

## No son of mine! Children abused through Prostitution - Summary

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### ***The words of a 14-year-old boy abused through prostitution***

*" Well, do you think I just woke up one day and thought I know I'll be a rent boy today:?"*

*Thousands of things have happened to me to get me here -mum leaving, no-one at home, hanging round the pub late and waiting to go home with dad, having blokes try to touch us up, seeing boys do tricks and getting cash and fags. If you want to change me, you're probably going to have to do thousands of things too, to balance it out "*

### **Introduction**

The involvement of children in prostitution is not a new phenomenon. However; over the past decade there has been growing recognition that the needs of these neglected and socially excluded young people should be addressed. Past attitudes are changing and the classic public "mindset" that children involved in such lifestyles are "deserving of their plight", "choosing to be involved", and therefore "asking for it" is being gradually replaced by the recognition that "informed choice" is rarely present in the equation. It is now acknowledged by both child welfare agencies and policy makers that the young people engaged in this lifestyle have unmet social, emotional and physical needs which can be traced back to early childhood experiences, and that they are thus entitled to support and protection.

Such a change in attitude has been brought about through the highlighting of the issues by national children's organisations, in particular Barnardo's and the Children's Society, and through recent publications by researchers and practitioners (Ayre and Barrett 2000, Liabo et al 2000, Kershaw 1999, Leheup 1999, Matthews 2000, Pritchard 1998, Shaw and Butler 1998, West 1992). The change is evidenced by the fact that in May 2000 Central Government, through the Department of Health, the Home Office, Department for Education and Employment and the National Assembly for Wales, issued a Supplementary Guidance to Working Together to Safeguard Children entitled Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution (DoH 2000).

There has been a great deal of interest in and research into female sex work (Kershaw 1999) and to a lesser extent into girls and young women who are abused through prostitution and generally already known to agencies. However; comparatively little is known about boys and young men who are in a similar position and in fact, there is a dearth of information and knowledge regarding this marginalised group within our society. It is apparent that the situation remains as in 1988 when Richie McMullan noted that "the incidences and the nature of boy prostitution in the UK are not fully understood". (McMullan 1988).

The purpose of this paper is threefold:

1. to discuss what we understand to date about the issue
2. to highlight the key issues
3. to suggest ways forward.

### ***What needs to be done? - National Level***

The Government should:

1. Make use of the infrastructure which is already in place - namely the National Plan\* -to promote and monitor appropriate responses to the needs of boys and young men
2. Implement changes in existing legislation pertinent to children who are sexually exploited as recommended in the consultation document Setting the Boundaries -reforming the law on sex offences
3. Review and draft amendments to the Street Offences Act 1959
4. Implement changes to Part I of the Sex Offenders Act 1997
5. Co-ordinate and fund research into the following:
  - the ways in which boys and young men become involved in prostitution
  - the profiling of the adults who abuse them
  - the differential modus operandi of those who abuse them, both those who abuse individually and those who do so within paedophile rings
  - the rehabilitative needs of boys and young men including effective exit strategies
  - what triggers boys and young men to run away from home and residential care
6. Fund services which are specifically for boys and young men and not targeted just towards the "gay issue"
7. Promote the sexual abuse of children as a public health issue, which should include awareness-raising of the existence of sexual exploitation through abuse of boys
8. Develop a national strategy for, and provision of, safe accommodation at point of need for boys who run away

\*The National Plan is part of the U.K Government's Agenda for Action, which was ratified at the First World Congress Against the Sexual Exploitation of Children, Stockholm 1996

### ***What needs to be done? - Local level***

Constituent agencies of Area Child Protection Committees should jointly draw up strategies for:

1. Recognising the problem by:
  - awareness-raising of the issue for both professionals and the wider community
  - understanding the “alerting” behaviours in boys and young men
  - changing public perceptions of boys and young men involved in prostitution
2. Preventing entry into a lifestyle of prostitution by:
  - awareness-raising of the issues for boys and young men
  - use of sex education within schools to address issues of exploitation and abusive relationships
  - the taking of precipitous action when alerting signs are apparent
  - raising the awareness of the added vulnerability of children in the care system
  - raising the profile of the needs of young people who identify as gay and ensuring that there are age-appropriate resources for them within the community
  - implementing MISPER (Missing Persons) Schemes
3. Protecting boys and young men who are involved in prostitution by:
  - working together according to an agreed local working protocol
  - carrying out risk assessments to meet their immediate and longer-term emotional, physical, social and health needs
  - providing drop-in centres where immediate needs can be met with a view to engaging the young person in longer-term intervention
  - having clear guidelines regarding protection issues
  - making constructive use of the law
4. Helping young people exit by:
  - provision of appropriate facilities to meet the whole needs of the young person:
    - housing
    - health - both sexual and physical emotional wellbeing education
    - employment
  - providing workers with appropriate training and skills to meet the specific individual needs of the young people
  - workers acting as advocates for the young people

- providing centres where longer term work can be carried out - separate from drop-in centres
- 5. Investigating and prosecuting coercers, exploiters and abusers of boys and young men involved in prostitution by:
  - developing strategies for detecting those who abuse young people by involving them in prostitution
  - acknowledgement that abuse through prostitution is as much an issue for boys as it is for girls
  - appointing a dedicated police officer to work alongside young people
  - developing national intelligence on "paedophile rings" in geographical areas and their connecting links to other areas
  - developing a multi-disciplinary task group to consider ways of managing the issue locally.

### ***What needs to be done? By Barnardo's***

Barnardo's will:

1. Promote appropriate responses to the needs of boys and young men abused through prostitution
2. Discuss with key organisations a way of promoting the issue of boys and young men abused through prostitution as a child protection issue
3. Promote appropriate responses to the needs of gay adolescent boys within the educational, social and family setting
4. Give clear messages regarding the "reality" for boys and young men abused through prostitution
5. Encourage the development of appropriate resources for boys and young men
6. Develop a resource pack for boys and young men for use within schools which addresses abusive relationships
7. Lobby the Government regarding the issues raised in the first part of this section.

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