An examination of the perspectives and experiences of police officers working with children and young people at risk of, or involved in, child sexual exploitation

October 2014

Dr Jane Dodsworth and Birgit Larsson

Centre for Research on Children and Families
University of East Anglia

Funded by Norfolk and Suffolk Constabulary
Acknowledgements

The researchers would like to thank Norfolk and Suffolk Constabulary for supporting and funding this research. We would also like to thank all the officers who took part for their time and for their openness in discussing a difficult issue. Particular thanks are also owed to Detective Superintendent Julie Wvendth for her assistance in accessing participants and for her helpful comments on the interim and draft reports.
## Contents

**Executive Summary**                                                                                               ........................................... 1  
**The Report**                                                                                                     ........................................... 7  
  Introduction                                                                                                       ........................................... 7  
  The aim of this study                                                                                              ........................................... 8  
  Methodology                                                                                                       ........................................... 8  
**Key themes**                                                                                                     ........................................... 10  
  The differences between child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation and the implications for practice ........... 10  
  Differences, vulnerabilities and criminalisation in children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation and the implications of this for practice ........................................... 12  
  The growth in internet abuse and the implications for practice ...................................................................................... 14  
  Achieving good proactive and preventative practice in working with young people at risk of, or involved in, sexual exploitation ......................................................................................... 16  
  Continuity and consistency - inflexibility of working hours, team remits and access to expertise ............................... 18  
  Uniformed/Specialist Officers—feeling ‘out of the loop’ ................................................................................................. 20  
  Gender issues in policing in this area and the implications for practice ........................................................................ 21  
  Police at home/being a parent ........................................................................................................................................... 23  
  The importance of good supervision ...................................................................................................................................... 24  
  Perceptions of training ......................................................................................................................................................... 26  
  Multi-agency working/information sharing .......................................................................................................................... 28  
  Officers’ commitment to and passion for the work .................................................................................................................. 29  
**Summary**                                                                                                        ........................................... 30  
**Recommendations** ............................................................................................................................................................ 34  
**Conclusions**                                                                 ........................................... 37  
**References**                                                                                                      ........................................... 38  
**Appendices**                                                                                                      ........................................... 40
Executive Summary

Background

In April 2014 Norfolk and Suffolk Constabulary commissioned The Centre for Research on Children and Families (CRCF) in the School of Social Work at the University of East Anglia to undertake a research study to explore the perspectives and experiences of police officers working in Norfolk with young people involved in, or at risk of, involvement in sexual exploitation (CSE). The objective was to increase understanding of what works well, what works less well and to identify any gaps in policy, procedure or practice, in order to inform service provision.

Study design

Qualitative grounded theory methods were used to collect and analyse the data to ensure the findings were grounded in the experiences of the officers participating in the research. Twenty-three telephone interviews and two focus groups were held with a total of thirty-eight police officers. Data was coded and analysed to identify key issues and themes.

Key Findings:

What Works Well- Four areas stood out as particular strengths in police officers’ work with children and young people involved in CSE. These included officers’:

- Sense of commitment to and passion for CSE work
- Awareness of the vulnerability of young people involved in CSE, including awareness of the links between victimisation and offending
- Recognition of three categories of young people involved in internet abuse; ‘naïve’ victims ‘wise’ victims and ‘naïve’ offenders
- Understanding that prevention and proactive early intervention is key

Sense of commitment to and passion for CSE work

Participating police officers are clearly passionate about, and committed to, working with young people at risk of or involved in CSE. Officers who specialised in CSE work believed they were capable of making a difference in young people’s lives and felt personally responsible for the outcomes of their cases. This meant they often engaged in additional work outside their contracted hours such as staying late or reading research to further inform themselves.
Awareness of the vulnerability of young people involved in CSE, including awareness of the links between victimisation and offending

Officers consistently demonstrated concern about the vulnerability of victims of child sexual exploitation. There was a general awareness that young people who were already vulnerable, such as children in care and those going missing from home or care, were also those most likely to be at increased risk.

Participants spoke knowledgably about the links between victimisation and criminal activity, understanding that becoming a victim of CSE might sometimes first begin through a young person’s involvement in criminal activity at the prompting of their abusers. Officers not only emphasised the importance of seeing beyond a young person’s initial presentation and trying to understand their circumstances, but also highlighted the importance of not criminalising young people unnecessarily.

Recognition of three categories of young people involved in internet abuse; ‘naïve’ victims, ‘wise’ victims and ‘naïve’ offenders

There was a clear understanding about other young people becoming vulnerable to CSE through increased, and perhaps unmonitored, internet use. It was observed that young people who became involved in CSE through internet activity often fell into one of three categories: ‘naïve’ young people who did not understand the potential risks, or ‘wise’ young people who believed they could handle them but quickly found themselves in situations they could not control. A third category were ‘naïve’ offenders where internet use posed a risk. There was concern that photo sharing between young people had sometimes drawn young men into the criminal justice system for engaging in adolescent sexual experimentation with girls they knew, not understanding that age differences meant they were committing criminal acts.

Understanding the importance of prevention and proactive early intervention

Early education of young people about the risks of CSE was thought crucial in preventing both victimisation and perpetration. Proactive engagement with young people through work in schools where police officers presented realistic case studies or spoke to young people and parents when problems first arose about unsafe internet usage, for example, was repeatedly suggested as good practice that some officers already carried out but would like to increase.

Areas for Improvement - Areas in which there appeared to be scope for improvement tended to relate to structural or institutional issues. These included:

- Supervision
- Training
- Joint-working between uniformed officers and specialist officers including issues of continuity and consistency and gender
Multi-agency working and information sharing

Supervision

Policing was perceived by most participants to be highly stressful work. Most of the officers interviewed had, at some point in their careers, felt deeply affected by a case or a series of cases. While the way officers managed this stress differed, one common theme was the importance of having good supervision.

The importance of good supervision was also highlighted by senior officers. However, both uniformed and specialist officers described great variation in the quality of supervision. Ensuring the quality of supervision across teams was recognised as an area for improvement that would help officers to continue to perform well in stressful situations and to avoid burnout.

Training

Online learning packages for child sexual exploitation were described with frustration by both specialist and uniformed officers. Not all officers interviewed remembered completing the training and several others recalled little of the contents due to the format and the general culture of attempting to complete such training as quickly as possible. Given the complex nature of CSE there was a strong preference for in-depth face to face learning in an environment where participants were able to ask questions.

Officers’ lack of enthusiasm about the content of e-learning packages did not reflect a reluctance to learn. Their criticism about the online packages usually concerned the packages not adequately addressing their questions and concerns. Many supplemented their learning at home by reading the latest research on the internet. They also used their work based experiences with CSE to identify gaps and suggest improvements in current police practices.

Working with CSE was felt to be different from other types of policing, not only because of the vulnerability of the victims involved, but also because officers needed to be ‘savvy’ about the internet, which many felt they were not. This included advising parents and young people about safe usage and dealing with social media companies who refused to cooperate. Policing CSE presented difficulties officers were not used to. Several officers also expressed confusion over the differences between child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation underlining a need for further training.

Joint-working between uniformed officers and specialist officers including issues of continuity and consistency and gender

A further area for improvement raised by both uniformed and specialist officers was the need to increase cooperation between specialist and uniformed officers. Uniformed officers felt under pressure to correctly identify CSE and to interview victims without being able to rely on specialist input. They cited difficulties reaching specialists
on the phone, knowing who to contact in the first place, or having no one to reach out to during night time shifts.

As a result of having to handle CSE cases on their own, often with limited knowledge, uniformed officers felt vulnerable to criticism and that no one appreciated the high volume of work they had to undertake. Specialists, however, often recognised that uniformed officers had to act quickly with little assistance. They believed the current working relationships could be improved upon and saw great potential in such a change.

Specialists suggested that uniformed officers could be trained to identify young people at risk of CSE, especially in areas where local uniformed officers were already known to the young people. Linked to this, the availability of female officers to work with female victims was seen as being crucial but was currently limited.

**Multi-agency working and information sharing**

Another important area where participants felt that improvements could be made was in multi-agency working and information sharing between agencies. CSE was thought of as 'mainly a police responsibility' and participants spoke of encountering difficulties from other agencies while working on cases. Children’s Services and Health were mentioned as the agencies where the most information sharing difficulties arose. Officers also wanted greater input into CSE from a wider range of agencies including voluntary agencies in order to be able to refer young people and their families for appropriate support.

**Recommendations**

On the basis of the findings this report makes six recommendations:

- Improving the quality and content of supervision
- Building relationships between specialist and uniformed officers
- Continued development of multi-agency working and information sharing
- Greater awareness of the impact of police officers' gender on CSE victims
- Improved training provision
- Future research

**Improve the quality and content of supervision**

Supervision plays an important part in promoting officers’ well-being and confidence in their professional abilities. It is crucial that supervising officers are enabled to keep up to date on their specific area in order to advise and support officers in their teams.

Additionally, it would be beneficial to overall morale and performance if supervisors ensured, as part of any supervision session, that they checked on the well-being of the officer, reviewed any difficult cases and possible personal impact and whether there is a need for further input/advice/counselling, where appropriate. If a personal
element is included as a standing item in any supervision session it becomes a part of normal practice.

**Building relationships between specialist and uniformed officers**

Participants, particularly those in the focus groups, welcomed the opportunity to discuss work related issues in a semi-informal way, to swap ideas with colleagues and ‘let off steam’ in a supportive environment. They noted a general lack of opportunity to do so during working hours, or to liaise with colleagues in different specialist teams. If opportunities where found, perhaps following specific training sessions, for intra-agency discussion this may improve morale and increase understanding and shared expertise on working with children and young people at risk of or involved in sexual exploitation.

**Continued development of multi-agency working and information sharing**

Whilst it is recognised that this is not, and should not be, the sole responsibility of the police force, it is clear from the findings, and from recent research and government guidance, that effective early and proactive intervention and appropriate support services are more effectively delivered where agencies work closely together.

