also identified a number of ways in which it increased risk of sexual exploitation. These included premature exposure to sexual material, the ability for abusers to adopt alternative identities, increased confidence on the part of abusers in terms of their approach to potential victims, and lowered inhibition among young people in terms of how they might respond to such an approach. Some professionals noted the grooming process to be accelerated in the online world compared to the real world, with less time spent grooming the child prior to an initial sexual approach and a rapid escalation from this to more serious abuse.

Although the medium of abuse was notably different from the other forms of sexual exploitation

previously outlined, many of the dynamics remained the same. This was particularly true of the targeting and subsequent grooming of vulnerable individuals. A pattern of initial conversational grooming via chatrooms, progressing to webcam images, was identified in a number of different cases. In some cases this was known to progress to serious contact abuse:

We have a case where a young person [in foster care] had been uploading photographs of herself naked and sending them out to people and people had come over to meet with her. She had made three or four contacts with people who had come over and met up with her for sex. She was 14 (fieldwork)

As with the other forms of sexual exploitation previously noted, the reasons why young people maintained links with their abusers were many and varied. Some did so out of emotional attachments, to either the actual abuser or a created identity that they believed to be real. Others did so as a result of blackmail, where the abuser had recorded webcam images without their knowledge and threatened to send these to parents or distribute them across the web. Although the creation and threatened distribution of such images (captured via webcams and mobile technology) was raised as a serious issue of concern, few references were made to the more commercial production and distribution of child abuse images. This is something that requires further investigation, as it is unlikely that NI would be immune from this form of abuse.

It is interesting to note that, unlike the other forms of sexual exploitation previously outlined, the general sense among professionals was that many Internet-related cases were being both identified and prosecuted. This was not generally because young

people were reporting, but due to others picking up concerns and progressing complaints. A number of different reasons were noted for this, including greater societal awareness about this type of abuse, less difficulty obtaining evidence (text logs/ emails/images can be accessed and abusers located by Internet Protocol addresses) and the existence of a specialised centralised unit within the PSNI dedicated to investigating this type of crime. If, under further investigation, this perception is confirmed, useful learning may be achieved for responding to other forms of abuse, particularly with reference to third-party complaints and evidential capacity.

6.4.6 Trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation

The final type of sexual exploitation identified within the qualitative elements of the research was trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. According to recent guidance on the issue, child trafficking includes the 'recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child, whether by force or not, by a third person or group, for the purpose of different types of exploitation' (DHSSPS and PSNI 2011: preface). Participants identified a small number of cases in which children from other countries were believed to have been trafficked (according to this definition) into NI for the purposes of sexual exploitation:

We have a young woman at the moment who is Eastern European and was trafficked here and continues to be exploited by people. She lives with her parents but we reckon she's being sold on a regular basis. Well, she says she lives with her parents but we aren't entirely sure if they are her parents. She is saying she is 17, but we suspect she's more like 14 (other criminal justice)

Participants also identified a number of cases of local children abused through sexual exploitation that fit within this definition of trafficking:

They arranged for a car to pick them up and take them to a house and within an hour of them disappearing they were being plied with alcohol and cocaine and plans were being made to book hotel rooms and move them up there (PSNI)

Cases cited with reference to this included both the organised movement of young people within NI (often referred to as internal trafficking) and cross-border trafficking into Ireland or further afield. Recent months have seen progress in relation to the potential use of trafficking protocols to respond to the organised sexual exploitation of young people within NI. Following initial enquiries by the Barnardo's Safe Choices Service, the PSNI formally referred seven local young people to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), a UK-wide system for identifying and supporting victims of trafficking. All seven cases received a positive response, confirming their status as victims of trafficking, which should now lead to a series of associated investigative and supportive actions.



Chapter seven: Abusers and victims

Key findings

- More information is needed about the types of people perpetrating this abuse, and the risks experienced by the general youth population.
- On the basis of what is known, most abusers appear to be adult males, although concerns were also identified in relation to female abusers and peer exploitation.
- While some known sex offenders were identified in professionals' case studies and the case file reviews, many of the abusers identified within the qualitative phases of the work had no known prior convictions for sexual offending.
- Professionals attributed increased risk of sexual exploitation among the looked-after population to both their pre-care experiences and, for some young people, the care experience itself. The latter was observed to be particularly true of young people in residential care due to the specific targeting of this population, behavioural norms amongst young people in some units, the complex needs of the young people residing there and a more limited ability to protect. Placement instability was also identified as increasing the risk of sexual exploitation.
- Professionals identified a clear association between going missing from care/home and risk of sexual exploitation.
- Other identified at-risk groups include young people in the community with similar life experiences as those in care (abuse, neglect, domestic violence etc), those with learning difficulties, those with drug and/or alcohol dependencies and economically vulnerable 16 to 18 year olds.
- Lesser knowledge about risk in the general population does not necessarily equate with lesser actual risk.
- Where a young person is abused through sexual exploitation, this impacts upon their wellbeing in a variety of detrimental ways. There are many complex and interrelated reasons why young people may maintain links with their abusers in spite of these detrimental impacts.

7.1 Introduction

Having identified the different types of sexual exploitation known to be occurring in NI, this chapter gives further consideration to both the types of people perpetrating the abuse and their modus operandi, and the kinds of young people being abused in this manner. Although reference has already been made to abusers and victims throughout the previous chapter, this chapter pulls together the overarching themes emerging in relation to them. Specific consideration is given to risk among young people in

or missing from care, as in the original aims of the research, and also to risk among young males, given the repeated identification of this as a particularly hidden issue.

Although there is a strong focus on what increases vulnerability to sexual exploitation throughout this chapter, this should not in any way be taken as indicating that responsibility for the abuse in any way lies with the vulnerable young person. Culpability firmly rests with the individuals who are willing to exploit these vulnerabilities; if these individuals

did not exist, nor would the abuse. In reflection of this, the chapter commences with a brief overview of what is known about the abusers, before progressing to a consideration of young people's vulnerabilities.

7.2 Adult abusers

It is clear from both the professional interviews and case file reviews that existing knowledge about abusers is often limited to generalisations (gender, age, location etc) rather than identified individuals or groups. This is something that requires further investigation, both at an individual level (who is perpetrating the abuse in individual cases) and at a collective level (what are the patterns across NI).

What we do know from the contributions within this research is that abusers come from a wide range of backgrounds. They can be of any age. They can come from any social, religious or ethnic grouping.⁵² They can also be male or female, although examples of the former greatly outweighed those of the latter within the research. Both the case file reviews and case studies cited by professionals reveal abusers to be operating in a wide range of geographical locations across NI – the range of examples identified included villages, towns and/or cities across all HSC Trusts/Policing Districts. In some cases, the same abusers were noted to be exploiting a number of different young people from different areas, either concurrently or sequentially over a period. In some cases this was as part of an organised network of abuse:

You will hear at case conferences the same names mentioned, involved with young people from a wide geographical area... We would cut down on one group of people and they very quickly move on to another town (residential)

They're doing this under the cover of darkness. These men are mobile, they have transport, they travel the length and breadth of the country [exploiting different young people]. They even play young people off against each other. My young person was considering making a statement and another young person told her such and such would get her (Trust management)

The general sense among professional participants was that many of the individuals perpetrating this type of abuse were not convicted sex offenders. Absence of a conviction does not however necessarily equate with absence of offending behaviour. As a PSNI representative involved in the management of sexual and violent offenders highlighted, 'the stats only represent about 20 per cent of the sexual offending that's out there. People get on their high horses about the 20 per cent but it's not the 20 per cent you have to worry about, it's the 80 per cent we don't know about'. Interviewees identified strong suspicions about prior sexual offending in a number of different cases where no such convictions existed. Some abusers were also known to the police for (suspected) involvement in other types of offending such as drug-related offences.

Although a small number of abusers (usually peers or young adults) were described as opportunistic and potentially unaware that what they were doing was not appropriate, most were noted to be emotionally manipulative, skilled in identifying and exploiting vulnerability and generally unconcerned about the welfare of the young people. Some were also noted to be intimidating and dangerous individuals who used fear, and in some instances violence, as a means of getting what they wanted and/or controlling young people's behaviour:

⁵² Ethnicity has played a significant role in recent public discourse about sexual exploitation in England. Although men from a number of different ethnic groupings were noted to be perpetrating this form of abuse within NI, there is insufficient evidence (and insufficient cultural diversity within NI) to enable any further comment on whether ethnicity has any bearing on rates of abusing behaviour.

He was so dangerous you wouldn't have gone into the house on your own. Even when the police were going it would have been three police landrovers at a time (residential)

A final important consideration within the context of NI is 'is there, or has there been, paramilitary involvement in the sexual exploitation of young people?' Interviewees⁵³ shared a number of different case studies in which paramilitaries were known to have sexually exploited children and young people in their communities:

We would have had a lot of concerns, with specific names given about alleged paramilitaries who have been involved in sexual exploitation and abuse of children... There were even allegations of cross-paramilitary exploiting, in terms of some organisations passing young children over to others

We had a group of eight or ten young women coming under paramilitary threat, excluded from the area and then allowed back. The inference was that [a senior paramilitary] allowed you back if you did what he wanted, but the minute you tried to break away from that you're put out under paramilitary threat, out of the area and basically in care. That is a major control to have over someone

There were allegations of paramilitaries running sexual exploitation rings from pubs. Very young girls going into pubs – exchanging alcohol for sex with older men

The general consensus among interviewees who offered comment on this issue was that such abuse still continues to exist in one guise or another, with many of the same people in the same structures still

perpetrating the abuse, and ongoing fear within communities creating a climate in which this can continue. Information shared within the research would strongly indicate that individuals associated with paramilitarism continue to be involved in controlling prostitution, trafficking individuals from other countries for the purposes of sexual exploitation and exploiting children from within their own communities. In discussing the last of these, a number of participants noted a clear link with drugs, observing sex (or providing access to other young people for sex) to be a recognised means of paying off a drug debt. While noting these links with paramilitarism, it is equally important to note that many of the case studies shared within this research had no such apparent links, although interestingly a number of abusers were reported to have falsely alluded to holding rank within a paramilitary organisation as a means of further silencing their victims.

7.3 Risk posed by other young people

As highlighted previously in section 6.4, peer exploitation and sexual violence was identified as an emerging issue of concern within the research. This included both specific concerns about identified individuals displaying sexually harmful behaviour and a general concern around attitudes to, and experiences of sexual aggression and violence among young people. One of the specific areas of concern raised within the qualitative elements of the research was the risk some young males within the looked-after system were posing to their peers, particularly those residing in residential units. While anxious not to demonise these young people (all of whom have their own vulnerabilities and difficulties), a number of professionals did raise serious concern about this issue, both in terms of current and future risk:

⁵³ Information relating to paramilitaries is not attributed to source.

We have a male coming into the unit who is extremely intimidating. He has been described as a sexual predator. He's coming into our project with a young girl who is extremely vulnerable and very open to manipulation and exploitation. She has stated that she feels intimidated by him and if he said jump, she'd say how high (voluntary care/aftercare)

[There are] known people in the community that we see coming through our system at 14 or 15 that you have worries about and then at 28 or 29 they are still on the periphery with young people and you suspect still exploiting the young people or being instrumental in their exploitation (residential)

A number of professionals also raised concerns about young females (primarily, but not exclusively, within the looked-after system) who had previously been sexually exploited, subsequently introducing others to risk, either unwittingly or at the instigation/coercion of their abuser(s):

It breaks my heart but we have some young people where we're concerned about sexual exploitation and a year on I'm hearing colleagues say they have become groomers. We have had three or four young women; we're talking about them being vulnerable and then within 12 months they've suddenly become a risk because there's not been sufficient service and recognition for them... And how do we tell kids that they should be wary of their mates as a way in as well. That's quite a difficult message (voluntary youth support)

The spider effect is quite concerning. I hate to say it but it's quite a brilliant tool by those who are organising this because it just keeps a fresh rotating network... 16 and 17 year olds are being the links

into the 14 or 15 year olds; that tends to be their use (fieldwork)

While the risk posed to other young people must be dealt with, these young people require a more nuanced and supportive approach that recognises their victim status and acknowledges the frequent threat and coercion involved in these situations. As with all other forms of sexual exploitation identified within this report, the primary focus of law enforcement agencies must be directed towards the adults who are organising and perpetrating the abuse. Responsibility must also be accepted, where relevant, for failure to protect in a young person's own history and the contribution this has made to current events.

