

**Vulnerable young people and the risk of sexual
exploitation in Ipswich**

Report to Ipswich Crime & Disorder Partnership
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Introduction

i. Background

Ipswich Crime & Disorder Partnership gained Home Office funding to research the impact of 'crack' cocaine on the adult sex industry and prostitution in Ipswich. As part of this programme of work they requested a piece of research on issues relating to the vulnerability of young people leaving care and being at risk of abuse through prostitution and sexual exploitation in Ipswich.

Barnardo's runs 16 services throughout the UK working with children and young people abused through prostitution and at risk of sexual exploitation. The Research team are currently undertaking a three-year evaluation of all these Barnardo's projects (2003-2006). In addition, we are carrying out a pan-London mapping exercise of the service needs and provision of young people at risk of sexual exploitation as well as a joint evaluation project with partners in the Netherlands and Estonia funded by the European Commission's 'Daphne I' and 'Agis' Programmes (until 2006).

Barnardo's Research and Development Team was established 12 years ago and undertakes a varied programme of research and evaluations for a range of commissioners. In addition, we focus our work on promoting the links between research, policy and practice and use research to give a voice to children, young people and their families. The team currently comprises 30 staff including senior researchers, research/development officers and assistants/interns and has members located at all of Barnardo's regional and national offices.

ii. Methodology

The aims of the research in Ipswich were –

- To identify current numbers of young people at risk in relation to commercial sexual exploitation
- To identify the relationship between care/leaving care and risk
- To identify current services that exist
- To identify the needs of young people who are at risk
- To identify gaps in service provision
- To identify priorities for inter-agency work in relation to reducing risk for young people

Barnardo's carried out a mapping exercise in Ipswich to determine the scale of the problem relating to the risk for young people of becoming commercially sexually exploited. This has comprised of the following activities:

1. Semi-structured interviews with key professionals in the social care, education, housing, police and voluntary sector
2. Internal audit of number of young people at risk through social services, police and voluntary services files.
3. Telephone survey to identify current services that exist for young people primarily in relation to homelessness, substance misuse, & sexual health.
4. The identification of young people who are current service users to conduct two focus groups (e.g. care leavers).
5. Identifying the contextual background on the work of the Crime & Disorder partnership including the Community Safety Strategy and the Crime & Disorder Strategy, as specifically related to children & young people.
6. Contextual literature review on best practice in relation to prevention strategies for children & young people at risk of commercial sexual exploitation (voluntary & statutory sector).

iii. Terminology and definitions of exploitation

In relation to the task of identifying numbers of young people at risk it is important to raise the issue of what constitutes a 'case' and how we defined this for the purpose of the research. Firstly, we defined a 'young person' as up to the age of 21 in order to try and identify those individuals who fall outside of the Department of Health Guidance (2000) but who may have become involved in prostitution under the age of 18. However we wished to concentrate on indicators of the number of young people currently under -18 who were at risk, as this is the target group of the Guidance documentation on Safeguarding Children.

In the process of conducting the research we defined the issue as 'young people abused through prostitution or at risk of exploitation'. We made it clear that we were concerned to identify young people who might be involved in a range of activities, including exchange of sexual activities, or the promise of them, for cash or 'in kind', which could include, accommodation, food, clothing, gifts and drugs. In this sense we wished to broaden the definition away from 'prostitution' per

se, and towards a recognition of the diversity of exploitative acts in which young people can become involved or coerced. We also identified that the perpetrator will have power over the child/young person, by virtue of one or more of the following – age, emotional maturity, gender, physical strength, intellect and economic and other resources e.g. access to drugs.

The researchers attempted to identify the difference between young people who were ‘definitely known’ by an interviewee/professional to be involved in prostitution, in contrast to those whose exploitation may be ‘suspected’. This proved to be the most difficult aspect of the data collection, as many interviewees ‘slipped’ between these two categories in the answers they gave. This lack of certainty on their part and the implications of it, are discussed in detail below.

1. Ipswich Mapping Exercise

A structured framework was used to collect information over the telephone and face to face from a range of professionals working with young people in Ipswich, to gain expert information about the current situation for those at risk of exploitation. In addition attempts were made to search internal records when available in order to verify professionals assessments of the numbers involved. Estimating prevalence is never an easy task and using the approach taken, identifying numbers through agency contacts, we may be at risk of ‘multiple counting’. The only way to truly overcome this is use a ‘capture-recapture’ data collection method, involving the collection of minimum data on each individual (e.g. date of birth and initials of individual). We were able to use this method for part of the scoping study, related to the records of young people who go missing in Ipswich. However this was not available to us with regard to young people definitely involved in prostitution, as separate individual records could not be identified within organisations, for us to consult and use this method of analysis. More on the implications of this are discussed below. However the ‘capture-recapture’ method is only possible for “street samples” of individuals who are made visible to outreach workers and similar (see Bloor et al 1991). It is likely that sexually exploited children and young people would be under-represented in a street sample using this method, as this would not ‘reach’ those exploited in ‘off street’ locations such as flats, hotels, nightclubs, sauna’s, massage parlours etc.(Barnardo’s, 1998a).

1.1 Prevalence

Using a telephone survey of key professionals we contacted over 30 individuals who worked in a variety of settings; social services, health, police, drugs services, housing and voluntary sector organisations (see Appendix A). All those who agreed to be interviewed were asked a

series of key questions regarding the numbers of young people definitely exploited through prostitution in Ipswich, and those suspected of involvement. All respondents confirmed that to their knowledge only a small number of young people were definitely being exploited – the precise number ranged from 4 – 6 individuals. From this total number, respondents identified between 2-6 females and 1-3 males, with the majority being described as ‘white’ according to ethnicity. The youngest age identified by professionals was 12, and the oldest 22, with the ‘peak’ age mentioned as 16 or 17 years old. However numbers of young people ‘suspected’ as involved or at ‘high risk’ of exploitation were much higher, and ranged from 5 – 30 individuals.

