UNDERSTANDING CHILD CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION:

RISK FACTORS AND PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Rachel Marcarian

A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the Forensic Psychology Practice Doctorate (ForenPsyD)

Centre of Applied Psychology

School of Psychology

College of Life and Environmental Sciences

The University of Birmingham

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Abstract

This thesis aims to expand the understanding of Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE), which, as a relatively new phenomenon, has limited existing literature. In the UK, many children are subjected to CCE; they are harmed both physically and emotionally, and are often placed on a path of criminality, which has long-term impacts for them and their victims. The lack of research in this area means there is a need to improve the evidence base by exploring the relevant literature on risk and protective factors and the experiences of practitioners, to inform policy and practice. The findings presented in this thesis provide recommendations for interventions that will strengthen the support offered to young people at risk of or harmed by criminal exploitation.

The first chapter introduces the key concepts explored within the thesis, including the background context and history of CCE to date. Relevant definitions and laws pertaining to CCE are discussed and the aims of the thesis are outlined. The second chapter explores the existing UK literature base, on risk factors and protective factors for CCE and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). The research included articles published since 2016 and employed a systematic process. The review found that risk factors were more commonly investigated and described than protective factors. The review also highlights the need for consistent definitions, clear guidelines, and reliable resources for identifying and responding to victims.

An empirical research project is presented in chapter three, which explored the views of practitioners in the Youth Justice Service (formerly Youth Offending Teams) who predominantly work with the criminal form of child exploitation, as well as CSE. Interviews were conducted with nine practitioners, and were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Seven themes and five subthemes are discussed in this chapter, with reference to practice, limitations, and recommendations for further research. Chapter four presents a critique of the Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children (Briere, 1996). This is a

psychometric tool used to assess self-reported symptoms of trauma in children and adolescents. The TSCC was largely found to be reliable and valid, and its possible applications to the field of CCE are discussed.

The conclusion of the thesis is presented in chapter five, where main findings are discussed. Limitations and implications of the thesis are explored, as are recommendations for additional research to further strengthen the knowledge base.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Thesis

Introduction

Historical Perspective

The exploitation of children has been brought to the attention of the public through media in recent years. However, this is not a recent phenomenon. Children have often been exploited through labour, where they were considered more docile and compliant, and when they could be paid less, and their low wages would drive down the wages of others (Cunningham, 2000). In the 20th century, additional laws were introduced in the UK to protect children, limit child labour, and encourage education. This was pushed by anthropologists and moralists concerned about the breakdown of family values (Lavalette, 1999). Chang et al. (2022) suggested that viewing exploitation issues as unique to the 21st century would be misguided and a misconception. Modern anti-trafficking and anti-exploitation efforts are a continuation of the fight for protection that has been apparent for centuries. The authors state that whilst children from every race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, ability type, and immigration status have experienced exploitation, there are over-represented groups, which are those usually considered as marginalised and disadvantaged. Writing from an American perspective they asserted that the use of (some) humans as expendable and for profit was steeped in all aspects of early U.S. society. The same could be said for many countries, including the UK.

Whilst the exploitation of children has been present throughout history, Broughton (2009) suggested that the problem has become more complicated in the last few decades. Increases in methods of transport, data sharing, and communication has meant that national problems are now international issues, where the occurrence of exploitation potentially links all nations and ethnic groups. New technology has changed the way in which adults can take advantage of, and therefore exploit, children. New tools have also meant that exploitation can take new forms, and that a wider range of children can be targeted.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC; 1989) has become the most universally endorsed human rights treaty in history (Simon et al., 2020). It articulates the human rights of children, including the right for freedom from sexual abuse and exploitation, and the child's right to protection against economic exploitation (Lievens et al., 2020). It has been over thirty years since the convention was introduced, however, and abuse and exploitation of children remain a serious global issue, particularly in the digital age, as it seems harder to police and prevent.

The UNCRC also states that "the arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time" (Article 37b). We know, however, that many children and young people in the UK are arrested and imprisoned for criminal acts they have been forced or coerced to take part in by their exploiters. Just as it has been suggested that those from disadvantaged groups are more likely to be exploited, they are also more likely to be criminalised (Dyer & Beaton, 2021). Furthermore, children in residential care are ten times more likely to be criminalised than other children (The Howard League for Penal Reform, 2019).

The minimum age of criminal responsibility in the UK has been age ten since the introduction of the Child and Young Persons Act (1963). This age is younger when compared to the minimum age of criminal responsibility in Europe. The age has not been changed despite criticism by policy makers and practitioners (Brown & Charles, 2021). In a 2018 consultation regarding the Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 10 (UNCRC, 2007), it was proposed that the minimum age of criminal responsibility should be set no lower than 14 years of age. In the UK, prior to 1998, the Doli Incapax presumption provided children a partial safeguard by viewing them as incapable of criminal intent. The government abolished this, however, and now vulnerable young people who may not fully

understand what they have done, or who may have acted on the instruction of others, are held to account in the same way that an adult would be.