Participants in the study recognised the merits of the M.A.S.H and the N.S.C.B CSE group in sharing expertise and information but there remain gaps in joint working and in information sharing provision and it is essential that these are closed.

Early identification and intervention is key to prevention and safeguarding those vulnerable to CSE, including boys and young men and black and minority ethnic (BME) young people. These groups appear currently to be insufficiently identified or considered. It is essential therefore, that key agencies pool their understanding, expertise and strategies to ensure that none of these vulnerable young people ‘fall through the net’.

**Greater awareness of the impacts of police officers’ gender on CSE victims**

A fundamental aspect of good practice in all safeguarding agencies is the ability to build rapport and trust with the child or young person concerned. Several participants in the study recognised that, for some young people, the ability to build rapport was impeded by the gender of the officer. It may be helpful to consider this issue at the earliest pre-intervention stage and, wherever appropriate/necessary to send a female officer. The issues of gender, sexuality and ethnicity should be an ongoing part of training to raise awareness of the potential impact on both the victim and the officers’ perceptions and responses.

**Improved Training Provision**

Whilst it is recognised that resources are limited, there is a need to review some of the training provision. The e-packages are not proving as effective as had been hoped and there is a clear need for some additional face to face training. This could build on what has been learnt in the e-package training which may ensure greater receptiveness to the e-packages. Ideally there would also be an element of multi-agency involvement in the training or a widening of targeted participants from the police service who are entitled to attend N.S.C.B multi-agency CSE training.
Officers need to increase their understanding of internet/mobile phone abuse in order to address concern about this new group of young people who are vulnerable to becoming victims or perpetrators of CSE.

It may be that an additional way forward is to nominate a CSE ‘champion’ in each team/district who accesses all available training, ‘cascades’ knowledge down to fellow officers and is a point of contact in addition to M.A.S.H officers.

**Future research**

Whilst much good local practice and a strong commitment to developing more expertise and confidence in working with this vulnerable group of young people is evident, there are some gaps identified in provision and some areas for further exploration.

Further research on police officers’ perspectives and experiences is needed on a national scale to compare and contrast practices in safeguarding children and young people at risk of or involved in sexual exploitation, to develop an increased understanding of what works well and what works less well and to build on the good practice already in existence nationally.

In addition, a crucial part of this wider picture is research to gain an understanding from young people at risk of or experiencing sexual exploitation themselves, on their experiences and perspectives on engaging with police officers.

**Conclusions**

Although this study has shown that there are identifiable difficulties, pressures and tensions for police officers in Norfolk working in this complex area, what is clearly evident is the high level of commitment to safeguarding, listening to and understanding children and young people at risk of child sexual exploitation.
The Report

An examination of the perspectives and experiences of police officers working with children and young people at risk of, or involved in, child sexual exploitation

‘The child is the most important thing; don’t lose sight of what they’re saying’

Introduction

There has been much recent research, and a growing awareness amongst professionals and the wider public, about child sexual exploitation (CSE). In particular there has been a paradigm shift to thinking of those children and young people involved in sexual exploitation as victims of abuse rather than criminals. There is also a growing awareness of the need for professionals to recognise the early warning signs and potential routes in to sexual exploitation for this vulnerable group of young people.

Additionally, much is now known about the need, in working effectively with these young people, for child-focused, relationship-based multi-agency working and preemptive and preventative action. Recent research studies have also aimed to gain the perspectives of the young people at risk of, or involved in, child sexual exploitation about those experiences and their views of the agencies involved in their care and wellbeing (Pearce et al 2009, Dodsworth 2013, Melrose and Pearce 2013, Office of the Children’s Commissioner 2013, Coffey 2014) There is, however, less research on the perspectives of police officers involved in working with this vulnerable group. An exploration of their experiences is timely given that, as Melrose and Pearce (2013: 41) note ‘child sexual exploitation is policed differently across the country’.

Research undertaken for The Police Foundation (Graham 2013) suggests that many young people tend to hold negative views of the police, who, in turn, tend to view young people as potential suspects in need of control rather than potential victims in need of protection. These negative views are also identified the Coffey report (2014) on CSE in Greater Manchester. The Graham study suggests that ‘there is a need to undertake research on a number of issues, including why young adults are generally reluctant to report offences to the police (particularly the reluctance of young adult women to report sexual offences) and what might be done to reverse this’ (Graham 2013:3).

In August 2013 the All Party Parliamentary Group for Children launched a new inquiry, ‘Children and the Police’ (APPG 2013). The Inquiry called for evidence to explore the relationships of the police with children and young people, how police officers seek to engage with children and young people and young people’s views of the police. The APPG committee stated that it had chosen this theme because it believed that how the police engage with children and young people is vitally important, particularly as
the police are often the first point of contact for children who are at risk or in challenging circumstances. The focus of the inquiry centres on hearing about children’s and young people’s personal narratives of engaging with the police and how the police interact with other services including education, social care, health and child protection services.

Given that many children and young people involved in child sexual exploitation become the vulnerable young adults that The Police Foundation study addresses, it is crucial that these issues are explored further. Indeed, as The Office of the Children’s Commissioner Report (OCC 2013) notes, children continue to slip through the net because many agencies are forgetting the child, who is too often viewed as ‘putting themselves at risk’. The OCC report also identifies a failure by agencies to engage and a failure to recognise victims.

This sadly, is brought home in reports of professionals failing to recognise and deal with sexual exploitation over considerable periods of time in Oxford, Rochdale and most recently in Rotherham. Whilst this is certainly not just an issue for police officers, it is essential that, since the police force is a key agency, these issues are further explored. This would help to ensure that the focus remains on the child, that pre-emptive action is taken whenever possible and that the multi-agency joined up working which the OCC report identifies as the way forward, is achieved.

**The aim of this study**

The aim of this study is to explore the perspectives and experiences of police officers working in Norfolk with young people involved in, or at risk of, involvement in sexual exploitation. The objective is to increase understanding of what works well, what works less well and to identify any gaps in policy, procedure or practice, in order to inform service provision.

**Methodology**

A qualitative grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) was taken to data collection and analysis to ensure that the findings were grounded in the experiences and expertise of senior officers responsible for policy and management, frontline specialist officers directly involved in working in this area, and uniformed officers who may be the first officer in contact with the child or young person.

**Research questions**

- What are the experiences and perspectives of police officers working with young people involved in, or at risk of involvement in, sexual exploitation?

- Are there identifiable differences between the perspectives and experiences of officers working in M.A.S.H or SARC teams and those of other police officers?
• How do police officers working with young people, involved in, or at risk of involvement in, sexual exploitation think engagement could be improved?

**Sample**

Once ethical approval was gained from the University of East Anglia, School of Social Work Ethics Committee, information leaflets and interview schedules were developed and participants sought.

Telephone interviews were conducted with a total of eleven specialist and six uniformed officers. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used to consider the range of experiences and perceptions and to ensure that, whilst the central themes were covered, there was scope for personal stories to emerge.

Two focus groups were conducted, one with specialist officers (twelve officers) and one with uniformed officers (five officers), none of whom were participants in the individual interviews, to ensure that a wide range of views and experiences were gained.

Telephone interviews were also conducted with four key senior officers to explore their views on child sexual exploitation, on how policy underpins practice, on training issues and on officer support.

**Limitations**

Whilst it is not possible to generalise from such a small scale study, the findings echo what is already known about the vulnerability of certain groups of young people. Additionally, analysis of the data highlighted several important issues and recommendations which are also reflected in the APPG for Children Inquiry into Children and the Police (2014) Final Report published on 27th October 2014 and launched in parliament on 28th October 2014 as this report was finalised and the Coffey Report (2014) published on 30th October 2014.

Whilst the sample is small, the qualitative methods used in the study provide rich data on participants’ experiences and perspectives which indicate a growing awareness by police officers in Norfolk of the seriousness and wide ranging nature of the issue of CSE and their recognition of the need to see the wider picture in working with the vulnerable young people at risk of or involved. There is a need for a larger study to compare practice and perspectives nationally to identify and build upon good practice making it ‘common practice’ APPG (2014:23). Additionally, there is a need to examine the perspectives of young people about their experiences of engaging with the police to ensure that their voices remain central.
Data Collection and analysis

Interviews were transcribed, anonymised and coded during data collection in order that any emerging patterns informed further interviews and analysis. Initial pilot interviews were used to develop and refine the questions. Probe and follow-up questions were also used to aid identification of differences and similarities in experiences and perceptions. Data was coded until saturation point was reached and the following key themes emerged:

- Differences between child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation and the implications of this for practice
- Differences, vulnerabilities and criminalisation in children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation and the implications of this for practice
- The growth in internet abuse and the implications for practice
- Achieving good, pro-active and preventative practice in working with young people at risk of or involved in sexual exploitation.
- Continuity and consistency - inflexibility of working hours, team remits and access to expertise
- Uniformed/Specialist Officers– feeling ‘out of the loop’
- Gender issues in policing in this area and the implications for practice
- Police at home/being a parent
- The importance of good supervision
- Perceptions of training
- Multi-agency working/information sharing
- Officers’ commitment to and passion for the work

The Key Themes:

- **The differences between child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation and the implications for practice**

  ‘Sometimes, it’s really difficult from our point of view, to say. ‘Well that is actually child sexual exploitation or just child sexual abuse’

A theme running through many of the interviews undertaken, particularly with uniformed officers, but also with some specialist officers was a feeling of uncertainty about the difference between child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and indeed whether there is one. This is a complex area in that it can be argued that a child or young person who has experienced child sexual exploitation has been sexually abused. As Barnardo’s (1998) note ‘a child cannot consent to their own abuse.’ Additionally, although it is not possible to argue that there is a causal link between being sexually abused as a child and becoming sexually exploited there are very clear correlations between the two.
Officers gave examples of this as a continuum where familial sexual abuse may then continue into child sexual exploitation. Considered comments were also made on the close links between those who are vulnerable to CSE and family histories of domestic abuse and neglect. Insightfully, one officer expressed the view that,

‘It is children looking for something they are possibly not getting elsewhere...love, affection and attention. They are getting into CSE...they become very vulnerable to something which is entirely inappropriate’

It was also observed by several participants that it was important to spot the precursors to CSE and that, until recently, this had been an area in need of development.