At a more general level, professionals also expressed serious concern about increasing pressure to engage in sexual activity at an early age, the confusion of sex and relationships and the normalisation of multiple sexual partners. They also expressed alarm at the attitudes they were observing, in both young males and young females, in terms of an apparent acceptance of sexual and other forms of violence towards females. Concern was also expressed about the frequency with which professionals were hearing incidences of young males being sexually manipulative or aggressive with female peers. This included cases of sexual activity in situations of questionable consent, rapes and other sexual assaults, sexual activity in return for drugs or alcohol and the distribution of child abuse images (often within the guise of sexting – sexual images sent by mobile phone):

Gang type stuff in terms of sexual stuff. Lots of drug taking. Males plying young women with drugs and alcohol and young women off their face in parks at night time and basically the girl being shared if

you like and then filmed on mobiles and put on YouTube or Bebo or whatever. That goes on quite a lot. Obviously there is the whole issue of did she consent – she may have at the time but full of blues and vodka, is it informed consent? And did she consent to it being filmed and put on Bebo? And it's always young women from vulnerable backgrounds who end up in this situation. We have had seven, eight, nine cases like that in the last six months (other criminal justice)

The vast majority of concerns related to risk posed by males to females, primarily within the 13 to 16 age bracket. Professionals' concerns about this issue related not only to the impact on the young people at the time, but also the precedents it set for future relationships and experiences for all parties involved. This is something that requires further investigation.

7.4 Risks for young people in or missing from care

One of the specific aims of this research was to consider risks for young people in or missing from care. It has already been established in the report that children in care, especially those in residential care, can be at particular risk of sexual exploitation. This section considers why this may be. The explanations given by professionals can be grouped into two main categories: vulnerabilities relating to their pre-care life experiences and those associated with the care experience itself. These are explored in turn below, with reference to learning gleaned from both professional and young people's interviews, and the case file reviews.

7.4.1 The ongoing impact of pre-care life experiences

Many young people in care have had very traumatic life experiences prior to their entry into the system that continue to impact upon their daily life

years after the event. Consideration of looked-after young people's backgrounds in the case file reviews showed a number of common pre-care experiences that were contributing to increased vulnerability to sexual exploitation in the present. These included prior sexual abuse or other abusive experience, an absence of nurturing relationships, family dysfunction and a lack of boundaries within the home. These factors were also identified by many interviewees, who observed a clear link between such experiences and more present vulnerability factors such as low self-esteem, inability to self-regulate, low levels of resilience, absconding and drug or alcohol misuse. In reading the commentary that follows in relation to this, the reader should bear in mind that it is not only the LAC population affected in this manner; such experiences and vulnerabilities are also experienced by many young people outside the care system.

It is widely acknowledged that young people who have been sexually abused in the past are at greater risk of further abuse in the future. This is particularly the case where they did not receive appropriate ongoing support to enable them to process what had happened to them (Smith 1995; Rymaszewska and Philpot 2005; Bunting et al 2009). Professionals participating in this research echoed these messages, noting young people who have been sexually abused as children to be easy targets for abusers, as a result of their premature sexualisation and frequently low self-esteem/self-worth. Some such individuals were even reported to see their experiences of sexual exploitation in a comparatively positive light, noting that at least they were getting something for it this time. Some were also observed to have become so desensitised to abuse that they did not even view what was happening to them as unusual or wrong. A stark theme

emerging in relation to this is the normalisation of rape among young females with repeated experiences of abuse: as one young person explained to her keyworker: 'me being raped, is like you having a cup of tea'.

Many young people with previous experiences of sexual abuse were also noted to live in heightened states of anxiety: absconding, misusing drugs and/or alcohol (and sometimes sex) to meet their need for stimulation and/or block out debilitating negative emotions:

There is a tendency to be reckless with your own welfare, a foreshortened sense of future. There's an immediacy because of heightened anxiety and hyper vigilance and it's a matter of blocking out and coping day to day; not allowing those feelings and thoughts to emerge and destroy you, so you continually place yourself at risk. Whether you are going to live or die doesn't really seem to matter (health)

One young person herself reflected:

Sometimes people's been through that [abusive background] and they just put on a brave face like nothing's happened but really deep inside they're hurting and they don't know what to do. People that's been through so much like that, you can't blame them for turning to drink or drugs because it's the only thing; it's givin them'ins like a big buzz and it's takin away their problems. But then you get up and then it's happenin again, so you take more

Such a reliance on use of substances to escape reality and negate pain was also observed to be true of young people with other forms of traumatic event, neglect or rejection in their past or present. This dependency, coupled with few legitimate sources of accessing the substances desired, further increases

young people's vulnerability to people who would use sex as a form of currency in this regard. This was noted to be the route into sexual exploitation for many young people, both within and outside the care system, whether via a direct exchange of sex for drugs or alcohol, or as a means of paying off a retrospective debt. The central role of drugs and/or alcohol in most cases of sexual exploitation is something that requires further consideration.

Absence of positive role models and nurturing relationships in the past (usually also continuing in the present) were also noted to increase young people's vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Most of the looked-after young people identified as at risk of or abused through sexual exploitation were observed to have seriously fractured family relationships, rejection and attachment issues (sometimes to the extent of attachment disorders) and an unmet need for love and significance. Many consequently sought to fulfil these needs in any way they could, from any person they could.

An interesting finding that emerged from the case file reviews was the pivotal role of family relationships as an immediate trigger to risk, as well as an underlying vulnerability factor. In a number of cases, a clear pattern could be identified between a negative encounter with a parent and a young person running to their abusers. In one particular case, nearly every incident of running to the abuser could be seen to occur within hours (or even minutes) of a bad phone call or contact visit with her mother. Abusers were noted to be very skilled at taking advantage of such situations and playing on these vulnerabilities, telling young people that no one really cared for them or understood them, reminding them that their families had 'rejected them' and assuring them that they were the only ones who cared for them and understood them. This task was made

easier by the freedom with which young people shared their stories with others and the lack of protective boundaries employed upon meeting strangers.

Low self-esteem and self-worth, resulting from negative interjections and/or inadequate positive interjections in their early years, was another common vulnerability factor identified within the interviews and case file reviews. For young people who entered the care system in adolescence, absence of boundaries and parental discipline, and the patterns of risk that ensued, were also key contributory factors to ongoing risk of sexual exploitation when in care. A number of senior social services staff raised serious concern about adolescents brought into care after months or years of freedom to come and go as they like, misuse of alcohol and/or drugs, associations with unsavoury older individuals in the community and suspected sexual exploitation within this. In a number of cases, reviewed in the case file reviews, such patterns of behaviour were observed to have been established as young as nine or ten years of age. Querying why the decision to remove such young people from a parent's care was so delayed, some participants questioned the degree to which the system could change such engrained patterns of behaviour.

7.4.2 The impact of a care experience

For many young people, particularly those who end up in appropriate stable placements akin to a family environment, the care experience provides a safe setting in which to receive appropriate support to deal with the impact of their pre-care experiences and rebuild their lives. For some others, however, the care experience can serve to compound existing difficulties and vulnerabilities, rather than alleviate them. Participants observed this to be particularly true of those entering the care system in adolescence, when patterns of risk

within the community were already established and appropriate placements in the community were harder to source and sustain. They also observed it to be particularly true of those who failed to receive appropriate support to deal with both their entry into care and the reasons for this, and those who were exposed to further instability and insecurity within the system in terms of where they lived and/or who was responsible for their care.

Most of the case file reviews, all of which related to young people with experience of sexual exploitation, revealed significant instability within the young person's care experience, in terms of changes in social work staff and/or placement instability. This was also identified as an issue of concern in the professional interviews, with one participant reporting that a young girl with whom they were working had had almost 40 placement moves by the age of 13. Professional participants noted this instability to be a serious issue of concern, highlighting the impact it had on young people's ability to develop healthy attachments with both professionals and peers and the consequent impact this had on vulnerability to dangerous others who appear to offer these attachments.

7.4.3 The impact of residential living

It is important to note at the outset of this discussion that not all residential living environments were associated with increased risk of sexual exploitation. A number of units that participated in the research reported no known concerns among their residents. These units attributed this to settled populations, controlled admissions, operating at reduced capacity, therapeutic underpinnings and a protected statement of purpose. This is something that merits further investigation, in terms of learning from promising practice. It is also important to note the concerted efforts made by many staff, across a

wide range of units, to protect the children in their care. However, in spite of such positives, the general consensus among interviewees (including those responsible for young people's care) was that, for many young people, an experience of residential care significantly increased risk of sexual exploitation:

There is a distinct group that come into care for reasons other than child protection concerns and when they come into a group living environment they become exposed to other types of abuse that they wouldn't otherwise have... It's one thing to say you will protect as much as you can but I know what these groups are like. No matter how much staff monitor them, you still expose young people to a certain level of risk (Trust management)

Many of the concerns about increased risk of sexual exploitation relate to the mix of young people residing in the unit and behavioural norms among the population. Young people in residential care are often those individuals who display more complex needs and/or present more challenging behavioural issues; many have been through several failed placements as a result of this and bring with them additional related issues. High proportions of young people in residential care were observed to be misusing drugs, solvents and/or alcohol, disengaged from education, going missing, engaging in underage sexual activity and associating with concerning adults – all known risk factors for sexual exploitation. High proportions were also identified as having already been sexually exploited. Beyond the deeply traumatic impact for the young person him/herself, this is also known to increase the risk of exploitation for those within their immediate circle (Munro 2004; Clutton and Coles 2007).

Numerous professionals expressed concern about the impact of exposure to such behaviours and risks within such a confined environment, and the impact of peer pressure within this. Many residential staff reported patterns of young people coming into their units and quickly adopting the behaviours of other residents, including those that led them into sexually exploitative situations. This was true even where no such concerns existed prior to entry into the unit. Younger residents, aged 12, 13 or 14, were noted to be particularly vulnerable to this.

Participants observed the vulnerability of young people in residential care to be compounded by the fact that abusers are explicitly targeting them over their peers in the community:

We come across very serious situations on a regular basis where we know that there are adults in the community specifically targeting children from the facility (Trust management)

They are targeted. We have had people sitting outside in cars watching who comes in and out of the unit (residential)

Participants believed there to be two main reasons for the specific targeting of children's homes by abusers – the fact that the young people were known to be vulnerable because of the impact of their past experiences and the fact that abusers did not perceive them to be as protected as their peers in the community:

The young people who are exploited are profiled and they're profiled on the basis of their internal personal and social protective factors which harks back to why I wasn't worried about my 14 year old but when I come

into work I'm worried about these 14 year olds... People who exploit or prey on children who live in children's homes don't see them as protected (residential)

7.4.4 Links with going missing

Missing from care was identified as a significant issue of concern within the research, both in terms of the prevalence of the issue and the risks associated with it. Interviewees raised particular concern about patterns of going missing among the residential care population. Three PSNI representatives who shared provisional figures as part of their interviews each reported between 55 and 75 missing reports a month from residential homes in their districts, during the months preceding their interviews. Provisional statistics from the HSC Board reveal 182 individuals, from residential or foster care across the five HSC Trusts, to have been notified to the police as having an unauthorised absence of 24 or more hours during 2010-11 (HSC Board response to data request).

Both the PSNI and HSC Board provisional statistics reveal going missing from care to be a pattern of behaviour for many young people, rather than a one-off incident. The case file reviews also reveal this to be the case; it was not unusual to observe citations of 15 or 20 missing episodes within one month. In some cases, this pattern of going missing had been established prior to entry into care; in others it commenced after the young person came into the system. Some young people appeared to be going missing on their own; others were known to be with other residents or friends from outside their placement. Particular reference was made to networks of young people within care (sometimes extending outside the care community) from different areas running together, having previously met in secure accommodation or via other previous placements.

While many young people remained in the general locale while missing, there were some who ended up in other towns or other HSC Trust areas (some as far as 60 or 70 miles away). A number of cases were also reported of young people found across the border after going missing, including one case of two young girls missing for three weeks. Concern was expressed as to how young people were able to travel such distances, without any obvious resources to do so. In a number of cases, abusers were reported to be explicitly facilitating this, through transporting young people themselves, arranging taxis and/or providing money for transport.

The illustrations shared within the research clearly indicate that young people go missing for a complex mix of reasons. Some of these relate to getting away from something (push factors); others relate to getting to somewhere, someone or something (pull factors). These include:

- being unsettled at home/ in placement
- lack of safety within the home or placement – bullying, sexual intimidation etc
- wanting freedom from rules and regulations
- a desire to be 'grown up' and do 'grown up things'
- boredom, and the initial thrill and excitement of running and people looking for you
- being part of the crowd
- a want or need to access drugs and/or alcohol
- maintaining links in areas of origin
- negative influences encouraging them to run.

