



Digital dangers

The impact of technology on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people

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In partnership with

The
Marie Collins
FOUNDATION

Meeting the needs of children abused online

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Foreword

The internet has transformed how we all live, learn, work and communicate. Over the last twenty years the ways in which we interact and engage have evolved beyond imagination; for many people, the world online is as real as the world offline.

For children – at the forefront of the digital revolution – the internet has created myriad opportunities. But it has also created risks. For every new piece of technology that can change how children access information, communicate or find entertainment, a new danger may present itself in a way that children, families and society may not immediately understand.

Barnardo's is the largest provider of support to at risk and sexually exploited children in the UK, and runs specialist services in 47 local areas across the country. In 2014-15, these services supported 3,175 children, a 49 per cent increase on the preceding year. Our project workers have witnessed first-hand how the internet has transformed the nature of abuse and sexual exploitation.

The concerns that we raise in this report build upon evidence that started to emerge when Barnardo's published *Just one click!* in 2004. This was one of the first publications in the UK to address the growing concerns amongst professionals about the ways in which children and young people may be at risk of harm online. More than a decade later, and now that the true scale of sexual exploitation of children in the UK is finally beginning to be recognised, it is even more crucial that we better understand the risks posed by the internet, and how we can address them.

What is clear from the report is that the ways in which children can be sexually exploited online do not always follow the models of sexual exploitation that we are familiar with. Children at risk may be younger than those referred to services for offline sexual exploitation, and may not fit into standard definitions of 'vulnerable'. What is also clear from the report is that the problem of online sexual abuse of children impacts on the work of Barnardo's across all projects. As communication becomes ever more private and personal, due to mobile devices and instant connectivity, it can become all the more difficult to identify who is at risk, how they are at risk and where they are at risk. It is vital that policy and practice recognises the particular vulnerabilities that children now face, and respond to them.

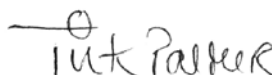
Drawing on research conducted with our services, this report makes a number of recommendations relating to service provision; training for professionals; and policy change. The recommendations are wide-ranging and emphasise the part that we can all play in protecting our children online.

In particular the report recommends that resources are made accessible to help prevent sexual abuse and exploitation happening online and to advise potential victims of the risks, including high quality age-appropriate sex and relationships education. It identifies the need for professionals to have the training and confidence they need to discuss online behaviours with young people, and calls for the development of best practice guidance for all professionals involved in investigating and intervening when children have been the subjects of internet crimes. As children spend more time online, away from adult supervision, we also call for a consultation on the complex relationship between children's right to privacy and their right to protection in the online context.

As a society, we are only just beginning to grasp the full impact of the internet on children and young people, and the implications for education and safeguarding. It is crucial that the Government, industry and the voluntary sector work together to keep our children safe. This means addressing online as well as offline threats.



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Executive summary

Summary of findings

In 2004 Barnardo's published the report *Just one click!*¹. It was the first publication in the UK to address the growing concerns amongst professionals about the ways in which children and young people may be at risk of harm online. The report highlighted the need for changes in both policy and practice to safeguard and protect children better and to ensure, when harmed, they were enabled to recover and live safe and fulfilling lives.

Barnardo's and the Marie Collins Foundation have now revisited the issue after it became apparent how central the internet and mobile phone technology had become to the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. Drawing on existing literature and information from Barnardo's child sexual exploitation services and four non-sexual exploitation services across the United Kingdom, the research found the following:

Accessibility, availability and anonymity

The internet and new technologies have enabled potential victims to be accessible and available to perpetrators, who may be anonymous, quickly and freely in ways that would otherwise not be possible. The internet enables users to feel they are protected and can remain anonymous, resulting in an apparent lack of inhibition online and risk-taking that would not take place offline.

Vulnerability

Young people at risk of harm online may not have any previous vulnerabilities that are often associated with being victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, such as being in care; from families facing adversities or having a history of sexual abuse. This has implications for identification, as they are less likely to be known to the authorities. The currently accepted indicators of possible sexual exploitation, such as going missing or school absence, may not be displayed, and the first parents may know that their child has been a victim of sexual exploitation is when the police contact the family.

Certain groups, such as young people with learning difficulties, those with mental health problems and lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) young people, appear to be particularly vulnerable to online harm. This is in part due to seeking social interaction online that they are not able to achieve offline and in part due to not fully understanding the consequences of sharing personal information, sending images or arranging to meet strangers met online.

1 Palmer, T with Stacey, L (2004) *Just one click! Sexual abuse of children and young people through the internet and mobile telephone technology*. Barnardo's, Barking'side.

Impact of the internet on communication

All professionals interviewed for the research believed that the development of new technology over the last eleven years has changed the way they have to work with young people and the methods of providing support. Children and young people are now able to communicate freely with people they would otherwise not usually interact with. This interaction can take place away from adult supervision, which raises questions around monitoring and has resulted in professionals having to navigate a technological environment with which they may not feel confident.

Changing nature of referrals

The type of referrals received by professionals has changed, with the internet now a feature in many cases. This includes sexting; sending sexually explicit images; online grooming; non-contact sexual abuse and controlling a young person using a mobile phone.

Reporting and discovering abuse

Children and young people involved in internet-related child sexual abuse and exploitation are very unlikely to tell someone that they have been harmed. This may be because they feel ashamed of their actions or feel they could be seen as complicit in their abuse. The report found that harm online is often accidentally discovered by parents or carers, who feel guilty for not questioning their child's unusual behaviour and being unaware that the internet posed a danger.

The apparent willingness to communicate with their abuser, or in some cases being seen as the instigator, has resulted in some victims being blamed by professionals for their own abuse. This has resulted in police and social care services having to challenge their own attitudes and treat it as a child protection issue.

Lack of knowledge, data and critical understanding of harm

As technology has been moving at such a fast pace, and perpetrators using a wide range of methods to target victims, there is a general lack of knowledge, data and critical understanding of the harm that can be caused by new technologies. This includes:

- a lack of understanding about the harm that can be caused by non-contact sexual abuse, which may include children and young people being coerced over the internet, with the perpetrator using a camera, into carrying out sexual acts on themselves or on others
- limited training, expertise and capacity within support and law enforcement services to investigate, protect and assist in the recovery of harm caused by online abuse

- A shortage of recovery programmes able to cater for children and young people harmed online, particularly taking into the account that young people may feel they were complicit in the abuse (e.g. sending photos or engaging in sexualised conversations) or do not recognise themselves as victims.

Summary of recommendations

This report makes a number of recommendations to governments across the UK, the police, internet and technology providers, and services that support victims of internet-related CSE. Overall, the recommendations highlight the need for:

- easier access to existing prevention resources and advice, including age-appropriate healthy relationships and sex education through schools
- training for all professionals working with children and young people so that they feel confident in identifying those at risk of harm online
- assessments carried out by support services to include abuse that relates to online harm only
- training and guidance for law enforcement professionals and the judiciary on investigating internet crimes, including engaging with young people and their families, and working with young witnesses and defendants in court
- assessment of products, such as games and apps, both those currently in use and those in development, to ensure they have safeguards in place to prevent children being harmed
- a consultation on the relationship between children's rights: their right to privacy and right to protection online.



Introduction

In 2004 Barnardo's published the report *Just one click!*². It was the first publication in the UK to address the growing concerns amongst professionals about the ways in which children and young people may be at risk of harm online. The report highlighted the need for changes in both policy and practice to safeguard and protect children better and to ensure, when harmed, they were enabled to recover and live safe and fulfilling lives.

The report recognised the fact that the new technology gave people who are sexually interested in children a new medium to network, share information, explore new identities and normalise their behaviour. It also noted that in the period 2001 to 2004 there had been a dramatic increase in the number of children online and therefore more children at risk from online sexual abusers than had been known before.

In 2004, 52% of 7 to 16 year olds owned a mobile phone but the report foresaw that with the onset of the new GPRS and 3G phone technology there would be an increase in opportunities for young people to communicate, access websites and other internet services away from the supervision of their carers. *Just one click!* was published before internet connectivity on mobile phones and other devices such as games consoles; before tablets and iPads were available; before Facebook, Twitter and self-generated materials existed; and before the establishment of the UK Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre (CEOP).

The findings from this report, '*Digital dangers*' highlight how changes, and availability of technology, impacts on the behaviours of children and young people; those intent on causing them harm; on parents and carers; and on the professionals working to safeguard and protect children and young people. Currently 78% of 12 to 15 year olds own a mobile phone of which 65% own a smartphone³ and 31% of 8 to 11 year olds own a mobile phone of which 20% own a smartphone.⁴ The high levels of ownership by young people of smartphones and tablets⁵ gives them the freedom to access anyone through numerous platforms in environments, such as their bedrooms or outside the house, where adults are less able to oversee the content.

At the time of the publication of *Just one click!* reference would be made to children and young people's online and offline worlds as if they were distinct entities. As this new report shows such distinctions have almost disappeared as online and offline identities merge into one psychological reality.⁶

2 Palmer, T with Stacey, L (2004) *Just one click!: Sexual abuse of children and young people through the internet and mobile telephone technology*. Barnardo's, Barking.

3 A mobile phone that performs many of the functions of a computer, typically having a touchscreen interface, internet access, and an operating system capable of running downloaded apps.(www.google.co.uk: 9 June 2015).

4 Ofcom (2014) *Children and parents: Media use and attitudes report*.

5 The use of tablet computers in the home has tripled among 5-15 year olds since 2012. Ibid.

6 Ralling, J (2015) *Youth and the internet: A guide for policy makers*. Barnardo's, Barking.

However, despite this merging of these two ‘worlds’ in the minds of young people, their behaviours online can be markedly different to those they display within their families and communities offline.

Similarly, whilst *Just one click!* identified the myriad ways children may be abused online these were discussed as single issues and little attention was drawn either to the inter-connections between forms of online abuse or to the relationship between online and offline sexually abusive activities involving children. In *Digital dangers*, the testimonies from children and young people, their parents, carers and the Barnardo’s staff who work with them reveal, for example, that grooming, taking and sending illegal images and the sexual abuse of children and young people frequently involve both online and offline abusive activity concurrently.

At the time of the publication of *Just one click!* in 2004 eighty-three children throughout the 350 services run by Barnardo’s were identified as victims of some form of online abuse. This new report shows that Barnardo’s now works with hundreds of children in its specialist sexual exploitation services who have been adversely affected through online harm and abuse. Other children’s services run by Barnardo’s are included in the report, as they are also dealing with cases involving the online abuse of children, including projects that provide support to young people who display harmful sexual behaviours but have also been victims of online abuse.

All the projects that contributed to this report highlighted that some of the referrals they have been receiving in recent years do not typically display the usual indicators of child sexual exploitation (CSE). Often, no indicators can be identified for these young people that would identify them as being at risk of sexual exploitation and a significant number come from secure, caring families but have been drawn into abusive and risky relationships through their online activities.

This new report highlights

- the impact that the development of new technology over the past ten years has made on the work now carried out by Barnardo’s services
- the current concerns relating to risks posed to children and young people through their internet usage
- what improvements need to occur in service provision for those who have been harmed and for their parents or carers
- the changes that need to occur in the professional response to the victims of online abuse and to those young people who enact harmful sexual behaviours online
- The training needs of those professionals charged with safeguarding young people

- The need for capacity building across all agencies if we are to better safeguard and protect our children
- The policy changes that need to occur to better protect children from harm and abuse online.

Research context

The last twenty years represents a unique period in our social development as children are becoming the teachers of their parents and carers in relation to new technologies. Parents and carers do not always have the knowledge and ability to protect their children when they socialise, communicate and learn, through new technologies;

“There is a big difference between what concerned parents understand and what their technologically savvy children know. The rapid pace at which new media are evolving has left adults and children stranded either side of a generational digital divide.... The trouble is that although as adults we instinctively know how to protect our children offline, we often assume that their greater technological expertise will ensure they can look after themselves online. But knowledge is not the same as wisdom.”⁷

In the last twenty years, the growth of internet usage, together with the ever increasing ways of communicating online, has transformed and changed the way people form relationships. The creation of cyberspace, the internet, electronic forms of communication, the web and networks which can be used for untraceable peer-to-peer transfers⁸ has enabled social interaction on a scale that has never been seen before. No other form of communication is as global and cheap or so easily transcends regional and national barriers and cultural and ethnic barriers. The ease of communication, without barriers or monitoring, has enabled not only positive interactions between people, but also harmful interactions.

What is cyberspace?

It is a virtual, vast area for communication that was established through the internet, a complex web of connections that was created by and is accessed through a range of digital and electronic media. The internet is the collective term for a number of electronic forms of communication that include still and moving images, audio transmission, electronic mail, chat rooms, bulletin boards, web sites, databases, social networking sites, Apps and newsgroups,

⁷ Byron, T (2010) *Do we have safer children in a digital world?* A review of progress since the 2008 Byron Review. Children and New Technology.

⁸ Hughes, D M (2002) *The use of new communications and information technologies for sexual exploitation of women and children*. Hastings women's law journal, 13, 129-148.

some of which are live and in real time. The web is part of the internet that links sites and allows for rapid movement from one site to another. The network can also be used for peer-to-peer transfers, the downloading and uploading of files from the hard drives of a designated group of people, which is significant because a server is not involved and thus transmissions may seem untraceable.⁹

Literature review

A comprehensive literature review on the current UK and international research on online abuse of children and young people was undertaken for this report and is available at www.barnardos.org.uk. The review includes the current knowledge base regarding the hidden scale of the problem of the online abuse of children; adult online sexual offenders; young people's harmful behaviours online; and that of children and young people harmed and abused online. It illustrates the impact of the development of the new technology over the past ten years, how behaviours have changed over this period of time and the means by which online abusers are able to access children and young people.

The literature review highlights the need for further research into the online abuse of children and young people. In particular:

- the scale of online abuse of children and young people
- the practices of online sexual offenders, particularly in the context of the new technological developments
- the impact of age-inappropriate sexual material on children and young people's psycho-sexual development, such as pornography sites, adult games and adult dating sites
- the development of evidence-based intervention and recovery programmes for children and young people.

Setting the scene: challenges of protecting children online

“The abuse of children online is another major international crime of our age. The online exploitation of children is happening on an almost industrial scale.”¹⁰

⁹ Hughes, D M (2002) *The use of new communications and information technologies for sexual exploitation of women and children*. Hastings Women's Law Journal, 13, 129-148.

¹⁰ David Cameron, #WeProtectChildren Online Global Summit December 2014.

The internet has allowed the development of unprecedented global connectivity, which has set a very serious challenge to how nations safeguard their children from harm. We are now working within a context in which children in the UK can be abused and exploited by someone living anywhere in the world. A number of issues and challenges have become increasingly evident since *Just one click!* which are changing our understanding of, and response to, abuse and exploitation of children and young people online.

Difference in international laws

The differences in laws that protect children, the ages of consent for sex and for criminal responsibility, can complicate working with abused children where there is an international dimension to the abuse. What might be an offence in one country may not be illegal in another.

The thematic papers from all three World Congresses¹¹ on the sexual exploitation of children identified the need for national and international harmonisation of laws that would enable more effective policing of the internet. There needs to be more international collaboration regarding how best to assist the child victims yet “laws set out acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and formalise norms but laws are not enough.”¹² Laws must be accompanied by procedures for achieving standards and goals and implemented through practice.

A positive step forward occurred in December 2014 at the #WeProtectChildren Online Global Summit hosted by the British Government, when countries across the world agreed to contribute to a global fund to build up capacity to tackle the online sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

Protecting and pursuing

Work has started among partners to have collaborative international ownership of the need to actively seek out offenders in order to protect children. These developments include the Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre (CEOP), the Virtual Global Taskforce¹³, the G8 group of countries¹⁴, the European Financial Coalition¹⁵ and the more recent #WeProtectChildren Online Global Summit. Whilst the investigation of offenders is vital, there has been concern that not enough emphasis has been placed on the identification of child victims and addressing their recovery and safeguarding needs.