‘Attitudes have changed a lot, police are more aware now of young people’s vulnerabilities and their ability to be exploited. A lot of police are now heavily into early intervention, prevention and assisting people to get on the right track earlier.’

Several officers spoke of it being a relatively new concept and an ‘umbrella term’ for a wider number of issues and offences but some anxiety was expressed that the focus on child sexual exploitation may take attention away from other child abuse cases.

‘I see sexual exploitation of children running parallel to child abuse, because all the same sort of dynamics are there...the process...the vulnerability of the child.’

‘The difficulty with CSE is that it is another title and therefore another opportunity to split crime down into a different grouped area- it is the abuse of children but focused on a different area.’

There was also some anxiety expressed about ‘not getting it right’ in terms of working with CSE cases.

‘It’s multi-faceted and I can’t say I’m au fait with it because we don’t get a massive amount of training and you don’t really see a massive amount of it’

‘I think every job that comes in changes my opinion of what CSE is because we are so new’

‘There are lots of referrals at the moment because everyone is like ‘Whoa, I don’t want to be the one who is missing it’

There was a level of anxiety about recognising CSE and knowing what to do, but there was evidence of a willingness on the part of specialist officers to advise and help other officers to reach a better understanding, albeit there were concerns from uniformed officers about the availability of specialists when they were needed.

‘I always say to people, ‘If you are not sure what you’ve got, just look at the balance of power in the relationship and see if you think that that imbalance of power is being used by a stronger person to sexually exploit the younger person, and then you’ll know you have got CSE or not’.
‘Actually what we need them doing out there on the frontline is being alive to the indicators and the vulnerabilities and thinking “Mmm, not quite happy about this young person here.”’

However, what emerged was a sense that there was, amongst both specialist and uniformed officers, a developing understanding of the wider picture pertaining to CSE and the vulnerability of those involved.

‘What does CSE mean to me? Lots of vulnerable kids, that’s what it means.’

‘I think it is important to understand why it happens not just that it happens.’

‘Both genders are equally vulnerable’

‘Each one on its merits as to how we deal with it, but ultimately the victim is the most important.’

The findings suggests that whilst there is a degree of uncertainty about what constitutes CSE, not only amongst uniformed officers but also some of the specialist team officers, the message about the vulnerability of the potential victims has been clearly heard. Whilst officers had experience of young people who were unaware that they were at risk, no one expressed the view that blame was attached to those young people. The next theme emerged from this almost universally expressed view.

- **Differences, vulnerabilities and criminalisation in children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation and the implications of this for practice**

‘Some children see it as their only option in life’

It is clear from recent research and government guidance that, particularly with the increase in internet abuse, any child or young person could find themselves at risk of sexual exploitation, however some appear to be at increased risk. Research studies (Coy 2008, DCSF 2009, Pearce et al 2009, DoE 2011, Dodsworth 2013, Smeaton 2013, Melrose and Pearce 2013, Office of the Children’s Commissioner 2013, Coffey 2014) consistently identify young people with histories of neglect, abuse and abandonment, particularly those who are ‘Looked After’ (LAC) by the Local Authority and/or have run away from home or care, as those potentially most vulnerable to the risks of sexual exploitation.

This is unsurprising given the background histories, confused sense of identity and self, need for approval and affection, and understandable distrust of those in authority amongst this vulnerable group of young people. They are therefore, potentially more vulnerable to peer pressure, coercion into CSE, and involvement in drug misuse and petty crime. This may, in turn lead to a greater risk of criminalisation, addiction and life threatening risk taking. The sense young people make of these experiences impacts
on how they perceive themselves, their sense of victimhood or agency, routes taken and receptiveness to safeguarding services (Smeaton 2012, Dodsworth 2012, Schofield et al 2014)

At senior management level there is an awareness and concern about this group of young people and an understanding that, at particular risk, within this group are those ‘LAC’ young people who are transferred in from out of county and for whom monitoring is difficult or impossible. The main barrier here is seen to be access to information from other agencies which is the subject of another theme which is explored later.

All the officers in the individual interviews and in the focus groups had a clear understanding of the vulnerabilities of this group of young people and how this, in turn, increases their vulnerability to CSE. One officer noted with insight, that CSE was a risk;

‘Anywhere children feel disenfranchised by the universe’

Others also noted the wider picture of vulnerabilities developing from early childhood histories of neglect and abuse;

‘Because they are being neglected they would look elsewhere for comfort and attention and look for it in the wrong place’

‘Children who are disaffected and not achieving at school and are unhappy or may have some special educational need, so anyone who’s more likely to be able to be manipulated without the strong family unit that could intercede and take some action to stop it’

‘LAC kids are at greatest risk. They haven’t got the stability’

There was, as the data collected indicated, an awareness of the additional risk, particularly for LAC children of peer pressure and grooming which resulted from groups of vulnerable young people living together.

‘Young people in care…are at greater risk of CSE because if one person does it and gets involved in a group, then they’ll often take a friend with them the next day and they (the perpetrators) can almost infiltrate the whole group if they get through to one person’

Several officers noted the time consuming nature of looking for, and returning, young people who have gone missing from care, but again were very clear about their levels of risk of sexual exploitation. An additional difficulty experienced in working with this group of young people was a reluctance on the part of the young people to recognise the risks they were taking and their often negative attitude towards officers. ‘They know the rules of engagement!’ This attitude will be explored further in the next theme.

In terms of whether some young people are at greater risk of criminalisation, one officer noted that the aim is not to criminalise this vulnerable group because,

‘We are looking at them from a victim point of view, but criminality may be an indicator’
Another officer observed that, ‘*our way of dealing with it, if we can, is to do it by education rather than criminalisation.*’

Another officer said, ‘*I am loathe to criminalise young people, particularly when I see their vulnerabilities.*’

As has been noted, internet abuse is a rapidly growing concern and those involved are another major group of young people who officers perceive are at risk and, given their lack of ‘street-wiseness’, may be equally vulnerable in different ways.

‘But then equally we have some children who, to the outside world have got a couple of parents at home, nice house, access to computers, iPads, iPods, all this technology and in a strange way, I think sometimes that makes them more vulnerable because they have unsupervised access to lots of different medias for being contacted by people.’

‘*Lots of things fall into two categories, you get lots of children in care running away, putting themselves in danger. Then the other side is internet stuff and it’s as young as eleven.*’

Overall, analysis indicates a clear sense amongst all the officers interviewed of the children and young people most vulnerable to CSE. They fall into two main groups; firstly, those made vulnerable by life circumstances, often of abuse and neglect and particularly those who are in the care system or running away from care or home.

However, what is also clear is that there is another growing group of young people, who may previously have had little involvement with the police who are vulnerable to grooming and abusive images via the internet. How officers find a way to work with these, often very different, young people is key to gaining their trust and ensuring that they are safeguarded. This issue is the subject of the next theme which emerged from the data analysis.

- **The growth in internet abuse and the implications for practice**

  ‘*Just about every single job now has got some involvement with Social Media*’

Both uniform officers and officers from specialist teams spoke frequently about the increased appearance of internet-related offences, which fundamentally changed some aspects of policing. For uniform officers, this was sometimes a source of frustration, with several feeling that a substantial portion of their jobs now involved dealing with conflicts that emerged or escalated through social media. This, they felt took their attention away from other, perhaps more serious types of conflicts.

  ‘*People who say nasty comments on Facebook isn’t really, in my view, a policing issue.*’

Specialist officers noted that many of the CSE crimes they dealt with involved the internet, from grooming over social media sites to image sharing. Several officers noted that the young people who became involved in CSE through internet activity fell
into one of two categories: ‘naïve’ young people who did not understand the potential risks, or ‘wise’ young people who believed they could handle them but quickly found themselves in situations they could not control.

‘So you’ve got, shall we say, a group of kids that think they know what they’re doing on the net and they think they’re being really wise and they can cope with and they can deal with it. Then you’ve got, shall we say, the kids from the good backgrounds, you know, nice, stable backgrounds and they’re quite naive when they go online and when they’re being exploited, they’re quite naive about it. They’ve got no idea what’s happening, whereas you’ve got your ‘streetwise’, in inverted commas, thinking, ‘Well, actually I’m being exploited, but I know what I’m doing,’ which they don’t know what they’re doing at all and it all becomes very dangerous.’

The internet, however, not only represented risks for ‘naïve’ victims but also for ‘naïve’ offenders. This issue was highlighted by officers who were concerned about the criminalisation of young men who exchanged photos with similarly aged, but younger girls. While these young men believed they were involved in a ‘normal’ activity many young people engaged in, the system did not necessarily note the differences between such offenders and other, more serious sex-offenders.

‘I think it’s a real risk area and we try and work hard with young people to point out and signpost them to, you know, how actually what they think is just, well, that’s what we do…That’s the fad. It’s actually, no, no, you could be criminalised here and that’s your life chances gone.’

On the theme of naiveté, however, with so much new responsibility involved in policing internet-based crimes, many officers felt that they were ill-equipped, especially if they did not use social media personally.

‘Things for instance, just the simple things, like a lot of our crimes now are computer based, that’s not something I’m particularly expert in, I don’t particularly use it at home, I’m not interested and you feel sometimes you get to a stage where things are running away a little bit’

These officers felt additional training was necessary in order to ‘keep up’ with new demands of their jobs, since without such training officers’ confidence suffered.

‘It seems to me, in the limited experience I’ve had, that every time, things change. So I don’t know whether or not it’s because it’s an emerging issue that things aren’t in place, or perhaps they are and I’m not aware of it.’