It proved to be impossible to search internal records for details about prevalence and sexual exploitation. Within social services the standard database containing information on child protection assessments did not allow us to specifically identify and extract those cases where ‘abuse through prostitution’ was raised as an issue. We were provided with some examples of minutes of strategy meetings where the individual child/young person at risk had been discussed.

Within the police it was possible to identify 6 recorded cases over the last 6 months on the Police National Computer, where exploitation through prostitution had been identified as an issue. In addition we were able to do a detailed search on missing persons records for the last 6 months, extracting and analysing all those cases relating to young people (see detailed section below).

1.2 Nature of exploitation

We asked respondents to describe the nature of the exploitation and we received a wide variety of descriptions. Some described young people as ‘working for themselves’, others that they were being controlled by adults (including family members), pimps, or a ‘network of adults’, and others suggested that there was a lack of pimps. Nearly all respondents described that drugs were linked to the exploitation, either by controlling adults or by the young people themselves. Very few professionals mentioned other kinds of ‘payment’ (in kind) like accommodation or clothing.

1.3 Location of exploitation

Many professionals identified a street based scene, connected to the ‘traditional’ red light district in Ipswich, but often commented that this was now only the ‘older’ young women who were seen there (without defining this age group). Equally, the majority of respondents identified ‘massage parlours’ as a location and emphasised this was usually ‘younger’ girls. A much smaller number of professionals talked about other off street locations, such as homes or crack houses, or other street

locations such as outside nightclubs and cinemas. Very few explicitly mentioned the locations used by young men – only one identified ‘public lavatories in town’ and another that they do not appear to be ‘street based’ but more likely to operate from homes or crack houses.

1.4 Knowing about exploitation & risk factors

Many respondents had great difficulty in describing how they ‘knew’ for sure a young person was being exploited or had suspicions of this. Most described this as being related to information gained through an assessment of the young person’s needs. Other described their experience through outreach work with vulnerable young people or through referral information received by them from another agency. A small number indicated that they would ‘hear’ about a new person at risk through conversations with other young people or professionals.

Connected to this difficulty, many professionals found it hard to identify a range of clear indicators of risk in their assessment of young people. A minority could clearly identify a ‘cluster’ of factors or vulnerabilities, such as drug dependency, parental involvement in prostitution, unstable or abusive family histories, unexplained absences, school exclusion, having money/items without explanation, involvement with coercive adults, and a history of being ‘looked after’ or now leaving care, as well as some individual characteristics such as low self esteem, low resilience, mental health problems and self destructive behaviours. However the majority of respondents identified drug dependency or heavy substance misuse alone as a risk indicator and/or involvement with adults who themselves are working in prostitution and/or drug dependent. A significant minority found it almost impossible to name risk indicators at all.

1.5 Acting on a suspicion of sexual exploitation

The majority of professionals contacted referred to the ACPC protocol for action in an individual case where they suspected a young person to be at risk and the need to refer to social services if there were child protection concerns. However a small number of respondents differentiated between those under and over the age of 16. They suggested that were a young person was 16+ they were more likely to risk assess themselves (within an agency) and refer the individual to other services, which might include social services. Nearly all respondents suggested that the ACPC guidance was useful and that it had enabled them to improve their inter-agency working. However a small number felt that a kind of ‘crisis management’ was only ever on offer for young people who were referred on and that resources were lacking to effectively respond to the needs of young people. A small number of those contacted were unsure or unclear about what action they would take if they had concerns, and did not seem to understand

the framework of the ACPC protocol, its remit or applicability to their own organisation.

2. Missing young people in Ipswich

The researchers examined the Ipswich police records for all missing persons in Ipswich, concentrating on those under 48 hours that would not be recorded on the Police National Computer. From this, all those cases under the age of 21 were extracted for more detailed analysis.

From a total of 117 missing cases over the last 6 months, 45 were young people, and nearly half of these were aged 14 or 15 (22 cases). The majority were 18 or under (41), the youngest was 9 years old, there were 3 aged 12 and 2 aged 13. There was an almost equal number of young women (23) as young men (22). Ethnicity was indicated in the vast majority of cases as 'white' (40 cases), with 'black' (4 cases) and 'mixed' (1 case) for the remainder.

In the vast majority of these cases the child or young person had gone missing from the family home (31 cases), with 8 missing from LAC, 2 from foster care, and 4 from other miscellaneous places. The bulk of the missing records indicated the missing incident as lasting for 24 hours, however a small number were indicated as 48 hours (5 cases), 3-4 days (6 cases) and in one case of a 17 year old male, missing for several weeks, having absconded from a refugee centre. There were 8 cases with information absent about the length of missing period. There were 8 young people recorded as having multiple missing incidents, but it was only clear in the records that in 3 cases these repeats were within the last 6 months.

In 5 cases the records indicated there was a risk for the young person in relation to sexual exploitation; this was usually recorded as the young person being 'sexually active' but in one case it was noted that they were on the CP register due to past abuse. Of these 5 cases there were 3 males and 2 females and all had gone missing from local authority care; in two of these cases mention was made of substance misuse and in 3 of them missing from care protocols had been actioned.

3. Interviews with professionals about service provision

Through a combination of telephone and face to face interviews, a range of professionals working with young people at risk in Ipswich were asked about their needs and service provision for them. No specialist service dedicated to the prevention and reduction of sexual exploitation exists in Ipswich.

3.1 Most people identified substance misuse and accommodation needs as being the most prevalent **immediate needs** for this group of young people. Related to this many professionals talked of their need for 'safety' and 'security' as well as specialist, consistent provision related to their wider problems. Most respondents stressed the vulnerability of these young people, and their often very complex wider needs related to health, sexual health, emotional support, disadvantaged background and problematic family/carer relationships and abusive experiences.