11 Held in Stockholm (1996), Yokohama (2001) and Rio de Janeiro (2008).

12 Barnes, R (2009) *Using the law to protect children from the reality of virtual abuse*. Bahrain.

13 The VGT is an international alliance of law enforcement agencies working together to prevent and deter online child abuse – 14 member countries as well as private sector partners.

14 The G8 Group of countries consist of Canada, USA, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Russia. Their aim is to tackle global problems by discussing big issues and planning what action to take. In October 2013 the UK and US brought the G8 countries together at an annual summit to discuss the international sexual exploitation of children.

15 The European Financial Coalition against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Online (EFC) brings together key actors from law enforcement, the private sector and civil society in Europe with the common goal of fighting the commercial sexual exploitation of children online. Members of the EFC join forces to take action on the payment and ICT systems that are used to run these illegal operations.

However, encouragingly in July 2014 in the UK, the initial outcomes of Operation Notarise where those people sharing peer to peer files of illegal images of children were targeted, showed that not only were 660 suspects arrested but also approximately 500 children were safeguarded. This policing approach was noted by Jonny Gwynne, Director of the National Crime Agency's (NCA) CEOP command:

“Child protection and criminal justice issues are bound together. In many cases, only through addressing the child protection issues can appropriate criminal justice outcomes can be achieved. Both issues are linked but the protection of the child must always take primacy.”¹⁶

Accessibility, availability and anonymity

The internet can break down boundaries and open up opportunities for people from different cultures and backgrounds to communicate. However, the negative impact of such easy accessibility is it enables those intent on harming children to engage with them more quickly, more anonymously and may act as a vehicle for groups of abusers to communicate with one another and provide mutual legitimisation.

To enable the abuse of a child, an offender must be able to access children. In the offline environment, this involves overcoming the physical and human ‘obstacles’ that may get in the way. The nature of grooming, however, takes on a different course online as children and young people are readily contactable. Perpetrators will often take a ‘scatter-gun’ approach, contacting hundreds of young people at one time and then waiting for one of them to respond.¹⁷ It is at this stage that the grooming process begins.

The numerous online channels that are available for abusers to access children makes it difficult to police illegal behaviours and to protect them. Peer to Peer (P2P)¹⁸ networks, the Dark Web¹⁹ and other ‘hidden’ ways of communicating enable communications to appear anonymous and increase the difficulties of identifying those engaging in abusive online behaviours towards children.

Inherent aspects of the new technologies

People's behaviour, including children's, can be less inhibited and more spontaneous online, and they may do and say things that they would not participate in offline. However, children and young people do not always recognise that their behaviour and actions online have consequences in the offline world and they can be at risk of interpreting situations and meanings

¹⁶ All Party Parliamentary Group for Children and Police Inquiry – *Session 7: Child Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking* in May 2014.

¹⁷ An example of this can be found at: *Bahrain men posed as girls online to dupe and sexually abuse UK boys*. National Crime Agency, 25.4.2014.

¹⁸ P2P is a decentralised communications model which bypasses the server.

¹⁹ Dark web is a term that refers specifically to a collection of websites that are publicly visible, but hide the IP addresses of the servers that run them. Thus they can be visited by any web user, but it is very difficult to work out who is behind the sites and you cannot find these sites using search engines. Almost all sites on the so-called Dark Web hide their identity using the Tor encryption tool.

differently than they might in the offline world. This has implications for children who are still learning and developing their critical reasoning skills and such aspects of the new technologies appear to increase the likelihood of sexually abusive and exploitative practices towards children.

The concept of friendship has taken on a different meaning with the introduction of Facebook and the possibility of ‘friending’ people who make contact. Children, and some adults, frequently refer to their online contacts as ‘friends’ or even ‘boy/girlfriends’, even though they may never have met them face to face. They may openly share intimate thoughts, feelings and emotions without consideration of who the person on the receiving end of their communications really is or what the consequences might be of sharing such information. Practice experience reveals that some of these online friendships are very important to young people and have serious psychological and social meaning for them.

Vulnerability

The correlation between children deemed as vulnerable offline being equally vulnerable online is not clear cut, with internet risks not “neatly associated with measures of deprivation”²⁰ and there being no ‘typical victim’.

“For children who are groomed and abused online, there does not appear to be a clear vulnerability profile for risks.... Recent work on this suggests that some children may have an online risk-taking appetite which does not match a typical vulnerability profile.”²¹

As this report shows, victims of online abuse accessing Barnardo’s services do not necessarily have a stereotypical history of sexual abuse and/or exploitation. Increasingly, referrals are for children who come from stable, safe and supportive family environments. What seems to be emerging from our understanding of vulnerability online is that the issue needs to be considered in relation to how children develop and the biological stages they naturally go through while growing up, as well as any other indicators of vulnerability.

Pornography

Over the past ten years, the debate regarding the easy availability of online pornography has continued. Now children and young people are able to access pornography in quantities that were never available to adults, let alone children, prior to the internet. The nature of the content that is readily available may be hard-core and violent and can be viewed in privacy, away from adults who may otherwise prevent children’s exposure.

²⁰ Livingstone, S and Palmer, T (2012) *Identifying vulnerable children online and what strategies can help them*. Report on the UKCCIS Evidence Group seminar, March 2012.

²¹ Johnny Gwynne, Director of the NCA’s CEOP (4.5.2014) at the All Party Parliamentary Group for Children. Children and the Police Inquiry: Child Sexual Exploitation, Oral session 7.

Lack of knowledge, data and critical understanding of harm

A number of high profile reports over the past eight years have recommended that more attention should be paid to addressing the needs of child victims and developing models of intervention that take account of the differential impacts that abuse via new technologies brings with it²²²³²⁴²⁵²⁶. In their thematic paper on Child Pornography and Sexual Exploitation of Children Online Quayle et al²⁷ highlighted a number of unresolved issues:

- lack of critical understanding of the harms posed by the new technologies
- lack of training, expertise and capacity to investigate crimes against children, to protect them from harm and assist their recovery
- lack of reliable data from many parts of the non-industrialised world which made generalisations from existing published studies more difficult
- the paucity of recovery programmes for children and young people abused and/or exploited through the new technologies.

Terminology

Definitions of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation

In the final report from the Council of Europe Expert Group on Sexual Exploitation, acknowledgement is made of the fact that these terms are used interchangeably and that there has been a lack of differentiation between them. This is portrayed in the literature where, for example a publication by Asquith and Turner²⁸ suggest that sexual exploitation encompasses various forms of sexual abuse including sexual exploitation, prostitution, child pornography and child marriage, and is used variously to mean any, one or all of these whilst Kane²⁹ defines commercial sexual exploitation as including, the prostitution of children, trafficking for sexual purposes, the production, sale distribution and use of child pornography, and child sex tourism.

For the purposes of this report the definitions below have been used when analysing cases relating to the internet. However, individual cases may not fit neatly into just one definition. In the UK there is no specific offence of sexual exploitation within legislation, resulting in police using the various pieces of

22 Palmer, T with Stacey, L (2004) *Just one click! Sexual abuse of children and young people through the internet and mobile phone technology*. Barnardo's, Barking.

23 ECPAT International (2005) *Violence against children in cyberspace*. Bangkok.

24 Quayle, E, Loof, L, Palmer, T (2005) *Child pornography and sexual exploitation of children online*. A contribution of ECPAT International to the World Congress III against sexual exploitation of children and adolescents.

25 European NGO Alliance for Child Safety Online (eNACSO) (2009) *The right click*. Rome.

26 UNICEF (2011) *Child Safety Online: Global challenges and strategies*. Innocenti Research Centre, Florence.

27 Quayle, E, Loof, L, Palmer, T (2005) *Child pornography and sexual exploitation of children online*. A contribution of ECPAT to the World Congress III against sexual exploitation of children and adolescents.

28 Asquith, S, Turner, E (2008) *Recovery and reintegration of children from the effects of sexual exploitation and related trafficking*. Oak foundation. Geneva.

29 Kane, J (2006) *Issues and experiences in combating violence against children, young people and women*. Daphne booklets. European commission: Directorate-General for justice freedom and security. Brussels.

legislation, predominantly from the Sexual Offences Act 2003, to be used to convict for sexual exploitation. The importance of the understanding sexual exploitation as a more nuanced form of sexual abuse is crucial for professionals to ensure that the most appropriate interventions and support are provided.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is any sexual activity with a child. Sexual abuse may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside clothing. It may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in the production of sexual images, forcing children to look at sexual images or watch sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.³⁰

Sexual exploitation

Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse in which young people are exploited, coerced and/or manipulated into engaging in some form of sexual activity in return for something they need or desire and/or for the gain of a third party. The “something” received by the child or young person can include both tangible items such as food, somewhere to stay, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes or money and more intangible “rewards” such as perceived affection, protection or a sense of value of belonging. Fear of what might happen if they do not comply can also be a significant influencing factor.

Sexual exploitation can manifest itself in many different forms, including grooming, abuse by an individual who has established a “seemingly consensual” relationship with a child or young person, informal “introductions” to other (potential) abusers and the formal prostitution of a child. Children and young people can also find themselves exploited through the production and distribution of sexual images or through exposure to such images. Common to all these scenarios is an imbalance of power in favour of the abuser and some degree of coercion, intimidation, exploitation, violence and/or enticement of the child or young person.^{31,32}

³⁰ HM Government (2015) *What to do if you're worried a child is being abused: Advice for practitioners*. Department for Education, London.

³¹ Adapted from National Work Group definition/DCSF 2009 Guidance by Dr Helen Beckett.

³² In Wales the following definition is included in Welsh Government guidance: 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 and 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.

For a more detailed look at issues of terminology, including the terms ‘paedophile’ and ‘child abuse images’, please see appendix 1.

Policy developments

England

In March 2001 the Home Office Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet was established following some serious cases in which children had been groomed online. Its purpose was to consider what could be done to tackle child protection issues which were emerging with the increasing popularity of the internet, in particular the potential risk of sexual abusers contacting children through chat rooms and other on-line communications. The Task Force partners included representation from across the UK of child welfare organisations, the internet industry, the Government, the police and others. Amongst other initiatives, the Task Force published models of good practice for the provision of different kinds of internet services by a range of companies and organisations who were active in the online world at that time.

Following a review of the Taskforce in 2010, it was replaced by the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS). UKCCIS is a group of over 200 organisations from across the UK including government, industry, law, academia and charity sectors that work in partnership to help keep children safe online. The UKCCIS Executive Board brings together twenty-four representatives from across the membership on a quarterly basis and is chaired jointly by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Internet and Safety and Security, Minister for Preventing Abuse and Exploitation and Minister of State for Children and Families. The Executive Board has created five working groups to consider topical issues – these are filtering, social networking, education, evidence and age verification. A theme that cuts across all these five topics is vulnerable groups, for which there is a named champion who is on the Executive Board. Some of UKCCIS achievements to date include:

- implementing an unavoidable choice for home broadband customers about whether to turn on parental control filters as well as considering potential problems around blocking
- working with the Registered Digital Institute to design a friendly WiFi logo to allow parents and families to easily identify places where they can be sure that the public wifi had filtered inappropriate sites
- creating summaries of a large body of internet safety research
- developing a series of guidance documents for industry including on social networking.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, with the growing recognition that the emergence of technology is one of several factors with the potential to endanger young people, the Safeguarding Children Board's strategic plan³³ prioritises helping children at risk of sexual abuse through 'sexting' and on-line exploitation. Such a move was prompted by the publication of a study carried out in 2011 by Barnardo's Northern Ireland (NI) in which the issue of child sexual exploitation was brought to the fore.³⁴

The first stage of the Board's work relating to risks posed by technology was the publication of research focused on e-safety messages entitled 'An exploration of e-safety messages to young people, parents and practitioners in northern Ireland'.³⁵ The report's focus is on how to keep children and young people safe in the digital world and educating them so they feel safe when using e-technologies. The NCB research shows that the risks to children and young people relate to 4C's – content, contact, conduct, and commercialism. The NCB research found 25 different organisations in NI who are working to keep children and young people safe online. However, many of the NI organisations that do work on e-safety do not make it clear on their websites what help they can offer and not all the organisations have the same messages.

In late 2013, the SBNI was asked to conduct a thematic review of CSE, following police identification of 22 young people as possible victims. At the same time, ministers announced an independent one-year inquiry into CSE, to establish the nature and extent of this abuse, and the effectiveness of responses to it. The inquiry was facilitated by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority and comprised a formal call for evidence.

In November 2014 the independent inquiry reported and made 17 key recommendations and a further 60 supporting recommendations.³⁶ These included a public health campaign on CSE-related issues; a commitment to collation and analysis of the data in a way that will facilitate a strategic response to CSE; consideration of proposals for legislative change; and the development of a regional strategy to prevent, identify, disrupt and tackle CSE.

The Inquiry also highlighted the risks of sexual exploitation through the internet and social media. It reported that the focus of work in schools tended to be on 'stranger danger' and internet safety rather than the broader dimensions of child sexual abuse, including CSE. The Inquiry's supporting recommendations included that schools receive additional, regularly updated

33 Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) (2013) *Strategic Plan 2013-2016*. SBNI, Northern Ireland.

34 Beckett, H (2011) *Not a World Away: The sexual exploitation of children and young people in Northern Ireland*. Barnardo's Northern Ireland, Belfast.

35 National Children's Bureau (2014) *An exploration of e-safety messages to young people, parents and practitioners in northern Ireland*. On behalf of Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland.

36 Marshall, K (2014) *Child sexual exploitation in Northern Ireland: Report of the independent inquiry*. RQIA, Northern Ireland.

training and resources to support them in educating pupils and parents on how to use social media and online resources responsibly, and how to keep their pupils safe. It also recommended there is provision for parents, carers and other educational professionals to improve their knowledge and skills regarding modern methods of communication and social media.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) has set up a response team responsible for the implementation of the Inquiry's recommendations and an implementation plan was published in June 2015. In his response to the Inquiry, the Health Minister also indicated consideration was being given to commissioning and funding the SBNI to develop an e-safety strategy and action plan for Northern Ireland.³⁷

Scotland

Due to concerns about the response to CSE in Scotland, in 2011, Barnardo's Scotland lodged a public petition asking the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to commission new research on the nature and scope of CSE in Scotland, and to:

- update and report back on all action points set out in the 2003 Scottish Executive guidance on Vulnerable Children and Young People Sexual Exploitation Through Prostitution³⁸
- review and develop dedicated Scottish Government guidelines on CSE
- refresh the 2010 National Child Protection Guidelines, to include CSE.

In 2012, the Scottish Government funded research found that what evidence does exist from Scotland about CSE is congruent with that from the rest of the UK – and, conversely, no findings were identified indicating that the scale and nature of sexual exploitation is likely to be different in Scotland.³⁹

The Public Petitions Committee instigated an inquiry into CSE in Scotland, taking written and oral evidence from both statutory and non-statutory agencies on the nature, scope and prevalence of CSE in Scotland. The Inquiry's Report acknowledged the risk of CSE through online exploitation, and recommended that all schools should have safety programmes including interactive safety workshops and internet dangers.⁴⁰ The Scottish Government

37 Oral Statement to the Assembly by Health Minister - report by the Independent Child Sexual Exploitation Inquiry, DHSSPSNI. 18 November 2014.

38 Scottish Executive (2003) *Vulnerable Children and Young People: Sexual Exploitation Through Prostitution*. Edinburgh.

39 Brodie, I & Pearce, J (2012) *Exploring the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation in Scotland*. Edinburgh.

40 Scottish Parliament (2014) Public Petitions Committee 1st Report (Session 4) *Report on tackling child sexual exploitation Scotland*. Edinburgh.

has since published an updated version of the *National Child Protection Guidelines for Scotland*⁴¹ with a separate section on CSE and online safety.

In November 2014, the Scottish Government published 'Scotland's National Action Plan to Tackle Child Sexual Exploitation'.⁴² Key actions include establishing the link between the internet and CSE, through:

- research to map the current provision of information resources and innovative practice at local authority level to support the development of robust internet safety and inclusion policies
- peer education network to be scoped for children and young people about internet safety which will have a crossover with CSE
- exploring options for practitioner training to include the specific element of online safety and links to CSE.

