Meeting the needs of sexually exploited young people in London

Zoe Harper and Sara Scott

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The Corporation of London's Bridge House Trust commissioned this research study to determine and map the service needs of young people at risk of sexual exploitation in London.

The authors of this report are Zoe Harper and Sara Scott of Barnardo's. This report is intended as a basis for discussion and every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the material therein. The report does not necessarily reflect the views of the Corporation of London or its Members.

Acknowledgements

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Foreword from Barnardo's

Barnardo's has been providing support to sexually exploited young people in London since 1997. This study allows us, for the first time, to understand the needs of these young people across the city, not only in terms of direct, specialist services, but also in the broader framework of statutory provision including the barriers to identifying young people in need.

There is some good news in this study. The research tells us how far police officers, social workers and other professionals have progressed in their recognition of sexual exploitation and its impact on young people's lives in recent years. It highlights excellent, proactive work in many London boroughs. However, it also identifies how far we still have to go in providing effective support and protection to all young people at risk. At best, only half of those young people currently being exploited in London are being identified by services. Many of those who do come to services' attention only do so when risk has escalated and intervention is more difficult. The lack of community-based alternatives sometimes means that these young people are placed in secure accommodation, even though it is widely acknowledged that this has limited value.

We all know resources are limited. It is understandable that hard-pressed service providers are not always motivated to seek out a problem that is often well hidden, or to reach out to a population of young people who are often wary of the forms of 'help' available. Professionals are often reluctant to identify a need if services are not readily available to meet it. However, if we are serious about preventing sexual exploitation, early intervention – that is, when young people are at risk because they are going missing or not attending school – is vital and must be resourced.

This study highlights some important lessons from the good practice which exists in London. The key message is to be proactive: sexual exploitation will remain hidden if services simply wait for it to reveal itself as a problem locally. All agencies working with young people – including schools, health services, the police and social services – need to be aware of the indicators of risk and be prepared to act to prevent sexual exploitation and to support young people who are being exploited. Examples of positive practice include where local authorities:

- have developed cross-agency protocols
- have a lead officer to co-ordinate support
- are developing a range of innovative service responses.

The key success factor appears to be senior management commitment across agencies. This commitment is essential for appropriate action. Where good practice prevails, the study shows that support can be provided. In particular, the use of secure accommodation can be avoided and this must be a priority.

The study also reveals some important concerns about police priorities. The research highlights an impressive degree of awareness and commitment by some police officers in London. However, there is a lack of co-ordinated work on sexual exploitation and a lack of resourcing for the police to monitor those children and young people who go missing, a key risk factor in sexual exploitation. The level of prosecutions of adults who sexually exploit young people remains depressingly low and is likely to remain so until this issue is made a national policing priority.

Sexual exploitation has to be regarded as a collective responsibility – it cannot be left to the police and social services alone. Yet the response of many agencies to sexual exploitation is very patchy. The research suggests variable levels of awareness among schools, youth offending teams and health professionals. These are precisely the professionals who are most likely to have initial contact with young people at risk and it is imperative that we develop inter-agency training and protocols as a matter of urgency.

Barnardo's has been providing specialist services for sexually exploited young people for nearly a decade and we are painfully aware of the challenges in obtaining the resources required to maintain and develop them. This research highlights the benefits of specialist services and shows that where there is inter-agency commitment and adequate resources we really can meet the needs of this most vulnerable group of young people.

The recommendations of this study offer us a way forward in tackling sexual exploitation across London. But it requires action from all of us: the government, local authorities, police, schools, health trusts, youth offending teams and voluntary organisations. We must work together to co-ordinate our responses and to mobilise the necessary resources for both prevention and intervention.

Roger Singleton
Chief Executive
Barnardo's

Forward from Bridge House Trust
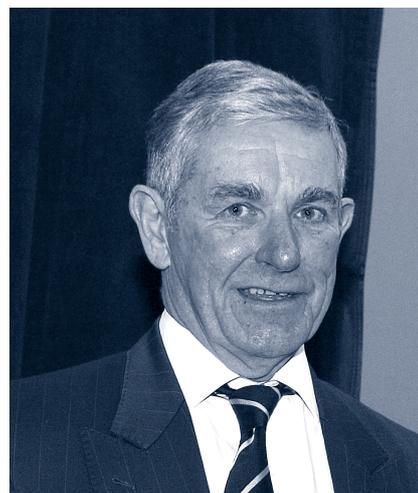
This report by Barnardo's on a very important subject concerning young people in London and those who work with them and for them, deserves our thanks, which are also due to all of those – practitioners and policy makers – who took part in the research. The Bridge House Trust very much appreciates and values your contributions.

When we commissioned Barnardo's to undertake this research we wanted to establish the level and current need for services amongst young people at risk of sexual exploitation in London so that these services could be developed and supported by all those with the power and wherewithal to so do. Our ten years' experience as London's largest independent funder had led us to believe that services to help and support these very vulnerable young people were patchy and were in need of further development and improved co-ordination.

This comprehensive report supports our initial premise and has identified key messages and recommendations where vulnerable young people can be better served and protected. We all – practitioners, policy makers and funders – have a responsibility to do our best in ensuring that young people should be free from poverty, abuse and discrimination – in keeping with the spirit of Dr Barnardo.

I am sure you will find the report both interesting and helpful and join me in thanking Barnardo's, and especially Zoe Harper and Dr Sara Scott, for all their work.

William Fraser
Deputy Chairman
Bridge House Trust

Executive summary

Meeting the needs of sexually exploited young people in London

This report presents the findings of a two-year research study mapping the service needs of young people at risk of sexual exploitation in London. The research was commissioned and funded by the Bridge House Trust and carried out by researchers from Barnardo's Policy and Research Unit between September 2003 and April 2005.

The objective of the research was to establish the level and nature of current need for services among young people at risk of sexual exploitation in London. This involved both investigating the nature and extent of sexual exploitation known in London, and exploring the experiences of services and young people, to identify promising practice and gaps in service provision.

Data was collected primarily through interviews with over 100 informants including child protection co-ordinators and lead officers for sexual exploitation from 30 London boroughs; representatives from the police, health services and education services; representatives from specialist sexual exploitation services and other voluntary sector services; as well as with young people themselves.

The nature of sexual exploitation in London

Sexual exploitation identified in London took a variety of forms, including situations where young people were exploited by family members; the involvement of young people in sexually exploitative relationships with older men or peers; the informal exchange of sex for favours, money, drugs, accommodation or other commodities; more 'formal' forms of prostitution; organised abuse; and trafficking.

Sexual exploitation occurs in a social context of normalised sexual violence towards women. This is most acutely experienced by young women, who are at highest risk of rape, sexual assault and domestic violence. Violence, coercion and intimidation were frequently present in situations of sexual exploitation. However, sexual exploitation primarily occurred as a result of young people making constrained choices against a background of social, economic and emotional vulnerability. Where young women were making constrained choices in relation to their circumstances, there was a danger that services saw this as a 'free choice' leading to a lack of protective action. The continued existence of legal provisions to arrest and prosecute young people for 'persistent and voluntary return' to prostitution may play a role in this perception.

As the sexual exploitation of young people is not limited to formal 'prostitution', it is important for services to understand and be aware of the full spectrum of sexually exploitative situations to identify and protect young people at risk. Talking about 'prostitution' or 'commercial sexual exploitation' of young people is therefore unhelpful.

The extent of sexual exploitation in London

The number of cases identified by informants to the research related directly to the level of awareness and proactive work within different local authorities. However, figures from local authority social services departments provide evidence of the minimum number of sexually exploited young people known to services. A total of 507 separate cases of young people were identified in London where sexual exploitation was known or indicated[1]. In approximately one third of cases (n=175), sexual exploitation was 'known' rather than 'indicated'. Cases were identified in every borough in London. The vast majority of cases involved young women (n=490). Young men at risk of sexual exploitation were rarely identified by interviewees. Practitioners acknowledged that they do not focus their concerns on young men.

Statistical techniques were used to estimate the risk of sexual exploitation for each borough in London based on a set of proxy indicators for exploitation including: the numbers of young people going missing, the numbers of children in local authority care, the numbers of children in residential homes, rates of school absence, levels of sexually transmitted infections and teenage pregnancy, levels of youth homelessness, and levels of drug use in the community.

The total number of young people estimated to be at risk across London was 1,002. This is double the number of young people currently identified by services. This figure does not represent 'true' prevalence, but the numbers of young people who would be identified if all boroughs worked as proactively to identify young people as the most proactive boroughs do. The statistical estimates suggest that some London boroughs may be under-identifying young people at risk by up to 80 per cent.

Responding to young people at risk of sexual exploitation

The research found considerable support for an approach based on the *prevention* of sexual exploitation, the *protection* of sexually exploited young people and the *prosecution* of perpetrators of this abuse.

Prevention should involve primary prevention work in schools to tackle a culture of normalised violence towards young women and to equip young people with the skills and confidence to assert themselves against sexually aggressive behaviour. Many young people who became at risk of sexual exploitation in adolescence had been failed by services at earlier stages of their lives, so improving the quality of services, particularly social services, is another important aspect of prevention.

Early identification of young people at risk, and targeting early intervention work through the provision of services, is also necessary to prevent risk escalating. Young people do not readily disclose this form of abuse, so practitioners must be able to respond to indications of possible sexual exploitation. Training and awareness-raising for practitioners is needed to enable them to proactively identify young people at risk.

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1 Information relates to 31 boroughs as additional information was provided by a specialist service in one borough where the social services lead officer was not interviewed.

Protection requires a *multi-agency approach* co-ordinated by social services under specific protocols for sexual exploitation. Services need to be able to respond quickly and flexibly to young people at risk. *Intensive support* is required to provide young people with a high level of relational security to counter the 'pull' of sexually exploitative relationships. As far as possible, a therapeutic approach needs to support and empower young people in achieving change on their own behalf.

Continuity of care and *safe accommodation* which promote stability and enable young people to remain in their community are also required. Therapeutic approaches should support and build on protective factors such as relationships with carers, friendship networks and educational opportunities. As sexual exploitation occurs within a context of constrained choices, providing more and better choices for young people is necessary. The provision of *specialist services* within a multi-agency partnership appears to be the best way to engage with and provide protection for this particularly vulnerable group. Sexually exploited young people from abroad may also need protection against removal from the UK to situations where they may be at risk.

Responses to young people at risk have been undermined by severe resource constraints. These were experienced by all agencies involved in the research. No additional funding has been given to local authorities or other agencies to implement the Department of Health guidance, *Safeguarding children involved in prostitution* (2000) so implementation has relied on already overstretched resources.

Police

Proactive police work is essential to gather and co-ordinate intelligence on exploitation. There has been some promising practice in the work undertaken by Clubs & Vice and through the North London CATSE Pilot Project. However, there is an overall lack of proactive work on sexual exploitation, and social services departments report struggling to engage the police in multi-agency responses to sexually exploited young people.

Preventative work and intelligence gathering about young people who run away is crucial, but this is under-resourced across London. In addition, the Metropolitan Police currently have no way to monitor the numbers of children who run away, either across London or within individual boroughs.

Police action has been undermined by a lack of clarity about which team in the Metropolitan Police has the remit and lead for co-ordinating intelligence and responding to sexual exploitation across London. Levels of resourcing in the police for work on sexual exploitation also limit their ability to proactively identify and respond to young people at risk.

To date, there has been an extremely low level of prosecutions achieved. The police identified the problem of being reliant on young people to give testimony when they are mostly unable or unwilling to do so.

Social services

There is good practice in social services departments in London, but awareness and response to sexual exploitation varies across and within boroughs in London.

Identifying young people at risk relies on practitioners' awareness of the issue, their proactive work to identify indicators of risk, their preparedness to work with situations where sexual exploitation is indicated rather than definitely known to be occurring, and the availability of services to support young people. These are linked – practitioners are reluctant to proactively identify young people in danger without the availability of services to refer them to. The training of practitioners to proactively identify sexual exploitation was highlighted by interviewees as a need both within social services and across other agencies. Requiring evidence of sexual exploitation as a 'local' problem before taking action to address it leads to inaction, and ensures that sexual exploitation remains unrecognised.

The adoption of detailed procedures is key in enabling practitioners to identify and respond to sexual exploitation. Many boroughs are relying exclusively on the sexual exploitation section of the London Child Protection Procedures to respond to this issue, but the procedures are not sufficiently detailed to support them to do so adequately. The London Procedures have been an important step towards harmonising child protection procedures across London and delineating cross-borough and inter-agency responsibilities. Updating these in line with current best practice around sexual exploitation would be a useful way of improving practice across London.

Resource pressures within social services lead to 'gatekeeping' in access to services. This may prevent the identification of young people at risk and has lead to young people as young as 14 not being offered a service. Resource constraints also resulted in high thresholds for intervention. As a result, prevention and early intervention work was rare.

Engagement with young people was highlighted as a difficulty by many services. Successful engagement often requires assertive outreach work, which social workers did not have the time or resources to provide.

Secure accommodation is widely used by local authorities as a crisis response for young women experiencing sexual exploitation, even though many practitioners acknowledge that it is unhelpful, and despite evidence of the damaging impact it has on this group of young people. The local authority that had the best level of awareness and response to sexual exploitation was able to avoid the use of secure accommodation completely.

The local authorities undertaking the most proactive work had a senior child protection officer taking a co-ordinating role, were working to an active protocol, and were working with cases where exploitation was 'indicated' as well as 'known'. Commitment from senior management within social services is needed to replicate this level of support across London.

Health

Many different health services come across young people at risk, including looked-after children's health services, Accident and Emergency departments, sexual health clinics, and teenage pregnancy services, and all need to be aware of protocols. The level of practitioner awareness and proactive work around sexual exploitation varied between Primary Care Trusts and within different parts of PCTs. Young people experienced difficulties in accessing services, particularly CAMHS support, though there was good practice in co-ordination between social services and CAMHS in one local authority. There were instances where health services were important in identifying young people from abroad who had been trafficked.

Education

Disengagement from school is an early indicator of risk. The development of a protective and pastoral ethos within schools to enable young people to disclose difficulties including possible abuse or exploitation is necessary. Schools need to identify those young people who are absenting themselves from education, with education welfare services addressing concerns and assisting young people to re-engage with education. School staff also need to be aware of risk indicators to actively identify them among young people in their care, and be able to refer to services to ensure the protection of young people. Staff need to be alert to young people being targeted at, or outside, school. Informants to the research also identified the need for services to effectively re-engage sexually exploited young people with education.

Youth Offending Teams

Some YOTs had low levels of awareness about sexual exploitation and could do more to identify young people at risk. This is true for young people of both genders, but it was identified that YOTs could play a particular role in identifying young men at risk.

Specialist sexual exploitation services

Where specialist services exist, they play a vital role in engaging this hard-to-reach and vulnerable group of young people; facilitating access to other services; and in developing and disseminating expertise in working with sexually exploited young people.

Services need resources. If all agencies proactively identified sexually exploited young people as they should, current services would need to expand to meet the demand. Some services are already having to prioritise referrals to meet current need. Only seven boroughs in London had access to a specialist service. Specialist services are particularly needed in high risk areas of London where there are currently no services.

It was widely acknowledged that working to change the circumstances of sexually exploited young people can take time. Long term funding needs to be provided in order to offer stability of service to young people.

Vulnerable groups of young people

Certain groups of young people suffer additional barriers to accessing protection. Young people aged 16-18 experience particular difficulties because they are vulnerable to their exploitation being viewed as an 'adult' choice, which has an impact on the readiness of statutory services to offer continued support and protection. Continuity of services for young people when they reach the age of 18 is also needed.

Homeless young people are a further category of young people at risk who experience difficulty in accessing services. As they are often older young people, they are vulnerable to not being offered a service by social services. This is compounded by the likelihood that, through being homeless, they have crossed borough boundaries and the host or home local authority may not accept responsibility for them.

Young people from abroad face specific barriers to protection. Difficulties in disclosing their abuse can be compounded by the fear and insecurity they face as a result of their insecure immigration status and lack of awareness of, and access to, protective services. Identification of exploited young people is made more difficult as they are not necessarily included in protective networks such as schools and other services which could identify their abuse. They also suffer difficulties in accessing services, particularly where their status as immigrants or asylum seekers is considered before their needs as young people in need of protection. There are often disputes over the age of young people from abroad which denies them access to services and leaves them particularly vulnerable.

Recommendations

Government

■ The government should provide ring-fenced resources to assist services to take forward the measures outlined in the guidance, *Safeguarding children involved in prostitution.*

■ The government should issue guidance that discourages the use of secure accommodation and promotes a model of care that includes prevention, early intervention, safe accommodation, continuity of care, intensive support, and multi-agency co-ordination, including police action against perpetrators.

■ The government should remove provisions to arrest and prosecute young people who are considered to 'persistently and voluntarily return' to prostitution. These undermine approaches acknowledging the vulnerability of young people and the need to offer persistent and long term support to young people to disengage them from abusive networks.

London Child Protection Committee

■ The London Child Protection Procedures should be updated in line with current best practice around sexual exploitation. This would assist boroughs to develop local coterminous protocols and to improve their work in line with current best practice.

■ The London Child Protection Committee should also update the procedures to include guidance on young people who run away or go missing to ensure London-wide service responses to such young people. The protocols developed as part of the Safe in the City programme provide a useful model.

Social services

■ Local authorities should develop and disseminate a detailed protocol on sexual exploitation, work actively to promote it among agencies within the borough and encourage proactive identification of young people at risk.

■ Local authorities should organise regular inter-agency training and awareness-raising around the use of protocols to identify and respond to young people at risk of sexual exploitation.

■ Local authorities should support lead officers in taking a proactive role in supporting protocols work. In boroughs where there are high levels of risk, this should be through making the lead officer role a full-time post.

■ Social services departments should avoid the use of secure accommodation as a response to sexually exploited young people. Resources should instead be deployed to provide community based responses involving early intervention, intensive support, safe accommodation and continuity of care.

■ Local authorities should consider providing funding for a specialist service to provide targeted services to young people at risk of sexual exploitation. Where levels of risk in an individual authority do not justify a whole service in the borough, consideration should be given to setting up joint services with neighbouring boroughs. The North London model is a useful template.

Police

■ The Metropolitan Police should identify a lead team to take responsibility for co-ordinating police work on sexual exploitation.

■ The Metropolitan Police team holding the remit for sexual exploitation should be adequately resourced to work proactively across the whole of London to protect young people and to prosecute abusers.

■ The Metropolitan Police should adopt proactive approaches to identifying sexual exploitation, including the gathering and co-ordination of intelligence; increased partnership

working with social services departments and other agencies; and the development of further work with young people who run away or go missing. Sufficient resources should be allocated to these areas of work.

■ The Metropolitan Police should identify a means of monitoring young people who go missing or run away.

■ Training around issues of sexual exploitation should also be provided to police officers likely to come into contact with this issue.

■ Creative approaches to securing prosecutions against perpetrators should be explored. These may involve approaches that do not rely on the evidence of the young person; proactive use of the Sexual Offences Act; and the creative use of other existing legislation.

Health

■ Primary Care Trusts should support the role of the identified lead officer within health to provide guidance and training to health professionals around issues of sexual exploitation.

■ Health services should be provided in forms that are flexible and accessible to young people at risk of sexual exploitation.

Education

■ Schools and education services should play a greater role in identifying young people at risk of sexual exploitation. This involves being alert to indicators of risk, identifying young people who disengage from education, and providing a pastoral and protective school ethos which facilitates disclosure of abuse.

■ Issues of sexual exploitation should be included in standard training to school child protection leads and other educational staff.

■ The PSHE curriculum should pay attention to issues of violence against women and equip young people with the knowledge and skills to enjoy more equal relationships.

■ Educational provision should also be developed to assist young people suffering sexual exploitation to re-engage with education.

Youth Offending Teams

■ Youth Offending Teams should play a greater role in identifying young people at risk of sexual exploitation. Indicators of risk need to be included in their assessments of young people.

Additional measures to protect young people from abroad

- Multi-agency safeguarding teams should operate at ports of entry to identify young people where there are concerns relating to their protection.

- Measures should be put in place to prevent young people from being age disputed. Young people whose age is disputed should be treated as minors and provided specialist and protective support and accommodation whilst they are awaiting independent assessments of their age.

- All services need to ensure that they are accessible to young people from abroad and work proactively to ensure their protection.

- The ongoing protection needs of young people from abroad who have been trafficked and sexually exploited should be acknowledged, and safe accommodation and intensive support provided under protocols for sexual exploitation.

- Funding should be provided to ensure that all young people from abroad are able to access free legal advice from a high-quality and specialist legal representative.

Potential funders

- This area of work needs more resources. Funding is needed for new specialist services in high risk areas of London where there are currently no services. Funding is also needed to enable existing services to expand to meet demand.

- Long term funding needs to be provided in order to offer stability of service to young people. It is important to acknowledge that working to change the circumstances of sexually exploited young people can take time.

Literature review

What is known about sexual exploitation?

There are large gaps in the knowledge base about the level and nature of sexual exploitation in London and in the UK as a whole. Understanding sexual exploitation is difficult not only because it is a hidden form of abuse, but also because definitions of the boundaries of the problem vary within the research literature and among practitioners, which makes comparisons of data difficult (Phoenix, 2003).

Understandings of the problem may be limited to 'prostitution' or to 'commercial' forms of exploitation. They may acknowledge the exploitation of young people in more informal settings as well as the exchange of sex for non-pecuniary benefits, and exploitation in the context of ongoing sexually exploitative relationships:

> 'Child sexual abuse is usually conceptualised as the victimisation of children by adults, either within or outwith the family. Perpetrators sometimes share, exchange or sell children. This is the way younger children are abused through prostitution. In adolescence prostitution may involve a young person selling sex on the streets for money. In between these two forms of exploitation young people (predominantly girls) may be involved in a range of less well recognised, but equally exploitative, sexual relationships. These may involve the receipt of money, drugs or accommodation in exchange for sex with one or more men. They sometimes involve a single sexual partner using emotional or physical coercion, but perceived by the young person as a lover and protector rather than as an "abuser"' (Creegan et al: 2005, p.28)

In an in-depth research study involving 55 young women to provide child-centred perspectives on sexual exploitation, Pearce, Williams and Galvin (2002) also found that young people's experience of sexual exploitation is not fixed or static. They identified three categories of sexual exploitation: being at risk of sexual exploitation through running away, truanting and engaging in emotional and sexual relationships with older, abusive and/or violent men; swapping sex for affection, money, accommodation or other returns 'in kind'; selling sex and intermittently identifying as working in 'prostitution' (p.26).

They found that young women could move backwards and forwards between these categories (p.28).

In understanding how young people become sexually exploited, researchers have identified different factors such as the role of coercive men (Liabo et al, 1998) as well as social, cultural and economic factors:

> 'Whatever the power of personal experiences that incline a person towards prostitution, this can still only be possible in specific cultural conditions. The

phenomenon of prostitution has the sexual double standard, poverty and an unequal labour market as prerequisites.' (Cusick, 2002, p.235)

The way the issue is defined and understood affects both which young people fall within the ambit of protective measures, and also which young people are seen as 'deserving' of protection. Phoenix has argued that emphasis in the Department of Health guidance, *Safeguarding children involved in prostitution* (2000) given to the role of predatory men in coercing young people into prostitution and the continued criminalisation of young people deemed to be 'voluntarily and persistently' returning to prostitution sets up a distinction whereby young people coerced by others are viewed as 'deserving' victims while young people involved in prostitution as a survival strategy within restricted social and material circumstances are viewed as 'undeserving' (Phoenix, 2002, p.368).

The largest-scale and most influential research into the prevalence of sexual exploitation is that undertaken as part of the review of the Department of Health Guidance (Swann and Balding, 2001). A survey of all 111 Area Child Protection Committees in England found that 76 per cent of ACPCs were aware of children involved in prostitution in their area (*ibid*, p.vi). From a targeted survey of 50 ACPCs, which including some London boroughs, 545 girls were identified by 28 ACPCs and 57 boys were identified in 18 ACPCs (*ibid*, p.8). The research concludes that an average of 19 girls and 3 boys are involved in prostitution in any local authority at any given time (*ibid*, p.vi). However, the impact of low levels of awareness, narrow definitions of 'prostitution' and resource issues on the identification of young people was highlighted (*ibid*, p.5).

In London, sexual exploitation has also been identified and researched through studies carried out in small areas of the city. In the research carried out by Pearce, Willaims and Galvin (2002), 30 of the 55 young people involved were in contact with a service based in a London borough.

Research in Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark identified sexually exploited young people in all three boroughs, but difficulty was experienced in quantifying the problem without risking double-counting (Barnardo's, 2000). Research with young people carried out for the study also revealed that young women in particular experienced a range of sexually threatening and coercive behaviour towards them, including everyday harassment, routine exploitation within peer groups and sexual approaches from adult men (Barnardos, 2000, p.37-39).

A study carried out in Lewisham concluded that concerns that young people are being sexually exploited within the borough were not substantiated (Nash and Cusick, 2004, p.4). However one group of service providers interviewed for the research reported several cases where exploitation was indicated, including young people in relationships with older men, age-related statutory rape and abuse through prostitution (*ibid*, p.22).

What is known about trafficking in the UK?

The most widely accepted definition of trafficking is that contained in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime:

> *'"Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, or abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs'* (Article 3a)

Specific reference is made to children, defined as anyone under the age of 18 years:

> *'The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered "trafficking in persons" even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article.'* (Article 3b)

The UK is a signatory to this Convention and Protocol, which came into force in December 2003.

The *Home Office Trafficking Toolkit* (2003), which provides information and guidance on trafficking, states that the core elements of trafficking include the movement of a person into a situation of exploitation (p.8). The definition also covers circumstances where a person may be trafficked within a country (p.9). As the UN Protocol envisages trafficking as a process, involving, for example, the recruitment, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, trafficking is also not limited to the transportation of a person.

Trafficking may involve exploitation in a wide range of circumstances, such as forced labour and domestic slavery as well as prostitution and sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation is not limited to more 'formal' forms of prostitution in the definition of trafficking. It is also important to note that while trafficking may involve various forms of coercion or deception, the definition provides that children are considered to be trafficked even if overt forms or coercion or deception are not identified. This coercion can therefore be understood to be inherent in the exploitation of young people as a result of their status as children.

Trafficking was first identified in the UK in 1995 by social workers at West Sussex social services who identified a pattern of young women, mainly Nigerian girls, who arrived as unaccompanied minors, claimed asylum and then disappeared from their care (Somerset, 2004, p.9). Police investigations identified that the young women contacted or were contacted by the trafficker at their residence and were trafficked to Europe, particularly Italy, and exploited through prostitution (Somerset, 2001, p.12).

Since that time, research into child trafficking (Somerset, 2001; UNICEF UK, 2003; Somerset, 2004) has identified further numbers of young people who have been trafficked into and through the UK. Trafficking of young people of other nationalities has been identified as well as different methods used by traffickers to transport and exploit young people. For example, young people may arrive in the UK accompanied by the trafficker or a third party, and may enter

clandestinely or through legal immigration routes (UNICEF UK, 2003, p.14). However, most information about trafficking of young people has related to young people who enter as unaccompanied minors, because they come to the attention of the authorities if they claim asylum (*ibid*, p.14).

As regards prevalence, UNICEF UK reports that there were 250 cases of trafficking in young people between 1998 and 2003 (UNICEF UK, 2003, p.17). This figure is based on cases known to a small number of social service departments, NGOs, police and immigration (*ibid*, p.17). As there is no official or consistent monitoring of trafficking in the UK and trafficking is a problem that remains hidden to services, this figure is likely to underestimate the extent of trafficking of young people in the UK (*ibid*, p.17).

Recent research has been carried out into the extent of trafficking of young people known to social services in London (Somerset, 2004). Through interviews with 68 individuals or teams working in social services, Unaccompanied Minor/Child Asylum teams, asylum teams, children in need or looked-after children teams and child protection teams in 33 London boroughs, Somerset found there were documented cases of trafficking in 17 out of the 33 boroughs (2004, p.26). Thirty-five cases of trafficking were identified where the nature of the exploitation was known. These included cases which involved sexual exploitation, as well as those which involved domestic servitude, exploitation to obtain benefits, and exploitation through restaurant work and drug trafficking (*ibid*, p.27). A further 15 cases were identified where there were no further details about the nature of trafficking (*ibid*, p.28). Further cases were also identified in the research where young people had gone missing and there were indications of trafficking and exploitation (*ibid*, p.29).

The needs of sexually exploited young people

The needs of children and young people abused through prostitution are complex and multi-layered. Intervention is needed at an early stage to prevent children and young people being at risk of exploitation. Harm reduction and exit strategies for those already being sexually exploited are also required (Liabo et al, 2000).

Through interviews with staff at a Barnardo's service in Wolverhampton, Scott (2001) explored the case histories of 12 young people abused through prostitution. The analysis revealed several risk factors associated with being drawn into exploitation including:

- violent fathers or stepfathers
- physical or sexual abuse within the family
- mothers who were victims of domestic violence and/or dependent on alcohol or drugs
- a history of 'going missing'
- drug or alcohol dependence
- being targeted and sexually exploited by a pimp
- being disengaged from education by their early teens
- being alienated from their families or communities
- being hungry for attention
- being keen to 'escape' childhood and be regarded as adults.

Once caught up in prostitution, factors such as peer pressure, material rewards, drug use, fear of coercers, lack of self-esteem and denial of their situation can act as barriers that make it extremely difficult for young people to move away from their involvement in exploitation (Liabo et al, 2000).

Research involving professionals and children and young people consistently identifies a number of practical, social and emotional issues that need to be addressed to enable young people to leave prostitution successfully. Taylor-Browne (2002) interviewed 47 children and young people from across England who had been sexually exploited. The problems identified include:

- financial difficulties
- drug addiction
- single parenthood
- lack of qualifications and training
- housing problems
- existing social networks
- lack of family support
- abusive partners/pimps/boyfriends
- criminal convictions that prevent people taking on relatively low skilled work such as childcare.

The Home Office Trafficking Toolkit (2003) also discusses particular needs of victims of trafficking. Victims may be fearful of trusting practitioners in the UK, they may fear reprisals from the trafficker/s towards themselves or to family members outside the UK; they may have formed an emotional attachment to their traffickers who may be boyfriends, husbands or other relatives; they may feel obliged to continue being exploited in order to pay off a debt; and they may fear being arrested and deported.

Housing and safety has been identified as a need for victims of trafficking. Health and mental health needs have also been identified, including treatment and counselling for harm suffered through physical and sexual violence; treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, advice about unwanted pregnancies; and needs relating to the emotional and psychological distress resulting from their experiences. They may also have adopted, or been encouraged into, coping strategies including dependence on drugs or alcohol (Home Office, 2003).

Barnardo's (1998) suggests that a range of strategic responses are required to address the needs of children and young people abused through prostitution. A framework for intervention is proposed that incorporates primary prevention, targeted prevention, harm reduction and recovery.

Services to meet the needs of sexually exploited young people

Research about services working with sexually exploited young people is limited. The information that is available mostly focuses on the approach of services rather than on outcomes for service-users, but some common themes do emerge.

A co-ordinated multi-agency approach is recommended throughout the literature on sexual exploitation (Cusick, 2002; Swann and Balding, 2001; Pearce et al, 2002; Creegan et al, 2005). Creegan, Scott and Smith (2005) identify that young women involved in sexual exploitation often have a range of complex needs which cannot be readily met by a single agency. Multi-agency co-ordination is needed to offer a package of support, which may involve social work, health, education and specialist services in the voluntary sector (Creegan et al, 2005, p.68).

To be effective, interventions aimed at young people at risk of sexual exploitation should be flexible, comprehensive, and be delivered by staff who are proficient at forming relationships based on trust and respect (Schorr, 1989, cited in Cusick, 2002). Joseph (1997) argues that there is no standard mechanism to facilitate change in individuals wishing to leave prostitution. Intervention design must take into account, 'the diversity and variety of human nature and experience' and should aim to foster security, stability, a sense of inclusion or belonging and a positive recognition of self and identity.

The concept of 'assertive outreach' (Creegan et al, 2005) or 'therapeutic outreach' (Pearce et al, 2002) has also been developed. This form of intensive support recognises that the lack of engagement of a young person relates to their distress and requires continued effort to reach out, rather than close down, support (Pearce et al, 2002, p.71). Enabling the young person to realise that professionals will continue to co-ordinate and offer a service, even if they do not take up support, forms part of a therapeutic approach (*ibid*, p.71). This may involve workers and carers adopting proactive and assertive outreach methods such as daily phone calls, text messaging and 'door stepping'. Such methods are used by Barnardo's sexual exploitation services with young people in crisis and at high risk (Creegan et al: 2005, p.68).

In relation to service delivery, Pearce, Williams and Galvin (2003) found that the services most often used by young people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing sexual exploitation were local community-based projects offering a range of legal, social and health services accompanied by outreach and drop-in provision.

Shaw and Butler (1998) argue for a holistic social work response to children and young people abused through prostitution, as separate services aimed at narrowly-focused client groups only serve to isolate those they wish to support. Children and young people abused through prostitution have much in common with other vulnerable groups, for example those who are homeless, living in poverty, are involved in substance misuse or whose health is at risk through lack of risk-awareness. However, others maintain that services intended specifically for those abused through prostitution are more desirable because service users do not need to either conceal, or openly reveal, their involvement in sexual exploitation (MacIver, 1992, cited in Cusick, 2002).

Research in Lewisham found that women in crack houses exchanging sex to fund a drug habit often did not self-identify as 'sex workers'. Women may also enter into relationships with a man or groups of men and exchange sex for drugs, which may be perceived as 'favours' or 'keeping their side of the relationship' (Nash and Cusick, 2004, p.15). In this context, the research states that services based on a stigmatised 'sex worker' identity may be rejected. The research advocates holistic and client-centred services profiling drugs, housing, outreach, health and youth services. It also says that this may be particularly important for young people and those who may be exploited in the context of a relationship (Nash and Cusick, 2004, p.25).