3.2 All respondents identified a **range of services** currently available that young people were referred to including provision for accommodation, substance misuse/harm reduction, health and sexual health, mental health and counselling. However although this range exists, many professionals commented on how this provision was 'stretched' across a number of providers, that there were time lapses between referrals and action for a young person, and that the pattern of provision appeared to be more about crisis management for the young person than structured holistic support to escape from exploitation. No respondents identified the existence of any prevention work in relation to the risks of sexual exploitation for children & young people in Ipswich.

3.3 Many professionals stressed the particular **problems** of supporting the 'older' age group of 16+ due to the lack of safe, supported accommodation, harm reduction drugs provision and a perceived 'route out' of their exploitative situation. A minority of professionals recognised the difficulty of these young people having ties to a relatively small, close knit community in Ipswich which although exploitative, provides them with a consistency of support that is ironically hard to 'match' through current inter-agency provision.

3.4 Inter agency working was stressed as important by many professional respondents. However a common feeling was that more needed to be done in this respect. The attempt to address shorter term practical needs for these young people was often being addressed but many people felt that there were substantial difficulties in moving beyond this to engage and support them over time and with continuity that would engender greater trust from the young people themselves. Improved information sharing was often mentioned as an issue as well as a lack of inter-agency knowledge about practical provision and help provided by specific services.

4. Focus groups with young people

The researchers sought to arrange a number of discussion groups with young people in Ipswich through several different organisations; the Youth Advice Centre, the YMCA, the Foyer and Connexions. Both YAC and the YMCA were able to arrange focus group opportunities for us. Due to difficulties with the timescale of the work and the Summer break it proved possible to only conduct two groups, one at each location, comprising a total of 17 participants. Details on the framework of the discussions are provided in Appendix B, and ethical constraints and protection of anonymity of the participants in Appendix C.

The focus group discussions comprised a number of separate exercises that enabled the young people participating to talk in general about possible 'risks and dangers' in Ipswich (see details below). It was important not to emphasise or advertise in advance our interest in sexual exploitation through prostitution and this was not explicitly named on the poster/flyer used to advertise the groups for example. We believed it was important to see if this issue came through general discussion between the young people and if it was raised spontaneously by them, rather than being placed in their minds by the researchers beforehand. In reality, these attempts were slightly distorted by one facilitator who unfortunately did pre-empt the discussion in one of the groups with some additional information about the research being related to prostitution in Ipswich.

How the groups were conducted:

Initially the participants were given 'cue cards' with a set of stereotypical 'risks' or problems young people experience that may lead to specific dangers for them in the future; homelessness, family conflict, teenage pregnancy, drugs, crime. A number of blank cards were provided for them to identify their own problems. After this initial exercise we asked the participants to 'rank' these cue cards according to the risks they felt to be very serious and potentially dangerous for young people to engage in, and those the least. For both these two exercises we asked the young people to work in pairs. From this the researcher facilitators attempted to draw out a general discussion and probe the reasons why the young people might have identified risks as 'serious and most dangerous' compared to those as least so. At this point in the groups we attempted to identify to what extent the risk of sexual exploitation or abuse through prostitution was considered at all by the participants.

The final exercise was entirely separate and involved reading a brief outline of the life situation for a fictitious 'best friend'; this person was named 'Sam' in order to be gender-neutral. The story outlined a set of circumstances and strong indicators that might lead the participants to

identify that such a 'friend' was becoming involved in prostitution. Again we attempted to draw out from the issues identified by the young people after reading the 'best friend's story', through a general discussion about why they had made particular suggestions. A focus of this exercise was to ask the participants where such a young person might seek help and support from in Ipswich and to name specific services available to use.

Findings from both the focus groups:

The additional risks identified by participants were in the main "no money" or "debt", and "alcohol", with a smaller number identifying "leaving school early" and "boredom". Drug misuse and homelessness were at the forefront of the risks identified by the young people as serious and dangerous – strongly connected to this for many participants was involvement in criminal activity. The young people overall saw these risks as closely inter-connected, especially the fact that, as they suggested, drug use led to criminal activity in order to fund a 'habit'. Equally they thought that the risk of homelessness and lack of money would increase the risk of criminal activity. The risk of becoming involved in prostitution, or selling sex, was not explicitly identified in the groups at the earlier points in the discussion, although it was mentioned later by the group that had been previously alerted to the issue (see above). It was referred to more 'in passing' by a number of participants in both groups as they discussed in pairs, or smaller groupings and more so by the females than males in the groups. Again it was explicitly linked by participants to the need of an individual young person to raise money for drugs.

The 'fictional' account of a young person becoming abused through prostitution was only picked up on by one of the (female) participants. Most of the young people suggested the circumstances of the 'best friend' Sam were related to drug misuse, rather than involvement in prostitution activity. When we asked the young people what they would advise such a friend to do and where they might seek help and support, there was a general lack of belief that anything would be useful. Overall there were few suggestions from participants that services in Ipswich could do anything for the fictitious 'Sam' – this was strongly connected to an expressed belief that it was up to the individual to change and reject the risks involved in their lifestyle. Similarly they did not believe they could assist Sam in any way (even as their 'best friend') and there was a general agreement that it was almost 'none of their business' although they would try to talk to Sam. Through the group discussion we tried to identify if there were any specific services in Ipswich young people would suggest to 'Sam' for potential help. Very few were explicitly named and in fact national services, such as 'Childline' or Connexions were more commonly

identified than those based locally. A small number of young people mentioned that they would seek drugs advice locally from CDT.

It is important to emphasise that these findings, although common to both focus groups are based on a very small number of overall participants and represent the views of the young people present. The extent to which these issues are widely prevalent for young people in Ipswich is not known.