Scottish Government Relationship Sexual Health and Parenting (RHSPE) guidance also recognises that many young people's relationships can begin and take place online and states that RSHPE in schools must take this into account, whilst also balancing concerns about online grooming and CSE.⁴³

Wales

The Welsh Government together with the South West Grid for Learning (SWGfL) have launched a project that will consolidate and enhance an e-safety strategy across the country and develop a variety of revolutionary online safety resources specifically adapted for Wales. Focusing on schools, these will include adapting the 360 degree online safety self-review tool that guides schools through better protecting their staff, and children when online.

The project started with a snapshot survey, led by PromoCymru with Plymouth University that will assess online safety across Wales. The aims of the survey are to gain insights into the state of e-safety in Wales and identify gaps in resources and support. Focusing on schools, the project aims to empower and equip school professionals by enhancing their general awareness and knowledge and providing them with tools and resources as well as sources of support on online safety.

41 Scottish Government (2014) *National Child Protection Guidelines for Scotland*. Edinburgh.

42 Scottish Government (2014) *Scotland's National Action Plan to Tackle Child Sexual Exploitation*. Edinburgh.

43 Scottish Government (2014) *Conduct of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education in Schools*. Edinburgh.

Methodology

The research for this report was designed to discover how vulnerable young people using Barnardo's services had been abused online, and how that experience had impacted on their need for care and support as well as on their lives in general. Data was drawn from an annual survey conducted every year with Barnardo's child sexual exploitation services, which includes a snapshot from September of the survey year, and in-depth interviews with practitioners, service users and parents and carers.

Drawing on data from the survey conducted in September 2014, twelve out of fifteen services reported that 259 young people had they worked with had been specifically impacted by online abuse (234 females and 25 males). This data is gathered from the records of Barnardo's services providing support to young people at risk, or victims of, sexual exploitation.

In order to conduct qualitative research, a request was made to all Barnardo's services on whether they had assisted young people who had been harmed online. Fourteen responded positively. These included foster carers, special schools, family support, alternative education provision, and provision for young people displaying sexually harmful behaviours. Four services were then approached for in-depth interviews. Eleven specialist sexual exploitation projects agreed to be involved in the research, and in total 34 staff, including practitioners and service managers were interviewed. Additionally, eleven young people were interviewed and eight parents and carers. This combination of survey of professionals and in-depth interviews with young people, their parents and the Barnardo's staff that support their needs, results in a better understanding of the impact that online sexual abuse and exploitation has on young people's everyday lives as well as how it affects their needs for additional care and support.

Both the Barnardo's Research Ethics Committee (BREC) and that of the Marie Collins Foundation scrutinised and approved the research proposal.



Sexual exploitation of children and young people and digital dangers

Without exception, every professional who was interviewed for this research believed that the developments of new technology over the last ten years has changed their professional landscape forever. Both those working in specialist fields, such as sexual abuse and exploitation, and those working in projects offering other types of services, have experienced a significant change in the way children and young people are now able to communicate. Via camera phones, web cams, social networking sites, chat rooms or instant messaging, blogs and apps, young people are able to self-generate content. This communication is often made away from the supervision of adults because “going online has become increasingly privatised, with children accessing the internet either via mobile or hand held devices or via access in the child’s bedroom, making it unrealistic for parents to literally watch over their child’s shoulder in order to keep them safe.”⁴⁴

The latest Ofcom findings on children’s and parents’ media use reports that, in a week, young people aged between 8 and 11 years watch approximately 14 hours of television, go on the internet for over 10 hours, play games for 9 hours and listen to the radio for 5 hours – whilst for 12 to 15 year olds the figures are television 15.7 hours, internet 17 hours, play games 11 hours and listen to the radio 6.8 hours.⁴⁵

Many young people have become the experts in use of new technology and see it as integral to their daily life. With greater availability and affordability, the majority of young people and some younger children in the UK have access to mobile phones through which they are able to communicate as and when they wish. This gives them freedom to explore, gather information, form new friendships, socialise and experiment in ways never experienced by children 20 or even ten years ago. This access has enabled an instant connectivity and accessibility and a perception of safety and anonymity. In addition, the online experience tends to act as a dis-inhibiter, for both adults and children, where people will say and do things that they would be unlikely to enact offline.

“What I find really strange is if you’re talking to a young person face to face and, for example, you get on to topics such as sexual health and contraception, they might go bright red and look at the floor and yet they can have [start] an online conversation with someone they’ve just met online and within 30 seconds they’ll be talking about really explicit sexual things, sending and receiving sexual messages and images with complete strangers that they don’t know and they can do that, and that’s fine... but to have a conversation with me on sexual matters, they just can’t do it. They revert back to being a child.”

Project worker

⁴⁴ Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Görzig, A., & Ólafsson, K (2011) *Risks and safety on the internet: The perspective of European children*. EU Kids online, London.

⁴⁵ Ofcom (2014) *Children and parents: Media use and attitudes report*.

Against this backdrop, this report attempts to illuminate a picture of the current professional response to the risks of sexual harm to children online; the impacts that such risks may have on children and their families; and the implications for the development of appropriate strategies and policies.

This section explores the key themes, observations and challenges as seen by Barnardo's project staff who work on a daily basis with children and young people who are at risk of or have been sexually abused and exploited online, the young people with whom they work, and their parents or carers. As well as gathering information through interviews with participants, data was also gathered in the child sexual exploitation services' annual survey 2013/2014 conducted internally by Barnardo's.

Changing nature of referrals

Since *Just one Click!*, the nature of the cases that are referred to projects working specifically with children and young people who have been sexually exploited has changed. Project workers report that:

- the 'street scene'⁴⁶ where young people at risk would be visible to perpetrators and also to project workers has diminished and is almost non-existent
- an increasing proportion of young people being referred to services who have been abused online do not present with the same vulnerabilities or risk indicators as those who have been sexually exploited offline
- the age at referral of young people abused online tends to be lower than those referred due to offline sexual exploitation
- referrals for young people due to the abuse they have received online appear to be given less priority by statutory services than other forms of sexual abuse and exploitation, which can mask the extent of the harm caused by online grooming and the abuse that may follow.

"The majority, if not all of my cases involve the internet. Some more than others are specifically internet... [if online abuse is not the initial cause for concern] there's always an element of the internet involved. I can't think of one where it's not been an issue of some sort."

Project worker

There appears to be a consensus that referrals which included an element of the online sexual abuse of children started to become a trend about five or

⁴⁶ The 'street scene' refers to the more traditional model of commercial sexual exploitation where young people are forced into sexual exploitation. This model takes place on the street, where 'punters' knew where they would find young people to have sex with for payment.

six years ago. A project worker commented that “in 2008/2009 it began as an emerging issue, we kept saying it was emerging and then [a couple of years ago] we thought why are we saying it’s emerging because it’s not – its core.” In particular, in the last two to three years the increase in referrals solely expressing concerns regarding online risks and harm to young people have started to be received, which may be due to “the fact that professionals are more aware.”⁴⁷ One project worker’s comment was that abuse online “impinges on everything now – the internet features in all our cases.”

In Barnardo’s 2013/2014 annual survey of child sexual exploitation services, 259 service users were identified in September 2014 as being victims of sexual exploitation in which there was an online component. Of the twelve projects that were able to provide a detailed response, the 259 cases identified represent 19% of the 1371 young people receiving a service. At the time of the survey, services working with young people who had been sexually exploited did not routinely log centrally whether technology was involved in the abuse, although this may have been recorded in individual case notes. This lack of routine recording is widely recognised by practitioners as resulting in an under-estimation of the number of cases connected to technology. Since this gap in reporting was made apparent, Barnardo’s has put measures in place to enable the routine logging of such information and will continue to adapt recording procedures to ensure this aspect is properly identified.

In the past year, referrals solely concerning internet abuse have ranged from 20% of a worker’s caseload through 45% to 70% and with one project worker stating “for 75% of the 30 cases I worked on last year, the initial referral was internet abuse.” “We wouldn’t have received referrals like we do now, four years ago such as picture sending, sexting, sexualised conversations with peers and adults, meeting a groomer following online conversations....”

As well as referrals where there is evidence of sexual exploitation, services also receive referrals where a young person is deemed at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation. There has been an increase in referrals due to the risky behaviours that young people are taking online. The technology enables perpetrators easy access to victims and talking to strangers on-line who they view as their ‘friends’ is becoming ‘the norm’ amongst some young people. One response from the Barnardo’s annual survey stated that “many of our clients engage in risky behaviours through the internet, and although they may not have actually been groomed as a result, they have certainly been made more vulnerable to targeting through their usage.”⁴⁸

Those projects that historically worked with young people involved in the street scene who were at risk from exploitation of various kinds, have noticed a difference over the past three to four years – “the street scene has gone

⁴⁷ Project worker.

⁴⁸ Barnardo’s internal child sexual exploitation services’ survey, 2013/2014.

away, almost - they used to use pagers but now they use mobiles - control of vulnerable young people is so much easier, we now very rarely do work with young people who are engaged in the street scene.”⁴⁹ One experienced worker who works in a co-located multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) outlined the extent that use of the internet and related technologies impacts on so many aspects of safeguarding work, including the methods used by perpetrators to exploit vulnerable young people. The project worker explained that “to groom and control them, no longer do perpetrators have to get out there, in the streets, and find the young people. They can just sit in their living rooms, switch on their computers, or pick up their iPhones, groom them [the young people] online, get them emotionally and psychologically dependent on them, and then they’ve got them.”

Alongside the lessening of the street scene, a key development in the past three to four years has been a change from the traditional vulnerabilities of sexual exploitation to those associated with online abuse. “It’s not like it’s a particular clientele of young people [that are now being referred] – all young people are vulnerable to internet abuse.” One project worker observed that “referrals are often young people not known to the services” and another “I work with a number of cases where there are no outstanding problems within the family – families who are just going about their normal lives and they get hit by this drama. It’s a complete shock and surprise to them.”

“Jenny⁵⁰ was only fourteen at the time she met the guy who groomed her online and she very quickly became emotionally dependent on him, met up with him and, as Jenny would put it, had sex with him – she certainly wouldn’t have seen it as rape. There were two things that stood out for me in this particular case, which was one of the first cases of internet related abuse that I had dealt with. Firstly, the perpetrator was a medical professional working with children and young people and secondly, the victim was an intelligent young lady, lovely girl. She had supportive parents and close extended family networks. She was a high achiever at school and had a good network of friends. There were no contra-indicators that would have shed some light on why Jenny had ended up being raped”.

Project worker

In relation to a similar case a worker reported saying to colleagues “if she’s vulnerable then every single young person living in [town] is vulnerable.”

⁴⁹ Children’s Service manager.

⁵⁰ All names have been changed to protect the identity of the young person.

Project workers noted that the age of the children at point of referral when the initial concern is online abuse appears to be lower than that of young people referred due to offline sexual exploitation. Workers reported children as young as 10, 11 and 12 years of age being more the norm whilst one reported that she had assisted a family whose 8 year old daughter “had just ended up in a chatroom somehow and had been encouraged by a perpetrator to do naked roly-polys – the site that she had landed up on was moderated and the moderator reported the incident and that is how it was discovered.”

Nature of referrals

The five key presenting problems that project workers employed in Barnardo’s CSE projects identified as being representative of the nature of the initial referrals for online abuse are:

- grooming
- sending and receiving sexually explicit messages and images (sexting)
- use of inappropriate websites
- communicating with people not known to the child or young person
- control of the young person via their mobile phones.

Across the board, Barnardo’s staff reported that the children’s social care threshold for engaging with children and young people harmed online was too high. This was attributed to the fact that online abuse of children is not seen as being as dangerous as offline abuse and exploitation and it therefore takes a lower priority. One worker commented that “there’s not the same sense of harm [on the part of local authority children’s services] if there is no contact.” This issue is further discussed in a later section regarding the professional responses to online abuse.

Vulnerability

As mentioned above, the majority of workers recognised the introduction of new cases involving children and their families who had no past history of requiring support from agencies such as children’s services, police, and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). The danger posed to such children was exacerbated through their reaching adolescence, testing boundaries and taking risks, including engaging in age relevant risk taking behaviour. One worker said, “Youth needs approval – online gives it to them.”

Three groups have emerged that, in the past, the majority of the workers would not have frequently supported but with whom they are now more regularly working. It would appear that certain aspects of these individuals makes them particularly vulnerable to exploitation through online activity.

The first group is those who are diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum.

“There is an increase in autistic young people being referred to us for internet harm. It seems that the way they perceive the world and relate with others leaves them particularly vulnerable to be taken in by perpetrators...and yet they can often be really savvy manoeuvring themselves around the net....”

Project worker

Whilst children and young people with autism can excel in their ability to use the internet, challenges around social communication and interaction can place them at serious risk of harm online.

A second group is those young people with mental health issues who rely on the internet for fulfilling aspects of their lives that they do not feel able to activate offline. The description of one young person was that “she seems to live her life through the internet. She’s like two different people – she spends most of her time online and seems unable to cope in the real world.”

Mary was raped by her boyfriend twice. On the second occasion, the rape was watched by the perpetrator’s friends. Sexually explicit images were taken at the time of the second rape and distributed round her school, as a result she disengaged from education completely. She has been diagnosed as clinically depressed and takes medication, monitored by CAMHS.

After the incident, Mary has low self-esteem, no confidence or motivation and rarely leaves her bedroom. Her only form of contact with the outside world is through the internet and she now lives her life through social networking sites and spends the majority of her time ‘messaging’ unknown males online. She will frequently send explicit images of herself if requested and appears to have a persona online that is in total contrast to that offline. The predicament for those working in CAMHS and Barnardo’s to support Mary is to try and wean her off the online communication addiction, and enable her to feel comfortable again with offline contact.

Mary, age 15 years

The third group that workers are increasingly identifying as more at risk online than others is young people who are exploring their sexual orientation. “We’ve recently had a run of gay young men being referred for internet harm – many of these are gay young men seeking appropriate relationships but not having a healthy or positive way to do so [offline] because they are just not there so they go online looking for acceptance and find themselves caught up with perpetrators.”⁵¹ Similarly, Barnardo’s annual survey 2013/2014 also found that technology often appears to be a route into CSE for boys, with ‘Grindr’⁵² mentioned as being used by young males “to explore their sexuality and meet local men who are willing to engage in sexual activities.”⁵³

Another project worker described how “young people go online to get information or to make contact with other gay young people... when they can’t find the information they need they go onto adult sites and end up on adult date sites to hook up.”

Tom began to question his sexual orientation when he was 12 years old and he went onto adult gay sites when he was 13 because he wanted gay people to talk to. He described how he “needed someone to speak to [he] just wanted someone to talk to who was gay, [he] just wanted a friend... didn’t need to meet... just talk about feelings and have a laugh.” But it transpired that Tom was groomed online and met up with men at different times who raped him. He didn’t see it as rape at the time and believed that the men he met cared about him.

Tom described how once he started meeting up with men he “got hooked on sex and became less discriminating because when you get a taste for sex you want more.” He described how he experienced occasions when men were rough with him and he could have ended up being “beaten up” – he was of the view that he could have got hurt but describes himself as “now being more particular.” Tom said he never thought about the risks he was taking because it was initially all so exciting.

He says he would have carried on meeting men online for sex offline if his mother hadn’t overheard some of his communications online and contacted the police.

Tom, aged 17 years

⁵¹ Project worker.

⁵² Grindr is an adult website for gay, bi or ‘curious’ men to date and find partners.

⁵³ Barnardo’s internal child sexual exploitation services’ survey 2013/2014.

Another group referred to in the annual survey 2013/2014 and explored in research in 2014,⁵⁴ is that of boys and young men. The annual survey highlighted concerns in relation to 'Grindr' and gaming sites, where perpetrators are able to chat to children and young people while playing games. This enables a relationship to be built up, particularly as the young person's guard may be down while they are concentrating on the game, and are more likely to reveal personal details and feel comfortable with the perpetrator. PS3 gaming partners set up via social networking sites were also identified as being of concern in the survey results.

