

Institution: University of Bedfordshire
Unit of Assessment: 22 - Social Work and Social Policy
Title of case study: Safeguarding young people affected by sexual violence and exploitation
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Child protection policy and practice has largely ignored young people's experiences of child sexual exploitation (CSE) and peer-on-peer violence. Law enforcement and child protection responses are not integrated, resulting in oversimplified interpretations of young people's victimhood and criminality. As the only research centre in Europe exclusively targeting these problems, <i>The International Centre: Researching Child Sexual Exploitation, Violence and Trafficking</i> has had direct impact on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy: using research findings to create safeguarding tools for all English Local Safeguarding Children's Boards; evaluating service provision, actively informing Scottish, Irish and English government departments; advising The Council of Europe and Eurochild; attracting funding for CSE prevention in six European countries; • Practice: actively working with four UK children's charities to prevent CSE; directing funding to CSE practitioners by coordinating over 23 funding trusts; running a 'CSE research forum' which engages with over 500 practitioners and researchers, • Sexually exploited young people: advocating child centred evidence practice-based interventions, promoting innovative child centred ethical research and integrating the voices of over 800 young people from the UK into policy and research agendas. Enabling victims of CSE to gain internships and employment, improving their assertiveness through media training and offering opportunities for skill development through creative art and film activities.
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Introduction:</p> <p>We utilise our expertise in child protection, youth justice, social policy and child participation. Our work is unique in that it reaches out to and engages with young people affected by CSE and sexual violence as actors in creating change through research and related activities. We have undertaken 36 externally funded projects and attracted £1.56 million since 2008 for research within two interrelated impact areas; 'Policy and practice' and 'research with 'hard to reach' young people'.</p> <p>Policy and practice:</p> <p>Sexually exploited young people had historically been criminalized for prostitution offences. Our research of women's retrospective accounts of entering prostitution revealed that they were victims of child abuse rather than 'willful villains' and our evaluation of three exit programmes for young people abused through prostitution found that multi-agency strategies matching interventions to risk levels facilitated exit most effectively [3.1]. In this and other research, we found that poverty was a significant causal factor for children becoming victims of CSE [3.2].</p> <p>Further work demonstrated that over a quarter of 55 victims of child sexual exploitation (CSE) faced multiple problems, including criminalization for behaviour resulting from abuse [3.3]. Subsequently:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our interviews with 48 young offending gang members in the UK [3.4] and ongoing findings (2011-13) from 188 young people affected by sexual exploitation and sexual violence in gang-affected neighbourhoods in the UK, evidenced the damaging relationship between social deprivation, violence and abuse, finding that sexual violence and exploitation is integral to gang crime. This is unique as it brings law enforcement and child protection strategies together with young people to address gender-based sexual violence. • Our review of 144 local safeguarding children boards' (LSCB) responses to CSE [3.5] revealed that less than a quarter integrated child protection and law enforcement responses and only 10% were effective in safeguarding exploited children. • Our research with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) on practitioners' responses to trafficked young people revealed a 'culture of disbelief' where child protection concerns were overlooked and children criminalized for actions resulting from exploitation [3.6].

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- At a European level, our review of European initiatives to engage children in stopping sexual violence in 43 countries found that only 5% of the countries had active policies engaging children to prevent sexual violence. The 'Our Voices project' (2012 ongoing) is targeting research with 6 European countries to share methods of engaging children in work to prevent sexual violence they experience.

Research with 'hard to reach' Young People:

Our innovative participatory methods have involved over 800 'hard to reach' young people in England representing their voices through art work, film and booklet productions. We have trained and supported them as advisors on research teams, media outputs and policy forums. Our creative 'life story' activities arising from street-based outreach with those selling sex engaged hitherto marginalized young people in research activities, supporting them to advise on recommendations for service delivery design and dissemination of research findings [3.1,3.3]. Our research with marginalised exploited young people has underpinned our research published through academic outputs and through creative film media productions by and for young people themselves. Alongside promoting marginalised children's voices this body of work has generated a strong ethical framework statement available to inform future research with children facing complex disadvantage and abuse avail.