5. Current service provision and inter-agency working for young people at risk of sexual exploitation in Ipswich

5.1. There is no dedicated specialist service for children and young people at risk of, or involved in prostitution in Ipswich, as mentioned in Section 3 above. However there are a number of service providers who do work with such young people and the services will be summarised here. The main finding from the research is that multi-agency working in this area is restricted in a number of ways and there is no evidence that true inter-agency provision is currently in existence.

5.2. It is important to identify the difference between the terms “multi-agency” and “inter-agency” when discussing service provision. Multi-agency provision describes the operation of a number of discrete services by services working independently from each other, but where the same ends are being sought – in this instance that would be that the risks of sexual exploitation for young people are reduced or eradicated completely. Agreed aims and objectives are established through a multi-agency partnership and a local protocol will govern the service responses. Inter-agency provision describes the more active and focused co-ordination of such work, for instance, practitioners from one service providing their service at another’s base or building, thus enabling resources to be shared across two agencies. Again, inter-agency provision should operate to agreed protocols and in addition can benefit from a Steering group or Advisory panel in order to manage the provision, identify and resolve problems and develop the service.

5.3. The following services identified themselves as currently, being accessed by young people at risk of sexual exploitation, or potentially able to:

Ipswich Social Services

- Leaving care team
- Adolescent Outreach
- Young Persons Support Team
- Child Protection

Ipswich Police/Criminal Justice

- Suffolk Community Arrest Referral Scheme (SCARS)
- Child Protection
- Youth Offending Service

Drugs/Substance Use services

- Community Drugs Team (CDT)
- Drug Action Team (DAT)
- NORCAS Youth service
- Icení (no longer for YP, historically has been)

Housing/ hostel provision

- YMCA
- Foyer

Youth services (including voluntary)

- Youth Advice Centre (Community Education)
- CSV Media
- Connexions

Health related and/or sexual abuse services

- SCSATS (NCH, sexual abuse therapeutic service)
- Health Outreach Project (Ipswich PCT)
- Suffolk Young People's Health Project (Independent, charity)
- Sexual health clinic at Ipswich Hospital
- CONNECT (CAMHS service for looked after children)
- Teenage Sexual Health project (Sure Start service)

5.4. On the surface this would appear to be a large number of potential services. However this brings with it a number of problems regarding support for young people at risk. In the interviews with professionals a number raised their concerns about the lack of continuity for young people identified as at risk. Individual services, or individual practitioners within them, are currently providing some degree of support for young people around particular needs, such as drug use, homelessness, sexual health, education/training and therapeutic sexual abuse input etc.. Some services are operating outreach work, others one-to-one sessions, others groupwork. What is absent is an agreed level of continuity in this provision and a specific focus on the issue of risks related to sexual exploitation and how to reduce them, through a dedicated 'key worker' provision.

5.5. A series of flow diagrams have been produced to represent on the one hand the two main protocols used to assess young people's

support needs and on the other, the multi-agency practice to provide a service for them (Appendix D). These diagrams have been drawn from the information provided by interviewees about the referral process and practice.

5.6. The flow diagrams illustrate how numerous potential pathways exist for a young person identified as at risk of exploitation and that there appears to be some degree of diversity in subsequent procedure and practice. Although such diversity can be positive, by for instance representing a range of individual needs, there is also the possibility that a young person in need is met by considerable variation in response to the same needs, dependent on which agency is approached. Current service provision as illustrated appears to work on what could be described a parallel tracks, which do occasionally cross over, rather than in a truly integrated fashion. There are significant problems in operating in such a manner to attempt to provide a service to extremely socially excluded young people who by the very nature of their situations are often already leading very chaotic lives, detached from mainstream services and untrusting of those in authority.

5.7. It is evident from the results of the mapping exercise that a core level of consistent provision needs to be established, agreed and embraced by all potential services, with any additional/new service provision available to respond in a flexible manner to individually variable needs. The service provision that is to be developed should draw on the model of effective practice that has been drawn from established research elsewhere in the UK (see literature review).

5.8. In addition it should be attune to the fact that there are a number of isolated professionals locally, within different agencies and organisations, who already have a high degree of awareness of the issues surrounding sexual exploitation risks for young people in Ipswich. Through developing a model of shared support for young people at risk, such individual professionals would be able to both share more widely their own current knowledge and receive crucial outside support from other professionals.

5.9. There are a number of ways forward to achieve this end and the following bullet points have been identified as a possible framework of appropriate mechanisms for developing a focused dedicated service for children & young people at risk of sexual exploitation Ipswich. The precise model that is drawn, will depend on additional local contextual factors such as overall timescale, overall resources and service specific funding.

- Re-writing the SCIP protocol to actively represent ALL parties currently likely to provide a service to young people at risk;
- Holding an initial information sharing event for all interested parties – make sure to engage those services on the ‘fringes’ of provision as well as those at the core;
- This event should act as a ‘shop window’ for each service to identify what it can (and cannot) do for YP at risk, specify areas of common practice/ overlap and areas of unmet need as well as possible training needs for professionals;
- From this forum establish an advisory steering group on CSE for Ipswich to take the lead on the new protocol and development of provision and training;
- Make active attempts through this forum to engage ‘new’ services or those who have previously remained detached from the existing protocol;
- Make active attempts to pilot innovative ways of working – such as professional secondments from one organisation to another – the benefits of such an approach can be to identify how to ‘pool’ limited resources and provide consistency in service contact for young people at risk;
- The SE forum and advisory steering group which develops from it, can then make an informed decision about what future service provision might look like, agree the frameworks for practice, and identify the funding needs;
- Consideration should be given to establishing a key base (premises) for an SE focused service to operate from – this could be through an existing service, with other professionals providing satellite provision from this place. One suggestion would be to consider the newly established premises of the ‘Young People’s Health Project’ as a key base, subject to negotiation and approval by the organisation itself;
- Consideration should be given to identifying and agreeing, across professional divides, key risk indicators that can place a YP in a position of vulnerability and clear ways of responding to these dependent on individual need;
- Related to this, consideration should be given to identifying a core mode of practice, expressed through a new protocol, which identifies specific services and professionals, agrees an information sharing protocol and in addition uses a common mode of recording individual needs, whilst still protecting a young person’s confidentiality (such as the use of only date of birth and initials);
- Consideration should be given to how to support those YP at the very highest need, who may be in immediate danger, by securing service provision away from the immediate geographic area – this could be through the development of high level specialist fostering provision, for instance.

