



‘I Never Spoke About It’...

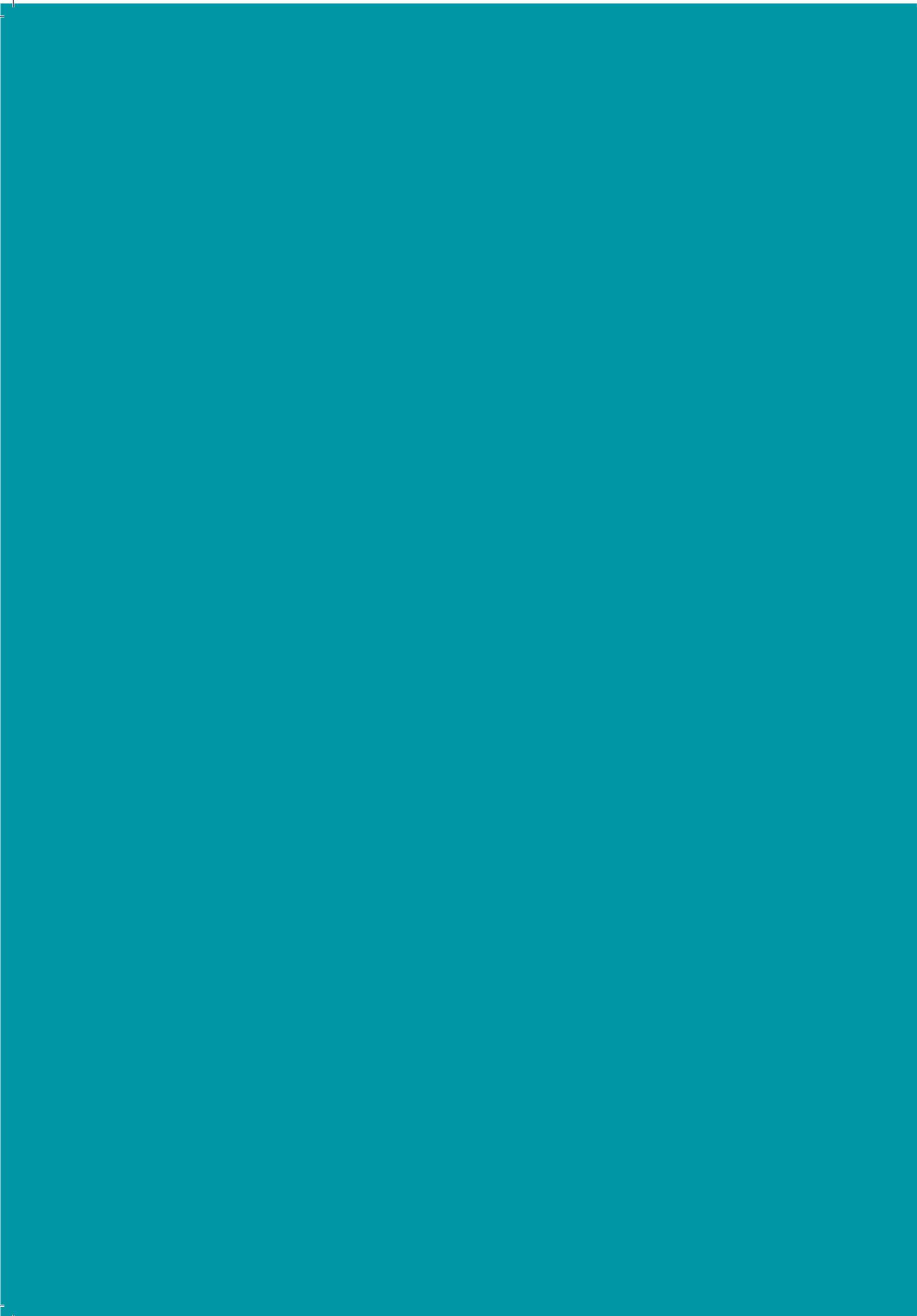
Supporting sexually exploited boys
and young men in Wales

Menna Thomas and Elaine Speyer

**Believe in
children**



Barnardo's
Cymru



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Section one

Introduction

For over two decades child sexual exploitation (CSE) has been a strategic priority for Barnardo's UK, and a key area for practice development.

Within Wales, Barnardo's Cymru has worked closely with Welsh Government since 2005, supporting the development of robust policy and practice guidance to address CSE across Wales.

The aim of this report is to increase understanding of child sexual exploitation relating to boys and young men. It provides recommendations to improve the engagement of at-risk boys and young men in services that address CSE prevention and intervention.

In 2005, the first scoping in relation to child sexual exploitation was carried out by Barnardo's Cymru in Wales¹. Of the data gathered from 22 local authority social service teams, only six local authorities at the time were able to split their data by gender, and among this data there were only nine reported cases of sexually exploited boys, all were over 16. Further research carried out in three local authorities in South Wales during 2006 and 2007², using the Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (SERAF) on all open cases in children's services, evidenced a higher proportion of boys identified as being at risk (58%) than girls (42%). However, there were larger numbers of girls identified as being at significant risk – (64% compared to 36% of boys).³

The Barnardo's Cymru Seraf Service was established in 2006, and has always been open to referrals for boys and young men. Yet the number of boys referred for support has remained consistently low in light of the above findings. The Seraf Service database records having received 1251 referrals over the five years to April 2015, and of these only 9.33% were for boys. The average age of male referrals; 15 years and 3 months, is slightly above that of females, whose average age is just under 15 years. The average SERAF risk assessment score is consistently lower for boys (at 22.9), which suggests a lower risk, than for girls (at 25.72), indicating they have a higher risk.⁴

Policy and guidance

The All Wales Protocol on child sexual exploitation was published by the All Wales Child Protection Procedures Review Group in 2008 (reviewed in 2013), and provides direction on safeguarding practice in relation to CSE.⁵ This was followed in 2011 by Welsh Government statutory guidance on safeguarding

1 Coles, J (2005) Out of sight, out of mind: Child sexual exploitation: Barnardo's Cymru

2 Clutton, S and Coles, J (2007) SERAF Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework: a pilot study: Barnardo's Cymru

3 Clutton, S and Coles, J (2007) SERAF Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework: a pilot study: Barnardo's Cymru

4 Seraf Service database April 2010 to April 2015

5 All Wales Child Protection Procedures Review Group (2008, reviewed 2013) Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Children who are at Risk of Abuse through Sexual Exploitation: All Wales Protocol

children and young people from sexual exploitation, which replaced guidance covering England and Wales that had been in place since 2000. Child sexual exploitation is defined within the All Wales Protocol and Welsh Government statutory guidance as follows:

‘Child sexual exploitation is the coercion or manipulation of children and young people into taking part in sexual activities. It is a form of sexual abuse involving an exchange of some form of payment which can include money, mobile phones and other items, drugs, alcohol, a place to stay, ‘protection’ or affection. The vulnerability of the young person and grooming process employed by perpetrators renders them powerless to recognise the exploitative nature of relationships and unable to give informed consent.’

Synopsis of study design and methods

This qualitative research draws primarily on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 42 professionals working across Wales. A focus group was however carried out with 20 young people involved in a junior safeguarding board, four of whom were boys who had been sexually exploited. An adult survivor of child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation participated in an in-depth interview.

Interviews with professionals

The research sample of professionals was drawn from the community of personnel working most closely with high risk groups of boys and young men across the four police force areas in Wales. The interviews were conducted face to face or over the phone. The aim was to interview a representative sample of professionals working in the following sectors:

- the police,
- social services,
- education,
- sexual health services,
- substance misuse services,
- youth offending teams,
- homelessness services,
- advocacy services,
- family support services,
- equalities organisations
- specialist services addressing; child sexual exploitation (CSE), harmful sexual behaviour (HSB).

It was possible to cover all these sectors in two of the four police force areas. In the other two areas we carried out a small number of interviews with professionals who did not fit with our original target group, but who clearly had a valid and important contribution to make, such as those working in projects supporting sex workers.

Interviews focussed on:

- roles and responsibilities relating to young people with experience/ at risk of CSE
- the SERAF assessment tool and how this is used to identify risk for boys and young men
- perceptions of the features of male CSE
- perceptions of how male experience of CSE compares to female experience
- perceptions of risk factors for boys and young men
- barriers and facilitators to identifying and engaging with at-risk boys or those with experience of CSE.

Accessing the views of those with experience of child sexual exploitation (CSE)

We originally aimed to interview between six and fifteen boys and young men aged between 16 and 25, who had experience of being at risk of, or involved in, CSE. This proved very difficult to achieve. The highly sensitive nature of the issue, and the low number of boys identified and referred to services, meant that even where boys were being worked with they were reluctant to engage in research interviews, or professionals working with them decided that they were too vulnerable. We approached the following services seeking the participation of boys:

- Barnardo's Cymru specialist CSE and HSB services, and services working with care leavers and homeless young people
- substance misuse services working with young people across Wales
- private residential care organisations across Wales
- an LGBTQ (lesbian gay bisexual trans questioning) service for young people

When this resulted in no individuals coming forward to participate, we approached organisations who worked with young people in groups, and organisations working with vulnerable adults. These included adult substance misuse services and homeless support services in one Welsh city, and two children's organisations working with vulnerable young people in groups.

The outcome of this was that we were able to engage, via a focus group, with 20 young people, both boys and girls, aged between 10 and 18, who were part of a junior safeguarding board. This group included at least four boys who had been sexually exploited, though as researchers we were not aware of their identity. It also included a girl who had been sexually exploited, and who made herself known to us. We were also contacted through an adult substance misuse service by a young adult survivor of sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse.

This person met with us and participated in an in-depth, semi-structured interview.

The following issues were addressed in the interview and the focus group:

- the ways a vulnerable or at-risk boy might present, and what professionals should look out for in boys
- perceptions of any differences between the way boys and girls experience CSE
- ideas about what approaches or environments might feel safe enough for boys to start talking about these issues
- experiences boys and young men may have had of being well supported
- perceptions of barriers to getting help
- information and support boys might need to help them keep safe in relationships

The ethical protocol for the research was approved by the Barnardo's Research Ethics Committee (BREC). Further information about the methodology and ethical protocol are included in the appendix.

Summary of key findings and recommendations

Key findings

- Negative experiences of care and family life are known to create vulnerabilities which can lead to a higher risk of sexual exploitation as children become adolescents, for boys as well as girls.
- There is concern among professionals that there may be more complacency when teenage boys go missing compared to girls, and that this explains discrepancies in reporting patterns.
- Boys' routes into sexual exploitation are complicated and difficult to identify, as they are often closely aligned to criminal behaviour and/or substance misuse.
- Boys can be groomed into sexual exploitation by older men, older women, and their peers, of both genders. Boys are at risk of being groomed online.
- There is evidence that sexual stereotypes often play a part in the interpretation of boys' behaviour, with negative behaviour being taken at face value and not explored, or understood, as a potential response to trauma, as is more likely to be the case with girls.
 - Professionals are more likely to view boys as aggressors rather than victims, based on their behaviour.
 - There is evidence that professionals do not give some CSE risk indicators the same weight for boys as they do for girls.
 - Boys are viewed as being more resistant than girls to recognising and accepting that they have been sexually exploited. For this reason, it was the experience of support workers that boys needed more time to establish trusting relationships with them.

