**CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION – FACTSHEET**

**Introduction**

Sexual exploitation can happen to any young person. It happens throughout the UK, in both urban and rural locations. It can happen to children of a range of ages, both male and female, from any ethnic background. Victims have identified as heterosexual, gay, lesbian and bisexual and some of them have been disabled or had learning difficulties.

Sexual exploitation can happen to children from loving and secure families, although young people with additional vulnerabilities, such as experience of early childhood abuse, particularly sexual abuse, are at increased risk.

**How do young people get involved?**

Children and young people become involved in sexual exploitation in a number of ways but some of the most common are:-

* **On street- grooming**

Young people are encouraged to get into cars with adults – this may be encouraged by adults themselves or by the young persons friends. This may initially look like good fun to a young person who may be given alcohol, cigarettes or even drugs. This can then lead to the young people being asked for sexual favours in return.

Young people can be encouraged to go to parties or ‘chill flats’, by older males and asked to bring friends, where alcohol/drugs are provided.

Adults grooming young people to believe they are a ‘boyfriend’ in order to persuade the young person to engage in sexual activity

* **Online sexual exploitation**

Befriending and making contact with children online, through social media for the purpose of sexually abusing them; this might involve

* An adult pretending to be a child, befriending the child through online chat rooms, social networking websites, email, mobile telephone messaging, gaining their trust, stalking their online activities
* Asking children to participate in non-contact sexual activities such as engaging in sexual conversations online or via mobile telephone
* Asking children to take and share indecent images of themselves online or through a mobile telephone
* Asking children to display sexualized behaviours or perform sexual acts that are recorded or shared live via webcam
* The creation, storage and distribution of child abuse images (also referred to as child pornography or indecent images)
* Arranging to meet a child in person for the purpose of sexually abusing them

**What stops young people telling about Sexual Exploitation?**

We know that many young people are unable to tell even the people they are closest to about sexual exploitation. The reasons most children and young people do not tell anyone about what is happening to them are feelings of:-

* Shame
* Guilt
* Fear they or loved ones might be harmed
* A desire to protect the abuser because they have been groomed
* Worries they will be blamed
* Worries that they will be rejected

**What is the impact of child sexual exploitation?**

Child sexual exploitation can have a devastating impact on a victim’s health, happiness and development. It can also have profound long-term effects on young people’s social integration and economic well-being and adversely affects life chances. Some of the difficulties faced by victims include:

* isolation from family and friends
* teenage parenthood
* failing examinations or dropping out of education altogether
* unemployment
* mental health problems
* suicide attempts
* alcohol and drug addiction
* aggressive behaviour
* criminal activity

**How much is child sexual exploitation is there?**

It is not possible to say exactly how many young people are victims of child sexual exploitation for a number of reasons. It is described as a ‘hidden’ form of abuse which leaves victims confused, frightened and reluctant to make any disclosures. Some young people are not even aware they are experiencing abuse as the perpetrator has manipulated them into believing they are in a loving relationship, or that they are dependent on their abuser for protection. There is also no recognised category of abuse for sexual exploitation in child protection procedures and data relating to CSE cases is often partial, incomplete, concealed in other categories of data, or simply unrecorded. In addition, when perpetrators are convicted for involvement in child sexual exploitation cases, it is for associated offences such as sexual activity with a child - there is no specific crime of child sexual exploitation and therefore it is not possible to obtain figures from police statistics of sexual offences.

A UK-wide survey estimated that in 2009-2010, there were over 3,000 young people accessing services because they had been affected by sexual exploitation. In a thematic assessment, CEOP received over 2,000 reports of victims from local authorities and police forces. The Children’s Commissioner’s inquiry in to sexual exploitation by groups and gangs confirmed 2,049 reported victims in the 14 month period from August 2010 to October 2011. Furthermore, the Children’s Commissioner’s inquiry estimated from the evidence that 16,500 children in the UK were at risk of sexual exploitation.

**What can we do about child sexual exploitation?**

Child sexual exploitation is child abuse, so local procedures and guidance must be followed if anyone suspects that a young person is a victim or is at risk of becoming a victim. It is important that agencies work together and share information in order to deal with child sexual exploitation. Professionals across a range of services, including sexual health clinics, mental health services, schools and specialist services for homeless and drug abusing young people need to know how to spot the signs of sexual exploitation so they can identify and respond as early as possible to support young people. Authorities including the police need to be trained to deal with young people who may not initially present as victims of sexual abuse and may be suspicious of authority and difficult to engage. Young victims need to be able to access specialist support services to help them deal with the fall-out from this type of abuse and understand that they are not to blame.

Police can also disrupt exploitation by issuing ‘abduction notices’ when they become aware that a child is spending time with an adult who could be harmful to them, for example if there is existing intelligence suggesting the adult has a sexual interest in children, or if parents report a child missing and the child is found at a particular individual’s address. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 also introduced a range of offences, including grooming and statutory rape of children under 13, which can be brought against perpetrators in CSE cases. Conviction rates for child sexual exploitation are low and prosecutions can often re-traumatise victims.

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