5.10. In order to drive aspects of the above framework, further consultancy and training from specialist agencies currently able to offer such, should be considered at key points in the development of the service. Notably, Barnardo's and the Children's Society are two independent charities who have already offered expertise to numerous local authorities throughout the UK, specifically in relation to young people, sexual exploitation and abuse through prostitution, but also in relation to risk, homelessness and 'running away' (and the development of specific protocols that are required for 'missing' children & young people). In addition, consultancy advice should be sought from locations where a model of statutory and voluntary inter-agency provision has already successfully been developed, such as in Nottingham and Doncaster.

6. Findings & recommendations

6.1. The identification of numbers of individual young people sexually exploited through prostitution in Ipswich through the techniques outlined above consistently indicates a **low prevalence rate**. A small and similar number of young people were identified across police, social services, drugs and other voluntary agencies. However there is no mechanism under the existing monitoring system of identifying if the individuals suggested by different agencies were the actually the same people. The only available match data that exists from police records confirms a maximum of 6 young people involved in prostitution over the last 6 months. In addition the data from police records on missing young people identified 5 cases where sexual exploitation risks were known.

Recommendation: To improve recording and monitoring systems to enable the clear identification of the number of those exploited through prostitution at any given time, by each individual agency.

6.2. However the data on those '**at risk**' of involvement is even less certain, with an average number of young people identified as 20 and the maximum stated as 30. We can shed some light on this through comparing the figure to the number of young people recorded by the police as going missing for 24 hours or less, in the last 6 months. The research literature and our own practice experience within Barnardo's indicates the prevalence of 'running' or 'missing' episodes in the early lives of young people who ultimately end up being exploited through prostitution later on. Often, but not always, these individuals are also in local authority care at the time. The police missing records show a total of 45 young people going missing for 24 hours in the last 6 months, the vast majority of whom were under-18, and nearly half of whom were

aged 14 or 15. We would suggest that **all missing young people** should be considered as putting themselves at risk of exploitation, but the younger age group are particularly vulnerable. This figure of 22 cases is almost the same as the upper estimate given by some professionals of those at risk of exploitation in Ipswich.

Recommendation: To prioritise the development of a specific protocol for **all** young people who go missing in Ipswich, related to their risk of sexual exploitation.

6.3. There was considerable variation in response by professionals about indicators of risk for sexual exploitation and the nature of exploitation that currently exists for young people in Ipswich. There was a lack of clarity for a significant number of respondents in the difference between 'definite' and 'suspected' exploitation.

Recommendation: To consider the development of specialist training for all professionals who are likely to provide a service for young people at risk of sexual exploitation in Ipswich. It may be possible to develop joint training across professional divides which would also improve inter-agency contact.

6.4. Although small in number, the young people involved in the focus groups did not on the whole proactively identify the risks associated with involvement in prostitution. In addition they found it difficult to identify specific services in Ipswich that they would feel confident in seeking advice and support from in relation to such risks.

Recommendation: To consider ways in which the immediate risks of sexual exploitation could be better communicated to young people in Ipswich, particularly those who are already vulnerable in relation to issues such as experiencing the care system, homelessness, lack of mainstream education, or involvement in crime. Innovative methods should be considered similar to those used generally for 'hard-to-reach' young people (or 'NEETS').

Recommendation: Connected to this, commitment to a longer term framework of prevention education provision should be drawn and made available through a variety of setting such as schools, youth clubs, health projects.

6.5. The current service provision in Ipswich does not adequately meet the needs of children & young people at highest risk of abuse through prostitution. There is a significant lack of continuity and consistency in the support offered and the danger that young people can literally 'fall through the net' of provision on offer, particularly if they are experiencing exploitation in 'off street' locations. In addition, very little

is being done at the earlier points of discovery of 'low – to – medium' risk for children & young people or identifying early intensive intervention opportunities, such as when a young person is first 'running' or going missing or exhibiting other significant vulnerabilities, such as drug misuse. This means that more focused intervention is only happening when a young person has experienced multiple risks and is usually very entrenched in exploitation activity, making the professionals' job significantly more difficult (if not impossible) in terms of trying to reduce individual risks.

Recommendation; To develop an integrated service model that seeks to bring together all agencies/organisations potentially able to offer support to children & young people at risk. An inter-agency steering/advisory group should revise the SCIP protocol and seek to actively engage additional professional agencies currently working in isolation. Through this model, additional specific training and consultancy needs should be highlighted, resource issues identified and funding sought to develop a specialist service. Creative ways to provide this service should be considered across voluntary and statutory provision – such as secondments between agencies – and a dedicated location to work from, such as under the umbrella of an existing youth focused service.

6.6. There was a particular lack of forthcoming information about the situation in Ipswich relating to the risks of trafficking and young people, and the needs of unaccompanied asylum seekers/minors from participants. It is important that this issue is identified more strongly by all agencies likely to encounter such individual young people at risk.

Recommendation; That concerns related to trafficking and unaccompanied asylum seekers/minors and the risks of sexual exploitation of young people are built into the future SCIP protocol and service practice model devised from it.