Media

In 2014, The Jay Report, commissioned by Rotherham City Council, was published. The report was the result of an investigation into how the local authority had managed Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) cases between 1997 and 2014. It stated that there were significant failings within the authority, including the police force and children's services. It also estimated that 1,400 children may have been victims of CSE during that time, abused through rape, trafficking, physical assault and intimidation. National media immediately featured their perspective on the report, which included systemic failures, criticism of social workers, and the perceived political correctness which they felt led to the unwillingness of services to confront issues of race, suggesting that the media attempted to create a moral panic (Boyd, 2015). Whilst the achievement of moral panic is debatable, the sexual exploitation of children became much more widely known about and discussed by the general public. Gill and Day (2020) suggested that there was a moral panic which falsely centred on South Asian grooming gangs preying on white girls. They claimed this masked the abuse carried out by white males, and invalidated the victim experiences of black and minority ethnic women. Thus, media portrayal of stereotypes of victims and perpetrators of CSE often obscures the diversity of perpetrators, victims, and exploitation experiences (Krsmanovic, 2021).

The massive media coverage of major CSE cases in parts of the UK such as those reported on in Bradford, Bristol, Coventry, Peterborough, Rochdale, and Rotherham led to former prime minister David Cameron announcing that child sexual abuse should be seen as a "national threat" (Cameron, 2015). Gallagher (2017) suggested, however, that despite the high number of children involved in these cases, CSE should not be escalated above other, more prevalent and equally harmful forms of child maltreatment.

The criminal exploitation of children was similarly distorted by the media in 2017, when one form of Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) - *county lines* - was referred to in the media as the "major new grooming scandal" (Davenport, 2017). At the same time, the Home Secretary called for a national strategy to tackle it. The amplification by the media, however, meant police and criminal justice agencies' focus was informed by an incomplete understanding of the key issues as well as considerable conjecture (McLean et al., 2020). Baidawi et al. (2020) found that UK research has predominantly focused on exploitation of children through drug trafficking across county lines, focusing on gangs, illegal substances, and weapons. Robinson et al. (2019) stated that although similarities exist between CSE and CCE, such as the grooming involved, the media focused on the extreme incidents of physical and sexual violence. At this time little, if any, research on CCE has been published and there remains very little media attention on other forms of CCE, which could be considered as having less prospect for sensationalising. This impacts on how this phenomenon is understood by the public, and the reality is likely to be that, as with other forms of child abuse, these incidents are underreported and underestimated.

Definitions and Statistics

There is no single agreed upon definition of CCE, which makes it difficult for researchers and policy writers to be confident of any consistency in their work. The Home Office (2018) gives a full definition of CCE as:

> Where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or (c) through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual.

Baidawi et al. (2020, p.2) use a much briefer, but similar definition of "the incitement, coercion, or manipulation of a child into criminal activity". It would be useful for all researchers to clearly show how they have defined CCE. For example, it is not always clear whether more subtle types of exploitation have been considered, or whether the coercion has been by another child or a family member. The definition used in this thesis is taken form the All Wales Practice Guide (2019, p.4):

> Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) can be defined as a form of child abuse whereby children are coerced to partake in criminal activities, including the movement of drugs or money. Exploitation can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and is often accompanied by violence or threats of violence. It is typified by power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the exploitation.

Whilst the concept of CCE research is relatively new, previous research has considered related or overlapping issues, including gangs and youth crime, and child sexual exploitation (Maxwell et al., 2019). There are other terms that have often been used in relation to CCE, some of which are: cuckooing – "the process where children are used to take over houses acquired from vulnerable adults including class A drug addicts" (Maxwell et al., 2019, p.31), and county lines – "Drug networks… who use children and young people and vulnerable adults to carry out illegal activity on their behalf. Gangs dealing drugs is not a new issue but the extent to which criminal exploitation … as well as the increasing use of violence, has become an inherent part of it … makes it especially damaging" (Serious Violence Strategy, 2018, p.48).

Despite CCE being reported as a priority for policymakers, in most of the UK there remains a lack of specific legislation for CCE. CCE should be considered under other broader legislation, such as the Modern Slavery Act (2015), the Children (Northern Ireland) Order

(1995), the Children Act 1989, the Child Abduction Act 1984, and the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 (Maxwell et al., 2019; Walsh, 2023). The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is a framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery or human trafficking (including sexual and criminal exploitation) in England and Wales. Specified public authorities have a duty to notify the Secretary of State of individuals they suspect to be victims. First responders, who can refer a person suspected of being a victim of modern slavery or trafficking, include a number of charities, such as the Red Cross and Barnardo's (Home Office, 2019). These decisions are made by considering legal definitions of modern slavery, exploitation, and trafficking, and by assessing evidence and credibility. The NRM can also be used as a way to ascertain victims of exploitation (including Modern Slavery, trafficking, and domestic servitude), who should not be prosecuted for the crimes they committed due to that exploitation (section 45 defence).