- Some boys are keenly affected by sexual stereotypes, and require a practice approach which actively avoids further disempowerment.
- Heterosexual boys who have been exploited by males can experience confusion about their sexuality which induces guilt, fear and distress. This can represent a significant barrier to disclosure and seeking help.
- Gay, bisexual or questioning boys who are made vulnerable through discrimination within their homes and communities can be at risk of entering same-sex relationships which are exploitative.
- Boys with learning disabilities which reduce their ability to understand new or complex information, learn new skills and to cope independently are at increased risk of sexual exploitation.
- CSE is currently viewed as an offence primarily affecting girls and young women, and this is a barrier to the identification of boys at risk of, or experiencing, CSE.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: All school-aged children and young people should have access to healthy relationships education which is gender balanced and inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) young people.

Recommendation 2: Educational materials and support information on CSE should be sufficiently diverse in range to ensure gender balance and to be LGBTQ inclusive. These materials should also be accessible to those with a learning disability.

Recommendation 3: The provision of information and specific programmes of work should be targeted at high-risk groups of boys including:

- those in care
- care leavers
- those accessing youth homelessness services, youth offending services, substance misuse services, and learning disability services
- those on the fringes of the education and criminal justice services.

Recommendation 4: Awareness-raising and training on the vulnerability of boys to CSE should be made available to professionals working with vulnerable boys and young men, particularly in the services listed above.

Recommendation 5: Information and awareness raising materials should be made available to parents and carers including how to support young people to use the internet and social media safely.

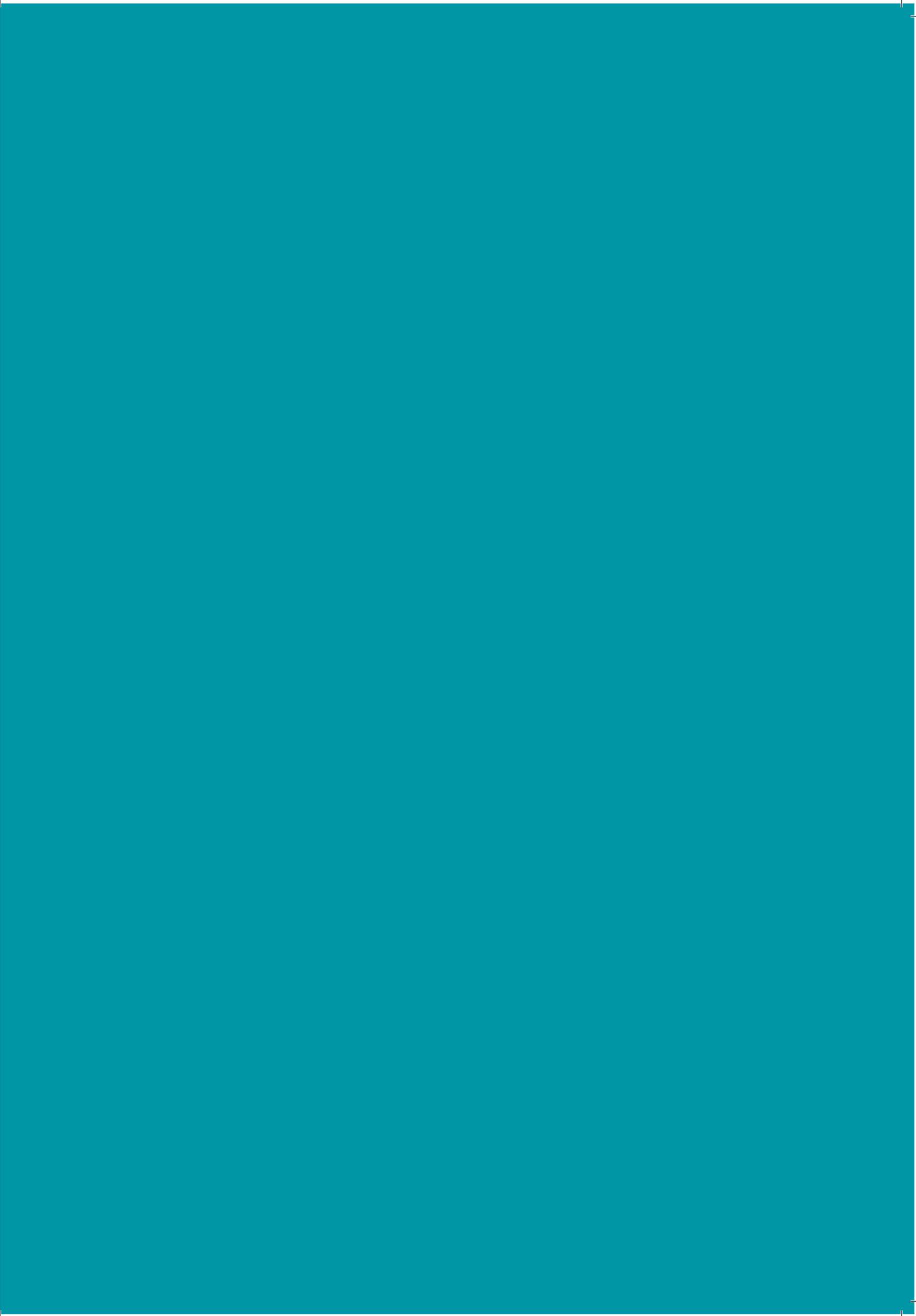
Recommendation 6: The SERAF (Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework) should be reviewed to ensure that the language used, and context outlined, is gender neutral.

Recommendation 7: Gay, bisexual and questioning boys and young men require access to a wider range of safe, offline LGBTQ opportunities to socialise and access support, particularly in more deprived urban communities, communities in the South Wales Valleys and in rural communities.

Recommendation 8: Services working with vulnerable, high-risk children and young people should ensure they present themselves as inclusive, and should promote a clear message that they are open and able to work with boys and girls alike.

Recommendation 9: Professionals working with vulnerable boys who may be at risk of CSE should diversify their range of practice approaches to increase the opportunity for boys and young men to engage in support.

Recommendation 10: There should be stronger joint working between specialist CSE services, substance misuse services and youth offending services to improve the identification, engagement and support of boys affected by CSE.





Section two

What makes boys vulnerable to sexual exploitation?

Negative experiences of care and family life

According to professionals, the circumstances and experiences that can make boys more vulnerable to sexual exploitation are broadly similar to those vulnerabilities experienced by girls. These include abuse and neglect in childhood, being brought up in families which might have a profile of substance misuse, domestic violence or mental ill health and not being safe in the home, or community environment. As boys with these experiences move into adolescence, they are at risk of mental health problems, substance misuse, homelessness and offending behaviour. More often than not it is one, or a combination, of these factors which makes boys vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

'for kids who are used to growing up in dysfunctional, unsafe environments, who are used to sofa surfing, walking the streets late at night, being homeless for periods of time, not having a secure family base, giving somebody a blow job in a station for £20 is actually an exchange they can live with at least. And I think there is a degree of denial about it.'

Youth offending service

'I would say the main things that are apparent in each of the four males that are currently involved with our project, is that they are offending from a young age, they've been in services for a long time, complex needs so mental ill health, some undiagnosed, some diagnosed, lack of family support... sexually abused as young people, as children, and they've always been homeless... they've got no regard for their own personal safety.'

Sex worker project

The Welsh Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, published in 2015, surveyed 2000 18-69 year olds on their experience of growing up in their families and home environment. They include experiences of sexual abuse, physical abuse, verbal abuse and living in environments affected by domestic violence, parental separation, mental illness, alcohol abuse, drug abuse and incarceration. The participants were also asked to list their experience of health harming behaviours across the life course. There is a relationship between negative early childhood experiences and health harming behaviours in adulthood, children *'with greater exposure to ACE's are more likely to go on to develop health harming and anti-social behaviours, often during adolescence, such as binge drinking, smoking and drug use'*.⁶

⁶ Welsh Adverse Childhood Experiences Study: Adverse Childhood Experiences and their impact on health-harming behaviours in the Welsh adult population. Public Health Wales NHS Trust 2015

Men reported higher levels of health harming behaviours than women in relation to all of the behaviours described in the survey, apart from ‘unintended teenage pregnancy’ where the difference between men and women had no statistical significance. Possible explanations for the difference between male and female experience may be that boys are exposed to more ACE’s, or are less able to overcome the impact of negative early experience.

Health harming behaviours	Males	Females
Alcohol and high risk drinking	19.8%	6.2%
Cannabis use	31.5%	18.7%
Heroin/Crack cocaine use	7.0%	1.9%
Violence victimisation	13.7%	4.5%
Violence perpetration	11.6%	4.0%
Incarceration	17.6%	4.3%
Early sexual initiation	27.6%	13.4%

These survey outcomes raise some questions about how we understand and respond to boys and young men who are growing up in difficult, challenging circumstances. One of the most pertinent outcomes, in relation to this research, is that more than double the number of boys had experienced ‘early sexual initiation’, that is sex before the age of 16, compared to girls. This suggests that particular attention needs to be given to boys in relation to their risk of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Social isolation

Professionals suggested that social isolation from peers and family can make boys and young men vulnerable to exploitation.

‘The boys tend to be more likely to be loners, and less sociable. This all adds to their vulnerability.’

Family support service

For adolescents, peers and a sense of belonging are fundamental to their emotional wellbeing.⁷ Peers facilitate the development of personal identity and social status. Partaking in sport and group activities is a part of this. Not having support to access these opportunities can mean a boy can be left exposed to risk as perpetrators identify and exploit this need.⁸

‘Isolation, if a young man is not into sports or not part of a group’

Family support service

⁷ Hanson, E. Holmes, D. That Difficult Age: Developing a more effective response to risk in adolescence. Research in Practice 2015

⁸ Hanson, E. Holmes, D. That Difficult Age: Developing a more effective response to risk in adolescence. Research in Practice 2015

Some families experience multiple stresses which may affect the way they can support their sons to partake in ordinary social activities with their peers.

'Families which have faced adversity... isolated in their community...multiple adversities... may miss things if they are pre-occupied'

Family support service

Factors which might lead to a young person becoming more socially isolated include:

- moving to a new area
- having a sexual identity that is not accepted or supported by family and friends, or that they feel they need to hide from family and friends
- anything which makes the young person a target of bullying and ostracizes them from their peer group
- having a learning disability, which often means young people are not seen as sexual beings, leaving them to deal with their growing sexuality in isolation.⁹

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) young people experience high levels of discrimination and bullying. A survey carried out in England¹⁰ found that *'overall nearly half (49%) of LGBTQ young people reported that their time at school was affected by discrimination or fear of discrimination'* which lead to them being *'isolated and left out and having to move school'*. Such discrimination can lead to social isolation, exposing boys to risk, particularly if the family are not accepting and supportive of their son's sexual identity.¹¹

Young people with a learning disability are also at higher risk of social isolation compared to their peers.¹² A number of our interviewees spoke about their experience of working with boys whose learning disability had played a key part in their becoming vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

'It became very apparent that this was a lad with learning difficulties who was physically very mature, quite tall, uncertain of his sexuality there was an ambivalence about the victimhood. Clearly he was a victim because he was vulnerable, he wasn't very intelligent, not very socially aware, not very sexually experienced, aside (from) being abused, and then he was in the bus stations turning tricks and engaging older men very deliberately.'

Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) service

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- 9 Franklin, A. Raws, P. Smeaton, E. Unprotected, overprotected: meeting the needs of young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of sexual exploitation. Barnardo's/bild/Coventry University/ Paradigm Research /The children's Society 2015
- 10 Youth Chances Survey of 16-25 year olds: First reference report. Youth Chances 2014
- 11 Palmer. T. Digital dangers: The impact of technology on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people. Barnardo's/The Marie Collins Foundation 2015
- 12 Franklin, A. Raws, P. Smeaton, E. Unprotected, overprotected: meeting the needs of young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of sexual exploitation. Barnardo's/bild/Coventry University/ Paradigm Research /The children's Society 2015

Isolated individuals who seek contact via the internet take their vulnerabilities online which, depending on the level of family, peer and educational support they have in using the internet, may make them more vulnerable to exploitation.¹³

Circumstances which can lead to sexual exploitation

Running away, going missing and homelessness

It is recognised that running away, going missing and being out on the streets exposes young people to the risk of being sexually exploited.¹⁴ Missing persons data for England and Wales¹⁵ for the periods 2010 – 11, 2011-12 and 2012-13 consistently shows that there are slightly higher numbers of males going missing in all age groups, with the exception of ages 12 to 17, where there are higher numbers of girls than boys going missing. Overall, this 12 to 17 age range has a far higher number of people going missing than any other age group. This may reflect a genuine increase in the number of girls going missing at this age; however our interviewees suggested that it may also be to do with a drop in reporting of adolescent boys going missing. There is consistency in the reporting of looked-after children, both male and female, who go missing, as there is a professional duty on the part of carers to do so.¹⁶ However, in the case of adolescent boys who go missing but are not looked after by carers, professionals reported an awareness of gaps in information, potentially due to poor parenting.

‘with looked after children if they’re not home they will get reported as missing, difference being, [a] 15 or 16 year old boy who’s not a looked after child, but there’s poor parenting.... the reality is they’re probably out and about but not being reported, I think that’s the issue that we’re missing.’

Police officer

A high number of the professionals we spoke to made reference to boys who had run away, were missing, or had been forced to live on the streets exchanging sex for a roof or food – (commonly referred to as ‘survival sex’). They described looked-after young people running away from their care placements, and young people running away from their homes, or being thrown out by parents, for reasons including family arguments, substance misuse or a family failing to accept a young person’s sexuality.

13 Palmer. T. Digital dangers: The impact of technology on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people. Barnardo’s/The Marie Collins Foundation 2015

14 Smeaton. E. Running away from hate to what you think is love: The relationship between running away and child sexual exploitation. Barnardo’s 2013

15 www.missingpersons.police.uk

16 All Wales Child Protection Procedures Review Group (2011) All Wales Protocol – Missing Children: Children who run away or go missing from care.4

‘We’re always aware of kids having picked up sexual activity – as a strategy for survival, if you like – from other peers. Kids run away from children’s homes together, kids abscond from home together, kids sofa-surf and live homeless together.’

HSB service

‘[A] big issue around the homeless young people...that’s around the survival sex and boys being picked up... the boys that I spoke to were older boys but clearly they had been sexually exploited due to their vulnerability of being homeless.’

CSE service

Substance misuse and sexual exploitation

A significant number of professionals we interviewed described boys and young men exchanging sex for drugs. We know that drugs and alcohol are used by perpetrators to ensnare young people in order to make victimisation and control easier.¹⁷

One of our interviewees, a professional with extensive experience of working with young people in a substance misuse service, reported that girls came to the service for support at a far earlier point in their substance misuse problem than boys.

‘You tend to find that girls will seek help earlier, which is better. They tend to have...a lower threshold of substance misuse, but the boys when they come to our services, they have a higher threshold, more risk in the behaviour when taking substances so that the amounts that they take and what they’re consuming is far greater.’

Substance misuse service

Professionals often noticed that a boy has a substance misuse problem prior to uncovering his sexual exploitation.

‘people often think that CSE issues look like drugs, so vulnerabilities display themselves as substance misuse, but there is more going on under the surface.’

CSE service

‘(Young people with CSE issues have experienced) Substance misuse in almost all cases and an element of social problems with the family. Of the ones that we have identified, they have all been substance misusers. That’s not to say that all would be in this situation.’

Youth offending service

¹⁷ Puppet on a String: the urgent need to cut children free from sexual exploitation. Barnardo’s 2011.

Professionals reported that boys and young men with substance misuse problems can be drawn into criminal behaviour, particularly drug dealing, which can lead them further into networks of criminality. Within this environment, where they are at increased risk of contact with perpetrators of CSE, they may exchange sex for drugs or use sex as a way of paying off debts to drug dealers.

'He had been selling heroin. There was a man older than him buying things and he was linked to other men.'

CSE service

'So there was a case where a social worker knew a young person was drug running, then found out later that it was CSE.'

CSE service

The above illustrates the complexity of boys' routes into CSE, and the risk that safeguarding issues can be masked by issues of substance misuse or offending. Some of the professionals we interviewed spoke about this:

'A young person putting themselves at risk of offending would inevitably also be at risk of other safeguarding issues such as CSE, violence etc.'

Youth offending service

Others noted the increase in youth offending services' awareness of this complex presentation, and the need to be open-minded and curious about the potential for offenders to have been exploited or abused.

'They get caught up in minor crime, whether it's drug misuse, or whether it's antisocial behaviour, or whatever, basically those people picking them up may be dealing with an offender initially, but there might actually be a victim underneath that as well. And I know youth offending services... are having quite good training in CSE.'

Police officer

We spoke to an adult survivor of CSE who attributed his years of drug addiction to his experience of abuse and subsequent exploitation as a young person. He advocated looking further than the drug use itself for the root problem.

'Most of the people who have drug problems have had some other problems, some other issues in the beginning... so they try to escape from the reality - "I'll have a joint now so I don't think about my problems.'

Adult survivor of CSE

Exploitation online

For young people vulnerable to sexual exploitation in the offline world, the internet and social media have the potential to magnify those vulnerabilities considerably once they enter the online environment.^{18 19} This is particularly the case where young people lack the digital literacy to protect themselves, or the supervision and support of well-informed carers.²⁰

Moreover, those at risk of sexual exploitation are among peers whose development is being shaped by the experience of their digital lives, and whose influence can serve to further blur the boundaries of what is safe and what is risky.²¹ A survey conducted by the Institute for Public Policy Research in England found that 46% of 18 year olds agreed that *'sending sexual or naked photos or videos is part of everyday life for teenagers nowadays'*. 81% agreed that *'Most young men look at pornography'* and 46% agreed that *'Most young women look at pornography'*.²² The research concluded that:

*'The overwhelming concern – reflected in our research – is that easier and wider access to porn and sexually explicit material creates unrealistic norms and assumptions for young men and women in how they should conduct their relationships.'*²³

In the online world there are increased opportunities for predators to trick, deceive and groom children and young people.²⁴ This may culminate in a meet-up offline where abuse takes place, or the exploitation may take place online where the predator persuades, threatens or blackmails the child or young person to perform sexual acts, or to send sexually explicit images.

When a young person is isolated from their peers, the online world can be even riskier, since it is an environment where their social need can be exploited.²⁵ Our research participants suggested that when boys and young men are left to deal with difficult personal and emotional challenges without any offline support – for example being bullied by peers or questioning their sexuality – going online to seek information, support and self-expression is an obvious option.

18 Franklin, A. Raws, P. Smeaton, E. Unprotected, overprotected: meeting the needs of young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of sexual exploitation. Barnardo's/bild/Coventry University/ Paradigm Research /The children's Society 2015

19 Palmer, T (2015) Digital dangers: The impact of technology on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people. Barnardo's/The Marie Collins Foundation.

20 Palmer, T (2015) Digital dangers: The impact of technology on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people. Barnardo's/The Marie Collins Foundation.

21 Parker, I (2014) Young people, sex and relationships: The new norms. Institute for Public Policy Research

22 Parker, I (2014) Young people, sex and relationships: The new norms. Institute for Public Policy Research

23 Parker, I (2014) Young people, sex and relationships: The new norms. Institute for Public Policy Research

24 Palmer, T (2015) Digital dangers: The impact of technology on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people. Barnardo's/The Marie Collins Foundation.

25 Palmer, T (2015) Digital dangers: The impact of technology on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people. Barnardo's/The Marie Collins Foundation.

'It's quite a brave thing to do, to come out if you're 15 and in a comprehensive in South Wales. So where do you go to experiment? Well, typically you'll go online, won't you?'

CSE service

How are boys groomed?

Professionals took the view that boys could be groomed in a similar way to girls, due to similar emotional vulnerabilities including loneliness and isolation, learning disabilities and attachment relationship difficulties. The majority of exploiters are male, though professionals gave evidence of cases where the perpetrators had been female.

Grooming by females

The method of grooming by a woman was thought to resemble the way some men groom and exploit girls. Affection and protection are proffered and ultimately a sexual relationship develops.

'When we look at the females who are exploiting the males it is more like a nurturing relationship, so it's about gaining the young person's trust. They act as an older person who can be trusted. They may have children of their own, grandchildren of their own, and they portray themselves as that older, caring female – kind of bringing them in under their wing, looking out for them, looking after them, with the intention to exploit.'

CSE service

There was also evidence of boys being groomed by female predators.

'I was delivering the sex education talk about sex and safety, and we were talking about the legal age and rape, and this one boy did make a comment about, "oh, I've got a 23-year-old girlfriend". He was year nine (age 13) – he was young.'

Teacher

There were also reports of female perpetrators simply exploiting the needs of homeless or drug-addicted young men, coercing them into having sex through a straight exchange method.

'Once again it's: "If you sleep with me, I'll give you money, I'll give you drugs." So you hear that and that definitely does happen [with] boys saying they've done it... they don't want to do it, but they have to do it, because it would basically sort them out for the rest of the day, the week. So it does, yeah, female perpetrators for sure.'

Substance misuse service

Grooming by peers

Interviewees suggested that males are more likely to groom through befriending in the first instance. They described befriending on a one-to-one basis which can lead to boys being drawn into social circles where they are sexually exploited by older men.

‘I know I’ve dealt with lads where there’s been other lads involved... But certainly a couple of the young people I’ve worked with, we’re aware they got into [CSE] through other young people, or young adults even – and I suspect the involvement of older young people in procuring other kids.’

HSB service

‘If they just happen to meet that person... they would be able to then enter them into that chain of exploiting on a bigger network, on a wider network and you know, some of the boys, one in particular I can think of... just by pure chance met someone and they were part of a group of men... that’s what they were into and that’s what they did, working as far afield as Bristol... Swansea and Newport.’

Substance misuse service

The peer group can be made up of girls as well as boys, and the first contact can be with a male or a female, before the young person is drawn into a network occupied by paedophiles.

‘This lad was mixing with girls who we knew had been victim to CSE and was hanging out in areas known for CSE. Had been approached by men and was mixing with those people. So we knew, if not yet, something could happen.’

CSE service

Grooming by older men

Professionals identified that older men create the opportunity to groom and exploit by assuming the role of mentor or older role model.

‘Boys can be groomed by other males. I think that’s a big shift in how people perceive things... a change in how we view adults. It used to be that boys needed to learn from the older generational figure... and it was perfectly acceptable... Now we know that some of the male role models in our society weren’t quite as great as we all thought.’

Social services

Professionals also gave examples of longer-term sexual relationships between young boys and older men, where boys involved seemed to be motivated by the material gains and the default secure base, rather than a genuine sexual interest in men. These accounts illustrate a tense co-dependency, where vulnerable young men find themselves needing to resort repeatedly to ‘survival sex’ with known abusers due to their addiction to drugs or a failure to establish secure accommodation.

‘He’s got a relationship and he has had with an older male for years and years, and in previous projects they always thought that was his uncle, and he always said it was his uncle... He’s now disclosed... he’s back up with this person, and he does have sex with him, but it’s a means to an end, it’s a roof over his head, he treats him to different things. So it’s again such a... damaging relationship but I think he sees it as his... security. His family support is nothing and... if he’s destitute, he can always go back.’

