



Child sexual exploitation in Wales: Hearing and learning from young people

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The research

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Why?

- Research has focussed on risk factors
- Quantitative/case file analysis - young peoples' voices are markedly or wholly absent (Warrington 2010)
- Low awareness amongst 'non-specialist' professionals – understandings of the issue; young people as 'troublesome' or making 'lifestyle choices' Vs 'naïve'

What?

- In-depth qualitative case-study into young people's and 'non-specialist' professionals' understandings and perspectives about CSE
 - to explore young peoples' perspectives about sexual exploitation, together with their views of what social care interventions would best meet their circumstances
 - to explore professionals' perspectives and understandings of child sexual exploitation, it's causes and possible interventions, and how this affects their operational and strategic orientations.

How?

- Semi-structured interviews and participative methods with 9 young people and 25 professionals; year long placement with a service working to support children and young people with experiences of sexual exploitation
- An illustrative not representative case study BUT it provides the grounds to generalise

Vulnerabilities: 'a blotting out'

Instability, home and care:

'I was in care and I was moved around here and there and anywhere because I was always doing runners, and when I met (name) it was having someone who was there for me you know' *Katie*

Exclusion:

'If you go to school that's really important. You know it keeps you around normal people, do you know what I mean?' *Leah*

Family and relationships:

'My upbringing was a bit, you know, um, I just needed help getting out of there' *Danny*

Confusion about sex and their bodies:

'you think it's all normal , because it could be your first relationship' *Hannah*

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Vulnerabilities

“Just insecurity, um um just not having a good, structural home base behind them, I think HOME is a massive thing and families are HUGE for security if the young people don’t have family security at home then, you’re just then like wallowing in not knowing where you belong, trying to find someone who could accept you so you do things to be accepted (pause) whereas when you’re secure and accepted within your home base then there’s less need to do that”

Cathy (fostering)

“because WE as like workers can’t touch the children really in any kind of caring way like if I see a child crying which I have I’m quite happy to put my arm round them and comfort him but you can’t really just generally just hug kids as you would your own”

Cara (children’s residential care)

“I think the issue was maybe more their vulnerability, and the LACK of um, kind of parenting, and the support they OR the lack of any kind of support or family network, and I think, that they were probably taken advantage of, because there was no one out there looking out for them and so no one would know if they went missing”.

Louisa (social work)

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Risk: 'being visible'

Hiding away

'If the family is ignoring the child, they need someone to talk to and they'll just go online and talk to people they don't know really, just for someone to talk to' *Claire*

'Hanging out'

'it's like there's this inside person and the outside person. And um, how you feel on the inside, you do things, and people might not know. Cos you look all hard and that. Like I had a reputation for fighting, so I get respect but then people don't know what you're really like, on the inside' *Leah*

Drugs and alcohol

'Alcohol influences you, you know, so you don't know what you are doing, same with drugs. It means you don't have to care anymore, you don't have to think about anything. You think you can do anything' *Sarah*

Sex

'It cheapens it a bit. Like you think, oh well I may as well get paid for doing it' *Katie*

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Risk – being a ‘teenager’

“It was to do with places that she, would *hang out*, and she was associating with people who, were probably, just weren’t holding things together but there was that veneer, in uh people have uh older people when they have problems they are able to have that veneer of respectability to give to a younger child who thinks, oh they’re alright they can look after themselves, she he then becomes associated with drug use and sex workers and, um, somebody who had been looking after her, worked in a massage parlour, so, if she’s in that milieu she’s not going to escape it.”

Andrea (healthcare)

“you know it’s that sexual high tension time of experimenting and stuff, you know they have all these hormones flying around.”

Polly (youth work)

“this whole (pause) RUSH into adulthood, in terms of if you drink and you smoke and you’re having sex, if you’re taking drugs, these are the things that adults do, therefore I’ll do them you know, and I think that’s, that’s part of it isn’t it, that’s part of the process, the need to be older than you are, to be seen to be older than you are”

Jack (youth justice)

It could happen to anyone, I mean that’s the problem you know, I think (pause) anyone who is emotionally vulnerable so that could be anyone and that’s for all *social areas or classes*, anyone, um, and teenagers are, um (pause) a sort of wry definition of being an adolescent is that they are all emotionally vulnerable and if someone wants to harm that emotional vulnerability then they can

Linda (community work)

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Risk – agency?

“sometimes young people are very plausible and are more articulate and I’ve seen this in (pause) in other people’s assessments when I’ve read other workers assessments and what’s been said, even very young children, so and so is intelligent and articulate. So does that make them all of a sudden not sexually exploited? But there is that um, *oh well if they can speak like that and talk like that then they must be fine* they must be able to look after themselves”

Andrea (healthcare)

“they needed to be *empowered*, to make the RIGHT decision and to protect THEMSELVES, and *not* keep putting themselves in that position. And that’s, not uh in NO WAY am I saying that it’s their fault for what happened or *blaming them*”

Louisa (social work)

“the young men that probably need, I would expect need help, from sexual exploitation are probably in the custody suites, they are probably seen already as offenders rather than victims”

Sandra (education)

CSE: 'it's people taking advantage'

'they basically brainwash you to get you to like them for what they are pretending to be, and, you end up having intimate conversations and end up getting even more intimate and then you end up doing stuff that you don't want to do' (Claire)

'He looked after me. He gave me everything, Everything I didn't have you know. I was safe there. When he knew that he changed. He was like oh come on now you've got to start pulling your weight, you know help him out. Nothing comes for free' (Katie)

'basically a previous friend was having issues when their parents were supposed to have hit um it was all reported to social services but the social service didn't um found it quite difficult to engage with the family and stuff and because of it um they were, trying to pimp themselves out so that they could avoid going home, um ok so stuff like that' (Nathan)

'I've woken up and been in really dangerous situations, like been taken down to (place) and stuff. And then you can't say no can you. You've taken their drink and they think you're drunk so they do it anyway' (Danny)

“It doesn’t just happen, it happens because either things just aren’t addressed people are less able to fend for themselves and they don’t get the help they need, for whatever reason, and are put into difficult positions and sometimes it DOES take them there and if, people were there to help them in the first place then they wouldn’t, then this wouldn’t happen...”