3. References to the research

- 3.1 Melrose, M with Barrett, D (2004) Anchors in Floating Lives: Interventions with young people abused through prostitution. Lyme Regis: Russell House publishers. *The first evaluation of CSE services summarised in this core text used in government guidance and child protection training on sexual exploitation.*
- 3.2 Melrose, M (2010) 'What's Love Got to Do With It? Theorising Young People's Involvement in Prostitution', Special edition Co- Editor (with J Pearce) Youth and Policy Special Edition, 'Sexual Trafficking and young people' No. 104. *The first compilation of journal articles within one edition providing a critical overview of the relationship between discourses on child protection, trafficking and sexual exploitation.*
- 3.3 Pearce, JJ (2009) Young people and sexual exploitation: It isn't hidden, you just aren't looking London: Routledge Falmer. *An overview of past and current CSE policy and practice and lessons from research in the UK.*
- 3.4 Pitts J (2008) Reluctant Gangsters: The Changing Face of Youth Crime, London, Willan/Routledge. *Cited as a lead publication in understanding youth violence in gang affected neighbourhoods.*
- 3.5 Pearce, JJ (2013) 'What's Going On' to safeguard children and young people from child sexual exploitation: A review of Local Safeguarding Children Boards' work to protect children from sexual exploitation?' Child Abuse Review first published online, 21 JUN 2013 DOI: 10.1002/car.2269. *Documenting research findings used in central government policy developments in CSE and child protection staff training*
- 3.6 Pearce, JJ (2011) 'Working with Trafficked Children and Young People: Complexities in Practice' British Journal of Social Work 41(8): 1424-14416. *A detailed research report summary used for NSPCC staff training.*

4. Details of the impact

We demonstrate impact from the two areas of research outlined above: Policy and Practice interventions; and research with 'hard to reach' young people.

Policy and practice:

Our body of research into CSE informed the 2000 and 2009 Government guidance noting that children selling sex were victims of abuse, and promoting multi-agency work to link child protection and law enforcement strategies to protect children [5.1]. Our two-year national review of 144 LSCB's implementation of the 2009 government guidance revealed that only one quarter of LSCBs were protecting children and prosecuting abusers of CSE. This informed the 'UK Action Plan Tackling Child Sexual exploitation' (2011), which referred to our research evidence on 15 occasions [5.2]. We acted as academic advisors for The UK Police Child Exploitation Online Protection Service (CEOP) thematic assessment of police interventions to protect children from CSE who used our research on five occasions to evidence the need for multi-agency interventions and for staff training on CSE [5.3]. A current review of LSCB and police responses to CSE undertaken by the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England (OCC) Inquiry into CSE in gangs and groups to be published in late

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2013, shows the impact of our work, with 68% of 97 LSCBs recording progression in collecting data since 2011 using tools adapted from our research outputs. Fifty-three percent have now established CSE sub-groups to oversee local policy and practice following recommendations from our research [5.4, 5.9].

Our researchers are actively involved in influencing government responses to protect children. Pearce is a member and invited speaker to the Government 'Roundtable' implementing the UK Action Plan 2011 'Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation'. Attended by three government ministers, policy leads of major children's charities and committed MPs from all parties, this roundtable is implementing child protection policies to safeguard children from sexual exploitation. Pearce chairs the Eurochild Child Participation Reference Group, incorporating marginalised children's voices into conference presentation and written materials, and is a member of Eurochild Policy Steering group, working on each to specifically challenge child sexual exploitation [5.5]. As result of the reach of this work, practitioners and policy makers supported her successful bid for funding from the Oak Foundation for the 'Our Voices' Project: facilitating children's involvement in policy to protect them from CSE. Pearce's work as rapporteur with the Council of Europe and with Eurochild has led to her being an invited expert advising Bulgaria on safeguarding children affected by sexual violence and exploitation throughout the process of deinstitutionalisation from residential care. The impact of the work on advancing CSE as a core safeguarding issue for has been recognised through the award of The 2013 Queens Anniversary Prize for applied research on child sexual exploitation: noting the work to hold strategic national importance, influencing UK policy and practice.

Pitts' studies of violent youth gangs in three London boroughs informed the deliberations of Ian Duncan Smith's Centre for Social Justice 'Working party on youth gangs', facilitating the awareness of peer-on-peer violence and sexual exploitation. Pitts consulted for this group which was composed of leading national experts in the fields of crime, justice, child and adolescent social care and safeguarding care. Its report, *Dying to Belong* (2009), cited Pitts work 40 times and adopted his gang definition [5.6]. This definition was subsequently adopted by the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Metropolitan Police Service and the government's national gang strategy, published in 2011 as '*Ending Gang and Youth Violence*,' in which his work is cited 5 times advocating the need for multi-agency responses to gang violence [5.7]. His research also had an impact in the area of child and adolescent safeguarding, and the London Children Safeguarding Board report (2009), *Safeguarding Children Affected by Gang Activity and/or Serious Youth Violence*, cites his work 15 times. As rapporteur, Pitts advised the Prime Minister's International Gangs Forum (Oct 2011) including William Bratton, the high-profile American police chief. Forum participants included representatives from police departments and social welfare agencies from all over Europe and North America. Pitts is now a member of the expert advisory group steering the UK national strategy 'Preventing Gang Violence'.