Sex work project

“‘Perpetrator” sounds very... I don’t know, it’s a very strong word to use for some of these men... because sometimes they’re vulnerable themselves, and I don’t mean that in kind of justifying their actions, but they obviously have issues themselves... Some of these men have been robbed... they’ve been beaten up as well by young people, but then they still see them as a financial source, you know.’

Substance misuse service

Our interviewees were also aware that some older boys and young men were being sexually exploited by violent men whose threat and malevolence prohibited boys naming them.

‘There’s violence, lots of control there, and those are the ones you don’t really see or hear about, don’t even say their names, you know. But with the ones that are vulnerable themselves, you get told their names, you get told where they live, because they don’t see them as a threat... it’s easy pickings’

Substance misuse service

Grooming online

Professionals raised the issue of online grooming as a risk for boys. Young men can approach each other as peers (primarily through gaming), or, as with girls groomed online, young men can be approached individually by older men disguised as peers, children or women.

‘Online and through gaming is a big risk for males, so we’re seeing... exploitation by older males, but not a huge age gap, so exploitation by males possibly early 20s... We’re seeing young people being exploited in a peer pressure way.’

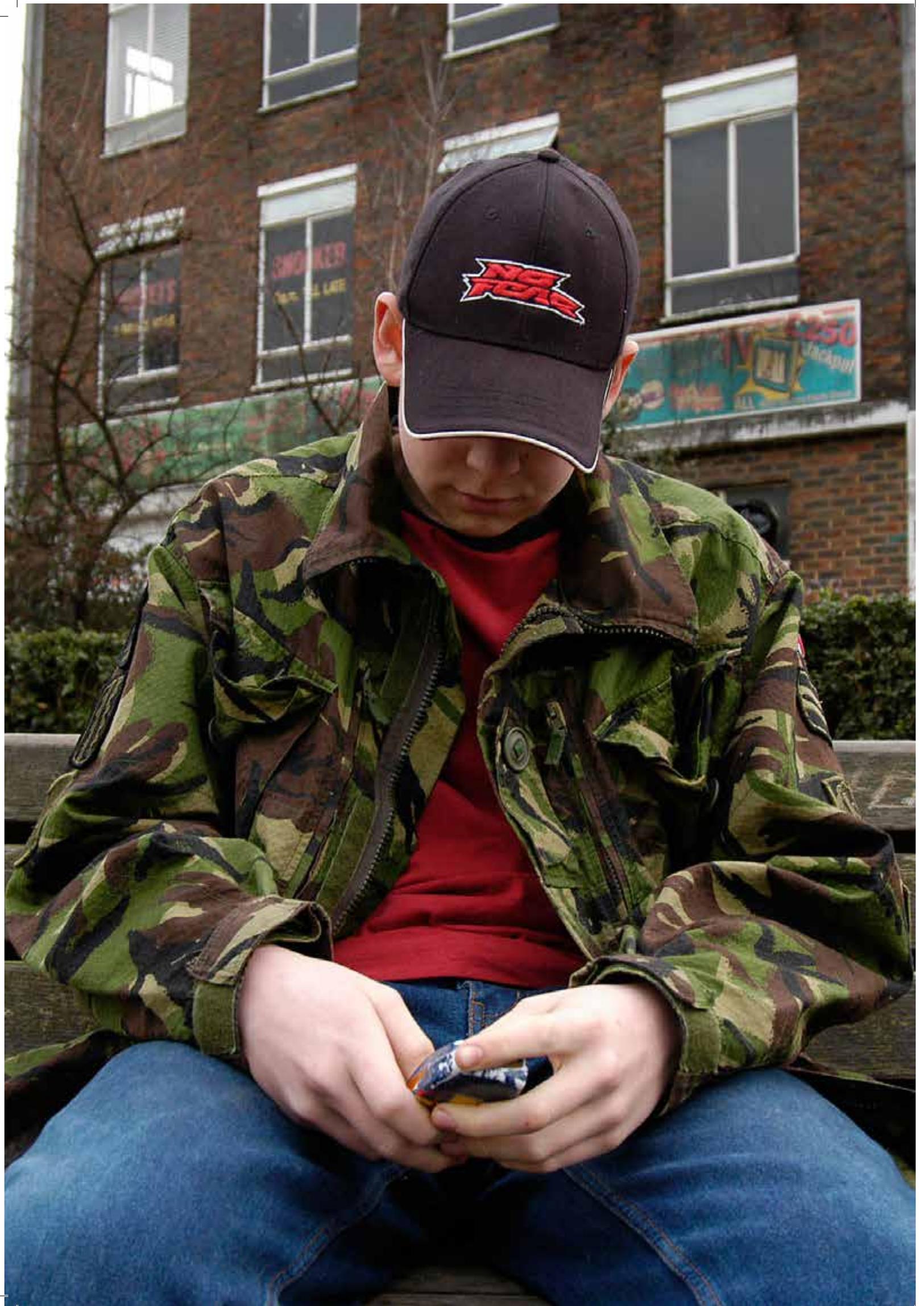
CSE Service

‘Where a boy has been a victim... you find that more online... So for example they have been approached online, they think they are talking to another child, [or a] female and they are not. I’m finding that more with boys at the moment.’

CSE service

Key findings

- Negative experiences of care and family life are known to create vulnerabilities which can lead to a higher risk of sexual exploitation as children become adolescents, for boys as well as girls.
- There is concern among professionals that there may be more complacency when teenage boys go missing compared to girls, and that this explains discrepancies in reporting patterns.
- Boys’ routes into sexual exploitation are complicated and difficult to identify, as they are often closely aligned to criminal behaviour and/or substance misuse.
- Boys can be groomed into sexual exploitation by older men, older women, and their peers, of both genders. Boys are at risk of being groomed online.



Barriers to identifying and supporting boys and young men at risk of sexual exploitation

Unhelpful stereotypes

A wide range of interviewees expressed views that professional attitudes based on underlying traditional masculine or hyper-masculine stereotypes were presenting barriers to identifying boys and young men at risk of CSE, and to working successfully with them. These attitudes included the belief that males are better able to protect themselves, and are therefore at lower risk of abuse.

‘There’s a sense that boys should be able to protect themselves more, whereas with girls... there’s a societal view that they need protecting.’

Social services

‘The problem is there has been a general perception that boys can look after themselves better than girls. The reality is they are all equally as vulnerable, and I don’t think there is any kind of shying away now from the fact that historic child abuse cases have demonstrated that boys have been equally targeted.’

Missing/CSE service

Professionals were concerned that the interpretation of boys and girls behaviour was at risk of being coloured by sexual stereotypes. One interviewee described their experiences of how other professionals and carers could often see past girls’ negative behaviour to the underlying causes, but were unable to do so in the case of boys.

‘Our girls are a really feisty bunch, and in comparison to the boys, they are just as feisty. But when I go on school visits, foster care visits, residential care visits, if I’m going for a boy, people want to tell me about the conduct stuff... [how] they’re getting excluded from school, sent outside the classroom, getting into fights – they want to tell me that. They don’t necessarily tell me that about the girls. So I’ll go to school and I’ll ask and it’s there – the behaviour’s there – but you know, she’s vulnerable, she’s a victim, we know why she’s doing it so we don’t need to tell you because we can explain that bit so that’s fine... I think our boys get a really raw deal in comparison to our girls... It might be that girls get more of a gold standard referral and an identification of behaviour, and boys not so much.’

HSB service

Professionals are more likely to consider boys as potentially involved in perpetrating the abuse – through engaging others in abusive networks, or partaking in the abuse – rather than being the victims.

‘With the boys that came through, there was an uncertainty with professionals around whether they were victims or perpetrators in almost all the cases.’

CSE service

‘With boys... they’re being abused either way, but are they being the victim or being encouraged to be a perpetrator? I think that’s kind of the double thing that you’re thinking of with men more than women, are they being... groomed to behave in a similar way to exploit other young people.’

Missing person’s service

‘A lot of the time I think practitioners view boys as being... risks... If you get a young girl who is displaying... the characteristics [and] risk factors you would associate with sexual exploitation, I think often the question is, “what’s happening to this young person? What’s wrong with her?” Like a victim type of pose, whereas boys it’s kind of like, “they’re a risk, they’re a threat”, which kind of fits in with the vast majority of work most people do in social care. Men generally tend to be the perpetrators, so if its domestic violence... sexual exploitation... [or] sexually harmful behaviour, boys and males tend to be the perpetrators. But I think that skews things really. There might be a whole raft of other young lads out there who are victims of sexual exploitation but just don’t get identified.’

CSE service

The existence and influence of sexual stereotypes and the way these can affect understanding of children’s experiences, also made sense to the young people who contributed to our focus group. They thought that:

‘(boys are) Expected to keep strong, but in reality are equally vulnerable, particularly boys in care.’

‘there are lots of stereotypes about, the man does it and the woman is the victim.’

‘Girls are seen as naive and more vulnerable than a boy.’

‘If they (adults) see bruises on a boy, they would be more likely to think it was a fight. If we see bruises on anyone, we should be worried.’

Focus group

Responding to indicators of boys at risk

Professionals noted that practice coloured by the unhelpful stereotypes described above can be partly responsible for not giving as much weight to indicators of risk in the case of boys as compared to girls.

‘His social worker said CSE was not a concern. That tends to happen more for boys. He was in a secure unit. Had been missing before, went to risk management, went missing again. There was substance misuse, he was vulnerable and easily led, and he has attachment issues. The event that occurred which led to me becoming involved was when he exposed himself to staff at the unit because of peer pressure... We scored him [on the SERAF] and he was in the 40s [significant risk].’

HSB service

Going missing is a high risk indicator for CSE among both boys and girls,²⁶ yet professionals held the view that this was not taken as seriously if the missing young person was male.

‘We had boys that presented as missing but somehow they are not viewed the same... We need to look at our lads that are missing, because we have had “repeat offenders” if you like... and I don’t think we have looked at that in the same way.’

Missing/CSE service

Similarly, participants highlighted that the illegality and risk to boys of relationships with older women was not widely understood or recognised.

‘(When) I think of the boys that have been groomed by women..there’s still very much that ‘Wahey! Cougar!’ thing and so we don’t see it...You know if there was a 30-year-old man with a 15-year-old girl we’d be (shocked)...You even see that where there’s a man grooming a boy around ‘Well they’re just testing their sexuality’, and we wouldn’t be saying the same if it was a girl.’

CSE service

Overall, there was a sense among our interviewees that the exploitation of boys is being missed by frontline professionals, who are not understanding (or not giving due weight to) evidence of potential risks of sexual exploitation relating to boys and young men.

‘I believe that the same behaviours are viewed differently. I think people are more aware of the issue for females. They are seen as more vulnerable.’

Youth offending service

‘I think in terms of how the services deal with them, the services are more proactive probably with girls and more on the lookout for it. Whereas with boys, I think they are more willing to take the upfront answer... they might keep probing more with girls.’

Substance misuse service

²⁶ Smeaton, E (2013) Running away from hate to what you think is love: The relationship between running away and child sexual exploitation. Barnardo’s.

‘So [it’s about] whether we stop and say “Well what’s going on in this young lad’s life that he’s behaving like this?” Or whether we just accept it.’

CSE service

Interpreting boys’ behaviour

Professionals reported that the way boys’ behaviour and presentation is understood can have implications for how they are referred to support services.

‘Historically we’ve always said that boys [who are victims of CSE] are in the criminal justice system and girls are in the social services system. I think [boys] are in both, we’re just not identifying the ones that are in the social services system, and potentially maybe we’re leaving it until they’ve gone over into the criminal justice system.’

CSE service

There was a strong view that boys are more likely to communicate emotional distress by externalising it in behaviour, rather than by internalising it or talking about their problems. A research evidence assessment carried out in 2014 supports this, reporting that evidence suggests boys make fewer disclosures of abuse overall.²⁷

‘I think boys, males, are a lot more reserved than girls in talking about it anyway, so it might not come up in a conversation with another professional because they don’t really want to talk about it.’

Sexual health service

Consequently, professionals asserted that there tended to be a lack of early identification of male victims of CSE and that boys were left until their behaviour (or the trajectory of their exploitation) meant they were progressing down a criminal route.

‘If somebody is being abused in some way, it manifests in some kind of behaviour. So it can manifest itself in behaviour that’s really passive, or it can manifest itself into behaviour that’s really aggressive. But when they act out, they tend to be picked up by youth offending.’

CSE service

We interviewed a number of professionals working in specialist services addressing harmful sexual behaviour (HSB). There was a similar consensus among these participants that many of their male referrals had previously experienced sexual abuse or sexual exploitation, but had been referred for support when they became sexually aggressive.

²⁷ Brayley, H; Cockbain, E; Gibson, K (2014) Rapid evidence assessment – the sexual exploitation of boys and young men. UCL, Barnardo’s, NatCen.

'I firmly believe that the vast majority of people we see in [the HSB service] now are victims with some kind of traumatic event in their past, and a lot of the time HSB is a symptom of that.'

HSB service

Furthermore, boys were reported as being more likely to be criminalised as a consequence of this delay in identification.

'I would say, where there were clearer obvious issues of CSE, but none of these kids were in [a secure unit] on welfare orders, they were on criminal orders. They were either on remand awaiting sentence or had been sentenced to serve custody because of the nature of their sexual offending – or other offending, but it tended to be sexual offending.'

Youth offending service

The young people taking part in the focus group recognised this, and thought that professionals and other adults should improve their skills in identifying boys at risk of CSE.

'[Professionals] don't know how to recognise boys needing help.'

Focus group

Boys' understanding of, and response to, being sexually exploited

Resistance and denial in boys

Research indicates a tendency among male victims of CSE to not recognise or acknowledge their experiences as abusive in the short term, and that this denial is considerably more marked in male than female victims, though the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (APMS) found that both men and women suffer similar negative effects in the long term.²⁸

The professionals we interviewed repeatedly referred to their own observations of this playing down – or denial – of abuse by boys.

²⁸ Brayley, H; Cockbain, E; Gibson, K (2014) Rapid evidence assessment – the sexual exploitation of boys and young men. UCL, Barnardo's, NatCen.

'It was utilitarian: "I can do this; it's easy; I sometimes get some pleasure out of it, but I always get money or a bed for the night, or drugs, or beer, or a sense of affection of one kind or another. Now albeit that we know that's skewed and laden with... abusive issues, in comparison with the girls there are a lot of similarities, but there is a distinction for me in that, broadly speaking, the boys seem to have a more cursory, utilitarian view of what they did sexually than the girls did.'

HSB service

'He's clearly a victim of CSE, there's no question, but he didn't see it as that, because he saw it as, "I need money and I can go and give somebody a blow job or a hand job.'"

HSB service

'One in particular just didn't recognise that he was being abused, or had been exploited – that he was still being exploited...He was having rooms paid for him in a hotel in Cardiff...His foster carer would ring up throughout the time that we were working with him, a number of times to say, 'look, he's been beaten up'..... He was very much being exploited, but didn't recognise it as exploitation.'

HSB service

This emotional detachment from the abuse is described by the adult survivor of CSE that we spoke to. He described the way he experienced his sexual abuse as an 'action' stripped of all meaning:

'When you're being abused, you're being abused. And it's not important the sex... it's just important the action, and the action stays there forever, in memory, it's a trauma... it's not for sex, for sexuality... when you are that age you are just a teenager. You are not a man, you are only a child. Some of them don't even think about sexuality.'

Adult survivor of CSE

It has been suggested that the social constructs that exist around masculinity and what boys are expected to conform to are partly responsible for this denial.^{29 30} The professionals who participated in our research supported this view.

'There seems to be so much peer pressure on boys to cope, to internalise and not to show emotion.'

Advocacy service

29 Working Effectively to Address Child Sexual Exploitation: An evidence scope. Research in Practice 2015

30 McNaughton-Nicholls, C; Harvey, S; Paskell, C (2014) Gendered perceptions: what professionals say about the sexual exploitation of boys and young men in the UK. UCL/ Barnardo's /NatCen.

'You've got social constructs of masculinity that are going to affect how boys respond; you know that big boys don't cry'

CSE service

Professionals also communicated strongly the view that boys don't talk about being exploited and abused, and rarely disclose abuse. In their experience, where boys had disclosed, these disclosures were often swiftly withdrawn, or disclosures came much later on when young men were accessing adult services.

'I think boys are less likely to disclose, but I think professionals are more likely to ask girls as well.'

HSB service

'We've had... self-disclosure from boys that when you then address it – or when we go to a risk panel and then a professional says "I'll address this" – and then they come back and they say, "Well basically they've retracted what they said. They said it didn't happen."'

Substance misuse service

For boys and girls, being sexually abused as children can create a vulnerability to sexual exploitation as they become adolescents.³¹ Research carried out by Barnardo's in 2014 suggests that boys don't disclose exploitation because they feel far more guilt associated with their own perceived collusion in the exploitation than girls do, accompanied sometimes by fear of the power of the abuser and a desire to hold on to the 'benefits' of exploitation.³² A professional interviewed for this research illustrated a pattern observed among boys they had worked with in an HSB service, who viewed their sexual abuse as children very differently to their sexual exploitation as older children and adolescents.

'The lads that I've dealt with have been happy to acknowledge that "there's CSE stuff going on, but we'll put that over there. I want to talk to you about what happened to me when my dad [sexually abused me]..." They're a lot happier talking about the stuff they didn't like and hated, and felt violated by, and a lot less happy to talk about stuff that I suspect they see as being more morally ambivalent. Maybe ever so slightly they feel they've got a little bit more power in [it]... a sense of choice maybe, or a sense that their volition is not completely overridden.'

HSB service

Moreover, as mentioned earlier in this report, boys can be colluding with their abusers in criminal behaviour such as drug dealing and theft, which further blurs the boundaries in terms of culpability and blame.

31 Working Effectively to Address Child Sexual Exploitation: An evidence scope. Research in Practice 2015.

32 McNaughton-Nicholls, C; Harvey, S; Paskell, C (2014) Gendered perceptions: what professionals say about the sexual exploitation of boys and young men in the UK. UCL, Barnardo's, NatCen.

Boys' communication

Overall, professionals held the view that one of the key differences between boys and girls – and one which prevented sexually exploited boys from being identified – was that girls talked more readily about what had happened to them. Boys were far less able to communicate verbally, perhaps resulting from their failure to acknowledge or accept the abuse, together with a fear of how the information might be perceived and how it could reflect on them.

'Girls tend to be more verbal, happier to talk and to present as vulnerable, especially at an age approaching adolescence, where boys wouldn't want to portray themselves as vulnerable.'

Family support service

'I think boys and young men are not open for discussions around things like sexual exploitation. It's shut down quite quickly... I think it takes time to build relationships with people, before they'll start opening up to these things... There's definitely a cultural aspect... boys who just have not... talked about these things and they'll just say they're ok, you know, "I'm ok, I'm ok."'

Substance misuse service

Interestingly, one professional had noticed that this applied just as much to boys with experience of the care system, who often experience frequent telling and re-telling of their personal histories, and have more opportunities to talk to professionals about their feelings and situations.

'When you work with young people who have been brought up through the care system... they're used to telling you things, and they kind of almost want to tell you things. But I think girls are almost more willing to talk to you about that kind of stuff... whereas the boys might not...'

Substance misuse service

The boys and young men we spoke to referenced the difficulties boys have speaking about their experiences, and described the issues that would prevent a boy feeling safe enough to talk.

'They will never talk about it because [other people may think] maybe you like it, maybe you are gay, maybe, you know, it was your fault, maybe you provoked it.'

Adult survivor of CSE

There was a view in the focus group that professionals needed to acknowledge how hard it is for boys to come to terms with, and discuss, issues of sexual exploitation and an idea that maybe they should not be expected to discuss them at all.

‘Boys find it hard to talk about things’

‘They should be allowed not to talk about it.’

Focus group

However, with regard to initial identification, the adult CSE survivor we interviewed suggested a more proactive approach.

‘Yes you need to be asking, you need to be probing, probably with some questionnaire, where they are anonymous so they can feel free to explain the situation,’

‘As I told you, you can easily keep it inside your mind, forget about it, then remove it and keep going on. So I would never come to you and tell you look, I have had this experience’

Adult survivor of CSE

Some professionals considered that boys communicated their responses to trauma by acting them out through negative or antisocial behaviour, and that professionals should be encouraged not to take such behaviour at face value but to be curious about what emotions and experiences were driving it.

‘I think it takes a long time for males to trust, and I know that evidence shows that referrals have come through youth offending teams, because what we find with males is they display their trauma in different ways to females. So they tend to display the trauma through aggression, through criminal activity. They come through the criminal justice system and, if they’re lucky, there will be someone in the criminal justice system who will take some time to sit down and talk with that young person. They build up that relationship, and the referral... comes through.’

CSE service

The impact of same-sex abuse

For both boys and girls, the majority of abusers are male.³³ A number of professionals reported observing that the sexual exploitation of heterosexual or questioning boys by males could lead to confusion about their sexuality. Unless this can be addressed, it can become a barrier to disclosure, resulting in the abuse remaining hidden.

‘The reason why a male [described] themselves, well at least a couple of the ones I have looked at, as confused was because a male had taken advantage

³³ Brayley, H; Cockbain, E; Gibson, K (2014) Rapid evidence assessment – the sexual exploitation of boys and young men. UCL/Barnardo’s/NatCen.

of them. A predatory male has taken advantage of them and in turn they then felt confused about their own sexuality. But there is no confusion, is there? They have been a victim, they are then reluctant to disclose and be open about it because they think, “I must be gay, I have had sex with that male.” No, you have been raped by that male or you have had a male take advantage of you because they have paid you money.’

Missing/CSE service

‘If you’re a heterosexual boy and you’ve been sexually exploited by a male and you’ve been anally raped, are you really going to be talking about those things? Again it goes back to the social construct. Big boys don’t cry, we don’t talk, and then somebody’s actually taken away your masculinity, taken away your power and control’

CSE service

It is possible for boys to experience eroticism while being abused.³⁴ One professional spoke about the complex emotional responses of boys who have exchanged sex for drugs.

“I can’t believe I’ve let myself do that” and “it goes against everything I stand for.” “My family... the group of people that I’m around, if they ever knew that this happened the implications of that would be massive.” [Young people can feel] all those different things... and then it’s that kind of trying to guess what the outcome could be from it... It could be just kissing... and they have mustered up some real emotions... right through to, you know, having a full blown sexual experience with another male, which is on another level... more difficult.’

Substance misuse service

Boys fear that assumptions may be made about their sexual identity, as a consequence of what they may view as an exchange of sex for something in which they have had some agency and control.³⁵ This is a barrier to understanding the limited choices available to them, and the power imbalance that exists between them and their exploiter.

‘Boys who have been sexually exploited could be seen as like a little bit effeminate or a wimp or, you know, something like that, something not really male and macho, and I think that can be one of the barriers.’