Recent research (Phoenix, 2003) has revealed that throughout the UK there are fewer than 50 services working with young people abused through prostitution. These services have a very patchy distribution:

■ 43 of the 50 services are located in England, and 42 of these are clustered in 13 major conurbations
■ only 7 local government regions in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have any service or provision at all.

The services that exist can be divided into two broad categories: those that work partly or solely with young people abused through prostitution, and those which have expertise or experience in working with this client group (Phoenix, 2003). Six specialist services working with young people at risk of sexual exploitation were identified in London, with several other services relevant to young people at risk also listed.

Use of secure accommodation as a response to sexually exploited young people

Placing children and young people in secure accommodation for welfare reasons raises a number of ethical and human rights dilemmas. Several studies raise concerns about locking up young people who have not committed an offence (eg Goldson, 2002; O'Neill, 2001).

In 1998 the Department of Health reported that of the different routes into secure accommodation, almost 29 per cent of boys and 70 per cent of girls were admitted via the welfare route. Goldson (2002) describes how placements in secure accommodation are something of a lottery, determined by a combination of four factors: the young person's vulnerability; professional priorities and resources; the social class, race and gender of the young person; and geographical location.

A review by the Social Work Services Inspectorate (1996) revealed that it is not uncommon for children and young people to be placed in secure accommodation because there is no alternative option available. In 1995 the National Children's Bureau carried out a survey of 193 children and young people placed in secure accommodation in England (96 for welfare reasons). Managers believed that 60 of the children and young people concerned could safely have been placed in open accommodation (National Children's Bureau, 1995).

Research has been carried out into the use of secure accommodation as a response to sexually exploited young people in Scotland. Based on interviews with 21 staff from all 6 secure units in Scotland and representatives from 21 local authorities, the researchers found that the decision to secure young people at risk was seen by local authorities as in their best interest, but that this sometimes related to a lack of suitable alternatives within the community. Managing risk in the community was generally preferred by local authority respondents but was sometimes considered impossible because of a lack of services or resources (Creegan et al, 2005, p.2-3).

Attention has been paid to the lack of therapeutic provision in secure units. O'Neill carried out a detailed study into the use of secure accommodation, interviewing 29 children and young people and 65 managers and staff members in six secure units across England. The study describes several factors that make it difficult to offer specialist therapeutic services, including:

- the length of time it takes to arrange and wait for specialist assessments and services compared to the length of placement, especially if other agencies are involved
- uncertainty concerning the period of a placement in secure accommodation
- additional costs incurred by the placing authority
- secure units being isolated from mainstream services
- the time taken and confusion over sorting out who is responsible for arranging and funding the services (O'Neill, 2001, p.236).

Evidence about whether the role carried out by secure accommodation meets that envisaged by guidance on the use of secure placements is restricted (Goldson, 2002, p.32). Previous research has indicated that secure accommodation is generally not successful in modifying behaviour such as prostitution and running away (O'Neill, 1999). Staff in O'Neill's study reported difficulties in evaluating the effectiveness of their practice, due to a lack of clarity concerning the aims of the work. None of the units involved in the study had any formal system in operation to monitor the progress of children and young people once they left secure accommodation.

Although secure accommodation is not a therapeutic setting, O'Neill considers that there is an expectation that skilled care and specialist therapeutic interventions will be provided for young people. However, the managers and staff that took part in the research admitted that they did not expect to be able to meet all the needs of a child or young person, and felt they could do very little to help the situation if the reason for referral lay in family or social circumstances. Secure accommodation staff interviewed by the National Children's Bureau (1995) considered children and young people abused through prostitution to be extremely difficult to care for and support effectively.

Creegan, Scott and Smith found that the dominant view among secure unit respondents was that secure accommodation was not desirable for the majority of sexually exploited or at risk young women currently referred. It was not considered that the physical security of units added any value to a hypothetical alternative in which the same levels of intensive support and provision of programmes were available in the young person's own community (2005, p.3).

In O'Neill's research (2001), 17 of the 29 young people had been admitted through welfare routes, but it was felt that only four had gained any benefit from the placement. Exit plans for many of the young people admitted through welfare routes were inadequate, and staff felt that placement in secure accommodation did not prevent continuation of the abuse when young people were released from the unit. Young people frequently returned to the same situations, risks and problems from which they were admitted. These findings were echoed in the research in Scotland (Creegan et al, 2005, p.4).

Many young people commented that the harm they had suffered as a result of being placed in secure accommodation outweighed the benefits. 13 of the 17 young people admitted to secure accommodation through welfare routes had completed previous placements, demonstrating that prior admissions had 'failed to meet their needs, change their behaviour and protect them from the risks which had led to their admission, other than by containment on a short term basis' (O'Neill p.256).

The London context

The nature, scale and complexity of the capital city present key challenges for the provision of effective services to identify and protect sexually exploited young people and to identify and prosecute perpetrators of this abuse.

Services in London need to be able to respond to high levels of deprivation and risk. 700,000, or 38 per cent of children in London, live in poverty. This is compared with a national average of 29 per cent. In Inner London, the figure rises to 54 per cent of children (*Households Below Average Income 2002/3* cited in *End Child Poverty/ALG*, 2004). There are high levels of homelessness, with 70,000 children of homeless households in temporary accommodation. This is over half of the national total (*Census 2001* cited in *End Child Poverty/ALG*, 2004). Crimes against the person (such as robbery, theft and assault) are highest in London (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, 2003, p.100) and problem drug use is high, with 23 per cent of all drug dependent adults resident in the capital (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit: 2004, p.102).

There are high levels of mobility of people in London which effects service delivery. High mobility enables criminals to evade detection or enforcement action. People are not necessarily engaged in local communities, making community policing more difficult (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, 2004, p.79). High pupil mobility also increases the difficulty of tracking young people when moving between boroughs (*ibid*, p.77).

In addition, London services suffer pressure on resources. Many London services suffer from greater staff turnover and vacancy rates than other areas of the country, resulting in less staff continuity (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit: 2004, p.74).

The administrative boundaries of London also pose unique difficulties for services which assist young people at risk of sexual exploitation. Services are replicated across 33 London boroughs, with borough boundaries reflecting administrative divisions rather than communities in London (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit: 2003, p.137). Working across such boundaries is often necessary to be able to protect young people.

Service frameworks

Child protection frameworks

The protection of young people from sexual exploitation is set within the wider context of child protection frameworks. The Children Act 1989 places a duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children 'in need' and to investigate and protect children at risk of 'significant harm'. The Children Act also clearly defines a child as a boy or girl under the age of 18 (section 105).

Safeguarding children involved in prostitution guidance

The government has issued specific guidance on this issue, *Safeguarding children involved in prostitution: supplementary guidance to working together to safeguard children* (Department of

Health, 2000). The guidance is issued under section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, which means it should be complied with unless local circumstances indicate exceptional reasons which justify a variation (1.7). The guidance sets out a multi-agency approach to identifying and safeguarding young people at risk, and the need to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of this abuse.

The guidance is clear that it relates to young people aged under 18 (1.5). Exploitation through prostitution is not defined, but the guidance states that there is no single pattern of how children become involved (4.4) and that young people may not necessarily be found in prostitution on the streets (4.5). Key aspects of the guidance are outlined below:

The need for a proactive approach to identifying and responding to young people at risk:

The ACPC should make arrangements to actively enquire into the extent to which children are involved in prostitution; develop a local protocol on children involved in prostitution, and to monitor and review the operation of the protocol; provide a local resource and source of expertise for those who have concerns that a child may be at risk of being drawn into prostitution or is being abused through prostitution. (5.5)

The development of protocols for young people who run away or go missing as well as protocols on sexual exploitation:

It is known from research that children looked after who run away are particularly at risk of sexual exploitation. Local authorities should monitor carefully the incidence of children looked after who go missing, particularly from residential care. Local authorities should have protocols in place with the police and other agencies on the action to be taken whenever a child goes missing and when she or he returns. (6.14)

The need for a multi-agency approach and long term support:

The government recognises that creating a successful exit strategy from prostitution for a child is not a simple process. It requires a careful, caring and concerted inter-agency approach that may have to be sustained for a long period of time. (2.4)

Each agency should have a named lead on this issue. (6.2)

Because of their lifestyle and past family experiences, many young people are reticent to engage with statutory services and often find voluntary agencies more approachable sources of help. By working in partnership with statutory bodies, voluntary agencies are able to offer services which reduce the harm to young people and may aid them in exiting from prostitution. (B.12)

The involvement of the young person in any plans relating to their care and protection:

The creation of a successful exit strategy and reintegration into a life free from abuse through prostitution are dependent on working with the child to construct a plan that she or he can agree to. (5.12)

Children involved in prostitution may be difficult to engage, and be under very strong pressure to remain in prostitution. In some instances they may be fearful of being involved with the police or social services and may initially respond best to informal contact from health or voluntary sector outreach workers. Gaining the child's trust and confidence is vital if she or he is to be safeguarded and enabled to exit from prostitution. (5.13)

The need to undertake preventative work:

ACPCs should also consider the need for appropriate inter-disciplinary training to raise awareness among professionals who work with children and/or adults who abuse children through prostitution. (5.7)

Over time, the information and experience gained by the ACPC members should be used to inform local policies and strategies to prevent the entry of children into prostitution. (5.6).

The guidance also outlines the individual roles and responsibilities of ACPCs, social services, police, health, education, the voluntary sector and youth services in relation to this issue. These are discussed later in this report.

Though the guidance is clear that young people should be treated as victims of sexual exploitation, the offences of soliciting, loitering or importuning in a public place for the purposes of prostitution have not been abolished for under 18s, and may still be used against young people deemed to be 'voluntarily and persistently' returning to prostitution (6.21). This strongly contradicts the approach of the guidance in acknowledging the vulnerability of young people at risk and the need to offer long term support to young people in order to engage them away from abusive networks.

People Trafficking Crime Reduction Toolkit

In 2003, the Home Office produced a People Trafficking Crime Reduction Toolkit, available at www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits. The guidance is directed at police, immigration officials, the Crown Prosecution Service, victim support, social services departments, NGOs and other agencies. It contains information about trafficking, the needs of victims, and the roles and responsibilities of different agencies in relation to protection.

It states that trafficked young people must always be assisted through mainstream child care policies and procedures, but may also need specialist support (p.32). It also states that the guidance in *Safeguarding children involved in prostitution* is relevant where there are concerns that a young person may be exploited through prostitution (p.25). In addition, the toolkit contains specific guidance to police, immigration officials and social services departments in relation to ensuring the protection of trafficked young people.

London Child Protection Procedures

The *London Child Protection Procedures* (2003) have been developed by the London Child Protection Committee in consultation with local authorities in London to harmonise working on child protection issues across London. The manual draws together child protection legislation

and government guidance to form a single set of child protection procedures for use in London. The procedures cover wider child protection and safeguarding issues, working across different borough and agency boundaries, and contains specific chapters on abuse through prostitution and trafficking.

Research methodology

The purpose of the study was to establish the level and nature of current need for services among young people at risk of sexual exploitation in London. In order to identify service need, the research aimed to extend knowledge of:

■ the nature and extent of sexual exploitation in London
■ the service needs of young people at risk of sexual exploitation
■ gaps in existing service provision in London and areas for further development of services
■ examples of promising practice which could be shared across London.

Approaches to the research

The boundaries of London

London is both a metropolitan network of boroughs, a national capital and an international hub. This made it difficult to define the geographical boundaries of the study. The most obvious approach to the study was to consider issues of sexual exploitation in the 33 boroughs which make up the metropolitan centre of London. These are the administrative limits of the city which fall within the scope and remit of bodies such as the Greater London Authority and the London Child Protection Committee.

However, London can also be conceptualised as a much larger city than that contained within these boundaries. In addition to the expansion of London beyond these limits (Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, 2003, p.49), the catchment area for commuters and other travellers to London is much greater, with the potential for sexual exploitation to be occurring across a much wider area. In addition, as a national and international centre, there is further considerable movement of people in and out of the capital. Heathrow airport falls within the administrative boundaries of London, but Gatwick and Stansted airports do not, though they are considered 'London' airports.

While the research focuses primarily on the 33 London boroughs, we also aimed to adopt a more fluid approach to understanding London that could capture movements in and out of London. Respondents were asked specifically about their awareness of young people or perpetrators of abuse moving in or out of their borough. In addition, child protection co-ordinators for local authorities containing Gatwick and Stansted airports were included in the research to identify issues of trafficking and movement in and out of London from these areas. Contact was also sought with services outside London which had had experience of young people moving or being moved in or out of London and suffering sexual exploitation in either location.

Researching a hidden form of abuse

Researching the nature and extent of sexual exploitation in London posed inherent difficulties due to the hidden nature of this abuse. A network approach to the research was adopted. This approach involved making contact with services likely to come into contact with young people at risk to find out how many young people they were working with where there were concerns around sexual exploitation. This approach has the disadvantage of only identifying those young people who are in contact with services. Research interviews with service providers were therefore devised to be qualitative in nature. Service providers were asked not only about *how many* young people at risk they were aware of, but also about *how they identified* young people at risk and about pressures on service provision. In this way, it was possible to find out both how many young people were known to be sexually exploited and the barriers that sexually exploited young people may face in accessing service provision.

A 'snowballing' approach was also adopted whereby research interviewees were asked for contacts of other services that might be working with sexually exploited young people. As the 'snowballing' approach was used with many different respondents, and supplemented with email questionnaires to groups of services not otherwise identified, we hoped to capture a wide range of services that may be in contact with sexually exploited young people.

Acknowledging the hidden nature of much sexual exploitation, the research also aimed to provide statistical estimates of the risk of sexual exploitation in each borough. Estimates were gained through statistical analysis of secondary data relating to known proxy indicators for sexual exploitation such as rates of going missing, numbers of homeless young people, levels of school absenteeism, numbers of 'looked-after' young people, numbers of young people in residential care, levels of teenage pregnancy and STD rates, and levels of drug use in the community. The full methodology is described in Appendix 1.

Working with differing definitions of sexual exploitation

In order to meaningfully quantify the numbers of young people at risk of sexual exploitation in London, it was important to be clear about the definitions used to determine what constituted a 'case' for the purposes of the research. Phoenix found that understandings of sexual exploitation could vary among practitioners, making it difficult to quantify the problem unless terms of reference used by service providers were identified and taken into account (2003). Our research commenced with a broad working definition of the sexual exploitation of young people to understand the full spectrum of abuse that might be occurring, and to accommodate potential variations in definitions being used by different professionals. This qualitative approach (advocated in Phoenix, 2003) allowed us to gather data on the numbers of young people who were identified as being sexually exploited, as well as information on how this was defined.

During the research interviews, we made clear that we were interested in learning about the full spectrum of abuse that might be occurring, from situations where young people were involved in sexually exploitative relationships, to ones where they may be exchanging sex for money, or other 'in kind' commodities such as accommodation, gifts or drugs, as well as activities more similar to 'formal' prostitution, and organised forms of exploitation. During the interview, informants were asked to provide details of those cases they identified as sexual exploitation,

to learn more about the young person's situation and about how sexual exploitation was understood by the interviewee. The use of a wide definition also enabled professionals to reflect on and report sexually exploitative situations which might not have been included in the working definitions of sexual exploitation used by their service.

In addition, respondents were asked about those cases where sexual exploitation was possibly indicated rather than known for sure. This was a particularly important and useful approach to the research. In this way, it was possible to identify cases where there were clear indications of sexual exploitation but which had not been identified as such due to lower levels of awareness. It was also possible to identify cases of sexual exploitation where there was professional reluctance to name or stigmatise young people by labelling them as young people involved in prostitution. And it was also possible to explore some of the difficulties faced by professionals in identifying and responding to a hidden form of abuse and in working with concerns that were frequently unclear.

Systems approach

The research also aimed to understand the service needs of sexually exploited young people. The research mainly focused on the systems of service provision in London and how these could best respond to young people at risk, rather than on young people themselves. The approach draws on Goldson's discussion of understanding the context of looked-after young people referred to secure and penal settings (Goldson, 2000). Recognising the role that the quality of care of children in the public care system plays in the quality of outcomes for looked-after children (Gabbidon and Goldson, 1998; Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998 in Goldson, 2002, p.23), and the role of class, race and gender in institutional reponses to young people (Goldson, 2002, p.26), Goldson states that it is important to view the behaviours and vulnerabilities of looked-after young people within the context of the wider systems of childcare in which they are situated (Goldson, p.24). As the behaviours and vulnerabilities of young people result from the interactions they have with these systems, ignoring the context risks locating these issues solely within the young person themselves, and risks 'pathologising' the young person (Goldson, 2002, p.24). Intervening in wider systems failing young people may therefore be a more effective way of addressing their behaviours and vulnerabilities (Goldson, 2002, p.24).

Our research therefore aims to understand the sexual exploitation of young people in the context of the quality of care provided to them, the social systems responsible for their care and protection, and the wider context of violence towards young people, and in particular young women. Instead of asking, 'what is wrong with these young people?' the research questions focus on 'how are we failing to protect young people and how could systems work better?'

For the research, respondents were asked to describe their service response to young people identified as being at risk of sexual exploitation. This facilitated an understanding of the level and nature of current service provision to young people at risk. At the same time, respondents were asked to reflect on the difficulties they faced in responding to the needs of sexually exploited young people as well as identify any possible gaps in services in London. All respondents were asked to discuss what they would like to see to better prevent sexual exploitation, better respond to the needs of sexually young people, and to prosecute perpetrators of this abuse.

The research was therefore able to identify positive and constructive ways to improve service responses to this group of young people as well as highlight difficulties.

Data collection

Taking account of the experience of previous research into service provision, data for the research was primarily collected through telephone and face-to-face interviews rather than through written questionnaires. If there are severe time and resource pressures on service providers, it has been found that sending written questionnaires yields a low response rate (Phoenix, 2003).

Collecting data through research interviews also facilitated the detailed, qualitative approach discussed above, which would not have been possible through questionnaires (Phoenix, 2003). Interviews were not taped, but were recorded verbatim as far as possible and written up immediately after interview.

One of the difficulties of the research was securing interviews within the time scale of the research schedule. It often took several telephone calls to secure an interview with a service provider. These difficulties were anticipated due to the known pressures on service providers and the research plan was flexible to accommodate the need to chase up appointments.

Ethical Protocol

A bespoke ethical protocol (in Appendix 3) was developed for this research.

Research methods

The research methodology involved six key stages:

- Desk research into policy frameworks for responding to young people at risk of sexual exploitation and a review of existing literature relating to sexual exploitation and service provision. This part of the research also included informal interviews and discussions with researchers and others with expertise in this area.
- An audit of statutory sector provision for sexually exploited young people including detailed interviews with social services child protection co-ordinators and lead officers for sexual exploitation, and members of the police, health and education services.
- An audit of voluntary sector provision for young people at risk, including specialist sexual exploitation services.
- Further detailed qualitative research into particular areas highlighted by the research.
- Research with young people at risk to understand their views on service provision.
- Assessment of the levels of risk of sexual exploitation in each London borough through statistical analysis of secondary data relating to proxy indicators of sexual exploitation (full methodology in Appendix 1).

Audit of statutory sector provision

Child protection co-ordinators, social services

From information gained from the literature review and existing frameworks for responding to sexual exploitation, a structured interview schedule was devised. Two face-to-face interviews were carried out with statutory service providers from the reference group to pilot the schedule. The interview schedule can be found in Appendix 2.

To provide an overview of issues of sexual exploitation in each local authority, the child protection co-ordinator for each borough of London was invited to participate in the research. Child protection co-ordinators for West Sussex and Essex were also included as discussed above. Child protection co-ordinators hold a role on the Area Child Protection Committee as well as within social services departments, which hold the lead role on this committee in relation to safeguarding children.

Contact details of child protection co-ordinators were obtained through the directory available at www.acpc.gov.uk, and individuals were contacted by letter initially, to provide information about the research and arrange a convenient time for interview.

In total, interviews were carried out with child protection co-ordinators or lead officers for sexual exploitation (where this role was separate) from 30 London boroughs and the two local authorities outside London. In one further local authority, the lead officer referred us to speak instead with the manager of the specialist sexual exploitation service that the authority funded. The only local authority that declined to participate in the research was Havering. The City of London was not included in the research.

The length of the telephone interviews varied from 25 minutes to 1 hour 15 minutes but interviews typically lasted 40 minutes. The length of interviews varied in relation to amount of information respondents could provide and other time pressures on interviewees. The extent to which the topic guide was used in full also varied according to these factors.

At the end of interview, local authority respondents were also asked for contacts within the police, health and education services as part of the 'snowballing' strategy.

Metropolitan police

Interviews were carried out with a purposive sample of members of the Metropolitan police. Contacts were provided by those local authority respondents who worked with a named police officer, all of whom were invited to participate in the research and were provided information about the research by email. Contacts for police teams known to be working on issues of sexual exploitation were also provided by members of the reference group and other professionals in the sector. In total, 10 police officers were interviewed for the research. Care was taken to ensure that interviewees represented a range of different police teams that may come across sexual exploitation and to include both front-line and senior officers within the sample. Eight face-to-face interviews and two telephone interviews were carried out.

Two further police officers were contacted during the research to obtain data on young people who go missing for the statistical analysis of risk of sexual exploitation.

Health services

It was more difficult to identify contacts from health services for interview. Agreement was obtained from the lead officers of London's five strategic health authorities to forward an email questionnaire to child protection lead officers within each of the Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) within their area. Some strategic health authority representatives also circulated the questionnaire more widely to practitioners in sexual health services, emergency health services and to teenage pregnancy co-ordinators.

The email questionnaire was kept very short to ensure as high a response rate as possible. Recipients were asked whether they had, through their work, come across young people about whom there were sexual exploitation concerns and whether there was any guidance on this issue within the PCT.

The response rate to the questionnaire was still fairly low. Six written responses were received with one follow-up telephone interview carried out for further information. One telephone interview was carried out with a practitioner from a health service identified as an example of promising practice by a local authority respondent. A further three face-to-face interviews were carried out with health service respondents as part of the local area research discussed below.

In total, a sample of 10 health service respondents was achieved, with a range of different services represented including CAMHS services, looked-after children's nurses, a sexual health service, and child protection leads.

Education services

Representatives from education services were identified through the contacts obtained from interviews with statutory and voluntary sector services and two telephone interviews were carried out.

Audit of voluntary sector provision

Specialist sexual exploitation services

Details of specialist sexual exploitation services were obtained from statutory sector respondents, colleagues from the reference group and from a list of specialist services in the UK compiled by Joanna Phoenix (2003).

Five specialist services were identified and semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were carried out with service managers from each service. A telephone interview was carried out with one additional practitioner. These were generally longer interviews, lasting approximately one and a half hours, reflecting the high numbers of young people these practitioners work with and the

level of specialist knowledge gained through the work of the service. The topic guide followed that used with statutory sector services, and included further information such as descriptions of the service, level and security of funding, numbers of service users and the intensity and duration of their engagement with the service. Recent annual reports from each of the services provided further detail. Interviews were carried out at the premises of each service which provided the opportunity to observe and be shown round the service.

Other voluntary sector services

A sample of voluntary sector services that may work with sexually exploited young people were contacted. These included drug and alcohol services, homelessness or 'missing' services, and adult sex worker services. Telephone interviews were carried out with respondents from four homelessness/missing services and three adult sex worker services. Drug and alcohol services were not well-represented in contacts gained from other services, so an email questionnaire was sent to all drug and alcohol services in London identified by Alcohol Concern (www.alcoholconcern.org.uk) as having a specific young person's worker. The questionnaire was emailed to 27 services. Eight emails were immediately bounced-back. Three telephone interviews were subsequently carried out.

In addition, representatives from three services outside London which work with young people who have been sexually exploited in London were interviewed for the research.

Further detailed qualitative research

Further detailed qualitative research was carried out in three specific areas identified during the course of the research.

Use of secure accommodation

In the course of interviews with local authority respondents, it became clear that many local authorities used secure accommodation as a response to young people at risk of sexual exploitation, but often did so reluctantly. Further data was collected on this issue to understand how far secure accommodation is used as a response to young people at risk of sexual exploitation; the effectiveness of secure accommodation as a response; and whether feasible alternatives could be identified.

In addition to data gained from local authority respondents and community agencies, managers from a sample of secure units in the UK were interviewed. A detailed list of secure units in England and Wales was obtained from www.secureaccommodation.net. The sample was devised to represent a range of geographical areas, including units near to and further away from London. Different types of secure unit were also represented, including single sex units for each gender, mixed gender units and units with differing balances of young people referred for welfare and criminal justice reasons. In addition, the secure units were all identified through the research as having been used by local authorities in London, and this was checked during the research interview.

A specific interview schedule addressing the research questions and particular issues relating to the use of secure accommodation was used. This was adapted from the interview schedule used in research into the use of secure accommodation as a response to sexually exploited young people in Scotland (Creegan et al, 2005). Five managers from different secure units were interviewed by telephone and interviews typically lasted 40 minutes.

Trafficking and sexual exploitation

As part of the research, we sought to identify forms of abuse and victims that may be more hidden from services. As a result, we examined issues of trafficking and sexual exploitation of young people from abroad. In addition to gaining information on this area from all interviews carried out, a further four face-to-face and two telephone interviews were carried out with community agencies with particular expertise in this area.

Local area research

Research was carried out in a specific geographical area of London to provide the opportunity to look at the issues for a particular local area in more depth and to interview a wider cross-section of respondents than was possible across the whole of London. An area of London was selected where secondary data collected on risk indicators indicated a high risk of exploitation, but where there were no specialist services and where protocols and awareness work was less developed. In this way, it was hoped that the research could contribute to service development in an area where this was needed.

At the same time, the choice of an area where there was less developed work to respond to sexual exploitation provided a way to balance possible bias in the research towards respondents and local authorities with higher levels of awareness. Although carrying out interviews with local authority respondents across the whole of London provided an overview of all boroughs, bias in the research data could occur through the detailed interviews with specialist service respondents, who would more likely be based in local authorities with higher levels of awareness. It was also likely that those interviewees in the statutory and voluntary sector who responded to research requests had had more contact with or interest in the issue.

Three boroughs in one area of London were selected for detailed qualitative research. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were carried out with three representatives from health/mental health services, three Youth Offending Team representatives, two respondents from different local authority looked-after children services, and one residential home manager, in addition to interviews already carried out with child protection co-ordinators.

Research with young people

The literature on sexual exploitation stresses the need to incorporate young people's views and perspectives in research on the issue, and this study aimed to enable the meaningful participation of young people in the research. Particular account was taken of existing research with sexually exploited young people (Taylor-Browne, 2002; Skidmore, 2000) so that their perspectives could inform the design and conduct of the research.

In addition, 12 young people were involved in the research to gain young people's perspectives on service provision in London. Young people were contacted through services where they had an on-going relationship with a worker who could support them and help them to make an informed decision about participating in the research. Contacts were made with young people via three services that either worked with young people who were sexually exploited, or worked with young people from groups that may be at risk of sexual exploitation, such as looked-after young people. Two group sessions of two and four young people were held, and six individual interviews were carried out. The young people interviewed included 11 young women and 1 young man, aged between 13 and 19.

The young people were not asked to give personal testimonies of sexual exploitation. We felt that this would be unethical in the context of a short research interview with an unknown researcher and where young people may frequently be asked to give personal and painful information about themselves by professionals. They were instead treated as experts on service provision and asked about their views on existing services in London and to describe their 'ideal' service. The ethical approach taken is detailed in Appendix 3.

Summary of research interviews

Type of respondent/ service represented	Number of respondents	Nature of interview
Child protection co-ordinator, social services	32	31 telephone interviews 1 face-to-face interview
Police	10	8 face-to-face interviews 2 telephone interviews
Health service	10	5 written responses 2 telephone interviews 3 face-to-face interviews
Education service	2	2 telephone interviews
Local authority looked-after children's service	2	2 face-to-face interviews
Residential home manager	1	1 telephone interview
Youth Offending Team	3	3 face-to-face interviews
Secure unit manager	5	5 telephone interviews
Specialist sexual exploitation service	6	5 face-to-face interviews 1 telephone interview
Voluntary sector service with expertise in trafficking	6	4 face-to-face interviews 2 telephone interviews
Homelessness/'Going Missing' service	4	4 telephone interviews
Drug and alcohol service	3	3 telephone interviews
Adult sex worker service	3	3 telephone interviews

| Other voluntary sector service | 3 | 3 telephone interviews |
| Young people | 12 | 2 group sessions
6 face-to-face interviews |

Data analysis

In total, data was received from 102 respondents. The data was analysed using the *Framework* method of qualitative analysis developed by the National Centre for Social Research (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). *Framework* enables a systematic approach to the analysis of qualitative data through the three key stages of the analytic hierarchy: data management, descriptive accounts and explanatory accounts.

An abbreviated version of *Framework* was used, involving the following key stages. The first stage involved familiarisation with the data and the identification of recurring themes arising from the data. An index of the themes identified relating to the research questions was developed and each part of the data was labelled systematically and rigorously in relation to the index. The data was then sorted in relation to the labels. Finally, key emerging themes and patterns were identified from the data. This process was carried out using the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, NVIVO version 2.0.

Nature and extent of sexual exploitation identified in London

Nature of sexual exploitation identified in London

In the course of the research a range of different forms of sexual exploitation were identified, including situations where young people were exploited by family members; the involvement of young people in sexually exploitative relationships with older men or peers; the informal exchange of sex for favours, money, drugs, accommodation or other commodities and more 'formal', organised forms of prostitution, including trafficking. A useful way of conceptualising this is as a spectrum of sexually exploitative experience with what is more commonly referred to as child sexual abuse at one end, and 'formal prostitution' at the other (Creegan et al, 2005, p.27). There is also a spectrum of influences coercing, manipulating and attracting young people towards activities and relationships which are more or less likely to be regarded by professionals as exploitative. What kind of relationships and activities were defined as abusive or exploitative varied according to the perspective and experience of our informants. The purpose of this study was to explore emergent understandings of sexual exploitation among those directly responsible for the protection of children and young people from harm, rather than attempting to produce a definitive description of the 'true' nature of the problem.

Forms of child sexual abuse where perpetrators within the family, or the family's friendship group, share, exchange or sell children were identified by a small minority of informants (n=5). Although this is probably a form of organised child abuse more commonly involving younger children (Creegan et al, 2005, p.28), it was noted by one practitioner that adolescents could also be caught up in such abusive networks:

> 'Yes, even with this age group. They are vulnerable. Some have learning disabilities, they are under-educated, they have no access to work or an independent way of getting out of the situation, so it becomes part of the family script.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Seven interviewees specifically identified the sexual exploitation of young women by young men of their own age, or who were only a little older:

> 'We have become aware of some cases of older young people sexually exploiting young people by virtue of intimidation and peer pressure … The older young people are in the 15-18 bracket. Some of that group activities, group intimidation… Individual girls are identified as someone that can be

shared and coerced into that, and they are coerced in threatening ways. "She's my girlfriend and it's OK" type of thing.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Two interviewees commented in particular on the culture of violence within what would be considered 'normal' heterosexual peer relationships. In these situations, young men behaved in sexually abusive ways towards young women and placed considerable pressure and expectation on them to have sex. At the same time, cultural expectations placed on young women or their past experience of violence made it difficult for them to refuse or 'disappoint' men. In three boroughs, there were concerns about the safety of young women involved in particular peer groups or gangs, where sexual exploitation occurred as part of initiation or acceptance into the gang. Similar concerns have been raised by school nurses working in London schools (Guardian, 28 April 2005).

More frequently, interviewees (n=20) identified young women who were sexually exploited in the context of an abusive relationship with an older man who they perceived as a lover or boyfriend. These 'boyfriends' introduced young women to friends, or acquaintances, with sexual exploitation taking place in informal settings and considered part of the relationship. In this way, the circumstances were very different from that of a traditional 'pimp' introducing young women into 'prostitution':

> *'And that it's not just about sex for cash, it's all the stuff about, "I'll put you up for the night," "I'll take you out for a meal," all with the expectation that at the end "you will sleep with me and my friends".'* Manager, residential children's home

Though abusers could be significantly older and raise professional alarm bells – for example, there were cases of men in their fifties 'befriending' young women – a more common pattern was of men in their twenties 'dating' teenagers and involving them in an informal network which included peers as well as adult men and women.

Twenty-five interviewees identified situations where young people exchanged sex for 'favours', money, accommodation, drugs, nights out, clothes or other commodities. This could occur through the involvement of a controlling 'boyfriend', or through coercion or manipulation from more casual associations. Sex could also be a means of accessing resources that would otherwise be unavailable to young people. The 'exchanges' would often be disguised, or normalised, as gifts or treats rather than as direct payment:

> *'She didn't see it as prostitution. She had sex with the men she associated with and then "borrowed" money from them.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

In many cases, young people's immediate vulnerability placed them in situations where sexual exploitation was an accepted part of the deal. This was particularly the case for the young people identified who had run away from home or care and were exploited by men in return for the provision of accommodation. Some local authorities also reported young women being accommodated and sexually exploited in crack houses.

Young people were typically taken to private homes, flats, hotels or crack houses for the purpose of exploitation. Four services were aware of young people being taken to 'parties' which appeared to be organised for the purposes of sexual exploitation. There was evidence of sexual exploitation being organised across London and cases identified of young people being taken to other towns and cities for the purpose of exploitation. Young people were themselves mobile within London, with interviewees noting that young people travelled to particular locations attractive to young people, where they were then targeted.

Informants were aware that vulnerable young people were specifically targeted for sexual exploitation. The targeting of residential children's homes was referred to frequently:

> *'It seemed that men knew the girls there [at the residential home], there was targeting going on, getting into relationships with the girls. It was not commercial prostitution, but there was a lot of exchanging favours.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Young people had also been targeted at particular schools in two boroughs.