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Zoe Harper for research input; all those professionals who agreed to be interviewed in Ipswich and gave us their time; all the young people who participated and shared their views and experiences with us.

7. Literature review on young people and sexual exploitation

The literature examined below provides a short summary of areas of relevance to the Ipswich study and is in no sense exhaustive of the research available in this area. The significant messages from previous work are drawn on to support the recommendations drawn about prevention, intervention and recovery for young people at risk of sexual exploitation in Ipswich.

Introduction;

The SCIP guidance related to young people and prostitution issued in 2000 by The Department of Health, Home Office, the Department of Education and Employment and the National Assembly for Wales was supplementary to *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (1999). The guidance explicitly promotes an inter-agency approach by,

“police, social services, education and all other agencies and professionals that may work with children about whom there are concerns that they are involved in prostitution”

(Department of Health, et al, 2000, p4)

The guidance is issued under Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act (1970) and as such must be complied with unless there are exceptional local circumstances to justify a variation. The SCIP guidance applies to young people of both sexes, aged under 18. The main points of the guidance as relevant to this research are;

- Children and young people (under 18) involved in prostitution are to be treated as victims of abuse and regarded as ‘children in need’;
- Inter-agency protocols should be developed by local authorities in relation to the protection of such children;
- Agencies involved in this process should include social services, the police, health authorities, education, youth services, probation, Crown Prosecution Services and local authority agencies;
- Immediate response should be made to concerns that a child is involved or at risk in prostitution through a multi-agency forum;
- This multi-agency forum should consider the immediate safety of the child and a child protection enquiry should be arranged; Criminal investigations should also be considered;
- The multi-agency forum should consider the best support and exit strategy for the child, tailored specifically to their needs; this strategy should include accommodation, therapy, leisure, education and training needs.

In addition to these main points, the guidance identifies ways in which young people’s involvement in prostitution may be uncovered. This amounts to a list of ‘risk factors’, or indicators of activity by young people that may be of

concern, when linked to the results of police investigation and involvement. These include; relationships with older people, unexplained absences from school or home, drug misuse, sexually transmitted infections, requests for contraception or pregnancy termination. Different responsibilities are outlined in the SCIP guidance for parents and carers, professionals, the local ACPC and the police, in relation to the discovery of such information and the duty to safeguard children at risk with appropriate consideration of issues of confidentiality and counselling from the young person concerned.

The needs of children and young people abused through prostitution;

Barnardo's has done much in recent years, along with other child care agencies, to highlight the issue of young people abused through prostitution. Between 1998 and 2001 two Barnardo's publications 'Whose daughter next?' and 'No son of mine!' drew attention to the plight of some of the most vulnerable and marginalised young people in society, identifying key issues facing young people and influencing the way that they young people are viewed. In spite of this, it is becoming more and more apparent that there are large gaps in the knowledge base, especially in relation to gaining accurate numbers of the young people involved in prostitution, the services available to them and the type of service that might be most effective at meeting their needs (Barnardo's, 1998b p.31). The needs of children and young people abused through prostitution are complex and multi-layered and there is a need for intervention at an early stage to prevent children and young people becoming at risk of exploitation, as well as harm reduction and exit strategies for those already being sexually exploited (Barnardo's, 2000).

Through interviews with staff at a Barnardo's service in Wolverhampton, Scott, (2001) explored the case histories of 12 young people abused through prostitution. The analysis revealed a number of risk factors associated with being drawn into exploitation including:

- violent fathers or stepfathers
- physical or sexual abuse within the family
- mothers who were victims of domestic violence and/or dependent on alcohol/drugs
- being disengaged from education by their early teens
- being alienated from their families or communities
- being hungry for attention
- a history of 'going missing'
- keen to 'escape' childhood and be regarded as adults
- drug/alcohol dependence
- being targeted and sexually exploited by a pimp

Once caught up in prostitution, factors such as peer pressure, material rewards, drug use, fear of coercers, lack of self-esteem, denial of their situation, and in some cases a sense of power over 'punters' can act as

barriers that make it extremely difficult for young people to want to move away from their involvement in exploitation (Barnardo's, 2000).

Research involving professionals and children and young people consistently identifies a number of practical, social and emotional issues that need to be addressed in order for people to successfully exit prostitution. Taylor-Browne (2002) interviewed 47 children and young people from across England who had been abused through prostitution. The problems they identified include:

- financial difficulties
- drug addiction
- single parenthood
- lack of qualifications and training
- housing problems
- existing social networks
- lack of family support
- abusive partners/pimps/boyfriends
- criminal convictions that prevent people taking on relatively low skilled work such as childcare.

Similar issues were identified by May, Harocopos and Turnbull (2001) through interviews with 55 adult sex workers. This study involved adults who had passed through an arrest referral scheme for drug dependent workers. Many stated that in order to give up sex work it was essential that they had somewhere safe and suitable to live. On the basis of information the women gave to the needs assessment worker at the project, referrals were made to services dealing with accommodation, sex work, problematic drug use, health and benefits.

The most recent research by Cusick et al (2003) on adult sex work and drug misuse indicates three significant "trapping factors" for the women involved in prostitution they interviewed (the study did not consider the situation for men). These were; involvement in prostitution and/or hard drug use before the age of 18; sex working 'outdoors', or as an 'independent drifter'; and experience of at least one additional vulnerability indicator (such as being in local authority care or being homeless). This model is one of, as they describe it, "mutually reinforcing vulnerabilities" that make exiting more difficult and the more 'trapping factors' participants had been exposed to, the greater their potential to reinforce vulnerability (Cusick et al 2003, p v). This research therefore made very clear recommendations with regard to the prevention of children & young people being abused through prostitution;

- To make the most of opportunities to identify children at risk, many of whom are already in contact with services
- To pursue and prosecute the child abusers who pay children for sex
- To conduct future research to investigate the licensing of sex worker premises that would therefore prohibit child labour.