Referrals to the NRM have increased every year since its introduction in 2009 (Maxwell et al., 2019). In 2022, 7019 referrals were made for potential victims who claimed exploitation as a child (17 and under). Of those potential victims, the type of exploitation children were most often referred for was criminal exploitation (43%; N= 3,013) (Home Office, 2023a). These increases in referrals have created very long delays whereby some young people have their bail conditions extended repeatedly whilst waiting for an outcome, and some go to court without the outcome available to them. This can mean that young people are at continued risk of exploitation during this time, are not considered eligible for interventions during this wait, and some are prosecuted without the legal defence they may be entitled to. During the 4th quarter of 2022 the average time taken from referral to decision was 642 days (Home Office, 2023b). Also of note is that prior to October 2019, criminal exploitation was included in figures for labour exploitation. Since that date criminal exploitation has been recorded separately. Having clear and consistent assessment tools that

practitioners can use with young people may help to identify those who have been exploited much more quickly and assist in accessing support for them more efficiently.

Youth justice practitioners were interviewed by Hill and Diaz (2021) to explore how they identify and respond to CSE, but this has not been explored in relation to CCE. Hill and Diaz (2021) stated that CSE should not overshadow other types of abuse and exploitation. They referred to the Home Office Child Exploitation Toolkit (2019), which suggests that practitioners should work consistently and proactively to identify and disrupt all forms of child exploitation (Home Office, 2019).

When considering gender and ethnicity, Alleyne and Wood (2010) found no differences in gender and ethnicity between adolescent gang members, those on the periphery of gangs, and non-gang youth. They suggested that girls were becoming more gang-involved and the ethnic composition of a gang was representative of the community in which it was found. They found some key factors underpinning gang membership in their UK adolescent sample. These were higher levels of delinquency, and anti-authority attitudes in the gang members, compared to non-gang youth. Social status was valued more highly by those in gangs and those on the periphery. Gang members and those on the periphery displaced responsibility for their actions either onto victims or onto those felt to be superior to them within the gang (Alleyne &Wood, 2010).

The statement made by Alleyne and Wood (2014) was that research into young people, gang involvement and related phenomena has been predominantly studied from a sociological and criminological perspective. They suggested that there is a need to understand more of the psychological processes that are involved. Whilst their research was conducted in relation to gang membership rather than CCE, there is considerable overlap between the two. A psychological understanding of child exploitation would help to inform assessments and interventions and reduce the impact of CCE on children and young people.

Aims of the Thesis

The overarching aim of this thesis was to contribute to the evidence base by exploring some of the pertinent issues of CCE, specifically, the risk factors for CCE and practitioners' perspectives of CCE. Due to the limited research in this area, a need for further exploration of CCE to improve understanding for both academics and practitioners was identified. This thesis and the conclusions drawn from it may help to guide professionals in their practice, thereby improving the direct work undertaken. Insights from this research can inform training and development, improving the effectiveness of assessment and intervention.

To achieve the aims set, Chapter 2 presents the Systematic Literature Review, which explored the risk and protective factors for children and young people being at risk of or being harmed by CCE and CSE. For this review it was necessary to include studies on CSE, or those where CSE and CCE were combined. This was, in part, due to the overlap between the two types of exploitation, but also because the amount of literature published on CCE *only* was insufficient to draw any conclusions. The findings of this literature review are discussed in relation to recommendations for future research and practice implications.

Chapter 3 presents an empirical research study which explored practitioners' perspectives on CCE, gathering information about how children and young people, who are at risk of CCE, are identified and supported. Qualitative methodology was used to identify the views of practitioners working in Youth Offending Teams (now known as the Youth Justice Service). The research explored the role the service has, what works well, and what hinders effective practice. It is of note that the service's name change occurred during the development of this thesis and that not all Youth Offending Teams had officially changed their name at the time of writing. Therefore, the terms are used interchangeably throughout this thesis. Reflexive Thematic Analysis was used to identify key themes in relation to the research questions. A discussion of these themes considers the implications and limitations of

the findings, suggestions for future research, and the conclusion of the study.

A key factor that was identified and raised repeatedly as a risk factor for children and young people who might be exploited, was trauma. Chapter 4 provides a critique of a widely used psychometric assessment tool, the Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children (TSCC, Briere, 1996). The TSCC can be used with children and adolescents to identify symptoms of trauma, as well as concepts related to trauma such as anger, post-traumatic stress, and dissociation. The chapter explored the psychometric properties of the measure, and conclusions are drawn regarding its value.

Finally, Chapter 5, concludes the thesis with a general review of the overall findings and a discussion of the potential implications for services and practitioners, as well as suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Risk and Protective Factors for Child Exploitation in the UK: A Review following Systematic Principles

Abstract

Exploitation of children can take numerous forms and has a detrimental impact, not only on the children and their families, but also on society in the wider context. This review considers child exploitation by exploring risk and protective factors for children and young people in the UK. The review was based on a systematic search of literature related to factors relevant to those under the age of 18.

The 17 papers that met the inclusion criteria, published between 2016 and 2023, were assessed for quality and were included if they were deemed, at the minimum, as having *moderate* methodological quality. The review identified a number of risk factors for child exploitation. There were fewer factors considered to be protective against child exploitation. The strengths and weaknesses of the review are discussed, and recommendations are made for future research and practice.

Introduction

Child exploitation occurs when an abuser, someone in a position of power and usually an adult, takes advantage of a child or young person for their own personal gain. Child exploitation can take many forms, but the two thought to be most common in the UK are Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE). Neither of these terms are defined by law, but offenders can be prosecuted for related offences.