Whatever the reason that prompted young people to go missing from care or home placements, professionals frequently noted that this tended to propel them towards

individuals who would harbour them, provide them with alcohol or drugs and often subsequently exploit them:

There are issues why they are leaving the home and then these people take advantage of that by supplying them somewhere to stay overnight. Having to have sex with them may be a payment for that (PSNI)

Concern was expressed about the state in which some young people were returning from missing episodes: tired, unkempt and undernourished and, more alarmingly, frequently agitated, upset or withdrawn. Tracking of patterns of going missing within the case file reviews showed a number of different young people seriously self-harming upon their return. This was suspected to be a reaction to some distressing experience while missing. Others were noted to be asking for pregnancy tests, reporting unprotected sex and indicating likely sexual assaults, all strong indications of having experienced sexual exploitation while away. Few, however, made formal disclosures of where they had been or what had happened to them. In spite of such failures to disclose, professionals were unanimous in their belief that the majority of young people going missing from care were at increased risk of sexual exploitation.⁵⁴ Such an assertion is supported by the fact that most cases of sexual exploitation, identified within both the interviews and case file reviews, also involved concerns about going missing.⁵⁵ In some cases, young people were missing overnight (returning in the early hours of the morning); in other cases they were away for days or, in a smaller number of cases, weeks:

We have one young person. We haven't seen her in five or six weeks. We have talked to her occasionally on the phone, but we don't know

where she is. The police are investigating a guy that was called her master. He was 33 and she was 15... One time we took her away for a few days and it all came out. She said this guy was tying her up, taking videos of her, posting them on the Internet and using her to try and lure other girls to come (residential)

I remember one wee girl, she would have gone out for maybe days at a time and come back and just been in an awful state, and being passed around from one guy to the other, to the other (residential)

While a clear association emerged between going missing and sexual exploitation within the research, an important caveat was attached to this: a young person does not have to be missing on repeated occasions, or even for prolonged periods, to be sexually exploited. They can be abused while out of a unit on agreement and never even registered as an unauthorised absence:

It could be during the day. It could be two o'clock in the morning. All sorts of times. The more we looked into it the more we realised they didn't have to be missing for a night, or two or three days: 20 minutes could sometimes make a difference. When I started looking into this, we learnt that some were literally getting into a car, being driven into an estate and back out again (fieldwork)

This can particularly be the case once the initial contact and control has been established with an abuser. Consideration should always therefore be given to the contextual circumstances of the individual case.

7.5 Sexual exploitation of males

Inadequate information about, and understanding of risks to males is repeatedly identified as an issue in

⁵⁴ Noted exceptions to this included cases where a young person was known to be running to spend time with family or friends in their area of origin, or an age-appropriate boyfriend/girlfriend.

⁵⁵ This also mirrors the relationship between sexual exploitation and going missing previously established in section 4.7.1.

both research reports and policy documents relating to sexual exploitation. For this reason, specific consideration will be given to the information shared about males in this research.

While as a general rule professionals felt that sexual exploitation was more prevalent among females than males, reflecting on this further, many concluded that this was likely, at least in part, to be an issue of identification rather than prevalence. A number of interviewees shared knowledge of male exploitation (reported by females in the same scenarios) that had never been reported, even informally, by the young males. This reluctance to report, while applicable across both genders, was felt to be a particular barrier for males given societal expectations of what 'being male' entails and a frequent fear among heterosexual males of being perceived to be gay, if abused by another male:

I think there is a huge problem with young men because if they do become exploited sexually they are less likely to disclose because they feel I'm a man, I should have been able to fend this off. Or will people think I'm gay? All sorts of stigmas that they feel would be attached to disclosing anything like that. There is a general feeling that there is a huge untapped exploitation going on with young men because it is so difficult for people to come forward (voluntary therapeutic)

In reflecting further upon the issue of male sexual exploitation, many professionals insightfully reported an unintentional bias in their identification of risk between the different genders, noting that they would be less inclined to consider sexual exploitation as a potential explanation for behaviours in males than females, even where the same set of presenting issues applied:

There was another fella, I remember, came back in a duvet. I don't even think he had underwear on, but it wasn't treated that worryingly as such. But as I said when I was up at the unit, 'if that was a girl that came back in a duvet, alarms would be sounding everywhere' (PSNI)

Some professionals also honestly reflected that they would feel less comfortable talking about sexual exploitation with males where suspicions existed. Professionals also noted that other things tended to take precedence in terms of presenting issues among males. This was frequently criminality or drug misuse. It was also at times concerns around the risk that a young male presented to others. Upon reflection, professionals further noted that this should not be taken as ruling out the possibility that the young male might also be the victim of sexual exploitation, either simultaneously or as a precipitating factor to their abuse of others.

The case studies presented below offer some illustrations of the different types of male sexual exploitation identified within the research:

There is a young gay male, aged 19 but with learning difficulties. He's meeting older men in their thirties/forties in gay clubs and male saunas... He's being plied with drink to make it easier. He phoned me from a hotel this time asking me to come and collect him. He said there was money left on the side when the guy left. That in itself was quite concerning because the young fella was like 'why's he leaving that money?' (voluntary care/after care)

We have one young male at the moment; he would describe himself as bisexual. He came with a history of putting his name up in toilet walls with a mobile number. He

would have been doing that when he was 14. At one point he did make a disclosure of rape and we think rohypnol may have been used on the basis that he woke up and his underwear was on back to front and he was lying in a bed in a man's house... That young man is also under investigation for exposing himself and initiating with younger residents (residential)

One of our young males, from the age of 11, he would have been in nightclubs partying with his mother and she would have set him up with her friends who he would have had sex with (residential)

One of the young lads I worked with, when he was 12 and living in a unit, there were 30-odd year old males coming and picking him up in cars and giving him drink. He was coming back, written all over his body and things. It was really scary, but he would have saw them as his mates (fieldwork)

Considering the patterns revealed in these and other male case studies identified in the research, a number of key points emerge:

- Young males, like young females, are being sexually exploited in a variety of ways.
- Abuse through prostitution is the most commonly identified way in which young males are being exploited – this does not necessarily mean that it is the most common means by which it is happening.
- Young males are being exploited by both males and females, though cases of the former predominate.
- Both heterosexual and homosexual young males are being sexually exploited by males.
- Many of the presenting signs are the same across both genders – unexplained money, periods of going missing, associating with unknown

adults etc – yet these are not being linked to potential for sexual exploitation as quickly for males as for females. This is something that requires redress.

7.6 Other vulnerable groups

While the primary focus of this research is on the risks to children in or missing from care, it is very important that their experiences be viewed in a wider context that acknowledges that they are not the only young people affected by this issue. Many of the factors previously noted as increasing looked-after young people's vulnerability to sexual exploitation – previous sexual abuse, fractured family relationships, low self-esteem, unmet need for love and significance, disengagement from education, youth offending, substance misuse – also apply to many other young people not within the care population. While these individuals may not have the added vulnerability of being as readily targeted as children in (residential) care, they do have the alternative vulnerability of having potentially less support and supervision than their peers within the looked-after system:

I know that young people in care are at risk and I'm not minimising that, but the ones who aren't in care, [whose] parents don't know what they are up to or where they are going, they are at risk too. I think there is much more going on out there than everyone is aware of (voluntary youth support)

Police representatives from a number of districts reported increasing numbers of sexual exploitation cases in recent years, relating to children outside the care system. Increasing reports of concerns were also noted by education welfare staff within the school environment and by voluntary sector organisations working across NI:

We had a case where a 15 year old and her friend were at the bars and leaving with guys in their 30s. They were disappearing on a Friday and coming back on a Sunday. The concern was they were going out with very little money and coming back with lots (voluntary youth support)

There is a case of a madam, and it's a mix of residential children and local community children that she's exploiting. She uses alcohol and drugs as a route in (PSNI)

It is not just young people in care who are at risk of sexual exploitation. There is an area in town where girls go. It's known as 'slappers' corner'. Boys and men come round in cars and pick them up. This is girls from the community whose parents have no idea what is going on. They would be shocked (residential)

Young people with learning difficulties were noted to be at particular risk of sexual exploitation, as a result of their more limited ability to identify and understand risk. Particular concerns were raised in relation to older young people with learning difficulties in terms of the more limited protection afforded them once they turn 18, that fails to take account of their additional vulnerabilities. Care leavers were also identified to be particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Again, particular concerns were raised about those in the 18 plus age bracket, given the more limited statutory obligations relating to them. A number of participants shared examples of young females reaching 18, with limited life skills and inadequate support, turning to prostitution as a means of supporting themselves. Similar risks were observed of other economically vulnerable youth who had no prior care experience, including those who had few employment prospects and those who were

homeless. Many young people in this older age group were also noted to end up in unhealthy and abusive relationships that exhibited many of the hallmarks of exploitation.

Given that less is generally known about levels of risk among young people not in receipt of statutory care services, it is possible, and indeed likely, that significantly higher levels of exploitation may be occurring than those being captured at present. The findings of the YLT Survey previously presented in Chapter five would lend weight to this assertion. This is therefore something that requires further investigation.

7.7 The impact of sexual exploitation

It is difficult to even begin to capture the many ways in which an experience of sexual exploitation negatively impacts upon a young person's life. It affects his/her health – physical, sexual and mental. It reinforces an inadequate sense of self and compounds existing vulnerabilities. It shapes future relationships, social integration and general life prospects. This is particularly the case when appropriate support is not received, both at the time and on an ongoing basis.

Considering first the impacts on physical health, professionals expressed concern about basic needs such as nutrition and hygiene, noting a lack of self-care both while young people were away with their abusers and upon their return. Serious concern was also expressed about the extent of drug, solvent and alcohol misuse among young people who were (at risk of) being sexually exploited and the impact this was having on both their physical and emotional health. Professionals also reported concern about sexually transmitted infections and, in the case of young females, risk of pregnancy. They also highlighted

difficulties addressing these issues, given a general reluctance to undergo sexual health examinations, frequent misconceptions about pregnancy and sexual health and a frequent desire to have a child among many of the young women being abused through sexual exploitation. Physical injuries as a result of rape and other sexual assaults were also identified as a serious issue of concern:

People would have performed sexual acts where she could have got quite badly damaged... she would have come back with her clothes covered in faeces because of anal penetration and stuff like that (residential)

She has been raped and gang raped. She was injured and it was unprotected sex... With all that has gone on, in one sense we're lucky she's alive and I thank God for that. I don't know if she will be in a year or two's time (Trust management)

The HSC Trust manager quoted above was by no means the only one to express fear about a potential death as a result of what was happening to young people who were being abused in this manner, whether directly at the hands of their abusers or as a result of suicide given the traumatic impacts of the abuse. Patterns of both self-harm and suicide attempts were noted in many of the cases of sexual exploitation identified by professional interviewees and included in the case file review. A number of young people were reported to have ended up in mental health facilities as a result of their experiences. Most, if not all, were noted to be experiencing serious emotional distress as a result of what had happened to them, many even years after the event:

The effects of it [rape and other sexual assaults] are devastating. There is still a lot of misconception that it's upsetting

at the time but a month or two later, it was just sex, you can move on from it. People don't realise the depth of the psychological damage that comes and your whole life just becomes changed overnight (voluntary therapeutic)

They can be doing well and something derails them years later. In this case [a young girl abused through prostitution since age 13] she was doing really well, but then was drugged and raped. She really deteriorated – it wasn't just about what happened. It was because it made her think about the past (fieldwork)

Many young people were observed to have feelings of guilt about their abuse, feeling they were in some way complicit in it because they got into a 'relationship' with the abuser, got something in return and/or because they failed to stop it. One young person who participated in a research interview still sometimes questioned whether she was to blame somehow, a few years on, even though the circumstances of her case clearly reveal this not to have been the case: 'I kinda think it was my fault, it was stupid me even saying hello to him'. Interviewees highlighted the importance of appropriately helping young people to work through these feelings of guilt and confusion and to help them see the power differential within, and abusive nature of, these relationships. They noted that while coming to such a realisation can be initially upsetting for a young person, in the long run it proved to be an integral part of their recovery:

[Aged 13] She had perceived herself to be an active participant in prostitution, she did not perceive herself as a victim of abuse. We were trying to get her to understand that she was a child and people took advantage

of her. Just because she felt like a real grown up when she was doing it, didn't mean she was. Her perception and guilt around what she did was very much assuaged by the fact that she came to an understanding that it was abuse (fieldwork)

7.8 Why young people maintain links with abusers

A central question that arose within the research was 'why, given all that was happening to them, did young people keep going back to their abuser(s) and placing themselves at continued risk?' Many of the reasons for this have already been considered elsewhere in the report, in reference to why they fail to disclose, the vulnerabilities that place them at risk of sexual exploitation in the first place and the dynamics of going missing. They do, however, merit further brief consideration here, as this issue gets to the heart of the problem both in terms of what drives continued risk, and the challenges inherent in responding to this. The contributory factors identified by professionals in relation to this include:

- inability to identify risk
- feeling in control (at least initially)
- not seeing themselves as a victim of abuse
- dependency on substances, and a need to access these (at whatever cost)
- getting something tangible in return (money, alcohol, clothes etc)
- perceived receipt of love and affection
- low self-esteem and low expectations for self
- reacting to lack of control over other areas of their life
- time spent with the abuser is preferable to other available options
- feeling trapped (owe a debt, blackmailed by the abuser etc)

- fear of the abuser
- social norms within a peer group.