Barnardo's (1998) suggests that a range of strategic responses are required to address the needs of children and young people abused through prostitution. A framework for intervention is proposed that incorporates primary prevention, targeted prevention, harm reduction and rehabilitation/recovery. In addition more recent work by Barnardo's in Scotland, detailed below, has concluded that the backgrounds of young people involved in sexual exploitation are complex and give rise to a range of needs which cannot be easily met by a single agency. The evidence suggests that an appropriate model of care to meet these needs will consist of five key elements: early intervention, safe accommodation, continuity of care, intensive support and multi-agency co-ordination.

Current service provision;

Service provision throughout the UK has been assessed by recent ESRC research which revealed that throughout the UK there are fewer than 50 services working with young people abused through prostitution (Phoenix, 2003). However these services have a very patchy distribution:

43 of the 50 services are located in England, and 42 of these are clustered in 13 major conurbations

Only 7 local government regions in the whole of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have any service or provision at all.

The services that do exist can be divided into two broad categories: those that work partly or solely with young people abused through prostitution, and those who have expertise or experience in working with this client group (Phoenix, 2003). However, a number of other services are identified that either work with adults involved in prostitution and come across young people in the course of their work, or work with young people on a range of issues including prostitution (Directory of Sexual Exploitation Services, 2003). Barnardo's is also aware of a number of services not identified during the course of the research, such as the FACE Project (Fighting Against Child Exploitation), an inter-agency initiative based in Dundee.

A survey carried out by Barnardo's in 1998 made contact with 48 agencies throughout England, Wales and Scotland via a directory that provides listings of projects that provide sexual health services for prostitutes. The range of services provided included streetwork, outreach, drop-in facilities, clinics, contact with schools, colleges and residential homes, 39 of which reported having contact with young people. (Barnardo's, 1998 p.34).

Effectiveness of service provision;

Research on the effectiveness of services working with children and young people abused through prostitution is limited. Of the information that is available, there appears to be a greater focus on the approach of the service

rather than on outcomes for service-users, but a number of common themes emerge.

It is suggested that in order to be effective, interventions aimed at young people at risk of being abused through prostitution should be flexible, comprehensive, and be delivered by staff who are proficient at forming relationships based on trust and respect (Schorr 1989, cited in Cusick 2002). Joseph (1997) argues that there is no standard mechanism to facilitate change in individuals wishing to exit prostitution. Intervention design must take into account, 'the diversity and variety of human nature and experience,' and should aim to foster security, stability, a sense of inclusion or belonging and a positive recognition of self and identity.

Pearce, Williams and Galvin (2003) found that the services most often used by young people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing sexual exploitation were local community based projects offering a range of legal, social and health services accompanied by outreach and drop-in provision. Most people would agree that young people abused through prostitution have many needs in common with other groups of young people, but the priorities are often considered to differ between client groups. Shaw and Butler (1998) argue for a holistic social work response to children and young people abused through prostitution, as separate services intended at narrowly focused client groups only serve to isolate those they wish to support. Children and young people abused through prostitution have much in common with other individuals, for example those who are homeless, living in poverty, have issues around substance misuse or whose health is at risk through lack of awareness. However, others maintain that services intended specifically for those abused through prostitution are more desirable because service users do not need to conceal or openly reveal their involvement (MacIver 1992, cited in Cusick 2002).

Research by Cusick et al (2003) emphasises that the effective implementation of the *Safeguarding Children* guidance (Department of Health, 2000) depends on good multi-agency practice, with the police taking both a lead in relation to the protection of children and the control of commercial sex activity in any local area. This has been previously emphasised by May et al (1999) who described the opportunities for the police to know about and restrict the extent of youth prostitution as well as policing off street/indoor sex markets. This research specifically highlights the benefits of police action against owners and managers of indoor sex markets (e.g. saunas, massage premises) in relation to both under age young women working there, and the use of drugs on the premises, as well as the strategy of establishing a WPC liaison post, to simultaneously work directly with adult women over the age of 18.

The use of secure accommodation for children & young people abused through prostitution;

Secure accommodation is often suggested as a technique to encourage young people to exit from their situation. In 1998 the Department of Health reported that of the three different legal welfare and criminal justice routes into secure accommodation, almost 29% of boys and 70% of girls were admitted via the welfare route. Placing children and young people in secure accommodation for welfare reasons raises a number of difficult issues relating to ethics and human rights, and a number of studies raise concerns about locking up young people who have not committed an offence (e.g. Goldson, 2002; O'Neill, 2001). Goldson (2002) describes how placements in secure accommodation are something of a lottery, determined by a combination of four factors:

- the young person's vulnerability
- professional priorities and resources
- social class, race and gender of the young person
- geographical location.

Evidence to indicate whether the role carried out by secure accommodation meets with expectations is restricted (Goldson, 2002), although previous research has indicated that secure accommodation is generally not a successful intervention for modifying behaviour such as prostitution and running away (O'Neill, 1999). Staff in O'Neill's study reported difficulties in evaluating the effectiveness of their work, due in particular to a lack of clarity concerning the aims of the work. In addition, none of the units involved in the study had any formal system in operation to monitor the progress of children and young people once they left secure accommodation.

Although secure accommodation does not represent a therapeutic setting, O'Neill considers that there is an expectation that skilled care and specialist therapeutic interventions will be provided for young people. However, the managers and staff that took part in the research admitted that they did not expect to be able to meet all the needs of a child or young person, and felt they could do very little to help the situation if the reason for referral lay in family or social circumstances. Secure accommodation staff interviewed by the National Children's Bureau (1995) considered children and young people abused through prostitution to be extremely difficult to treat.