Overall, involvement in more 'formal' prostitution was less frequently identified by interviewees. In particular, it was less common for young women to be identified as selling sex on the street, although this was known to occur in five boroughs, and one practitioner identified young women 'selling' sex in exchange for crack in one location.

A range of evidence points to the likelihood that young women are increasingly likely to be exploited in off-street locations. Researchers mapping the adult sex industry found that they were not offered under-age girls in sex work locations, although they were occasionally told that it was a woman's first day, with the implication that she was young and inexperienced (Dickson, 2004, p.24). Young women abused through prostitution are not generally 'marketed' as 'children', but as 'younger women' in an industry where youth is at a premium.

The Metropolitan Clubs and Vice team who regularly visit 'red-light' areas and off-street sex work locations have found fewer young people being exploited in traditional sex work locations over a period of three years.

Figure 1: Numbers of young people identified through Clubs and Vice outreach work

Year	Number of young people identified as being sexually exploited	Number of young people considered at risk of sexual exploitation
2001	42	47
2002	49	22
2003	23	9

Both the Clubs and Vice team and other interviewees were aware that young women were being exploited in more hidden locations such as private flats and crack houses. Such locations isolate young women and deprive them of the limited protection that peers and older women have traditionally provided in street-based work.

However, it is important to note that the disclosure of involvement in 'formal' prostitution is particularly difficult for young people, and may not be acknowledged even when services are available and proactive. Our research found some examples of young people who were sexually exploited in adult sex work locations who had not initially disclosed their real age to services.

Analysis of sexual exploitation in London

Definitions of sexual exploitation

Terms such as 'abuse through prostitution' or 'commercial sexual exploitation' fail to capture the spectrum of sexual exploitation described above. Likewise, the London Child Protection Procedures' definition of sexual exploitation as the exchange of sex for money, drugs or other resources is too narrow to describe the full range of forms of sexual exploitation identified by interviewees in the course of this research. It was clear to several informants that the use of restrictive definitions of sexual exploitation could affect the extent to which sexually exploited young people were identified and offered protection:

> 'We hold an inter-agency planning meeting under the Protocol for Safeguarding Children Abused through Prostitution. I want to change the name as 'abuse through prostitution' is confusing as people think that they have to be on a street corner looking into cars in order to help.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

For some informants, only those cases most similar to 'formal' adult prostitution were readily acknowledged as sexual exploitation:

> 'We don't get much here. We don't have child prostitution here. We have had the odd case. We don't have brothels here stacked with child prostitutes.' Police officer

Informants confirmed that young people did not view the informal exchange of sex for gifts or other resources as 'prostitution'. The stigmatised identity associated with prostitution could prevent both interviewees and young people from understanding the abuse they experienced:

> 'Prefixing prostitution and prostitute with 'Child' has not enabled professionals to engage without fear of stigmatising and labelling, and more importantly, it has not encouraged children towards an understanding of their abuse. Rather it has enhanced their denial and exacerbated their isolation.' Local Authority Protocol

Constrained 'choices'

Understandings of sexual exploitation need to have regard to the role of young people making constrained choices in very difficult circumstances. Violence, coercion and intimidation were frequently present in situations of sexual exploitation, but exploitation primarily occurred as a result of young people making constrained choices against a background of social, economic

and emotional vulnerability. Interviewees compared the 'pull' of abusers offering corrupt forms of care, or access to resources, with the absence of positive alternatives in vulnerable young people's lives:

> *'In the short term, they are getting things that they are not getting in the care system. At that point, it's exciting, it can look attractive. They get approval, they can receive emotional messages from the adult, which we would say are unreal, but for the young person, they feel it is real.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Many interviewees identified a mixture of both underlying and immediate vulnerabilities among sexually exploited young people they were working with:

> *'It's symptomatic of a bigger picture of vulnerability, accommodation needs, family support, associated drug and alcohol use, poor self esteem, family relationships.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

> *'They have a combination of problems. They are also running from care, skipping school. It is hard to see it as one single problem, there is a whole spectrum of issues/problems.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

The failure of services to intervene helpfully at an earlier point in children's lives was often identified as an issue that underpinned vulnerability to sexual exploitation in adolescence:

> *'Depressingly, the 18 year-old I talked about, this department was involved with her since 6 or 7, and has not made the right decisions. The damage has been done from day one, and perpetuated itself.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

The exploitation of young women occurs within a wider societal context. Home Office research into the extent of rape and sexual assault in the UK show that young women are the age group most likely to be victim of a sexual offence:

> *'Age is the biggest risk factor for being a victim of a sexual offence. Young women aged 16 to 19 are most likely to be victimised. Women aged 20 to 24 have an almost equally high risk of experiencing some form of sexual victimisation. With regard to rape, 16 to 19-year-old women were over four times as likely to have reported being raped in the last year than women from any other age group. The risks for these younger women are statistically significant.'* (Myhill and Allen, 2002, p.21)

Home Office research indicates that young women are also most at risk of domestic violence (Mirlees-Black, 1999, p.28, p.62). A recent NSPCC survey (2005) also highlights the high levels of violence experienced by young women at the hands of boyfriends and partners. Age-appropriate relationships are not necessarily positive ones.

For young women who are additionally vulnerable the perception of the 'benefits' of exploitative relationships are increased by the inadequacy of alternatives. For example, the level of violence experienced by young people in residential children's homes has been documented (Renold and Barter, 2003) and the status and material benefits presented by an older 'boyfriend' can become a rational choice for young women seeking to escape exploitative peer relationships as well as the social and emotional insecurity of both adolescence in general, and being a teenager in care. (Phillips, 1999).

It is important to distinguish between this form of 'choice' and an 'adult' choice. Treating young people's involvement in sexual exploitation as an 'adult' choice fails to acknowledge the wider systemic factors which constrain young people's actions. It also places the responsibility for leaving the sexually exploitative situation squarely on the young person alone. Based on her research into 127 consensual relationships between teenage women and older men, Lynne Phillips concludes that while the decision to enter a relationship with an older man may be 'chosen' by young women seeking an escape from emotional and material deprivation in adolescence, the power imbalance within such relationships makes it difficult for young women to negotiate within, or to leave, the relationship without considerable social, economic and material repercussions (Phillips, 1999, p.101). Accounts given by young people experiencing sexual exploitation explain why they stay in abusive situations: reliance on the money, addiction to drugs, having no qualifications, having no other support, and the experience of violence, control and manipulation by an abuser (Taylor-Browne, 2002: p.7). Seeing their decision to remain in abusive situations as 'choice' without acknowledging their disempowerment within these situations leaves them unsupported in leaving.

No definitive definition of sexual exploitation is possible. While professionals readily agree that certain kinds of activities and relationships are exploitative, particularly those involving 'formal' prostitution, younger teenagers and overt coercion, other situations are less clear and the definition of a case as one of sexual exploitation may be contested. However, it was also clear that there is an emerging professional consensus on the range, or spectrum, of young people's experience which is sexually exploitative.

Levels of sexual exploitation identified in London

In order to meaningfully identify the numbers of young people at risk of sexual exploitation in London, it was important to be clear about the definitions used to determine what constituted a 'case' for the purposes of the research. The research commenced with a broad working definition of the sexual exploitation of young people in order to understand the full spectrum of abuse that might be occurring, and to accommodate potential variations in definitions being used by different professionals. In this way, we could gather data on the numbers of young people who were identified as being sexually exploited, as well as information on how this was defined. During the research, it was made clear that we were interested in learning about the full spectrum of abuse that might be occurring, from situations where young people were involved in sexually exploitative relationships, to where they may be exchanging sex for money, or other 'in kind' commodities such as accommodation, gifts or drugs, as well as activities that have more in common with 'formal' prostitution, and organised forms of exploitation. During interview,

informants were asked to provide details of those cases they identified as sexual exploitation, to learn more about the young person's situation and how sexual exploitation was understood by the interviewee. In recognition of the potential difficulty that interviewees might experience in knowing the full extent of abuse that might be occurring, informants were asked separately about those cases where sexual exploitation was definitely known, and those cases where there were indications that sexual exploitation may be occurring but they could not say with certainty that this was so.

There are difficulties in estimating the level of sexual exploitation occurring in any locality. Sexual exploitation, like other sexual abuse, is a hidden problem and the numbers of young people known to statutory and voluntary agencies are inevitably underestimates. The number of young people identified is influenced by different agencies' level of awareness of, and response to, sexual exploitation, as well as ease of access to services, and the degree of 'active enquiry' undertaken.

This research identified considerable variation in the level of awareness of, and response to, sexual exploitation within different local authorities. The 31 London boroughs surveyed could be divided into roughly equal thirds:

- those that used protocols on sexual exploitation proactively
- those that had a working protocol on sexual exploitation but did not use it proactively
- those that needed to develop protocols work further, or were just beginning to map the issue in the borough.

This affected not only how many young people were identified in less proactive boroughs, but also the ability of child protection co-ordinators in these boroughs to give an overview of the numbers of young people at risk as they did not monitor the numbers in the same way. This was especially apparent in relation to young people for whom there were less clear concerns around sexual exploitation where informants gave responses such as *'there are numerous cases where we suspect or think'* or even, *'there's no way of estimating'*. Proactive boroughs identified more cases and were able to provide more accurate information from their monitoring of young people at risk.

It is impossible to estimate 'true' prevalence from the data available. What we have been able to identify is the absolute minimum level of sexual exploitation of young people as represented by numbers of cases known to social services in London. By relying on figures provided by social services we avoided the risk of 'double counting' as departments are rigorous in not accepting responsibility for young people who may be the responsibility of another local authority. Where there were discrepancies between the figures provided by different informants within the same authority, or additional data was available from voluntary sector services for a borough, the highest figure was used. However, figures were not added together in order to avoid counting young people twice.

Prevalence of sexual exploitation identified

Informants were asked how many cases of young people aged 18 or under the service had identified in the previous calendar year (2003) where sexual exploitation was known or indicated. In total, across the 31 London boroughs for which information was available, 507 separate cases were identified where sexual exploitation was known or indicated. Young people were identified in every borough in London. If the total figure was averaged across London this would give an average for each borough of 16 young people which is slightly lower than Swann's findings nationally (Swann and Balding, 2001). However, there was considerable variation between the numbers of young people identified in different boroughs, with figures varying between 1 and 53 cases.

This figure still under-represents the number of young people about whom there were sexual exploitation concerns. Some interviewees were unable to give an overview of all cases known to their department and only the most proactive boroughs worked actively with young people where concerns were less clear and exploitation was indicated rather than known.

Separating out cases where sexual exploitation was known to be an issue from those where it was indicated by a young person's behaviours or issues was difficult. The attitudes and understanding of informants on what constituted sexual exploitation informed their classification of cases. A stark example was in one borough where the case of a 13 year-old girl with a 24 year-old 'boyfriend', who made her have sex with his friends in exchange for drugs, was identified only as 'possible' exploitation.

Assessing concerns as 'definite' or 'possible' could also relate to more restrictive understandings of sexual exploitation with experiences more similar to 'formal' prostitution more likely to be expressed as 'definite' exploitation:

'It is usually based on speculations about the young person's behaviour. It's small numbers, but some, it's maybe what the children have said, but more often it is concerns about what is happening with those young people, for example, selling sex, chaotic sexual practice, attracting men that we think may abuse, but no definite prostituting.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Exploitation was most readily categorised as 'known' on the basis of a disclosure made by the young person. In approximately a third of cases (n=175) sexual exploitation was identified by informants as being 'known' rather than 'indicated'.

Breakdown by gender

The majority of cases of sexual exploitation identified involved young women. 17 young men were identified in 10 different boroughs where sexual exploitation was known or indicated. In another six boroughs, respondents stated that there were *'some'* or *'occasional'* or *'possible'* concerns, and a further three local authority respondents stated that they had been concerned about young men in the past. Concerns around young men's sexual exploitation were more likely to be expressed as 'possible' rather than 'definite' concerns. Some interviewees noted that it was harder to find out about young men's sexual exploitation:

'There are occasional concerns, but less so. It is more difficult to uncover, you are less likely to get near. Maybe if they have money that can't be explained. Staff are more vigilant of girls and it is more obvious. Often girls go missing, or that is, they stay out late. They are more willing to talk about their boyfriend. With boys, it is usually a homosexual thing. Though girls will always deny what is really going on. But with boys you don't even get near this.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Fear of being identified or labelled as 'gay' could be an additional barrier to young men disclosing sexual exploitation.

Some interviewees acknowledged that there was less emphasis on identifying young men at risk of sexual exploitation:

'[We have identified] more girls, but only because we have had more focus on this. With boys, there are two we are concerned about, but these are very cautious figures. I assume that there are far greater numbers in the at risk category rather than where we are pretty sure that major exploitation is going on.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Gendered constructions of young men and women could also make it more difficult to see young men as vulnerable, with the possibility that young men in trouble are more likely to come to the attention of criminal justice services:

'With the young boy, it was not initially framed around sexual exploitation. I intervened around this issue. He may have been involved in offending so he came to us that way.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Breakdown by age

Interviewees were asked for the numbers of young people they worked with who were under and over 16. Respondents generally gave data on ages for the specific cases they discussed where exploitation had been identified as 'definite'. Many interviewees also gave a general age range for the young people they worked with rather than a specific age for each individual case.

The age of young people specifically identified ranged from 11 to 18 years. Ten local authorities identified young people only under the age of 16; 16 boroughs were working with young people who were both older and younger than 16; and one borough had identified young people over the age of 16 only. No information on age was available for the remaining three boroughs. The larger proportion of young people identified by local authorities were under 16 years. By contrast, interviewees from the three adult sex work services surveyed mainly identified young people aged 16 and over.

Breakdown by ethnicity

Because many informants spoke generally about several cases, details of ethnicity were not always available. Three local authorities stated that they did not monitor ethnicity in cases of

sexual exploitation that came to their attention. Where ethnicity was identified in individual cases discussed, this was predominantly White, but cases were also identified involving young women from a wide range of ethnic groups including Black African, Black Caribbean, Asian Bangladeshi, and young people of dual heritage.

Estimating risk of sexual exploitation in London

Given the likely under-identification of young people who are sexually exploited, particularly in boroughs where young people are not being proactively identified or targeted with services, we set out to assess the risk of sexual exploitation both across London, and within individual boroughs, based on the prevalence of a set of known risk factors (proxy indicators) for sexual exploitation. The data for the proxy indicators is combined with available estimates of prevalence of sexual exploitation in particular boroughs (selected as 'anchor points') to ascertain the estimated level of sexual exploitation in all boroughs in London. The methodology adopted (the multiple indicator method) has been previously used in Home Office research to assess likely levels of problematic and injecting drug use for Drug Action Teams in the UK (Frischer et al, 2004).

This is the first time the method has been used to estimate sexual exploitation and is therefore exploratory in nature. The procedure may be subject to margins of error due to the quality of data available for the proxy indicators and the wide confidence intervals for the final estimates. However, this work represents an attempt to develop a structured model to provide estimates of sexual exploitation where no such data currently exists, to assist in the planning of services. The method is outlined in brief below, with the full methodology provided in Appendix 1.

Previous research on sexual exploitation, using definitions closely related to ours, has highlighted several risk factors for sexual exploitation (Scott, 2001; Cusick, 2002). Drawing on this research we developed the following proxy indicators for sexual exploitation:

- numbers of young people going missing
- numbers of 'looked-after' children
- absences or exclusions from school
- level of teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections among young people
- levels of youth homelessness
- levels of drug use in the community.

Our own research also suggested the number of residential children's homes in an area as an indicator of risk and this was also included. Statistics from a number of secondary sources were available for each indicator.

Factor analysis using the principal components method was carried out on the data for the 7 indicators in all 32 boroughs using SPSS version 12.0. This technique measures the shared variance between the variables to identify whether there is an underlying quality, here assumed to be the level of sexual exploitation. One 'component' was extracted representing this quality, and used to provide factor scores representing the level of risk in each borough.

Eight local authorities were selected as 'anchor points'. These were the local authorities that carried out the most proactive work and also had the most reliable data for identified cases of sexual exploitation (there were three other proactive boroughs but these were eliminated as data for sexual exploitation was less reliable).

Standard linear regression was carried out on the factor scores for the eight 'anchor points' and the known level of exploitation identified in these eight local authorities. This provides a model identifying the relationship between the level of risk indicated by factor analysis and the numbers of identified cases of sexual exploitation. This model can then be used to calculate the estimates for the numbers of young people at risk of exploitation for the remaining local authorities based on their factor scores.

The figure below shows the degree of association between the level of exploitation identified in the eight boroughs and the level of risk derived from the factor analysis of the proxy indicators.
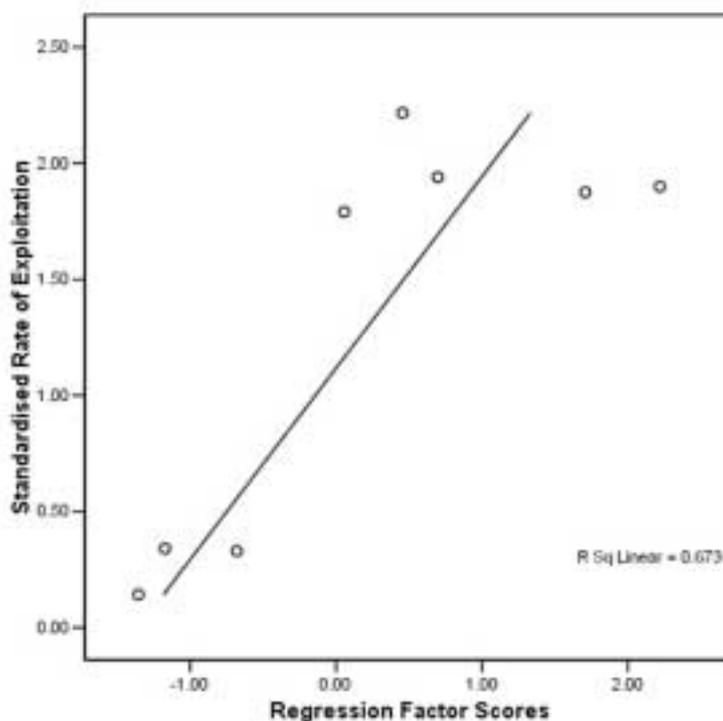
Correlation between the model and the data was found, with one possible outlier. The model represented the data to a statistically significant degree ($p < 0.05$). The inclusion of local authorities with comparative low levels of exploitation with those with higher levels of exploitation also enables a line of best fit to be drawn between two clear points. The regression equation for the line of fit was then calculated in order provide estimates for the numbers of young people at risk in the remaining local authorities, based on the factor scores indicating the level of risk in each of these boroughs.

The scatter graph overleaf shows the relationship between the factor scores of the model and the resulting estimated numbers of young people at risk of sexual exploitation in each London borough:
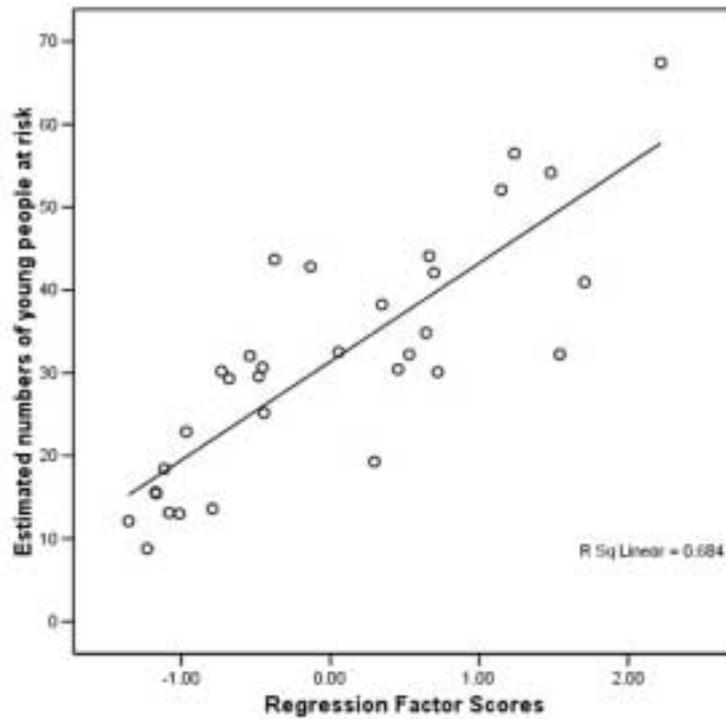
The map below indicates the estimated level of sexual exploitation in London derived from the model. The map indicates boroughs identified as having high risk of sexual exploitation (where the mean estimate of number of young people at risk was over 40); medium risk (where the mean estimate was between 31 and 40 young people); moderate risk (where the mean estimate was between 21 and 30 young people); and low risk (where the mean estimate was under 20 young people).

Estimated risk of sexual exploitation for individual boroughs in London

1   City of London
2   City of Westminster
3   Kensington and Chelsea
4   Hammersmith and Fulham
5   Islington

High risk
Medium risk
Moderate risk
Low risk
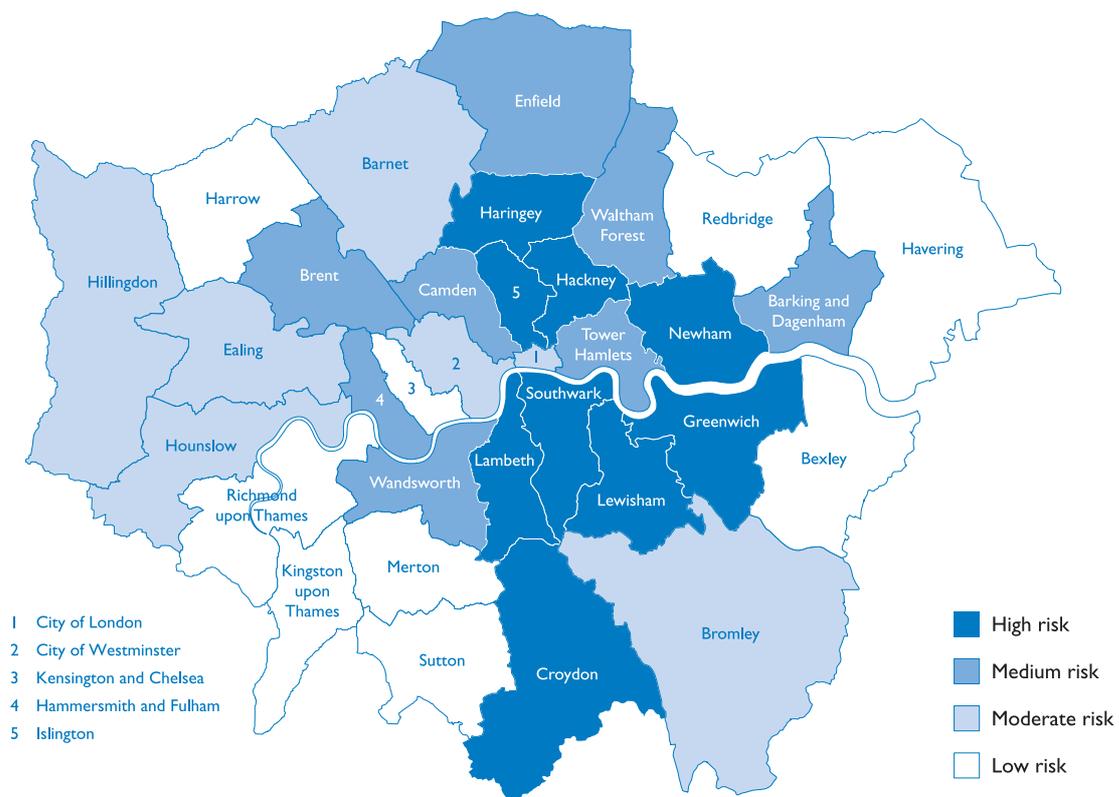
The total estimated number of young people likely to be experiencing sexual exploitation in London is 1,002. This is approximately double the number of young people currently being identified by services. However, the relationship between the estimates and numbers of young people currently identified varied between boroughs, with the data suggesting that some London boroughs may be under-identifying young people at risk by up to 80 per cent.

It is important to note that figures from the model will still be an under-estimate. Informants from the local authorities in the eight boroughs used as 'anchor points' believed that much sexual exploitation still remained hidden in their local authority. The statistical exercise therefore does not represent the *prevalence* of sexual exploitation, but the level of exploitation that would be likely to be identified if all local authorities worked as proactively as the eight 'anchor point' boroughs.

The standard deviation of the model (0.54) was lower than that of the mean (0.88). This indicates that the model used to estimate risk is a better model than taking an average of all cases and applying this average (16 cases) to each borough in London. The model is helpful in that it takes account of the individual levels of risk, as identified by the factor analysis, in each borough in calculating the estimates.

The estimates may therefore indicate areas of high risk of sexual exploitation where there is currently a lack of service provision for sexually exploited young people.

As with any statistical model, the estimates should be used cautiously. The estimates are subject to wide confidence intervals, with the mean value used to provide the final estimate. However, this was also the case in the research estimating prevalence of problematic drug use in the UK (Frischer et al, 2004). Similarly, our model also assumes that the relationship between the individual risk indicators and sexual exploitation is the same in different local authorities (Frischer et al, 2004). The comparatively small area of this study and the high levels of mobility within London suggest that this could be a reasonable assumption.

The model may not take account of other factors in particular areas that lead to higher risk of sexual exploitation. One local authority respondent stated that they had received intelligence that their borough might be targeted more as it was considered a '*nice'* borough, so exploitation could be more hidden.

In addition, given the fluidity of mobility of people between boroughs, high risk in some areas may have an impact on others. For example, some local authority respondents noted that their borough bordered on an area of high risk, which may be a factor that influenced risk of sexual exploitation for young people in their own borough.

Service responses: police

The Metropolitan Police work within the frameworks of the National Police Plan and the Metropolitan Police Plan which set priorities for their work. While the National Police Plan included child protection work as a policing priority for the first time this year, the Metropolitan Police has included child protection in its yearly policing plans over the last three years.

In relation to the sexual exploitation of young people, the role of the police is set out in the Department of Health guidance, *Safeguarding children involved in prostitution* (2000):

> *'The police have the lead in the investigation and detection of crime in relation to the abuse of children through prostitution. […] The police will play a full role in the inter-agency discussions and their role in investigating criminal activity must run alongside the work of the social services department regarding the child's welfare.'* (paragraph B9)

Guidelines on dealing with exploitation and abuse through prostitution developed in 1998 by the Association of Chief Police officers (ACPO), and reiterated in its Prostitution Strategy (2004), also provide a framework for police action in relation to the sexual exploitation of young people.

The London Child Protection Procedures introduced in 2003 reaffirm that the role of the police is the prevention and detection of crime, the identification of offenders and the securing of the best evidence for prosecution (2.3.1- 2.3.2). The work of the Metropolitan Police on sexual exploitation is discussed here in the light of these responsibilities.

Identifying and preventing sexual exploitation

The ACPO Prostitution Strategy (2004) stresses the importance of proactively identifying sexual exploitation:

> *'Intelligence systems must be used to proactively assess the true extent of problems caused by prostitution. The covert nature of many aspects of prostitution-related crimes, especially those relating to child prostitution, off-street prostitution and trafficking, will rarely reveal themselves through passive techniques.'* (p.7)

The main ways in which sexual exploitation comes to the attention of the police are described below. While some proactive work to identify perpetrators of sexual exploitation is carried out, many respondents noted that there was a lack of proactive work to prevent or detect this kind of crime, and many, including police officers interviewed for the research, were frustrated by this:

'Paladin[2] was very unusual to be involved in. We do not actively go out looking, we wait for it to come to us' Police officer

Vice units

The Charing Cross Clubs and Vice team patrols red light areas and off street sex work locations, identifying as a part of their work young people exploited through prostitution. Based in Central London, the majority of their work has traditionally been based there. However, at the time of interview in 2003, the Clubs and Vice team had recently been given a pan-London remit, and so could focus work on different areas of London for short periods of time, either at the borough's request or as identified by the team.

Through their work, the Clubs and Vice team have identified significant numbers of young people who were, or were at risk of being, sexually exploited. They noted however that they are finding fewer young people on the streets and in traditional sex work locations, and that sexually exploited young people were more hidden than a few years ago. The statistics for young people identified by outreach work undertaken by Clubs and Vice provide evidence for this observation. Due to the increasingly hidden nature of young people's sexual exploitation, the Clubs and Vice team highlighted the increased importance of liaising with social services departments to identify cases.

Sexual exploitation was also identified by smaller, local vice units. Reduced resources meant that they played a lesser role, although their presence was valued by other respondents in the boroughs where they were located.

Work with young people who run away or go missing

Running away, or going missing from care or home, is a known risk indicator for sexual exploitation. Five out of ten police respondents interviewed stated that sexual exploitation was often identified through work on finding young people who go missing or run away. Concerns about sexual exploitation could be identified through investigating missing persons, carrying out return interviews with young people who have been missing, and tracking addresses where they have stayed:

'We mostly get to hear about it in the course of investigating missing persons. […] There are two addresses where if they are staying there, they would be at risk of sexual exploitation. It mostly comes from the return interviews that we conduct.' Police officer

'The Miss-U scheme is a real bonus. There are a lot of things that would get missed without them.' Police officer

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2 Operation Paladin Child was a pilot study carried out between January and March 2003 at Heathrow airport to scope the nature of child migration from non-EU countries into the UK. A child protection officer and a social worker based at the airport assessed any potential risk to young people arriving in the UK, and their destination addresses were passed to social services for follow-up checks.

However, there were gaps in police responses across London to children and young people who run away or go missing. One respondent identified a lack of resources for police teams working with missing persons. The Metropolitan Police Child Abuse Prevention Strategy paper states that resources are not available to routinely interview all missing persons, but advises that consideration should be given to interviewing more children who go missing upon their return as well as targeting resources to those young people who are considered most vulnerable (Metropolitan Police, 2002, p.6).

On a strategic level, the Metropolitan Police had no means of knowing exactly how many young people run away, or go missing at any time, in individual boroughs or across London. This was the case for the central missing persons team within the Police (Operation Compass) as well as for missing persons teams at a local borough level. It was not possible to monitor cases of young people going missing since although case reports of young people running away are recorded on the new police computer system, Merlin, the system does not yet have a statistical data retrieval facility. While missing reports are also filed by boroughs to a separate section of Merlin, this section was not designed for data extraction so information cannot be retrieved, for example, by age or sex. Therefore, in order for the Metropolitan Police to know about the rates of young people going missing in a particular area, it is necessary to go through individual cases on the Merlin system and identify and extract this information by hand, something that both central and local missing persons teams obviously did not have the time or resources to do.

The Metropolitan Police were aware of the problem and the need to identify a solution. This is an important area as it would facilitate the monitoring of areas where there is risk of sexual exploitation. The police are currently unable to use information on young people going missing to quickly or easily identify particular boroughs or residential children's homes that may be being targeted.

Partnership working with social services departments

It was readily acknowledged by police respondents that working in partnership with social services departments (for example through multi-agency planning meetings under protocols on sexual exploitation) was a useful way for the police to perform their role of identifying and responding to sexual exploitation. However, a significant number of respondents from social services departments said that there were difficulties with getting police 'on board' with work on sexual exploitation:

> *'The single biggest complaint is that you can't get the police to take it up despite the overt attempts by the Met to say that they deal with the issue.'*
> Child protection co-ordinator, social services

> *'The biggest and ongoing struggle is to have a response from the police towards prosecution.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

However, with police commitment, partnership working with social services departments and other professionals could be very successful. This was demonstrated by the recent scoping exercise, *CATSE North London Pilot Project*, carried out in two boroughs by the Metropolitan Police Child Abuse Partnerships and Prevention Unit.

The CATSE North London Pilot Project aimed to investigate the scale of the problem in the two boroughs, develop a referrals procedure to facilitate sharing of intelligence and pilot systems, and to inform the debate within the Metropolitan Police over where the remit for sexual exploitation should lie. Under the pilot scheme, commenced in September 2004, social services departments were encouraged to refer cases of sexual exploitation to the Police Child Protection Unit who then referred cases that did not involve intra-familial abuse to the CATSE team. A 'macro-map' meeting was also organised at which practitioners from social services, a specialist service and different police teams met to share confidential information under the provisions of section 47 of the Children Act to map the cases of sexual exploitation they were aware of. Information on victims, suspects, vehicles etc was exchanged, and the work generated a significant level of useful intelligence that police teams could use to proactively investigate abuse.

Barriers to an effective police response

Remit

There been no clear lead team working on sexual exploitation in the Metropolitan police, and this was recognised as a serious limitation to effective working by many respondents, including members of the Metropolitan police. The London Child Proection Procedures have not offered clarity in this area. At 2.3.9, they state that child abuse occurring outside the home or family, and therefore outside the traditional remit of Child Protection Units, would be dealt with by Borough CID staff but would become the responsibility of Child Protection Units (CPUs) in 2004. However, in the specific section of the procedures relating to children who are sexually exploited, the procedures hint at a lesser role for Child Protection Units:

> '*CPUs, as a function of their expertise in working with children, have an important contribution to this multi-agency work, even where police responsibility lies with CID or vice squad.' (Paragraph 9.8.9)*

By contrast, in the same section, the London Procedures imply that CPUs hold the central role and indeed advise agencies to contact the CPU in the first instance (9.8.17-9.8.27). They further state:

> '*Uniformed police, CID or vice squad may become aware that a child is involved in prostitution through the course of their duties. Unless immediate action is required to provide protection they should inform the CPU and SSD.'* (9.8.20)

The situation is even less clear in practice. Different social services departments and other services were working with a range of different police teams as a result of ambiguity over remit, including Child Protection Units, Community Safety Units, Clubs and Vice, Sapphire teams, local borough police, CID, Missing Persons Units, Public Protection Police and the Child Abuse Prevention Unit. Some social services departments were negotiating with two or more teams at the same time, and experiencing difficulties in securing one team to undertake responsibility for responding to individual cases of sexual exploitation.