CSE occurs when an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator (Department for Education, 2017). It is important to note that exploitation may have occurred even if the victim appears to have consented or complied, and/or if there has been no physical contact e.g., sexual behaviour through the use of technology.

CCE occurs when an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity. This may be in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, for a financial or other advantage of the perpetrator, and/or through violence or the threat of violence. Similar to CSE it may appear that the criminal activity is consensual, and there may not be any physical contact (Home Office, 2019).

The term CCE has come to be associated, in the UK at least, with the *county lines* model of exploitation. This form of criminal exploitation occurs when gangs and organised criminal networks use children and vulnerable adults and dedicated mobile phone lines to sell and move drugs or sometimes weapons. Other forms of child exploitation could involve elements of sexual or criminal behaviour, and could have varying detrimental effects on the child. Forced begging, using small children to gain access to buildings, organ harvesting, and

forced servitude are just some of the many forms child exploitation can take. Despite the recent increased media and government interest in child exploitation, firstly with CSE and more recently with county lines, it remains a relatively hidden phenomenon. Victims of child exploitation are often prosecuted for the behaviour, despite the element of coercion. This, coupled with the relationship building that has likely enabled the exploitation, means that many children do not disclose their abuse, and many do not recognise that they have been abused or exploited.

There are also variations in how CSE and CCE are defined throughout the UK, which leads to inconsistencies in how these forms of exploitation are recorded. When considering the NRM process, there may be inconsistencies in how and whether first responders identify potential victims of exploitation, and inconsistencies across the different agencies (such as statutory services and charities) that may refer.

In 2019, the government decided to separate criminal exploitation from labour exploitation in terms of how it is statistically recorded. This should have made it easier to identify the number of children referred as potential victims of criminal exploitation, but again significant differences in the number of professionals using NRM in different areas of the UK have been noted. Despite a duty of care to act on suspicions of modern slavery, this duty to report is often little known or not well understood by professionals. There are many factors which impact on whether a case is referred to the NRM, and factors which impact on whether cases are more likely to be considered as modern day slavery. For example, O'Brien et al. (2022) suggested that cases involving more than one victim and/or sexual exploitation were less likely to be referred. Heys et al. (2022) added that many victims of criminal exploitation do not meet the current narrative of the 'ideal victim'.

Due to criticisms of the NRM system, such as resourcing issues, significant delays and insufficient reasons given when NRM decisions are denied, the government are currently

piloting a devolved system. In the proposed new system, the NRM moves the decision making from the Home Office to local authorities (Home Office, 2023c). The decision that someone has been a victim of modern slavery, trafficking, or exploitation will no longer be admissible in court. It can, however, form part of the representations made by the defence to the prosecution before trial. As this is currently in a pilot phase, the full effect on the criminal justice system is yet to be seen.

There has been a shift in how child exploitation is understood, including a shift in the language used (Choi, 2015), both amongst practitioners and by society in general. In the UK, policy developments that took place between 2000 and 2009, meant that children and young people who were being sexually exploited should no longer be prosecuted for prostitution-related offences. At the end of 2009, supplementary guidance was published by the UK Government (DCSF, 2009) to guide organisations and individuals to safeguard children and young people from sexual exploitation. A change occurred in the terms used, whereby issues around child exploitation were discussed using language that moved away from a criminal or delinquent viewpoint e.g., child prostitution (Franchino-Olsen, 2021). Prior to this, young people were perceived as being responsible for their own abuse due to the assumption that they had made choices about it (Hallett, 2019). This echoes past views about domestic violence, and whilst there has been some shift towards updated thinking about criminally exploited children, there remains a narrative in this field and in the community about what a victim of exploitation should look like and how they should present (Heys et al., 2022). This is a relatively new field, and there remains much that is unknown, particularly around how to identify those that may be at risk of, or are already being exploited, and how to protect them from these forms of abuse. Young people who have experienced sexual exploitation are often accused of criminal activity and are placed in correctional or other secure facilities. Halter (2010) and Cole et al. (2016) suggested that this treatment of victims should be more

accurately viewed as re-victimisation experiences. Cole et al. (2016) further stated that exploited youth can become confused about what constitutes kindness and safety, which may result in greater vulnerability to further exploitation by adults. According to Hossain et al. (2010) there is often extreme sexual, physical, and psychological abuse associated with child sexual exploitation and trafficking. This means that victims of such exploitation are a population of particular concern for mental health specialists. Tsutsumi et al. (2008) found those sexually exploited reported higher levels of anxiety, depression, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) compared to those exploited for other purposes. Sexual exploitation can have a profound effect on a victim's mental health and wellbeing, not only as a child but throughout the lifespan.

The impact of criminal exploitation on children seems to have been considered much less within the literature. It would be reasonable to assume, however, that at the very least those that have a criminal record from their exploitation will face the usual associated negative consequences, which have previously been associated with having a criminal record, such as how they are seen by others, stigma, and conflict (Harragan et al., 2018), further criminalisation when they encounter the police as victims (Hunter et al., 2023), and potential difficulty accessing jobs (Sands, 2016). Case and Bateman (2020) suggested that for many young people, contact with youth justice leads to their identity changing to that of an offender, which they term "offenderisation", and *punitive* approaches predominate *child first* approaches. If those who have been criminalised are directed to prison, they will also be exposed to other criminals (Pitts, 2019), and may believe that there are very few other options available to them other than to continue with a criminal lifestyle. Those that have been exploited by gangs or organised crime networks may be at risk of physical injury and potentially death (Alexander, 2023). They may also be living in fear of retribution from other gang members. Therefore, intervening in the early stages of criminal exploitation could

prevent re-offending and further physical and psychological harm.

Identifying risk factors could help identify children most at risk of exploitation and enable action to be taken. Klatt et al. (2014) summarised the most commonly considered risk factors for child sexual exploitation as: child abuse and neglect, family dysfunction, education difficulties, poverty, drug and alcohol use, involvement of child protection services, friends or family involved in CSE, running away, homelessness, delinquency, and sexual activity. The Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (SERAF[1]) devised by Barnardo's Cymru also included risk factors such as having unexplained amounts of money and being seen in unknown vehicles. Brown et al. (2016; 2017) conducted a survey and interview with professionals to consider how these risk factors fed into screening and risk assessment tools in England and Wales. They reported some concerning findings including considerable variations across the large number of tools (at least 19) used, how they were used, and the processes that followed. Additionally, some of the tools were used to capture actual signs of sexual harm, rather than indicators of risk (Brown et al., 2016; 2017), which is concerning. Furthermore, the authors commented that little was known about how these tools were developed, whether they were evidence-based, and how reliable they were. Concerns were also raised that many of these assessment tools had not evolved with time, and therefore did not, for example, consider the impact of new technology.

Little research seems to have been carried out in relation to specific risk factors for Child Criminal Exploitation, but according to Baidawi et al. (2020) there is considerable crossover with CSE. They suggested children who are estranged from their family, neglected, or homeless, those with a learning disability, and looked after children are particularly

[1] The SERAF was devised by Barnardo's Cymru (Clutton & Coles, 2007) due to practitioners raising concerns about the identification of young people at risk of or abused by CSE. This was one of the first CSE assessment tools developed in the UK and was used in many localities, often adapted for local concerns and thresholds.

vulnerable and therefore, these features should be considered as additional risk factors. It should be noted, however, that organised criminals will also target children who are not known to services to evade detection.

There are millions of children for whom some of these risk factors are relevant in their lives, but do not experience child exploitation. It may be that protective factors help to negate these risk factors and protect children and young people from potential exploitation. Williams and Glover (2019) suggested that children are less susceptible to criminal exploitation (and gang membership) if they experience healthy relationships, and by building the self-worth and self-esteem of vulnerable young people. Kimber and Ferdossifard (2020) suggested that positive family relationships could reduce the risk for trafficking and exploitation. Similarly, Chisolm-Straker et al. (2018) found that the presence of a supportive adult in the life of a homeless young person was a protective factor against being trafficked. Klatt et al. (2014) suggested that very little research has been carried out to identify protective factors for CSE, and that much more research is needed in this area.

The Current Review

The aim of this systematic review was to identify risk factors and protective factors for the exploitation of children and young people in the UK, taking into account the overlap between CSE, CCE, and some other forms of exploitation. Current screening tools used for CCE are heavily based on risk factors for CSE, as this is a more researched area. Exploring all potential risk factors and protective factors together would improve the understanding of those factors that are relevant to work with children who are at risk of or are experiencing any form of exploitation. Focusing on a UK population also increases the understanding of these factors as they are relevant to this population, rather than considering those that may be more relevant to other countries. Some factors may, for example, cloud or confuse matters if they are not applicable to the UK.

The current review aimed to systematically examine extant research findings to identify a) factors that may impact on child exploitation, as a risk or vulnerability factor, and b) factors that negate child exploitation and serve as a protective or resilience factor. The review focused on the victim or potential victim only, and does not extend to characteristics of offenders. A narrative synthesis approach was taken to the analysis of the papers included in the review, as this is useful where studies include a range of methods.

Method

Scoping Exercise and Database Searches

In order to determine whether any pre-existing literature reviews have examined risk and protective factors for child exploitation, an initial scoping search was run on the 28th of February 2021. Databases searched included: Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, The Campbell Library of Systematic Reviews and The Centre for Reviews and Dissemination. No existing reviews were found on this topic during these searches. A wider scope of the existing literature was conducted using Google Scholar. Similarly, no existing systematic literature reviews or meta-analyses were found in relation to the current research question. Reviews were found that considered risk factors for Child Sexual Exploitation only or Child Criminal Exploitation only. There were no reviews found that looked at risk and protective factors for Criminal Exploitation as a whole, and none that focused on the UK population. This exercise suggested that the topic area may be too broad, and helped to refine the review to focus on risk and protective factors for exploitation of children and young people in the UK population.