As can be seen from the variety of factors cited here, the reasons why young people are vulnerable to sexual exploitation in the first place and the reasons why they may appear to allow themselves to continue to be exploited (often over prolonged periods) are highly complex. They relate to developmental deficiencies that inhibit young people's ability to identify risk and establish their own needs and wishes within a situation. They also relate to previous life experiences that leave them with unmet foundational needs that they try to fill through other means and the manipulative and calculated means used by abusers to entice and entrap. Young people's experiences of exploitative situations are also complicated by the fact that the negatives are generally tied up with some positives. There can be a sense of gain, or even enjoyment or gratification, alongside the degradation and abuse. This makes the task of helping young people exit such abuse incredibly challenging, as subsequently explored in Chapter eight.



Chapter eight: Responding to sexual exploitation

Key messages

- Many young people abused through sexual exploitation are not currently receiving adequate support or protection, despite the efforts of many dedicated professionals. There is, however, a willingness to proactively engage with this issue across the range of agencies involved in the safeguarding of children and young people within NI.
- No single agency can effectively address this issue on its own.
- Some examples of promising practice have been identified, but there are many more areas in which progress is required.
- An effective response needs to proactively address the three core areas of prevention, protection and prosecution. Further progress is required across each of these fields.
- Key principles that should inform future working on this issue include: collaborative working and information sharing, common frameworks and accountability structures, regional consistency, and professional competency and capacity.
- A preventative approach to sexual exploitation needs to address awareness of the issue among children and young people, professionals and wider society. It also needs to proactively identify and address known vulnerability factors in order to minimise future risk.
- At present, many professionals do not feel that they are able to adequately protect sexually exploited young people, or those at particular risk of such exploitation. Further work is required to identify ‘what works’ in responding to this issue. Specific consideration should be given to appropriate means of providing a safe and secure environment.
- An apparent failure to hold abusers to account was one of the most frequently identified sources of frustration within the research – further progress is required within the criminal justice arena in this regard.

8.1 Introduction

Having outlined what is known about the nature and extent of sexual exploitation within NI, this chapter considers existing statutory responses to the issue. As stated in the original aims of the research, consideration is given to both examples of promising practice and areas in which stakeholders identified that further progress is required. These are presented with reference to learning from the rest of the UK, where the issue has received greater attention to date.

The commentary that follows is not a comprehensive mapping exercise

of existing responses to sexual exploitation (that is beyond the scope of this report). It is an overview of the key messages emerging from the research in relation to existing and required progress within the field, presented with reference to learning from the existing body of research and practice evidence within the UK. While many areas are identified as requiring improvement, commentary on these is offered in the context of the following recognitions:

- Sexual exploitation is a very complex issue that presents significant challenges to agencies seeking to prevent and address it.

- Only anecdotal evidence on the scale and nature of the issue has existed prior to this research. This has inevitably affected the attention afforded the issue within both public discourse and service priorities to date.
- Increasing awareness of, and attention to, the issue of sexual exploitation has been observable throughout the period of the research. This report is published in a climate of increasing engagement with the issue and a willingness to utilise the findings of the research to help inform more effective responses to it in the future.

It is hoped that the critique offered here will be viewed in this context and seen as an attempt to help agencies deliver better outcomes for children and young people at risk of or abused through sexual exploitation, rather than an attempt to undermine existing structures, efforts or initiatives.

8.2 General principles

To tackle the whole world of sexual exploitation is massive but it doesn't mean that we should shy away from trying to do it. It's just how we plot our way through (Trust management)

Like all forms of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation is a complex and frequently veiled issue that is difficult to address. As highlighted in Chapter one, both research and practice evidence clearly indicate that effectively addressing the issue requires a multi-agency, multi-faceted approach, focusing on three core areas:

- the prevention of sexual exploitation
- the protection of sexually exploited young people
- the prosecution of abusers.

A brief commentary on progress and challenges within each of the above areas is presented in sections 8.3 to 8.5, following a more detailed discussion of a number of general principles that are critical to achieving appropriate outcomes across each of the three areas.

8.2.1 A shared responsibility and collaborative approach

No one agency can, or should, address the challenge of preventing and responding to sexual exploitation in isolation. Both research and practice evidence show that an effective response to the issue requires acceptance of a shared responsibility across statutory bodies, and indeed wider society, and a commitment to working collaboratively to protect children and young people from this form of abuse (DCSF 2008, 2009; Welsh Assembly 2010; CEOP 2011).

This need for shared responsibility and collaborative working was clearly recognised by participants from each of the key agencies who participated in the research. The general consensus among these participants was that significant inroads had been made in this regard in recent years, at both strategic and operational levels. A number of different developments were cited as examples of promising practice in relation to this, including:

- senior-level collaborative working under the auspices of the RCPC and Trust Child Protection Panels
- the relationship between Missing and Vulnerable Persons Liaison Officers (MVPLO) from the PSNI and residential staff in some of the HSC Trusts
- the Special Interest Groups on Missing, established by Safe Choices
- a number of local inter-agency forums in which police, staff from residential units and other interested parties meet to consider patterns of risk and

appropriate responses within their local area.

Significant room for improvement was, however, still noted in terms of collaborative working across agencies. Particular concern was expressed about the fact that many of the improvements noted in recent years were driven by, and based on the work of a number of committed individuals rather than clear strategic organisational commitments. Concern was expressed about the sustainability of such initiatives when the personnel involved moved on.

A number of areas were also identified in which professional tensions were still observable between individuals in different agencies. The most frequently cited example of this was responding to missing young people at risk of sexual exploitation. In spite of the introduction of inter-agency regional guidance in 2009 (HSC Board and PSNI 2009), professionals from both the PSNI and HSC Trusts identified ongoing operational difficulties between the two agencies in relation to the assessment of risk and the relative responsibilities of each agency in facilitating a young person's return.

One of the key explanations given for these difficulties was the failure to roll out inter-agency training with the introduction of the guidance. Those participants who had the opportunity to attend such training reported greater understanding of the limitations of other professionals' roles and much better collaborative working across the agencies as a result. It is imperative that lessons be learnt from this, and that the forthcoming revised version of the guidance be accompanied by a comprehensive inter-agency training programme that filters down to all relevant practitioners working on the ground. Such an approach should become standard practice when

any new guidance or protocols are released, or when significant revisions are made to existing documents.

Information sharing was also identified as an important element of effective multi-agency working. While examples of promising practice were observed in relation to this, the general sense among participants was that it was currently more ad hoc than systematic, with many important details failing to be identified and/or passed on to relevant personnel.

A recent serious case review on two looked-after young females, abused through sexual exploitation in Derby, highlighted failures in collaborative working and inadequate information sharing to be key contributory factors to the failure of statutory bodies to protect these young people. The review specifically identified gaps in communication between agencies, failure to recognise the significance of information that some individuals held and confusion around what information can and cannot be shared in the context of safeguarding efforts (Galley 2010). All of these issues were also identified within this research, with difficulties reported both between and within agencies.

While recognising data protection and human rights limitations on what information can be shared, participants expressed strong support for improved information sharing across agencies. Many participants highlighted a desire for some form of centralised database in which to record and check matters of concern (addresses, number plates, names etc). Many also highlighted a need for regular multi-agency information-sharing forums, operating at local, Trust and regional levels, and accompanying protocols that would address professional anxiety about what can and cannot be shared within such contexts.

When asked to consider how collaborative working and information sharing could be further improved, a number of different professionals from across a range of agencies also suggested the establishment of co-located multi-agency units. Reference was made to both existing local models of this (relating to both domestic violence and sex offender management) and specialist sexual exploitation units in England, as potential templates for progressing such an approach.

Barnardo's NI has been promoting the establishment of a co-located sexual exploitation unit within NI for some time now. A review of the existing body of research and practice evidence reveals that such models are increasingly being adopted elsewhere in the UK, having been repeatedly identified as best practice in terms of coordinating a proactive and effective multi-agency response to sexual exploitation (DCSF 2008, 2009; Jago and Pearce 2008; CEOP 2011). Areas that have adopted such models are observed to achieve increased identification of young people at risk, better protection and rehabilitation for those abused through sexual exploitation and notably higher rates of successful prosecutions against abusers. As a recent assessment of localised grooming across the UK concludes, 'co-location is considered absolutely vital to the development and cultivation of a shared understanding of the issues underlying child sexual exploitation. Agencies develop a keen awareness of the ways in which their respective authorities and perspectives dovetail to provide a superior overall response' (CEOP 2011 :109–110).

One of the key features of these specialist sexual exploitation units is the proactive approach they take to uncovering and responding to sexual exploitation. Both research and practice evidence clearly indicate that such a proactive approach is

necessary to ensure an effective response to sexual exploitation (DCSF 2009; CEOP 2011). The findings of this research support this assertion. Several examples were shared in which situations and individuals of concern were only identified when professionals decided to proactively act upon suspicions and further investigate concerns, in the absence of concrete evidence. Examples of this include the commissioning of subject profiles and problem profiles within the PSNI and the use of formal organised abuse procedures to substantiate concerns about cross-Trust patterns of abuse first observed by Safe Choices staff working across different HSC Trusts. The latter of these was observed to have 'uncovered a whole gambit of stuff going on' (Trust management), beyond that initially identified, once concerted efforts were directed towards the issue.

8.2.2 Common frameworks and clear accountability structures

As highlighted previously in Chapter one, the research has occurred during a period of significant transition in relation to the way statutory bodies fulfil their legislative duty to protect children and young people from this and other forms of abuse. Structures are changing and policies and procedures are being reviewed. In this respect, the commissioning and delivery of this research are very timely. Senior professionals involved in driving these changes have indicated that specific consideration is being given to improving recognition of, and responses to, the many ways in which children and young people can be sexually exploited.

This commitment to addressing the specific needs of young people abused through sexual exploitation is to be welcomed. While existing policy documents have incorporated many important principles for addressing this issue, they have done so within narrow parameters

that do not fully reflect the nature of sexual exploitation. Revisions need to be made to reflect the full range of sexually exploitative situations that are now known to occur and to further address the particular complexities inherent in responding to this form of sexual abuse (across the fields of prevention, identification and response).

Responses to sexual exploitation must be considered within the context of children's holistic wellbeing, addressing all other factors that contribute to their vulnerability. Specific guidance on sexual exploitation, issued in England in 2009, offers a useful model for the development of a holistic child-centred common framework for responding to this issue, if adapted to the local context and updated in the light of subsequent learning (DCSF 2009).

It is imperative that the development of any revised guidance be accompanied by clear procedural guidelines and practice advice, and clear accountability structures across agencies. Good practice from elsewhere would highlight the importance of appointing lead individuals within agencies with responsibility for developing expertise within the field and promoting sustained commitment to the issue throughout their agency. It would also identify a vital role for local sexual exploitation coordinators working in conjunction with local safeguarding boards (panels in the new NI structure) to coordinate local responses, and the importance of a strategic lead on this issue at governmental level (DCSF 2009; Jago 2010).

Clear strategic objectives and assessment frameworks (by which to assess the degree to which these are being delivered) are also vital components in ensuring the development of an effective response

to sexual exploitation. One of the clear gaps identified within the research in this respect was the fact that child protection is not identified as a policing priority within the current NI Policing Plan. This has also been highlighted as a serious issue of concern by the Criminal Justice Inspectorate (CJI) NI, which noted that the Policing Board should 'take cognisance of child protection issues during the planning process for the next Policing Plan in order to reflect the critical importance of this area of work' (CJI 2010:10).

Comprehensive and consistent data collection is also required if the effectiveness of responses is to be assessed and future responses determined. While the data collated within this research will provide a useful baseline in this respect, it is important that statutory bodies develop and implement appropriate recording systems that monitor the extent and nature of the problem on an ongoing basis. It is important that the issue previously identified in section 1.7, of sexual exploitation cases being reported only as missing cases, be addressed within this. It is also important that data be collected on all young people affected by this issue, not just those within the care system or those also reported as missing. Existing child protection reporting mechanisms could be adapted for this purpose, as this issue clearly falls within the child protection remit.

8.2.3 Regional consistency

It is important that revised policies and procedures are consistently implemented on a regional basis. It is also important that children and young people are able to access adequate support and protection irrespective of where they live. Neither was observed to be the case currently within the research. Many regional inconsistencies were identified including:

- varying emphases on the missing children element of the MVPLO role across different Policing Districts
- apparent variations in identification rates across HSC Trusts
- different interpretations of what residential units can and cannot do in the exercise of an HSC Trust's corporate parenting duties (e.g. removal of mobile phones – noted to vary between and within HSC Trusts)
- differential levels of access to the Safe Choices service across different HSC Trusts. Limited capacity of the service (only two practitioner posts are currently funded) means that the service can only offer limited direct work with young people in some of the HSC Trusts
- differential approaches to the coding of missing young people in different Policing Districts.