Children and young people's behaviours online

Several common themes arose from the professionals' perception of children and young people's behaviours online.

- How sexually explicit young people can be online was raised, with one project worker saying "everything is so quick and anonymous online, I mean you're not standing in front of someone and taking your clothes off, you're taking a picture of yourself and you're sending it – the interaction online dispels the fear of human interaction..." Some young people are also sexually explicit in the written language online, or in texts, which would not be the case offline.
- There was a consensus amongst the staff interviewed that whilst grooming online may follow the more traditional sexual exploitation model of targeting, friendship, 'loving' and abusing, current referrals indicate that the initiation of the abuse is changing. Some evidence indicates that young people may quickly engage in sexually explicit talk and behaviour online.
- The ease of which young people can be approached was evident, and attributed to the fact that some young people share details about their lives online, such as through Facebook, enabling perpetrators to "easily pick out who may be vulnerable because of what they share online."⁵⁵ Facebook was also mentioned in the annual survey 2013/2014 as being a popular medium for young people to be contacted over the internet. The acceptance that everyone can know about what you are doing is seen to break down barriers around personal information.

Lizzie, aged 15, described how she would go onto Facebook and communicate with friends of friends and "didn't think about whether I knew them or not." Lizzie was abused by two men who she met through her Facebook contacts

⁵⁴ Barnardo's (2014) *Hidden in plain sight: A scoping study into the sexual exploitation of boys and young men in the UK*. Barkingside.

⁵⁵ Project worker.

– both are now in prison. Debbie, aged 15, started using Facebook at age 12 and would be added to strangers' lists of friends "they added me and they were talking to me at first and then they asked for pictures. Some I said no to some I didn't really want to but I thought – well if they like me then I felt I had to."

- There can be a lack of inhibition in young people's online behaviour and Susie, aged 15, described how "you can be anyone you want to be online, you can be older and say things that you would never say direct to someone's face at school or at home."

A 14 year old was encouraged by an older boy in her school to use her webcam and masturbate online "yet she wouldn't give eye contact to a boy in the offline world." A 13 year old girl was "very shy offline, wouldn't even walk to the local store on her own, and yet she went to the bus station, caught a bus to XXX and met up with this man who raped her." A 14 year old had sent compromising pictures of herself in her underwear yet "this was so surprising to me because she is so self-conscious of her body."

Project workers

Every CSE worker interviewed referred to "the norm" or "the normalisation of sexual content", both images and sexualised online conversations, when describing the changes that have taken place over the last decade regarding young people's online sexual and sexualised behaviour. They describe the young people that they work with as having "no thought about sending or sharing a photo that is deemed as indecent."

"The main thing for me is that we are fighting against a culture... the young people think it is normal to send a picture of [their] breasts, it's normal to send a picture of their vagina and that's what we are fighting against as professionals."

Project worker

Because many young people do not perceive what is happening to them as abusive, but normal, they do not report it, "they just think that this is something that happens to everybody and you just have to deal with it." Similarly, one worker pointed out how such normalisation "makes the task of helping young people change their attitudes so much more difficult especially when everyone else around them who is important to them is saying it's normal

and why aren't you doing it?" Another practitioner described this process as "the theory of disconnection" in which young people's persona online is desensitised to the normal taboos of talking openly and blatantly about sex.

"Eva had been sending highly sexually explicit images of herself to her friends – not only those she knew offline but also those who she had only met online, some being friends of friends on Facebook. She had no understanding of the risk to which she was putting herself both from predatory people online and from the law, bearing in mind the illegality of what she was sending. She saw it as "just a laugh", and something that they all did.... It was as if she thought that to behave online as she did was normal and she couldn't understand what I was so concerned about."

Project worker

One case reported in the research stood out as slightly different to the others. This involved a 12 year old boy, Chris, who was given a mentor at school, a bright, sporty, 16 year old boy, Dave. These two built up a strong relationship and spent a lot of time together inside, and outside of school. What transpired in relation to sexual exploitation was that Dave had been going online as an alias and threatening Chris. The threats forced Chris to be sexually exploited by Dave, as Chris was told the if he didn't carry out the demands, Dave would be harmed. These incidents were often filmed. Chris had no idea that the person threatening him online was his mentor. The use of the internet to gain anonymity and threaten enabled Dave to sexually exploit Chris, who carried on trusting his mentor because he was oblivious of the fact that his abuser and mentor were one and the same person.

Difficulties in disclosure and discovery of online abuse

Even before the popularity of the internet, it was well known how difficult it can be for children and young people to disclose if they had been the victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. This was due to a number of factors such as the control of the perpetrator; the nature of the relationship between victim and perpetrator; fear of the repercussions by the perpetrator and on those close to the victim; and the belief that he/she would not be believed if they told someone. In cases of sexual exploitation, many young people did not see themselves as victims or at risk from abuse. Therefore, although disclosures did occur in childhood or at the time of the abuse, they were relatively rare events.

Practice experience confirms that children who have been sexually abused online are even less likely to disclose what has happened to them for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is a permanency to their abuse. Their images and their scripts will remain online in perpetuity and, to quote Marie Collins who is an adult survivor of abusive photography, “As a child I wouldn’t have told anybody about my abuse because if I had told someone about the pictures they might have found them. I definitely didn’t want anyone to find them because they would then have seen how awful a person I was... but I always worried about those pictures... where they were and who had seen them.”⁵⁶

Alongside feelings of shame, embarrassment and guilt, there is also a feeling of paranoia regarding who may have had access to/seen the images. The term ‘rational paranoia’ has recently been coined to describe this feeling⁵⁷ in an attempt to acknowledge the symptoms of paranoia that the young person may display and to underline the accuracy/norm of feeling this way. “Victims just can’t talk about it... imagery plays on the most powerful emotions, doesn’t it? One young woman I worked with told me that it felt like she was being watched all the time.”⁵⁸

“It felt like everyone in the street was looking at me. It felt like they had all seen the pictures that had been taken of me and I was terrified they would come up and say that they had seen me on the net. I know it’s not logical but that’s how it felt. Because of this, I refused to go out in public, started to refuse to go to school and didn’t feel I could trust even my closest friends.”

Jenny, aged 15 years

Children and young people who are sexually exploited or abused online can feel ashamed or ‘complicit’ in what happened to them. Some young people have described being fearful of the repercussions of telling anyone for example, threats by the perpetrator to distribute illegal images if the child were to tell. Others have said that they just don’t talk to anyone, even their peers, about what they do online because “it’s kind of embarrassing.”

All the workers interviewed reported that the young people abused online with whom they had worked had not personally disclosed what had happened to them, with just one exception. This was confirmed by one project worker who commented:

⁵⁶ Marie Collins, Just one Click conference, February 2004.

⁵⁷ Dr. Sharon Cooper, email correspondence 2014. Dr. Cooper is a Developmental and Forensic Paediatrician and holds faculty positions at the University of North Carolina and the Uniformed University of Health Sciences at Bethesda, Maryland, USA

⁵⁸ Dr Sharon Cooper, email correspondence March 2015.

“Young people are silenced [because of their online behaviour]... they will never tell anybody – it’s always about discovery. It is fear that surrounds disclosure regarding online abuse... and the largest facet of that fear is the fact that if they tell anyone there is every chance that the images they have sent and the language they have used may be seen and read. The anticipated embarrassment and the feelings of shame form the barrier to any disclosure.”

Project worker

Three workers were of the view that discovery rarely happened due to vigilance by the child’s parents or carers but was more likely to happen because of the young person forgetting to close down their laptop, tablet or locking their smartphone and thus leaving it for others to view their history. One described the circumstances in which a 16 year old omitted to close down her phone properly and her mother, by chance, saw inappropriate material which she subsequently reported. It turned out that this 16 year old young woman had been groomed online since the age of 11.

Josie, aged 12, has mild learning difficulties and autism. She loved a particular series of films on which she was fixated. She was approached by a 28 year old man on Facebook who claimed to be one of the characters from the movie. He got her to send indecent images of herself and he reciprocated by sending naked images of himself. In her mind they were in a relationship and she loved him and he loved her. Although he lived abroad he had said he wanted to come over to the UK to meet her. It was at this stage of the relationship that Josie’s parents walked into the room where Josie was using her smartphone to talk to her ‘boyfriend’, saw some of the communications on her phone and intervened and asked for help from their social worker. Josie panicked and tried to delete the records from her Facebook account. It transpired that Josie’s online ‘boyfriend’ was known to the police in his country of origin and she had been protected from further abuse through her parent’s discovery.

Project worker

The only example of a situation where a child was known to have voluntarily disclosed was that of a 10 year old girl. Within two hours of engaging the child online, the perpetrator got her to send explicit images. The day after this occurred the girl told her mother.

All of the young people who were interviewed said they would not tell any adult about what was happening to them online. One described how her brother was suspicious and tried to get hold of her phone but she refused to give it to him. Her mother eventually found out, at which point the young person ran away from home. If they were, in the rare event, to tell anyone most young people say it would be a friend but they could not imagine themselves being in that situation. However one young person who was interviewed revealed that she had told her friend, who in turn reported it to her own mother.

Tom described how it was his mother who discovered he was being groomed online.

“Mum hearing me on the phone started everything. I would probably be dead right now if Mum hadn’t heard me on the phone. I got pissed off with my parents stopping contact. They [the parents] would text the guys like mad... I understood my parents’ need to protect me... I really love Mum and Dad... I didn’t like them for a while... I shouldn’t have done what I did.”

Tom, aged 14 years

All but one of the parents and carers interviewed reported that they discovered that their child was being abused online by accident, whilst others were suspicious and went into their child’s phone. Three parents over-heard conversations their child was having and became concerned about the content. One foster carer described the shock of what she discovered regarding her foster daughter who was aged 16 at the time of the discovery and had been living with her since a baby, “I was so shocked that tears came into my eyes – this little girl that I look after and trusted... and all these disgusting things that this person is saying to her... and she is believing these things.” Another reported “I suppose I didn’t think it could be too much, because what is there to do really in your bedroom, and he was on his own and that sort of thing.”

“Tom’s behaviour and emotional state changed from when he reached his 13th birthday. He became increasingly detached from us as a family and this was strange because we were always close. He became secretive, highly sensitive and would have what I can only describe as emotional meltdowns. I sought help from the school and GP but it didn’t change how Tom was feeling. I never, ever thought to ask what was happening to him online. If I had only asked that question I believe I would have saved him from all the abuse he suffered, but I didn’t and I will live with the guilt of not asking for the rest of my life.”

Tom’s mother

“Whether it came from him or the police I’m not quite sure. I didn’t believe it was Dave. He said it’s Dave [the boy’s mentor]. I said, it’s not Dave, I don’t believe it’s Dave, I really don’t believe it’s Dave. He said, trust me, it’s Dave, he said. And then when he showed me the document, the conversation thread and everything I realised it was Dave, and that was just the most awful thing. For my son, I guess it was the most awful thing as well because he really trusted him and looked up to him and admired him.”

Mother of Chris, aged 12 years

Impact of discovery

The discovery of online abuse on the children and young people concerned and their families can have far-reaching consequences. A particular cohort of 21 young people and their families whom the author of this report has assisted in their recovery were groomed online and some then went on to meet their abuser(s) offline and were sexually abused. None of these young people had reported the abuse that occurred and they all said that they would not have told anyone of the abuse had it not been discovered. The five principle reasons why these young people did not tell anyone were:

- the highly sexualised nature of the communications sent by the young people, both written and pictorial
- feelings of complicity
- lying about their age
- being in love and having emotional dependency on their online ‘boyfriend/girlfriend’
- fear of peer group and family responses to what they had done.

Just under half of this cohort of 21 young people who had only online contact with their abuser remained supportive of their abuser many months after the discovery. Those who had met their abuser offline initially denied that abuse had taken place or gave minimal information when first contacted by the police.

These findings reflect the reactions of the young people interviewed for the purposes of this report. Three of those who were interviewed believed that they did not need to attend support sessions because they were not at risk of anything. One young woman’s view regarding her attendance at the project was:

“I don’t really need to be here and I don’t know what everyone is going on about what they [police] found on my phone. They go on about me being at risk from some guys but I’m not. I’ve always been able to look after myself and not needed anybody to help me... so I don’t know why I bother to come here.”

Pat, aged 15 years

This particular young woman had been attending the project for over 18 months prior to being interviewed and had not disclosed anything to her project worker about her online contacts, remained silent on such matters but chose to continue to attend regularly and during this time the project worker was able to work on issues regarding self-esteem and personal safety.

The majority of parents interviewed (six out of eight) had no awareness that their child was being harmed online until they were contacted by the police. They mentioned the difficulties they had in grasping what they were being told, and the feelings of guilt from not realising something was happening to their child.

“I got this knock on the door and there was this police officer asking if he could come in and have a word. Initially, I thought something must have happened to my husband or my children... and then out it came. He told me that they [the police] had seized some man’s computer and forensically examined it and... they had got evidence that my daughter had been groomed online by this man and they had reason to believe that he had met up with her and sexually abused her... I can remember just staring at him and thinking to myself that this wasn’t really happening... I can also remember not believing him for a bit..... Our daughter is pretty sensible, was doing more than OK at school, got good friends.... The following week was really difficult... my husband wanted to go out and get the bloke concerned and ‘deal with him’, my daughter was distraught that it had all been discovered and I went through a stack of emotions from being really upset and protective of her to being really angry that she got herself in that situation... and the guilt set in. I love my daughter and would never intentionally let anyone hurt her and they did right under my very nose. That’s a big thing to cope with as a parent... a terrible thing to cope with....”

Mother of Emily, aged 14 years

Professionals' response to online risk

Concern was expressed by practitioners universally regarding the perceptions of the police, children's social care, health workers and teachers about the risks posed to children and young people by online abuse. One worker believed that "the system is out of control – the whole culture [in which we are now working] has changed." Another expressed the view that "we still need to convince police and social workers regarding internet abuse and exploitation and its serious repercussions for young people."

Social care

The research indicated that professionals across the children's workforce lacked confidence in dealing with online abuse. Reasons included a lack of understanding of the differential impacts of online sexual abuse; insufficient training and models for investigation and intervention and the surge of referrals that has occurred over the last four to five years resulting in a large workload without additional training. The threshold that children's services impose for initiating interventions is also seen as too high resulting in many children not receiving early help and safeguarding action. Project workers recognised that they themselves needed further training regarding intervention programmes and needed to develop new resources to use with young people in their recovery. This is discussed in more detail later in this report.

"To assess such cases as non-priority because no physical contact between the young person and the perpetrator has occurred shows a lack of understanding of the impact that online grooming and sexual abuse may have on a victim."

Project worker

The need for professionals to be more supportive of one another is seen as a key issue for the majority of workers. One practitioner noted that "the multi-agency response to young people needs to be more robust, it needs to tighten up and the communication between professionals needs to improve" and another described the multi-disciplinary response as "bitty and piecemeal... ultimately it is not co-ordinated."

For cases that are referred for recovery work, there is rarely any further social work involvement resulting in little ongoing support for the child and their family to ensure the child stays safe. If children's social care do remain involved, lack of consistency amongst social workers can lead to young people having only a superficial relationship with their social worker. This situation was reported by eight of the project workers who were interviewed

and is reinforced by discussions that the author has had with other frontline safeguarding professionals, including police officers and some social workers themselves.

This lack of contact with social workers was also reflected in the views of the young people. One young person interviewed said that the social worker “made me feel, a bit as if I had done something wrong.... My mum says she [the social worker] treated me like a naughty child.”

“I think my social worker is still about but I don’t see him very much now that I’m coming here [to a Barnardo’s project]... I think he goes to meetings about me every month... that’s when XXX [project worker] sees him and that’s about it. I’m not sure what his job is.... He was around a lot at the beginning [when the abuse was discovered].... I know my mum and dad get a bit cross at times because I’ve still got to go to court to talk about what happened to me... and they say that they haven’t got a clue what’s happening.”