At the time of interview, Clubs and Vice had been formally allocated the lead responsibility for this area of work. This team holds expertise in relation to sexual exploitation. However, lack of clarity around their remit remained, and they were not sufficiently resourced to cover demand across the whole of London. Protecting sexually exploited young people would also fall under safeguarding children remits. The CATSE North London Pilot Project was undertaken by the Child Abuse Prevention Unit under the Child Protection command. One of the aims of this pilot project was to investigate where responsibility for sexual exploitation should lie within the police. During the period of the research, there was ongoing debate within the Metropolitan Police about which team should hold the remit and lead for cases of sexual exploitation.

The lack of an identified and adequately resourced lead team prevents the police from co-ordinating proactive work to prevent and detect crime:

> *'If you had a department with a specific interest, then at least there would be someone to pass the information on to. At the moment, there are lots of people with little bits of information and passing on to the intelligence system, and as no one is looking for it, so they are not putting it together and acting on it.'* Police officer

Some respondents mentioned that they passed intelligence to Clubs and Vice, who they felt were good at keeping a watch over this information. But as this was not the case across the board for all services, it could not happen in a co-ordinated or systematic way.

The lack of overall remit held by one team was felt to have an impact on the ability of the police to respond to sexual exploitation, and therefore on vulnerable young people at risk:

> *'It's a grey area. The Child Protection Teams, the Met policy teams who deal with family abuse, the DOH guidance talks of CPTs being part of the process. And they are in other forces. But in the Met, there are little silos about what you deal with. And the girls, the vast majority are girls, they slip between the cracks.'* Police officer

Resources

One of the difficulties around the issues of establishing remit may be related to resources:

> *'It's not that the police are unwilling, but to commit to lead is to commit to resources.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Interviewees reported their concern that there was significant under-resourcing within the police for this area of work, which undermined their ability to detect and respond effectively to the sexual exploitation of young people. Child Protection Teams also suffered a lack of resources to respond to the level of need. The CATSE North London Pilot Project highlighted a need for further resources in order to respond to the levels of abuse uncovered during the investigation.

Prioritising work on sexual exploitation

Lack of resources meant that the police were faced with juggling competing priorities. In view of the pressure on resources, there was evidence of difficulty ensuring that protection of young people from sexual exploitation received the priority it needed:

> 'I am convinced that sexual exploitation is a big problem, but there is difficulty convincing those who hold the purse strings. It is a hidden problem. Children present themselves as if they are happy with the situation. […] And this area is the most difficult to argue. You need to argue that they deserve to be helped in spite of themselves where resources are expensive and finite.' Police officer

Some police interviewees pointed out that police work is intelligence-led and that there was no intelligence to suggest a large problem of sexual exploitation:

> 'We do not have many operations, we have not got intelligence, which suggests that there is not much of a problem. It is driven by case studies, anecdotes.' Police officer

However, the need for proactive work was highlighted by others as key to uncovering what is a hidden problem. In the words of one police officer, *'if you are not looking, you will not find.'* Proactive work was said to be needed both in terms of identifying sexual exploitation as well as responding to concerns, as these were understood to be linked:

> 'Police officers are looking for hard and fast evidence all the time. If you spend a lot of time trying to find the scale of the problem, you will never find it. You therefore have to accept that the problem is there and then work on it.' Police officer

Awareness issues

While some police officers were very knowledgeable about the spectrum of sexual exploitation experienced by young people, three respondents identified only activities similar to 'formal' prostitution as sexual exploitation, suggesting varying levels of awareness within the police:

> 'We don't get much here. We don't have child prostitution here. We have had the odd case. We don't have brothels here stacked with child prostitutes.' Police officer

Though sexual exploitation was most commonly characterised by young people making constrained choices in situations of social, economic and material vulnerability, there was a danger that these young people were not considered 'proper victims':

> *'There's a difference between the 14 year-old girl who goes out because she wants to do it and the 14 year-old girl who is forced into it. Often the former becomes the latter as the pimp takes over, and they are forced into things that they do not want to do. We need to concentrate on the girls being forced into prostitution.'* Police officer

This approach, which understands involvement in sexual exploitation as an 'adult' choice, ignores the dangerous and exploitative circumstances that leave young people trapped.

Two police respondents stated that the police could not offer a protective response to young people aged 16-18 years, which may also relate to understanding sexual exploitation as an 'adult choice'.

> *'And 16-18 is different isn't it? [Researcher: Is that your view?] Yes, there's a major difference. You can consent at 16. And the exploitation is greater the younger a child is. There's more free will at that age, isn't there?'* Police officer

Two local authority respondents had experienced difficulty securing protective responses for young people at that age:

> *'We had a 16 year-old and when we contacted them [the police], they told us not to worry about it. At 16, they are seen to have moved into adult prostitution scenario.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

By contrast, another police officer spoke of their frustration at social services' reluctance to pursue the case of a 16 year-old whose abuser the police were trying to prosecute.

Both the Department of Health guidance (2000) and the Sexual Offences Act (2003) state that young sexually exploited people under the age of 18 years should be treated as victims of abuse and offered protection. Although the ACPO Guidelines are clear that young people under 18 years should be protected as victims of abuse, they do not outline specific responses for protecting young people aged 16-18:

> *'Young people (those below the age of 18 years) are protected by the Children Act 1989 which prescribes a method for removing, the child or young person from a situation which is likely to cause them significant harm. Police and other agencies have considerable powers under this legislation. It is therefore proposed that children up to the age of 16 years who are found to be engaged in prostitution be dealt with in all circumstances as being in significant harm. Police officers coming into contact with such young people will not issue a caution (or prostitute warning) but will ensure the young person is lodged safely and away from immediate harm.'* (ACPO Guidelines, 1998)

The Metropolitan Police approach to women suffering domestic violence points to strategies for continuing to provide effective protection. The Metropolitan Police research (Richards, 2004), *'Getting away with it': a strategic overview of domestic violence sexual assault and 'serious' incident*

analysis', which profiled approximately 400 offences flagged by police officers as domestic violence related sexual offences or serious offences, found that:

> *'The ongoing relationship between the perpetrators and victim may enhance vulnerability to future abuse and act as a barrier to help-seeking options'.*
> (paragraph 2.9)

Although women suffering domestic violence may 'choose' to remain in an abusive relationship, it is recognised that police responses are still appropriate and should be offered proactively. The report also states that incidents escalate in frequency and severity over time, that early intervention can help prevent escalation where patterns are not yet established and that structured intervention can also help disrupt established patterns of domestic abuse (p.13). Young people under 18 years old suffering sexual exploitation, who are even more disempowered, should not receive less help.

Achieving prosecutions of perpetrators

The number of prosecutions of those exploiting young people is extremely low. Prosecuting perpetrators was the exception rather than the norm. In total, two prosecutions in cases of sexual exploitation were identified through the research period (2003).

The most significant barrier identified by respondents to achieving successful prosecutions was the current practice of relying on the young person to press charges and give evidence. Young people were frequently unable to press charges, or unwilling to be involved in pursuing prosecutions, because of their disempowerment, their fear of the exploiter/s, their dependence on them, or because of the difficulty of understanding their situation as abuse. As a result, it was difficult to get the level of evidence required to secure a prosecution.

Some of the difficulties related to barriers further along the process of prosecution. One police officer said that without the young person's statement, they were unable to obtain the level of evidence required by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). There were also widely expressed concerns about the treatment of children within the criminal justice system in general. Child witnesses were not believed or seen as reliable witnesses, female witnesses were not believed or seen as reliable witnesses, and the experience of childhood sexual abuse was not believed. Many practitioners described the extreme difficulty in securing prosecutions in childhood sexual abuse cases, let alone cases of exploitation which were seen as much more difficult to prove. This would suggest that serious discussion of possible approaches to securing evidence and prosecutions needs to involve not only the police, but also the CPS and members of the judiciary.

With regard to alternative approaches to securing prosecution, surveillance of the abuser and the young person was the main alternative tentatively being considered. Some practitioners pointed out the ethical difficulties of witnessing a young person being exploited in order to gather evidence. Police interviewees pointed out that surveillance is an expensive and resource-intensive option that had to be strongly justified as a result.

The Metropolitan Police pioneering approach to prosecuting perpetrators of domestic violence without the participation of the victim could be explored as an approach to securing prosecutions in cases of sexual exploitation. Police respondents noted some difficulties: in domestic violence cases the perpetrator is often known, and there is other evidence that can be relied on such as a 999 call, photographs of the crime scene, neighbours' statements etc, which may not exist for young people who have been sexually exploited. However, there were cases identified in the research of young people attending Accident and Emergency departments following assaults and young people who had made statements that they had later retracted, for example. This suggests that, with proactive police intelligence work, this approach may be possible in some cases.

Responses were mixed as to whether the implementation of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, (recently made law and due to be enacted at the time of the fieldwork), would make a difference in terms of achieving prosecutions. Half of those who discussed the Act were positive about its possible impact, and two local authorities were working on cases where the Act would make a difference to the possibility of prosecuting. Offences related to grooming, to arranging and facilitating abuse, and to purchasing sex from young people were identified as helpful by police respondents. Those practitioners who were less optimistic about the impact it would have on prosecution highlighted the need for change across the whole criminal justice system. Another caveat expressed was the need for police resources to carry out the preliminary investigative and detective work.

Creative approaches to using alternative legislation were also suggested by interviewees, such as the use of domestic violence injunctions and the use of child abduction law to prevent men from picking up young people from schools or children's homes.

The lead agencies: social services and the ACPCs

Child protection co-ordinators from 30 London boroughs and 2 local authorities outside London were interviewed for the research. Through their role on their Area Child Protection Committee(ACPC), interviewees were able to provide insight on the local authority as a whole, as well as the particular issues experienced by the social services department in identifying and responding to sexually exploited young people.

The Area Child Protection Committee in each local authority is a multi-agency forum responsible for protecting and safeguarding children at a strategic level, with social services departments identified as holding the lead role. These will be replaced by Safeguarding Boards as part of the changes introduced by the Children Act 2004 and the *Every Child Matters* agenda. The ACPC's role includes developing and agreeing inter-agency policies and procedures; strategic planning; developing effective inter-agency working; and ensuring delivery of effective training. As part of its child protection work, the ACPC is specifically required to have in place a local protocol on responding to young people where there are concerns around sexual exploitation (*Working together to Safeguard Children*, paragraph 4.18). The Department of Health guidance, *Safeguarding children involved in prostitution* (2000) states that ACPCs should:

> *'actively enquire into the extent to which children are involved in prostitution; develop a local protocol on children involved in prostitution, and to monitor and review the operation of the protocol; provide a local resource and source of expertise for those who have concerns that a child may be at risk of being drawn into prostitution or is being abused through prostitution.'*
> (paragraph 5.5)

Protocols should identify a specific postholder in each agency responsible for co-ordinating information and responses to sexually exploited young people (6.2). In addition, ACPCs should also take forward preventative work (paragraph 5.6) and organise inter-agency training to raise awareness among professionals around sexual exploitation where necessary (paragraph 5.7). In this way, the guidelines place a duty on ACPCs to undertake proactive work on identifying and responding to young people at risk of sexual exploitation.

Responses in different local authorities

The research found considerable variation between local authorities in how far they complied with the guidance and worked proactively to identify and respond to sexual exploitation. Information from the interviews with child protection co-ordinators made it possible to compare the level of proactive work in each local authority. To assess this objectively, local authorities were scored (yes/no) on the following indicators developed both from the guidance and from particular issues arising from the research.

These were:

- the active use of a protocol on sexual exploitation
- an identified postholder within social services taking an active lead on sexual exploitation
- awareness of appropriate risk indicators for sexual exploitation
- knowledge of the numbers of young people where exploitation is indicated, but not known
- organisation of training around sexual exploitation
- proactive efforts to ensure police involvement
- existence of multi-agency working to identify and respond to sexual exploitation
- access to a specialist service
- preventative work being undertaken.

Local authorities were assessed in relation to each other. From the scores, it was possible to identify three clear groups of boroughs: eleven local authorities worked proactively to identify and respond to young people at risk of sexual exploitation; eight local authorities had developed work on sexual exploitation but were not proactive; and fifteen local authorities were in need of further development work around sexual exploitation or were just beginning to map the issue in the borough. The findings concur with the observations of two police respondents that they were aware of ten London boroughs working proactively on issues of sexual exploitation. The level of proactivity of individual local authorities was found to be independent of the level of risk in the borough. There were boroughs that had low levels of risk and provided a better and proactive response, and there were local authorities with high levels of risk identified as being in need of development work. Both Inner and Outer London boroughs were represented in each category. An analysis of the data suggests that the proactive use of a protocol on sexual exploitation, and an active lead officer within social services empowered to take this forward, played an important role in whether the other indicators were met.

Use of protocols

Child protection co-ordinators were asked about the protocols that they worked to in order to identify and respond to young people at risk of sexual exploitation. Joint London Child Protection Procedures developed by the London Child Protection Committee were introduced in 2003 to harmonise working between different boroughs and agencies across London. The London Procedures cover wider child protection issues, working across different borough and agency boundaries, and contain specific sections on abuse through prostitution and trafficking. In light of the development of these procedures, practitioners were asked specifically about the use of the London Procedures.

Respondents from all 31[3] London boroughs profiled stated that their borough had formally adopted the London Procedures. In 13 London boroughs the London Procedures doubled as local procedures. However, 18 boroughs had developed their own protocol on sexual exploitation, or used their own protocol alongside the London Procedures.

Strengths of the London Child Protection Procedures identified by informants were that they name sexual exploitation as an issue, and so put it on the agenda, and that the multi-agency planning meeting approach introduced alongside traditional child protection procedures was

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3 Information relates to 31 boroughs as additional information was provided by a specialist service in one borough
  where the social services lead officer was not interviewed.

useful. Some respondents found the procedures clear, straightforward and succinct. The London Procedures in general were found to be useful in delineating cross-borough responsibilities, and the different responsibilities of police and social services, although there remained difficulties in working across boroughs. child protection co-ordinators in five boroughs stated that the new procedures were very much in line with the way they had been working previously. However, respondents using their own protocols did so because, as currently drafted, the London Procedures lacked the detail necessary to ensure an adequate response to cases of sexual exploitation.

> *'They are not as helpful as our individual protocol as our protocol is more detailed. The LCPC procedures are quite brief and there is not a lot of local guidance about what things should be in place.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Some respondents also noted that it was useful to include local processes in the protocol. Although some local authorities which relied on the London Procedures for work on sexual exploitation used them proactively, there was a danger that relying solely on them meant local ownership of the issues was less developed.

The London Child Protection Procedures already acted as a standard by which respondents reviewed and aligned their practice. Two local authority respondents stated that they had updated their procedures around sexual exploitation in line with the London Procedures. Other local authorities stated that although their protocols were more detailed, they were coterminous. The London Procedures played an important role in sharing and standardising practice. If revised in line with current best practice in this area, the London Procedures would therefore play an important role in helping boroughs to develop and improve work in this area, including local coterminous protocols over which there was some ownership.

Some boroughs had their own protocols, but did not use them proactively. One respondent stated that a specific protocol had been drawn up for the borough, but it was found to be unworkable and never disseminated. It was clearly not enough for protocols to exist on paper. The need for ongoing training and awareness-raising was clear:

> *'There hasn't been a specific focus for the last couple of years. It reflects the nature of social services departments in London. A lot of energy went into the procedures/guidance, we distributed them widely, involving individuals, giving them lead responsibility. Then there was little in terms of follow up in the last 18 months. We are more likely to come across it [sexual exploitation] by chance.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Some local authority respondents were not confident that the protocols were always adhered to, or used in every case. Practitioners also said that difficulties such as securing police attendance at meetings undermined the working of protocols. And protocols could only take local authorities so far in the absence of other resources:

> *'There is a problem about what we offer young people. We are not geared up to deal with it yet.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Identifying sexual exploitation

The main way that social services departments identified sexual exploitation was from within their own client base. This may relate primarily to the particular vulnerability of children with whom they work, but could also indicate that other exploited children are less likely to come to their attention:

> 'There may be other children, but we don't get referrals and don't do any outreach, nor are there other young people's services that young people would access and we would get referrals.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Concerns over sexual exploitation were most frequently raised by parents, foster carers and staff in residential homes, and some local authorities prioritised training and awareness-raising with carers and residential social workers as a result. Undertaking missing-from-care assessments was one way that sexual exploitation came to light. It was also identified through general assessment of young people for child protection purposes, though it was generally not the initial reason for referral. This could be because sexual exploitation was part of a whole spectrum of difficulties:

> 'Some children are so vulnerable, when we are looking at every dimension of their life, in the assessment, it [sexual exploitation] comes out there.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

However, it could also relate to lack of awareness:

> 'We don't get many referrals [for sexual exploitation] actually. It usually comes up after the event, indirectly. The two or three cases we know of were looked-after, and it only became known after they were looked after, so it wasn't the reason for the referral. It is about people's understanding and awareness of the issue.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Social workers being alert to the risk indicators for sexual exploitation was considered an important means of identifying young people at risk. In some authorities sexual exploitation had also been identified, to a lesser extent, by YOT staff, asylum teams and through Multi-Agency Public Protection Panels.

Some local authority respondents commented that it was unusual to receive referrals for sexual exploitation. Those that did receive referrals most frequently cited the police and education service as the source of referral, with some authorities receiving referrals from health or sexual health teams. There was a clear link between providing training and raising awareness and receiving referrals:

> 'We have single agency and multi-agency training in [borough] so referrals come as a result of that, so we have had referrals from schools, for example kids truanting, having behavioural issues in schools. Also we get referrals on open cases from residential placements. Residential workers pick up concerns due to the training' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Without active protocols, training and awareness, concerns around sexual exploitation may not reach the attention of social services. One health professional, in a borough identified as being in need of development work, said that she thought many professionals in the local authority had concerns, but they did not know where to take them or what to do to make a difference.

Sexual exploitation also came to the attention of social services through specific scoping exercises. These appeared to be a useful way of raising awareness and setting in motion work on sexual exploitation. Auditing cases within social services was also a way to identify cases that might not have been identified through routine processes. One local authority also carried out an in-depth enquiry in response to several cases of concern.

Three local authorities had carried out outreach work with young people and identified those at risk that way. Local authorities with access to a specialist service were positive about the way services enabled identification through peer introductions to the service, and through the skills of specialist workers which facilitated disclosure.

Barriers to identifying young people at risk

Practitioners generally acknowledged that young people do not readily disclose this form of abuse. Only two local authorities surveyed stated that they had identified sexual exploitation through a disclosure by the young person:

> *'We rely on young people complaining. If only they would, it would be easier of course! But understandably they don't, for lots of reasons, fear etc.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

> *'I am not aware of many cases where young people come in and say 'I need help'. The issue is professionals working with the young person and identifying concerns.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

However, as some local authority respondents admitted, many practitioners were not actively looking for signs of sexual exploitation. Four local authorities had only just begun work under sexual exploitation protocols at the time of the interviews in 2003. Identifying concerns also relied on practitioners' awareness of sexual exploitation. While lead officers interviewed had a good awareness of sexual exploitation risk indicators, many acknowledged that this was not the case across the whole of their department:

> *'Being aware of the risk indicators. Experienced staff are good, but we don't have many of those, it's a problem getting staff, like in many boroughs. We run awareness courses, but it's a bit of a struggle.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Professionals sometimes failed to recognise sexually exploited young people as victims of abuse even with clear evidence. One health practitioner noted that one of her roles was to highlight young people's vulnerability as they are often seen as *'bad'* rather than vulnerable. This perception could be compounded if they were involved in offending:

> *'It comes up through social services, the Youth Offending Team. It is harder for young people there as they are seen as on the edge of criminality and so it is harder to see them as victims, so they are more vulnerable in some ways.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Some interviewees were clear that challenging behaviour could be a response to experiences of abuse or a means of getting this heard by professionals:

> *'One of the other girl's behaviour was so out of control and was giving half stories to her social worker. Normally at that age, they are coming out of the social work spectrum, but she became very disruptive and was self-harming. She was trying to tell us but she couldn't. She told us through her behaviour, then there was a painful picking away and getting up a relationship to give courage to the young person to trust and confide.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

A lack of confidence about how to respond to sexual exploitation or a lack of services for young people to which referrals could be made affected practitioners' readiness to identify sexual exploitation. One practitioner noted that professionals were unlikely to proactively identify young people at risk for *'fear of opening a can of worms.'* The availability of a specialist service able to respond to young people at risk made it more likely that sexual exploitation would be identified. One child protection co-ordinator said that they had not carried out awareness-raising around sexual exploitation under the protocols, and were reluctant to do so in the absence of any service able to respond to young people identified as a result.

Systemic problems relating to resources and staffing within social services also acted as a major barrier both to identifying young people at risk and to offering them a service.

Service response to young people at risk of sexual exploitation

Child protection co-ordinators were asked about the protection process for young people identified as being, or at risk of being, sexually exploited. Most local authority respondents stated that they held multi-agency planning or strategy meetings to plan and co-ordinate responses to young people at risk of sexual exploitation. The introduction of multi-agency planning meetings, alongside the more traditional responses of child protection conferences and enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act, was welcomed. Many practitioners noted the difficulty of using traditional child protection processes with this form of abuse. Child protection processes were designed to cope primarily with intra-familial abuse, and some practitioners felt that these made it difficult to work with families to protect young people against abusers outside the family.

Five local authority respondents said that they did not hold meetings under protocols on sexual exploitation for looked-after children. Instead, they were held under generic looked-after children review processes. At least one practitioner found that these were inappropriate for raising issues of sexual exploitation, and another found that it was difficult to get sexual exploitation on the agenda and discussed at these meetings. Planning for young people outside

protocols on sexual exploitation could prevent lead officers from being able to maintain an overview of issues of sexual exploitation in the borough, and from ensuring consistent responses to young people in need of protection. In a couple of instances, where there was less proactive work around the protocols and looked-after children were assisted under generic review processes, the looked-after teams were aware of many more young people at risk than were the child protection co-ordinators with lead responsibility for sexual exploitation. Discrepancies in the number of young people identified were of 20 or more cases.

A multi-agency approach was clearly extremely important, and there was a marked contrast between local authorities which had worked proactively with the protocols and forged multi-agency partnerships and those which had yet to develop this work.

Working with indications rather than knowledge

Factors affecting the type of response of social services included the degree of certainty that sexual exploitation was occurring:

> *'It depends on the certainty.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

> *'If we're really clear Section 47 but if they are nebulous concerns, Section 17'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

This approach is supported by the London Child Protection Procedures which outline thresholds for action under Section 17 and Section 47. Where there are suspicions, assistance should be given under Section 17, and where there is a clear disclosure, Section 47. A difficulty of the approach outlined in the guidance on thresholds is that although serious exploitation may be occurring, research indicates that it is unlikely for young people to disclose this, and so assessments made by practitioners based on risk and other indicators would be important in identifying exploitation. It is therefore likely that to be effective in offering assistance at an early stage, it will be important to be working on the basis of concerns rather than hard evidence.

Responses to the research question relating to numbers of cases where sexual exploitation was indicated rather than known highlighted the differences between authorities in their approach to concerns in this area:

> *'There are individual cases where we have suspicions about sexual exploitation. But quantifying this is impossible, and there is no hard evidence. It is usually at 14 years and above where we are concerned about relationships with older boyfriends, not pimping. We don't quantify, and we are a long way from services being able to quantify, we don't have a way of quantifying. There is no definition, no clear thresholds.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

'We are working within a procedure, we have a specific procedure for those children and we are extending them to bring in early intervention. There are [figure] young people where we have concerns.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

The approach used by the second of these two authorities is to use a tiered risk assessment for identification and intervention for this specific area. Under their draft protocol, young people are identified at three levels of concern and are assisted accordingly. Level one concern would be for those where there was identified risk. A discussion would be held and a plan would be put in place for them. At level two, where there was risk of exploitation becoming entrenched, there would be a multi-agency planning meeting. At level three, where young people were identifying as being involved in prostitution, a higher level of response would be implemented.

The advantage of this approach is that it delineates different levels of risk and how to intervene accordingly. The inclusion of young people seen as lower risk could also be an important step towards taking action to prevent young people from becoming sexually exploited.

Systemic barriers within social services

The majority of respondents from social services, and others commenting on social services provision, spoke of the extreme pressure on resources faced by departments and the impact that this has on service provision. Social services respondents were clear that they were forced to make choices about how to allocate limited resources, and therefore prioritised cases where there was abuse of younger children:

'We are bombarded with referrals. We have limited resources and these are prioritised for young children at risk. Our top priority is babies and young children. The difficulty with young women abused through prostitution is that they are at the other end of the age range.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

In addition, they reported that social services were struggling to respond to cases of *known* abuse, therefore responding to indications of risk or possible cases of exploitation, especially where the young person did not seem to want to co-operate, was even more difficult:

'To prioritise this group, we need enough staff to manage the day-to-day stuff. Staffing is a real difficulty. Otherwise they won't get over the threshold. Our front door service focuses on the most vulnerable, those who are obviously abused, and the very youngest. So a possibly sexually exploited 14 year-old is further down the order.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

'We are struggling to meet the things that we do know about, let alone the things that are more hidden. This discussion is making me feel uncomfortable, as there are more hidden areas that children can be extremely abused.

We are struggling to keep up with the things that are in your face.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Although guidelines exist on paper for thresholds for responding to sexual exploitation, the pressure on social services in London meant that in practice, operational thresholds were much higher. This made early identification of risk of sexual exploitation extremely difficult. One respondent noted that social services will act only once concerns have escalated:

> *'There's a gap for younger girls. What happens is that educational staff identify it, but the threshold for social services is so high, so there is a gap of two to three years where they are not being offered a service.'* Practitioner, specialist service

High staff turnover not only increased pressure of work on social services but had the additional impact of making it difficult to maintain raised awareness of sexual exploitation among staff, leading to patchy identification and inconsistent responses to young people at risk. Even when a young person did receive a service, some social services staff said that they did not have the time to provide the level of intensive support that they knew young people who were sexually exploited required.

Protecting older teenagers

Following research highlighting gaps in services for young people aged 16-18 (Phoenix, 2004), respondents were asked specifically whether their protection procedures would be the same for young people in this age group. While some local authorities said their response under the protocols would be the same, most acknowledged that they found it more difficult to assist young people in this age group and younger:

> *'With social services, it's different. When you have younger children, the local authority can take a stronger role, decide whether it is the responsibility of the parents or not. At 15/16, there is not the same ability to enforce, either with families or, well young people can have sex aged 16, so can consent. With 12/13, there is a much higher degree of concern and ability to do more. At 15/16, Social services are not going to take major action, and also other monitoring systems are not in place at that age.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

In the context of pressure on resources, older teenagers were less likely to meet the thresholds for social services intervention:

> *'For our frontline staff, it is the older age group that causes difficulty. With under 15s, it is very clear. The difficulties are with the older age range. There are threshold issues for front line staff, so they are not keying in to specific needs, and it's about awareness, and developing understanding of the implications.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Several practitioners reported that young people as young as 14 or 15 years old were failing to access a service as a result:

> 'One of the frustrations is 15 year-olds and the way social services work with them. If we're concerned they're getting into a [sexually exploitative] situation, even for that one or two, it is difficult to get a service.' Practitioner, homelessness/missing service

Homeless young people suffered extra disadvantage as it was harder for them to access social services as a result of their age, the lack of available and appropriate accommodation for young people aged 16-18 and the likelihood that they would have crossed borough boundaries and may not be accepted by the home or host authority as a result.

Responding to young people making constrained 'choices'

Older teenagers were particularly vulnerable to their involvement in sexually exploitative relationships being considered to be an 'adult' choice by practitioners.

> 'It is often not easy to see a 17 year-old as a victim. She's saying, 'this is my boyfriend and I love him.' It's difficult to know how to deal with, whether to treat her as an adult or a child.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

> 'I'm not aware of any [sexually exploited young people] over 16. We begin to take a different attitude to young people who are 16+, sometimes not appropriately. It can be seen as "it's your choice" but are not looking at whether this is a fair or equal choice.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

As discussed earlier, treating young people's involvement as an 'adult' choice fails to acknowledge the wider systemic factors which constrain young people's actions. Seeing their decision to remain in abusive situations as 'choice' without acknowledging their disempowerment within these situations leaves them unsupported in exiting such situations and places the responsibility on the young person for the wider systemic discrimination experienced by them. While it is accepted that services should work actively to support women suffering domestic violence to escape the abuse suffered at the hands of their partners, young women from the age of 14 risked being left to deal with the abuse on their own.

Engagement

To be able to provide interventions and recovery strategies young people first need to be engaged with services. Engaging young people was acknowledged to be a major difficulty by the majority of practitioners interviewed across all agencies. Respondents also said that young people were less likely to engage with statutory services, as a result of poor past experiences or for fear of triggering particular protective responses.

Young people's failure to engage with services was a reason sometimes given for not being able to find out more about their sexually exploitative circumstances or offer them protection. One child protection co-ordinator noted that young people who did not engage were perceived as uncooperative or 'bad' and risked not being offered protection.

Lack of engagement of young people with services could be seen as a failure on the part of the young person rather than as a lack of appropriate services or a service failure:

> *'It's far more difficult [to work with young people over 16] because of their right to decide that they don't want to work with us. It's not because we are unwilling to offer services.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

> *'There was difficulty in identifying services, and she was unwilling to accept services. So she is back on the streets probably. I don't know what else we could do.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

While still acknowledging that engaging young people was difficult, there were creative examples of ways in which local authorities could work with young people:

> *'Who are the people they do trust? We know that they would share with a sexual health worker, a counsellor at the Youth Offending Team. Are there relationships in the network that may be stepping stones?'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Indeed this was the way that boroughs with a specialist service worked, with the service engaging with the young person and working in partnership with the local authority.

Engaging with sexually exploited young people requires both time and persistence:

> *'We recently had a prosecution where the girl was being threatened for years. It was a couple of years before it was disclosed and it was via the [specialist service], who have a brilliant track record on this!'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

> *'Social workers are willing, but don't have enough time. What you need is to see the young person every day for several hours each time. With our social workers, we're lucky if we see a young person once every 3 weeks, and it is not through a lack of will. And we can't refer. We can refer, but it needs a month with someone the young person trusts before they can accept the referral. She is not going to go alone to the unknown.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

> *'I would like to see a worker being all over a child 24/7 for 6 weeks. It's only that way that you begin to build a relationship. There's not enough of me and my colleagues. The way is to overwhelm them, wherever you go, I care about you. You know with one young person, I would put a note under her door, knock on her door and when I did she would turn the music up,*

and I said I would call back tomorrow, and I did. And in the end, it worked. You need that consistency. And I don't care who it is, whether it's a social worker, police officer, [specialist service] worker.' Practitioner, specialist service

Availability and accessibility of services was also a factor that respondents highlighted as having an impact on young people's engagement. Most practitioners noted that flexible services that could be accessed quickly by young people were required. Services offering appointments several weeks in advance at early hours in the morning were unlikely to be accessible to young people. The difficulty of accessing CAMHS support was particularly highlighted in this regard, although there were examples of promising practice to overcome this (see chapter on health provision, p.81).

Though it was important to work with young people at an early stage to prevent levels of risk escalating, one practitioner also noted a gap in services available at periods of crisis:

'The difficulties in particular come when a young person is picked up by police late at night. […] There's a major gap in services. Very seldom is anyone able to meet with them, do an assessment, it's only the police. So someone to do a piece of work at a period of crisis. […] We need workers who are skilled to be able to do a short piece of crisis work with them. They are left sitting in the police station for hours.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Use of secure accommodation

Most local authorities in and around London sometimes use secure accommodation as a crisis response to sexually exploited young people, or those they believe to be at high risk. Twenty-five of the thirty-three local authorities involved in the research had used secure provision in response to such cases during the previous 12 months. Of the remaining eight authorities, seven were not asked about their use of secure accommodation as they were only just beginning to identify cases of sexual exploitation or the interviewees did not have an overview of such cases in the borough. One local authority that had worked with many young women at high risk had successfully avoided the use of secure accommodation during the previous year.

In two instances, local authority child protection co-ordinators said that there was no history of secure accommodation being used in response to this issue in their borough. However, interviews with other local authority respondents within the borough, or with secure unit managers, identified that sexually exploited young women from these boroughs had indeed been referred to secure accommodation. This may indicate a reluctance to admit, in a research context, to this use of secure accommodation, or the lack of a full overview of cases of sexual exploitation within these boroughs.

Typically, local authorities identified one or two cases where they had used secure provision, while some local authorities used it more frequently. Whatever the frequency of use, concerns around sexual exploitation were a significant factor for secure disposals:

'I suppose if you pose the question the other way around, it's the only issue for which we've used secure in the last [few] years. We have a couple of remand foster carers, so we have not used it for young men.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

The significance of the issue for young women's routes to secure is supported by the proportion of sexually exploited young women identified by secure units themselves. Managers from five secure units were interviewed for the research. The numbers of young women identified as sexually exploited by the four respondents from secure units working with young women varied from 50 to 80 per cent of referrals, with three of these four units stating that sexual exploitation was a factor for the majority of referrals (75 to 80 per cent of cases).

Sexually exploited young men were referred to secure units to a much lesser extent. This is probably a reflection of the lower level of identification of sexually exploited young men generally. A respondent from the unit which worked exclusively with young men said that the number of sexually exploited young men referred would be *'a small minority'*. Two of the three mixed-gender secure units each identified a small percentage of young men, around 10-15 per cent, where there were concerns about sexual exploitation. One respondent suggested that it may be more difficult for young men to disclose exploitation, or understand their experience in such terms. Gendered beliefs around vulnerability and sexuality among professionals are also likely to play a role in the identification of young men as being sexually exploited or 'at risk'.