Nathan

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Responding to sexual exploitation

“I think it might be because they are sometimes overseen (pause) like um the issues that young people face (pause) aren’t (pause) aren’t always dealt with. Like people can be dealing with things internally, and no one not many people have the time, or put the time in to find out what’s really going on (pause) they just see the surface exterior and they never try and pursue further to see what the actual person is dealing with”

(Kerry)

“people think you’re not at risk until you’ve started doing it”

(Sarah)

“people don’t, sometimes I think they just see the outside of it and they don’t give enough time to focus on what’s happening on the inside, you know discovering what the vulnerabilities are, to, um, also to make sure that they don’t fall into it (pause) as I said, I don’t think it (sexual exploitation) starts with a young person needing to do it, or, being tricked or forced into sex, I think it’s at the point where, you’re becoming vulnerable to getting to that stage.”

(Nathan)

“Try and work on the issues that make them vulnerable to it, and then as they become as their life becomes a bit more *stable*, um hopefully they should be able to withdraw from, what is making turn towards that ... sometimes I think they try to deal with sexual exploitation on its own, and I think that, it can sometimes sort itself, temporarily but, the underlying issue needs to be, *dealt* with as well otherwise they might just come back to it, and sometimes I think that, unless um, yeh the underlying issues are dealt with, and you may not be able to get to them when you start off but they can just quite easily fall into the risk of doing it again... .. I think that when people try to *pull* them out *really quickly* that sometimes, if it’s an emotional issue, it can sometimes *cause* them damage as well because they haven’t, even if it’s an unhealthy outlet they haven’t dealt with that and so it can just be redirected somewhere else and cause more issues for them somewhere else”

Nathan

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'young people find ways of creating solutions to their problems: if we do not listen to them, they will empower themselves in the only way they know how' (Moore 2006: 84)

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Learning from young people...

Hallett, S. (PI), Forrester, D., and Verbruggen, J. (2016-18) **Keeping safe? An analysis of the outcomes of work with sexually exploited young people in Wales.** Health and Care Research Wales. £237,890

Hallett, S. (PI) and Hudson, K. (2016-19) **'Gwella': A national knowledge and practice hub preventing risk of child sexual exploitation and sexually harmful behaviours.** Delivering Sustainable Social Services Grant – Welsh Government, with Barnardo's Cymru. £219,393. (Full award £1.5 million)

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Summary

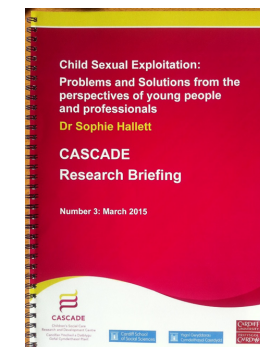
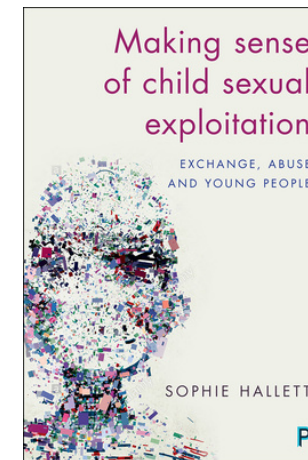
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- There are multiple forms of sexual exploitation. An individual child or young person can have multiple and different experiences of abuse through sexual exploitation;
- The element of exchange is what makes CSE different from other forms of abuse;
- Child sexual exploitation is intimately bound up with other problems and difficulties young people are experiencing. Central to an understanding of sexual exploitation is that underpinning this form of sexual abuse is the meeting (and exploitation) of unmet needs;
- In the absence of other forms of care and support, exchanging sex for some young people can feel like a solution of sorts, or a response, to the sorts of problems that made them vulnerable. The seeming contradiction of feeling in some ways visible as a person (being appreciated, looked at, 'looked after'), whilst also being sexually exploited, can occur because the objectification in exchanging sex is cast as something acceptable, or, a least-worst option;
- Tackling the underlying problems and difficulties experienced by young people is key to responding to CSE. Dealing with sexual exploitation as an isolated issue may, conversely, end up leaving young people more vulnerable if these other problems (i.e. substance misuse, housing, mental health) are not also addressed;
- Creating opportunities for young people to build positive relationships is vital. Promoting young people's active participation in their own support is key.

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People don't listen to young people do they?
They need to listen more, don't they? They
need to hear people like me.....

- Hallett, S (2017). Making sense of child sexual exploitation: exchange, abuse and young people. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Hickle, K. and Hallett, S. (2016) Mitigating harm: considering harm reduction principles in work with sexually exploited young people. *Children & Society* 30(4), pp. 302-313.
- Hallett, S. (2015) 'An uncomfortable comfortableness': 'care', child protection and child sexual exploitation. *British Journal of Social Work* (10.1093/bjsw/bcv136)



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