Laura, aged 15 years

Other young people reported having regular contact with their social worker which they valued, with one stating that having the social worker particularly helped their parents. While the young person had a Barnardo’s support worker they saw every week, the parents “haven’t really got anyone else.”

Police response

There is substantial variation in police practice for dealing with cases of young people sexually abused online, as evidenced in this research and recent inspections by Her Majesty’s Inspector of Constabulary.⁵⁹ One example is the way different police forces deal with cases where young people have sent and or exchanged ‘selfies’ of themselves that may be illegal according to the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Two practitioners reported that the police in their areas “are not criminalising selfies” whereas those working in other geographical locations reported that they were concerned about “the criminalisation of young people” whereby they would be cautioned or charged for sending abusive or illegal images of themselves.

Because of the ‘normalisation’ of young people’s online use of sexualised language and sending or exchanging of sexually explicit images, the police response can come across as blaming the child. This approach has parallels with how the police had, in the past, dealt with offline sexual exploitation cases, which is now improving. Practitioners reported that police appeared to believe “young people are making informed decisions”, or that “they put themselves in the situation – they made the choices”, and “well she did contact them, didn’t

⁵⁹ HMIC (2015) *In harm’s way: The role of the police in keeping children safe*. London.

she?” The apparent ease with which young people appear to interact sexually online has resulted in some professionals normalising their behaviour and accepting it, rather than questioning the activities and ensuring the adults in the situation are held responsible.

“We’ve had some concerns in the sense of police attitudes because we’ve had some examples where the police will say OK that 14 year old has been asked to perform a sexual act on herself but she chose to go onto that dating website and that dating website is for people over the age of 18. So actually she can be seen as exploiting other people.... So we’ve not always had a very helpful police response.”

Project worker

“The family and Sarah were never really aware of what was happening [regarding police activity] however they did know that the perpetrator was remanded in custody. The young person’s phone was taken by the police and when the text messages between the young person and perpetrator were seen the police and all other agencies were shocked and also seemed to be judgemental as to how many texts she had sent. There were hundreds of texts in a single day that went back and forth between them and sometimes it was Sarah who would instigate the conversations. The young person was seen as the instigator of the sexual grooming and exploitation that she experienced and she was judged as being responsible because of the sexualised nature of her texts and the number of texts that were exchanged between her and the perpetrator.”

Project worker to Sarah, aged 13 years

A common theme for young people was the attitude of the police when they were being interviewed. One described the police as “treating me as a criminal”, while another stated that “the police were alright to begin with but I think they got fed up with me after a while...”

The length of time required by the police to investigate cases is seen as a challenge to assisting children and young people in their recovery. One worker commented that “investigations can be slow, communications are poor, there are often issues of lost phones and dropped cases”, while another observed that it “can take up to a year before they come back to me.”⁶⁰ The reasons for the

⁶⁰ One young person’s abuse was discovered in 2011 and all matters have still not been resolved with two criminal cases pending to be heard later in 2015.

delays can be explained, in part, by the number of devices that the police have to send away for forensic examination, for which there is often a waiting list. It is also not unusual for the police to discover multiple offenders and to trace other victims which delays the process for bringing the matter to a close.

The handling of the initial response on the part of social workers and police was raised by practitioners and there was a general consensus that the agencies “were not always coping well with such cases.” Attitudes towards parents were frequently seen to apportion blame, although many were in shock regarding their child’s abuse. Closer communication with parents regarding any investigation was recommended. Furthermore, it was pointed out that some parents might be fearful of the police themselves. One practitioner stated that “at the discovery stage the police and social worker’s attitudes need to change, explanations need to be given to parents about what the concerns are and what’s going to happen next. The police need to understand the shock that parents feel, they need to remove the stigma and to work together with parents to protect their child, not work against them.”

Some of the project staff interviewed worked as members of multi-disciplinary teams. Their experiences differed with some considering that they were “reactive and piecemeal, no cohesion, no strategic perspective” whilst two other project workers believed that “it’s working well – it was very much a police culture but I think I’ve made a difference to values and attitudes”, and “the police in our team are good... some attitude issues but generally OK.” However, all of these project workers considered that “online grooming is not seen as serious as offline and it needs to be.”

Health

Health workers’ involvement with children and young people harmed online was seen as problematic, particularly in respect of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) workers and GPs. Ten of the project workers interviewed had a child(ren) on their caseloads who was receiving or had received input from CAMHS services. It was felt that CAMHS services lacked knowledge and training about online sexual abuse of children, and because of this lack of knowledge it was felt that “CAMHS workers do not always know how or when to escalate a case.”

The nature of online grooming, as mentioned previously in this report, has resulted in a significant proportion of young people harmed online coming from secure, caring family backgrounds, and this scenario does not fit existing CAMHS models for intervention. “CAMHS always need to find a reason/ probe as to why the abuse happened – this doesn’t always apply online.” Such an approach results in “parents feeling or thinking it is their fault.”⁶¹ The threshold for referral to CAMHS was seen as a deterrent to enabling some

⁶¹ Project worker.

young people harmed online to receive the therapeutic interventions they require – “with CAMHS it has to be a diagnosable disorder – so if a young person wants therapeutic help, in a safe place she can’t access it but if she wants to start self-harming then she will get an appointment [access] for therapeutic support.”⁶²

Generally, workers reported that CAMHS services can appear rigid, formal and to lack empathy. They were perceived as not “user friendly” and were rarely able to respond in a timely manner to the needs of children and young people harmed online – “I do refer young people to CAMHS when appropriate but they have such a long waiting list that isn’t helpful to the young person... also the trouble with CAMHS is if you miss three appointments, sometimes less, you’re out.”

These concerns are reflected in the findings outlined in the Government’s report on children’s mental health and well-being.⁶³ The report recommends that CAMHS needs to review its work practices, approaches and systems and to work more closely with other agencies working with children and young people.

In two cases, parents had taken their 13 year old child to see the family GP because of concerns about their emotional and psychological state. In both cases, the children were from secure family homes where no members were known to the police or social care services and both were high achievers at school. However, both young people had developed erratic sleep patterns, displayed severe mood swings and a withdrawal and distancing from family life. Both sets of parents had initially thought that their child was affected by the changes that occur physically, hormonally and emotionally during adolescence. As the symptoms persisted for four to six months, the parents felt that their child may have a more serious mental health condition and thus sought advice from their GPs.

“It didn’t cross my mind to ask her about what might be happening for her online. But it also didn’t cross the minds of the GP or the school. It was 3 months from the point that I raised my concerns with the professionals about my daughter that I discovered through over hearing a conversation she was having, that she was planning to meet someone the next day right in the south of the country – 100 of miles from our home. I knew something was terribly wrong for her and that’s why we went to the school and to the GP but neither we, nor they, asked the question. I didn’t ask the question that needed asking because I didn’t know about online grooming behaviours. Her teachers and GP didn’t ask the question because they didn’t think about

⁶² Project worker.

⁶³ Department of Health and NHS England (2015) *Promoting, protecting and improving our children and young people’s mental health and well being*.

what might be happening for Joanna online. All professionals working with children and young people need to ask the question when concerned about a child or young person – but I think they don't do so because they aren't confident enough to do so."

Parent of Joanna, aged 13 years

Schools

There was a varied response to the ways in which schools handled situations where their pupils had been sexually harmed online. Some schools tried to manage the situation in the whole school setting, supporting the young person who has been harmed and ensuring they remain integrated within the school. However, this can be challenging and practitioners pointed out that there is a need for models of best practice within educational settings to help teachers manage the risks facing their pupils.

Schools are one of the key agencies that can impact on the nature of the recovery process for young people harmed online and the project workers interviewed recognised the need for developing models of intervention that, for the lower risk children, could be managed within the school setting. Again the issue of staff confidence within the school to do this was raised. One worker commented "education staff get really panicky and refer to our service. Through working alongside them we are trying to get schools to gain a bit more confidence and for them to take responsibility for managing the lower risk cases in their settings – this should be manageable."

Criminal justice

The criminal justice response to the needs of children having been sexually abused online was raised by professionals, parents and young people. The slow process of disclosure of traumatic events over time makes it difficult for the criminal justice process to gain evidence as quickly as possible after the discovery of an abusive event for a child. Discovery, rather than disclosure by the victim, of online abuse is the predominant way in which such crimes are exposed. The reality of discovery is that the child victim may well not be in an emotional and psychological position to talk immediately about what has happened to them.

Similarly, denial that any harm has occurred, minimisation and retraction often occur on the part of the victim and may, at times, be used by the defence as proof that nothing happened; that it was not as severe as the prosecution case would suggest or that the child was lying and thus retracted their initial disclosure of abuse. One young person mentioned how badly affected he was by the experience of giving evidence in criminal proceedings against his perpetrator.

“They didn’t believe me when I went to court. The bloke’s barrister said I was lying because I had changed what I told the police.... I had first off said that nothing had happened when the police interviewed me.... Later I told them bits and then I told XXXX [project worker] more and he let the police know and they interviewed me again.... I think the barrister said I was lying or something like that... I can remember feeling upset and angry.... The Jury were very quick in making their decision... I felt like I had done wrong and not him.”

Justin, aged 18 years

The need for expert witnesses who can explain the impact on young people of grooming and abuse to the court has been evident for some years. This need becomes even more evident when considering cases of online abuse, when young people are frequently viewed as willing and active participants in their abuse and the ‘evidence’ of their behaviours is there to be seen through, texts messages or imagery they have exchanged. This finding supports evidence from other reports⁶⁴⁶⁵ that recommend that the criminal justice system, including juries, should be better informed about sexual abuse and exploitation and the impact on victims.

“We have spent many a time in court to hear our child’s perpetrators face the consequences of what they did to him and have been appalled.... There is a total lack of understanding of what online grooming does to a child... the judges don’t tend to get it... one did and he was brilliant... the CPS barristers hardly mentioned it and the jury [through their not guilty verdicts] obviously hadn’t got a clue. We asked the CPS and their Barrister to get an expert witness who could explain to the court just what grooming online involved for a child but they refused to do so.... To this day, we believe that this would have made a difference.... There’s a lot of education that needs to take place throughout the criminal justice system before children abused online are going to be believed.”

Mother of Paul, aged 16 years

The majority of the practitioners had little experience of the criminal court processes in relation to prosecutions for internet abuse. This was put down to

64 Barnardo’s (2014) *Report on the Parliamentary Inquiry into the effectiveness of legislation for tackling child sexual exploitation and trafficking within the UK*. Barkingside.

65 Beckett, H & Warrington, C (2015) *Making justice work: Experiences of criminal justice for children and young people affected by sexual exploitation as victims and witnesses*, University of Bedfordshire, Luton.

the fact that “it seems very hard for the CPS to take anything forward”. Workers reported that getting cases into court is very difficult, “even ones that seem clear cut.”

Three practitioners had each had a young person referred to them for support and counselling but found that their work was hindered because the young people were due to give evidence in criminal proceedings against their perpetrator. In two of these cases the referrals were delayed until the criminal proceedings had finished and in the third, the practitioner was able to commence working with the young person but felt that her interventions were constrained because she was told that she could support the young person but not discuss the alleged offence. In these three cases, it was the police who informed the practitioners about when the counselling work might commence, contrary to guidelines laid down for pre-trial therapy.

There are a number of myths that surround pre-trial support and counselling, in particular regarding fear of contamination of evidence and the consequent collapse of a trial. One of the key issues regarding provision of pre-trial therapy is the criminal justice system’s overall limited understanding about what such processes involve. It is not in the best interests of children and young people for their recovery to be left delayed until the criminal proceedings have been completed.

Rose was 14 when her mother overheard her daughter on the phone talking to her new ‘boyfriend’ and was sufficiently concerned to go to the police. The man was arrested, charged and two years later was found guilty of a number of sexual offences against Rose. Rose had been referred to a Barnardo’s project for counselling but the police and the CPS stipulated that the work was not to commence until after the trial. Rose was left in emotional limbo and remained committed to her ‘boyfriend’ and mourned his loss in her life. She was unable to move on and when she eventually received the help she required proved resistant to any suggestion that her ‘boyfriend’ was a sexual predator. It took over two years of work with Rose and her family before the project worker was satisfied that Rose was well on the road to recovery. The two years of being in limbo before receiving the required assistance had resulted in Rose developing entrenched beliefs regarding her ‘boyfriend’ and her parents being left to manage the situation with no support from any services.

Rose, aged 14 years

There were also concerns about the disclosure of confidential records. One practitioner described a situation in which a CAMHS worker disclosed all her records to the court. Within the notes was a record that the child giving

evidence had at some point lied about the matter. Her project worker said that the child was, “destroyed by the court and the guy went free.” Handling requests for disclosure of confidential records is little understood by health, children’s services, education and voluntary sector personnel and they have little confidence in resisting full disclosure rather than only supplying the court with details that might be seen as relevant to either the prosecution and/or defence case.

Concerns were expressed regarding not only the attitude of judges and barristers (both prosecution and defence) towards young witnesses but also their lack of understanding regarding matters relating to the way young people communicate online, the lack of inhibition displayed, the language used and the images exchanged. Defence lawyers have been known to trace the digital footprint of young witnesses and to describe to the court what they have found in attempts (often successful) to discredit the witness’ character.

Young people reported that they were seldom kept informed about how their case was progressing and were often given dates for hearings which would then change at the last minute or not go ahead with little explanation given for this. Four young people’s cases were dropped through lack of evidence which they described as leaving them feeling devastated and “disbelieved.”

The disclosure of evidence has become more complicated since the growth of internet crimes of abuse. Bearing in mind the quantity of materials they have to review in each case of internet harm, agencies collecting evidence, such as the police, should consider taking a more focused approach when collecting evidence. The author of this report has found that if the right evidence is collected to ensure a conviction, the perpetrator is more likely to enter a guilty plea which means the young victims do not have to give evidence in court.

Good practice by professionals

Pockets of positive practice by police and social workers in relation to online abuse were identified by four respondents. One commented that in her area “police seem more confident now in their response – social workers less so” and another was of the view “I think police have realised that attitudes and values were... not in line with a child centred approach. I think there has been a real change in attitudes and values within the [local] police force. There’s been more acceptance that what they’re seeing is abuse. There’s a better response and more of an acceptance that it’s prosecutions we need to be looking at rather than blaming the young people.” Good practice was also noted in a examples where agencies work together, as a team, and remain involved and supportive of the young person.

Vera, aged 14, is a 'child in need' and has a social worker with whom she has built a trusting relationship. The early intervention service have been involved for over a year and considered closing the case after it was escalated to Social Care. However, professionals agreed that ongoing involvement would be beneficial considering the positive relationship the worker has established with Vera's mum. Professional meetings are held every 4-6 weeks – with all professionals are required to attend, resulting in a more coordinated approach to Vera's care.

Project worker

Engagement, assessment and recovery

Engagement with families and young people

Currently there is no national multi-disciplinary guidance for best practice when online abuse is discovered. The standard of the response families receive is dependent on where they may be living and the expertise of the professionals in their area. Practice evidence to date informs us that the discovery of the online abuse of a child needs to be treated as seriously as any other kind of abuse. Careful, but timely, planning needs to occur on the part of the professionals at the outset and how we intervene in internet cases needs to be reconsidered. Immediate safety measures need to be assessed at point of discovery, including the decision regarding mobile phone possession, access by young people to online platforms and assessing the parents or carers abilities to safeguard their children's future online activities.

There appears to be a poor understanding of the impacts of online abuse on the victims. The effect of the differential nature of the grooming process online, in particular the speed at which it occurs, and the seeming complicity by young people appears to be little understood by the majority of the children's workforce. This has an impact on the nature of the referrals made to projects and the types of interventions requested.

The experience of the vast majority of the practitioners interviewed is that the impact and recovery process, both on and offline is "a long haul" and "cutting the ties that the young person has with their perpetrator(s) is very difficult." Online abuse of young people brings new aspects to safeguarding in which police, social workers, teachers and parents, all play a key role in the recovery process of a young person. This unified working practice needs to be galvanised at the initial involvement of the victim and their family if safe outcomes are going to be achieved in the long term. In practice this does not

always happen and families are often left without the support they require to enable them to safeguard their children.