Inadequate sharing of good practice across HSC Trusts and Policing Districts was also observed within the research. Many good local initiatives were identified, but colleagues in other areas were often not aware of them. It is important that, when an initiative is identified as making a positive contribution in one area, colleagues in other areas are able to avail themselves of this learning. It is hoped that this research will help facilitate this and encourage further shared learning and reflective practice.

Particular reference was made to the importance of ensuring consistent identification and assessment of risk across different HSC Trusts. Professionals highlighted a need for a specific sexual assessment screening or assessment tool that could be used as an accompaniment to UNOCINI to facilitate this. A number of professionals who completed the risk assessment tool used within this research highlighted this as a potential model that could be used for this purpose; indeed a number have

continued to informally use the tool to help them assess risk in subsequent cases. A roll-out of this tool would have the benefit of familiarity, with copies circulated to most child and family fieldwork teams across the five HSC Trusts and more than 1,000 completed as part of the research. Learning gleaned from the use of the tool within the research could also be used to further refine its application within the NI context.

8.2.4 Professional competency and capacity

While policies and procedures offer the framework in which to protect children and young people, it is individual professionals who translate the principles and commitments made within them into practice:

Policies, procedures and processes in themselves do not protect children. People protect children... It is about how [policies and procedures] are understood by those who need to understand them; how they actually relate that to their own responsibilities. The key to that is training, retraining and familiarity (commissioning/oversight body)

As such, individuals across all the key agencies need to be both sufficiently aware of their respective roles and responsibilities, and adequately resourced and supported to deliver upon these. The degree to which this was currently the case was noted to vary considerably across different professionals working in the field, both in terms of ability to identify risk and appropriate responses after identification.

Considering first the issue of identification, it has previously been highlighted that young people rarely explicitly disclose the abuse that they are experiencing. It is therefore imperative that parents/carers and professionals working

with young people are aware of, and able to identify, indicators of risk (as previously listed in section 6.2 of the report). Current levels of awareness of risk indicators were observed to vary considerably across professionals, even between those working within the same agencies.

Unsurprisingly, greater awareness of risk was observed among those with previous experience of working with a young person who had been sexually exploited and/or those who attended specific training on the issue.⁵⁶ Highlighting the important contribution that this training had made to professional awareness and understanding of the issue, participants expressed significant support for such training to be made mandatory for all social workers, police representatives, educationalists and other relevant professionals working with children and young people. The benefit of such training being delivered on a multi-agency basis was also highlighted, in terms of a common language and understanding across agencies and the development of better working relationships.

Moving beyond the issue of identification, professionals also need to be equipped to understand the complex nature of sexual exploitation and the many psychosocial factors impacting upon a young person affected by it. While many professionals revealed insightful understanding of these issues, others were observed to struggle with the apparent contradictions inherent in many cases of sexual exploitation. A number of professionals, from a number of different fields, expressed both confusion and frustration with young people 'choosing' to return to their abusers, despite professional attempts to 'rescue' them. They could not understand why, when young people were being raped and abused, they would continue to return to the

people who were doing this to them. Asked the same question, one of the young people who participated in the research explained:

Their head be's all pickled and they don't know what they're doin an all... They keep goin back because they think that nobody else cares for them, that they're the only people that's there for them. And because they have drink and drugs, that's why they keep goin back. And when you do something wrong, social workers fall out with you. Like when I used to do somethin wrong when I was in [residential unit] half the staff would have fell out with me and they would have ignored me and I would have gone 'd'ye know what, I'm goin out' and then I would have went and got drink or drugs or somethin. I hate it when people say that [that you choose to go back]. Like you'd like to see them, with everything you've went through – if you could just throw it all at them'ins and see if they can deal with it! [Researcher asks 'What do you think they would do if that was the case?'] Do everything I've done... They should like really sit and think to themselves if I was in that person's shoes what way would I feel?

A professional perspective on the same issue notes:

The difficulty is that when people are frustrated by trying to understand the choices of another person, there's a whole pile implicit in that frustration. There's at least two elements to it. One is the assumption of psychological integrity; that they could choose, that they have access to similar reasoning processes as the person looking at it. And with our kids that's simply not the case. The second is an implicit moral judgement. Implicit in the asking of the question 'why would they choose to do that', is 'because I wouldn't'. Both of those things put

⁵⁶ Provided by the Barnardo's Safe Choices Service.

you in a really bad place for working with these young people (health)

Responses to young people will vary considerably based on whether a professional perceives them to be victims or willing participants in an activity. Professionals therefore need to be supported to recognise that the reasons why young people seem to 'allow' themselves to be exploited are incredibly complex and frequently beyond their control, and to tailor their responses and reactions accordingly. They also need to be supported to identify vulnerability in the midst of challenging behaviour and frequent apparent disregard for professional support. The findings of the serious case review into sexual exploitation in Derby observed a failure to grasp these issues as directly contributing to young people's failure to disclose abuse, and therefore access support (Galley 2010).

As previously highlighted in the report, there is an onus on professionals to exercise professional curiosity and refuse to take situations at face value. Just because a young person describes their abuser as their boyfriend or thinks it is acceptable for a 13 year old to have sex with a 30 year old, this does not mean that a professional should also. A number of professional interviews and case file reviews highlighted some concerning use of language in this regard, with some professionals observed as describing abusing adults as underage young people's 'boyfriends'. Other inappropriate descriptors observed within the research include 'underage sexual activity' or 'sexually promiscuous behaviour' (used in reference to underage children and significantly older adults), 'leaving themselves open to it', being 'complicit in their abuse' or being 'up for it'. The use of such language is contradictory to the widely recognised principle that young people abused through sexual exploitation are victims. It conceals

the power differential inherent within the abuse and the vulnerability of the young person involved. Further educative work is therefore required in relation to this issue.

Further important issues identified within the research, in terms of professional competency and capacity within HSC Trusts, included the pressure that practitioners were under and the many competing demands on their time. Unsurprisingly, this was observed to impact upon their capacity to proactively identify and manage risk. While some very good examples of risk assessment and risk management were observed within the research, a number of case file reviews revealed a clear disjunction between the nature and seriousness of the risk (as noted elsewhere in the files) and the content of the plan devised to manage this. Inadequate review and revision was also apparent in a number of cases, with assessments of risk and associated plans being repeated verbatim from one time to the next, without evidence of any positive impact upon the level of risk, and in some cases a clear escalation of risk.

It is recognised that managing risk in sexual exploitation cases presents specific challenges, most notably associated with young people's refusal to perceive themselves as victims, the complex mix of push and pull factors at play in the situation and the frequent co-existence of other issues of concern (drugs, alcohol, going missing etc). It is important that practitioners are further supported to assess risk, and identify and implement appropriate risk reduction measures, in these situations. Valuable learning on how to do this could be drawn from previous cases if a case management review (or an informal application of these principles) was undertaken in an atmosphere of learning rather than blame, and professionals openly engaged with this process.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Guidance on the conduct of case management reviews is due to be revised as part of the implementation of the Safeguarding Board of NI (SBNI). This could further facilitate such learning.

A related issue that also needs to be addressed, in order to support professionals to more effectively protect children and young people from sexual exploitation, is that of the compliance culture that has emerged in recent years. A number of different senior-level participants acknowledged that systems have become too procedural and target driven, noting that the subsequent drive for compliance is happening at the expense of child-centred service provision. This compliance culture is not by any means unique to NI. The recent large-scale review of child protection procedures in England led by Professor Eileen Munro similarly observed:

Statutory guidance, targets and local rules have become so extensive that they limit [the] ability to stay child-centred... Instead of 'doing things right' (i.e. following procedures) the system needs to be focused on doing the right thing (i.e. checking whether children and young people are being helped)... [We need] to help professionals move from a compliance culture to a learning culture, where they have more freedom to use their expertise in assessing need and providing the right help (Munro 2011:6-7)

In response to Munro's report, the government in England has committed itself to review regulatory requirements, re-establish the rightful position of the child at the centre of the process, invest in relationships and improve knowledge and skills within the social work profession. Parallel commitments should be implemented within NI.

One further important finding that emerged in relation to professional competency and capacity, both directly and through fieldwork observations, was that of the personal impact that working with this issue can have upon professionals. Participants frequently

used terms such as furious, frustrated, impotent, powerless and vulnerable, in respect of themselves and other staff, when discussing cases of sexual exploitation. One residential manager honestly reflected:

When they're on drugs and they're being groomed, you just want to go out and find the abusers and be violent towards them. It brings out all these kind of raw feelings and you feel very powerless. It can take its toll. I reacted quite a lot because I was furious at the time, at my powerlessness at keeping her safe. The toll it took on the team was massive in terms of emotional toll and worry (residential)

It is imperative that practitioners are supported to deal with the negative emotional impacts of working in this field, both for their own welfare and for the purposes of effectively protecting the children and young people in their care.

8.3 The prevention of sexual exploitation

As previously highlighted in Chapter one, effective prevention of sexual exploitation involves a number of distinct but related elements. Beyond the general principles previously outlined, these include awareness of the issue across a range of relevant stakeholders, addressing known vulnerability factors, increasing resilience among young people and sending a clear message to abusers that abuse will not be tolerated within society (the last of these is addressed in section 8.5).

8.3.1 Educating young people

While acknowledging the existence and contribution of a number of different awareness-raising initiatives of relevance to risk of sexual exploitation (Internet safety, healthy relationships etc), the general consensus among

participants was that young people were still not sufficiently aware of the risks of sexual exploitation, in terms of many of the scenarios identified within this report. Professionals identified a clear need for further educative work with young people in this regard in terms of awareness of the types of sexual exploitation that can occur, the grooming methods used by abusers, and activities that could render a young person particularly vulnerable (drug/ alcohol use etc). Particular reference was made to the need to bridge an apparent disconnect between young people's abstract knowledge of risk (which some were noted to have) and understanding of how this related to them personally:

'I think they are aware, but they feel that they're safe. It's like it'll never happen to me' (voluntary youth support).

A strong emerging message in relation to this was that of finding inventive and appropriate means of letting young people know that not only do these things happen, they can happen to them. As with other forms of sexual abuse, this needs to be done in different ways, and with differing degrees of detail, according to the age and experiences of the young people. It is, however, imperative that these messages are delivered at an early age and consistently reinforced over time. Almost one-third of all sexual exploitation cases identified in this research were first picked up at the age of 12 or 13. It is important that young people are equipped to identify signs of risk, and know how to protect themselves when faced with these, before this time.

Professionals also identified a wider education issue in terms of young people's expectations of (peer) relationships and their acceptance of exploitation and violence within these. Although work has already

commenced on this issue within schools, the findings of this research show that further work is required. This needs to be undertaken with both males and females, both within the school environment and in other more informal settings to ensure inclusion of those outside mainstream education establishments.

8.3.2 Educating parents/carers and wider society

Broadening the focus beyond young people, participants also noted the importance of ensuring that families and communities were adequately informed about the ways in which young people can become sexually exploited and the warning signs to look out for. This is particularly pertinent in the light of the finding that young people rarely disclose this form of abuse.

Participant contributions within the research indicated that parents/carers did not feel adequately equipped to either identify or address these issues at present. They similarly indicated that society as a whole had little awareness of the realities of this issue. In most cases, it was felt that this was because people did not know that such things happened, but a number of professionals also identified cases of communities seeing young people being sexually exploited (e.g. 13-year-old girls in pubs being abused by 30-year-old males) and failing to identify it as abuse or do anything about it. Either way, professionals identified a clear need for further publicity and education around the issue so that communities are equipped to identify and report the abuse that is going on in their neighbourhoods.

8.3.3 Addressing vulnerability/risk and increasing resilience

Effective prevention of sexual exploitation requires more than awareness raising. It also requires a targeted approach to identifying

vulnerability and risk (and appropriate intervention where this is identified) and proactive investment in developing the resilience of children and young people. Both the interview and case file review elements of the research identified a need for further progress in these fields.

Looking retrospectively through case files, it is clear that most of the young people who have been abused through sexual exploitation had easily identifiable vulnerabilities that predated their abuse and, in the absence of appropriate intervention to address them, clearly contributed to their subsequent experiences of abuse. These included previous abuse or neglect, drug and/or alcohol misuse and domestic violence or other family dysfunction. It is imperative that where such issues are identified in young people's lives, proactive measures are taken to address them. This is important both for the immediate welfare of the children and for their future risk of sexual exploitation and other negative life experiences.

Young people who were identified as experiencing these vulnerabilities were also frequently observed to have low levels of self-esteem and self-worth, and an absence of other positive protective factors within their lives. Recognising this, many professionals also highlighted the importance of building resilience as a proactive means of reducing their vulnerability to exploitation:

To build in resilience in them and their wellbeing and self-esteem and everything else. That's probably the best protective factor that is out there (education welfare)

Abusers were observed to be very proactive at profiling and targeting vulnerability. Agencies tasked with the care and protection of children and young people need to become

equally proactive at identifying and addressing vulnerability, in order to better protect young people from these individuals. The findings of this research can be used to profile young people who may be particularly vulnerable to abuse in the future, and to inform targeted early intervention.