‘From a confidence point of view, it would be nice just to, you know, as you build up your confidence in terms of going to all sorts of jobs, you can go then and you pretty much know what to do.’

However, even for officers who felt reasonably comfortable using the internet and keeping up to date with new technologies, working with various companies in order to get the evidence they needed added new challenges and frustrations, especially when
some social media sites did not want to assist, did not return calls or messages, or took a long time responding to requests for information.

‘You just come up against walls in relation to, anything that’s on the internet you really hit walls and you think actually nowadays there should be something out there that says that companies have to comply with the police and provide information in relation to offences.’

In summary, the increasing use of the internet produced several challenges for police officers, from understanding how the technologies worked and being confident about knowing how to collect evidence to dealing with companies who were often unwilling to help. The greatest challenge, however, seemed to be how to protect young people affected by the internet, not only the various groups of ‘naïve’ and ‘wise’ victims but also the ‘naïve’ offenders they now felt they had a duty to educate. Their lack of confidence in their own understanding of technology, however, impacted on this preventative work, which, as will be shown in the next section, was considered by officers to be one of the most important aspects of their jobs.

- Achieving good proactive and preventative practice in working with young people at risk of, or involved in, CSE

‘Talking to children you’ve got to take that police hat off.’

‘I put myself in their shoes a little bit.’

Research indicates that what is effective in working with children and young people at risk of, or involved in, sexual exploitation, particularly from the perspectives of the young people themselves is interventions that are child-focused, at the young person’s pace and relationship based. Young people speak of needing someone to ‘be there, wanting respect, continuity and to be really listened to (Dodsworth 2013, Melrose and Pearce 2013, Warrington 2010, OCC 2013).

For example, a young woman who had been coerced into sexual exploitation in her early teens but managed, with support, to exit and move on to work for a specialist support project noted that services need to, ‘be there for people. They are just normal human beings. The only way to find out anything is if you stop putting people in boxes and start looking at them as human beings and talk to them. You have got to get past what they are doing, past the drugs they’re on and find the person inside’. (Dodsworth 2012: 534)

However, despite a growing public and professional awareness of the issues, the recent OCC report (OCC 2013:8, 9) noted that many agencies are forgetting the child and failing to engage with them. They add that ‘too many people who should be
protecting children are in denial about the realities of CSE and therefore do not believe what children may tell them.' They are consequently failing to recognise victims and delay in responding. It is clear from the OCC report that, whilst there is evidence of good practice nationally, there is much still to do.

Analysis of the data in this study indicates a good understanding on the part of both uniformed and specialist officers of the need to be proactive and preventative wherever possible in working with all young people, but particularly those at risk of, or involved in, sexual exploitation. Whilst there was recognition of the difficulty of providing continuity and consistency, given shift patterns and the need to move cases on to different teams to be actioned, overall, officers conveyed a clear understanding of the need to develop a sense of rapport with young people, to gain their trust and to 'really listen' to what they had to say. One uniformed officer observed,

‘I feel I have developed a greater understanding of the young people. It’s a learning culture, not a blaming culture.’

A specialist team officer saw the need for ‘a softer approach’ … ‘Speak to them and listen to them and don’t prejudge people…I think that is where the police force are improving’

‘I always think that if a young person is not telling the exact truth there will be a reason…work at their pace and build trust’

‘They need to see us as people that want to help them and want the best for them and make sure they are kept safe.’

‘So you are hearing not only what they are saying, but what they are not saying as well.’

‘It is most important for police to treat young people with respect and keep them up to date with information, because so much is out of their control.’

‘It’s important that they understand what they are doing and why they are doing it and if they trust you they’ll do it… they’ll talk to you.’

Additionally, analysis of the data indicated a good understanding amongst officers of the wider picture pertaining to CSE and the implications of this for the children and young people and for their families. One officer noted that what was needed was; ‘a bit of empathy, a bit of saying what you see, using language that people can understand and having a bit of compassion.’

‘We’ve got to consider, as a police force that it is not just abuse, it’s about the continued damage and emotions that are happening to the family’

‘It’s easy to fall into the trap with younger children to update the parents and yet the child is kept in the dark.’
‘The biggest difficulty is getting the young people to engage with us. It is important to persevere with young people who can’t see the risk.’

Officers had a good understanding of the most effective ways of engaging with children and young people and the importance of continuity and consistency in working with them. However, several key factors were identified as impeding their ability to achieve this as well as they would wish.

Respect for the police, or rather the lack of it, was cited as a factor which made the job more challenging. Whilst there was an understanding that some young people had family histories of not seeing the police in a positive light this made the ability to engage with them and, on occasion, enable them to see the risks they were running much harder.

‘There are times when we need to say as adults - I don’t believe you are happy where you are’

‘The police are a joke…this is the world they know’

‘Difficult upbringings generally leads to difficulties with the police’

‘Neglected kids see police as the enemy…they see us as an empty threat’

Another area of difficulty for some officers was a feeling of lack of experience and/or training leading to a sense of anxiety about dealing with CSE.

‘I dread it because you know how serious it is and how vulnerable they are.’

‘The problem for uniformed officers is that everyone expects them to be aware of all the specialist areas.’

‘I feel ill-equipped to deal with CSE’

Given these feelings of anxiety some officers asked for more, or different training, advice and support. These are key themes which are addressed later in the report.

Another significant factor in ensuring good proactive and preventative work with this vulnerable group, which is identified in the OCC report (2013) and by many of the officers in this study, is the need for continuity and consistency to build rapport and develop trust. Whilst there is evidence of good practice in the area identified above there were also impediments which are the subject of the next theme.

- Continuity and consistency - inflexibility of working hours, team remits and access to expertise

‘Shift work is a barrier to continuity’

One recurring theme was the difficulty, particularly for uniformed officers, of the inflexibility of working hours and shift patterns. This meant that officers felt that they were never in a position to spend sufficient time with a young person to build up the
rapport they would like. Additionally, once the initial inquiries had been made the case was passed to specialist teams for further action leaving uniformed officers feeling ‘out of the loop’ in terms of knowing how the case progressed.

‘Uniformed officers do what they needed to do…get a young person to a place of safety but then different officers take over so you can’t build up trust with that young person…child protection officers can go back and build rapport and trust’.

‘We have high caseloads so you can’t give as good a service as you want. The support networks aren’t necessarily in place for young people or parents.’

‘Young people get frustrated if they think they have shared their information and then they have to tell it all over again.’

The uniformed officers interviewed also expressed regret that they were no longer on foot and able to develop relationships with young people in the community. This is, it was noted, now the role of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). But fears were expressed that PCSO numbers will be cut and this will reduce the opportunity of relationship building within communities and affect their important remit of talking to children and young people in schools.

‘To build rapport you’ve got to let them see you are normal’.

‘One of the big curses is we are stuck in our cars’

‘PCSOs are an important part of engaging young people and they are going to be cut.’

In addition to these concerns some uniformed officers expressed frustration that the specialist units had closely defined remits and were not always available when advice was needed.

‘The backroom officers have no idea what it is like on the frontline’

‘Even though there are specialist units we are asked to go out on CSE cases’:

‘The M.A.S.H is good but it is understaffed’

‘The problem of young people going missing out of hours is there is no M.A.S.H.’

‘The problem for uniformed is the length of time between CSE cases- you go rusty and you’ve only got e-packages to keep up’

There was a sense emerging from the narratives that several uniformed officers felt that they were very much in the frontline in dealing, usually out of hours, with often very vulnerable young people, many of whom have repeatedly gone missing from care homes and were placing themselves at great risk but that these officers felt that they had little training, support or counselling. This has had an impact on the morale of officers who several times described themselves as feeling ‘out of the loop’ and
needing more access to expertise. These issues will be explored further in the following themes.

- Uniformed/Specialist Officers– feeling ‘out of the loop’

‘Our worlds are different...we are in different worlds’

Even though uniformed and specialist officers worked on the same CSE cases, with uniformed officers being the first on scene and perhaps the first to identify the potential of CSE, there was a real sense that there was not enough cooperation. Officers saw themselves in ‘different worlds’ with ‘different’ concerns. In part this divide seemed to emerge with the hierarchy that has been identified within the police (Silvestri, 2007) but it also seemed to be about a lack of knowledge of what uniformed/specialist officers did and did not do. This was, in part, because some specialists had not been in uniform for many years and/or because some specialist teams were new and constantly changing in terms of what they could take on.

This lack of knowledge sometimes led to differing expectations of each other. Uniformed officers, for example, sometimes felt that specialist teams mainly appeared to critique their work, rather than guide them in new and challenging terrains.

‘You’ve got all the people who are in the back office who basically send you emails telling you what you did wrong and they’ve got no appreciation of how much we have to get done.’

There was, however, recognition by some specialists that uniformed officers had many expectations placed on them and often had to make decisions or evaluations quickly.

‘With uniformed colleagues, they sort of just turn up and respond straight away to things and have to act on what they’ve got, where we have a little bit more time to perhaps think about things’

Whilst specialists believed that uniformed officers could reach out to them in situations where uniformed officers needed additional support or information, ‘if they go to something and they’re really not sure, they’ve only got to pick up the phone, and somebody’ll always be happy to talk to them,’ uniformed officers disagreed that this actually happened. Some uniformed officers felt they did not know who to call and others felt the problem lay with the availability of specialist officers. Small specialist teams and day shifts were the biggest barriers to connecting with more knowledgeable officers who could help with difficult CSE cases.

‘The biggest frustration is knowing who the right person is’

‘I know people change departments unfortunately very quickly, but if we had a name specific, that would be our point of contact. It could provide us
with information, but as it stands at the moment, I don’t think we’ve even got that’

‘It’s easy to know who to call, but it’s one thing calling someone and being able to get hold of them, because again it’s to do with how busy they are or the staffing levels….or the times of day, sometimes… we end up dealing with things [when] there isn’t anybody.’