Finally, recognising the impact of our work, new developments arising include:

- Working with Oxford University on a new ESRC seminar series titled 'Fostering teenagers: challenges, theories and research'.
- Developing the evaluation of new Child Sexual Exploitation Services funded through the CSE Funders Alliance, for whom Pearce acts as coordinator. Pearce is managing the collaboration of over 23 major trusts and funders who are promoting practice-based interventions to prevent child sexual exploitation by funding 16 new CSE services from 2012-2015.

Research with hard to reach young people

Through externally funded participatory action research we have directly engaged with over 800 marginalised and sexually exploited young people from the UK. This work has impacted on the confidence and self esteem of the young people involved and has resulted in wider distribution of child-appropriate messages, given in young people's voices about the meaning and impact of sexual exploitation. The work is distinctive as it provides opportunity for exploited young people's voices to be heard. For example, four young people spoke at a Council of Europe conference in Rome (2010) and two young people were selected from 8 volunteers to speak at a Eurochild European conference of over 300 European policy leaders in Milan (2013). The work brings young people's own research agendas to the fore. For example, we have, with our partner agencies,

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trained and supported young people affected by child sexual exploitation to work with the 'What Works For Us' (WWFU) group. They produced a WWFU Annual Report listing topics that need research in the future [5.8]. This was distributed to 144 LSCBs and specialist CSE services. The report documents their activities, including advising mass media coverage of CSE through the BBC East Enders CSE story line; directing the Police 'Child Sexual Exploitation On Line Protection Service' (CEOP) in youth sensitive policing; and advising The Office of the Children's Commissioner for England OCC on the dissemination of youth appropriate materials from their Inquiry into CSE in gangs and groups, with the OCC recognising the impact of the University's work in this field on their developing policy [5.9].

In our research with and for hard to reach young people we have co-produced creative writing project outputs. To create these outputs, young people identify a problem; engage with other young people through one-to-one interviews/ focus groups or workshop activities and document findings in youth-friendly materials. This impacts on improving the self esteem of the young people concerned and on the reach of dissemination to other young people and those who work with them. This has included

- Working with 53 sexually exploited young people to produce two booklets that explain the impact of abuse caused through CSE (see www.beds.ac.uk/iasr/centres/intcent). These booklets have been accessed by 46 specialist CSE projects with a reach to over 2,000 young people with whom they work. CSE funders have also been influenced by viewing these materials: The CSE Funder's Alliance has recognised the impact of participatory research activities on both the young people participating and those who access the outputs. The funder's alliance has, in recognition of this, opened requests for funding for further peer research projects with the intention of producing more similar outputs.
- Working with The Association of Young People's Health (AYPH) to engage with 10 young people under the 'be healthy' project. The young people have produced a booklet and CD film about their use of support services [5.10]. This was launched to an audience of 56 young people and is widely disseminated to child health agencies and child sexual exploitation services. Its relevance to young people is demonstrated through calls for reprinting of a further 3,000 copies of the booklet with CD for distribution to CSE projects across England and through Eurochild and The Council of Europe.
- Reaching and engaging with 35 young people affected by sexual violence to produce a high quality film which, prior to final production, has already reached 55 gang-affected young people. Following media training, 12 of these young people represented the group at the report launch at The UK Government 'Speaker's House' to an audience of Government ministers, MPs and key policy makers.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Department for Children Families and Schools (2009) *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation* London, DCSF
- 5.2 Department for Education (2011) *National Action Plan for Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation*, London, Department for Education
- 5.3 Corroboration from The Chairman, Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre (2011)
- 5.4 Office of the Children's Commissioner for England *If only someone had listened...* Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups, Final Report. London: Office of The Children's Commissioner for England
- 5.5 Corroboration from The Secretary General, Eurochild (2013)
- 5.6 Centre for Social Justice (2009) *Dying to Belong: An In-depth Review of Street Gangs in Britain*, London, Centre for Social Justice
- 5.7 Home Office (2011) *Ending Gang and Youth Violence: A Cross-Government Report*, London, Home Office
- 5.8 What Works for Us: Young Peoples' Advisory Group Annual Report 2010-2011 Available at www.beds.ac.uk/research/iasr/centres/intcent/publications
- 5.9 Corroboration from The Deputy Children's Commissioner for England (2012)
- 5.10 AYPH 'be healthy': booklet, film, resources by young people. Available from www.ayph-behealthy.org.uk