Equalities organisation

³⁴ Brayley, H; Cockbain, E; Gibson, K (2014) Rapid evidence assessment – the sexual exploitation of boys and young men. UCL/Barnardo’s/NatCen

³⁵ McNaughton-Nicholls, C; Harvey, S; Paskell, C (2014) Gendered perceptions: what professionals say about the sexual exploitation of boys and young men in the UK. UCL, Barnardo’s, NatCen.

As the adult survivor interviewed explained:

‘Until you are secure and you feel safe and you feel secure about your sexuality, you cannot talk about it.’

Adult survivor of CSE

Some professionals had worked with homosexual boys and young men who had limited access to support, acceptance, and opportunities to explore their sexuality in a safe environment. Some of these young men had experienced sexual exploitation, but as with the heterosexual boys, they found it difficult to accept that they have been exploited.

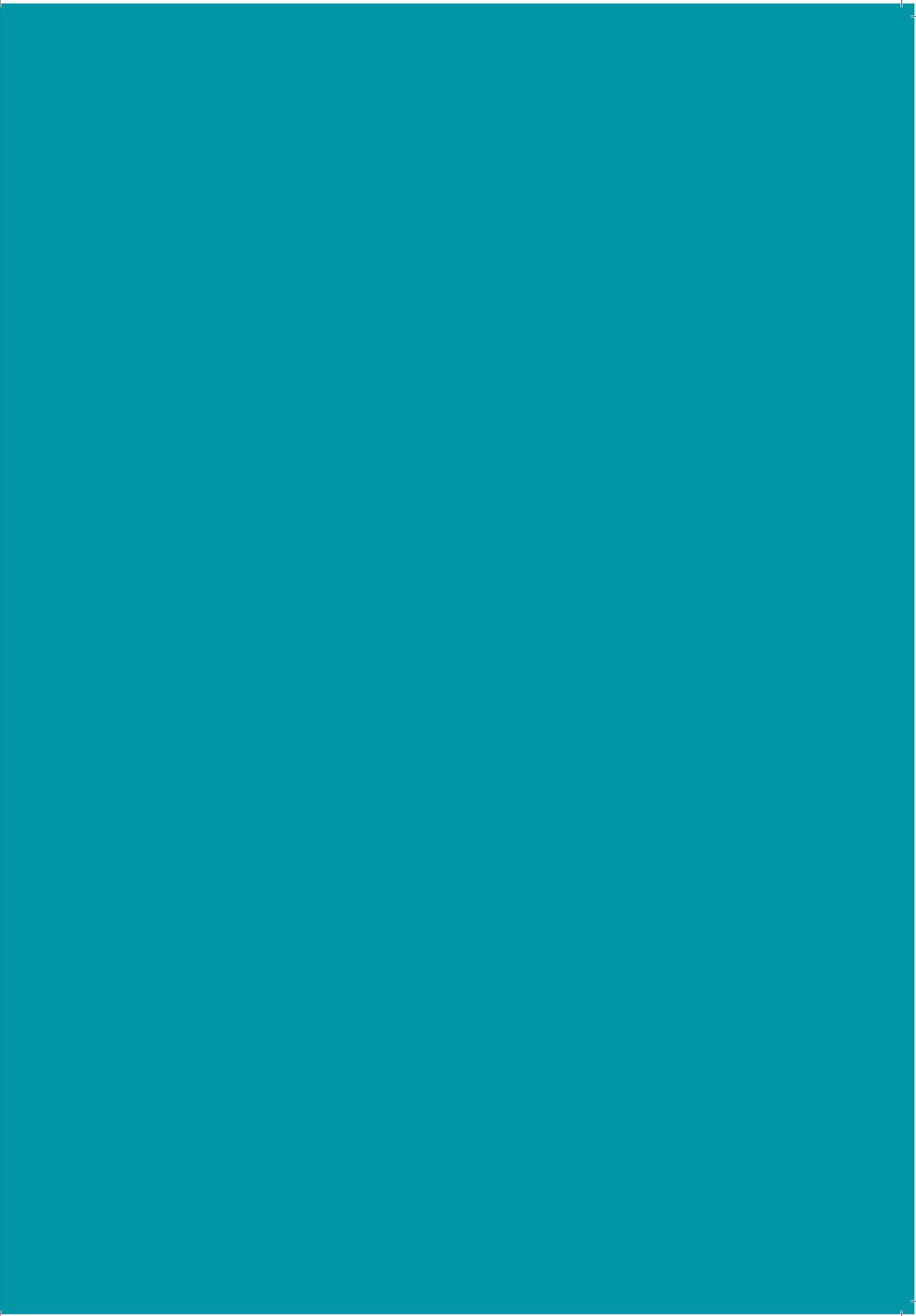
‘His first gay sexual experience was at 12... and his boyfriend was 28... And first session this came out..., and I was like, “You did not see that as a problem?” No, that wasn’t a problem. He wanted it and enjoyed it, you know, the same old thing. By the end of the sessions he actually sat there and said, “Yeah, you know, I can see it now. I can see how I was used by him.”’

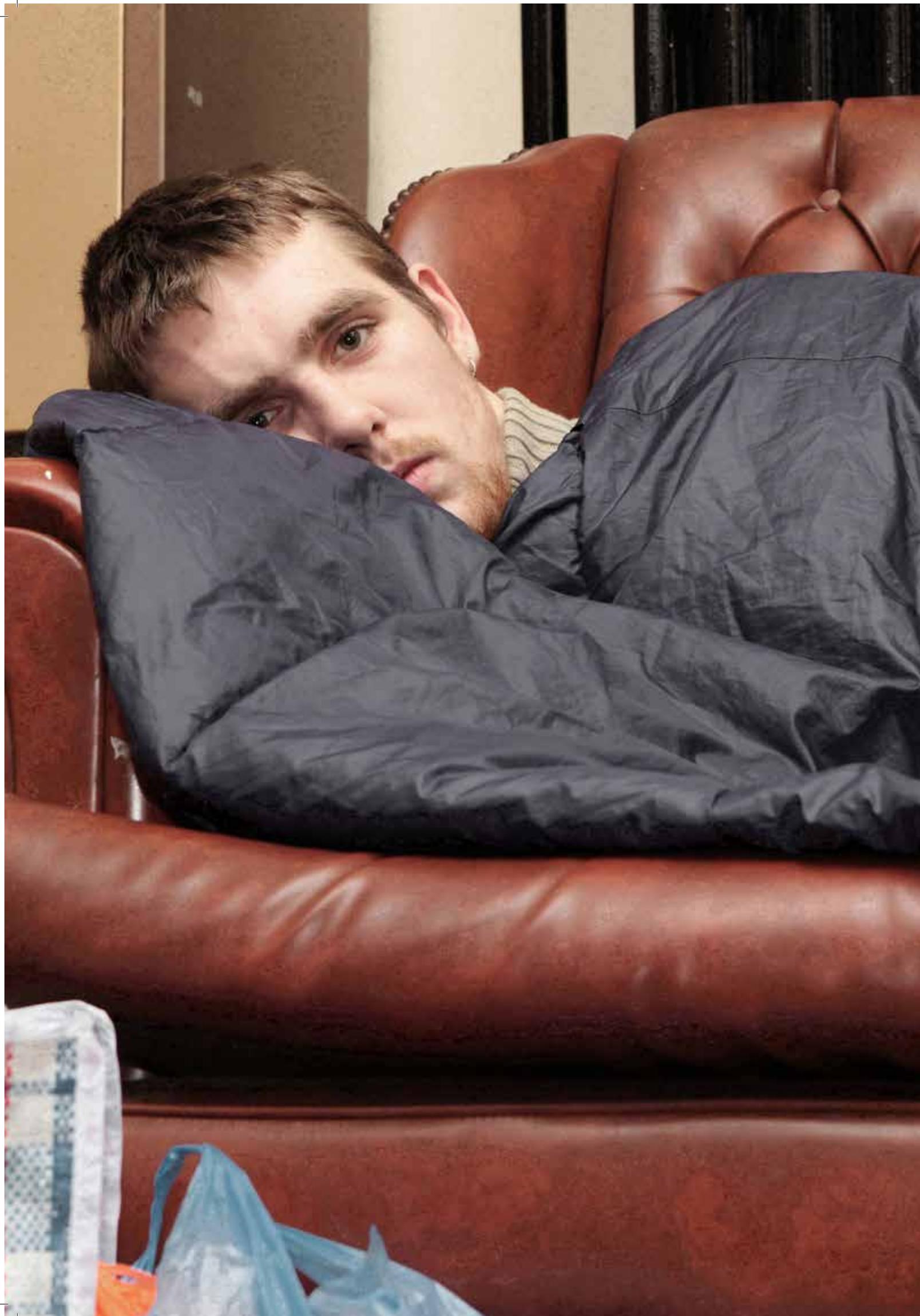
Sexual health service

Key findings

- There is evidence that sexual stereotypes often play a part in the interpretation of boys’ behaviour, with negative behaviour being taken at face value and not explored, or understood, as a potential response to trauma, as is more likely to be the case with girls.
 - Professionals are more likely to view boys as aggressors rather than victims, based on their behaviour.
 - There is evidence that professionals do not give some CSE risk indicators the same weight for boys as they do for girls.
 - Boys are viewed as being more resistant than girls to recognising and accepting that they have been sexually exploited. For this reason, it was the experience of support workers that boys needed more time to establish trusting relationships with them.
- Some boys are keenly affected by sexual stereotypes, and require a practice approach which actively avoids further disempowerment.
- Heterosexual boys who have been exploited by males can experience confusion about their sexuality which induces guilt, fear and distress. This can represent a significant barrier to disclosure and seeking help.
- Gay, bisexual or questioning boys who are made vulnerable through discrimination within their homes and communities can be at risk of entering same-sex relationships which are exploitative.

- Boys with learning disabilities which reduce their ability to understand new or complex information, learn new skills and to cope independently are at increased risk of sexual exploitation.
- CSE is currently viewed as an offence primarily affecting girls and young women, and this is a barrier to the identification of boys at risk of, or experiencing, CSE.





Section three

Service improvement

Professionals made a number of key suggestions for practice and service improvement.

- Ensuring that all boys and young men have access to good quality, gender – balanced, healthy relationships education.
- Improving identification, intervention and prevention of sexual exploitation by raising awareness among professionals and carers of the vulnerability of boys and young men, and the risks they experience.
- Improving service opportunities for boys and young men to discuss the issues affecting male sexual development and sexual identity in safe supportive environments.
- Making improvements to the ways services working with vulnerable young people engage with at-risk boys and young men, by diversifying the range of approaches used.
- Improving the opportunities for gay, bisexual and questioning boys and young men to meet socially in safe, supportive environments

Educating and informing young people about healthy relationships and child sexual exploitation (CSE)

The professionals we interviewed expressed concern that future development of information and educational materials addressing healthy relationships and CSE – and their delivery – should be informed by, and address the needs of boys and young men. Professionals currently experience a lack of gender balance in educational tools and feel that this has an impact on the messaging on healthy relationships. At best, these resources risk missing boys and young men who are victims and, at worst, they serve to further reinforce the sexual stereotypes which undermine the quality of boys' and girls' relationships.

'When you get the material for sexual exploitation – the videos people have made – they're brill, but there's so much about girls. It is always about girls, isn't it? And when we have conversations it's always leading to girls.'

Sexual health service

'Resources are more female-orientated, which is not helping staff to think about boys and healthy relationships.'

Youth offending service

'And again, if you look at CEOP, which is used in schools, there [is] only one DVD on CEOP that is male exploitation, and lots and lots and lots of female DVDs. So even CEOP's resources that are used by the school [are] very focused on females, not males.'

CSE service

The young people we spoke to also agreed that their experience of resources to educate and raise awareness about CSE was that most contained gender bias.