8.3.4 Care as a protective or risk factor

A particularly interesting point emerging from participants' contributions about preventing sexual exploitation was the question of whether entry into care was itself a protective or risk factor. This question was recently considered in a report on 10 young people's pathways to secure accommodation by the health and social care regulatory body, RQIA. While recognising many positive aspects within the care system, and the complex nature of most of the cases reviewed, the report did note that for some of the young people included in the study, 'being admitted to care also acted as a conduit to some new or increased risk factors including... sexual exploitation and predatory male networks' (RQIA 2011:43). The findings of this research also clearly indicate this to be the case for some young people.

It is important to clarify that it is not the act of placing a child on a care order that increases risk – many of the care population were not observed to be at any greater risk than their peers outside the care system – but some of the associated and subsequent actions and experiences. Those particularly highlighted in this study include multiple placement moves and an experience of residential care. The potential risks associated with a care experience therefore require explicit consideration when weighing up the pros and cons of moving a young person out of the family home and into an alternative care placement. This

is especially pertinent in relation to adolescents, who, within the present system, are particularly likely to end up in residential care:

It's about thinking through not just the immediate almost 'child rescue' approach, but also saying what are the needs of this child, how best can they be met? I suppose what I'm saying is moving away from this notion of how we're going to defeat risk. What we're looking at is managing risk... It gets back to good quality assessment that thinks this through and analyses it rather than being descriptive in its approach... It is also [having] the confidence to look at the medium to long term future and stop reacting to the immediate presentation (commissioning/oversight body)

8.4 Protecting sexually exploited young people

The overriding message that emerges from all elements of the research is that, despite the efforts of many dedicated professionals, in some cases we are failing in our duty to safeguard children and young people from sexual exploitation. Beyond the shortcomings in the preventative field already outlined in section 8.3, participants identified serious failures to protect many of those who are actually being abused through sexual exploitation and those at immediate risk of it. A clear indicator of this failure to protect is the prolonged periods during which many of the identified cases of sexual exploitation were observed to continue: often months or even years after statutory services became aware of the risk and involved in managing the case. In a number of cases, this failure to protect a young person from abuse not only failed that young person, but other young people also, who were subsequently introduced to the abusive network through this individual.

Many professionals working with young people who were entrenched in sexually exploitative situations were very open about their inability to adequately manage risk in some cases and their consequent frustration with this. This is not a reflection of lack of effort on the part of these professionals; many were noted to exert considerable effort in their attempts to protect young people in their care (on some occasions placing their own welfare at risk). It is more a reflection of the fact that the structures in which they are working and the limited tools at their disposal are often an inadequate defence against the manipulative grooming and controlling techniques employed by abusers. This was particularly noted to be the case where situations of abuse had developed unchecked for some time, and for some complex cases within the care system. Some of the key difficulties inherent in responding to such situations are outlined below, together with consideration of examples of promising practice in addressing these and the key principles needed to underpin an effective response.

8.4.1 Early identification and protective action

Both the findings of this research, and those of previous studies, clearly indicate that early identification, accompanied by appropriate intervention, is one of the most effective means of protecting young people who are (at risk of) being sexually exploited. This is true both in terms of protecting them from present abuse and in terms of mitigating against risk of further abuse in the future (Holden et al 2005; Harper and Scott 2006; CEOP 2011).

When specific consideration was given to cases in which sexual exploitation was no longer current, it became apparent that all such cases had benefited from early identification of

concerns and proactive management of this risk. Once risk was identified (usually by a parent or long-term carer) a number of proactive protective measures were put in place to break associations before patterns of attachment and dependence could be further developed. These included removal of mobile phones and/or Internet access where relevant, pursuit of a third-party complaint by a parent/carer, use of harbouring notices to disrupt contact between young people and their abusers, proactive police investigations, use of civil orders to place prohibitions on abusers' behaviours and provision of therapeutic support for the child. In many of the other cases in which sexual exploitation was noted to occur over a prolonged period, there was a clear absence of such factors. High tolerance of risk was observed in several of these cases, with situations allowed to escalate to very concerning levels before any concerted effort was made to address them.

Many professionals working with young people who are being/have been sexually exploited also identified a failure to appropriately intervene in the earlier stages of abuse, noting that the longer a young person remained exposed to abusive relationships and situations, the more difficult the task of extricating them was. Similar patterns were observed by Safe Choices practitioners, who reported substantially better outcomes for young people referred to the service in the earlier stages of abuse, than for those who were not referred until patterns of risk had become established. As previously highlighted, it is important that professionals be supported to better identify risk indicators and act upon these in an appropriate and informed manner. It is also imperative that greater recognition be given to the many different ways in which a young person may be disclosing abuse, through apparently flippant comments or their

behaviours, if important disclosures are not to be missed:

I was throwing hints to people an all. I was throwing hints cos I didn't want it comin out of my own mouth. I wanted people to work it out ... I was getting myself drunk so I could come out with it, cos I couldn't say it when I was like sober. I was like 'I can't say it'. So I was standing in [the bathroom], standing banging my head off the walls and my keyworker came down and I just hugged her and she was like 'what's wrong' and I just told her

8.4.2 Access to specialist support services

The body of research and practice evidence repeatedly identifies the vital role of non-statutory specialist support services in the protection and support of young people abused through sexual exploitation (Scott and Skidmore 2006; Jago and Pearce 2008; DCSF 2009). The service undertaking this research, Barnardo's Safe Choices, is one of 22 specialist sexual exploitation/missing services operated by Barnardo's across the UK. The service is part funded by the HSC Board.⁵⁸

The work of this service was highly commended by participants within the research, both in terms of the direct work staff undertake with young people and the training and consultancy provided to other professionals on how to appropriately support young people abused through sexual exploitation. A number of professionals also noted the important role that the service plays in offering a cross-Trust perspective on the issue, in terms of sharing good practice and identifying patterns and links that cross HSC Trust boundaries. Concern was however expressed about the capacity of the service to meet need across NI, with funding for only two full-time practitioners,

⁵⁸ The HSC Board funds one full-time senior practitioner post to work with children going missing from care, most of whom also present concerns in relation to sexual exploitation (see Devaney 2010). This post was previously funded by DHSSPS. The service also receives funding from Comic Relief and Barnardo's NI.

and also about the service's limited ability to accept referrals for young people other than LAC.⁵⁹

Prior to mid-2010, the service was able to operate without a waiting list. However, increased awareness of the issue of sexual exploitation has led to a significantly greater demand for the service and a consequent waiting list for referrals. It is imperative that when a sexually exploited young person agrees to attend a service such as Safe Choices, he or she is seen without delay. Both this and other research reveal inadequate investment in therapeutic and support services for young people who have been sexually abused within NI. This is something that requires urgent redress (Bunting et al 2009; RQIA 2011).

Resourcing decisions about therapeutic and support services for young people who have been sexually exploited need to recognise that effective rehabilitation requires prolonged and sustained engagement with the young person. As the statutory sexual exploitation guidance for England recognises:

Gaining the child or young person's trust and confidence is important if he or she is to be safeguarded from harm and enabled to escape from sexual exploitation. Often the process of engaging with children who are being sexually exploited can be difficult and lengthy and it can take time for professionals to build up trust and overcome their resistance to being helped and supported to exit the abusive situation (DCSF 2009:47)

Young people who have been sexually exploited may find it difficult to maintain sustained involvement with a service. They may withdraw at times when it all becomes too much – 'my head just went and I just couldn't take it, I just gave up on myself and didn't

take the support' – but it is important that the door remains open to them and that they know support is there whenever they feel ready to re-engage, as this young person subsequently did after a period of 'assertive outreach' on the part of her worker.

Proactively creating an environment in which young people are able to talk about their experiences in a non-judgmental and safe environment is a vital tool in helping them come to terms with their experiences, escape their abusers and rebuild their lives:

I needed to talk to somebody and I couldn't talk to my mum and dad...
[Was it helpful?] Yeah, just getting understanding of it, being able to talk to somebody who didn't really know the situation, didn't know me. And just getting perspective on it, because I didn't have perspective on it before

One of the key challenges in working with young people who are being sexually exploited, but do not view themselves as victims, is helping them to begin to see the motivations of the abusers and the power imbalance within the situation, without dismissing their perspective on events or undermining their sense of self. A further challenge in providing therapeutic support to sexually exploited young people is that of managing the tension between confidentiality and reporting requirements. A number of different participants observed that young people often wanted to talk about their situations, without triggering formal child protection procedures. This was noted to be a potential barrier to young people accessing support:

She would have always said to me 'I can't talk to you about things that have happened to me because I know if I do, you'll have to do something about it'... I always felt it was very unfortunate for her that

⁵⁹ The DHSSPS/HSC Board funded post has the sole remit of looked-after children going missing from care. While the Comic Relief funded post can work with other young people, this was only a part-time post until June 2011 (full time at the time of writing).

she knew that she couldn't confide in me ... So when she was in secure for the second time we [brought in] a counsellor from a project that had a very different boundary of confidentiality, which basically was we will keep your confidence unless your life is at risk. So she was able to talk very openly with this girl ... and she subsequently assisted the police by providing information about the people that were prostituting her. Undoubtedly that was what helped her because she needed to vent, she definitely did (fieldwork)

While identification and prosecution of abusers is always the ultimate goal, there are situations such as these where higher reporting thresholds may be beneficial in ensuring that the young person receives the support he/she requires. Following the provision of this support, the young person may subsequently feel able to formally disclose, as described in the case outlined above.

8.4.3 Adopting a holistic approach

It has previously been highlighted in this report that sexual exploitation is often only one of many presenting issues of concern. Young people who are sexually exploited are also frequently observed to have difficulties with substance misuse, low self-esteem and/or self-harm. Many are disengaged from education, employment or training and/or in a pattern of going missing from their homes or placements. An effective protective strategy must address all of these issues in a holistic manner, not only closing down avenues of abuse but also addressing the factors that made a young person vulnerable to the abuse in the first place. If, for example, a young person is returning to their abuser because of a dependency on drugs or alcohol, this is unlikely to change if the substance dependency is not also addressed. Similarly, if they are drawn to their abuser because of

a need for attachment or affection, alternative meaningful relationships will be key to sustaining ongoing disengagement with the abuser. Such an approach requires understanding of the complexities of each individual case and an individually tailored response. While it is recognised that this requires time and resources, such an approach is essential to the effective rehabilitation of victims of sexual exploitation.

8.4.4 Providing a safe environment

A vital element in the protection of sexually exploited young people is the provision of a safe supportive environment in which to find refuge from their abusers. The use of secure accommodation in this regard is separately discussed in section 8.4.6. This section primarily considers the creation of a safe environment within residential care, the setting in which most risk was observed within the research.

Asked what would help protect young people from risk of sexual exploitation, a number of the young people who participated in research interviews highlighted the contribution that feeling safe and 'at home' in their placement made to reducing missing behaviours and associated risk of sexual exploitation:

I used to run riot in [previous children's home] cos it's not a place that you would actually call your home. Whereas in [current children's home] it's your actual home, it feels like a home. It's a place where you can say like 'I can't wait to get back home and see everybody' whereas in the other place it was like 'I don't want to go back'... I didn't want to change. I wanted to stay the way I was but like when you're put into an environment like that, where there's nobody going out and they're sitting watching TV or having a wee cuppa tea, it influences you.

...See like, if they plan an activity or like even sit in – we used to sit in all the time and get the munchies and just watch DVDs and bring our quilts downstairs. Stuff like that, that would make you not want to go out... I used to run more in my old children's home but then I came here and it was much better. Staff are much nicer to you, they'd like bring you out on drives or buy munchies and watch DVDs and go to the pictures and stuff like that, so it's good

As was the case in the example above, a positive relationship between staff and young people was also repeatedly identified as one of the most effective protective factors against young people running to their abusers:

The attachments and relationship [that] staff have with young people is keeping a lot of them alive. I'm not undermining or over-emphasising the point, it has kept some of the young people alive (fieldwork)

Where young people felt that staff genuinely cared about them and for them, they were more likely to confide in them, listen to them and be persuaded by them. A number of examples of promising practice were identified within the research where a member of staff who had a particularly good relationship with a young person was released from other duties in order to spend time with that person, as an alternative to them returning to their abuser.

Some of the therapeutic approaches being implemented in residential units across the different HSC Trusts were also observed to be contributing to a greater sense of safety and security for young people within units. They were also observed to be greatly enhancing staff capacity to work with young people in a more effective and less reactive manner, which in turn improved relationships within the

units. A further example of promising practice observed across a number of different units was a flexibility to adapt the composition of units according to the needs of the young people within them. Examples were shared of HSC Trusts trialling dedicated units, organised by age or gender, or reducing the occupancy levels to three- or four-bedded units. While no definite conclusions could as yet be drawn as to the impact of such initiatives or the likely continuation of them, forthcoming evaluations should offer helpful learning.