The scoping exercise also informed which databases to include in the review, through examination of those used in reviews on similar topics. To identify potential studies to be included in this review a search was undertaken on 22nd June 2021 of the following databases: Web of Science, Ovid APA PsycArticles, Journals@Ovid, Embase 1974 to 2021, Ovid Medline 1946 to 2021, APA PsycInfo (1967 to 2021), Social Policy and Practice, SCOPUS, and ProQuest (ASSIA). Search parameters included papers written in English, and dated between 2010 and 2021. It was considered justified to include only English language papers due to the need for papers on the UK population, and also as time constraints would not allow for any necessary translation of articles. Originally, the year 2010 was specified as a search start date due to the changes in language and policy that occurred immediately prior

to this, whereby child exploitation was more formally recognised as abuse. Supplementary guidance was published by the UK Government (DCSF, 2009) to guide organisations and individuals to safeguard children and young people from sexual exploitation. The new terminology was not used consistently at this point, however, as understandably it took time to enter the vocabulary of researchers and participants, and make its way into studies. On further exploration most researchers did not begin to publish studies on risk factors for CSE until some years later and risk factors for child criminal exploitation later again. Research on CCE started to emerge around 2016. It was therefore decided that choosing 2016 as the start of the search period would provide sufficient relevant articles on risk factors for both CSE and CCE. The search period for this review covered up to mid-2023 as it was felt necessary to include the most recent studies, given that this is a relatively new and emerging area of research.

Reviews, commentaries, narratives and opinion papers were excluded from the results. Journal articles were included whether they were peer reviewed or non-peer reviewed (grey literature) to reduce the sampling bias associated with using only peer reviewed studies. Publication bias should be considered, however, as this is likely to have influenced the studies that were published, and subsequently the studies accessed and included here. Time constraints meant that hand searching the reference lists of key journals was not feasible, but in an attempt to ensure the most relevant literature was included, a further search was conducted using Google Scholar, grey literature was examined, and other professionals who may have been able to contribute were contacted.

Relevant search terms were identified from the scoping exercise and from the articles read as part of the scoping exercise. Synonyms were identified and a list of keywords was produced that could be used as search terms. The same search terms were used across all databases, with some changes being made to the Boolean operators that were applicable for

the individual database. This allowed for a consistent approach across databases. Firstly, search terms related to children (such as teenager, adolescent, and young person) were searched. Secondly, terms related to exploitation and its various forms (such as county lines, exploitation, and slavery) were entered. Thirdly, search terms related to risk and protective factors were searched (such as risk factor, protective factor, and resilience). These were then combined using the 'and' command to produce a list of articles containing a term from each of the three sections. Table 1 shows the search terms used, with truncated endings for each database.

Table 1.

Search Terms

Concept	Terms used
1 (child)	Teen* OR adolescen* OR Juvenile* OR child* OR minor OR "young person" OR "young people"
2 (exploitation)	Crim* NEAR/2 Exploit* OR "county lines" OR sex* NEAR/2 exploitation OR "transaction* sex" OR "sex traffic*" OR "domestic minor sex traffic*" OR "commercial sexual exploitation" OR "child sexual exploitation" OR "child porn*" OR "sex* NEAR/2 exchange*" OR "forced lab*" OR slavery OR "abuse image*"
3 (factors)	vulnerab* OR risk* OR "risk factor*" OR "protective factor*" OR protect* OR resilien* OR predict* OR characteristic*

When searching using the terms above, a large number of articles were produced, so further limiters were applied where possible. These included de-duplications where possible, limiting to articles published in the UK, and removing articles that were found to be irrelevant to the subject area such as maths and optics. The table containing specific search terms and limits applied is provided in Appendix A.

The remaining articles numbered 721, across all databases. These were exported into the reference management tool Endnote and grouped according to the database of origin. No additional articles, that met the criteria for inclusion, were found through contact with professionals or a Google search. Once in Endnote, a further 51 duplicate articles were removed through a combined effort of using the duplicate function, and from manually reviewing the list. Following this, further searches were carried out in Endnote to identify and remove any articles that were easily seen, by title or abstract, to be irrelevant to the review. Any deemed irrelevant were removed to a separate Endnote library. On the first screening, 301 articles were removed due to being based on a non-UK sample. A second screening of the remaining articles resulted in the removal of a further 230 articles. The articles removed concerned topics such as maternal health, incontinence, or HIV infection.

The same procedure was followed when an updated search was completed on 2nd July 2023. Using the same terms but limiting the time period from 2021 to 2023 produced 346 articles, across all databases, to be exported into Endnote. Seventeen duplicates were removed, leaving 329 articles to be screened. Those deemed irrelevant to the subject area or based on a non-UK sample were removed, leaving 22 additional articles to be evaluated for inclusion using pre-determined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

The SPIDER tool (Cooke et al., 2012) was used as a framework to help form inclusion and exclusion criteria. The criteria are shown in Table 2. This tool was chosen as, although it is based on the more commonly known PICO framework, it is appropriate for evaluating qualitative and mixed methods research studies.

Table 2.

SPIDER Tool with Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

SPIDER	INCLUSION	EXCLUSION
Sample	Young people, teenagers, children, adolescents, young people who may be vulnerable to or have been exploited, trafficked, forced labour, Criminal exploitation, county lines and those that work directly with them	Studies using only adult sample who have been exploited, participants over 18, non-UK studies, studies published before 2016.
Phenomenon of Interest	Risk/vulnerability factors Resilience/protective factors	Maternal health, incontinence, HIV infection, sex offenders only. Service evaluations.
Design	Questionnaires, interviews, surveys, case studies.	Meta-analyses, reviews, viewpoint articles, think pieces.
Evaluation	Experiences, perceptions, commentary, self and other assessments	N/A
Research Type	Qualitative, quantitative, or mixed design	N/A

The rationale for the inclusion and exclusion criteria in the SPIDER were as follows:

- Sample – As this review focused on children and young people, it was important to exclude any studies that solely considered factors in adults. It was also acknowledged that studies, which used a sample of professionals who were working directly with children and young people who have been exploited, may be useful. It is not always

possible or ethical to use samples of young people; therefore evaluating a sample of those working directly with them may be more appropriate in some cases.

- Phenomenon of interest – This review looked at risk and protective factors of those young people who have experienced or are at risk of exploitation. Therefore, it was important for all studies included in the review to identify these factors in their sample; studies that merely commented on factors found in other studies were not included.
- Design – The scoping exercise identified that the majority of studies looking at child exploitation were qualitative in design. This may have been due to a lack of consistent definitions used across the literature to date. For this reason, qualitative and quantitative studies were included. As original research was desired to answer the review question, reviews, meta-analyses, and viewpoint articles were excluded.
- Evaluation – The scoping exercise suggested many of the relevant studies would include descriptions of experiences, perceptions, and commentary on child exploitation, which is why these were deemed suitable for inclusion in this review. It was hoped that quantitative research would also be found, and so assessments were included. Assessments, and studies using quantifiable data, would help to produce risk factors that may be more objective in nature.
- Research Type – Although many qualitative studies were found in the scoping exercise, it was acknowledged that quantitative and mixed methods studies would also be informative. As the area is a relatively new field of research, it was important to include as many types of studies as possible.

Abstracts were read so that inclusion and exclusion criteria could be applied, to reduce the number of articles and have a more relevant selection. Examples of those deemed not to have met the criteria for inclusion focused on offenders and abusers, those that used

American or European samples, and those that considered only adult victims of exploitation. This reduced the potentially relevant studies to 24. At this stage, those articles remaining in the database were read in full to ensure they met the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Full copies of the articles were obtained through the University of Birmingham E-library. A further 12 were removed, leaving a total of 12 articles that were found to be suitable for inclusion in this review. During the updated review process 5 additional articles were found to be relevant. This left a final total of 17 articles. A list of the articles removed at this stage can be found in Appendix B. The studies that met the inclusion criteria, during the original search and the updated search, can be found in Appendix C.

Quality Assessment

The quality of the articles included in any review needs to be assessed to give credibility to the review. There is not a single framework that suits every type of review, and so many tools and checklists have been created. According to Long et al. (2020), the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) tool is the most commonly used tool for quality appraisal of qualitative evidence, and is recommended for novice qualitative researchers. CASP have developed eight critical appraisal tools, designed for use with various types of studies, not only those of qualitative design. It was therefore considered as the appropriate tool for this review, which contained mostly qualitative studies, but also other types of research designs. It was deemed necessary to adapt the CASP when reviewing non-qualitative studies, as the prompts given did not always sufficiently match the study under review. The checklist used was based on the CASP for qualitative studies, with the wording of some questions modified to increase flexibility, for example, wording from other versions of the CASP were added, and prompts useful only to qualitative studies were removed.

The adapted checklist (Appendix D) comprises ten questions designed to guide consideration of various aspects of a study. These included a clear statement of aims,

appropriate methodology, consideration of potential for bias, rigorous data analysis, and value of the research. Questions could be answered by ticking a box based on how well the paper met the quality criteria (yes/partial/no), to make the tool quick and efficient to use. All questions allow for additional comments to be captured when considering the quality criteria using the scoring hints and prompts listed. Although the authors of the original CASP did not recommend scoring the information on the checklist, categorical scoring was deemed important to assess and compare the quality of each of the studies in this review to be confident in their inclusion. It was decided that five items or less endorsed on the checklist would suggest the study had low quality. Six to eight items endorsed would suggest moderate quality, and nine or ten items endorsed would suggest high quality. A half mark was allocated to any item where the answer was not clear, or the criteria was only partially met.

The quality of all 17 articles was assessed using the adapted tool, and all were deemed to be of moderate quality (Appendix E). In total, seven studies were considered to be of high methodological quality (scoring between 8.5 and 10). When considering the checklist and the individual items, there were two areas in which all studies achieved high scores. All studies appeared to use methodology that was appropriate for their research aims and questions. All studies appeared to be valuable, although this may be easier to achieve when researching a topic that is still relatively new as the individual findings can be broadly useful (e.g., to identify further areas and directions for research). Furthermore, the item on the checklist that was concerned with bias was most commonly not endorsed or endorsed as 'partial'. Fifteen of the seventeen studies lacked clarity in this area. Nonetheless, all seventeen studies were deemed to be of good enough quality to be included for data extraction. It should be considered, however, that using a simplified checklist to assess the studies based on their methodological quality may have inadvertently resulted in some types of bias (e.g., rater bias). Due to time constraints, the studies were not quality assessed by a second reviewer

(inter-rater reliability), which increases the subjectivity of these ratings. The data selection process is detailed in Figure 1.