As well as concerns regarding the way police interact with parents, one practitioner was of the view that “children’s services are a deterrent to seeking help” and two others reported, “I think intervention of children’s services causes a lot of fear for the family and many a time they are blameless.” “People are less likely to seek help if they have to get children’s services involved – the stigma attached is a deterrent.” One Service Manager commented “we forget the impacts on parents. I think there’s a lack of support for parents to come to terms with what’s happened but also to help them understand it – which many of them don’t.” A theme that developed during the interviews with practitioners was that “one of the biggest gaps in service provision is help and support for parents.” As one project worker commentated “what’s the use of my working with someone when they go home and spend most of their time with their parents and they are the ones who can safeguard them.”

To enable engagement with parents and their child, plans must be drawn up from the outset that include all those involved and ensure the safety of the child in the immediate and longer term. It also requires understanding by the police and social services personnel who carry out the interviews that victims are frequently not in a position to be able to immediately talk about what has happened. They need time to come to terms with what professionals have discovered and the impact that it inevitably has on both themselves and their family.

Monitoring young people’s activities

The safeguarding of children and young people who have been harmed online brings with it new considerations of children’s rights, such as to privacy, alongside their rights to protection. In order to ensure their initial safety some young people are denied all access to online activity as a means of safeguarding, or are closely supervised. This may seem a protective tactic but does not necessarily ensure that the young person remains safe as they may use friend’s equipment and not only maintain themselves in risky situations but also expose their peer group to risk as well. For young people at risk from exploitation, their mobile phone may be a form of support and safety if they need to contact someone for help. As a specialist CSE worker commented – “removing the phone may put them more at risk – they can’t phone or text for support.”

“The starting point needs to be one of ‘continue to do what you enjoy doing but do it much more safely’ because young people don’t think they’re doing anything wrong... so our starting point shouldn’t be you need to stop doing that but offering them different ways that keeps them safe.”

Project worker

As well as varying views on whether a young person should be denied access to the internet, there are also differences in professional views regarding the monitoring of young people's communications online. In a number of cases, young people have continued to have the use of a mobile phone following the discovery of their abuse. This phone, not always with internet connectivity, may be provided by parents, sometimes by police and in other cases by social workers. In all these examples an agreement was made with the young person regarding some form of monitoring. The condition for the young person having a phone is often that they share their password(s) with the adult responsible for their care.

Some professionals have less difficulty with this stance than others: for example a project worker put this scenario – “there is a child at risk, so is it OK to educate parents regarding monitoring of their child's online activities? Yes it is. Is this an invasion of the child's privacy? Absolutely not. Should this be a standard practice response? Yes it should.”

“Something what's interesting when it comes to trying to protect children who we believe to be at risk is the care homes reluctance to even look at kids Facebook pages and things. Now I'm not sure what the boundaries are around that and what their policies and procedures are, but for example, when one of my young people from secure went missing last week one of my first ports of call was well we'll look on her Facebook and see who she's with, what she has posted, because it might give you some indication of whether she's safe and alive and where she is.”

Project worker

Four parents reported the difficulties involved in monitoring their children's online behaviour as part of the safeguarding package. Their children resented their parents knowing what they were doing online and two of the four parents felt ill-equipped to be able to monitor effectively. As one mother put it “to monitor effectively is incredibly difficult because my son is so clever.” In one case, the mother found it helpful to draw up an agreement with her son, teacher and project worker – thus it was jointly owned by those responsible for her son's safeguarding on a daily basis. A monthly meeting would be held to discuss her son's progress including the monitoring of his online behaviour.

Clearly, best practice guidance is needed on how to safeguard children and young people, particularly in relation to their online access, immediately after the discovery of their abuse and more long term. How integral online communication has become to young people in their social interaction must be taken into account when making safeguarding plans.

Assessment of risk

Many Barnardo's services currently use a sexual exploitation assessment tool, Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (SERAF), to identify levels of risk of sexual exploitation for children and young people.⁶⁶ Whilst this model remains a reliable tool for assessing children and young people at risk from sexual exploitation and acknowledges that many young people may be controlled by perpetrators through the use of mobile phones and the internet, practitioners have identified that it is not suitable for use with 'internet abuse only' cases. This is because a significant proportion of 'internet abuse only' referrals do not involve children and young people who have experienced difficult childhoods or displayed risky behaviours, such as going missing or having older friends.

There is a need to consider the development of specific tools for the identification of risk in relation to online child sex abuse. Currently, if the initial referral centres on online harm, "the measurement of risk scores, at point of referral, is very low on the initial assessment that we carry out."⁶⁷ Young people who may be at serious risk from online abuse do not register as such through use of the tool. The recognition of the need for more refined models of assessment for online risks (and intervention programmes) that reflect the known impacts of online grooming and sexual abuse as well as the broader social and family context in which this may occur is reflected across the children's workforce.

Recovery

Online grooming, illegal child abuse images, blatant sexualised online chat, trauma, keeping safe, self-esteem, transferring blame and shame and 'what to do if scenarios' are some of the key issues that are generally covered by practitioners when working with children and young people harmed online. They report that the majority of the young people resist talking in any detail about their online behaviours and it is often impossible for them to vocalise certain aspects in particular. The reason for this is that "from a therapeutic perspective, children who meet their abuser online and suffer offline abuse seem to have additional problems to deal with in therapy. It seems that in IT-related sexual abuse, feelings of guilt and shame may be accentuated by the fact that they were seen to be actively participating in the contact with the abuser."⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Those services that don't use SERAF use similar assessments, as requested by their commissioning authority.

⁶⁷ Project worker.

⁶⁸ Ainsaar, M & Loof, L. (eds) (2011) *Online behaviour related to child sexual abuse*. Literature report. Council of the Baltic Sea States, Stockholm. ROBERT project.

Alison sent sexually provocative and naked images of herself to an older male online. He distributed these via Instagram. Alison was so upset by the incident that she took an overdose and was referred to CAHMS for support. She was subsequently referred to a Barnardo's project. Alison was ashamed and embarrassed by the incident and did not want to discuss any details regarding what had happened or to engage in the work. Gradually she began to open up and share some of her thoughts and emotions. When working on issues relating to online safety Alison found it easier if her worker made use of third party scenarios rather than concentrate on her own experiences.

Alison, aged 14 years

In the initial phases of recovery from sexual exploitation, any feelings of guilt or shame often associated with being abused may be over-ruled by the fact that the young person believes that those who groomed them online and then sexually abused them, either on or offline, are the people who cared for them and for whom they have a strong emotional attachment and need.⁶⁹ Practitioners reported that one of the difficulties in helping the young people is to “cut the ties with their abuser(s).” Depending on the circumstances in which the online abuse occurred, the ‘long haul’ to release the young person from the emotional hold of the abuser may take as long as two years or more. The experience of practitioners is that “young people will always minimise what they do online and they are rarely able to talk about the detail of what happened.”⁷⁰ One young person “took over a year to talk about the abusive activity”, while some never do. One service manager suggested that “we need to ask young people more often what they consider to be a healthy sexual relationship rather than assume that they know.”

Helping young people come to terms with the idea that images of their abuse may remain on the internet is a complex and sensitive process. For those who had their images taken there is embarrassment of the discovery, while for those who self-generated sexual images, there is the added burden of feeling responsible for their production and, in some cases, their distribution. In both situations it takes time to assist the young person in coming to terms with the reality and in moving forward with their lives. Rarely can such work commence until the young person has built up their self-confidence and self-esteem sufficiently to be able develop coping strategies.

Just as the need to engage parents at the beginning of any investigation is seen as essential to achieving a good outcome, practitioners have found that part of their intervention model needs to encompass working with parents and sometimes the whole family. Parents are frequently in a state of shock when

⁶⁹ Department for Health and Channon Consulting (2014) *Health impacts of sexual exploitation on adolescents*. Appendix. London.

⁷⁰ Project worker.

they realise that their child has been harmed online. They need timely help in understanding the processes that have occurred and support in keeping their child who has been abused and their other children safe online for the future. Many practitioners saw the role of parents and carers as integral to helping their victimised child have a future safer online experience.

Resources

The websites and apps most commonly identified as being linked to the sexual exploitation of young people were named by practitioners. It was found that the majority of young people commenced relationships on Facebook before going onto other sites and apps. Snapchat, Instagram, BBM, WhatsApp and Skype were reported as the most popular sites used by perpetrators to communicate with young people. Three other sites, Grindr, Flirtfinder and Kik, each featured on three occasions, and others were named once. A list of the most frequently mentioned sites is attached as an appendix⁷¹ to this report together with descriptors and the risks they may pose to children and young people.

With new websites and apps being developed continually, it is difficult for professionals to keep up to date, and to understand the related risks. Generally, the younger staff working with children harmed online felt more confident in working on issue of online safety. Many took a practical approach and would go actively online with a young person with practitioners saying the following: “I like to be more practical, so I’m literally on the sites and often catch them [young people] out with their safety measures”.... “I can wing it with a young person... I know enough to make them think that I know more so it allows me to open up conversations and have a dialogue with them so that I can gauge and assess their vulnerability and risk a lot quicker.” Another practitioner commented that “young people give me the training – I ask them things and get them to show me – my confidence and understanding of how things work has grown considerably by doing this over the past couple of years.” Others are less confident “I’d love to be able to do that but I just don’t have the know-how.”

Limited use of the wide range of resources on online abuse is made by practitioners, mainly as they were unaware of their existence. Use is made of the CEOP Think U Know packs, various DVDs, the Barnardo’s B Wise2 Exploitation, Real Love Rocks education pack, the Wud U app and Blast project’s materials. A number of workers have undertaken the CEOP Ambassador training on internet safety.

Staff are beginning to make their own resources, sometimes in conjunction with young people. One person interviewed said that she uses “lots of different links and websites for her work with both parents and young people.” One project has added internet related activity to the model that is used with young people to explain the four stages of grooming. This is an innovative piece of work.

⁷¹ Appendix 2.

Very few staff knew of the UK Safer Internet Centre (UKSIC), the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS), the South West Grid for Learning or Internet Matters, all of which have a range of resources to raise awareness about internet harm and how better to protect children. Two major contacts, the Internet Watch Foundation and the Professionals' Online Safety Helpline (POSH)⁷² were also little known. This lack of knowledge is not specific to Barnardo's staff as many frontline professionals working with children and young people have expressed feelings of being deskilled by the onset of online abuse and the different aspects and conduits for harm of young people via the internet. This has been evidenced by the comments of some of the project workers interviewed for this report. It has also been evidenced on a larger scale through a survey⁷³ carried out on behalf of the Marie Collins Foundation which found that 96.5% of professional respondents in Children's Services, Education and Health across England stated that they required training for online risk assessment, while 94% needed training for intervention programmes.

One worker interviewed for the research stated "trying to protect our young people is really difficult with the society that we live in. Just keeping up with new developments such as new sites is really difficult for professionals." Yet many of these professionals bring skills and experience to their work which are still required, their ability to form trusting relationships with those they set out to assist; their communication skills; their ability to stay there for the 'long run'; their knowledge base regarding sexual abuse and exploitation and the modus operandi of sexual abusers are all essential components for helping young people in their recovery.

In summary:

- there is no UK-wide guidance for multi-disciplinary working when investigating cases of online abuse of children
- there are no evidence-based models for assessing online risk and the therapeutic needs of children
- there are some pockets of innovative practice that should be developed and used to inform national policies
- there are a number of good resources available to raise awareness of the safety issues regarding the internet, but these could be better advertised
- there are few resources currently available to help practitioners in their recovery work with children and young people, particularly younger children who are at risk of grooming online
- confidence of practitioners needs increasing through training on online communications and the role it plays in the sexual abuse of young people.

⁷² IWF is a 'notice and take down service' for reporting child abuse images and POSH is a helpline set up to assist professionals, including if they have concerns regarding particular sites regarding the safety of children and need assistance.

⁷³ Bond, E & Phippen, A (2014) *The Children's workforce across England is ill informed to meet the needs of child victims of online abuse*. Marie Collins Foundation, Plymouth University and University Campus of Suffolk.



Barnardo's non-sexual exploitation services and online risk

The main focus of this report was to establish the impact of new technology on the projects working with children who are sexually abused and exploited. However, other projects responded to requests for information regarding children they support who have been sexually harmed online or who displayed sexually harmful behaviours. Fourteen projects responded to the request for information and four offering different services were chosen as examples of the cross section of work carried out by Barnardo's across the four nations, and their response to internet harm. No children or parents were interviewed for the purposes of this section of the report and no case studies are included, although a number were given by staff during the interview process.⁷⁴

Overall the findings from the interviews found similarities to the CSE projects in the way that young people are harmed online. Other issues were also raised, such as fostered and adopted children using the internet to search for their birth parents. This was an issue raised on a number of occasions but not addressed in this report. As well as similarities in the type of abuse, there were also similarities in the way projects address the issue. These include:

- involving young people and their parents in safeguarding plans regarding their internet and phone use
- mainstreaming e-safety rather than keeping it CSE focused
- building self-esteem and coping strategies for young people
- training staff to better understand internet and phone use, and how past abuse can impact on a young person's current behaviour around internet and phones
- identifying that young people can have a 'dual status' of being a victim of abuse and displaying harmful sexual behaviours.

A school offering both day and boarding facilities to children with social, emotional and mental health difficulties

This school offers education to male and female pupils, ranging in ages from 7 to 18 years. The children suffer from a wide range of social, emotional and mental health difficulties.⁷⁵ The staff work closely with professionals from

⁷⁴ Parts of some case studies have been used in the main section of the report to illustrate specific points. The reason for taking this position was to protect children and their families from the possibility of being identified.

⁷⁵ These are categorised by Ofsted as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Oppositional Defiance Disorder, Conduct Disorder, depression, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Tourette's. In addition, Ofsted has recognised the school as one suitable for pupils with Communication and Interaction Needs, Autistic Spectrum and Speech, Language and Communication Needs.

Children's Social Care, Health and the Police and in partnership with the pupils' parents and carers.

A Residential Unit Manager, employed at the school for ten years, was interviewed for the purposes of this report. She reported that the changing nature and role of new technology in children's lives over the past decade has been a huge challenge to staff, both in the way they safeguard children and in the way that the whole school community adapts to the new methods of communicating and learning. In 2006 a few pupils had use of mobile phones, yet the manager noted that now "if you took away their phones or took away their internet enabled devices, you're taking away not just their belongings but you're taking away, like their social group, you're taking away their social life."

In 2006, those pupils who had mobile phones would hand them to staff when they came into school and only get them back "if they were going out independently somewhere." If pupils wanted to play games or go online they were able to use the game consoles and computers that were situated in communal rooms with staff monitoring their online activities. By 2009/10 the school management realised that they had to change their approach as phones became more integral to young people's lives. In 2014 school staff estimated that the majority children in their school in the 11 to 16 age group owned or had use of a mobile phone. At the time of the interview it was believed that "about 90% of our young people in that age group have got a smart phone, at least one smart phone possibly more."⁷⁶

The drive to change the school policies regarding mobile phone usage came from the pupils themselves. Around 2009 and 2010, pupils began to raise the issue of mobile phone use both in the young people's group meetings, which are held in the residential units, and through the young people's membership of the School Council. At that time, staff were aware that a number of pupils hid their access to phones and this was causing upset between teachers and pupils. Due to children having access and staff unable to monitor or manage how phones were used, the school policy regarding mobile phone usage changed and young people were given access to mobile phones within the school setting. To ensure safe use of their phone, each young person has a personal safeguarding plan to enable staff to monitor activities, if necessary, and help the young person manage their online risk.

As smartphones became more widespread the school's initial response to older pupils who had access to social media sites and were at risk of abuse and exploitation was to stop the young person having access to the internet and to remove their phone. In retrospect, the Unit Manager is of the view that this was not a helpful approach.

⁷⁶ Residential Unit Manager.