In spite of the many examples of promising practice observed across some units, one key issue was repeatedly identified as conspiring against the effective protection of young people in residential care – the limited ability staff felt they had to stop young people leaving a placement, even when they knew that they were going to an abuser who would cause them serious harm. While there are options available to professionals in these situations, many residential staff did not feel sufficiently equipped and/or supported to effectively protect the children in their care:

I struggle with the fact that young people walking out the front door, you know they are sexually vulnerable or at risk of doing themselves serious harm, but the system doesn't actually make it easy for you to stop them. It makes it very difficult. You're immediately under scrutiny if you do try to stop them in a physical way. There is something wrong whenever we have to continually defend ourselves for doing what I would see as a proper duty of care and what you would afford kids within your family (residential)

Many good examples were observed within the research of staff trying to compensate for this by proactively

engaging with young people in an attempt to persuade them to remain within the unit. Where this failed, similarly good examples were observed of staff following young people out of the unit to try and persuade them to return and/or to obtain knowledge of their whereabouts or associates on which to base subsequent searches. Not all units were, however, observed to have sufficient staff capacity to facilitate this – waking night staff and additional staff capacity were observed to contribute to an ability to adopt such proactive measures.

A further issue raised as relevant to the creation of a safe environment was that of mobile phones. Numerous illustrations were shared of young people being relatively settled in units and then leaving suddenly after a text or call. There was significant debate among professionals as to whether or not mobile phones could be removed from young people, as a means of severing their lines of communication to the abuser(s) and/or as a means of sourcing evidence about suspected abuse. Different HSC Trusts, and indeed different units within the Trusts, operated different policies in this regard, with some reporting that they could not remove a young person's mobile phone and others reporting that they have confiscated them as a protective action. While decisions to remove a phone were not taken lightly, those who reported doing so highlighted the significant contribution this made to decreasing risk:

Her not having a mobile phone was excellent. We were surprised but it did make a big difference to her – she cocooned herself and was able to go back to school. We weren't getting anywhere with her as long as this mobile phone was there because it was this constant link and she couldn't say no (residential)

Recent advice on this matter states that phones may be removed from a child where there is a significant safeguarding concern. The practical outworking of this advice, and the difficulties and benefits emerging from it, require ongoing monitoring.

8.4.5 Disruption plans

In spite of the best attempts of many professionals to divert young people away from their abusers, in many cases, the draw and/or fear is too great and they continue to return to those who abuse them. In such circumstances, best practice dictates that 'disruption plans' should be developed and implemented. Such plans can involve a number of different activities, including monitoring an abuser's behaviour, use of RSHOs or SOPOs to place prohibitions on behaviours, or use of harbouring notices to disrupt contact with young people.

Increasing use of disruption techniques was observable throughout the period of the research, although to varying degrees across different Policing Districts. Part of this variation was observed to be due to the different weighting of the dual aspects of the MVPLO role across different districts. Where greater time was allocated to missing persons, this role was observed to be central to progressing disruption plans against abusers. The general consensus among both the MVPLOs and associated police personnel who participated in this research was that there was sufficient work to justify the creation of a distinct role for working with missing children. Professionals across the board felt that, with the right person in post, this would greatly enhance the police response to the disruption of sexual exploitation.

One of the most frequently used means of disruption observed within the research was that of harbouring notices. With the consent of the person with parental responsibility for a

child, the PSNI can issue harbouring notices to inform an adult that if he/she continues to associate with an identified child, he/she may be arrested for child abduction under Article 4 of the Child Abduction (NI) Order 1985 or Article 68 of the Children's (NI) Order 1995.⁶⁰ Although some difficulties have arisen in relation to the use of harbouring notices in recent months, resulting in a slight revision of PSNI service procedures governing their use, both police and social services reported these to be a vital tool in their attempts to protect young people from sexual exploitation and were keen to see their use further extended in the future.

8.4.6 Secure accommodation

All elements of the research clearly illustrated applications for secure accommodation to be one of the most common responses to ongoing concerns about sexual exploitation and going missing. Professionals highlighted a number of potential benefits associated with a period in secure accommodation, including the possibility of breaking a cycle of behaviour, the opportunity to deliver services (both practical and therapeutic) to a young person and respite from the influence and demands of abusers. In situations of serious risk, a period of secure accommodation was often felt to be the only way to ensure the immediate physical safety of a young person. As one residential manager reflected, 'secure worked because it kept them alive and we knew they were safe – it was a case of get this child in here before she's found dead.'⁶¹

In spite of these benefits, serious concerns were observed about the appropriateness and impact of secure accommodation as a response to sexual exploitation. Some professionals felt that in locking up a young person, rather than the abuser(s), it gives the message that the young person is the one at fault. As one residential manager observed,

'she was being punished for her vulnerability, but it's predatory males and females in the community who were placing her in that kind of risk'.

A further concern identified in the research was the number of repeat admissions to secure accommodation and the limited impact time spent there appeared to have on behaviours, beyond the immediate period of containment. A young interviewee who had been in secure accommodation on five different occasions offered the following insights into this:

When I was running, my social worker put me in secure and kept putting me in secure. But I don't agree with secure because if you go into secure and secure doesn't work the first time, then you don't keep putting them in cos that just sends their head away more – cos they're locked up and they're just going mad and all their emotions are inside and they can't let it out cos they're locked up. Locking kids up isn't right cos they're going through enough

As alluded to in the above quotation, behaviour has meaning. Enforcing behavioural changes by restricting liberty is not the same as achieving meaningful change. As one residential manager observed, 'compliance is not the same as progress', particularly where any degree of freedom or choice has been removed from the equation. This was noted to be especially pertinent for young people with multiple experiences of secure accommodation, a number of whom were described as knowing how to work the system in order to ensure their release. As one health professional observed: 'Secure should be a launching pad for changing the lifelong trajectory of a child's life, but it is simply an interruption, a plaster, an occupational hazard'.

The nature of the secure accommodation system – particularly

⁶⁰ While the latter applies to all children under 18 on a care order, the former only applies to those under 16 years of age. Children aged 16 or 17 who are not on a care order are not therefore covered by the legislation. Many professionals working with this age group identified this as an issue of concern.

⁶¹ Where the risk is so serious, it is imperative that a secure environment be immediately accessible – this was not the case during the period of fieldwork, with demand for secure care outweighing availability and, in the absence of any other viable options, many young people assessed as in need of a secure placement unable to access this at the point of need.

the short-term nature of orders and the requirement to be working on exit planning from point of admission – was observed to be counterproductive to achieving any meaningful and lasting change in some circumstances. Inadequate follow-through between work undertaken before, during and after secure placements was also identified as limiting any potential to achieve meaningful progress. A period in secure accommodation was also noted to actually increase risk for some young people, in terms of the relationships established there and the risk they were introduced to via these relationships on their return to the community. In a number of different cases where young people from different HSC Trusts were known to be together in dangerous situations, it transpired that these links had been established in secure accommodation. As one field social worker observed, ‘in a way it’s a breeding ground for abusers, in terms of getting access to more victims’.

While secure accommodation may have a role to play where threat to life and welfare is imminent, it is not in itself an adequate response to sexual exploitation; nor was it ever designed to be. Secure accommodation needs to be one part of a more comprehensive structural response to sexual exploitation. Many professionals highlighted the need for some form of therapeutic community that would facilitate engagement in long-term therapeutic work in a safe environment. Few felt that secure accommodation – ‘a short-term solution to a long-term problem’ (PSNI) – offered this opportunity.

8.5 The prosecution of abusers

Although there have been many individual vulnerabilities and system inadequacies identified throughout this report, none of these is the actual cause of sexual exploitation.

Sexual exploitation exists because individuals are willing to abuse young people in this manner; the individual vulnerabilities and system failures just make it easier for them to do so. Ultimate culpability firmly rests with the abusers and, as such, proactive pursuit and prosecution of these individuals must form a central element of any response to the issue. An apparent failure to hold abusers to account for their actions was one of the most frequently identified sources of frustration within the research:

There is a frustration factor as well because you know damn rightly that these guys are up to no good whatsoever, yet nobody is able to touch them at this minute in time (Trust management)

In the vast majority of case studies identified within the research, there was no prosecution of any abuser, despite the commission of many different sexual offences. As with other forms of sexual offending, various interrelating factors were noted to contribute to this. These included low reporting rates, lack of confidence in the criminal justice system, reluctant witnesses, evidential difficulties and attrition within the system.

Examples of promising practice identified within the research which have started to address some of these issues, include:

- proactive intelligence gathering by police, including use of subject profiles and problem profiles
- proactive investigation in the absence of a young person’s complaint
- provision of pre-prosecutorial advice by the PPS
- police taking time to develop relationships with young people and offering flexibility in how they can disclose
- provision for pre-trial therapy

- provision for vulnerable and intimidated witnesses and use of special measures
- the work of the NSPCC Young Witness Service
- training of police and prosecutorial staff in dealing with sexual offences and offences against children.

While these and other initiatives are clearly positive developments within the field, their application and cumulative impact were unfortunately observed to be somewhat limited to date. Significant variations in approach were apparent across different geographical areas and different types of cases. One clear example of this was a difference in attitude towards progressing a case in the absence of a young person's complaint. While, in some areas, police were observed to be actively progressing investigations despite this (and subsequently uncovering other sources of evidence), in others the absence of a complaint was observed to result in very limited or, on some occasions, no obvious investigative effort.

While the difficulties in achieving convictions in the absence of a complaint from the victim are recognised, these are not reasons for inaction. There is a duty on police to proactively investigate offences, irrespective of whether or not the victim makes a complaint. As the regional missing guidance observes:

There will be instances whereby [a] child may not wish to formally complain about the matter for differing reasons, this would be deemed to be a reluctant witness. Regardless of whether or not a child makes a complaint, under Section 32 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, police have a duty 'where an offence has been committed, to take measures to bring the offender to justice' (HSC Board and PSNI 2009:57).

A number of PSNI participants highlighted cases where, following proactive investigation of an offence, they uncovered adequate evidence (on phones or computers for example) to progress a case without a victim statement. Increased liaison between the police and the PPS had a vital role to play in such cases, in terms of prosecutorial and pre-charge advice in relation to what evidence is required to further progress the case. Equipping others, such as parents/carers or residential staff, to collect and preserve evidence, also played a vital role, as did encouraging those with parental responsibility for a child to pursue third-party complaints.

Even where actions such as these do not deliver sufficient evidence to achieve a criminal prosecution for sexual offending, they may provide enough evidence to pursue the prosecution of some other criminal offence(s) or to facilitate the pursuit of a civil case that requires lower evidential thresholds. In some cases, the attention placed on an abuser by a proactive police investigation may be enough to deter the abuser from further abuse of the young person, in the absence of any form of prosecutorial case.

A further key area in which significant progress is still required is that of young people's experiences of the criminal justice system, from initial disclosure through to experiences of courts and sentencing. It has previously been highlighted that most young people do not formally disclose their experiences of sexual exploitation. When they do, or when they reach a point of considering such a disclosure, it is imperative that all efforts are made to ease this process. One young person described the difficulties inherent in this, thus:

[You] have to sit and talk about it all to the peelers and most kids hate the peelers and they're sittin goin 'na, I don't want to talk to them'ins'. And then it brings back memories and then you're sittin goin 'oh God, see if I say all this, like is the people gonna know it was me' and you just feel scared. You keep thinkin that they're gonna come after you

[Asked what might help young people to do this, she replied:]

Just let them do it in their own time. Just don't be sayin to them 'are you thinkin about this, are you doing this, are you doing that?' Cos you're just gonna put them off. Just mention it once and don't say it again. They'll know when they're ready ... It would be better if it was somewhere you were comfortable with and have all the people round you that you're comfortable with. Like doin it in here [informal room at Safe Choices where interview occurred]

A number of examples of promising practice were observed within the research in terms of police taking time to build up a relationship with a young person and being willing to be flexible in how and where they facilitated initial disclosures. Such actions were noted to make a substantial difference to a young person's willingness to disclose. As such, it is important that they be more regularly utilised. The forthcoming establishment of a specialist Sexual Assault Referral Centre offers a potentially effective medium for further progressing this.

Explicit consideration must also be given to the fact that in making a disclosure, a young person may end up at even greater risk of harm from the abuser. This was particularly noted to be the case where there was insufficient evidence to obtain

any prohibitive orders and/or hold an abuser in custody. Care must be taken to proactively manage risk in such situations.

It is also important that when young people consider making a disclosure, their expectations of what will happen as a result of this are appropriately managed. It is important that they are kept informed about the progress of their case and that they are assured that all possible efforts are being made to gather the necessary evidence to apprehend the abusers. It is also important that they realise that achieving a conviction takes time, and may not always even be possible, and that they are supported in dealing with this. One young person who participated in the research noted her regret at making a disclosure on the basis of what subsequently happened or, more accurately, failed to happen:

I walk down the road and he's still there. You walk down to get shoppin or somethin, just a wee dilly dander, and you look over and you see him walkin down and your whole heart an all goes and you really really like crap yourself. It's really scary.

