

Discussion item for team/staff meetings

Learning from case reviews around child sexual exploitation- NSPCC briefing (Nov 13)

This at a glance briefing pulls together and highlights the learning from case reviews into the death and serious injury of a child based on case reviews published since 2010.

Risk factors

Most of the children and young people in the case reviews displayed at least some of the known risk factors for sexual exploitation

The victims were mainly girls; many were in local authority care, foster care placements or residential care; many had difficult early life experiences at home, including childhood physical or sexual abuse and domestic violence.

Many of the victims had a poor self-image, low self-esteem and a poor sense of their own identity. They may have abused drugs and alcohol, have gone missing from home, have become disengaged from education or have had sexual health concerns. They may have been difficult to engage and displayed challenging or offending behaviour.

Key issues

Confusion around sexual activity and the issue of consent

The fact that young people are engaged in what they view as consensual sexual activity does not mean that they are not being exploited.

- Victims of sexual exploitation may be coerced into sexual activity with the perpetrators or they may feel unable to say no.
- Some young people may not recognise they are being sexually exploited, instead believing they are behaving as they wish.
- 16 and 17 year olds are often viewed as being more in control of their own choices and so less vulnerable to exploitation.
- Sexual activity between young people of the same age is often perceived as being consensual, but exploitation may still be occurring.

Child sexual exploitation and risk-taking behaviour

Victims of sexual exploitation often display challenging or offending behaviour, but risk-taking behaviour is a key indicator of abuse.

- When dealing with troubled children, practitioners need to see young people as vulnerable children in need of protection rather than focusing on their challenging behaviour.
- Victims of exploitation who engage in offending behaviour should not be criminalised, but instead need protection and support.

Disclosure of sexual exploitation

Young people are unlikely to disclose sexual exploitation due to: fear of perpetrators; loyalty to perpetrators; lack of knowledge or acceptance that they are being exploited; or lack of trust and fear of authorities. Too often, even when young people do disclose abuse, no actions are taken by agencies against perpetrators or to support young people and the abuse continues.

Lessons for improving practice

Identifying and assessing child sexual exploitation

- Practitioners must be aware of the warning signs of potential sexual exploitation and grooming, including: underage sexual activity; sexual health concerns; teenage pregnancy; getting involved in crime; concerning relationships, especially with unknown adults; alcohol and drug misuse; going missing from home or placement; truancy, exclusion and disengagement from school.
- Professionals providing sexual health services (including contraception) should consider the child protection implications of possible abuse or exploitation whenever they become aware of underage sexual activity.
- An early and **comprehensive assessment** should be carried out. Without a comprehensive assessment, practice becomes task focussed so that individual incidents are addressed, for example sexual health concerns, but the bigger picture of child sexual exploitation is missed.
- Assessment should draw on knowledge from different agencies so that a complete picture can be established in cases where sexual exploitation is suspected.
- Any assessment of child sexual exploitation must also include issues of 'capacity to consent', taking into account the grooming process and issues of coercion which may be experienced by victims of child sexual exploitation.

Interventions

- Practitioners need to balance the young person's right to make their own decisions and assess their own risk, with the need to protect the young person from exploitation. Even when a young person is unaware or doesn't accept that they are at risk, or when risks to the young person's safety arise from their own behaviour and the decisions they make, professionals still need to intervene to prevent exploitation.
- Practitioners need perseverance and patience to help disengaged young people engage with and remain involved with services aimed at protecting and supporting them.

- Services need to embed a child-centred approach where children at risk of exploitation are viewed as vulnerable children in need of protection. Children need to be listened to and their experiences accepted, so trust can develop and young people can feel supported and able to disclose their experiences.
- Victims of sexual exploitation may need on-going support to ensure they are protected from further exploitation in the future.

Identifying and dealing with perpetrators

- Disclosure from young people of underage sexual activity or sexual exploitation needs to be taken seriously and dealt with as a crime. Actions taken following disclosure should not depend on the victim's willingness to act as a witness in a criminal trial.
 - Perpetrators need to be identified quickly and a case built against them by the police. They need to be prosecuted so that victims can feel safe, have trust in the authorities and feel confident that agencies can protect them.
 - To reduce future exploitation, victim profiles should be compiled and collated. This information can be used to identify local 'hotspot' locations or methods that are used to target potential victims.
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NB. Don't forget the SERAC process in Luton – all cases of children and young people at risk of, or experiencing CSE MUST BE referred to the SERAC panel. Please see LSCB website (link below) for referral form

http://lutonlscb.org/images/SERAC_Referral_Form_-web_copy_Nov13.pdf