“This was our first case, I think, our first big one who had such restrictions. And I think we got it wrong at first because we didn’t really know what we were doing to the young person by taking the phone away.... Because we were obviously scared for her and her vulnerability, we did stop everything. And whilst it kept her safe at the time it didn’t do anything to help her learn about keeping her safe online.”

Residential Unit Manager

Key concerns⁷⁷ regarding the potential and actual sexual abuse and/or exploitation online of pupils are similar to those reported by staff working in Barnardo’s child sexual exploitation projects. When there are such concerns “a lot of them tend to be in house, as in speaking inappropriately to one another or sending one another inappropriate images.” It is some of the older pupils, 13 years of age and upwards, who tend to get involved online with “outsiders – people we don’t know.” Pupils accessing age inappropriate games is viewed as a continual problem amongst the school population, both at primary and secondary level, as some parents buy games for their children without checking the content.

Due to the troubled backgrounds of many of their pupils, the school staff work closely with Children’s Services and CAMHS. One of the biggest hurdles that they face is being able to ensure that those pupils who have been harmed online receive appropriate intervention programmes. One pupil had to wait two years before it was agreed that Children’s Services would pay for treatment at a specialist voluntary project. The delay was caused by lack of funding and decisions regarding who would pay for the service. Specialist services are seen as difficult to find.

Similarly, referrals to CAMHS are extremely problematic because “they don’t have the funding and their waiting lists are sky high.” When cases relating to internet harm online are referred to the CAMHS, the response appears to show a lack of understanding regarding how damaging online abuse can be to the individuals concerned. The manager noted “we try to get across [to CAMHS] that we’re saying it’s a high priority in our setting.... it seems that they don’t understand our setting and what we’re dealing with.”

The criminal justice response to the needs of pupils who have been harmed and abused via the internet, in a number of cases groomed online and sexually abused offline, has been disappointing and poor. In connection with the abuse of one pupil, the Police and CPS made the decision to drop the case because she was viewed as an unstable witness who was to blame for her abuse, rather than a vulnerable young person with mental health issues and emotional behavioural difficulties.

⁷⁷ As well as concerns regarding inappropriate content, and meeting up with strangers, a serious issue for the school is for fostered and adopted children to use the internet to find their birth parents, or vice versa.

Prevention and safeguarding

The school places great emphasis on educating the young people to be safe online, with the manager being a trained CEOP Ambassador. Due to the young people who attend the school having issues relating to learning difficulties and poor past experiences of care, the online safety education can be difficult to deliver, but is more successful where a relationship develops between the young people and their key workers.

“We try to educate them to look after themselves online. However, because our young people have so many other issues anyway, they’re more at risk than your average mainstream child. Their impulse control is poor, they don’t understand consequences and they don’t understand long term impact of their behaviour or other people’s behaviour.... Again, with our young people having such negative experiences of education and professionals, previous to coming to us, it takes a long time for some of them to understand that what we’re trying to educate them about is for their benefit, not because we are telling them and we want to ruin their lives.”

Residential Unit Manager

The school approach to safeguarding children online includes everyone involved in the care of each pupil. The young person, their key care workers, their teachers, social worker and their parents or carers are involved in developing individual plans for keeping the young person safe online. Staff training on internet safety has revealed the lack of understanding amongst some staff members regarding the current reach that internet connectivity of mobile phones gives to users, including those intent on harming children. The need for increased education and continual updating of new developments for staff is seen as paramount. Engaging parents can be problematic but they are encouraged to be part of the team regarding online safety of their child, how to monitor and use filters and how to take some responsibility for the children’s safety, rather than leaving it to the school.

Despite all the planning that takes place regarding each pupil’s online safety needs, the nature of some of the learning difficulties that the pupils experience results in some of them disregarding the information they have been given when they “become fixated on a particular activity online, some pupils take on the view that ‘no one’s going to stop me.’”

Managing the rights of their pupils to online access whilst ensuring their safety is a complex issue for all concerned and one with which all those involved in the safety of the pupils is engaged. However, the school is developing a model for safeguarding their pupils who have particular vulnerabilities.

The following are some of the developments that have taken place over the past five years:

- acceptable use policies and agreements for staff and volunteers
- acceptable use policy and agreement for parents/carers
- signed Permission Form for parents to give their consent to their child having access to the internet and IT systems within school – both the classroom and the residential unit
- e-safety contract for primary and secondary children and individual e-safety plan, according to needs
- log sheets for each pupil that record the date of an internet related concern, the nature of the concern and the action taken by unit staff.

The staff have also taken some innovative approaches to raising awareness regarding particular anti-social and harmful behaviours online. An example of this was the work they carried out with pupils during ‘anti-bullying week’. Following the promotion for anti-bullying week in 2013, one of the Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) teachers had noticed a spike in bullying incidents within the school. Therefore, in 2014 they turned anti-bullying week into ‘friendship week’ thus encouraging the pupils to think about how to be a good friend online, how to be a good friend in real life and how to combine these two together. In general, the school have tried to encapsulate e-safety into all their activities.

Residential care unit

This residential care project offers places for six children of primary school age who have experienced extreme trauma, deprivation, abuse and neglect and whose care plan is long term fostering. It is integrated with a fostering project that supports professional foster carers for children with complex needs.

The Children’s Service Manager for these services reported that ten years ago the internet was not a particular cause for concern. The impact of developments online for the safeguarding of children in their care began in 2005/6. The three predominant concerns are sexually harmful behaviours and exploitation of children online, the accessibility of pornography and unauthorised family contact via social media and mobile phones.

All foster carers, supervising social workers and residential social workers receive e-safety training and foster carers are trained how to monitor the online behaviours of young people in their care. A service user risk management assessment is carried out for each child in foster placement and a detailed plan is followed to lessen the risks to children. Foster parents are expected to report if they have concerns about a child’s online activities and will then, together with the supervising social worker look at what action might be required

which might include no internet access or removal of mobile phone for the short term. Such actions are seen as responding to the safeguarding needs of the children and any restrictions placed on their accessibility to online communications is temporary and accompanied by education programmes regarding risks. It is seen as the need for the adults to take charge.

“Because, if we don’t take charge, who will? And it is a really difficult issue because I will never be disrespectful to children’s rights, but their fundamental right is to protection and safeguarding. However, taking the mobile phone off a child forever is pointless. So you have to educate them about why you want them to be safe and why you don’t want them to be unsafe.”

Children’s Service Manager

Within the residential project where children are all recovering from severely abusive experiences there are no mobile phones in order to ensure there is no bullying, no danger of sexual exploitation or being able to take inappropriate pictures on mobile phones. There is internet connection with a robust monitoring programme on which the settings can be changed if requested. Each child has their own login and is supervised when they are online in order to protect them as much as possible from being exposed to material that might re-traumatise them and bring back experiences from their past.

Ten years ago risk management assessment would not have included online risks to the child, and currently such risks are considered in a reactive way, when there is a cause for concern, rather than in a pro-active way where consideration of possible risks are considered and catered for. During the interview the Service Manager reflected that internet risks should, in the future, always be included in any risk management assessment on a child. Similarly, she was going to recommend changes to the referral forms for children in which any known internet harm experienced by or perpetrated by the child would be recorded. The reason for making these changes to the referral form is reinforced by the experience of staff who work with the children. There have been occasions when children have raised issues which leave the staff wondering what has happened to them in relation to internet abuse. Over the past five or six years some children have mentioned things including a child who said “when my dad [known to be a sexual abuser] took photos of me and put them online” or children have been observed reacting to particular situations, such as a child having supervised contact with his mother who, when she took out her camera, became openly upset, crawled under a chair, covered his face and cried that he did not want his photo taken.

Staff of the integrated service reported that “there was still a long way to go” to improve the service response of other professionals, such as police, children’s services, health and education. While there are areas of good practice, the Service Manager raised concerns regarding courts that are aware of children having contact with their parents via Facebook, who otherwise should not be contacting their children and police who blamed victims for their own abuse. This reflects a lack of understanding about the vulnerabilities of the children accessing the service and why they may act in the way they do.

“A young person who was very vulnerable, had little self-confidence and had some learning difficulties. She was desperate to have a boyfriend and posted a naked image of herself online. The police became involved and gave her a warning and told her that if she did anything like this again she would be prosecuted.”

Service Manager

Family support and education alternative provision

This project offers support to parents, carers and families in the community and in diverse cultural circumstances. Project staff work alongside family members and offer guidance and advice aimed at supporting vulnerable children and their families. The project also offers education alternative provision for children and young people in residential, day and community schools as well as after school sessions aimed at improving overall attendance, encouraging involvement in education and community life. Additionally, support is available for those at risk of social exclusion and young mothers completing their statutory education.

The project works in partnership with the local education and social care departments and with the aim “to ensure as many young people as possible can remain in their own families, schools and communities wherever safe and appropriate.”

Staff reported that they first began to feel the impact of the internet on the lives of the young people with whom they work about six to seven years ago and in the last three years this impact has become main-stream and affects the lives of all the young people they currently work with. In the past, concerns regarding internet use would not be mentioned in referrals but since 2011/2012 “internet concerns are becoming quite explicit in referrals and more details are given regarding the harm online.”⁷⁸ When addressing the changing nature

⁷⁸ Service Manager.

of young people's relationships due to digital interaction, staff have needed to develop their understanding of what this means to young people. Whilst such relationships appear to raise the self-esteem of young people they do not necessarily help them develop peer relationships which is often a problem for the young people referred to the project.

"I personally think it's problematic. I think they think it boosts their self-esteem. They feel good when they can look at how many friends they have got and it makes them feel important that they've got a sense of belonging, there's a sense of identity within these relationships but I, personally don't see them as relationships.... Most of the young people we work with have got really low self-esteem and cannot relate well within their communities."

Project worker

Project staff have worked with a number of young people who have sent inappropriate images of themselves, with the senders tending to be girls and the recipients boys. Hardly any of the young people had ensured that their privacy was protected by, for example, ensuring the right privacy settings on their Facebook accounts were in place and when concerned adults have seen the images and mentioned the matter to the young people they will generally delete them [the concerned person] from their account rather than take on the message that their behaviours might be inappropriate.

In some instances young women have been traumatised by the fact that inappropriate, naked/illegal images that they sent to a friend have been posted by them online for 'all the world to see'. This appears to happen when friendships fail and the aggrieved party wants 'to get their own back'. Sometimes the impact on the victim of such retribution has been so great that it has been necessary to change her name and move her to another school. Although such a move appears a drastic response with good professional team work and involvement on the part of the young person such a move, in one particular case, was a great success.

"They can be harmed in so many ways and I don't think they see that. They don't recognise anything that they're doing is harmful, self-harm or harm to others. I think that's such a massive question about young people, they don't see their language as being harmful, sexually explicit pictures being harmful, the abuse being harmful."

Support worker

The project workers have been involved in a numbers of cases where parents have abused their own children through distributing sexually abusive images of them and/or selling or advertising their children online for sex. The policing response to such cases has not always been successful and there have been instances where parents have not been charged. The outcome of some cases has resulted in the children being placed in secure accommodation and their parents remaining within the community.

Whilst the project workers thought the professional approach to online harm was improving, they felt there could be more improvements. The need for training programmes to address both the assessment and intervention needs of children and their families was highlighted. Wider raising awareness and the provision of education to parents and carers within the community was also recommended. Within the service, further development of their 'in house' training programmes for volunteers and staff was highlighted and the need for training on how to better understand the internet and to enable staff to feel more confident in addressing young people's online activities.

"I was one of the young people who grew up with the internet. Not at the same level as our young people now but I can remember sitting at home in my parents' basement and hiding the router under a duvet cover so they couldn't hear me turning the dial on and sneaking online.... Now I access most of the same social media that our young people do and, if I'm not using a particular account that our young people are, I will create one so that I can understand it and work out what the risks may be. I think a lot of people [colleagues] are a bit fearful of the internet because they didn't grow up with it and they are not as proactive about just going on and figuring it out."

Project worker

Currently, project workers consider 'well-being indicators' in relation to young people but do not always include issues regarding the internet. It was noted that because of the meeting with the researcher, the service manager said "our discussions today have made me think differently about how we approach working with young people at all levels. We should be considering young people's risks online in every case and currently we don't."

Project workers identified that there was no agreed multi-disciplinary response to the management of online cases in their geographical area particularly in responding to a young person at risk from sexual abuse and exploitation. Experience has shown that the police take a different perspective to social care or foster carers in the management of risk, such as taking away their ability to connect to the internet, which can result in further vulnerability.

Specialist project offering services to young people displaying sexually harmful behaviours both online and in the community

The project provides assessment and intervention for children and young people aged 8 to 21 years who are alleged to have been involved in harmful sexual behaviours. Since it was established fifteen years ago this service has assisted over 1000 children and young people. Five practitioners and the Service Manager were interviewed for the purposes of this report.

Although approximately ten years ago issues relating to the internet began to impact on some of the behaviours of young people referred to the project, it is in the last five years that the issues of internet related harmful behaviours have become mainstream. One experienced practitioner reported “when I first came here [nine years ago] there was very, very minimal internet stuff, and over the years that has grown; but I would say that over the last maybe two years it’s exploded.”

The nature of the initial concerns expressed in referrals to the project have become increasingly centred on concerning sexual behaviours online with workers reporting that between 10 to 40 per cent of their current case loads were young people referred because of online harmful behaviours. During the assessment and/or intervention stages of work, of the cases that are currently referred for offline harmful sexual behaviours, the majority are found to have been involved in risk-taking, harmful and/or illegal behaviours online. Often, the young people will hold the dual status of being a victim and perpetrator of online harm. Project workers are developing an understanding of the complicated matrix of behaviours in which young people can become embroiled online and the impacts that these have on the individual concerned. This understanding includes consideration of the impact of non-contact abuse, with one worker stating that the impact of online abuse “may in some ways be worse...because it is insidious, it’s in wherever you are, you can’t get away from it, you can’t get away from your abuser.”

The impact of online pornography on the young people referred to this project is a concern for the team. It would appear that the majority of children referred who have been exposed to pornography are desensitised. One worker reported that nearly all of the young people she currently works with “will tell you that they have watched bestiality online... and when I raise my concerns about this their responses will generally be ‘yeah. So?’ – it’s becoming normalised.” A view was expressed that the issue of exposure to pornography is not just related to the young people who attend the project “I would say it’s prevalent amongst school age kids in general and I think more so primary kids now.” The worker reported working with an eight year old who was quite accustomed to regularly looking at pornography sites.

The project workers reported that they are regularly receiving referrals for young people who have committed internet offences online who have never been known to the police or social services and would not be categorised as coming from ‘troubled backgrounds’. This mirrors the experiences of child sexual exploitation services. The project workers also said that they are finding it difficult to keep information and images away from children and young people that in the past would have been difficult to view.

The most common sites accessed by children attending for assistance with online harmful behaviours are similar to those for children who are the victims of online abuse – Facebook, Snapchat, Whatsapp, Kik and Skype being the most frequently referred to. Online games featured regularly when discussing concerns about young people’s online access to inappropriate material. Project workers have also observed that younger and younger children appear to be playing games that are suitable for at least 15 year olds⁷⁹, and are reported to have spent hours a day playing them. In particular, young people referred to the project with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) were highlighted as a concern, with one worker commenting “we have problems with ASD kids because ASD kids become completely, completely engrossed in this stuff: whether that’s porn and they start collecting it..., or its violence and excessively violent video games; these things become majorly important to them...”

The key issue for one worker in connection with parents and games is “they don’t understand the games... a lot of parents don’t game, don’t play on the internet, don’t use it to any great degree and don’t understand what the pull is, they don’t understand the attraction, they don’t understand the addictive nature.” There is widespread recognition amongst the team that more work needs to be developed with parents regarding an understanding of what their children are exposed to online; what their children’s harmful behaviours have been online and how they can work in partnership with the project staff to better protect their children.