It just does my head that they're still walkin about doin the same thing. I'm sittin here now and you want to just burst out in tears, but you're holding it back sayin 'if they're holding their head up high, why can't I?'

Sometimes I sit and think to myself that I should never have gone to the cops, cos see if I went to the paramilitaries they would have been shot long ago, they would have ... But I went to the cops thinkin 'oh, they'll be locked away soon an all this' but I know this is gonna run on for months, years probably, and if they ever do get locked up – for the time that you've been waitin for them to get locked up that's probably how long they'll get, then they'll get out to

do it again – and keep doin it again and doin it again. Sure look at how many times they locked up [male] and told him to stay away from wee girls, they locked him up loads of times and then they just let him out and he just keeps doin it and doin it

The issue of victims' experiences of court was also identified as an area that required significant improvement. While the introduction of special measures goes some way to easing the process for young people, it does not protect them from difficult questioning in court, or ensure any better conviction rates of abusers:

It is hard to remember exact details especially if there were a number of incidents with similar people and similar venues and similar experiences... so holes start to appear and the defence will tear shreds in them... it may be something as stupid as the colour of your trousers or who raped you first. I have seen that happen and I've seen it happen that because of those issues it never even gets to court... It can feel like the child is abused again when they go through all of that... I know people in this profession who would say if my child was abused, I wouldn't go through the police process because they know what the child would be subjected to. There's something fundamentally wrong with the system when we have people in the business who are making comments like that (Trust management)

It's hard when you get the wrong jury to present that evidence, that it's not 'sure why didn't you do something about it, why did you keep going back'. If they don't like the injured party or they're not sympathetic they might just think 'well you should have known better'. If you don't

get a sympathetic jury who can understand how someone can be overpowered by someone else's strength of character, it's very difficult (other criminal justice)

Taking into consideration these and other factors, it is apparent that there is still significant progress required within the criminal justice field if abusers are to be appropriately held to account for their actions and victims are to be given adequate confidence and incentive to report. It is hoped that the renewed emphasis in recent years on criminal justice processes, and the experiences of victims and witnesses within this, will make significant inroads into addressing the current deficiencies within the system, as without a strong response from the criminal justice system, abusers will continue to abuse and exploit, confident in their ability to evade conviction.

Chapter nine: Conclusion and recommendations

The findings of this exploratory research, as presented in Chapters three to eight of this report, have clearly indicated that sexual exploitation is an issue of serious concern within NI. The particular nature of the abuse can take many different forms. Those most frequently identified within the research were abuse through prostitution (most involving third-party organisation and gain), less obvious transactional exploitation in the context of party houses, and sexually exploitative relationships. Internet exploitation and trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation were also identified as issues of concern although less frequently.

Significant overlap was observed between some of these categories, in terms of the individuals perpetrating the abuse, the young people affected by it, and the nature of the exploitation. The vast majority of identified abusers were adult males, although a significant number of female adult abusers were also identified within the research. Peer exploitation also emerged as an increasing issue of concern that merits further investigation in the future. Young people aged 12 to 15 years emerged as the age group most at risk of experiencing sexual exploitation. Both males and females were identified as having been abused in this manner, although significantly higher prevalence rates were reported for the latter.

As a cohort, children in care were observed to be at greater risk of sexual exploitation than those outside the care system. Risk was not however equally experienced across the care population. Young people in residential care experienced significantly higher rates of risk than their peers in kinship or non-familial foster care placements, who did not present any significantly greater levels of risk than young people

within the general population. Females in residential care were observed to be at particular risk. The risks facing the residential population require further attention, as do current responses to managing these risks.

Young people outside the care system were also identified to be at significant risk of sexual exploitation, but less knowledge of their activities means that the degree of risk and exploitation that they are experiencing is likely to be significantly underestimated at present. This is also an area that requires further investigation in the future.

Sexual exploitation is without doubt a challenging issue to identify and address. The frequent co-existence of many other presenting issues (drugs, alcohol, self-harm etc) can cloud identification of risk. Young people often do not see themselves as victims and frequently fail to disclose their experiences of abuse. Because of a complex mix of push and pull factors, many keep returning to their abusers despite professional attempts to 'rescue' them. In the midst of such challenges, it can be very difficult to extricate young people from the abusive situations and networks and to hold abusers to account for their actions.

For these and other reasons, a proactive strategic multi-agency response is needed to address the issue. While a number of examples of promising practice were identified within the research in terms of starting to progress such an approach, the overriding message from the research is that significant progress is still required if we are to adequately prevent and respond to the sexual exploitation of children and young people in NI. In this respect, both the findings of the research and the increased awareness of the issue of sexual exploitation generated through it are very timely; thanks are due to DHSSPS for

providing the funding that allowed this to happen.

In collating what is known about sexual exploitation within NI, and in considering this in the light of best practice evidence from elsewhere, this exploratory research has highlighted a number of important patterns and principles that can be used, and further developed, to inform a more effective response to this issue in the future. It is hoped that, as agencies further progress their efforts to safeguard children and young people within the new safeguarding structures, the learning from the research will be incorporated into the work of both individual agencies and strategic inter-agency bodies. While it is recognised that appropriately responding to the findings of the research will require some initial investment from agencies, the long-term impacts that will ensue from a failure to adequately engage with this issue, at this point, will be significantly more costly to address.

Recommendations

A number of areas have been identified throughout the report as requiring further investigation or consideration. The specific recommendations highlighted below present a strategic framework for beginning to address these:

1. **When established, the SBNI should, as part of its work plan, consider the issue of child sexual exploitation and the effectiveness of current responses to it.**
2. **DHSSPS should revise existing Safeguarding and Child Protection Guidance to explicitly reference the complex nature and impact of sexual exploitation. This should be supported by the development of detailed inter-agency procedural**
- guidance for practitioners to assist them in responding appropriately to instances where the sexual exploitation of children or young people is confirmed or suspected. The latter will be a matter for the SBNI to consider when established.
3. **The HSC Board should progress the development of a targeted and fully resourced action plan on sexual exploitation that includes, but is not limited to, consideration of the following issues:**
 - data collection and monitoring
 - professional competency and capacity
 - best-practice models for responding to sexual exploitation, including the merits of a co-located inter-agency model of response
 - regional implementation of the sexual exploitation risk assessment tool
 - resourcing of a regional specialist support service.
4. **The HSC Board should consider how best to coordinate and prioritise the provision of specialist (Tier 3) drug and alcohol counselling services to young people who display signs of drug and alcohol abuse which may make them vulnerable to sexual exploitation, in particular to children living in residential care.**
5. **The Public Health Agency should develop a campaign to raise public awareness of the sexual exploitation of children and young people.**
6. **The NI Policing Board should incorporate child protection (including sexual exploitation) as a priority in forthcoming Policing Plans, in reflection of the critical importance of this area of work.**

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Appendix one: Annotated copy of the sexual exploitation risk assessment tool (explanation of use and scoring).

Sexual exploitation risk assessment framework.

Please read the accompanying guidance before completing this assessment.¹

Please do not include the child's name or any other identifying information anywhere on the form.

A. Background information

Name of worker completing assessment		HSC Trust	
Social Work Team		Date of Assessment	

Child's SOSCAR ID		Known to social services since:	
Legal Status		Current placement type/living arrangements	
Age		Gender	
Ethnicity		Religion	
Disability	Physical: Yes/No Learning: Yes/No	Current involvement with youth justice system?	Yes/No
Is the child currently on the child protection register?	Yes/No If yes, when were they placed on the register?	Is the child currently receiving support or services from any other agency?	Yes/No
If other agencies are currently involved with the child, please list ALL of them here (e.g. CAMHS, EWO)			

¹ Available on request from Barnardo's Safe Choices Service

Based on the definition provided on page 2 of the guidance notes, has sexual exploitation ever been identified as an issue for this child?²

Yes – confirmed Yes – suspected No

If yes (confirmed or suspected), please complete section B. If no, please go straight to section C.

B. History of known/suspected sexual exploitation.

If sexual exploitation has ever been identified as an issue for this child (whether confirmed or suspected) please briefly outline.

a. When this was (if more than one occasion, please note this).

b. The nature of concerns.

c. Whether a Joint Protocol Investigation has ever been initiated in relation to these concerns:

No Yes, on the following date: _____.

d. Whether a Child Protection Case Conference has ever been convened in relation to these concerns:

No Yes, on the following date: _____.

e. Any other action taken (e.g. change of placement, secure care, referral to another agency etc).

f. Outcomes (e.g. prosecution of perpetrator, continued risk, reduced missing episodes etc).

² This question and section B were inserted solely for the purposes of the research (to determine known prevalence) and did not affect the risk assessment score/level. Sections C to E were taken from and scored on the basis of the original Welsh model.

C. Underlying vulnerabilities (please tick if present now or at any time in the past; please tick all that apply – whether known or suspected)

Vulnerabilities	Tick if present now OR in past	Vulnerabilities	Tick if present now OR in past
Emotional neglect by parent/carer/family member	<i>Score 1 for each present</i>	Family history of domestic abuse	
Physical abuse by parent/carer/family member		Family history of substance misuse	
Sexual abuse (known or suspected)		Family history of mental health difficulties	
Breakdown of family relationships		Low self esteem	
Unsuitable/inappropriate accommodation/placement		Isolated from peers/social networks	
Lack of positive relationship with a protective/nurturing adult			

D. Moderate risk indicators (please tick if present now or during the last 6 months; please tick all that apply)

Moderate Risk Indicators	Tick if present now OR in past	Moderate Risk Indicators	Tick if present now OR in past
Staying out late	<i>Score 1 for each present</i>	Sexually transmitted infections (STI's)	
Multiple callers (unknown adults/older young people)		Peers/Siblings who have been sexually exploited (known or suspected)	
Use of a mobile phone that causes concern		Drugs misuse	
Expressions of despair (self-harm, overdose, eating disorder, challenging behaviour, aggression, loss of interest in appearance)		Alcohol misuse	
Exclusion, or unexplained absences, from school or not engaged in school/college/training/work		Use of the Internet that causes concern	
Disclosure of sexual/physical assault, followed by withdrawal of allegation		Living independently and failing to respond to attempts by worker to keep in touch	

E. Significant risk indicators (please tick appropriate column based on when indicator was present – tick both columns if present in both time periods)

Significant Risk Indicators	Tick if present now or during the last 6 months	Tick if present between 6 and 12 months ago
Periods of going missing overnight or longer	<i>Score 5 for each present in this column</i>	<i>Score 1 for each present in this column</i>
Older 'boyfriend'/ relationship with controlling adult		
Physical abuse by that controlling adult/ Physical injury without plausible explanation		
Emotional abuse by that controlling adult		
Entering/leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults		
Unexplained amounts of money, expensive clothes or other items		
Frequenting areas known for on/off street sex work or 'party houses' operated by adults		

Any other comments

Appendix two: Categories of risk

Category of risk	Description	Associated actions
Category 1 No Current Risk (score of 0-5)	A child or young person who may be 'in need' but who is not currently at particular risk of being groomed for sexual exploitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Educate to stay safe ■ Review risk following any significant change in circumstances
Category 2 Mild Risk (score of 6-10)	A vulnerable child or young person who may be at risk of being groomed for sexual exploitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Undertake preventative work with young person on risk awareness and staying safe ■ Review risk following any significant change in circumstances
Category 3 Moderate Risk (score of 11-15)	A child or young person who may be targeted for opportunistic abuse through exchange of sex for drugs, accommodation (overnight stays) and goods etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Refer to ACPC Regional Policy and Procedures and Co-operating to Safeguard Children May 2003 ■ Convene a multi-agency meeting to share information and formulate a protection plan, with agreed actions for all relevant partners ■ Schedule a review meeting and review risk following any significant change in circumstances ■ Prioritise work with the child/young person around risk reduction and keeping safe
Category 4 Significant Risk (score of 16 plus)	Clear indication that a child or young person is at significant risk of, or is already being, sexually exploited. At this stage, sexual exploitation is likely to be habitual and often self-denied. Coercion/control is implicit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Refer to ACPC Regional Policy and Procedures and Co-operating to Safeguard Children May 2003 ■ Convene a multi-agency meeting to share information and formulate a protection plan, with agreed actions for all relevant partners ■ Schedule regular review meetings and review risk following any significant change in circumstances ■ The protection plan should include measures to protect the child from both immediate and longer term risk and should involve long-term intensive work with the child/young person ■ An effective response to concerns around sexual exploitation must also prioritise the identification, disruption and prosecution of suspected perpetrators

Notes

'Not a world away'
*The sexual exploitation of
children and young people in
Northern Ireland*

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