Despite these divisions, there was the clear sense that officers wanted to communicate better with each other and saw the need for increased cooperation and team work, especially when it came to CSE. Partially this had to do with the M.A.S.H needing to refer their case load to uniform officers after their investigations, which uniformed officers felt would potentially increase with growing awareness of CSE.

‘I think that, as they get more, and more cases, I guess, they are also going to be more, and more stretched for the amount of time they are actually going to be spending with the people, and that’s why they refer them on’

Specialist officers also, however, felt that uniformed officers could play a key role in identifying CSE cases early on through awareness of the young people in the neighbourhoods they patrolled and perhaps through already established relationships with these young people.

‘Again getting to know the local police officers as well, if we come across the youngsters wherever they are attending, you have got some things that they get to know, even a local bobby, like a local police or someone like that they can be friends and get to know.’

However, because uniformed officers often did identify cases in this manner, work on them, and then hand them over, many felt an ongoing sense of responsibility toward that young person whose case they did not know the conclusion of. They felt that they were in a unique position to continue following up with them but that this was not something they could or should do. This theme, therefore, raised the question of how slight changes could be made to policing practice in order to improve work with victims of CSE. A related theme which identified the possibility of working in a slightly different way with CSE victims follows.

- Gender issues in policing in this area and the implications for practice

‘I think it’s difficult for girls to talk about. I think they find it difficult, and I think maybe the police maybe have to approach things differently.’
The literature has suggested that women bring a different sensitivity and style to policing, which can be both useful and necessary (Silvestri, 2007). There was a strong sense among some police officers that female officers could play a particularly important role in some CSE offences, or at least that the gender of the police officers could have an effect on victims of CSE offences.

Most commonly noted was that young women who had been abused by a man might have difficulty discussing their abuse with male officers. Some officers had had experience of this happening and had had to respond by taking over the interview.

‘I’ve had to ask a colleague to leave an interview before, because the girl didn’t want to talk about things in front of him, and only wanted to talk to a female...you do whatever they feel comfortable with.’

Since the policing of CSE cases was often strongly driven by the ethos that the victims should be accommodated and supported in any way possible in order for them to open up and speak, officers wished that a more “gender-responsive” approach (Bloom and Covington, 2003) could be taken earlier. For example, in order to prevent such on the spot changes as described above, officers wished that a decision about who to send to a CSE or sexual abuse case involving a young female victim could be established earlier and with the victim in mind.

‘is a young girl going to turn round and tell two big policemen, oh, yes, he’s just sexually abused me, or I’ve been seeing this boy and…? Whereas, if you deploy the appropriate officer, they might be more willing to, talk about what’s happened to them.’

In general, police officers felt that gender needed to be more strongly considered and that the way young women were dealt with should be ‘softer’.

‘I think we need to have a... try and think of ways to get a more soft approach so that young girls feel that they can speak about things openly.’

In summary, police officers felt new sensitivity had to be brought to policing CSE cases. They frequently spoke about needing to think about the victims’ comfort levels during interviews, and about the need for police officers to think about how they, or something about them, such as their gender, might affect vulnerable victims. This type of police work not only reflected emotionally-aware practices, which have not always been associated with traditional police work (see Silvestri, 2007) but was also indicative of how much the work stayed with them after their jobs ended. This will be discussed further in the following theme.
• Police at home/being a parent

‘You never switch off…If something’s going on that shouldn’t be, you feel you’ve got to act, well, you have got to act because you’re on duty 24/7.’

Most of the police officers interviewed were passionate about the work that they did, especially as it related to young people. However, with passion also came a sense of overwhelming responsibility and anxiety. Many felt that they could ‘never switch off’ as the officer quote above described. They continued to feel responsible when they went home: for the cases they had worked on during the day or in the past days or for potential cases they thought they had spotted. As policing turned into a way of life rather than a job, officers ran into problems.

‘I go home sometimes and I’m really distressed’

What triggered such high levels of stress in police officers differed; for some it was dealing with a particularly difficult case, for others it was the general sense of needing to do things perfectly so that people did not get hurt. For others it was the increasing work load and responsibility.

‘It’s huge, it’s an absolutely huge responsibility, because yes, you deal with the here and now, what’s in front of you, but everything you do nearly, has massive ramifications and personally, that to me is always, in some jobs, that’s always at the back of my mind’.

‘The only thing that affects me is probably the sheer volume of work that we have’.

Not all officers took their work home with them. Some felt that their personalities were particularly suited to the type of work they did and/or that they had found a way of keeping their personal and professional lives separate. This, however, was a rarer perspective for officers to be able to employ:

‘I find that when I go home, I’m almost a different person. I find that I can switch off quite easily, even with some of the things that we’ve come across, it might live with me for one or two days, but I don’t know if that’s just my personality and stuff, but I tend to just deal with whatever has happened.’

A theme closely related to taking work home and constantly thinking like a police officer was that of being a parent and bringing the parenting role into CSE work.

Officers who were parents quickly made connections between their professional and personal roles. Some officers felt that the way they policed changed since they became parents in a fundamental way. As one officer said, ‘before I had my little boy I was fine, I could deal with everything.’ Police officers who were parents spoke about how their parenting identity was never far from their minds when they engaged in work with vulnerable young people. While this brought new stress into their policing work,
as described above, for the majority of police officer parents, being a parent also provided them with a new tool/perspective to use in their policing.

‘Well, for me it’s, I mean I’m a parent so I obviously have to think on both sides of the legal, the law and the professional side and also as a parent.’

Problems with being both a parent and a police officer in CSE or child abuse work mainly arose when the child was the same or similar age to their own child/ren.

‘It’s when they’re the same age as your kids, that’s the problem I have. Slightly older I can deal with that a little bit better, but when you go home to them, you think, ’Oh, there’s some other little boy that’s had this happen to them today, because of something that’s happened,’ that I find hard.’

‘My own children were that age as well, so then you had a direct correlation with your personal life and that was particularly, I won’t say traumatic, but that, sort of, tested your resilience.’

Thus, the majority of police officers brought the stress of working on CSE cases home with them. The more they cared about their work, the more this impacted on them because caring about their work meant policing in a sensitive and deliberate manner and using all their personal resources and perspectives in order to put victims first. The difference between being able to handle the various ‘tests’ of resilience officers encountered, or for this stress to increasingly break officers down, had to do with the type of supervisor and the type of support that was available.

- The importance of good supervision

‘If you’ve got a skipper that isn’t going to back you up…when it really matters, how can you make decent decisions in the job?’

The majority of officers interviewed identified good supervision as being key to them being able to perform at their best. Officers who felt supported were generally happy with their jobs, felt they could handle the stress, and that they had had someone to speak to on the occasions when they could not.

‘If you’ve got support and confidence in your skills, it makes your day, your week, your work so much easier, because you get decent guidance, but then at the same time, you feel the confidence that you are going to be backed up when the decisions are made or helped not to make any sort of decisions that aren’t right and that sort of thing.’
Officers, however, felt that the quality of supervision available differed between teams, and while some officers felt they had the support they needed, they noted that other colleagues did not.

‘We have decent supervisors, they look after us and it’s a huge difference to another unit that doesn’t, in my opinion, and you can see that.’

Examples of poor supervision experienced by some officers included having to proactively approach supervisors in order to speak about difficult cases and being dismissed as an ‘inconvenience.’

‘It’s having to say, ‘Look, you know, I found that…’ you have to have the guts to stand up and say, ‘Look, that affected me, I really didn’t enjoy it, can I at least chat with you for ten minutes.’ Speaking to a supervisor or inspector or something like that. You are so busy or you are expected that you should be above that kind of thing, that you are not expected to do that. When it does go wrong, it is almost, with some people that you end up dealing with, it’s almost like you are an inconvenience.’

Poor supervision also sometimes meant a total absence of support.

‘Personal support, there’s not a lot. There’s not a lot or there hasn’t been any offered, put it that way.’

Elements of good supervision, which were mentioned by uniform and specialist officers, included ‘flexibility’, collaborative processes, and feeling as though they could approach their supervisors when they needed to. Managers and supervisors, in turn, added the need to protect the officers on their teams from undue stress. One supervisor compared the role to CSE by highlighting the necessity of preventing stress and burnout rather than simply reacting to it.

‘That's important, to make sure that they don't feel that they are on their own investigating, and when they end up with their case load becoming an unmanageable level, actually we need to intervene, a bit like CSE really but we need to intervene before it happens, as opposed to when it happens, and it's that part of the process.’

Finally, an aspect of good supervision included ensuring that both specialist and uniformed officers within their teams were appropriately trained for their roles, particularly when it involved relatively ‘new’ areas of policing such as CSE since good training improved officers’ confidence. Training, however, emerged as a difficult area where the needs of officers had to be balanced with financial and time constraints, as will be discussed in the next section.
• Perceptions of training

‘Nothing beats face-to-face contact with a person.’

Despite the online computer packages about CSE and general awareness training, some of the officers interviewed were either not aware of the training or could not remember completing it.

‘There might be some training, some online training. There’s so many of those, it’d be wrong of me to say yes, definitely on that one.’

‘I think, we have done some training on it, it’s really bad, but I can’t quite remember but I do believe, we have done some training which is online training.’

In part this had to do with the format of the training. Most of the officers interviewed did not feel that the online packages were a good way to learn and were too time consuming. They had, therefore, found a way of cutting corners in order to get through them faster.

‘You can just click through it without reading it properly, and they used to do knowledge checks at the end of it, but there’s not so many of those anymore, so you can literally just whiz through it and not do it properly. There’s just no time.’

‘Every training package that we get is online. If you’re quick enough and fast enough like most of us are, you work out that you don’t even have to listen to the package, you can tick the boxes’

Individuals who thought this way were careful to emphasise that they wanted to learn but the structure and pressure of their days meant learning in this type of way simply did not work.

‘Our online training, it gets done so quickly, you are doing it because you know you have to do it, and it’s interesting stuff, you want to learn, about it but you are fitting it in, in your fulltime hours of work, and if you come into work, and you’ve got loads of stuff going on which pretty much 90% of the time we have.’