O'Neill (2001) interviewed 29 children and young people and 65 managers and staff members in six secure units across England. For most of the young people involved in the research, the problems that led to their admission to secure accommodation were only partly addressed by their placement. Many young people in the study commented that the harm they had suffered as a result of being placed in secure accommodation outweighed the benefits. Thirteen of the 17 young people admitted to secure accommodation through welfare routes had completed previous placements, demonstrating that prior admissions had 'failed to meet their needs, change their behaviour and protect them from the risks which had led to their admission, other than by containment on a short term basis' (O'Neill p.256).

In 2003 Barnardo's was commissioned by the Scottish Executive to conduct research into the use of secure accommodation and alternatives for sexually exploited young people (Creegan, C. et al 2004). Although this study was confined to the situation in Scotland, the findings are applicable to the wider situation for young people at risk throughout the UK. The study found that staff in secure units in Scotland estimated that between 40 and 90% of the young women resident in their unit at any one time had been exposed to some level of sexual exploitation. Being prematurely 'adrift' from family life was probably the most significant immediate vulnerability factor for sexual exploitation amongst the young women identified by informants in the research. The other most common immediate factors were drug and alcohol misuse - although the interplay between this and sexual exploitation was complex. The evidence was less clear in relation to young men, although it does suggest that there are similarities in the underlying and immediate vulnerability factors.

The decision to place young women involved in or at risk of involvement in sexual exploitation in secure units was seen by their local authority to be in their best interests, although this was sometimes related to a lack of suitable alternatives within the community. It was considered necessary because they were perceived to be out of adult control, in danger from others and/or a risk to themselves. Whilst there was widespread recognition that sexual exploitation was an issue, the ability of managers and care staff to address it either in a research interview, or in their work with young people, appeared to vary enormously. Secure interventions are by definition short term and were regarded by respondents in the Scottish study as being at best, only one stage in a much longer process. Their effectiveness was thought to be dependent upon the young person's needs being adequately addressed once they left the unit. While a number of the programmes in use were 'evidence-based' these tended to be cognitive behavioural interventions designed and evaluated in relation to a 'largely male' population of young offenders. Access to individual therapy or counselling - in which sexual exploitation, abuse and family relationships could be expected to be addressed - was very variable.

Most secure unit respondents interviewed for the research did not consider that secure accommodation was desirable for the majority of sexually exploited/at risk young women currently referred. They did not consider physical security added any value compared to the same levels of intensive support and provision of programmes being available in the young person's own community. Managing risk in the community was preferred by most local authority respondents, but was sometimes considered impossible because of lack of services/resources. Throughcare and aftercare were considered to present considerable challenges and were often poor - sometimes so inadequate that it was feared any benefits that might accrue from a secure experience were liable to be cancelled out by the lack of continuity of care and effective follow through.

The evidence from this Scottish Executive study therefore points to a set of principles which should inform the process of making decisions about appropriate interventions for young people experiencing, or considered to be at risk of, sexual exploitation:

Intervention should occur as soon as possible after concerns have been identified;

Intensive contact with the young person addressing the key areas of vulnerability is vital;

Continuity and stability of care should be prioritised, and risk managed within the young person's home/community context wherever possible;

Family and carers should be actively involved in the planning and conduct of the intervention and additional support and guidance provided for them;

Safe accommodation should be provided at the lowest level of physical security necessary; and incorporate the highest level of relational security possible.

In 1997 NCH Action for Children set up the Community Alternative Placement Scheme (CAPS) to provide family placements as an **alternative to secure accommodation** for young people in Scotland. An evaluation of the first three years of the project followed the progress of 20 young people placed with CAPS and a comparison sample of 20 young people in secure accommodation. Outcomes were similar for those placed with CAPS and those in secure accommodation in relation to behaviour, emotional difficulties, self-esteem and education, training or work. Social workers considered that the CAPS scheme had helped all of the young people to some extent, but the benefits were clearer for some young people than for others. When the research ended none of the carers had left the scheme or insisted on a placement being ended against the wishes of the young person and/or the professionals involved. The evaluation concluded that fostering could offer a distinctive service to some young people that face the prospect of secure accommodation, but is not a quick and easy answer. A key message from both young people and carers was that unless the young people felt valued and cared for, changes in behaviour were unlikely (Walker, Hill & Triseliotis, 2002).

A 'what works' model for working with at risk young people;

As mentioned above there is limited but growing evidence that children young people at risk of sexual exploitation require significantly different and strongly flexible modes of social care intervention in order to reduce their likelihood of becoming entrapped in adult prostitution. The previously limited evidence for this has been further enhanced by the findings from the recent Home Office initiatives relating to adult sex worker research and practice that also examined the situation for children & young people. Hester and Westmarland

(2004) advocate a 'needs and support' model of intervention closely linked to both additional 'enforcement and community liaison' measures and 'diversion and support' techniques as the way to approach the challenge of street prostitution in local communities.

For young people at risk, the authors outline that this model should specifically comprise;

- Identification and intervention at the earliest stage possible;
- Ongoing professional training to identify vulnerabilities;
- Police training in diversion, referral and liaison;
- Social work training in identification and referral processes;
- Dedicated and trained specialist workers for one-to-one key work with young people at risk;
- Establishing outreach as an integral aspect of service provision;
- Separate child/young person focused service (from adult sex worker service);
- Long term, consistent, key worker support;
- Fast track drugs programme for harm reduction;
- Fast track emergency accommodation/ re-housing options;
- Addressing poverty, economic marginalisation and lack of benefits for under-18's;
- Moving towards exiting and actually exiting is a long & complex process requiring a range of multi-agency support;
- Multi-agency partnerships across statutory and voluntary services are the most effective in providing holistic, needs centred and flexible provision.

Hester and Westmarland (2004, pp vi-xii).

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