'Videos are often about girl's sexual exploitation.'

'Need to minimise the stereotypical approaches to relationship education – it gets me mad sometimes.'

Focus group

Professionals recognised that many of the most high-risk boys and young men may not access mainstream education, and for this reason educational programmes also need to be delivered in a more targeted way.

'I think schools are good because it's generic, but... we need to be in the PRUs [pupil referral units], because that's where our vulnerable children are... Like last night, there were more boys in the youth provision than there were girls. So I think we need to get to those informal educational places you know and... if we're saying that boys are in the criminal justice system, then we need to be focusing there as well.'

CSE service

Raising awareness with professionals and carers

There is an improved public awareness of CSE due to the criminal convictions reported in the media over the past four years. However, the view of professionals was that it is still treated as an issue predominantly affecting girls.

'Although the message to the general public is gradually getting out there about CSE, and people are becoming more aware of the issues, it still is about girls.'

Family support service

An evidence scope carried out as part of the Greater Manchester project on CSE³⁶ reported that, 'CSE is, unarguably, linked to male violence to women and girls', but that, 'boys are also exploited and women are perpetrators, often having been victims themselves.' The report warned that, 'simplistic assertions about gender are not helpful.'³⁷

³⁶ Working Effectively to Address Child Sexual Exploitation: An evidence scope. Research in Practice 2015.

³⁷ Working Effectively to Address Child Sexual Exploitation: An evidence scope. Research in Practice 2015.

There was a sense among professionals that overall there was less awareness of the risks to boys of CSE, and that this could lead to issues being overlooked. Training and awareness-raising was suggested, particularly for staff working with those known to be vulnerable and those working in services used by high numbers of boys and young men.

'I definitely think in terms of unpicking more with boys it's about up-skilling staff, making them aware, but also – I would say – targeting those services that already work with the really vulnerable kids. It is the looked-after teams or the leaving care teams, it is the youth homelessness teams, youth offending services, the ones that are already working disproportionately with boys that definitely we should be targeting.'

Youth offending service

There was some discussion around the SERAF risk assessment tool with some professionals suggesting it was orientated towards girls. Although, the majority of professionals felt that the vulnerabilities and risk factors for both boys and girls were broadly similar. However, tweaking some of the wording of the SERAF to ensure its gender neutrality was suggested.

'When we look at the significant risk indicators, those risk indicators are definitely present when it comes to the boys, so I think it hits the mark. I just think it's the language that's used, so I think if it was to get rid of the "older boyfriend" so it would just say "relationship with controlling adult or peer".'

CSE service

Professional discomfort at discussing sexual exploitation issues with boys was also identified as a problem in ensuring the SERAF tool was used effectively. Some suggested this could be due to anxiety relating to social stereotypes.

'I think it may just be that we're not perhaps so comfortable with asking the questions for boys perhaps as we are for girls.'

Sexual health service

'I think there's probably two things – it may be that there's risk factors that aren't there, or it may just be the way that professionals interpret the tool or use the tool which are you know, influenced by kind of society's values around boys. I'm thinking that's probably more likely to be the case.'

CSE service

For those professionals who are most likely to come across at-risk boys in their services, it was suggested that risk factors for CSE should be considered as part of other assessment tools and processes.

‘Assessment tools, screening tools, induction tools for residential homes, secure units... need to include the risk factors around CSE. Are there unexplained amounts of money? Are there people ringing up that the family don’t recognise, or that the care home don’t recognise? Does the kid go missing overnight and come back with stuff he didn’t leave with? Is there the physical stuff? Urinary tract infection? Genital problems? STDs? The sorts of stuff that can be there but might not be in our minds.’

Youth offending service

More safe spaces for boys and young men to discuss sexual development and relationships

As well as good-quality information and healthy relationships education, it was felt that boys should also have opportunities for follow-up support, which might involve small group work, or the opportunity for confidential one-to-one support. This was in part to ensure that boys could have the chance to think through the more emotionally sensitive aspects of their sexual feelings and experiences.

‘With boys it’s a little bit more difficult because of adolescence and their feelings and emotions... which are sometimes giving them mixed messages. I’ve had some boys say to me [that] they thought they were gay once. They’ve never had the opportunity to speak to someone else where they’ve said that’s normal, other boys have been through that, because sometimes it’s difficult for other boys to be able to openly say, “oh yeah, I’ve had feelings and thoughts about boys”, because then that would be it for them, you know, so those experiences and an outlet to have that are non-existent.’

Substance misuse service

‘Going into schools is a good idea, but also you’re going to need to do the small group work... because with boys there’s a lot of bravado’

CSE service

The adult survivor we interviewed made the point that, while the issue could be raised in a group situation, private, confidential one-to-one work should also be available as a follow-on. Nobody should be expected to disclose or talk about a personal abuse experience within a group situation.

‘talking to the whole lot of them, explaining the situation, explaining what are the first signs that make you alert, and then talking one by one together, because that’s the only way that they can open themselves, when they feel safe and they know that everything is going to be anonymous, no-one can point the finger on them, and no-one can judge, no-one can wind them up.’

‘keep it private because otherwise they will feel like they’re abused for a second time.’

Adult survivor of CSE

Professionals reported that there are often limited opportunities available, both in rural and urban settings, for gay, bisexual and questioning boys to socialise with other LGBTQ young people in safe environments local to where they live. Coupled with discriminatory social attitudes, this can sometimes mean that LGBTQ young people struggle to find acceptance in their homes and communities, and can increase their risk of exposure to sexual exploitation.

‘We don’t have much of an LGBT society... and because we don’t have much of a scene... I don’t see then how young people have that opportunity to explore, or to ask questions, or be able to find like-minded people that they can open up to.’

Substance misuse service

Ensuring that there is a network of well-promoted support (including LGBTQ youth services) for young people in each locality will bring multi-faceted benefits, one aspect of which will be that vulnerable LGBTQ young people will be less exposed to the risk of CSE.

Diversifying the range of approaches to working with vulnerable young people

While professionals recognised similarities in the needs of boys and girls, they also suggested that a range of approaches might be required at the outset of any work to increase the opportunity for engaging boys and young men.

‘The approach that we use... around building relationships is to take young people out into their community, take them for food as we know food is nurturing. And I think it’s quite ok for a 16 or 17-year-old female to be with a practitioner in their 30s, it looks ok, it’s [a] mum and daughter relationship, it can be [an] older sister relationship. I think the boys feel awkward going into those environments. So we have to look at how we engage them, whether that’s going to play pool, going for drives in the car, down to the beach, those types of things. It’s a different kind of activity that we need to bring the boys in than [for the] girls.’

CSE service

‘How you talk to young boys is different. Boys... aren’t going to sit down and tell you about their feelings straight away, but if you go and play pool with them or do an activity and get them engaged in something, you can start talking to them a lot more.’

CSE service

Specialist professionals’ experiences of working with boys who had experienced CSE were that the process of engaging them took longer than it did with girls, and that the practitioner should be aware of social stereotypes and how they may have impacted on the boys’ feelings of self-esteem and identity.

‘I think people have to stop and think about what engages boys. I think there has to be recognition that boys are different from girls in lots of ways. Obviously there’s lots of commonalities as well, but there are lots of differences, so in terms of how you engage with boys, particularly around these subject matters, because that whole societal thing about boys not being victims, well boys share that as well. They share that idea that they can’t be victims, particularly in a sexual context, so that’s something that’s really difficult to overcome.’

CSE service

‘The work that you start doing with them is about trying to give back that power and control, so I think it’s not helpful when we start calling them victims, because again I think we’re taking some of their power away. It can be the same with girls, and I suppose that’s why here we tend to talk about young people as survivors and not victims.’

CSE service

‘It’s really hard for males to talk. Really, really hard, and I think the difference is we need to understand that males are going to take much longer to open up. Work with males needs to be done over a longer period of time than with females because it’s hidden with females, [but] it’s even more hidden with males, and they find it very hard to speak out about, because of that whole... [issue] around their sexuality and them being judged, being believed.’

CSE service

Some professionals suggested it might be easier for certain boys to engage with male practitioners. Overall, professionals felt it would be good if the young person could have a choice between a male or female support worker, but that it was the quality of the relationship that ultimately enabled the relationship to work, and not the gender of the support worker.

Apart from the challenge of engaging with boys, the only other possible difference between working with girls and boys, as described by specialist professionals, was that boys might need more time. However, professionals may hold this view due to the lack of experience, and thus confidence, they have in working through the issues with boys.

Ensuring that services are putting out clear messages that CSE can affect boys and young men as well as girls and young women was thought to be an important development that needed to take place.

Professionals suggested ensuring that media information and promotional materials for services addressing CSE were inclusive, including images of males and their stories in these communications. Such materials need to put out a clear message that sexual exploitation can happen to boys, and that there are services open to boys which can be accessed equally alongside girls.

'I think we definitely have to get away from the stereotype image of female exploitation... Society has that perception that it is females that this happens to and not males. I think we do have to raise advertising campaigns, media in schools, and awareness really around in youth clubs, hostels, all those kind of environments, to have the same level of knowledge out there as we've got for females.'

CSE service

The young people we spoke to also noted that a strong public message to boys was required.

'First of all you're going to let them know that there is an opportunity, second of all you've got to let them know that there is a problem that they can face.'

Adult survivor of CSE

'Boys don't want to come forward because they might not know that there is a service for them.'

'Lack of visible images.'

Focus group

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: All school-aged children and young people should have access to healthy relationships education which is gender balanced and inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) young people.

Recommendation 2: Educational materials and support information on CSE should be sufficiently diverse in range to be gender balanced and to be LGBTQ inclusive. These materials should also be accessible to those with a learning disability.

Recommendation 3: The provision of information and specific programmes of work should be targeted at high-risk groups of boys including:

- those in care
- care leavers
- those accessing youth homelessness services, youth offending services, substance misuse services, and learning disability services
- those on the fringes of the education and criminal justice services.

Recommendation 4: Awareness-raising and training on the vulnerability of boys to CSE should be made available to professionals working with vulnerable boys and young men, particularly in the services listed above.

Recommendation 5: Information and awareness raising materials should be made available to parents and carers including how to support young people to use the internet and social media safely.