Team members expressed that there needs to be a far more co-ordinated approach amongst the professionals involved in protecting children, to the issue of young people displaying sexually harmful and abusive behaviours online. The need for a co-ordinated, consistent approach is vital otherwise “we run the risk of criminalising young people, particularly those who have never been involved with the police in the past and perhaps we don’t need to, perhaps we need to think of alternatives.”⁸⁰ Another practitioner commented “I think we have to stop over-reacting to some things and under-reacting to others. I think maybe we need to have some guidelines that are very explicit and everybody understands properly – and I don’t think they do at the moment.”

⁷⁹ The games mentioned are The Walking Dead, Call of Duty and Grand Theft Auto, all of which contain violence, including sexual violence.

⁸⁰ Project Worker.

The matter of suitable resources to assist in working with young people who have displayed sexually harmful behaviours online was a common theme raised by practitioners. As well as the need to develop more robust evidence based models for risk assessment and intervention programmes. The project has started work on innovative materials and models for practice and plans to test out and develop these.

Many of the concerns and limitations to current practice raised by the staff of the projects mirror those raised by project staff working with children who have been sexually exploited. The key themes being:

- lack of a strategic approach to intervention
- lack of national guidelines for best practice
- uncoordinated service response
- lack of resources
- lack of understanding of the harm caused to and by children, through online abusive behaviours.



Conclusion

Since the publication of *Just one click!* in 2004, the growth of the influence of the internet and associated technologies on people's lives has grown exponentially. More people than ever have access to the internet and children and young people are now growing up with the internet as part of the lives, both at home, in school and socially.

The online harms identified in *Just one click!* are still evident but, with the development and changes in the new technologies that are now available, the channels for causing such harms have magnified the potential for more children to be at risk online.

This research highlights that online abuse is no longer the preserve of specialist Barnardo's projects offering services to children who have been sexually abused and exploited. It has become more main stream and its impact will be felt across all the work-strands in which Barnardo's engages, and the partner agencies they work alongside.

By listening to children and young people, their parents and carers and the professionals that assist them, it has been possible to identify some of what is needed in order to better safeguard and protect children from online abuse. These findings form the evidence base for the recommendations put forward in the following section.

What is concerning is that a number of the key recommendations put forward in *Just one click!* eleven years ago have still not been acted upon and these relate, in particular, to the service response to children harmed online including the need for national guidance for investigating such matters; models for intervention and therapeutic work with the children and their families; and training programmes for all professionals across the board who are charged with the duty to protect children. By taking forward the recommendations and working closely together, changes can be made to better prevent, reduce risk and safeguard children and young people becoming victims of internet-related sexual abuse and exploitation.



Recommendations

Research conducted for this report, and other available literature, clearly illustrate that while there are many benefits to children and young people's access to technology there are also consequences. The ability to interact anonymously; send images and be coerced into 'non-contact' sexual abuse, are all issues that have increased in the last ten years. The following recommendations relate to preventing; identifying and supporting; assessing, investigating and protecting children and young people. Overall, the recommendations highlight:

- easier access to existing prevention resources and advice
- all educational establishments to provide high quality healthy relationships and sex education
- training to all professionals working with children and young people to enable all to feel confident in identifying possible harm online
- assessments, intervention and recovery programmes to include abuse that is identified as relating to harm online only
- peer mentoring programmes to be supported
- best practice guidance on the investigation of internet crimes to be developed
- consultation on complex relationship between children's rights: their right to privacy and right to protection online.

Prevention

Many frontline professionals working with children and young people have expressed feelings of being deskilled by the onset of online abuse and the different aspects and conduits for harm of young people via the internet.⁸¹

Since the launch of *'Just One Click!'* in 2004⁸² there has been a large increase in the attention given to staying safe online, resulting in an increase in the number of resources available. Part of this work has focused on preventing young people becoming victims of abuse due to their internet activity. Prevention work is crucial in ensuring that young people are aware of the dangers of the internet and know how to stay safe online.

⁸¹ The quotes in this section are taken from the main report.

⁸² A number of the recommendations are the same recommendations proposed in the original report in 2004.

UK Council for Child Internet Safety, along with the Government and interested parties, should:

- conduct a comprehensive audit of available prevention resources and develop a portal that brings all the resources into one place. Attention during the audit should be paid to assessing whether the resources are relevant to different groups of young people⁸³ and of any evaluations conducted on resources. Gaps in resources should be identified and additional prevention resources developed to ensure comprehensive coverage.

The technology industry, including those operating search engines, should:

- make the above portal easily accessible and widely available, for example on the front page of a search engine. This would sign-post users to all the resources.

Ofcom should:

- recommend to retailers the inclusion of ‘stay safe’ information with new mobile phones and other technical devices.
- assess products, such as games and apps, both those currently in use and those in development, to ensure they have safeguards in place to prevent children being harmed. This should include manufacturers providing evidence that every effort has been made to ensure children are safeguarded.

UK Government should:

Ensure all educational establishments provide high quality, age appropriate sex and relationship education including: safe internet use, same-sex relationships and the impact of young people’s increasing access to sexualised material. Information should be made accessible and adapted for all young people, taking into consideration the age of the child and any learning difficulties.

Identification and support

“It didn’t cross my mind to ask her about what might be happening to her online. But it also didn’t cross the minds of the GP or the school.”

Spotting the signs of possible sexual abuse and exploitation is key to identifying young people who may be at risk of, or are already victims of online abuse. Recommendations for training were made in the original report, but based on the findings of the research this is still a gap. After a young person has been identified, the support they receive needs to be tailored to their situation, taking into account the context of their abuse and its potential wide circulation via the internet.

⁸³ This should include, at a minimum, children with learning difficulties and disabilities and lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans-gender and questioning young people.

UK Government and those responsible for delivering training should:

Include in existing training to all professionals information to enhance professionals' response to children and young people harmed online. The training should help professionals to:

- gain confidence in order to discuss online behaviours with children and young people and know where to refer to⁸⁴
- develop tools to identify and measure risk online
- develop a best practice model for investigation
- develop models for assisting children with their recovery

Ensure that training provided to specialist professionals working within the child protection arena, including those investigating cases of possible sexual abuse and exploitation, contains online aspects of such abuse. Such training should provide models for intervention and recovery programmes.

Agencies working with victims, including the police and specialist support agencies, should:

- ensure practice guidance acknowledges the impact that non-contact sexual abuse via the internet can have on the victim and the impact of discovery of their abuse on the victims and their families
- consider supporting peer mentoring programmes to enable young people to work closely with young people who have recovered from abuse.

UK Government should:

Review appropriate resources currently available, including staff capacity, and identify the gaps:

- in the policing of the internet to prevent children and young people being harmed online and
- in intervention and recovery programmes of children and young people and offenders.

Assessments

“The recognition of the need for more refined models of assessment for online risk... is reflected across the children’s workforce.”

Once a young person has been identified as at risk, or a victim of sexual abuse and exploitation, support services should conduct assessments to identify the problem, level of risk and type of intervention required. Additionally, as more is

⁸⁴ This should include, at a minimum, Centre for Online Protection and Exploitation, Professionals Online Safety Network and Internet Watch Foundation.

being understood regarding the links between victims who are also offenders, assessments should take this into account.

With the relationship between technology and sexual abuse and exploitation now being better understood the following recommendations are:

Agencies that assess children and young people in the statutory and voluntary sector should:

- Ensure that assessment tools include how a young person uses technology; the dual status of offenders who may also be victims and the ability to assess young people for harm even when there has been no contact abuse.

Investigation and protection

“From a therapeutic perspective, children who meet their abuser online and suffer offline abuse seem to have additional problems to deal with in therapy. It seems that in IT-related sexual abuse, feelings of guilt and shame may be accentuated by the fact that they were seen to be actively participating in the contact with the abuser.”

There are many different ways in which children and young people may be sexually abused as well as a number of models of sexual exploitation. Investigations must take into account the links with technology, and how they interweave with the different aspects of sexual exploitation. While the investigation is taking place, victims must be provided with appropriate protection and support to enable the recovery process to start.

Criminal justice system, including the police and the Crown Prosecution Service, should:

- develop best practice guidance clearly stating how internet crimes should be investigated and how victimless court cases or early guilty pleas⁸⁵ could be achieved. This should include how and when to interview young people who have been victims of online abuse, bearing in mind victims rarely disclose online abuse. The impact of the discovery on victims should never be under-estimated.
- consult on the best way of informing court proceedings about issues specific to sexual abuse and exploitation and/ or harm online.
- Review and develop a consistent approach to not criminalising children who send inappropriate images of themselves.
- train legal advocates on how to work with young witnesses and defendants, including those relating to non-contact online abuse, to ensure they receive a fair trial without unnecessary trauma to the young person.

⁸⁵ The Times (1.5.2015) ‘Rapist jailed on the victim’s evidence ‘from the grave’. CPS guidance victimless cases.

Agencies working with victims should:

- provide guidance for professionals investigating possible cases of sexual abuse and exploitation and technology on how to approach families and young people.

Children's rights

The use of technology has become an integral part of children and young people's lives. While there are many positive aspects to the internet, it is clear there are also risks. What has yet to be fully explored is the child's right to freedom and privacy, which includes using technology, versus their right to protection. It is recommended that the UK Children's Commissioners in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland:

- lead a consultation on the complex relationship between children's rights: their right to privacy and right to protection online.



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Appendices

Appendix 1: Terminology

Child sexual exploitation – Over the past 15 years, the term child sexual exploitation has been increasingly used, both by the media and professionals, to talk about a multitude of sexually abusive activities perpetrated against children. Such generic usage tends to not only blur the nature of what is actually happening to each child who is sexually harmed and exploited but may also detract from recognition of those who abuse them. Such a state of affairs has an impact on how best to develop clear national policies that better protect and safeguard children.

This issue was highlighted in the Barnardo's report *Not a world away: the sexual exploitation of children and young people in Northern Ireland*⁸⁶ where six types of exploitative situations were identified. Whilst the differentiation was deemed useful in case management and intervention programmes, the author suggested that such typology should be viewed as a fluid framework of interconnecting strands due to the multifarious nature of sexually abusive behaviours on the part of perpetrators. Similarly, the Office of the Children's Commissioner published a report which identified fourteen different forms of exploitation relating to gangs alone.⁸⁷

Within the UK, there is no specific criminal offence of child sexual exploitation – it is a general term applied to an array of offences and behaviours. In the threat assessment of child sexual exploitation and abuse⁸⁸ CEOP recommended that “there would be benefit in moving away from a single all encompassing term for such a variety of offending.”

Child abuse images – since the beginning of the 2000s there has been an increasing debate regarding the use of terminology, particularly in relation to that used to describe sexualised material – images, text and audio files – relating to children. The term child pornography is consistently used in the majority of laws and by a high proportion of stakeholders working in the field of internet abuse. However, this term does not rest easily with increasing numbers of practitioners and researchers alike. The language we use is important when discussing the abuse of children and there is a growing consensus of opinion that the term child pornography not only does not reflect the reality for the child but is a term that seems to implicitly imply consensual activity⁸⁹⁹⁰⁹¹. Throughout this report, the term ‘child abuse images’ is used to depict still and moving images of children being abused. However, as not all sexualised depictions of children are visual – text and audio- there is now a train of

86 Beckett, H (2011) *Not a world away: The sexual exploitation of children and young people in Northern Ireland*. Barnardo's, Northern Ireland.

87 Office of the Children's Commissioners' (2013) *If only someone had listened*. Inquiry into child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups.

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thought that the term “abusive materials” might be considered as an umbrella term and lend itself to further definition in international law. The international debate regarding this has started but a consensus has yet to be found.

Paedophile – in the UK and further afield, this is a popular but inaccurate term used to describe anyone who sexually offends against children. Paedophilia is a diagnostic category referring to an exclusive sexual orientation towards pre-pubescent children. It does not accurately portray many of those who sexually abuse children via the internet and mobile technologies, many of whom are married or in long term sexual relationships with adults. In addition, the term paedophile tends to distance those who sexually harm from the mainstream of society – it makes them seem to be outside our community. That this is evidently not the case is demonstrated through the findings of many police Operations such as Operation Ore in 2001 when just under 7000 suspects in the UK were investigated for accessing abusive images through a pay-for-view site. Those arrested represented a cross section of people from all walks of life and social backgrounds. Similarly, in 2010 the NSPCC analysed media reports of court cases over the past 20 months. They found that 2 million+ images had been circulated by 100 offenders who were consequently convicted and 1 in 4 offenders had held positions of trust – including teachers, clergymen, medics and police.⁹² Again, the more recent findings from Operation Notarise mentioned above confirmed that “there was no organised paedophile ring and almost 90% of those arrested were not on the radar of the police. The suspects came from all walks of life from paediatricians to former police officers and from across the UK: 51 people were arrested in Wales, 13 in Scotland and 41 in the West Midlands.”⁹³

92 BBC News (28.4.2010) *NSPCC says 2m child abuse images circulated on internet.*

93 The Guardian (16 July 2014), *Operation Notarise: a snapshot of child abuse in the UK.*

Appendix 2: Website and apps linked to sexual exploitation and abuse

- a) **Facebook** – age limit 13+. Social media, you can share images, write status updates and comment on others pages and content. Also has private messages and instant chat facility. Requires a ‘real name’ policy, i.e not impersonation.

Risks – privacy issues, possible to ‘friend’ strangers, graphic content now allowed. Although the age limit is 13+, this site is popular with younger users and there is no default safety in place for these users.

- b) **Snapchat** – an app which allows you to take a photo and send it to someone else, the image then self-destructs after a predetermined time.

Risks – Snapchat was dubbed by media as ‘sexting app’, it is also used to bully and ridicule. Easy to copy the images and share them eg ‘snapchat exposed’ pages on Facebook and Twitter.

- c) **Instagram** – age limit 13+. This is a photo sharing app which is popular with young people. It is owned by Facebook thus reporting facilities are more robust than some other apps.

Risks – seems extremely popular with primary age pupils. Sexting images can be shared in closed groups, bullying and videos of playground fights are frequently found.

- d) **BB** – this is a messaging service on blackberry phones. Its popularity with young people has diminished considerably over the past four years.

Risks – it was a serious cause of bullying and sexting issues within schools.

- e) **Kik** – app which offers free text messaging. You can add people by user name, set up group chats, and send images.

Risks – stranger interactions, sexting.

- f) **WhatsApp** – age limit 16+. This is an app similar to Kik, the site matches you with other users from your mobile contacts list. It has more users than Twitter

Risks – to be added

- g) **Skype** – age limit 13+. Web cam and instant chat website.

Risks – unsolicited contacts from strangers, sexting risks. Some of the self-generated illegal image of children (IIOC) content has been taken from Skype chats where perpetrator has used webcam capture technology.

- h) **Grindr** – adult gay dating app, which uses geo-location to match you to

people in your local area. If you both 'like' each other, you can then start chatting via private message.

Risks – most profile pictures are indecent, lots of sexting and the GPS element shows where users are. This is an adult site and not suitable for children and young people

- i) **Flirtfinder**- a mobile dating site for men and women exclusive to UK mobile users. It allows users to join the site in less than a minute, search for matching members, send messages to members, buy message credits and upload pictures.

Risks – this is an adult site and not suitable for children and young people

- j.) **Tumblr** – a 'blogging' site, popular with aged 14+. You write content, or upload images (called gifs), and others can see and share your content. You can follow other users' blogs and make comments.

Risks – the site is sometimes used for therapeutic benefits, for example recovery diaries, but also holds significant amounts of content on self-harm and pro anorexia. Allows nudity and erotic content.

- k) **YikYak** – age limit 17+. A Geo location based anonymous app. They are currently working to ring-fence it from schools addresses so they cannot be accessed.

Risks – adult comments, young people use it to anonymously bully others, for example 'outing' children.

- l) **Oovoo** – age limit 13+. A messaging app popular with young people. Allows for video and group video chat.

Risks – unsolicited contacts and requests for sexual activity.

- m) **Topix** – chat boards and forums.

Risks – lots of inappropriate content, potential grooming content, and bullying by way of publishing private numbers, or Kik details as 'interested in sex'.

Digital dangers

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