

CSE Research: Short films for practice

Research Briefing Note #1



10 key facts about child sexual exploitation
Dr Helen Beckett

Text of the Film

1. *“Child sexual exploitation – or CSE - is a form of child sexual abuse. What differentiates it from other forms is the concept of exchange – the fact that the young person or the person abusing them receives something in return for the abusive act.*
2. *CSE can affect any child under 18 years of age. Although 16 and 17 year olds can legally consent to have sex, they can still be abused in this way.*
3. *Research tells us that both males and females are abused through CSE. Similarly, both males and females perpetrate the abuse.*
4. *We also know from research that CSE exists across every ethnic grouping, both in terms of those perpetrating and in terms of those experiencing the abuse.*
5. *Whilst most of our focus historically has been on adults abusing children through CSE, we are increasingly learning about peer on peer abuse and the risk that young people face within their own social settings.*
6. *CSE can take place online and offline. It can be perpetrated by individuals or by groups.*
7. *There is no typical CSE case. CSE takes many different forms. A 14 year old boy, for example, giving oral sex to a 17 year old boy in return for money. Or three 15 year olds being taken to a party house, given drugs or alcohol, and then told they have to ‘pay this back’ by sexual activity with adults.*
8. *What is common across all forms of CSE is the rarity with which young people disclose what is happening to them. There are many different reasons for this – many young people don’t even realise the abusive nature of what is happening. Some may even feel in some way complicit in the abuse because there has been some kind of ‘reward’ or receipt of something.*
9. *Unfortunately, as professionals, we can compound these misconceptions through our attitudes and our language. For example, when we mistakenly describe a 12*

year old girl as sexually active. Or when we describe a 35 year old male as a 14 year old's 'boyfriend' as opposed to an abuser.

10. What we also know from research is that an effective response to CSE needs to move beyond a focus on victims and also focus on perpetrators. We talk about the 3 P's – an effective response needs to have: prevention, protection and prosecution. And although there is no offence of CSE there are a range of offences under the Sexual Offences Act that we can – and should – use to prosecute this abuse.¹

So, a final thought. CSE can affect any child and no one agency holds the solution to this. We must work together to safeguard young people; work together to prevent, protect and prosecute.”

Research Summary

The observations shared in this film are drawn from a wide range of research undertaken by staff at 'The International Centre', and embedded in current policy frameworks. For further information please see the links at the end of this document.

Contextualising CSE

'Child sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse in which a person(s) exploits, coerces and/or manipulates a child or young person into engaging in some form of sexual activity in return for something the child needs or desires and/or for the gain of the person(s) perpetrating or facilitating the abuse.' (SBNI 2014, adopted from CSE Knowledge Transfer Partnership NI)

The key thing that distinguishes CSE from other forms of child sexual abuse is the concept of exchange – the fact that someone coerces or manipulates a child into engaging in sexual activity in return for something they need or desire and/or for the gain of those perpetrating or facilitating the abuse.

¹ Please note that since the publication of this short film and briefing paper the Serious Crime Act 2015 changed all references to 'child prostitution or pornography' in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 with alternative wording of 'sexual exploitation of children', creating a set of offences entitled 'sexual exploitation of children'.

CSE can take many different forms including:

- internet exploitation;
- exploitation at party houses;
- abuse through prostitution (as per Sexual Offences Act definition);
- inappropriate/sexually exploitative relationships;
- child abuse images; and
- internal trafficking for sexual exploitation (Beckett, 2011).

Cases of CSE can incorporate a range of different sexual offences, including rape or sexual activity with a child, abuse of a child through prostitution or pornography, indecent photographs of a child or meeting a child following sexual grooming. CSE refers, not to the specific offence, but the context within which the offending occurs.

The increasing profile of CSE can mean that we become so focused on this particular form of abuse that we miss other forms of violence and abuse also being experienced by, and causing significant harm to, young people. It is therefore critical that we identify and respond to CSE alongside other forms of harm that adolescents may experience, including other types of sexual violence or abuse, domestic violence, trafficking and going missing from home or care.

Questions for practice reflection

You may want to discuss or consider the following:

- Does your current preventative practice reflect a holistic understanding of CSE, in terms of recognising the many different forms it can take and the range of young people it can affect?
- Is it possible that the language you use (in your dialogue with young people or other professionals, or in your case notes) may inadvertently be acting as a barrier to identification or disclosure? If so, how might you address this?
- What steps could you take to encourage disclosures from young people?
- Are you clear about local referral mechanisms if concerns are disclosed or identified?

Is there someone you know who would benefit from seeing this short film? If so, take a minute to pass it on <http://youtu.be/b-LcS0fwTxg>

To cite this film

University of Bedfordshire (2015) *10 key facts about child sexual exploitation*. Available at: <http://youtu.be/b-LcS0fwTxg> (Accessed day, month, year).

Further resources

For more information about CSE, and responses to this, please see:

- DCSF (2009) Safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation
- DfE (2012) What to do if you suspect a child is being sexually exploited
- SBNI (2014) Child sexual exploitation. Definition and guidance

For further information about the work of The International Centre in this field, please see www.beds.ac.uk/ic

For further information about any aspect of the film or briefing please contact Dr Helen Beckett at helen.beckett@beds.ac.uk

The International Centre

Increasing understanding of, and improving responses to, child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking

The International Centre at the University of Bedfordshire is committed to increasing understanding of, and improving responses to, child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking in local, national and international contexts. This is achieved through:

- academic rigour and research excellence
- collaborative and partnership based approaches to applied social research
- meaningful and ethical engagement of children and young people
- active dissemination and evidence-based engagement in theory, policy and practice



Staff at the International Centre work collaboratively in teams with internal and external staff on applied research, evaluation, consultancy and training. We prioritise a focus on children and young people's participation, taking this seriously in all aspects of our work.

The University of Bedfordshire has been awarded the Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education for The International Centre's pioneering research into child sexual exploitation. This prestigious prize is the highest form of national recognition open to higher and further education institutions in the UK.

What is Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)?

The following definition of CSE is that used in the government guidance 'Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation' (DCSF, 2009, p.9)

Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative

situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the Internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability.