The Children's Society

Child Criminal Exploitation

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Exploitation

- “The act of benefitting from someone’s work or actions at the expense of that person.”

- “Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity in exchange for (a)something the victim needs or wants and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.”

  (‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’ revised February 2017)

- “Child Criminal Exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or (c) through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

  (Serious Violence Strategy, April 2018)

“When someone you trusted makes you commit crimes for their benefit.”

D, aged 12

Created by young people – CCE grooming

Targeting stage

This is when a person targets a young person who is vulnerable, as this as this reduces their chances of getting caught. **Signs of this stage include a person:**

- Observing you, finding out your vulnerabilities, needs and wants
- Glamourising their lifestyle to you
- Gaining and developing your trust
- Sharing information about you with other members of their gang
- Recruiting you to their gang or friendship group

Experience stage

This stage is where this person might try to get you used to their lifestyle, or train you up in what they're doing. **At this stage a person might:**

- Make you feel wanted
- Give you gifts and rewards
- Test out your loyalty
- Offer you protection
- Relate to you and offer you advice
- Give you a sense of belonging
- Give you a weapon
- Introduce you to more established members of their gang

Hooked stage

This is the stage where the person will make you feel like you're a member of their gang, even though actually they're just exploiting you for their own gain. **Signs of this stage include a person:**

- You getting more responsibilities within the group eg more money
- You might be asked to commit low level crimes
- You might feel more powerful (although this may not be the reality)
- Exposure of possible consequences to your actions
- Engaging in activities such as drugs, alcohol and sexual behaviour

Trapped stage

Now you feel dependant on the group, the relationship with the person exploiting you may start to become unpleasant, as they reveal their true intents or character. **At this stage you may experience:**

- Threatening behaviour and physical violence
- People playing on your guilt, shame and fear
- Attempts to isolate you from your family, friends and society
- People forcing you to abuse others, assault or even shoot people
- Involvement in Class A drugs (cooking or running)

Risks to young people

The risks to young people being criminally exploited:

- Physical violence: high-levels of violence (including stabbings and shootings), death
- Sexual exploitation and abuse
- Affects on mental health
- Disruption of education
- Harming relationships with family and support networks
- Criminalisation, including with custodial sentences

The Rochdale Serious Case Review identified that five of the six young people who had been sexually exploited for a prolonged period of time had learning disabilities or difficulties.

Children and young people in England with moderate to severe learning disabilities are around six times more likely to have been affected by sexual abuse than the general population of children and young people (Spencer et al, 2005).

Studies suggest that 39-68% of girls and 16-30 % of boys with intellectual or developmental disabilities will be sexually abused before their 18th birthday. Violence against children with a disability occurs at 1.7 times the rate of violence against non-disabled children. (UN Violence Study, 2006).

Research conducted by University College London in relation to in excess of 9,000 Barnardo's CSE service users found that males were 2.6 times more likely than females to have a disability, although 13% of female victims also had a disability. Both males and females can be victims of abuse (Cockbain et al, 2015)

Despite indicators being used widely across the UK in literature and practice, the only two experiences that were shown to have a correlation (not causation) with CSE were being in care and having a disability (Eaton and Holmes, 2017)

Why are young people with disabilities particularly vulnerable to exploitation?

Unprotected, overprotected (2015)

Factors that play a part in the failure to recognise that young people with learning disabilities experience, and are at risk of, CSE include:

- the infantilisation* of many young people with learning disabilities
- the social isolation of this group of young people
- their lack of empowerment and voice
- the lack of access to information and education on sex and relationships
- false perceptions that young people with learning disabilities do not have the same needs, wishes and desires to have a relationship as all young people, and/or that they cannot be sexually exploited.

*infantilisation – to treat them as though they are still a small child

“He said he loved me and wanted to be my boyfriend. Why would he say those things if he didn’t mean them? I wanted a boyfriend so why would I not have someone as my boyfriend who said he wanted to be my boyfriend?”

“He said it was a secret… He said that lots of people thought that people with autism shouldn’t have boyfriends or girlfriends and that they would be angry with me if they knew I had a boyfriend.”

Tom, aged 15
(Unprotected, Overprotected, 2015)

The invisibility of some children and young people with learning disabilities

- A significant number of young people who become known to CSE services have moderate or mild learning disabilities or learning difficulties – in particular, autistic spectrum conditions (ASC) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
- These young people have often not received support to meet their needs.
- Young people clearly articulated how the lack of recognition that they have a learning disability can be problematic, leading to frustration and also to others viewing them as exhibiting 'challenging' behaviour.
- For some, problems at school led them to cease engaging in education or being excluded, which further increases their vulnerability to CSE
- There appears to be a clear pattern across the UK of CSE professionals working with young people for whom there is no formal or informal identification of a learning disability or specific learning need.

(Unprotected, Overprotected, 2015)

Practical Tips on Responding to CCE

- Child Criminal Exploitation is a Child Protection issue- always follow your local safeguarding procedures

- Remember, CCE often involves trafficking of young people – if you have suspicions that a young person is being trafficked for the purpose of exploitation, you should make a NRM referral (National Referral Mechanism).

- Consider the strengths around the young persons context – does the young person have any existing positive relationships which we can build upon to provide understanding and support?

- Do you have any information or insight to share or access that we could consider as 'intelligence' that will help inform a safeguarding response?

- Listen to the young person and how they might describe criminal exploitation or what is happening to them in their terms

- Continue to use appropriate language in practice, ensuring that CCE is framed accurately

- Consider the context that CCE occurs in and that young people often have multiple vulnerabilities

Thank you

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