‘You are not trying to recall a NCALT package that you did at six in the morning after being awake for eighteen hours.’

Since officers did not find the type of learning they felt they wanted and needed through work, several did independent research in their free time in order to do their jobs more effectively.
‘I’ve learnt it as I’ve gone along, and because I’m passionate about the work, I’m quite happy to do it. There’s lots to read and I’m forever reading books on things and when I get a spare moment, I’ll read all the research papers and hopefully when you’ve done yours, I’ll read yours. So I’ve trained myself and there’s e-learn...there is e-learning packages online, but yeah alright, so an e-learning package, read it, tick a box, that’s not really training, is it? I’d rather somebody tell me what I’m supposed to know and sit amongst a group of people and learn off their experiences.’

‘I do a lot of research on the internet to try and build my knowledge.’

Many officers felt that the administration was aware of the problems with the training but were content to do the bare minimum because that is all they were required to do.

‘I sometimes feel that that is another one of these tick boxes, well, they’ve had the training so if they make a mistake, it’s their own fault.’

Other officers were understanding of the time and monetary constraints that prevented the delivery of more traditional learning approaches.

‘We’re in times of cuts and we’re in times of the money isn’t there anymore to do a lot of these things.’

‘But of course, time and finances and everything don’t allow it’

Nearly every officer interviewed reported wanting to learn about CSE and similarly new police initiatives through traditional training: in person, in a group setting, led by an expert in the field, and preferably in a multi-agency setting.

‘Actually what you’d benefit from is either conference or proper training with a person and guest speakers coming in.’

‘What would be great to do beyond that, of course, would be, be able to have a, a training environment where you could do some face to face work.’

‘I think, for that kind of thing, for that kind of training, we have old fashion training, where we all sit in a classroom.’

‘And I think it’s good for them to interact with other agencies, I think that’s really important. Because when you’re sitting at the training and you’re on a round table, and they’re mixing you all up and you’re sitting...’

Because officers recognised that organising such training events was difficult, several had thought of various ways it could happen. Ideas included adding CSE to existing training on child abuse, taking advantage of mandatory, shorter training days, and following the format of neighbouring counties.
‘It’s balancing it out, if you put your CSE in with other elements of child abuse then perhaps somebody would agree to do the training.’

‘Well even adding a session on at the end of, say, a first aid class, because we all have to do first aid once a year, and the days are very short, and they send you home early. It’d be nice if they could then do a three hour input on the latest thing, even if it’s once a year.’

‘I think we would be better off having a training day once every quarter, or once every six months. I know Suffolk do that; Suffolk have training days, I think, once a quarter, where all the shifts go in and do the latest training, so you could have a day’s training, and the morning could be on CSE and the afternoon could be on RTCs or something, it depends, whatever the latest thing is. So then you could almost do a proper input. That’s how I’d do it.’

As the examples above illustrate, the aspect which most officers felt was missing in online training was the chance to work with, and learn from, other people.

- Multi-agency working/information sharing

‘CSE is a multi-agency responsibility’

As the OCC report (2013:76) argues, ‘No single agency should tackle CSE on its own or in isolation from other safeguarding issues. All agencies need to come together and agree their unique and shared roles and functions to ensure the system works effectively and that children and young people are protected.’ It is clear from research on CSE (OCC 2013, Dodsworth 2013, Melrose and Pearce 2013), and on Serious Case Reviews (Brandon et al 2013, 2009) multi-agency working and information sharing is crucial to safeguarding vulnerable children and young people.

Analysis of the data from this study indicates that this is a view shared by the officers interviewed. The development of the M.A.S.H (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) team is considered a positive move forward, albeit more staff would be welcomed, as would a wider range of multi-agency staff, particularly from education and health. In terms of wider multi-agency working, whilst there was recognition of many examples of good multi-agency practice, police officers felt that they were driving the agenda to too great an extent.

‘There is a need for other agencies to take more ownership and a better feedback loop around investigations.’

Several officers also spoke of the difficulties inherent in information sharing between agencies, but in particular Children’s Services and Health.

‘Information sharing is the hardest part.’
‘Information sharing between agencies is sometimes difficult.’

‘The main barrier in cases is accessing information from other agencies.’

A further difficulty identified by both uniformed and specialist officers, was that of a lack of preventative and support services available to children at risk of, or involved in sexual exploitation with the exception of one third sector agency. This appeared to be across the board but particularly for older 16-18 year olds. This, in part, was a consequence, it was felt, of ‘a problem of different thresholds’ but was also thought to be a wider problem of a lack of resources in this area for the young people involved and for their parents.

‘The big problem is-no services for sexually abused children in Norwich’

‘16/17 year olds are a real problem for us re: what interventions to put into place because of their age’

‘We need to pull together- other agencies should re-educate and support them’

‘The support networks aren’t necessarily in place for young people or parents’

This is a problem on a national scale, in part due to a need to continue to raise awareness of the issues, but also as a consequence of the need to prioritise scarce resources, but it is one which the Office of The Children’s Commissioner is strongly stating should be addressed by all Local Safeguarding Children Boards (OCC 2013). As these emerging themes have illustrated the issue is perhaps more one of a lack of resources than a lack of commitment to or passion for the work.

• Officers’ commitment to and passion for the work

‘I think we need more passionate people working in child protection’

The final and overarching theme emerging from analysis of the data is a positive one. Despite many comments about the increase in workloads, inflexibility of hours, the patchy nature of supervision in some instances, and the lack of the face to face training that most officers would prefer, officers, across the board, spoke of their commitment to and passion for the work they do and their support of each other in doing that work.

‘You can do the work without passion but you don’t do it as well’
'If I’m having a bad day it’s not the kid’s fault, it’s my bad day not their bad day'

‘That’s the nicest thing about our working, we all work together. When we come together on a shift, whether its child sexual exploitation…. I know I can phone up anyone on ‘Child’ and they will tell me what I want to know, or M.A.S.H. We all work together, there is no “We aren’t helping you”. It’s not like that we all work together.’

‘My advice to new officers-ask for help and think of your colleagues like your family.” ‘Cos we will always look out for them”

‘The police is one big family’

This may explain why this study found such a high level awareness amongst the officers interviewed about the vulnerability of young people to CSE and their desire to ‘get alongside’ and work with these vulnerable and often resistant young people.

Summary

The aim of this study has been to explore the perspectives and experiences of police officers working in Norfolk with young people involved in, or at risk of, involvement in sexual exploitation. The objective is to increase understanding of what works well, what works less well and to identify any gaps in policy, procedure or practice, in order to inform service provision.

The questions to which this study sought answers focus on the experiences and perspectives of police officers working with young people involved in, or at risk of involvement in, sexual exploitation, and whether there were any identifiable differences between the perspectives and experiences of specialist and uniformed officers. Additionally, the research sought to determine how police officers working with this vulnerable group of young people thought engagement with them and services for them could be improved.

Whilst there are areas of challenge and issues which cause tensions in working with these young people, the police officers participating in this study are committed to treating them as victims of abuse and recognise the need to understand the wider background issues including individual, familial and environmental factors.

There are examples of young people who do not recognise that they are being sexually exploited and those who are resistant to any intervention and support offered. Again, officers’ narratives indicated an understanding of this as an issue. This echoes what research indicates is the way forward in working effectively with all young people and this vulnerable group in particular and is good practice which must continue to be built upon (Melrose, M. and Pearce, J. 2013, Dodsworth 2013).
Whilst there is some confusion about the differences between child abuse and child sexual exploitation, and some concern that the recent focus on child sexual exploitation might result in services for sexually abused children and young people being reduced, overall there is recognition of these issues as part of a whole, albeit an often complex one, and a determination on the part of officers to find out more. This suggests the need for uniformed officers to have greater access to specialist officers and specialist training to better understand this complex area. This could be helped by nominating CSE ‘champions’ as additional sources of expertise. This is reflected in the recommendations set out below.

Both specialist and uniformed officers appeared to have a clear understanding of which groups of children and young people were the most vulnerable to sexual exploitation and to criminalisation. Two main groups were identified; firstly these were children with background histories of neglect and abuse, particularly those who have a history of being ‘Looked After’ and of running away from care or from home including those transferred in from out of county. Second were children and young people who become involved in internet abuse with no previous experience of what they may be becoming involved in.

Again, these findings accord with what current research indicates about the additional vulnerabilities of the first group (Pearce 2009, Dodsworth 2012, Smeaton 2012). Interestingly however, it is clear from this study, that the second group are also causing increasing concern. This suggests the need for more research into this area, but crucially a greater recognition by police forces and other safeguarding agencies of the need to recognise the vulnerabilities of this rapidly growing group and address the issues proactively and as early as possible, particularly through education programmes in schools.

The identification of this second vulnerable group is intrinsically linked to, the third theme; the growth in internet abuse and the implications for practice. There was a sense of frustration amongst officers about the time taken up in responding to internet inquiries and liaising with companies running internet services. But, of additional significance was the challenge presented by a need to protect the, sometimes interchangeable groups, of naïve’ and ‘wise’ victims and ‘naïve’ offenders.

Many officers acknowledged that their own lack of understanding of some of the complexities of the fast developing technology put them at a disadvantage in dealing with this growing problem. There is a need therefore, for police policy and procedures, and indeed those of all the safeguarding agencies, to ‘catch up’ with this growth area of vulnerability. Again, this issue is addressed in the recommendations outlined below.

Across the board, uniformed and specialist officers recognised the need for good proactive and preventative practice in working with young people vulnerable to the risks of sexual exploitation. The need for early intervention, continuity and consistency in achieving this was flagged up regularly.
Some of the identified challenges to this included inflexibility of working hours, team remits which disabled rather than enabled proactive working and limited access to expertise at times, mainly out of hours, when it was most needed. These factors left officers in both uniformed and specialist teams feeling ‘out of the loop’ in terms of the progress of cases and often unable to provide the continuity and consistency they are aware most young people need, and want, in their engagement with the police, and indeed with other safeguarding agencies.

