

# **CSE Research: Short films for practice Research Briefing Note #3**



## **Peer-on-Peer Child Sexual Exploitation** Georgina Curtis

### **Text of the Film**

Historically, child protection and adolescent safeguarding have focused on the abuse and exploitation of children by adults. But services are now increasingly responding to cases where everybody involved is under 18.

Peer-on-peer abuse can include; sexual bullying at school, being coerced to send sexual images, physical and sexual assaults and violence, child sexual exploitation and teenage relationship abuse. It also includes gang associated abuse and exploitation: Our research found that gang-affected young women are particularly vulnerable to being sexually exploited for protection, status, drugs or money.

When responding to peer-on peer abuse it's important to remember:

Firstly, everyone involved is often in the same school or neighbourhood. So we need to take account of how a network of peer relationships is affected.

Secondly, we need to recognise the relationships between sexual exploitation, serious youth violence, and teenage relationship abuse, to ensure we notice when young people are experiencing multiple forms of abuse.

Thirdly, that young people who have experienced abuse and exploitation can also be groomed to abuse their peers. This means we need to think much more holistically about safeguarding if we want to prevent and, respond to young people's experiences of violence. So, we need to develop responses that are sensitive to the particular dynamics of peer on peer sexual exploitation.

### **Research Summary**

Historically, child protection and adolescent safeguarding has focused on the abuse and exploitation of children by adults. However services are now increasingly responding to cases of child sexual exploitation in which all those involved are young people under the age of 18 research (Home Office 2011, Beckett et al 2014). Research into young people's experiences of abuse and exploitation identifies that young people experience multiple forms of abuse from their peers (Firmin Forthcoming 2015). Existing research into peer-on-peer abuse creates an evidence base from which we can inform our response:

- A quarter of child sexual exploitation cases are peer-on-peer as opposed to adult on child (Berelowitz et al 2012, Barnardo's 2011). In some areas peer-on-peer abuse is the most frequently identified model of exploitation (Beckett et al 2014).

- One in five girls in England suffered physical violence from their boyfriend and more than four in ten teenage schoolgirls aged between 13 and 17 in England have experienced sexual coercion (Barter et al 2015).
- Almost a third of 16-18-year-old girls say they've been subjected to unwanted sexual touching in UK schools (EVAW 2010)
- Young people living in gang affected neighbourhoods report experiencing physical, sexual and emotional abuse by their peers. This is often linked to status, drugs, money and protection (Beckett et al 2013, Firmin 2013,).

### **Issues for practice reflection**

This film highlights some of the key differences to consider when responding to peer-on peer exploitation as distinct from child sexual exploitation perpetrated by adults.

Firstly, the young people involved often know each other, they may attend the same school or live in the same area or neighbourhood. Therefore our response should consider the impact the abuse has on wider networks of peer relationships, responses therefore need to look beyond the individuals directly identified as involved.

Secondly, young people often experience and are affected by multiple forms of abuse. Our responses therefore recognise the links between sexual exploitation, serious youth violence, and teenage relationship abuse.

Thirdly, young people who have experienced abuse and exploitation can also be groomed to abuse their peers. Therefore we need to think much more holistically about safeguarding if we want to prevent and respond to young people's experiences of violence.

**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/qrLeH9EAolk>**

### **To cite this film**

University of Bedfordshire (2015) *Peer-on-Peer Child Sexual Exploitation*. Available at: <http://youtu.be/qrLeH9EAolk> (Accessed day, month, year).

### **References**

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# 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



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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.*