Young people referred to secure accommodation

Secure accommodation was generally used by local authorities as a crisis response to provide immediate physical safety, usually with young people deemed to be at very high, and immediate, risk. This was frequently expressed in terms of a young person being *'beyond our control'.* Secure units identified that in half of the referrals of young women where sexual exploitation was a factor the concerns were 'specific' and 'definite'.

The use of secure as a response to sexual exploitation was more likely where there were additional risk factors identified. A combination of drug use and sexual exploitation was more likely to lead to a secure disposal, or it might be used in the hope of *'breaking a pattern'* of running away and going missing. Running away was identified by secure units as the most significant factor leading to a secure placement for young women. Running away could in itself lead to placement in secure accommodation, it could be a factor that accompanied known exploitation, or it could raise concerns about possible exploitation. Both 'going missing' and drug use are well-evidenced risk factors associated with the sexual exploitation of young people.

The age of the young person was also relevant, with secure unit respondents reporting the increased use of secure placements for younger children (12+) in the last few years. The rationale offered was that in developmental terms an 'early intervention' was more likely to be effective in changing behaviour. Some respondents expressed their concern over the particular unsuitability of secure disposals for pre-adolescents.

Victim-blaming attitudes were embedded in some respondents' reasons for referral of young women to secure. It was suggested that secure might be used for young women,

'putting their selves at a lot of risk,' for young woman *'actively selling sex'* or who were considered to be *'recruiting'* others. The secure provision could be considered, and experienced as being, a form of punishment where such attitudes prevailed.

Gendered attitudes towards young women may also play a role in secure admissions. Two secure unit respondents referred to referrals made by local authorities on the basis of *'promiscuous behaviour'*. One secure unit respondent also noted the negative attitudes towards looked-after young women as a group of potentially 'bad girls':

> *'The girls in the unit, they want to wear the latest fashion, so they will go out and dress in a mini skirt, and when they're seen by people, they're called prostitutes and make comments. By comparison, my own daughter, if she goes out in a mini skirt, no comment is made.'* Manager, secure unit

The underlying discourse of gender, in which 'good boys' keep out of trouble with the police, while 'good girls' keep out of trouble sexually was clearly recognised by some interviewees:

> *'They [local authorities] tend to make the assumption that girls are involved in prostitution, with boys they assume criminal activity. The local authorities will always say prostitution, with boys they say other things like criminal activity.'* Manager, secure unit

Respondents felt that young men were less readily perceived as vulnerable and as a result were either less likely to be identified at an early stage, or were more likely to be referred through criminal justice routes. All the units that had worked with young men who were sexually exploited said that it was more common for exploitation to be recognised among younger boys.

Reasons for referral to secure accommodation

Most local authority respondents discussed secure referrals in negative terms, and said that they used secure provision reluctantly. Most local authorities saw secure accommodation as an unsatisfactory 'last ditch' resource in desperate circumstances.

> *'[It's] all we have… the kid being raped every night we put in secure, especially if they are younger, and if they go back again and again. We haven't got anything else. I'm not going home on a Friday night unless they're physically safe, even if it is secure.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

The use of secure accommodation was frequently justified as the only alternative when young people were in grave danger. In this way, local authorities felt *'cornered into a position as they are clearly so much at risk'* and also felt under pressure to *'do something'*. Sometimes this could be a *'back-covering'* exercise, particularly as working with young people who are sexually exploited involves assessing and managing high levels of risk:

> *'[T]his is a horrible area of work. It's frightening. And I can understand from a worker's point of view why they might want to lock a young person up. They*

> *don't want to find them ten days later dead in a ditch somewhere. But there needs to be a long term view.'* Practitioner, specialist service

It was also acknowledged that the placement of a young person in secure accommodation could relate to the needs of staff as much as the needs of young people:

> *'I hold the view that secure accommodation can be a temporary respite, but they have to come out again. In my experience, despite claims made by some providers, it is quite difficult to produce significant change in the world via a period of secure. If they are at risk when they go in, they are still at risk when they come out. What you have had is three months where they have been safe and have not had the police, social workers etc driven nuts.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Many local authorities which felt pressured to resort to secure had failed to identify or work with young people at an earlier stage. Indeed, for some local authorities, the secure placement provided their first opportunity to discover the young person's context of risk:

> *'The first thing everyone wants is an assessment. The reasons for absconding, why they are running, what the risk issues are. And get names and consolidate information where there were perhaps previously concerns. So information gathering from the child. A psychological assessment. We screen for mental health issues, mental health issues that have not been picked up. Drugs, alcohol work. Reduce the risk factors, and stabilise them to return to the community.'* Manager, secure unit

Reasons for using secure accommodation included a lack of resources within social services as well as a lack of well-resourced alternative options:

> *'Secure accommodation, it is not always the most appropriate option for the young person, but it is a question of resources. Statutory services are really stretched trying to support people, which is why social workers do not have the time to invest in supporting open placements.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Four local authority respondents did express positive views about the use of secure accommodation in certain circumstances. Although in the case described by one of these respondents the young person discussed had seemed to do well in secure but progress had not been sustained after leaving.

Secure unit respondents also discussed the lack of alternative provision for young people before their placement in secure accommodation. All said that the main 'alternative' tried before the secure disposal was to change the young person's residential placement, rather than any specific intervention. Young people referred had typically experienced several changes of placement – six or seven placements in the previous year for many young people referred to one secure unit.

Secure unit respondents identified placements with two-to-one staffing, away from the young person's home area, as an alternative to secure that was sometimes considered by local authorities. However, prohibitive fees and limited information about the quality of care in private residential units made these an unusual choice. Two respondents noted that moving a young person away from their area in this way was not usually effective as it compounded the young person's isolation from family, school and community and so often served to strengthen their dependency on an exploitative 'boyfriend' or network.

Respondents highlighted the absence of alternative, accessible non-residential therapeutic or supportive provision for young people:

> 'All have had previous social work allocation. Though I don't know the extent of the support they receive. Most will have been referred to CAMHS, but have not received a service due to their lifestyle. So they will have been enacted, but never been seen. So there will be a lot of concerns, but not seen by anyone. There is a massive lack in terms of voluntary sector provision. There's not much intervention. Lots of residential placements. The professionals will be worried and no one is doing anything.' Manager, secure unit

In particular, there was a lack of services able to flexibly and proactively engage with young people whose histories of abuse and exploitation made it difficult for them to engage with services or accept support without considerable 'testing out':

> 'Another child was supposed to receive help around substance misuse, but the service used said they would only work with young people [who] wanted to work with them. Which is fine as a [general] approach, I would agree with that, but for these young people, you need to be [just] turning up, and not talking about drugs, so that in three months time you have built up enough trust for them to talk about drugs.' Practitioner, specialist service

Finally, the use of alternative services may not relate solely to a lack of resources, but also to a lack of faith in the possibility of change for some of these young people:

> 'They think once a child runs, they always will. There is a lack of [belief in] alternative packages, a lack of use of specialised foster carers.' Practitioner, specialist service

Where services worked flexibly, sensitively and proactively with sexually exploited young people, respondents were convinced that it was possible to respond to their needs. One local authority that worked with high numbers of young women at risk was able to avoid the use of secure accommodation completely. This authority had the highest level of awareness of sexual exploitation, the most sophisticated tiered risk assessment, and a clear commitment to providing appropriate services to young women at risk of, or experiencing, sexual exploitation.

Secure units used by London local authorities

Young people who were sexually exploited in London were referred to secure units across England and Wales. Most of the secure units (14) receive a mixture of criminal justice and welfare referrals. Eleven of these units are mixed gender and three are male only. Nine of these units (all mixed gender) had contracts with the Youth Justice Board and so report information about the breakdown of criminal justice and welfare places: in all but one of the units, the majority of places are for referrals related to criminal justice. Six units that accepted welfare referrals only, of which two are female-only and four are mixed gender. A further two units provide criminal justice placements for boys only and information was not available for four units. Three units state specifically that they work with young women who are abused through prostitution, of which one is a female-only unit, and three units that state that they specialise in work with both victims and perpetrators of abuse. A further four units work with young people who have committed sex offences, all of these units receive both welfare and criminal justice referrals (www.secureaccommodation.net).

In practice, pressure on places means that the choice of secure unit is generally based on availability of beds rather than the appropriateness of the unit for the young person:

> '[We take] whatever we can get. We have removed a young person from one unit as it was so appalling. But there are so few secure beds, we don't have any choice.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

The lack of choice of placements also meant that they could be at a considerable distance from London. The distance of the unit from the young person's home and neighbourhood was sometimes considered a way of breaking links with exploitative and dangerous people in their lives. However, it also severely restricts opportunities for continuity of positive relationships with carers and workers, and so may increase reliance on exploitative relationships.

Provision in secure units

Immediate safety for a young person was usually sought by local authorities organising a secure disposal, and three secure unit respondents felt that secure accommodation could offer safety and stability where young people would otherwise be at serious risk. This view was expressed in the context of a lack of alternative interventions in the community, with one respondent stating that, *'there's a panic'* as a result. However, the physical security of a unit did not necessarily guarantee young people's safety.

In mixed gender units, it was acknowledged that young women could become targets for sexual aggression, and were particularly vulnerable to this as a result of their background of abuse and exploitation. One practitioner reported that a sexually exploited young person in her care was subjected to severe sexual harassment from other young people while detained in secure accommodation. Other concerns related to where young people – both boys and girls – were detained alongside young men who had previously committed sex offences, with secure unit managers expressing a sense of powerlessness:

'We don't allow relationships between young people, but boys and girls have covert ways of meeting up. On one occasion, there was a boy who was a sex offender, who was friendly with a girl in the unit. We couldn't tell her why there were concerns, and she was making arrangements to meet this child outside. There is not a lot we can do in that situation other than alert foster carers, placements. It tends to be rare, but the potential is there.' Manager, secure unit

While most safety concerns related to units that were predominantly criminal justice units and mixed gender, welfare units could also be terrifying places for young people:

'With the welfare unit, there was no programme work, but there was a different feel to the place. Having said that, in that setting, there were very disturbed young people there. There were children there with terrible mental health problems. So someone would regularly cut their wrists open in front of other children. They put them in with children with terrible things happening. There would be an alarms, then people swooping in, throwing children to the ground etc. And it's horrendous to witness, and that would be happening regularly. And the young person would have nowhere to go from it, it was their home, this was their daily experience.' Practitioner, specialist service

'We have a policy of unconditional care. If they're violent, we continue to work and contain them. And it does involve issues of restraint, no one likes to talk about it, but it does involve restraint.' Manager, secure unit

Most secure unit respondents highlighted the provision of basic needs as an important component of their work and felt that they did this well. This involved providing a structured day, regular meals, primary health care including sexual health care, and schooling. Mental health needs were also frequently identified by secure units, sometimes where they had not been picked up previously. PTSD and ADHD were sometimes identified, but emotional difficulties resulting from young people's histories of abuse and neglect and related attachment difficulties were more common.

The type of therapeutic input provided to young people in secure units varied. All units had access to a psychiatrist and a psychologist, although their input could vary from involvement in a one-off screening to providing consultancy or supervision to a key worker undertaking direct work with a young person. In some cases, mental health screening was part of the initial assessment process, in others it was provided at the request of referring local authorities who paid for this separately.

Therapeutic approaches also varied. Cognitive behavioural programmes were employed by two secure units, both of which predominantly worked with young people referred for criminal justice reasons. In another unit that received referrals only for welfare reasons, the manager stated that specific behavioural packages were not used because, *'if the young person does not fit the model, then what do you do?'* (Manager, secure unit).

Most units said that they worked on an individual key work basis to create trust and a relationship with young people. Building relational support was considered an important part of working with sexually exploited young people, for them to address the complex issues of abuse and exploitation in their lives. However, by necessity, the level of work with young people was limited and recognised as one part of what needed to be a far longer process:

> 'We undertake work that has not happened as they are absconding. We are not here long enough for anything to be... it's really contain and stabilise, in order to begin to think.' Manager, secure unit

This was particularly seen to be the case given the range of complex needs that sexually exploited young people typically presented.

> 'We will prioritise. We've got to be realistic. If a girl is sexually exploited, but can't have a conversation before becoming violent, we have to address that. It's all we can do, and hope that the placement that she is moved on to will [do more]' Manager, secure unit

After care

Despite the need for ongoing support, secure unit respondents unanimously identified the level of support to young people leaving secure units as inadequate. Only one secure unit was able to provide any outreach support to young people to facilitate transition, and then only where young people were from the local area. The provision of aftercare support was the responsibility of local authorities, but most secure unit respondents noted that the quality of support and service provision varied enormously both between authorities and between individual social workers. The worst cases related to local authorities that failed to make any preparations for the young person's return to the community while they were in secure accommodation, with young people offered inappropriate, last-minute placements on leaving the unit and without protective networks in place:

> 'There are some local authorities that are brilliant, set everything up. […] It boils down to resources. Social services are under stress. And they can be precious about their own areas. So education fights with social services about who funds what and can't agree. A lot of problems result from social workers being overworked. The [young person] is placed here and we do not see [the social worker] again. They think they don't need to worry about the kid here.' Manager, secure unit

In one case identified by the research, a sexually exploited young woman was discharged to a placement that was of such poor quality that it was closed down after her complaint.

Secure accommodation as a response to sexually exploited young people

The use of secure accommodation for young people who have committed no offence raises important questions of human rights, and is often criticised in such terms. However, even putting such important issues aside, there are equally 'ethical' questions about the efficacy of secure

accommodation as a response to sexually exploited young people. There is no routine monitoring of outcomes for young people after leaving secure accommodation, nor has there been any major study of the impact or efficacy of secure placement. While secure units could identify some success stories, all secure unit staff interviewed had experienced re-referrals of young people who had previously been secured. One young woman identified by the research had been held in secure on five separate occasions. Local authority child protection co-ordinators were generally negative about outcomes for young people referred to secure.

Two secure unit respondents felt that the locked nature of secure accommodation ensured a '*captive audience*' and that the physical containment provided the opportunity for relationships to be built with young people where this had not been possible when they were often running away for extended periods of time. Other respondents felt that physical containment did not necessarily enable young people to form the relationships they needed:

> '*The bottom line is that if young people will engage then we can do work, but some young people can't engage, and for local authorities, this is an abuse of secure units. I don't know where they're then placed, but it's wrong to keep them locked up as they're not able to do the work.*' Manager, secure unit

The use of secure accommodation could also have a negative impact on young people's ability to form positive relationships and overcome the impact of abuse and exploitation. The confusion between what is intended as 'protection' but is experienced as punishment can leave young people who have been sexually exploited feeling blamed for their abuse:

> '*With the criminal justice young people, they can at least rationalise it, they've done something wrong and been locked up. With welfare, there's a perception that everyone else has failed them and now they are being punished.*' Manager, secure unit

Trust in workers or carers could be undermined by the deception sometimes employed to take them to a secure placement. One practitioner noted that one young person she worked with had been '*tricked*' into coming to the secure unit.

> '*Whatever happens, be honest with the child and in what is being planned for them. And they are never involved in the planning. Even where it is happening with other young people, with participation etc, they are not being involved, and this is the most important group of young people to be honest with.*' Practitioner, specialist service

The experience in secure accommodation may also make it even less likely for a young person to access the long term support they need afterwards:

> '*In our experience, if children have been through secure, they are absolutely determined not to be returned – when they go missing, they stay away from protective adults. They are very afraid of emerging. And it does not solve the problem as the networks are there when they leave. I am not persuaded that it is helpful.*' Practitioner, specialist service

Another practitioner described how this was viewed from the young person's perspective:

> *'They use the time to plan how to go missing, how to hide themselves next time. They are there, have nothing to do and they are thinking, 'this time I'm gonna show these people', there's this whole backlash brewing, which is unleashed when they are released. I consistently went to meetings, and if the purpose is to stop going missing, then they 100 per cent failed. They delay it and the damage done to young people in secure compounds it, the damage to their emotional well-being, their problems are compounded not solved.'*
> Practitioner, specialist service

The use of secure accommodation for young women who have been sexually exploited can also lead to stigmatisation and further victimisation on leaving the unit:

> *'When she came out, she went underground as the risk was… they placed her in a really unsuitable children's home with mostly boys. And they knew WHY she was in secure as boys do. So they were assuming she was an easy lay and trying to touch her up.'* Practitioner, specialist service

Although the difficulties of working with young people who run away were recognised, most secure unit respondents, including those that believed units offered valuable physical security, felt that interventions could be provided in the community:

> *'Oh gosh, <u>yeah</u>. Supported foster care with access to CAMHS. I think if CAMHS came out more to young people. Their service is not accessible. So instead kids are contained to receive the service.'* Manager, secure unit

Respondents also saw a need for effective early interventions with young people before levels of risk had escalated, and believed that this needed to be combined with police action against perpetrators. There were also models of intensive support recommended that do not require physically secure care, and keep the child at the centre of the planning process. For example, CAMHS in East Glasgow co-ordinate intensive support around young people to remain in their home or placement, with the aim of avoiding secure admissions. Their success relies on a thorough assessment of need and the resources and relationships available to each young person, accompanied by a high level of multi-agency co-operation and co-ordination (Creegan et al, 2005, p.72). The Community Alternative Placements Scheme (Walker et al, 2000) is an example of a service where specialist foster carers provide a high level of support for young people who might otherwise be in secure care (Creegan et al, 2005, p.72).

Promising practice

In the boroughs with the most proactive response to sexual exploitation, taking a systematic overview of young people at risk was a useful way of centralising information and expertise. This was achieved by lead officers chairing child protection conferences, or working with conference chairs to identify sexual exploitation; systematically reviewing minutes of child protection

conferences to identify concerns that may have been missed; or systems whereby the lead officer was involved in discussions around possible cases. The subsequent overview of all cases of sexual exploitation in the borough, held by the lead officer, made it possible to make important links between cases:

> 'Sometimes a social worker will have concerns and we will discuss them and I'll ask her to go back to get further information, this, this and this, and when they come back with the information, I'll go "I know that name".' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

The overview held by the lead officer also enabled them to act as a source of advice and guidance to colleagues, as well as provide specialist training and awareness-raising within social services and other agencies in the local authority.

Working proactively, lead officers could forge strategic multi-agency partnerships centred around the needs of young people in their borough who were sexually exploited. For example, one local authority had developed a referral agreement with a young person's counselling service, so that young people identified as at risk could be prioritised. Another lead officer had identified housing as a problem for the young people they were working with, and had set up meetings with the housing department to find ways of responding to their needs. Lead officers were also able to identify gaps in responses among different social services teams, with one respondent working to improve the responses of the duty and assessment team. This type of proactive work was essential to work with this particularly hidden form of abuse:

> 'This is the sort of area where you can potentially say that you are committed without doing anything, as it rarely stands up and slaps you in the face.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

The level of proactive work required to respond effectively to the needs of young people at risk of exploitation could therefore constitute a full-time job. However, most lead officers were carrying out this role in addition to carrying out their generic child protection duties. Proactive working on issues of sexual exploitation was achieved through the efforts of particularly dedicated individuals. Commitment from senior management within social services is needed to sustain proactive work on sexual exploitation and replicate this level of support across London.

Supporting specialist sexual exploitation services was another important way of meeting the needs of sexually exploited young people, and six local authorities had committed resources to this. The value of the work of specialist services in engaging with young people at risk and providing appropriate support in partnership with other services is discussed in detail on p.xx.

Two local authority respondents felt that given the broad range of vulnerabilities of young people who were sexually exploited, it might not be helpful for services to focus specifically on sexual exploitation. A co-ordinated approach was advocated elsewhere:

> 'We use different things depending on the young person. If they are drug using, we would involve an organisation called [name of organisation], and refer to the YOT if they are being pulled into criminal activity. So there is a

big network inputting into meetings, but holding onto the specific focus on sexual exploitation can be difficult. Each of the organisations have their own concerns and it is a chicken and egg thing which need is driving which. There is a need for linking up without losing the focus.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

One of the main obstacles to developing specialist services was the perceived lack of demand in the local authority for a project serving one borough alone. The estimates of risk indicate those areas of London where there is need for services. The North London model where four boroughs contribute funding to one shared service is a model that could be replicated in other areas of London.

Three local authorities with relatively low levels of risk had worked successfully to identify and support sexually exploited young people without access to a specialist service. This was generally achieved through taking a proactive lead, and working closely with other local resources to meet young people's needs. Local authority respondents were not asked specifically whether their borough would benefit from a specialist resource, but half of those informants without access to a specialist service stated that they would like to be able to refer to one. Reasons given included such services being able to engage with young people who are being sexually exploited:

'[We need] services that young people feel confident in accessing. They don't come to social services if their boyfriend has raped them. We do so much strategy work and this is what is seen. We do other work, but what young people see is the strategy work, and with the whole media profile and everything, they are not gonna come. They need access to friendly services they know.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Access to specialist expertise in working with young people to reduce their level of risk was also important. One child protection co-ordinator noted that although there were local voluntary agencies willing to take referrals, they did not have the expertise to work with sexually exploited young women. Specialist expertise was also sought by respondents for consultancy, training and advice.

Service responses: health, education and other statutory services

Health

The Department of Health guidance, *Safeguarding children involved in prostitution* (2000) sets out the role of health professionals in meeting the needs of sexually exploited young people. The guidance states that due to the universal nature of health services, health professionals may be the first to be aware of children at risk of sexual exploitation (B5). Health professionals may therefore play an important role in identifying this form of abuse. The guidance states that all agencies should have a lead officer on sexual exploitation to share and co-ordinate information and to represent the agency in its response to sexually exploited young people (6.2). It also states that Primary Care Groups and Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) should play an important role in the development of local protocols and in ensuring that staff are aware of risk indicators for identifying sexual exploitation (B8). Finally, health services have a duty to ensure that they are able to provide an appropriate and accessible service to young people who are sexually exploited (B7).

The London Child Protection Procedures (2003) identify the proactive role that health professionals have in identifying child abuse generally, and outline the structures that need to be in place within PCTs for co-ordinating this work in accordance with the Department of Health Guidance, *Working together* (2000). PCTs have a duty to appoint designated and named professionals to hold central roles in relation to this issue.

Identifying sexual exploitation

Information from health service informants and from referrals received by other interviewees indicated that young people at risk of sexual exploitaiton came to the attention of health professionals working in a range of different settings. These included Accident and Emergency departments, sexual health services, looked-after children's health services, teenage pregnancy services and CAMHS. These were also the services identified as health departments likely to come into contact with young people at risk in the Department of Health guidance, *Safeguarding children involved in prostitution* (2000).

Given the range of different health services where young people may come to professional attention, the lead role within the PCT is important in raising awareness among a broad range of health workers of both indicators of risk for sexual exploitation, and procedures for securing

protection for the young person. The level of proactive work around sexual exploitation varied. In one local authority, training had been organised in partnership with a specialist service for health practitioners likely to come into contact with young people at risk. In another borough, the designated nurse was developing guidance and training for health practitioners. And in a third borough, the health respondent stated that there was no guidance from the health authority. The level of partnership between different health services also varied between boroughs. While a 'looked-after' nurse in one borough received reports from Accident and Emergency of looked-after children attending (eg in relation to assault or self harm) to alert her to concerns, this was not the case in another local authority. Difficulties relating to working across London local authority boundaries were also found in one case. A looked-after nurse in one authority received reports of concerns for looked-after children, but these did not include those looked-after children in residential homes in the borough who had been placed there by a different local authority.

Awareness of sexual exploitation could also vary between different local authorities and within different parts of the PCT:

> 'With health, it's a bit more hit and miss. With GU clinics and midwifes, we have a really good relationship with them. They will ring up and make referrals. But it depends on where they are in health. We aim to deliver training, ACPC training on sexual exploitation.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

While the ACPC has an important role in facilitating inter-agency training and awareness-raising among practitioners, more work needs to be carried out within PCTs, with one practitioner stating that the agenda needed to be *'driven more'* from within health. Examples were identified where work around sexual health, relationships and sexual exploitation had been taken forward by the PCT under teenage pregnancy strategies.

Difficulties were sometimes mentioned in relation to breaching the confidentiality of sexual health services to access protection for the young person, and risking disengagement of the young person from health provision altogether. However, partnership working within a multi-agency approach could provide clear guidance on thresholds for protection, and prevent sexual health services from being isolated in their work with young people. One designated nurse was organising child protection training within sexual health services in the local authority to formalise approaches to working with young people at risk.

Service provision for young people at risk of sexual exploitation

Health services played an important role in meeting the needs of young people identified by agencies in the multi-agency partnership as being at risk of sexual exploitation. Practitioners identified the need for physical health care, as young people frequently suffered a high level of neglect in their general health. Sexual health services were identified as a particular need, for young people to access provision to prevent and treat sexually transmitted infections, and unwanted pregnancies, as well as sexual health advice. A need was also identified for access to mental health services.

Given the social exclusion, and high level of disengagement from services, of young people who are sexually exploited, it is important that health services are easily accessible. There were examples of partnership working which facilitated this. For example, one specialist service had an agreement with an agency providing health care under which young women were fast-tracked within the service.

Promising practice

An innovative project, 'Girlzone' involved a partnership between a specialist service and a young person's sexual health service. Through the partnership, a qualified sexual health nurse provided a weekly sexual health drop-in service at the specialist project. The evaluation of the service highlighted significant advantages to this approach. The nurse's availability at a project familiar to the young women removed barriers to accessing sexual health services. Provision was flexible; young women could see the nurse alone or in pairs and spend as much time as they needed with her. An emphasis on confidentiality enabled the nurse to build trust with young women, and as part of the team she was able to share general information about risk with project staff without breaching confidentiality. The sexual health provision at the project also provided a practical service that could encourage young women to access the service. Both the specialist service and sexual health service also gained from the expertise of the partner agency.

Many practitioners identified the need for therapeutic support for sexually exploited young people, resulting from the abuse and neglect in their past and present life:

> *'Usually, a history of neglect, abuse. There's also a common theme of being sexually abused and raped and from then on having difficulties. There is a need for counselling, therapy. A lot of the behaviour shows emotional turmoil.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Practitioners highlighted the difficulty of engaging young people in therapeutic work and stressed the importance of accessible and flexible services:

> *'Young people do not go to counselling enthusiastically so if you happen to work with a young person who wants to speak to someone, you need to strike while the iron's hot.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

> *'There are problems referring to therapeutic services, there is a waiting list and delay can be lethal. You need immediately accessible resources.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

The difficulty of accessing CAMHS support for sexually exploited young people was a common theme among interviews with practitioners:

> *'CAMHS is a difficulty for us, and not just for us as I hear from other boroughs also, that the young person is so disengaged that they can't keep*

*appointments and then appointments are not offered to them. They need
something more unstructured. […] [We need a] Less structured children's
mental health service, something able to deal with children who disengage,
that allows children to come back after they have missed appointments.
With CAMHS, if you miss three appointments, that's it. Less structured
services and better able to engage this chaotic group.'* Child protection co-
ordinator, social services

However, the problem is not an insurmountable one. One child protection co-ordinator stated
that their local CAMHS responded well to referrals from this client group. Another child
protection co-ordinator stated that they were setting up a meeting with CAMHS to raise
awareness and develop appropriate responses. And in a third borough, there was an example of
creative practice within CAMHS that could be reproduced elsewhere.

Promising practice

One CAMHS, with a dedicated team working solely with looked-after children and
children leaving care, regularly gives presentations to the social work team and a social
work manager assists them in prioritising referrals. Both have close working relationships as
a result. The CAMHS team provides consultations to social workers to support them in
their work with young people. It offers individual work to young people, and also provides
support to those in the protective network such as foster carers and residential social
workers. One of the things that the team finds works well is allowing flexibility in the
provision of their service. For example, one young woman will telephone the service, and
the service is flexible enough to support her that way. The team are also hoping to
develop the flexibility of the service by bidding for a new post for a community psychiatric
nurse to work with young people on an outreach basis, develop sexual health work at the
same time and developing links with hostels and children's homes.

Education

The Department of Health guidance, *Safeguarding children abused through prostitution* (2000)
highlights the important role that schools and education services play in identifying young people
at risk of sexual exploitation:

*'Teachers and other staff in schools are in close and regular contact with
children who may be at risk of becoming involved in prostitution. They should
be aware of the risk that children may be drawn into prostitution, and be
alert to changes in patterns of behaviour such as truancy.'* (B.2)

The guidance also discusses the reintegration of sexually exploited young people into school
(B4) and the importance of schools undertaking preventative work around sexual exploitation
through the PSHE (personal, social and health education) curriculum:

'The national framework for Personal, Social and Health Education provides clear opportunities for teachers to discuss personal, social and moral issues and to assist children develop personal and social skills. Teachers will be able to raise awareness of children involved in prostitution as part of this important area of the curriculum.' (B3)

Identifying young people at risk

Many practitioners interviewed highlighted the importance of staff in schools and education services identifying young people at risk of sexual exploitation. Significant barriers to identifying sexual exploitation by school staff were identified in the research. It was recognised that schools needed to ensure a protective ethos and put in place support systems that facilitated disclosure of harm, but this could vary enormously:

'It varies from school to school. [School name] put a lot of effort into their pastoral care systems therefore they do pick up on things. And another school the same. It's not just lip service, they work to create a safe school. There are other schools where this is patently not the case or where the system is so stretched that it's not functioning. And one or two schools do not see the need. And where the culture wouldn't promote it, young people wouldn't disclose.' Practitioner, education service

In the same way, unchallenged homophobia in schools could also make it difficult for young people to discuss their sexuality openly or disclose difficulties in this regard:

'And for some professionals, homophobia is an issue. Bullying in London schools now is all, "you're gay," "you're a faggot." It leaves young men isolated.' Practitioner, specialist service

Identifying sexual exploitation also relied on staff awareness of sexual exploitation and indicators of risk, but this varied between different schools and local authorities:

'Schools have done a big piece of work on teenage pregnancy including things like citizenship, self esteem, so they are really clued up at the moment.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

'It's about awareness-raising for them, for schools as well. I think when they have a clear child protection issue, with a bruise for example, they are very clear on child protection policy. But issues of sexual exploitation, I am not sure they know where to go. It is not necessarily within the family. They are worried about what they can share. It's based on supposition, the risk indicators, having rings, jewellery etc, it's underlying so they are not willing to say.' Police officer

Schools could also be a place where young people were targeted, and two practitioners noted the importance of school staff being alert to young people being picked up by men at the school gates.

Disengagement from school was highlighted as an important indicator of risk as well as a factor that could place young people at increased risk of sexual exploitation. This is supported by the literature on sexual exploitation. It was crucial therefore for educational staff to be alert to young people being absent from school:

> *'The biggest risk factor is a child who has become isolated and cut off, one, from other children, two, from education. If a child is out of education, you have to be asking why they are not in education, with all the involvement of social workers trying to get kids in school.'* Child protection co-ordinator, social services

> *'It all relates to vulnerability, if you are excluded from school, have no stable home, no structure, someone comes along and will be nice to them, lure them in.'* Practitioner, drugs/alcohol service

However, there were serious gaps in identifying and responding to young people who were truanting from school. In one borough, where there was a highly mobile population and children frequently changed schools, it was noted that there was little tracking of this. As a result, if a young person left school, the local authority had no way of knowing where they went, whether they were attending school in a different borough or whether they were attending school at all. There was also difficulty in responding to the numbers of young people absent from school and different levels of concern:

> *'Each school has an allocated educational welfare officer or part of an educational welfare officer, so schools should be identifying young people at risk of disaffection then hope that they refer on quickly. The problem is that there are lots of young people who are 14, 15 who are disaffected, drift. It's hard to know if they just can't be bothered, general drift, or if there's something more malignant. And in my experience, social services don't respond.'* Practitioner, education service

The high thresholds for social services intervention, and the subsequent lack of emphasis on early identification and intervention, could also be a barrier to protecting young people even where schools identified early indicators of sexual exploitation:

> *'What happens is that educational staff identify it, but the threshold for social services is so high, so there is a gap of two to three years when they are not being offered a service.'* Practitioner, specialist service

> *'And you also get culture difference between schools and social services. Social services operate on different thresholds to schools, then schools are aggrieved. Social services are resource led, they don't have the resources, so you get a conflict and then schools don't refer, and you get a backlash.'* Practitioner, education service

Educational welfare officers within individual local educational authorities ran child protection training for school and educational staff. Investigation and Referrals Support Co-ordinators produce materials to support training, but as far as was identified, no specific materials were used to raise awareness of sexual exploitation. The development of a pack in conjunction with a specialist service may be a useful way to support training of educational staff, but one education professional noted that it was often difficult to carry out awareness-raising training with schools due to the pressure of curriculum obligations.

Service provision

Since being absent from school could lead to increased risk of sexual exploitation, keeping young people engaged with schooling is an important protective strategy. In one example identified by the research, a young woman was going missing for frequent and prolonged periods from her residential home, giving rise to concerns that she was being sexually exploited. As part of the multi-agency work to provide intensive support, the young woman was supported to continue her schooling. The practitioner from the specialist service working with her noted that this meant that not only could she could keep the friendships she had there, but through continuing her studies, could see and look forward to a different future for herself. Both of these acted as protective factors against becoming entrenched in a sexually exploitative situation.

In terms of 'holding' young people in school, one specialist service practitioner noted that using learning mentors had worked well. She also highlighted the need for flexibility in schools. One education professional noted the difficulty of re-engaging sexually exploited young people with school once they had left – *'They've gone through such life-changing experiences that they're not gonna sit at a desk and open their exercise books'*. Another practitioner said that educational input was critically needed for young people who could not be contained in school and for whom nothing else was being offered.

Primary prevention of sexual exploitation

Most practitioners interviewed across all services stressed the need for preventative educational work on sexual exploitation to be carried out in schools. It was important that preventative education be carried out at an early stage since young people from the age of 11 years were identified in the research as being at risk of sexual exploitation.

Some practitioners suggested that preventative education would involve highlighting the signs and dangers of sexually exploitative relationships. However, research on promoting safer sex for young people suggests education must go further than this to be effective. Research indicates that young women are disempowered in negotiating sex within relationships even with their peers (Holland et al, 1998). It is therefore important that educational work with young women in particular promotes the confidence and skills to assert themselves against coercive and exploitative relationships and sexual relationships.

Although practitioners frequently focused on preventative education to stop young women from becoming involved in sexually exploitative relationships, there was also a need to tackle a general culture of abusive and sexually aggressive behaviour towards young women. While young women need to be equipped to assert themselves against coercive behaviour, it should not be forgotten that the responsibility for sexually abusive behaviour lies with its perpetrators. Preventative work around sexual exploitation needs to tackle the behaviour of perpetrators and normalised sexual aggression towards women.

Promising Practice

The Metropolitan Police Service Child Abuse Prevention Strategy (MPS, 2002, p.11) describes a pilot scheme developed in partnership with Camden Borough Education Department to address inappropriate behaviour to pupils by their peers, and reduce incidents of bullying and other assaults. It was based upon the Respect Campaign developed for schools in Thurrock, Essex by the Zero Tolerance Trust and South Essex Incest and Rape Crisis Centre.

The value of educating all young people about issues of sex, relationships and sexual exploitation was highlighted by one child protection co-ordinator:

> '*Prevention is the best way, education and awareness about how people will exploit. […] It should be for all kids and then they can help their friends as most kids will tell their friends rather than us.*' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Since many of the young people at greatest risk may not be in school, it is important to carry out preventative work in other settings such as pupil referral units, residential units, youth clubs and hostels.

Promising practice

A specialist service in conjunction with the educational welfare service ran training for PSHE co-ordinators in one local authority to provide guidance on leading lessons on sex, relationships and sexual exploitation with young people.

Youth Offending Teams

Three Youth Offending Team managers were interviewed for the research. These teams had not identified young people at risk of sexual exploitation. It was acknowledged that sexual exploitation may not be something that teams would actively look for or identify. There were concerns that the assessment tool used by these teams would not pick up on sexual exploitation.

While the assessment explored abuse within the family, it did not look at indicators of risk of sexual exploitation. Practitioners were also unsure of how to respond where sexual exploitation was indicated. Another barrier raised by one respondent was that, *'we tend to focus on the offending behaviour at the expense of welfare issues.'*

Identifying young people at risk may be a question of training and awareness rather than a problem specific to Youth Offending Teams. All respondents were working in areas where protocols work was less developed and had not had access to training around the use of protocols on sexual exploitation. Another Youth Offending Team in a borough where protocols had been used proactively was identified as playing an active role in the multi-agency partnership, identifying young people at risk and making referrals. This example of promising practice could be developed across London, and in particular, may be a way of identifying young men at risk of sexual exploitation.

Service response: voluntary sector specialist services

The useful contribution of voluntary sector services specialising in responding to the needs of young people at risk of sexual exploitation is outlined in the Department of Health guidance, *Safeguarding children involved in prostitution* (2000):

> *'The voluntary sector have an important part to play in working with children who are abused through prostitution. Because of their lifestyle and past family experiences, many young people are reticent to engage with statutory services and often find voluntary agencies more approachable sources of help. By working in partnership with statutory bodies, voluntary agencies are able to offer services which reduce the harm to young people and may aid them in exiting from prostitution. Present practice indicates that an holistic approach is required to meet the needs of children abused through prostitution.'* (B12)

Specialist service provision

Five specialist services working with sexually exploited young people were identified. Three of these worked with young women and two worked with young men. Three specialist projects provided services principally in the borough in which they were based. One worked in partnership with, and received referrals from, four boroughs. This cross-borough partnership could provide a model for specialist service provision in areas of London where there may not be sufficient demand in just one borough. One service worked on a pan-London basis, carrying out outreach work with young men referred from different boroughs in London.

All services worked within the context of multi-agency partnerships in the boroughs where they were working. For most specialist services, social services was the main source of referral. Referrals were also received from education and sexual health services, often following training and awareness-raising by specialist service practitioners. Outreach work carried out by services in schools and other young people's settings also facilitated the identification of young people at risk. The nature of the services enabled young people to be introduced to the service by friends and peers, and to self-refer.

The three services working with young women had similar approaches to their on-going client work. All provided a combination of one-to-one key working and counselling for individual young women, alongside drop-in support and groupwork. These were provided in a dedicated building providing a women-only space in comfortable surroundings, with outreach work also being carried out where appropriate. Practitioners worked to make the centre a safe and welcoming space that could be accessible to different young women.

Practitioners worked to engage young women, building trust to be able to work with them to address areas of difficulty in their lives and reduce their risk of sexual exploitation.

> *'We have the time, energy and effort to build a relationship with young people. Social services don't. We think social services have a lot of power, but they don't have a lot of power. What they do in [social services] is support our service well.'* Practitioner, specialist service

Specialist services could offer young women the intensity of support, and the persistence in offering it, that they needed to be able to accept help. This could involve 'assertive outreach' methods such as door-stepping young women, sending frequent texts when they were not in touch with the service, and other regular and persistent contact.

The length of time young women stayed with a service was also important. It could take considerable time to build up a relationship which could make a difference. It was not uncommon for young women to engage with a service for a period of two years.

Flexibility of service provision was also considered important by practitioners interviewed. For example, it was necessary to be able to offer young people a service immediately. Practitioners also stated that they did not close files and young women were able to return to the service if and when they needed to.

The level of confidentiality provided by services was also an important factor in engaging with young women who were sexually exploited. Specialist services agreed high levels of confidentiality with the multi-agency partnership to enable them to build trust, while still working within child protection and information-sharing frameworks. The following extract from an article based on the experience of one specialist service in London describes why such an approach is important:

> *'[M]any young people who have been abused, committed offences or continued to be hard to reach, would be frightened of what might happen after a well kept secret was disclosed. In these situations, the young person might resist support offered, responding only to a trusting relationship where they felt safe that their disclosure would be managed to protect them from harm.'* (Patel and Pearce, 2004, p.78)

Under such policies, confidentiality would be broken only if the young person was considered to be in immediate or grave danger, and preferably after discussing it with the young person involved. Such an approach was a therapeutic way of working with the young person, supporting and empowering them in achieving change on their own behalf. Effective support and supervision helped staff to work with levels of risk in this way. The level of confidentiality of the service was a feature discussed positively by young women interviewed for the research (p.108).

Practitioners frequently described their role as advocates for young women and assisted them in accessing services using a rights-based approach. Specialist services worked to link this hard-to-reach group of young people with other services. This involved partnership working with statutory agencies; practitioners viewed this as crucial:

> *'Good partnership work, this can make or break a case.'* Practitioner, specialist service

It could also involve working to make other services accessible to young women, for example through partnerships to set up outreach services on-site such as sexual health provision and substance use counselling; through accompanying young women to other services such as sexual health clinics; and through having strong links with other agencies, for example one service had a dedicated police officer linked to the service.

Not only did providing a range of services facilitate access for this socially excluded group of young people, but it also provided a means of engaging with young women who did not acknowledge that they were being exploited:

> *'For younger girls, if we overtly say we are a sexual exploitation service, they are put off. So having a broad service does help.'* Practitioner, specialist service

As well as offering support and services, specialist centres also organised activities such as art, beauty therapy, computing, music etc. This provided both a way to engage young people with the service, and with staff, and opportunities to increase young people's self-esteem. One practitioner from a young men's service described how such provision facilitates access and engagement with a service:

> *'Having a range of services, so a number of reasons to hook in. We provide food, which is important as it may be the only thing they eat, but also it gives a basic reason to come here, they don't have to say, "I need help" they don't have to say that to themselves to come.'* Practitioner, specialist service

In the research literature on sexual exploitation, there has been some discussion about whether it is better to have broad services that provide different ways for young people to access a service or for services to be overtly 'sexual exploitation' services so that young people who access them do not have to hide that they were swapping or selling sex. In practice, in specialist sexual exploitation services in London, there was not such a clear distinction between these two positions. All services offered a broad range of services to encourage young women to engage even if they did not acknowledge that they were being exploited. Simultaneously, the services were managed in a way that enabled young women who did acknowledge that they were being exploited to be supported by staff and other young women. For example, one service ran a specific group for older young women who were selling sex.

One difficulty raised by practitioners at two of the three services working with young women was the transition from the service at the age of 18. One practitioner noted the difficulty of withdrawing the service at a point when young people may only just have started engaging with them. As a result, these services continued to work with young people past the age of 18, each developing 'ex-service user' groups to support these young women. There was a need for such work to be recognised and funded, particularly given the significant gap in services in London for young people aged 18-21 years.

One service targeted at young men worked in a slightly different way. Work was exclusively based on outreach work with young men, visiting settings such as hostels and residential units to carry out education and prevention work, and key-working with young men on a one-to-one basis. The approach to building relational security was the same: practitioners used different activities agreed with the young person to engage them in a positive relationship with a worker to begin to help them address difficulties.

Outreach work

All services undertook outreach work including group sessions with young women identified in schools as being at risk. Preventative education work in schools, residential homes, pupil referral units, homelessness hostels and other youth settings was also carried out by specialist services. Indeed most preventative education work in London was being carried out by specialist services. This work has not yet been routinely evaluated. However, it is important that preventative education work draws systematically on the evidence base for what works effectively in terms of achieving change in sex and relationships education.

All services offered training to other professionals to raise awareness of issues of sexual exploitation, and provide support and guidance about appropriate ways to respond. This work was extremely important in professionals' identifying young people at risk and all practitioners noted increased referrals to their services as a result of training and awareness-raising. The existence of a specialist service in an area also provided a focus for work on sexual exploitation which encouraged priority to be given to the issue by other agencies, and galvanised action from the protective networks.

Interviewees reported that outreach, training and influencing work were all extremely important in their own right. However, this work also provided a way for practitioners to take time away from emotionally difficult direct work, and use their experience to promote positive change. This was acknowledged as a factor that facilitated the retention of staff despite the pressures of the work.

Funding difficulties

Like many voluntary sector agencies, specialist services working with sexually exploited young people faced difficulties accessing funding for their services. Difficulties with funding were experienced by all agencies interviewed. Two respondents stated that they were reluctantly having to prioritise young people where sexual exploitation was known or most clearly indicated, with one of these services already forced to turn young people away. This could reduce the services' ability to carry out early intervention work – one of the strengths of specialist voluntary sector services. All respondents said that if demand increased, for example through more proactive identification of young people, they would not have the resources to meet it. All respondents had creative suggestions of how they would like to develop the work further if resources were available.

The short-term nature of many sources of funding was a major difficulty. One stream of funding was only provided for a year, which was *'stressful'*. Even when funding was provided for 3 years, this meant beginning research into new funding opportunities after 18 months to ensure the continuity of the service. Given that young people could engage with services for two or more years and that therapeutically they needed consistency, the short-term nature of many funding sources could be very difficult to manage. While different funding priorities could lead to innovation, it was also important for services to be able to rely on funders to support the core work of the service:

> *'I really believe there must be a longer term focus. There's got to be something that gives stability. And the recognition that maybe we did get it right five years ago. You do not have to keep finding something "new".'*
> Practitioner, specialist service

It was also sometimes difficult to raise funds for things that young people themselves saw as important and that made a real difference to how they engaged with a service:

> *'And client welfare [money] for groupwork, food, money. It's hard to get people to recognise a need for this and fund it. It's seen as extra, but it's so crucial for the girls.'* Practitioner, specialist service

The downside of reliance on voluntary sector provision is that services are inevitably provided to young people where provision is available, rather than to all young people as a right. All young people have a *right* to be protected from sexual exploitation. Protecting young people from sexual exploitation is a statutory duty even though the format of services most accessible to young people at risk of sexual exploitation are those currently provided by the voluntary sector. While specialist services did their best to assist individual young people from outside their boroughs when possible, it was still the case that young women from 25 boroughs in London had no direct access to a service.

Specialist services would not exist without the support they receive from a range of funders. Providing services through the voluntary sector has always been a way to demonstrate need among the most hard-to-reach young people and to develop innovative forms of practice to meet those needs. Respondents from specialist services stated that accessing funding was most difficult at the early stage of developing a service. At this point, they had relied exclusively on charitable funding. After a period of time they became more established in their boroughs, were able to demonstrate a clear need for service provision, and local authorities came to rely on the services they provided. Four out of five of the specialist services surveyed were currently receiving a proportion of their funding from statutory sources. However, interviewees believed that continued voluntary sector funding ensured that specialist services retained the independence and flexibility they needed to respond flexibly to client need, expand their services, develop innovative practice and share expertise.

Other voluntary sector organisations

A number of other voluntary sector organisations are involved at various times in the protective network for young people at risk of sexual exploitation.

Adult sex worker organisations

Four practitioners from services which provide health and outreach support to adult sex workers were interviewed for the research. Although it was less common for young people to be exploited in adult sex work locations, organisations offering outreach support to women in these locations could identify young people at risk and support them in accessing other services.

Three services had identified young people at risk in the course of their work – young people who might otherwise be hidden from other services. The young people identified were frequently in the older age group (16-18 years). Some young people do not disclose their real age initially, and adult services were able to identify their vulnerability only in the course of their relationship with them and through facilitating access to health services. In one area, adult women selling sex also identified young women and introduced them to services they were in contact with. Some young women who had been exploited in more hidden locations such as crack houses had been identified in this way.

The existence of services working with adult sex workers in these locations enabled specialist services working with young people to concentrate their outreach work in other settings. In addition, the outreach role of adult sex worker organisations could be a valuable resource for multi-agency partnerships supporting young women. One example of promising practice was where police and social services routinely circulated details of missing young people at risk of sexual exploitation to an adult service in the borough.

Missing/homelessness services

All five informants from missing/homelessness services interviewed for the research had identified young people at risk of sexual exploitation in the course of their work.

Running away, or going missing from care or home, is a known risk indicator for sexual exploitation. Responding to young people who run away is an important way of identifying young people who may be at risk of exploitation and of preventing levels of risk from escalating. The voluntary sector can play a useful role in providing independent return interviews for young people who have run away. This is the model used by Miss-U schemes and the Safe in the City

programme. Since funding was not renewed for the work of Safe in the City, this work still needs to be funded and promoted across London. The inclusion of procedures to respond to young people who run away or go missing in the London Child Protection Procedures would help ensure this.

Young people also need to be able to access safe places when they run away. Our research found that young people who ran away were often accommodated by unsafe adults and exploited in these contexts. Services offering support to young people who had run away provided an important safe space for young people:

> *'The feedback we had from one young woman was that she just had the space to sort her head out, she felt that it was no one person in particular that really helped, but she just had the space. And staff helped her to think about what she wanted. And what she wanted, and how to achieve that.'*
> Practitioner, missing/homelessness service

However, missing or homelessness services could only offer support to young people for short periods of time. This means that more long term work to build the relationship needed to address issues of sexual exploitation was frequently not possible.

Lack of housing options for homeless young people aged 16-18 years was a serious problem. Social services frequently did not take responsibility for this age group, and young people often relied on accessing housing from Homeless Persons Units. However, as housing was not readily available and young people frequently did not have all the documentation needed to access this easily, they risked being left in limbo. There was also a shortage in suitable hostel accommodation for homeless young people.

Drugs/alcohol services

Three drug and alcohol services provided information on sexual exploitation for the research. All had identified sexually exploited young people in the course of their work. Two services were in areas where there was also a specialist service and had more confidence in working with sexually exploited young people. The third service was more isolated in their work. Partnership working enabled sexual exploitation services and substance misuse services to jointly support young people at risk, and to share expertise between agencies.

Interviewees identified gaps in services for young people around substance misuse. One interviewee considered services for young people to be patchy across London, particularly in more specialist work such as treatment and in-depth key-working.

There was a major gap in detoxification services. One informant noted that there was only one six-bed residential rehabilitation service for young people in the country and that it could be hard to secure funding to access it. The gap in services was even more acute for young women who were sexually exploited due to the lack of single sex provision:

'The resources needed are single sex rehabs for age 13 up as there aren't any. We have had 14 year-olds desperate to get off crack and there is nowhere to go. If we send them to a mixed rehab, then the only way they know how to relate to men is sexually, so they get kicked out for having sex with a resident, so there is no provision.' Practitioner, specialist service

Supporting young people from abroad

All those interviewed for the research were asked about their awareness of cases of trafficking and sexual exploitation of young people from abroad. Seven agencies with experience of working with trafficked young people from abroad were also interviewed. This part of the research aimed to identify issues of sexual exploitation that may be more hidden and to understand whether young people from abroad who had suffered, or were at risk of, sexual exploitation experienced any particular barriers to protection.

The definition of trafficking underpinning our research is that used in the UN protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons. Young people may experience trafficking for different exploitative circumstances, for example, domestic labour exploitation, commercial labour exploitation and other forms of exploitation. In the context of our research into sexual exploitation in London, we have only considered trafficking which involved sexual exploitation.

The Trafficking Toolkit (Home Office, 2003) provides information on trafficking and on the roles and responsibilities of agencies in identifying and protecting victims and prosecuting perpetrators. It states that trafficked young people must always be assisted through mainstream child care policies and procedures, but may in addition need specialist support (p.32). It also states that the guidance in *Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution* should be followed if there are concerns that a young person may be exploited through prostitution (p.25). The London Child Protection Procedures also contain guidance relating to trafficking and exploitation.

To find out about issues of trafficking and sexual exploitation, interviewees were asked: 'Have you come across any young people from abroad where there were concerns about sexual exploitation?', and 'Are you aware of any young people at risk coming into or moving out of the authority?'. The broad formulation of these questions followed the approach of previous research, which enabled practitioners to discuss a wider range of young people at risk than did asking about 'trafficking' per se (ECPAT, 2004). Follow up questions were asked to understand more about the needs of, and service responses to, young people identified.

Numbers of young people identified

Twelve out of thirty-two local authority representatives interviewed were aware of cases of young people from abroad who had been sexually exploited. Thirteen specific cases of young people from abroad were identified, with two child protection co-ordinators talking generally about exploitation of young people in their boroughs without giving a precise figure. Though information about domestic labour exploitation was not specifically requested in interviews, four local authority respondents mentioned that they had come across cases of young people exploited for domestic labour.

Research with Unaccompanied Minor/Child asylum teams, asylum teams, and other social services departments covering the same period (2003) identified a total of 35 documented cases of trafficking in 17 out of the 33 London boroughs (Somerset, 2004). These included 14 cases of trafficking involving sexual exploitation (*ibid,* p.28).

Twenty health service and voluntary sector agencies also identified 52 young people from abroad who had been sexually exploited. On the information available, it was not possible to match cases and avoid double-counting of young people who may have come to the attention of more than one agency. However, given the difficulty experienced by young people in accessing statutory services, it is likely that some proportion were additional cases. The number of young people identified as having been trafficked for sexual exploitation could therefore be a figure between 14 and 66. The lower number of 14 was used in calculating the total minimum number of young people where there were known or indicated concerns of sexual exploitation at p.xx. Young people identified came from a range of different nationalities.

Nature of exploitation identified

Information from the cases identified indicates a broad range of ways that young people from abroad were trafficked and sexually exploited. Young people were identified who had been specifically brought to the UK for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Trafficking may have involved direct coercion; parental complicity in the arrangements; false promises of an education, employment or a 'better life' abroad; or through involving young women in an exploitative relationship. Debt bondage, under which young people were forced to pay off debts incurred in being brought to the UK, was also found.

There were cases where young people had been trafficked and sexually exploited in their own or other countries before coming to the UK, and in at least two cases identified, for prolonged periods of time. There were also examples of young women who had sought refuge in the UK from trafficking and sexual exploitation in their own or a third country.

Young women could arrive unaccompanied and be met in the UK by an abuser. They could also arrive accompanied by an abuser or by a third party. In a couple of instances, trafficking was facilitated through an abuser being married to the young woman.

Some cases were identified in London where practitioners were becoming aware of indications of possible sexual exploitation, but where its context was not known. Instances were identified of disappearances of young people from their accommodation, which gave rise to concerns about the young person's safety. Within the UK, it was acknowledged that young women were sexually exploited in more hidden locations:

> *'Traffickers may not bring to London as there is Vice here. I don't know the scale, it's not massive in London as we are not finding them. Trafficked young girls are found in sauna/brothel establishments, not on the street.'* Police officer

Six agencies in London had worked with young women who had been identified in off-street sex work locations such as saunas or brothels. However, it was also the case that exploitation could be even more hidden. Many young women identified through the research had been sexually exploited in more 'informal' locations such as private flats or houses, where they were expected to have sex with groups of men. One case was identified where a young person arriving in the UK at a London airport was trafficked internally to another 'informal' location outside London.

In addition, examples were identified where trafficking for domestic servitude had sexual exploitation as a covert agenda, and where domestic servitude provided the coercive conditions for sexual exploitation, suggesting overlap between these forms of abuse.

Identifying sexual exploitation

Practitioners noted the difficulties young people experienced in disclosing that they had been trafficked or sexually exploited, stating that this was more likely to be disclosed through building a relationship with a trusted person over time:

> 'In these cases, they have usually gone somewhere to access services eg health, saying they are older. Then the story is found bit by bit. They are unable to confide straight away.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Like young women in the UK, trafficked young women may not identify their experience of abuse as 'trafficking' and therefore not disclose this:

> 'It's hard. The girl's story can suggest trafficking but… One girl was brought by an adult man and she did not say she was trafficked, but she was taken to a flat with other adult men who were expecting sex, so yes. I think it's a label that professionals are comfortable with, but not young people. At least one was trafficked, though she would not say it.' Practitioner, specialist service

Fear of their abusers and fear that the UK authorities would not offer protection could also force young women to remain hidden in sexually exploitative situations:

> 'It's difficult as they have immigration problems, so they are not wanting to be identified, they have a fear of deportation, a fear of their pimp finding out. It's an area we find difficult to tread around, support.' Practitioner, specialist service

Voluntary sector practitioners working with young people from abroad identified issues of trafficking and sexual exploitation through picking up on indicators of risk and through their relationships with young people. Due to the difficulties of disclosure, identifying trafficking relied on practitioners' levels of awareness and proactive work. However, eight local authority

respondents said that current levels of awareness within social services acted as a barrier to identifying young people at risk:

> 'It has not been raised at this stage. We are beginning to build it into our training programmes. There is currently a mixed level of knowledge, [and] confidence.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Responses from child protection co-ordinators indicated that their involvement in Operation Paladin[4] had an important impact on their awareness of trafficking in their borough. When asked about issues of trafficking and sexual exploitation of children from abroad, 20 child protection co-ordinators from social services referred to the work they were involved in with Operation Paladin.

> 'We are part of Operation Paladin and we have found this very helpful as it enables us to have this flagged up. We have had seven cases through them and they have all checked out OK. If only it could be extended… It is so much easier to track young people. Otherwise, you may never know.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

> 'Operation Paladin started the ball rolling. There is a need to track those coming in to identify those at risk, there is a need for an effective tracking system. There have been difficulties, but it is needed.' Child protection co-ordinator, social services

Few local authority respondents mentioned other ways that trafficking came to their attention, although four respondents named the police as a source of referral in cases where young people were identified in saunas or brothels. One child protection co-ordinator stated that in a previous post within an asylum team, there was monitoring to look out for signs of trafficking and exploitation, but only two local authority respondents mentioned asylum teams as a source of referral or identification, although research carried out by ECPAT indicates that young people at risk have come to attention in this way (ECPAT, 2004). Two local authority respondents stated that their asylum teams might have more information about trafficking. This suggests that in some boroughs concerns related to trafficking may not reach child protection teams.

Health services and voluntary sector agencies were important in identifying young people from abroad at risk of sexual exploitation. Five out of eleven health services contacted for the research had identified concerns, with other agencies also identifying health services as a source of referral. The universal, confidential nature of health services may play an important role here. The accessibility of voluntary sector agencies also played a role in identifying young people at risk since many young people from abroad found it hard to access statutory services. Refugee legal representatives also identified young people at risk. One interviewee from a specialist service noted that, of the 21 referrals for advice on individual cases of trafficking it received between March 2003 and January 2005, one third came from legal advisers representing young people in an asylum claim.

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4 Operation Paladin Child was a pilot study carried out between January and March 2003 at Heathrow Airport to scope the nature of child migration from no-EU countries into the UK. A child protection police officer and a social worker based at the airport assessed any potential risk to young people arriving in the UK, and their destination addresses were passed to social services for follow up checks.

Accessing protection: the problem of age disputes

Although the guidance above details measures for protecting young people who have been trafficked, in practice many young people from abroad faced significant difficulties accessing protection because their status as 'children' was disputed. Seven out of 16 voluntary sector respondents interviewed said that this was a significant barrier to accessing protection. Four agencies had experienced this problem with more than one young person, and one agency stated that it was an issue for most of the clients known to them. Disputes about the age of young people from abroad who had experienced sexual exploitation were found in the research to have occurred with children as young as 14.

The age of a young person may be disputed by an immigration officer when applying for asylum on arrival in the country or, as in some cases identified by the research, on applying for asylum in-country after escaping exploitative situations. Social services departments may also dispute the age of a young person approaching them for assistance.

The disputing of a young person's age could have a serious impact on their access to protection, with young people then being treated as adults in the asylum and asylum support system. Cases were reported of sexually exploited young people who were detained and subject to fast-track immigration procedures, and young people who were denied accommodation and support under section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. The dispersal of young people to National Asylum Support Service accommodation in different parts of the country was also identified as an action which placed them at risk.

Young people may approach social services to carry out an age assessment to confirm their real age and access protection as children. One practitioner said that social services departments accepted the age of many young people where this was disputed by the Immigration Service or Home Office. However, it was noted that carrying out age assessments created considerable pressure for social services departments. In some cases, there were concerns about the quality of age assessments offered, with two trafficked young people refused support following assessments that were not sufficiently in-depth. Concerns were also expressed about gate-keeping of services given the resource pressures experienced by social services departments.

Where voluntary sector agencies were able to support young people in obtaining an independent assessment of age, this could take time and leave trafficked young people without the security and protection they needed in the meantime:

> *'There's two to three months when they're not in social services care. They go missing. They are so isolated, they stay in their rooms, their mental health issues triple, they are not supported, not secure. At least if they're with social services, they get a house where they can settle, begin a new life. It's difficult for all asylum seekers, but even more difficult for young women who have been raped, tortured or trafficked.'* Practitioner, specialist service

Practitioners noted that providing support around sexual exploitation to young people from abroad was difficult, as issues around their immigration status took precedence over their other needs, particularly where age was disputed:

> *'It's difficult to keep the focus on sexual exploitation when you are working on their immigration. It's really hard work once you get into immigration issues. Workers dread it when there are asylum issues.'* Practitioner, specialist service

Accessing protection from social services

Accessing social work support was considered difficult by voluntary sector practitioners working with sexually exploited young people from abroad:

> *'My experience is that you have always had to push them. And it includes a lot of letter writing. And it is only at the point that you say you are going to take it to a solicitor that it's being done.'* Practitioner, specialist service

It was rare for specialist agencies to have had experience of young people from abroad being assisted under protocols for sexual exploitation. Even mainstream specialist sexual exploitation services who were experienced in advocating for protection under the protocols found it especially difficult with this client group. Three practitioners noted that young people from abroad who had suffered sexual exploitation were not necessarily recognised as having ongoing protection needs:

> *'It's almost not taken as a child protection issue. It's taken as part of their story and it's "OK now"'* Practitioner, specialist service

> *'In my eye, these women have experienced high levels of abuse and that this is very relevant in terms of assessment. But a lot of social services assessments will say that this is in the past and therefore not a current risk. But I would say that that is very relevant. Not only because of the high levels of abuse and possible permanent damage, but also because younger women that are damaged, have difficulty with boundaries, dealing with men and so would be at risk again.'* Practitioner, specialist service

This was supported by another practitioner, working with a 15 year-old girl who had been trafficked, who said that although a strategy meeting was held under the protocol for sexual exploitation, no further support was provided.

Practitioners with experience of working with trafficked young people highlighted the need for safe accommodation and high levels of support to protect young people at risk of sexual exploitation. Safe accommodation reduced the danger of being found and re-trafficked. However, young people from abroad could become dependent on abusers offering corrupt forms of care, and without support might return to the abusive situation:

> *'She was found wandering, by the police. She said that she had been bought from her parents. She was told that she was coming for education and then was put into prostitution in a massage parlour, and she escaped from there. The sad thing is that she was placed into care, from which within a day,*

she escaped and went back to the man. You like to think that she's gone home, but I'm sure she went back to the people she knew. So it is a problem.' Police officer

Two practitioners also identified young people who were exploited after their experience of trafficking, though it was not known if these were different abusers.

The Home Office Trafficking Toolkit (2003) identifies the need for social services to provide support and build a relationship with young people to encourage the child not to leave with a trafficker (p.32). It also states that action to ensure a child's safety should not result in the child feeling that they are being detained against their will (p.18). This could increase the 'pull' of an abuser.

Linking into protective networks such as school, a friendship group and health services, with the provision of intensive support was considered a strong protective factor:

> *'It's about building up a network around them.'* Practitioner, specialist service

> *'I would say that the young people who survive the best are the ones that have a voluntary organisation behind them. […] They do a lot of running around behind the scenes. It's a major contributory factor in how well young people do.'* Practitioner, specialist service

While social services support should be provided to young people from abroad under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, following guidance issued under Local Authority Circular (2003) 13, practitioners identified difficulties accessing this full level of support:

> *'They take responsibility but only in terms of a roof over their head and money. There's no one keeping an eye on them. They should all have an allocated social worker and a Pathway plan.'* Practitioner, specialist service

However, the research identified examples of good practice:

> *'I believe that social services were quite supportive. She was housed in a project designed to assist victims of trafficking'* Practitioner, specialist service

Some social services departments also worked to support sexually exploited young people whose age was disputed by the Immigration Service. Four social workers had contacted a specialist service for advice on working with the trafficked young people and to access additional support for them. One local authority was also planning a study conference to better identify and respond to the needs of trafficked young people.

Police protection for young people from abroad

One practitioner noted a strong senior commitment to counter-trafficking work and effective multi-agency working at a strategic level. Good practice was also noted in operations such as Paladin Child. But resources were lacking:

> 'There is police understanding, doing overwhelming work probably with a few officers. And Reflex[5], there's lots of good practice. The intelligence fed to Paladin, Reflex, it needs double, treble officers to get to grips with it. You get good crack operations, but they're under-resourced. And CO14[6] only have 12 officers, and it's not their whole remit, how can they cope?' Practitioner, specialist service

Gathering intelligence on perpetrators was also reported as a difficulty. In one case, this related to lack of police input:

> 'We made the referral, a strategy meeting was held, and the young woman was willing to go to the police to drive around and try and identify the house, but despite numerous attempts, they wouldn't.' Manager, residential unit

Young people often either did not have much firm knowledge about those that had exploited them, or they were frightened of disclosing this information:

> 'I spend a lot of time with them going through the police issue. They are scared of authority. I talk through safety, protection issues. It's a real convincing game. […] A lot are really scared and delayed and delayed. It's difficult as the police then say there's not enough info so it's disheartening for the young person. They say "We came over with a woman called X, she took us…somewhere…" That's hard.' Practitioner, specialist service

The value of specialist service support is clear in this example. It was also noted that young people needed to feel safe and secure before they could give evidence. This highlights the need for a multi-agency approach to security for the young person:

> 'The only thing you can do … it's fundamentally intelligence. And to get intelligence, there's no short cut to getting a safe environment for the child.' Practitioner, specialist service

> 'Safety and security. It comes back to accommodation. And if they give info, how is that negotiated, if they feel they're in danger? There's the danger of being returned, of being found. They lack safe, secure accommodation, especially if they're disputed. The info gathering process may lead to better prosecutions. At my level, there's not enough information from the girls as they do not feel safe, secure in their accommodation.' Practitioner, specialist service

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5 Reflex is a multi-agency taskforce funded by the Home Office to tackle organised immigration crime including trafficking in persons.

6 Charing Cross Clubs and Vice Unit.

Protection from exploitation outside the UK

Although the priority of agencies should be the immediate safety of a young person, young people from abroad also need to be protected from removal from the UK where their return would threaten their life or freedom. Young people can risk being re-trafficked or exploited if returned to their home country. Not only do young people need protection from sexual exploitation in the UK, but also from removal to situations where they may be in similar danger abroad. Young people may seek protection from return to dangerous situations by applying for asylum in the UK, making an application for protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention and the Human Rights Act 1998.

Sexually exploited young people faced particular difficulties in putting forward their claim, including difficulties in disclosing their abuse and a lack of existing documentary evidence and human rights information to support their claim for protection:

> 'Their stories are not believed. And there are inconsistencies in their stories as they do not readily come forward. The girls do not want to tell their stories. So they can present as sullen to other professionals. And what they have been through can't be verified.' Practitioner, specialist service

These difficulties were exacerbated for young people whose age was disputed, as the barriers they faced as children in putting forward their claim would not be taken into account:

> 'Young people are prone not to be confident dealing with officials. If they're assessed as being over 18 by the Home Office, the adult procedures are harsher, so there's no leeway as there should be for a child, for scrappy questions. So the issue about age is fundamental to credibility.' Practitioner, specialist service

This indicates the need for more sensitive decision-making on claims for protection, but the need for a high-quality and experienced legal representative to assist the young person is also paramount. The findings of the research indicate that having an experienced, specialist legal representative from an early stage makes a key difference to the young person's ability to access protection.