Officers spoke of this as an impediment to achieving good practice in terms of what was in the best interests of the young people themselves. Officers were aware that young people, particularly in this vulnerable group, did not want to have to repeat their story over and over again to a series of different officers and needed to be able to form a relationship of trust with an officer before they became willing to disclose or to cooperate. This again is reflected in recent research about the need to be child focused, develop trust and offer continuity in order to build rapport (Dodsworth 2013, Melrose and Pearce 2013, Warrington 2010, OCC 2013). Additionally, satisfaction in the job was felt to be reduced by not being able to ‘hear the end of the story’ about someone with whom an officer may have been involved in quite an intense way at the initial stages of an inquiry.

Another area for improved, child focused practice identified by analysis of the data was that of gender issues in policing in this area. The Graham study (2013) noted that young adults, particularly young women, are generally reluctant to report offences, particularly sexual offences to the police. As has been outlined in earlier sections, several officers in this study reflected on some of the possible reasons for this. The need for continuity, the need for developing a relationship of trust and the need to consider deploying female officers for specific cases have all been mentioned as areas current practice could build on and will be considered in the recommendations.

The theme of the police at home and of the police officer as a parent links to the theme outlined above in that several officers observed that being a parent had had a positive effect on their understanding of the young people they worked with and had increased their ability to ‘take their police hat off’ and build a rapport with young people. This is a strength that should be more widely recognised and harnessed in training and in supervision sessions.

The challenging aspects of combining the job, a home life and being a parent which were noted by several participants, are to an extent, those experienced by many people in employment, of long and often inflexible hours and unsocial shift patterns. This suggests a need for supervisors to consider developing greater flexibility in shift patterns as far as is possible, particularly given the identified need to have female officers available for young people who would prefer to speak to a female officer. Flexibility around family events and commitments may result in higher morale and increased motivation for all officers whatever their gender.
A further challenge identified by participants was that of taking the stresses of work home. This is arguably of a different nature than most people’s work related stress issues given the expectations and remit of the job. This links directly to the importance of good supervision. It is clear from participants’ narratives that good supervision is key in increasing confidence, morale and motivation and conversely lack of supervision or weak supervision correlates with low confidence, morale and motivation.

As the Inquiries into CSE in Rotherham (Jay 2014) and those undertaken in other areas including the Coffey report on CSE in Greater Manchester (2014), and research undertaken on Serious Case Reviews (Brandon et al 2009, 2013) have identified, lack of clear management and supervision and loss of focus on the child appear to be major factors in what went wrong. It is therefore, crucial that supervision is good and that supervisors are well informed and well supported by senior management. For this to work well supervisors also need to be able to access good quality training on an ongoing basis. Senior managers also need to maintain a comprehensive understanding of the key issues. This will be addressed further in the recommendations.

Participants’ perspectives on the training they have received on CSE were realistic in that officers recognised that there are limited resources for training provision. However, almost universally, the e-packages were seen as a way of gaining a very basic understanding of the issues, but as unsatisfactory in that they were mainly completed at the end of a shift when tired, and were easy to skim through.

There was a need noted by participants for face to face training, particularly inter-agency training. This, it was felt, would also provide the opportunity of developing better working relationships with other agencies and an increased understanding of professionals’ respective roles. Some innovative suggestions were made about how this could be achieved and these will be addressed in the recommendations. This is an issue also recognised in the Coffey report (2014:36) in which it is recommended that all front-line police response officers and PCSOs are ‘trained in spotting CSE’.

Multi-agency working and information sharing is a key theme linked to participants’ perceptions of what would be the most effective training, but is also linked to issues of shared responsibilities and best practice. Participants recognised some of the difficulties inherent in ‘joined-up’ working and information sharing but saw the value of close co-operative interagency working.

This is in line with government guidance on child sexual exploitation which notes that, included in the key principles which services and others should follow are to: ‘share information at the earliest possible stage where necessary to enable professionals to consider jointly how to proceed in the best interests of the child and to safeguard and promote the welfare of children more generally’ (DFCSF 2009:14).
The guidance also notes that ‘safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people in this context, like safeguarding children more generally, depends on effective joint working between different agencies and professionals ...their full involvement is vital if children and young people are to be effectively supported and action is to be taken against perpetrators of sexual exploitation. All agencies should be alert to the risks of sexual exploitation and be able to take action and work together when an issue is identified’ (DFCSF 2009:16). The Office of the Children’s Commission Report (OCC 2013) also identified and reiterated the importance of good inter-agency working in safeguarding children and young people in this vulnerable group.

Whilst joint working it is a key principle of the guidance and seen as good practice it appears, from the participants’ narratives, that it is not always easy to achieve. The Norfolk M.A.S.H is seen as a positive step forward but several participants noted that vital agencies are missing. Several officers also spoke of the difficulties inherent in information sharing between agencies which, it was felt, impeded good practice and negated the positive aspects of early intervention. The recommendations section will address these issues further.

The final, and overarching theme, is that of a sense of commitment to and passion for the work. A highlight of the findings of this study has been the identification of a strong sense of determination on the part of officers in all roles and at all levels to gain a better understanding of this vulnerable group of children and young people, and an aim to maintain a clear focus on the child and to listen to what they have to say.

The findings suggest that although there are differences in experiences between specialist and uniformed officers, there are no identifiable differences in perspectives on the importance of safeguarding this vulnerable group.

**Recommendations**

- **Improve the quality and content of supervision**

The findings indicate that supervision is key to officers’ well-being and confidence in their professional abilities. It is crucial that supervising officers are enabled to keep updated on the training available for their specific area in order to advise, empower and support officers in their teams.

Additionally, it would be beneficial to overall morale and well-being if supervisors ensured, as part of any supervision session, that they checked on the well-being of the officer, reviewed any difficult cases and possible personal impact and whether there is a need for further input/advice/ counselling, where appropriate. If a personal element is included as a standing item in any supervision session it becomes a part of normal practice and perhaps therefore easier to discuss.
Effort should be made to ensure that all specialist officers are equally supported. Good supervision practices include supervisors being willing and available to talk to officers about difficult cases (open-door policies); being knowledgeable about the type of work they are supervising; listening to officers who approach them about issues; being attentive to officers’ workloads; and being flexible and understanding if personal issues arise which affect officers’ work (such as physical or emotional health concerns).

Perhaps most importantly, good supervisors should know their team well enough to notice if an officer is feeling overwhelmed. Supervisors should not wait always until officers come to them but should be trained to recognise early the warning signs of stress and burnout. Senior managers should ensure that good supervision is provided across the board.

- **Building relationships between specialist and uniformed officers**

Participants, particularly those in the focus groups, said that they welcomed the opportunity to discuss work related issues in a semi-informal way, to swap ideas with colleagues and ‘let off steam’ in a supportive environment. They noted a general lack of opportunity to do so during working hours, or to liaise with colleagues in different specialist teams. If opportunities where found, perhaps following specific training sessions, for intra-agency discussion this may improve morale and increase understanding and shared expertise on working with children and young people at risk of, or involved in, sexual exploitation.

Additional attention should also be paid to the communication between uniformed and specialist officers when cases are handed back and forth. Since consistency is often crucial for victims, keeping the initial responding uniformed officers informed would perhaps allow for better follow up and would allow for specialised knowledge about CSE to be communicated more effectively between police. As the Coffey report (2014:41) notes ‘the role of the integrated neighbourhood policing teams is integral to the fight against CSE’.

- **Continued development of multi-agency working and information sharing**

Whilst it is recognised that this is not, and should not be, the sole responsibility of the police force, it is clear from the findings, and from recent research and government guidance, that effective early and proactive intervention and appropriate support services are more effectively delivered where agencies work closely together.

Participants in the study recognised the merits of the M.A.S.H and the N.S.C.B CSE group in sharing expertise and information but there remain gaps in joint working and in information sharing provision and it is essential that these are closed. Early identification and intervention is key to prevention and safeguarding those vulnerable to CSE, including boys and young men and BME young people, groups which appear currently to be insufficiently identified or considered. It is essential therefore, that key
agencies pool their understanding, expertise and strategies to ensure that these vulnerable young people do not ‘fall through the net’.

The N.C.S.B should ensure that this is a standing item on their committee meeting agenda in order to inform the understanding of agencies, who are not yet involved, of the importance of this issue. Participants also noted the impact and value of multi-agency training which enable professionals to share understandings of respective roles and knowledge. This must continue to be a key part of N.S.C.B training provision.

- **Greater awareness of the impacts of police officers’ gender on CSE victims**

A key aspect of good practice in all safeguarding agencies is the ability to build rapport and trust with the child or young person concerned. Several participants in the study recognised that, for some young people, the ability to build rapport was impeded by the gender of the officer. It may be helpful to consider this issue at the earliest pre-intervention stage and, wherever appropriate/necessary to send a female officer. Issue of gender, sexuality and ethnicity should be an ongoing part of training to raise awareness of the potential impact on both the victim and the officer in terms of perceptions and responses.

- **Improved Training Provision**

Whilst it is recognised that resources are limited, there is a need to review some of the training provision. The e-packages are not proving as effective as had been hoped and there is a clear need for some additional face to face training.

This could build on what has been learnt in the e-package training which may ensure greater receptiveness to the e-packages. Ideally there would also be an element of multi-agency involvement in the training or a widening of targeted participants from the police service who are entitled to attend N.S.C.B multi-agency CSE training.

An additional issue is that of the need for officers to increase their understanding of the growing issue of internet/mobile phone abuse in order to address a growing area of concern about this new group of young people who are vulnerable to become victims or perpetrators of CSE.

Both uniformed and specialist officers saw benefits in working more closely together. Since specialist officers believed uniformed officers could play a key, new role in early identification of CSE and follow-up, and uniformed officers wanted to do CSE work well but felt unsupervised to do so. As the Coffey report (2014) also recognises PCSOs must be included in the training.