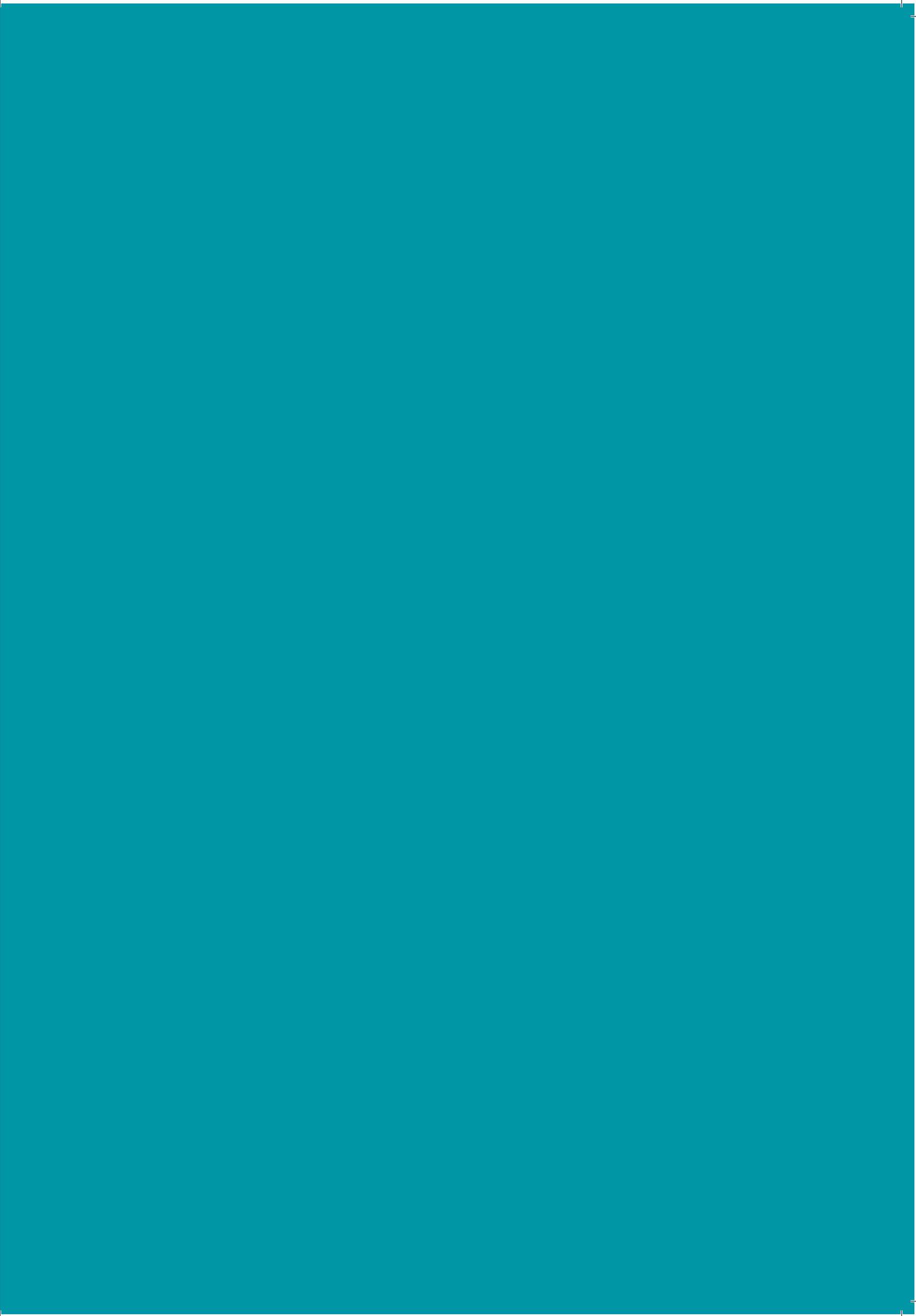
Recommendation 6: The SERAF (Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework) should be reviewed to ensure that the language used, and context outlined, is gender neutral.

Recommendation 7: Gay, bisexual and questioning boys and young men require access to a wider range of safe, offline LGBTQ opportunities to socialise and access support, particularly in more deprived urban communities, communities in the South Wales Valleys and in rural communities.

Recommendation 8: Services working with vulnerable, high-risk children and young people should ensure they present themselves as inclusive, and should promote a clear message that they are open and able to work with boys and girls alike.

Recommendation 9: Professionals working with vulnerable boys who may be at risk of CSE should diversify their range of practice approaches to increase the opportunity for boys and young men to engage in support.

Recommendation 10: There should be stronger joint working between specialist CSE services, substance misuse services and youth offending services to improve the identification, engagement and support of boys affected by CSE





Appendix

Research design and methods

Study design

The research sample was drawn from those professionals working most closely with high-risk groups of boys and young men across the four police force areas in Wales. We aimed to interview a representative sample of professionals working with vulnerable boys and young men across a range of statutory and voluntary sectors. It was possible to cover all our target sectors in two of the four police areas, and we ended up carrying out six more interviews than we had originally intended. These consisted of colleagues of professionals we had approached who were interested in making a contribution, and interviews with professionals who didn't fit with our original target groups, but who clearly had valid and important contributions to make, such as those working in projects supporting sex workers.

In total, we were able to interview 42 professionals from across Wales, covering all four police force areas, and our participants included representation from the following sectors:

- the police
- social services
- education
- sexual health services
- substance misuse services
- youth offending teams
- homelessness services
- advocacy services
- family support services
- equalities organisations
- specialist services addressing: child sexual exploitation (CSE), harmful sexual behaviour (HSB)

We originally aimed to interview between 6 and 15 boys and young men aged between 16 and 25, who had experience of being at risk of, or involved in, CSE. This proved very difficult to achieve. The highly sensitive nature of the issue, and the low number of boys identified and referred to services, meant that even where boys were being worked with they were reluctant to engage in research interviews, or professionals working with them decided that they were too vulnerable. We approached the following services seeking the participation of boys:

- Barnardo's Cymru specialist CSE and HSB services, and services working with care leavers and homeless young people
- substance misuse services working with young people across Wales
- private residential care organisations across Wales
- an LGBT service for young people.

When this resulted in no individuals coming forward to participate, we approached organisations who worked with young people in groups, and organisations working with vulnerable adults. These included adult substance misuse services and homeless support services in one Welsh city, and two

children's organisations working with vulnerable young people in groups.

The outcome of this was that we were able to engage, via a focus group, with 20 young people, both boys and girls aged between 10 and 18, who were part of a junior safeguarding board. This group included at least four boys who had been sexually exploited, though as researchers we were not aware of their identities. It also included a girl who had been sexually exploited, and who made herself known to us. We were also contacted through an adult substance misuse service by a young adult survivor of sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse. This person met with us and participated in an in-depth, semi-structured interview.

Research methods

This qualitative research draws on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 42 professionals working across Wales. The interviews were conducted face to face or over the phone. There is representation from across all four police force areas and the interviews capture a comprehensive range of views from professionals working with vulnerable boys and young men in the statutory and voluntary sectors.

Interviews with professionals focused on:

- roles and responsibilities relating to young people with experience/at risk of CSE
- the SERAF assessment tool and how this is used to identify risk for boys and young men
- perceptions of the features of male CSE
- perceptions of how male experience of CSE compares to female experience
- perceptions of risk factors for boys and young men
- barriers and facilitators to identifying and engaging with at-risk boys or those with experience of CSE.

Our engagements with the young people's focus group and the adult survivor of CSE focused on the following issues:

- the ways a vulnerable or at-risk boy might present, and what professionals should look out for in boys
- perceptions of any differences between the way boys and girls experience CSE
- ideas about what approaches or environments might feel safe enough for boys to start talking about these issues
- experiences boys and young men may have had of being well supported
- perceptions of barriers to getting help
- information and support boys might need to help them keep safe in relationships.

Ethics

The research was approved by the Barnardo's Research Ethics Committee (BREC). The study adhered to required ethical research practice as laid out in the *Barnardo's Statement of Ethical Research Practice (which is available on request)* which draws on the British Sociological Association (March 2004) *Statement of Ethical Practice* and the National Children's Bureau (May 2003) *Guidelines for Research*. 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.

The research observed the principles of informed voluntary consent, anonymity and confidentiality. Participants were given information about the study and signed consent was obtained before the interviews and focus group. Participants could decline being interviewed at any stage without negative consequences.

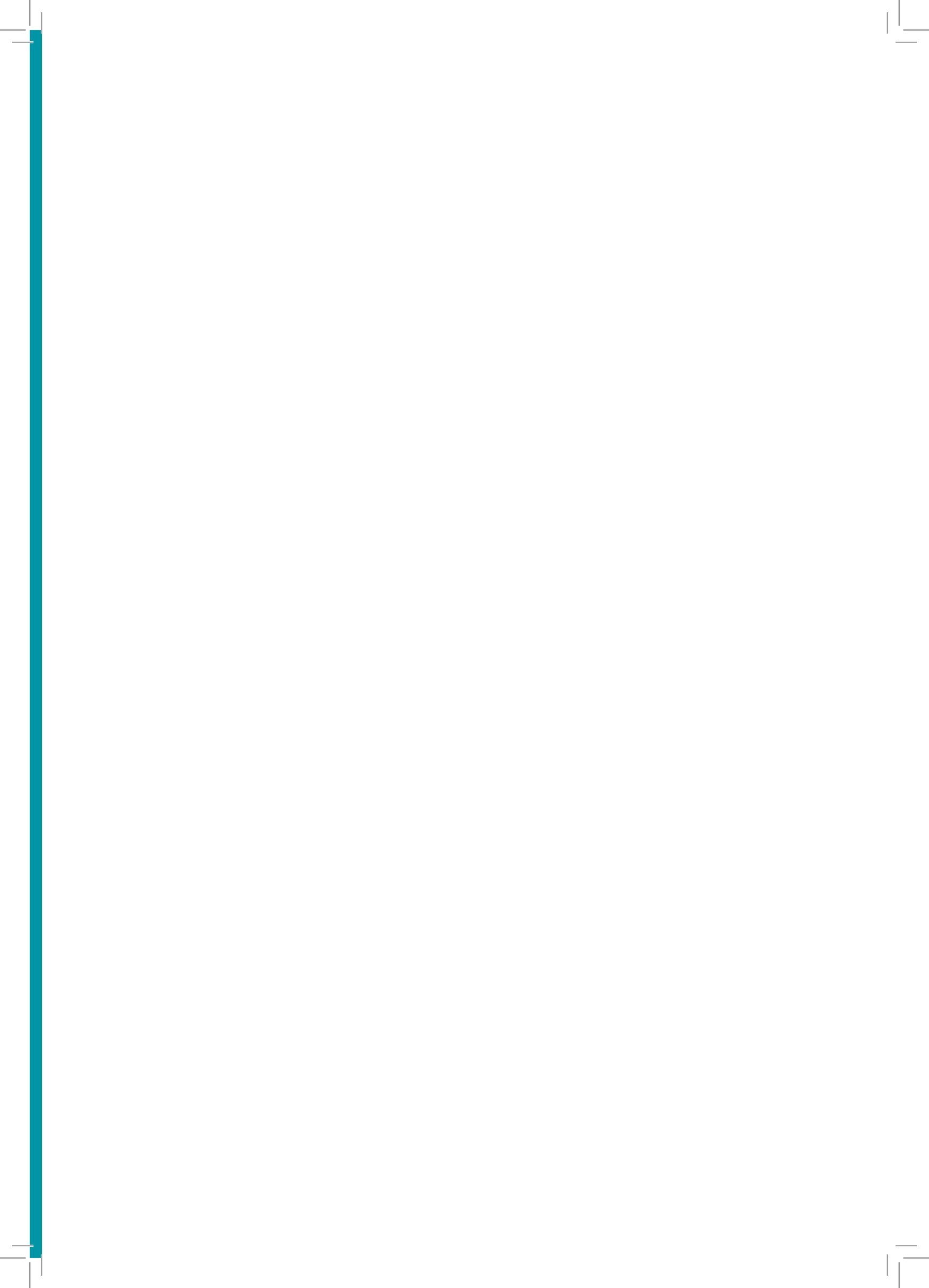
Due to the particular vulnerability of some of the participants interviewed, a number of measures were put in place to ensure their safety and emotional wellbeing.

All research data was stored and managed in line with the Data Protection Act.

Data analysis

All audio recordings were fully transcribed. Interviews and the focus group discussions were analysed using a constant comparative approach. Transcripts were read by research team members and an analytic framework developed, based on emergent themes. The data was analysed using NVivo 9.





'I Never Spoke About It'...

Supporting sexually exploited boys and young men in Wales

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The report was compiled
by Menna Thomas and
Elaine Speyer

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Barnardo's
Cymru

www.barnardos.org.uk

Head Office, Tanners Lane,
Barkingside, Ilford,
Essex IG6 1QG
Tel: 020 8550 8822

Barnardo's Registered Charity Nos.
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