There may be a lack of awareness of the importance of high quality legal advice among mainstream agencies: only one child protection co-ordinator referred to this as a need. In terms of accessing legal advice, three out of eight practitioners that had experience of making referrals stated that they did not have difficulties accessing high quality legal support. In all of these cases, practitioners said that this was due to their knowledge of resources available, and that they had built up good relations with legal providers.

Five practitioners highlighted difficulties in accessing legal advice. Three of these practitioners said that they had to spend time phoning around before being able to find someone able to take a case on. This was found by one practitioner to be particularly difficult where a young person was poorly represented and needed a new legal representative at a later stage. One specialist practitioner also identified a need for more flexible forms of provision for those young people who had many barriers to accessing formal services.

Young people's views on service provision

Twelve young people were involved in the research to gain young people's perspectives on service provision in London. Young people were contacted through services where they had an on-going relationship with a support worker. Contacts were made with young people via three services that worked with either young people who were sexually exploited, or young people from groups that might be at risk of sexual exploitation. Two group sessions of two and four young people were held, and six individual interviews were carried out. The young people interviewed included 11 young women and 1 young man, and were aged between 13 and 19. They were asked about their views on existing services in London and to describe their 'ideal' service.

Views on existing services

From a list of different types of worker, young people were asked to identify those workers they considered to be most helpful and supportive. The list included: police officer, social worker, worker at young person's service, worker at young women's service, helpline worker, nurse, teacher, and solicitor. Young people were then asked to explain and talk about their choices.

Most young people (n=10) placed young women's/young person's worker and social worker *together* at the top of their list. In some cases this related to specialist services working in partnership with social services departments and helping to improve young people's relationships with statutory services:

> 'What's good is that if you want something from the social worker, here [at
> the specialist service] they will work together with them.'

Four young people identified their social worker as most helpful and supportive. But views on social services varied, with two young people identifying social workers as one of the least helpful services. Young people's views on social workers could reflect how they had experienced previous social services intervention in their lives:

> 'Social workers, I don't like them because they take your children away. If
> they see you are running away, they will take you away for nothing. If
> something is bad, they put you in foster care.'

> 'Social worker [is the most helpful]. Because people help more. You might not
> notice it, but they do help. They pull you out of homes that are in danger.'

Difficulties with social services included not being able to talk comfortably with their worker, and access difficulties, for example the need to have an appointment, or not being able to contact their worker in an emergency. Restrictions on the service that social services departments could offer was a source of frustration that could have an impact on some young people's relationship with their social workers:

> '"When I go and I say (I am lonely)" and "I don't have a TV or radio", they say "sorry, I can't do anything". So then I keep my distance. We are put off. Social services have a limit to where they can go. You can't ask everything.'

One young woman, who had had both good and bad experiences with different social workers, said that what made the difference with her current social worker was that they were honest with her. They did not automatically take sides with other people or workers in her life, and also acted as an advocate for her.

Reasons for considering specialist/young person's services as the most helpful included being able to talk comfortably and openly to workers, the flexibility and availability of workers in emergencies, being able to meet other young women with shared experiences and the confidentiality offered by the service:

> 'It's very, very confidential. I don't know, it would be wicked if it was here every day of the week. Even though I have only been here twice. I've not met these girls, but I feel fine around them. There's always food, drinks, somewhere to get away. There's always someone to talk to. If your worker isn't here, there's another worker. And if you don't talk to staff, there are the other girls there and on a level with you. They're the best things.'

The fact that services were women-only was also valued by young women interviewed:

> 'Because women can express their feelings without boys being there.'

> 'Women only, that's really important. I wouldn't like… girls can be very concentrated on something and can stay on one thing. Boys are all over. A women's project [is best]. Girls talk anyway and not worry about boys.'

Many young women also identified the importance of having rules at the service they used or at the service they described as an 'ideal' service:

> 'There are rules, no swearing, no running etc which is good.'
> 'But they would need to know certain rules, like no bullying, no stealing, no pushing, no shouting.'

The emphasis young women placed on this may indicate a lack of such safety outside the service, and that specialist services provided one of the few places where they could feel safe.

Other services were mentioned less frequently. Seven young people discussed the police, with five young people talking about the police in negative terms. Previous research with sexually

exploited young people has found that young people had negative experiences of the police generally, but spoke positively about those police officers who had had contact with them in a protective role (Skidmore, 2000, p.10). Two young people discussed such direct contact with the police and had had differing experiences. One young person was positive about their response:

> *'I have been there [to the Police]. They were helpful. They said they couldn't do anything, but they sat and listened and they gave me a reference number. So they were helpful.'*

However, for another young person who had run away, the protective action taken by the police was experienced as something frightening:

> *'The police came and got me from the homeless shelter and took me to a cell, that was horrible.'*

Schools and health services were less frequently discussed, which may relate to young people being out of school or not in contact with mainstream health services. However, one young person considered nurses to be one of the most supportive kinds of worker, and two young women spoke positively about having a sexual health nurse based at a service. Helplines were discussed, with young people responding differently. Three young people had not heard of any helplines. Two young people had used helplines and not found them particularly helpful, *'you don't know who is talking to you,'* but two young people had used them and appreciated the confidentiality that they offered.

Access to services in general was also discussed. Access could be facilitated through being reimbursed for travel expenses and lunch. Language could act as a barrier:

> *'Sometimes the doctor will say you are OK but sometimes it's because they don't understand you as you don't speak English.'*

Lack of childcare could also be a barrier to services:

> *'[Workers at the specialist service] will look after your child while you are doing something. Even if it's just for five minutes, social services would not do that as they are being careful. But it's important to have as a lone parent.'*

Importantly, one service that a young person felt was missing in London was:

> *'Somewhere to stay, for runaways, a safe space to stay.'*

What service provision should look like

Young people were asked what an ideal service would be like and asked further questions to describe the service. Most young people described services very similar to the specialist services they were using:

> *'My ideal service would be kind of like [specialist service]. I think that it is the best service I have received. You get to socialise, you get to meet other young women, new people. You have help with your problems and support. What more could you ask for free of charge?!'*

Most young people described services where everything could be accessed in the same building, but different services did not need to be physically close to be accessible:

> *'It does not have to be under one roof though. They [project workers] could connect you to someone like a nurse who could come if you needed.'*

Additional types of services or workers mentioned that should be accessible at the service included social workers, a nurse, a sexual health clinic, career advice and education support:

> *'Not a teacher teacher, but someone who knows stuff. If someone is behind at school, on a certain day of the week, they can catch up. Not to make them feel like they're lacking, but just to catch up.'*

One young person said that the service would be the kind of place, *'where everyone wants to go. All young people know that it is somewhere they can go. You don't have to go there just for problems.'* And all young people spoke positively about services having other enjoyable activities.

It was important for services to be confidential, have rules, be flexible and accessible, and (for young women) be women-only. Most young people who discussed the age of young people able to access the service said that it should continue up till 20 or 21 years.

Young people said that it was important for services to be close to where they lived, with good transport links. A shortage of services was identified: *'there should be a lot of these places,'* with one young woman also identifying a need for services for young men:

> *'A separate one for the boys, but not necessarily for the same reasons. There's so much for girls and nothing for boys and they are getting into lots of trouble. It's good to have something for both of them [separately]. A lot of boys will not like that, but once they start going, they would like it.'*

One young person interviewed identified a different type of service: a computer where young people could type what they needed in relation to any issue (such as abuse, drugs, dating) and receive an automatic response from someone with suggestions or a referral. The advantage of a website would be, *'you can hide yourself, you can't see, you feel safe,'* as well as being able to make your own decisions from the information.

Conclusions and recommendations

Prevention of sexual exploitation

Primary prevention

Most respondents discussed the need for primary prevention work with young people in schools. It is important that such prevention work equips young people with the skills and self-confidence to assert themselves against sexually aggressive and coercive behaviour, rather than merely providing information about the dangers of being sexually exploited. As young people may be more likely to make disclosures to friends rather than adults, a universal approach to preventative education work in schools is recommended.

At the same time, it is important to remember that the responsibility for sexually aggressive behaviour lies with its perpetrators, and that education work in schools needs to tackle a societal culture where violence towards young women is normalised. This is necessary to prevent young men becoming perpetrators of sexual exploitation and violence towards women, as well as preventing abuse of young women by their peers.

Many young people who became at risk of sexual exploitation in adolescence had been failed by services at earlier stages of their lives. It is important therefore to note that improving the quality of services, particularly social services, to all children in need is necessary to address underlying vulnerabilities at an early stage.

Early identification and targeted prevention

Prevention of sexual exploitation is not limited to primary prevention, and the early identification of young people at risk is necessary to target early intervention work in order to prevent risk from escalating.

The research found that a wide range of agencies need to play a role in the early identification of young people at risk. As sexual exploitation is a particularly hidden form of abuse, this relies on professionals' awareness of risk indicators and on their taking a proactive approach to identifying young people. As young people do not readily disclose this form of abuse, practitioners need to be able to respond to indications of possible sexual exploitation as well as where exploitation is definitely known.

Disengagement from school is an early risk indicator. Schools therefore need to identify young people who are absenting themselves from education, with education welfare services addressing concerns and assisting young people to re-engage with education.

School staff also need to be aware of risk indicators to actively identify them among young people in their care, and refer to services to ensure the protection of young people. Staff also need to be alert to young people being targeted at, or outside, school. The development of a protective and pastoral ethos within schools to enable young people to disclose possible abuse or exploitation is also necessary. Tackling homophobia in schools is a related issue, and may be particularly relevant to enabling young men to explore their sexuality safely, as well as disclose abuse and exploitation by older men.

Running away, or going missing from home or residential care, is another early indicator of risk of sexual exploitation. Running away could also place young people directly at risk of sexual exploitation. It is important for social workers and residential care workers to be aware of indicators of risk of sexual exploitation as well as reporting young people who go missing or run away, even for short periods of time.

It is equally important for the police to play an active role in identifying and protecting young people who run away from home or from care. This involves recording and acting on reports of young people who go missing or run away; carrying out intelligence work to find young people who have run away; tracking known addresses where young people are accommodated while they are missing; and arranging return interviews to address any issues of concern experienced by the young person. Return interviews should preferably be carried out in partnership with an independent agency. Miss-U schemes and the Safe in the City programme provide useful models for working in this way.

Practitioners from other agencies coming into contact with young people need to be equipped to actively identify young people at risk and refer to services to ensure their protection. This includes health professionals; youth offending teams; voluntary sector agencies, for example those working with young people around alcohol and substance misuse or homelessness; and adult agencies, for example services for adult sex workers. Youth offending teams may be particularly important in identifying young men at risk of sexual exploitation. The availability of services readily accessible to young people is also necessary as young people may not readily approach statutory services for help.

Young people from abroad who have been trafficked or sexually exploited face additional barriers to accessing services. It is important that young people at risk of harm are identified on arrival before abuse takes place. It is equally important that a protective network exists within the UK and is accessible to young people from abroad regardless of their immigration status. There were instances where health services played an important role in identifying young people at risk. Voluntary sector services and specialist legal representatives were also important in this regard and such provision should be expanded. Statutory services must also work to become more accessible to young people from abroad to avoid their needs being missed.

Training and awareness-raising around protocols

For practitioners to identify and know how to respond to sexually exploited young people, the new Safeguarding Boards and individual agencies need to take responsibility for using protocols on sexual exploitation proactively and organise training and awareness-raising for practitioners working with young people. Training of practitioners to proactively identify young people at risk is an important preventative approach.

Service provision

The provision of specialist services to young people at risk of sexual exploitation is discussed below in relation to protecting young people. It is also important to note that early intervention through the provision of services is an important way to work with young people to prevent sexual exploitation and prevent levels of risk from escalating.

This research found that the existence of a specialist service in a local authority meant that other practitioners working with young people were more likely to identify those at risk as they had a way to respond to the concerns they identified. It also found reluctance to raise awareness, and encourage practitioners to actively identify young people at risk, if there was an absence of services to respond to the need once identified.

Protection of young people at risk of sexual exploitation

As well as working to prevent sexual exploitation, it is necessary to support young people who are being sexually exploited, to reduce their levels of risk and assist them to leave, and recover from sexually exploitative situations. As discussed above, early intervention where sexual exploitation is identified, or indicated, is essential.

Multi-agency approach

The vulnerabilities of sexually exploited young people give rise to a range of complex needs that cannot easily be met by a single agency. A multi-agency approach is therefore necessary, and should be co-ordinated under local authority protocols for sexual exploitation. The existence of local multi-agency protocols, and the proactive use of these, are essential in identifying and responding to young people at risk.

Social services should play the lead role in co-ordinating services to support a young person, but this may be delivered via a specialist service, with which vulnerable young people may more readily engage. The involvement of other relevant services, such as health, education and the police, is also necessary to meet the needs of the young person as well as to identify their abusers. Services need to be able to respond quickly and flexibly to the needs of young people. The following elements are important in providing effective responses to young people.

Specialist services

The provision of specialist services within a multi-agency partnership appears to be the best way to engage with and protect this particularly vulnerable group of young people. Specialist services can provide the flexibility, accessibility and confidentiality that young people require to engage with services. They can also provide links to other services to facilitate young people's access to these.

Intensive support

Intensive support is required to provide young people with a high level of relational security to provide support against the 'pull' of sexually exploitative relationships and circumstances. Both time and persistence in offering intensive support are required to engage with young people at risk. This will involve the use of 'assertive' or 'therapeutic' outreach methods such as daily phone calls and text messages, door-stepping and other ways of maintaining contact, even where this support is initially, or repeatedly, rejected. Being honest with young people and building relationships of trust is crucial. As far as possible a therapeutic approach needs to support and empower them in achieving change on their own behalf. These are the approaches used by specialist services in working with sexually exploited young people.

Continuity of care and safe accommodation

The high level of vulnerability of sexually exploited young people often leads to multiple placements and interventions which in turn result in discontinuity in their care. Consistency and continuity of care are vital in building and retaining relationships with young people at risk and should be facilitated through a consistent key-working approach wherever a young person is placed. Safe accommodation is also needed. To prevent discontinuity of care, a high degree of support should be provided to young people, and their carers, to support young people in their existing accommodation where this is safe for them. Appropriate and safe accommodation should alternatively be found close to their community to enable young people to maintain links with protective networks. The use of specialist foster carers may be a useful approach in these circumstances.

Intensive support, the provision of safe accommodation, linking in with protective networks and the provision of services to provide young people with security were also vital in ensuring the safety of young people from abroad who had been trafficked and sexually exploited. Such young people also may require protection from removal to situations outside the UK where they may be at risk. Sensitive decision-making on claims for protection made by young people at risk and the provision of high-quality, specialist legal advice to ensure this are important in this regard.

Community-based approaches

Community-based approaches to supporting young people are a valuable way to enable them to stay in contact with, or re-engage with, protective factors such as relationships with carers, friendship networks and education, which are important in providing alternatives for the young person to abusive networks and sexually exploitative relationships. It is necessary for therapeutic approaches to support and build on these protective factors. Young people are exploited primarily as a result of choices made in a context of social, economic and emotional vulnerability. Ensuring that young people can access alternatives is a necessary means of assisting young people to make different choices. The provision of services to facilitate this is necessary.

Avoidance of secure accommodation

This research found that many boroughs used secure accommodation as a crisis response to young people at high risk. However, most secure unit managers and local authority respondents

did not consider that the use of secure accommodation helped young people over the longer term to make changes in their lives and escape exploitative circumstances. Locking up young people may also cause positive harm by making them less likely to approach protective services in the future. Providing intensive support to young people in their own communities could work effectively as an alternative to using secure accommodation. The London local authority with the highest levels of proactive work and service provision for young people at risk is able to avoid the use of secure accommodation completely.

Prosecution of perpetrators of sexual exploitation

The prosecution of perpetrators responsible for this form of abuse is a necessary means of protecting young people, and it is important that the focus for protection is not placed solely on the young people themselves. Proactive police action is required to protect young people from their abusers and to secure prosecutions against perpetrators. This requires proactive gathering and co-ordination of intelligence against those abusing young people; working in multi-agency partnership with social services and other agencies working with sexually exploited young people; and the use of prosecution methods that do not rely on the young person giving evidence.

Multi-agency co-ordination

Services need to work in partnership so that service provision can be co-ordinated around the needs of the individual young person. This is best achieved through the proactive use of specific protocols on sexual exploitation, a dedicated lead officer within social services to co-ordinate services on a strategic level; the active involvement of other services in the multi-agency partnership; and the provision of specialist services.

Current barriers to a co-ordinated response

Barriers within individual services to identifying and responding to young people at risk of sexual exploitation are discussed in detail in the individual chapters of the report, however, some common themes across services in London emerge.

Understandings of sexual exploitation

The sexual exploitation of young people can take a variety of different forms, and is primarily found to occur as a result of constrained choices made by young people against a background of social, economic and emotional vulnerability. Where understandings of sexual exploitation are restricted to 'formal' forms of prostitution, there is a danger that a large number of young people at risk of serious sexual abuse could be excluded from protection.

There is also a danger that young people could be viewed as making an 'adult' choice about sexual exploitation – particularly beyond their early teens. It is possible that the continued existence of provisions to arrest and prosecute young people for 'persistent and voluntary return' to prostitution play a role in this perception. These provisions in the Department of Health guidance (2000) allow for the involvement of young people in exploitative situations to be considered an 'adult' choice in some circumstances, and may prevent the provision of persistent and intensive support to young people.

Practitioner awareness and understanding of sexual exploitation and the needs and vulnerabilities of young people were therefore important in being able to identify and protect young people at risk. Training and awareness-raising are important, as well as a government lead in completely decriminalising the involvement of young people in prostitution.

Resource constraints

All agencies interviewed for the research experienced severe resource constraints. No additional funding is provided to local authorities or other agencies to implement the Department of Health guidance (2000) so the implementation of the guidance has relied on the use of existing resources, which were already extremely stretched.

Resource constraints have had a serious impact on the ability of agencies to identify and to respond to young people at risk of sexual exploitation. For example, pressure on social services resources leads to 'gatekeeping' of services for young people which prevents the early identification of young people at risk and the provision of services to support them.

The operation of high thresholds for intervention as a result of resource pressures also prevents early intervention work, and means that services are more readily offered where levels of risk have escalated, rather than on a preventative basis. This also risks undermining multi-agency partnerships, where there are gaps between services in the community identifying young people at risk, and the securing of protection for young people by social services and the police.

As sexual exploitation is a hidden form of abuse which young people do not readily disclose, identifying it relies on practitioners proactively identifying young people and working with indications and concerns rather than certainty. Investment in services for sexually exploited young people is necessary to proactively identify young people at risk. However, the lack of known exploitation in an area can lead to the conclusion that there is not a sufficient problem to justify such investment, leading to sexual exploitation remaining unrecognised.

Availability and accessibility of services

There is a need for specialist services to provide young people with the levels of intensive support required to engage them and assist them in overcoming the areas of difficulty in their lives. The lack of services available to provide such intensive support in the community is identified as a factor leading to the use of secure accommodation as a response to young people where levels of risk had escalated to crisis point.

Other service gaps identified by respondents include safe accommodation for young people who run away, housing and services for homeless young people, and single-sex detoxification services for young people who were dependent on drugs and/or alcohol.

Additional barriers experienced by particular groups of young people

Certain groups of young people suffer additional barriers to accessing protection. Young people aged 16-18 years experience particular difficulties because they are vulnerable to their exploitation being viewed as an 'adult' choice, which has an impact on the readiness of statutory services to offer continued support and protection. Continuity of support services for young people when they reach the age of 18 is also needed.

Homeless young people are a further category of young people at risk who experience difficulty in accessing services. As they are often older young people, they are vulnerable to not being offered a service by social services. This is compounded by the likelihood that, through being homeless, they have crossed borough boundaries and the host or home local authority may not accept responsibility for them.

Young people from abroad also face specific difficulties in accessing protection. Difficulties in disclosing their abuse can be compounded by the additional fear and insecurity they face as a result of their insecure immigration status and lack of awareness of and access to protective services. Identification of exploited young people is made more difficult as they are not necessarily included in protective networks such as schools and other services which could identify their abuse. They also suffer additional difficulties in accessing services, particularly where their status as immigrants or asylum seekers is considered before their needs as young people in need of protection. There are often disputes over the age of young people from abroad which denies them access to services and leaves them particularly vulnerable.

Promising practice

There were however examples of promising practice developed in areas of London and the specific recommendations outlined below build on these.

Specific recommendations

Government

■ The government should provide ring-fenced resources to help services take forward the measures outlined in the guidance, *Safeguarding children involved in prostitution*.

■ The government should issue guidance that discourages the use of secure accommodation and promotes a model of care that includes prevention, early intervention, safe accommodation, continuity of care, intensive support, and multi-agency co-ordination, including police action against perpetrators.

■ The government should remove provisions to arrest and prosecute young people who are considered to 'persistently and voluntarily return' to prostitution. These undermine approaches acknowledging the vulnerability of young people and the need to offer persistent and long term support to young people in order to engage them away from abusive networks.

London Child Protection Committee

■ The London Child Protection Procedures should be updated in line with current best practice around sexual exploitation. This would help boroughs to develop local coterminous protocols and to improve their work in line with current best practice.

■ The London Child Protection Committee should also update the procedures to include guidance on young people who run away or go missing to ensure London-wide service responses to such young people. The protocols developed as part of the Safe in the City programme provide a useful model.

Social services

■ Local authorities should develop and disseminate a detailed protocol on sexual exploitation, work actively to promote it among agencies within the borough and encourage proactive identification of young people at risk.

■ Local authorities should organise regular inter-agency training and awareness-raising around the use of protocols to identify and respond to young people at risk of sexual exploitation.

■ Local authorities should support lead officers in taking a proactive role in supporting protocols work. In boroughs where there are high levels of risk, this should be through making the lead officer role a full-time post.

■ Social services departments should avoid the use of secure accommodation as a response to sexually exploited young people. Resources should instead be deployed to provide community based responses involving early intervention, intensive support, safe accommodation and continuity of care.

■ Local authorities should consider providing funding for a specialist service to provide targeted services to young people at risk of sexual exploitation. Where levels of risk in an individual authority do not justify a whole service in the borough, consideration should be given to setting up joint services with neighbouring boroughs. The North London model is a useful template.

Police

■ The Metropolitan Police should identify a lead team within the police to take responsibility for co-ordinating police work on sexual exploitation.

■ The Metropolitan Police team holding the remit for sexual exploitation should be adequately resourced to work proactively across the whole of London to protect young people and to prosecute abusers.

■ The Metropolitan Police should adopt proactive approaches to identifying sexual exploitation, including the gathering and co-ordination of intelligence; increased partnership working with social services departments and other agencies; and the development of further work with young people who run away or go missing. Sufficient resources should be allocated to these areas of work.

■ The Metropolitan Police should identify a means of monitoring young people who go missing or run away.

■ Training around issues of sexual exploitation should also be provided to police officers likely to come into contact with this issue.

■ Creative approaches to securing prosecutions against perpetrators should be explored. These may involve approaches that do not rely on the evidence of the young person; proactive use of the Sexual Offences Act; and the creative use of other existing legislation.

Health

■ Primary Care Trusts should support the role of the identified lead officer within health to provide guidance and training to health professionals around issues of sexual exploitation.

■ Health services should be provided in forms that are flexible and accessible to young people at risk of sexual exploitation.

Education

■ Schools and education services should play a greater role in identifying young people at risk of sexual exploitation. This involves being alert to indicators of risk, identifying young people who disengage from education, and providing a pastoral and protective school ethos which facilitates disclosure of abuse.

■ Issues of sexual exploitation should be included in standard training to school child protection leads and other educational staff.

■ The PSHE curriculum should pay attention to issues of violence against women and equip young people with the knowledge and skills to enjoy more equal relationships.

■ Educational provision should also be developed to assist young people suffering sexual exploitation to re-engage with education.

Youth Offending Teams

■ Youth Offending Teams should play a greater role in identifying young people at risk of sexual exploitation. Indicators of risk need to be included in their assessments of young people.

Additional measures to protect young people from abroad

■ Multi-agency safeguarding teams should operate at ports of entry to identify young people where there are concerns relating to their protection.

■ Measures should be put in place to prevent young people from being age disputed. Young people whose age is disputed should be treated as minors and provided specialist and protective support and accommodation whilst they are awaiting independent assessments of their age.

■ All services need to ensure that they are accessible to young people from abroad and work proactively to ensure their protection.

■ The ongoing protection needs of young people from abroad who have been trafficked and sexually exploited should be acknowledged and safe accommodation and intensive support provided under protocols for sexual exploitation.

■ Funding should be provided to ensure that all young people from abroad can access free legal advice from a high-quality and specialist legal representative.

Potential funders

■ This area of work needs more resources. Funding is needed for new specialist services in high risk areas of London where there are currently no services. Funding is also needed to enable existing services to expand to meet demand.

■ Long term funding needs to be provided to offer stability of service to young people. It is important to acknowledge that working to change the circumstances of sexually exploited young people can take time.

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Appendix 1: Estimating risk of sexual exploitation in London

Risk of sexual exploitation across London and within individual London boroughs was estimated using a quantitative analytical procedure called the multiple indicator method. This method was developed by researchers in the United States (for example, Wickens, 1993) to estimate the size of drug-using populations and has recently been used in Home Office research to assess the levels of problematic and injecting drug use for Drug Action Teams in the UK (Frischer et al, 2004).

The method makes it possible to estimate the level of a hidden problem, here, sexual exploitation, using data from a set of proxy indicators for sexual exploitation for each area of London. This data is combined with available estimates of prevalence of sexual exploitation in particular boroughs (selected as 'anchor points') to ascertain the estimated level of sexual exploitation in all boroughs in London.

This is the first time the method has been used to estimate sexual exploitation and is therefore exploratory in nature. The procedure may be subject to margins of error, due to the quality of data available for the proxy indicators and the wide confidence intervals for the final estimates. However, this work represents an attempt to develop a structured model to provide estimates of sexual exploitation where no such data currently exists, in order to assist in the planning of services.

The procedure involves the following steps:

1. Identification of proxy indicators for sexual exploitation
2. Identication of data relating to the proxy indicators for each borough of London.
3. Identification of 'anchor points', areas where there is information on prevalence.
4. Conversion of proxy indicators and anchor points into rates in relation to the population of each borough. Standardisation (ie division of the difference between the value and the mean by the standard deviation) of the data in order to ensure that each variable has equal weighting in the analysis.
5. Factor analysis (using the principal components method) of the data for the proxy indicators to identify the component or components which represent the shared variance of the variables and therefore the underlying quality: sexual exploitation.
6. Standard linear regression on the selected anchor points of the estimates of exploitation and the component extracted through factor analysis to establish the relationship between these which is the regression equation.
7. Use of the regression equation to calculate estimates for the prevalence of sexual exploitation in the remaining boroughs.

(adapted from Frischer et al, 2004)

1. Identification of proxy indicators

Previous research on sexual exploitation, utilizing definitions closely related to ours, highlighted a number of risk factors for sexual exploitation. Through interviews with staff at a Barnardo's service in Wolverhampton, Scott (2001) explored the case histories of 12 young people who were sexually exploited. The analysis indicated a number of risk factors associated with being drawn into sexual exploitation, including:

- violent fathers or stepfathers
- physical or sexual abuse in the family
- mothers who were victims of domestic violence and/or dependent on alcohol/drugs
- being disengaged from education by their early teens
- being alienated from their families or communities
- being hungry for attention
- a history of 'going missing'
- keenness to 'escape' childhood and be regarded as adults
- drug/alcohol dependence
- being targeted and sexually exploited by a pimp.

Reviewing the literature on sexual exploitation, Cusick (2002, p.234) identifies that particularly strong correlates of sexual exploitation include:

- homelessness
- running away
- experience of life on the street
- a desire for money, particularly in relation to drug use
- being 'looked-after' in local authority care.

Drawing on this research we developed the following proxy indicators for sexual exploitation:

- numbers of young people going missing
- numbers of 'looked-after' children
- absences or exclusions from school
- level of sexually transmitted infections and teenage pregnancies among young people
- levels of youth homelessness
- levels of drug use in the community
- numbers of 'looked-after' children in residential children's homes.

The number of residential children's homes in an area was identified as an indicator of risk through our own research in London and therefore included in the set of proxy indicators above.

2. Selection of data relating to the proxy indicators

Data for each of the proxy indicators was principally identified from existing secondary sources of data, to create a dataset for the proxy indicators for each borough of London. The choice of data for each proxy indicator is discussed below.

Numbers of young people going missing

The Metropolitan Police were contacted for data relating to the numbers of young people going missing in each borough of London for the period of the research, the year 2003. This data was not available and led us to the finding at p.xx that the Metropolitan Police did not currently monitor or have any means of monitoring the numbers of young people who go missing in different boroughs across London.

A police officer from the central Missing Persons team, Operation Compass, assisted the research by manually extracting from Merlin, data for the number of missing investigations carried out in one month by Missing Persons Units for each borough. The month of February 2004 was selected as Merlin was not fully operational in 2003, and January 2004 was disregarded in case data was unusual due to the holiday period. As the number of missing investigations reported related to all investigations, including those relating to adults, the same officer counted the number of missing investigations relating to children for an 'average' borough. This proportion was used to estimate the number of missing investigations relating to children for each borough for one month. An estimate was then calculated for the period of one year.

Reported numbers of missing investigations relating to children may however under-estimate the numbers of young people going missing. Young people who go missing for short periods of time or who go missing frequently may not always be reported to the police or recorded as a Missing Investigation.

Numbers of looked-after children

Data used was obtained from the dataset, 'Children Looked After by Local Authorities Year Ending 31 March 2003' (table 5), *Social Services Statistics*, available at http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/VOL/v000454/localauthoritytables.xls

Absences or exclusions from school

Data used was obtained from 'Half days missed per pupil in maintained primary and secondary schools by LEA 2003/04 (table 6), *LEA statistics*, available at: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000547/tab006.xls.

Data relating to unauthorised absence from secondary schools was used. Data on absence was selected rather than on exclusions for reasons relating to the data available, and also to represent the numbers of young people who temporarily exclude themselves or unofficially disengage from school.

Levels of STIs and teenage pregnancies

It was not possible to collect data on the level of STIs for individual boroughs in London. The Health Protection Agency collects data on the prevalence of STIs from returns from GU clinics in London and as a result, it is not possible to disaggregate data by borough (www.hpa.org.uk).

As a result, only data on levels of teenage pregnancy was used. However, in its sexual health and HIV strategy, the Department of Health reports that there is a strong link between deprivation, STIs, abortions and teenage conceptions (2001, paragraph 1.17). The Public Health Laboratory Service Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre also reports that teenage conceptions indicate risky behaviour (2001, p.44)

The dataset used was 'Under 18 Conceptions Data for top-tier Local Authorities (LAD1), 1998-2002' available at: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/teenagepregnancy/dsp_content.cfm?pageid=245

Levels of youth homelessness

In a recent report commissioned by Centrepoint to estimate the level of youth homelessness in England, it is stated that data from P1E returns submitted by local authorities to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister provide the most comprehensive data source on homelessness available (Pleace and Fitzpatrick, 2004, p.5). This data is not available online so the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was contacted for access to the datasets.

Quarterly reports for Section E2 of the P1E form *(Households found to be eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need during the quarter)* making up the year 2003 was used for the research. This contained data on the numbers of homeless young people aged 16-17 years. Where data was missing for a borough during one quarter, this was replaced with the average of the figures for the remaining quarters. Data was missing completely for one borough. For this borough, a figure was provided using that obtained from a neighbouring borough of a similar size and with similar data for the other proxy indicators.

Levels of drug use in the community

In its research informing the London crack cocaine strategy, the Greater London Alcohol and Drug Alliance found that services providing treatment for those using crack cocaine see a smaller number of crack cocaine users than the Metropolitan Police Service does through its criminal justice work (2004, paragraph 1.22).

Data from the Metropolitan Police Service on drug possession and supply offences was therefore selected as the best proxy of drug use in the community. Data was obtained for the financial year, 2003/4 from http://www.met.police.uk/crimestatistics/index.htm

Numbers of 'looked-after children' in residential homes

Data was obtained for the year 2003 from 'Number of children looked after at 31 March 2001 to 2003 by placement', *Social Services Statistics* (table 8) available at: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/VOL/v000454/localauthoritytables.xls

3. Identification of 'anchor points'

In previous research, the multiple indicator method has been used with estimates of drug use that were only available in a few areas, where research studies had been carried out in the local area to identify prevalence. These areas were used as the 'anchor points' in the methodology in order to provide estimates for other areas where there was no information about prevalence available.

In our research, we gained information about the numbers of sexually exploited young people identified in all the London boroughs surveyed. However the qualitative research undertaken indicated that sexual exploitation was under-identified where there was less proactivity in identifying this form of abuse and where levels of practitioner awareness were low. We therefore used the method in the same way, identifying those local authorities where information on prevalence was likely to be more reliable and selecting these as anchor points from which to estimate the numbers of young people at risk across London and in each of the 32 local authorities.

A clear group of 11 local authorities was identified through the research as carrying out the most proactive work on sexual exploitation and these were initially considered as the anchor points. However, three of these local authorities had less reliable data, for example, where numbers of young people were described as *'some'* or *'numerous'* rather than in figures. The remaining eight local authorities were therefore selected as the anchor points.

4. Conversion of proxy indicator and anchor point data into rates

Data for the proxy indicators in each borough and for the numbers of young people known to be sexually exploited in the anchor point boroughs were converted into rates per thousand young people and then standardised.

Careful consideration was given to the selection of population data from which to calculate the rates. The 2001 Census lead to under-counting of population in certain geographical areas, with London being particularly affected: four out of the thirteen areas affected by under-estimates were London boroughs. Following further research, adjustments in the population count were included in the 2001 Mid Year Estimates. These are considered more reliable than the 2001 Census figures where estimates of population are required by age and sex (Source: www.statistics.gov.uk). This may particularly be the case in relation to London statistics. The 2003 Mid Year Estimates were used in order to match the year of the research. Data was available for young people aged 10-19 years, and this was used to calculate rates per 1000 young people.