It may be that an additional way forward is to nominate a CSE ‘champion’ in each team/district who accesses all available training, ‘cascades’ knowledge down to fellow officers and is a point of contact in addition to M.A.S.H officers.
• **Future research**

Whilst much good practice and a strong commitment to continuing to develop this is evident from the findings of this study, there are, as the above discussion illustrates, some gaps identified in provision and some areas for further exploration.

Further research on police officers' perspectives and experiences, including those of PCSOs is needed on a wider national scale to compare and contrast practices in safeguarding children and young people at risk of or involved in sexual exploitation, to develop an increased understanding of what works well and what works less well and to build on existing good practice.

In addition, a crucial, and largely missing, part of this wider picture is research to gain an understanding of the experience and perspectives of young people at risk of or experiencing sexual exploitation, who have engaged with police officers and in particular to examine more closely the perspectives and experiences of very hidden groups of young men, LGBT and BME young people to ensure that their needs for support and protection are also being met.

**Conclusions**

*‘Because we do care we do want to do a good job, we want to make it work’*

This study has identified what works well, what works less well and what the gaps and areas for further development are in policy, procedure and practice from the perspectives of a group of specialist and uniformed police officers working with children and young people at risk of and involved in sexual exploitation in Norfolk.

Although there are identifiable difficulties, pressures and tensions for police officers in Norfolk working in this complex area, what is clearly evident from the research undertaken for this study is the high level of commitment, at all levels, to safeguarding and understanding children and young people at risk of child sexual exploitation.
References


Brandon, M., Bailey, S., Belderson, P., Larsson, B. (2013) *Neglect and Serious Case Reviews*, University of East Anglia/NSPCC (Report)


Department for Children Schools and Families (2009) *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation, Supplementary guidance to Working Together to Safeguard Children* London HM Government


Smeaton E. (2012) Running from hate to what you think is love: The relationship between running away and child sexual exploitation Barnado’s Essex


Warrington, C.,(2010) From less harm to more good: the role of children and young people’s participation in relation to sexual exploitation Youth and Policy No.104 pp 62-79
A research study exploring the perspectives and experiences of police officers working with children and young people at risk of or involved in child sexual exploitation

Dear Colleague,

We are researchers at UEA with the Centre for Research on Children & Families. Our names are Dr Jane Dodsworth and Birgit Larsson. We are currently undertaking a research study in which we hope you might be willing to be involved.

What is the research about?

The research project, which has the approval of and is funded by, the Police Service is about police officers’ experiences of, and views about, working with young people, particularly those who are at risk of sexual exploitation or who have been sexually exploited.

Who do we want to speak to?

We would like to speak to officers who work for the M.A.S.H., the S.A.R.C. and community officers across Norfolk. If you don’t have much experience of working with this population we would still like to speak to you as we are also interested in hearing about police officers’ work with vulnerable young people in general.

Where will the interview take place and how long will it last?

Interviews will take place over the phone and will last about 45 minutes. We will work with your schedule, and will interview you at a time and day that works for you.

What will happen to the interview?

Your interview will be anonymised so you are not identifiable. Your experiences and views will then form part of a report about police officers’ perspectives on working with young people at risk of sexual exploitation.

If you’re interested, please call, text, or e-mail Birgit Larsson at xxxxxxxxx

We look forward to hearing from you

Birgit Larsson and Jane Dodsworth
Consent form (interviews)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. You were sent a leaflet explaining the details and purpose of the research—which is to gather police officers’ experiences with or views on working with sexually exploited young people. Your name will be changed to protect your identity, and no one will listen to this recording other than the persons working on the research.

Do you have any questions before we proceed?

Please state your name and the date:

Could you please say yes or no in response to the following questions:

The purpose of the research has been explained to me Yes/No

I am happy to have this interview recorded Yes/No

I understand that my name will be changed so that my interview will be anonymous Yes/No

I am happy to take part in this research interview Yes/No
Interview schedule for police/child sexual exploitation research

Understanding of c.s.e. and who is involved

1. In the course of your work with the police what kinds of cases involving child sexual exploitation have you come across?

2. Do you think there are any groups of children and young people who are at greater risk of involvement in c.s.e. and if so, who and why?

3. Do you think there are any groups of children and young people who are involved in c.s.e. who are at greater risk of being criminalised?

4. What is your understanding of what child sexual exploitation is?

Experience of working with young people involved in c.s.e

5. If you have not been directly involved in working with children or young people involved in c.s.e how would you feel about doing this work?

OR

6. I want to ask you some questions about your work with sexually exploited children or children at risk of sexual exploitation. I'll be asking you to talk me through a case you worked on from start to finish. It would be your most recent case or one that you remember vividly. First, what kind of information were you given to begin with?

7. Can you talk me through the case itself?

8. What happened then?

9. How did you feel?

10. What were the lessons learned?

11. Could you describe any barriers to best practice?

12. What is the experience of working with the young people you work with?


14. What do you think the young people you encounter think of the police?

15. Where do you think this attitude comes from?

16. How do you work with this attitude?
17. How do you think a young person at risk of or involved in c.s.e would describe their interactions with the police?

18. I'd like to hear about your experiences of engaging young people. Could you tell me about a time when you thought working with a young person went particularly well?

19. Can you describe any strategies you used?

20. Can you talk me through a case where engaging with a child felt difficult?

21. What do you think is most important for the young people you work with in terms of your interactions with them?

22. What is most important for you when engaging with young people?

23. Do you have suggestions for improvements on how police engage with young people involved in or at risk of sexual exploitation?

24. What kind of cases keep you awake at night?

25. What kind of support, both formal and informal, did you get with this case? Is supervision/support for work with young people involved in c.s.e different or the same as support for other aspects of your work?

**Training on c.s.e**

26. Could you describe the level of support you receive in the course of your work?

27. What kind of training did you receive to do this work?

28. If so what are your views on it? Do you have suggestions for improvements? Or anything to add to such training?

29. If not, what sort of training would you find useful

**Multi-agency working**

30. How often do you work with professionals from other relevant agencies on cases involving c.s.e and what are your views on this?

31. What, if anything do you feel the role of other agencies should be in working with young people involved in or at risk of c.s.e?

**The wider context**

32. Is there anything else you think it would be helpful for me to know?

33. What kind of advice would you give to officers who were new to the job and beginning to work with c.s.e. or children at risk of sexual exploitation?
Consent form (focus groups)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in today’s focus group. The research project, which has the approval of and is funded by, the Police Service is about police officers’ experiences of, and views about, working with young people, particularly those who are at risk of sexual exploitation or who have been sexually exploited.

Your input today will be anonymised so you are not identifiable. Your experiences and views will then form part of a report about police officers’ perspectives on working with young people at risk of sexual exploitation.

I understand the purpose of the research: Yes/No

I am happy to have this focus group recorded: Yes/No

I am happy to take part in this focus group Yes/No

___________________________    __________________________
Signature                                      Date
CSE group focus questions (specialist group)

1. What does being a police officer mean to you?
2. Why did you join the police and has it met your expectations?
3. What sort of responsibility do you feel as a police officer?
4. We assume you have experience working with young people involved in either c.s.e. or sex abuse. What do you see as the main differences between c.s.e. and sex abuse?
5. What has the increased use of the internet meant for your work?
6. Do you think there are any groups of children and young people who are at greater risk of involvement in c.s.e. and if so, who and why? *
7. Do you think there are any groups of children and young people who are involved in c.s.e. who are at greater risk of being criminalised? *
8. How do you think a young person at risk of or involved in c.s.e would describe their interactions with the police? *
9. I’d like to hear about your experiences of engaging young people. Could you tell me about a time when you thought working with a young person went particularly well? *
10. Can you talk me through a case where engaging with a child felt difficult? *
11. What do you think is most important for the young people you work with in terms of your interactions with them? *
12. What is most important for you when engaging with young people? *
13. Do you have suggestions for improvements on how police engage with young people involved in or at risk of sexual exploitation? *
14. What kind of training have you received about CSE? And what do you think about it?
15. What kind of support do you get given the potential effects of your work? *
16. Can you tell us about your experiences with counselling?
17. What kind of support/training would you like?
18. Do you feel like the work affects you at home? Those of you who are parents, do you feel additional impacts? *
19. How have you found multi-agency working? *
20. What are your views on tenure given the stressful circumstances of your work?
21. If you had your time over again, would you become a police officer?
22. What advice would you give to someone new to the job?
CSE focus group questions (uniformed officers)

1. What does being a police officer mean to you?

2. Why did you join the police and has it met your expectations?

3. What sort of responsibility do you feel as a police officer?

4. What has the increased use of the internet meant for your work?

5. Do you think there are any groups of children and young people who are at greater risk of involvement in c.s.e. and if so, who and why? *

6. Do you think there are any groups of children and young people who are involved in c.s.e. who are at greater risk of being criminalised? *

7. If you have not been directly involved in working with children or young people involved in c.s.e how would you feel about doing this work?

8. How do you think young people would describe their interactions with the police? *

9. Could you tell us about strategies you use which you feel are successful in engaging young people? *

10. Do you have suggestions for improvements on how police engage with young people? *

11. What kind of training have you received about C.S.E.? And what do you think about it?

12. What kind of support do you get given the potential effects of your work? *

13. What kind of support would you like?

14. Do you feel the work affects you at home? Those of you who are parents, do you feel additional impacts? *

15. How have you found multi-agency working? *

16. How easy it is to move up or move to different areas of policing?

17. If you had your time over again, would you become a police officer?

18. What advice would you give to someone new to the
For more information:

Centre for Research on Children and Families
Elizabeth Fry Building
University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich, Norfolk
NR4 7TJ
United Kingdom

Email: crcf@uea.ac.uk
Web: www.uea.ac.uk/crcf
Tel: +44 (0) 1603 592086
Director: Professor Marian Brandon

University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich
Norfolk
NR4 7TJ
United Kingdom
Web: www.uea.ac.uk
Tel: +44 (0)1603 456161