5. Factor analysis using principal components method

Factor analysis using the principal components method was carried out on the data for the 7 indicators using SPSS version 12.0. This technique measures the shared variance between the variables to identify whether there is an underlying quality, here assumed to be the level of sexual exploitation.

Prior to carrying out principal components analysis, the suitability of the data was assessed. The inspection of the correlation matrix (below) revealed the presence of many coefficients of 0.3 and above. The Kaiser-Meyer-Oklin value was 0.842, exceeding the recommended value of 0.6 (Kaiser, 1970, 1974) and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) reached statistical signficance, supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix.

## Correlations between proxy indicators in 32 London boroughs (p<0.5 in bold)

	Going Missing	Looked-after children	LAC in residential homes	School absence	Teenage Pregnancy	Homeless-ness	Drug use
Going missing	1	.645	.717	.057	.612	.642	.614
Looked-after children	.645	1	.834	.448	.817	.819	.620
LAC in residential homes	.717	.834	1	.436	.804	.747	.491
School absence	.057	.448	.436	1	.385	.388	.208
Teenage pregnancy	.612	.817	.804	.385	1	.676	.468
Homelessness	.642	.819	.747	.388	.676	1	.619
Drug use	.614	.620	.491	.208	.468	.619	1

Principal components analysis identified the presence of two components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 65.4 per cent and 14.3 per cent of the variance respectively. An inspection of the scree plot (below) revealed a clear break after the first component. Using Catell's (1966) scree test, it was decided to retain one component from the factor analysis.

Total Variance Explained

	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
Component	Total	per cent of Variance	Cumulative per cent	Total	per cent of Variance	Cumulative per cent
1	4.579	65.414	65.414	4.579	65.414	65.414
2	1.000	14.290	79.704	1.000	14.290	79.704
3	.580	8.280	87.985			
4	.300	4.289	92.274			
5	.282	4.028	96.301			
6	.146	2.088	98.390			
7	.113	1.610	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
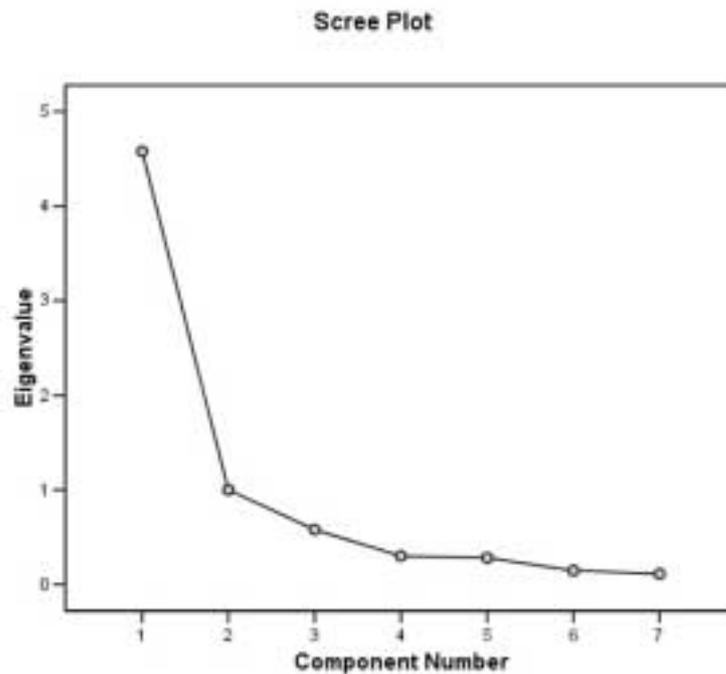
The table below shows the loading of each proxy indicator on the component extracted. There were a number of strong loadings on the component.

Component Matrix(a)

|	Component 1
Going missing	.787
Looked-after children	.936
LAC in residential homes	.909
School absence	.470
Teenage pregnancy	.863
Homelessness	.883
Drug use	.715

Extraction method: principal component analysis.
a) 1 component extracted.

The component extracted from the principal components analysis provided factor scores for each London borough representing the level of risk of exploitation according to the proxy indicators.

6. Standard linear regression

Standard linear regression was carried out on the factor scores for the eight 'anchor points' and the known level of exploitation identified in these eight local authorities. This provides a model identifying the relationship between the level of risk indicated by factor analysis and the numbers of identified cases of sexual exploitation. This model can then be used to calculate the estimates for the numbers of young people at risk of exploitaton for the remaining local authorities based on their factor scores.

The scatter graph below shows the relationship between the level of exploitation identified in the eight anchor point boroughs and the factor scores derived from the component extracted above.
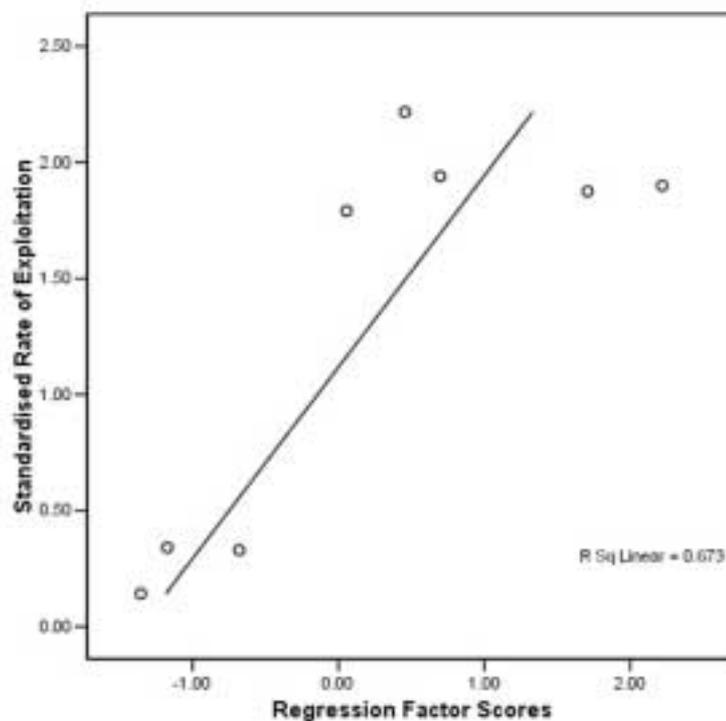

Correlation was found between the model and the data for the 'anchor points', with one possible outlier. The anchor points however appear to cluster between two points, relating to the identification of local authorities with similar comparatively low levels of exploitation and authorities with similar comparatively high levels of exploitation. However, a line of best fit can be drawn between the two points identified. Earlier research into drug use prevalence has used just two anchor points to estimate prevalence in other areas (for example, Wickens 1993). It is also helpful that these points are widely separated as interpolating from these is more reliable than extrapolating from points that are closer together (Wickens, 1993, p.189).

The regression model explained 61.9 per cent of the variance in the dependent variable (exploitation) which is quite high. The lower Adjusted R square figure has been reported here rather than the R square figure as this provides a better estimate where samples are small (Pallant, 2005: p.153). The regression model also represented the data to a statistically significant degree ($p < 0.05$).

The standard deviation of the model (0.54) was lower than that of the mean (0.88). This indicates that the model used to estimate the numbers of young people at risk is a better model than taking an average of all cases and applying this average (16 cases) to each borough in London.

The regression equation derived from the model was then used to calculate estimates for the numbers of young people at risk of sexual exploitation in each borough. The graph below shows the relationship between the actual level of exploitation identified and the estimates derived from the model for those local authorities selected as 'anchor points'.
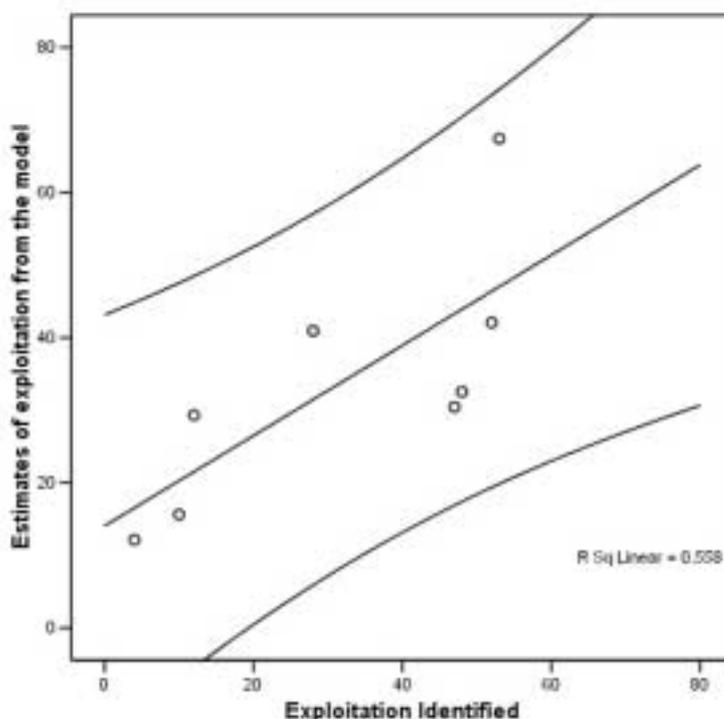
As in previous research (Frischer et al, 2004), the model results in quite wide confidence intervals for the estimates. The 95 per cent confidence intervals are indicated on the graph, with the central line representing the mean figure calculated for the estimate.

The scatter graph overleaf shows the relationship between the factor scores of the model and the resulting estimated numbers of young people at risk of sexual exploitation in each London borough:
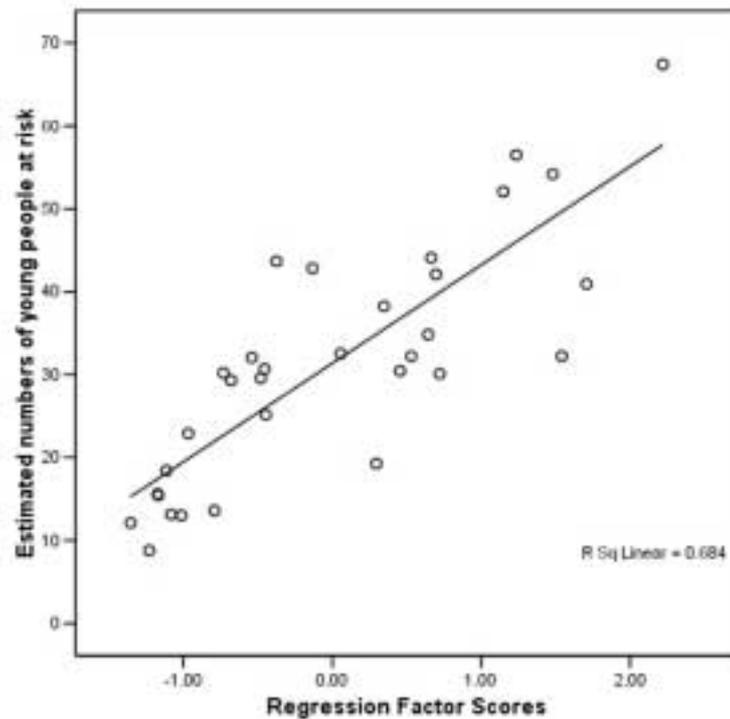
The mean figure for the estimates was used to represent the number of young people at risk of exploitation in each borough. The total number of young people estimated to be at risk of sexual exploitation is 1,002, and the chart below indicates the estimated level of sexual exploitation in individual boroughs in London derived from the model:

Level of Risk	Numbers of young people estimated to be at risk (mean estimate)	Boroughs
High Risk	Over 40	Croydon, Greenwich, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Lambeth, Lewisham, Newham, Southwark
Medium Risk	31-40	Barking and Dagenham, Brent, Camden, Enfield, Hammersmith and Fulham, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest, Wandsworth
Moderate Risk	21-30	Barnet, Bromley, Ealing, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Westminster
Low Risk	Under 20	Bexley, Harrow, Havering, Kensington and Chelsea, Kingston, Merton, Redbridge, Richmond, Sutton,

Figures from the model will still be an under-estimate of the level of sexual exploitation. Interviewees from the local authorities in the eight boroughs used as 'anchor points' believed that much sexual exploitation still remained hidden in their local authority. The statistical exercise therefore does not represent the *prevalence* of sexual exploitation, but the level of exploitation that would be likely to be identified if all local authorities worked as proactively as the eight 'anchor point' boroughs.

As with any statistical model, the estimates should be used cautiously. Like the research estimating prevalence of problematic drug use in the UK, our model assumes that the relationship between individual risk indicators and sexual exploitation is the same in different local areas (Frischer et al, 2004). The comparatively small area of this study and the high levels of mobility within London suggest that this could be a reasonable assumption.

The model may not take account of other factors in particular areas that lead to higher risk of sexual exploitation. One local authority respondent stated that they had received intelligence that their borough may be targetted more as it was considered a '*nice*' borough, so exploitation could be more hidden.

In addition, given the fluidity of mobility of people between boroughs, high risk in some areas may have an impact on others. For example, some local authority respondents noted that their borough bordered on an area of high risk, which may be a factor that influenced risk of sexual exploitation for young people in their own borough.

Appendix 2: Interview schedule for social services

Introducing the research: The purpose of the research is both to map the level and nature of sexual exploitation in London as well as some of the issues that come up for services in responding to the needs of young people at risk of sexual exploitation. We will therefore ask about the nature and extent of sexual exploitation you are aware of, as well as about how your service responds to young people. In relation to sexual exploitation, we are interested in the full spectrum of concerns that you may have, from where there are concerns about young people in sexually exploitative relationships to where there is evidence of exchanging sex for money or other things, through to more formal forms of prostitution.

Nature and extent of sexual exploitation

Are you aware of any young people who are *definitely* being sexually exploited in your area?
Are there any estimates of the number of young people definitely being sexually exploited in your area?
Further monitoring information – gender, age, ethnicity, whether insecure immigration status is an issue for any young people
Further information about exploitation – locations, means of exploitation (eg controlling adults, drugs, gangs etc)

Do you have concerns about the possible sexual exploitation of any young people with whom social services is involved?
Are there any estimates of the number of young people you have concerns about?
Further monitoring information – gender, age
Further information about exploitation – locations, means of exploitation (eg controlling adults, drugs, gangs etc)

Are you aware of any young people coming/being brought into or out of the area for exploitation? Which boroughs/towns/countries involved?

Identifying sexual exploitation

Have you identified any risk indicators for sexual exploitation?
Have you identified any risk indicators for trafficking?
Are risk indicators communicated to staff/part of the risk assessment of young people?

How do you come to know about young people who are sexually exploited in area? (eg assessments, outreach work, referrals, mapping exercises)

Service responses to young people at risk

What happens next, when you suspect a young person is being sexually exploited or at risk of being sexually exploited?
(Is this the same for boys and girls / 16-17 year-olds / children from abroad / those identified as at risk of rather than involved in? What happens if out of borough?)
What procedures are used? (London Child Protection Procedures, own specific protocol on sexual exploitation etc)
Are these triggered every time a young person is referred?
How many times procedures have been used?
Have your team found these useful in responding to needs of children who are sexually exploited. What has been useful/ difficult?
Under what section of Children Act are young people assisted under (Section 17, section 47 etc)?
(Is this the same for boys and girls / 16-17 year-olds / children from abroad / those identified as at risk of rather than exploited through?)

What other needs do young people who are sexually exploited usually present?
What are you able to offer to meet those needs?
Which agencies do you involve/ make referrals to?
Have you experienced any difficulties in making referrals?
Is there a specialist service in your area or other services which have developed expertise in sexual exploitation/ trafficking?

What difficulties have you encountered when assisting young people in this area?

Have any young people in your area been prosecuted/ referred to Youth Offending Team for offences related to prostitution?

Is secure accommodation used for sexually exploited young people? (Follow up questions about how/when used and whether it has been effective)

Preventing sexual exploitation

Are there any strategies (universal and targeted) in place to prevent young people being sexually exploited?
What preventative strategies have been found to be effective? How have they been evaluated?

Perpetrators

Are there known men or women who seek out young people in your area?
Are there abusers using new technologies (eg mobile phones, internet)?
Are you involved in gathering evidence – are there mechanisms for gathering/ passing on evidence? Is there a common recording form?
Have there been any successful prosecutions of abusers?
If so, what legislation have abusers been prosecuted under? If not, what have been the difficulties?
Will the new Sexual Offences Act 2003 assist in securing prosecutions in your view?

Ways forward

What in your view would help you/ agencies:
a) prevent young people from being sexually exploited;
b) respond to needs of sexually exploited young people;
c) identify and prosecute abusers/coercers/customers.

Other information

Is there anything else around the issue of sexual exploitation that you would like to add? Are there any other issues you are grappling with?
Is there anyone in your area with a particular interest in this issue who I might also speak with?
Contacts from other services (eg police, education, health, looked-after teams).

Appendix 3: Ethical protocol:

Mapping the service needs of children & young people who are, or are at risk of being, sexually exploited in London

This protocol sets out the ethical framework that will guide the conduct of the study mapping the service needs of children and young people who are, or are at risk of being, sexually exploited in London. It has been developed in line with Barnardo's Statement of Ethical Research Practice (Appendix 4).

The purpose of the study

In order to deliver an ethically responsible study, this statement systematically considers the study rationale, methods and procedures and the steps that will be taken in response to ethical considerations.

The core task of the study is to provide information which can inform policy, service planning and delivery.

The study will focus on the following research questions:

- What is the level and nature of sexual exploitation in London?
- What is the level of risk of sexual exploitation across London indicated by proxy risk indicators for exploitation?
- What are the service needs of young people who are identified as being at risk of sexual exploitation?
- How are the London Child Protection Procedures and 'Safeguarding children' protocols working in relation to young people who are sexually exploited?
- What services are currently being provided?
- What are the gaps in service provision both in terms of prevention and protection?
- What existing examples of good practice in terms of service provision can be identified?
- What are the views of young people in relation to service provision in London?
- How can policy and service provision best be developed to meet the needs of young people at risk of sexual exploitation?

The study is intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to children and young people, their parents/carers, social services, local authorities and voluntary sector services in London. It is anticipated that it will provide useful knowledge for both service providers and policy makers.

The study and the questions it poses are worthwhile for the following reasons:

- The knowledge and understanding of the level and nature of sexual exploitation gathered by the study will raise awareness of the extent of the problem in London as well as inform service provision to this vulnerable and marginalised group of young people.
- The study will assess the gaps in service provision and opportunities for development of services and will highlight areas where funding could be targeted to improve service provision to young people who are, or are at risk of being, sexually exploited.

The study will reflect the participatory approach of Barnardo's and will therefore involve young people as well as local authority child protection co-ordinators, police, workers in community/voluntary services, and those involved in the referral and ongoing care of young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation.

Responsibilities towards research participants

The researchers undertaking the study are responsible for ensuring that the physical, social and psychological wellbeing of research participants is not adversely affected by the study. The following sections highlight the issues raised by the study and describe the researchers' steps to protect informants.

The researchers recognise the potential imbalance of power between the researchers and some of the respondents. Careful planning and the research design will go some way to address this. The guiding principle is that all those taking part should be viewed as equals and be treated with respect.

Young people

The study will attempt to involve young people who have experience of the risks of becoming sexually exploited in London. Access to young people will be sought through community/voluntary services with which they are involved on an ongoing basis. The researchers will work closely with service managers and staff to identify appropriate young people to invite to contribute their views to the research. Contact with young people will be established through a designated key worker who will be briefed to assist a young person in making an informed decision about participation, and who is able to provide ongoing support in relation to the issues explored in the research interview.

The researchers recognise that some of the participants will suffer from multiple disadvantage including poverty, educational disadvantage and the impacts of racism and sexism. Some may be coping with severe stress within their home or community setting. The research team will take careful account of these issues in the design of the methodology and in their analysis of data collected. Particular sensitivity to gender issues will be shown in the selection of interviewers/observers, the issues attended to and the questions asked. The research will treat young people as experts on how services can best work with young people and will *not* ask them for their personal testimonies of sexual exploitation.

The researchers will provide a non-judgemental, supportive, friendly and empathic response when conducting interviews. The researchers will be clear as to the nature and limits of their role. They will ensure that they are well informed about relevant local and national services/sources of support. Where appropriate young people will be informed about/or referred to other services.

All research participants

Voluntary, informed consent

Steps will be taken to ensure that all participants are able to give voluntary, informed consent. In order to give their full consent, all participants will be provided with *information* about the study in advance. This will contain an explanation of the study process: including information on what the study is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken, what to expect when taking part and what will happen to the information. All information for young people will use language that is accessible, appropriate and relevant to young people and will contain the researchers' contact details. All participants will be encouraged to ask questions and discuss the study with their worker, and the researcher, before deciding to consent. All information will be reiterated at the start of any interview.

All participation in the study process is *voluntary*. Potential participants will be reassured that not taking part in the study or withdrawing consent will in no way impact on their employment or placement. Participants will be able to withdraw from the study process at any stage. In an interview the researcher will rehearse with how to indicate if the participant does not want to answer a question or if they no longer wish to take part.

Young people are potentially more vulnerable to pressure to participate in a particular process. Pressure may come from adults or peers, therefore care must be taken to provide young people with the time, support and information to make an informed choice as to whether or not to take part in the study. In addition to being a specific agreement about the conditions of participation in the study, *consent* is viewed as an on-going, two-way communication process between the researcher and participants.

The researchers will ensure that there is a person to contact if a respondent is unhappy with any aspect of the study process.

Confidentiality, anonymity and privacy

The limits of *confidentiality* will be explicitly communicated to all participants taking part in the study as follows: 'Whatever you have to say in this interview is confidential unless you disclose that you, or someone else, is in immediate danger of serious harm. In such a case I would need to report that to someone who might be able to help.' If a participant does disclose a matter of concern, the researcher will discuss the steps they must take with the participant and offer to support them in telling someone else. This is in line with Barnardo's child protection policies.

The *anonymity* and *privacy* of those who participate in the study will be respected. All material that relates to the experiences of individuals will be anonymised (with identifying features such as names and locations removed/replaced with fictional versions). Quotations used in reporting the research will not be attributed to individual sites or persons.

The research team is aware that some of the young people involved in the study may be mistrustful of confidentiality policies and have heightened concerns over privacy based on their lifestyle choices or previous negative experiences with professionals and agencies. It will be made clear to them that their accounts will not be made available informally or formally to workers, ex-workers or carers or anyone outside the research team itself.

Recording data

When making notes or recording for research purposes, researchers will make clear to participants the purpose and as precisely as possible, with whom findings will be shared. The researchers will always seek permission from the respondents before recording any information.

The preferred means of recording data will be through taking notes. Where a tape is used, participants will be shown how to indicate that they wish the researcher to switch off the recording equipment if they wish to say something but do not want it to be recorded. In addition, the researcher will always come prepared to take notes if participants do not feel comfortable about being recorded.

All data will be anonymised for analysis and publication purposes. This again will be communicated to the respondents. Only the research team will have access to the information collected. Participants will be able to obtain a copy of their transcript on request.

In accordance with the Data Protection Act, data will be stored in a secure manner and all research records will be destroyed 6 months after the study is completed.

Selection, inclusion and exclusion

Participants will be selected to take part in the study because of their knowledge and experience of service provision in London and they will have consented to take part. As discussed earlier, all participation in the study is voluntary and care will be taken to ensure that any request for participation is not coercive.

Feedback and dissemination

The study is participative – questions, discussions and feedback are integral to the process. The researchers will negotiate with participants how they would like feedback on the study findings. The researcher team is committed to providing feedback on the study findings to all participants and others who may benefit from the results. The findings will also be published as a report and will also form the subject of a conference held in London. If written feedback is requested by young people materials will be produced in a way that is appropriate and accessible.

Payment or reward

The researchers feel that it is important to thank young people for their time. £10 will be given to young people participating in this study. This will be offered as a token of appreciation at the end of any interview or partial interview rather than offered as an incentive beforehand, to ensure that participation in the research is not influenced or coerced through the offer of a gift.

Competent researchers

The researchers involved in the study are skilled and experienced in involving children and young people in research. They have postgraduate degrees in research methods and they have received specific training in research with children/researching sensitive issues/child protection. They will be working within Barnardo's child protection policies. The researchers have access to experienced colleagues in the R&D team for consultation and support.

Hoped-for benefits

- Immediate benefits for individual young people
  It is hoped that the experience of taking part in the study will have immediate benefits to the young people involved. Alongside the opportunity to voice their opinions, participating in the study may increase self-confidence.

- Benefits to the services involved
  The learning from the study process and findings will help develop services for young people who experience or are at risk of sexual exploitation in London. Whatever is learnt from interviews with decision makers, staff and young people will be fed back into planning and development. The underlying hypothesis is that careful research can inform decision making, promote best-practice and increase efficacy.

Appendix 4: Barnardo's statement of ethical research practice

This statement sets out the ethical guidelines that should guide the conduct of all research undertaken by, or on behalf of, Barnardo's. The values and purpose of the organisation provide the overall framework within which ethical research practice is defined. These values are:

- respecting the unique worth of every individual
- encouraging people to fulfil their potential
- working with hope
- exercising responsible stewardship

Barnardo's purpose is:

- to provide services to children and young people in greatest need
- to demonstrate effective good practice and to promote developments in practice widely
- to influence social policy for the benefit of children
- to promote good childhood experiences for all children.

Barnardo's acknowledges that ethical practice is necessarily rooted in ongoing reflection and discussion. The statement does not, therefore, provide a set of rules, adherence to which will avoid ethical choices or dilemmas, but recognises that it is often necessary to make such choices on the basis of principles and values, and the – sometimes conflicting – interests of those involved (see Alderson, 1996 for a comprehensive discussion of relevant ethical issues).

Core principles

Barnardo's researchers, and those undertaking research on behalf of Barnardo's will:

- safeguard the interests of those involved in or affected by their work
- report their findings accurately and truthfully
- consider the consequences of their work or its misuse for those they study and other interested parties
- acknowledge the boundaries of their competence
- ensure that the research they undertake is worthwhile and that the methods of investigation are appropriate.

Responsibilities towards research participants

Researchers undertaking work for, or on behalf of, Barnardo's are responsible for ensuring that the physical, social and psychological well-being of research participants is not adversely affected by the research.

Research undertaken by and on behalf of, Barnardo's is frequently characterised by disparities of power and status between researchers and participants. It is expected that such disparities should be addressed in relation to research design, methods and dissemination and that researchers should strive to develop relationships with research participants on a basis of equality, trust and partnership.

Research should be based on the freely given *informed consent* of those studied. This involves providing full explanations of research projects: including information on what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken, and how it is to be promoted. Such explanations should be provided in terms and language, which are accessible and meaningful to participants.

- Research participants should be made aware of their right to refuse participation whenever and for whatever reason they wish.
- Research participants should understand how far they will be afforded anonymity and confidentiality and should be able to reject the use of data-gathering devices such as tape recorders and video cameras.
- Where there is a likelihood that data may be shared with other researchers, the potential uses to which the data might be put may need to be discussed with research participants.
- When making notes, filming or recording for research purposes, researchers should make clear to research participants the purpose of the notes, filming or recording, and, as precisely as possible, to whom it will be communicated.
- In situations where access to a research setting is gained via 'gatekeepers' (eg Project Leaders and their managers) researchers should adhere to the principle of obtaining informed consent directly from the research participants to whom access is required, while at the same time taking account of the gatekeepers' interests.

  Since the relationship between the research participant and a gatekeeper may continue long after the researcher has left the research setting, care should be taken not to disturb that relationship unnecessarily.

The *anonymity and privacy* of those who participate in research should be respected. Personal information concerning research participants should be kept confidential. In some cases it may be necessary to decide whether it is proper or appropriate even to record certain kinds of sensitive information. Where possible threats to the confidentiality and anonymity of research data should be anticipated by researchers.

Appropriate measures should be taken to store research data in a secure manner. Researchers should have regard to their obligations under the Data Protection Act. Wherever appropriate methods for preserving the privacy of data should be used. These will include the removal of

identifiers and the use of pseudonyms. Researchers should particularly guard against data being published or released in a form which would permit the actual or potential identification of research participants

Guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity given to research participants must be honoured, unless there are clear and overriding reasons to do otherwise. However, research data given in confidence do not enjoy legal privilege and may be liable to subpoena by a court. In relevant circumstances research participants should be made aware of this fact.
Barnardo's is committed to providing feedback on *research* findings to participants. In addition to making copies of full reports readily available, summaries, presentations and young people's reports should be produced as appropriate.

Research involving children and young people

The majority of research conducted by, and on behalf of, Barnardo's involves children and young people. The responsibilities detailed above apply equally to children and young people, however, there are specific issues arising from children and young people's legal status, their knowledge and experience of the world and their relative lack of independence/autonomy that require specific attention in order to ensure appropriate and ethical research practice. Research conducted by, and on behalf of, Barnardo's is committed to addressing these issues in the context of an organisational commitment to maximising the participation of children and young people at all levels of planning, study and influencing.

Research intending to involve children and young people as respondents should begin with a consideration of the *potential costs and hoped-for benefits* of such participation.

- In order to ensure that such issues are central to the research design young people should be involved/consulted in the planning and piloting of research whenever possible.
- Safeguards to minimise any inconvenience, intrusion, embarrassment, coercion or distress should be written into the research protocol.
- Attention should be paid to ensuring that participation in research is a positive and rewarding experience. Where there is no direct benefit likely to ensue from the time and expertise contributed by young people consideration should be given to appropriate gratuities.
- Feedback on research findings should be routinely provided to children and young people as part of acknowledging their contribution and seeking their views on outputs and dissemination.

The *informed consent* of children and young people to participation in research should be actively and explicitly sought.

- Information about the proposed research and the optional nature of participation should be provided in both oral and written form and presented in accessible language.
- Attention should be paid to minimising possible coercion from parents, teachers and other adults, and to minimising the influence of peer pressure.

- Young people should be encouraged to question researchers about the aims and methods of the research.
- Written, or explicit, recorded consent should be obtained from research participants whenever possible. (For children aged 5-12 the recommended procedure to be followed is Sieber, 1992[i])
- The option of withdrawing from the research at any stage should be clearly communicated and reviewed at intervals in the research process.

The *consent of parents*, or guardians should be routinely sought except:

- where it is clear that participation in the research involves minimal risk (ie risks no greater than those in everyday life) and will not infringe the rights or impact on the welfare of participants
- where parental/carer permission is impossible or would not protect the child or young person (ie where relations have broken down)
- where the young people concerned are resistant to parental/carer consent being sought on the grounds of their right to privacy and confidentiality, *and* where the emotional and social maturity and particular vulnerabilities of the young people have been evaluated and the risks of participation are considered to be low.

At risk and particularly vulnerable children and young people

Barnardo's recognises that young people involved in risky or illegal activities (under-age sex for example), who are incarcerated or have run away from home or care will have heightened concerns over privacy and may be mistrustful of the confidentiality of their participation. In this context:

- Ethical dilemmas should be anticipated and advice sought from those working with the relevant population of young people.
- Where possible young people from the relevant population should be involved in research design and piloting consent procedures.
- Special precautions – such as the collection of anonymous data – may be used to protect confidentiality.
- Researchers should be cognisant of services relevant to the possible support needs of research participants. A fact sheet detailing services should be prepared.
- Where participation in research is liable to be stressful young people should be asked if they would like to have a friend or advocate with them.
- Arrangements for optional de-briefing after interview/focus group participation should be considered.

i   Hi [child's name]
    My name is [your name], and I am trying to learn about [describe project briefly in appropriate language].
    I would like you to [describe what you would ask the child to do. Don't use words like 'help' or 'co-operate', which can imply a subtle form of coercion].
    Do you want to do this? [If the child does not give clear affirmative agreement to participate, you may not continue with this child.]
    Do you have any questions before we start? [Answer questions clearly.]
    If you want to stop at any time, just tell me. [If the child says to stop, you must stop.]

■ The limits to confidentiality should be explicitly communicated as follows: 'Whatever you have to say in this interview/focus group/questionnaire is confidential unless you disclose that you, or someone else, is in immediate danger of serious harm. In such a case I would need to report that to someone who might be able to help.'

Responsibilities towards sponsors and/or funders

Research that is unlikely to contribute to Barnardo's purpose, or is in contradiction with the organisation's values, will not be undertaken or commissioned. Research will be undertaken with a view to providing information or explanation rather than being constrained to reach particular conclusions or prescribe particular courses of action.

When Barnardo's is commissioning research, or being funded to undertake research on behalf of a third party there should be a written contract detailing the central research questions, methods, time-frame, outputs and dissemination plans.

■ Researchers have a responsibility to notify the sponsor and/or funder of any proposed departure from the terms of reference of the proposed change in the nature of the contracted research.
■ Researchers must make every reasonable effort to complete the proposed research on schedule, including reports to funders.

Alderson, P (1996) 'Ethics and research directed towards effective outcomes' in Oakley, A and Roberts, H (eds) *Evaluating Social Interventions.* Barnardo's, London
Sieber, J E (1992) *Planning Ethically Responsible Research.* Sage, Newbury Park, CA
Stanley, B and Sieber, J E (1991) *Social Research on Children and Adolescents: Ethical Issues.* Sage, Newbury Park, CA.

This report presents the findings of a two-year research study into the needs of young people at risk of sexual exploitation in London. The research was commissioned and funded by the Bridge House Trust and carried out by researchers from Barnardo's Policy and Research Unit between September 2003 and April 2005.

The objective was to establish the nature and level of current need for services amongst young people at risk of sexual exploitation in London. The research suggests that only half of those young people likely to be at risk in London are currently being identified. The roles of social services, the police, education and health services are explored and proactive approaches to early identification and intervention are recommended based on current best practice.

It is essential reading for policy makers and service providers across the statutory and voluntary sectors.

Bridge House Trust

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