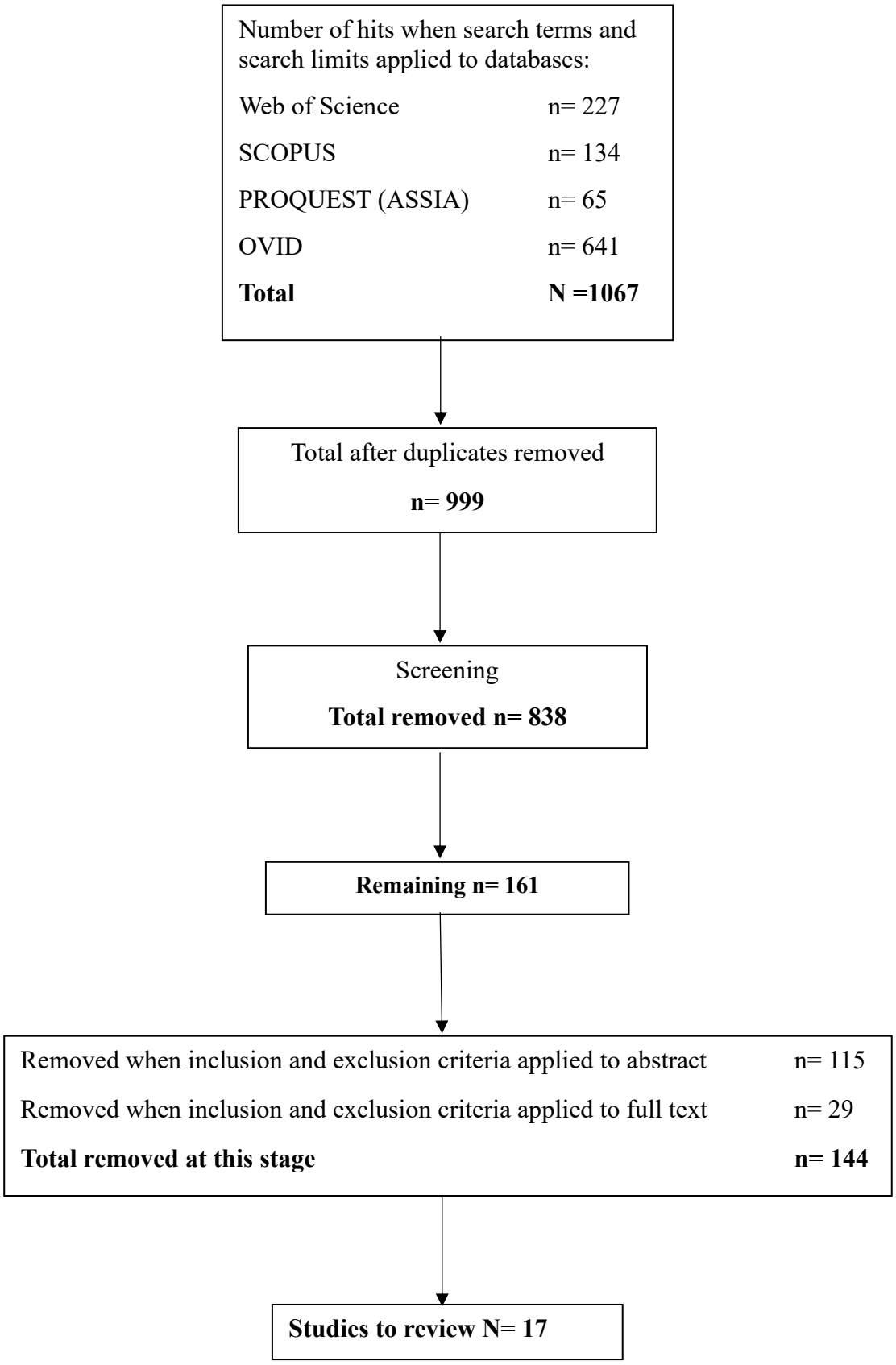
Data Extraction

A data extraction form was devised as a way of organising the key information contained in each of the studies. This enabled the data to be extracted in a standardised way, across all included studies. A copy of this form is included in Appendix F. The data extraction form was kept simple so that it could be used across the varying types of studies. Key pieces of information relating to the sample and key findings were included. There may be some limitations to using a simple data extraction form, but it was felt that this was necessary considering the articles were qualitative and quantitative in design, and including additional information would have made it more challenging to standardise.

The final papers included in this review were read in full, online, with relevant information extracted and entered into the form. This was done electronically. If additional comments needed to be made, then these were also included in the form. For example, this occurred when the article under review mentioned something relevant to the overall review, or something that needed to be considered, which did not fit into any of the pre-determined boxes on the form.

Figure 1.

Data Selection Process



Results

Overview

Data were extracted from studies that met the inclusion criteria and that were assessed as being of strong or moderate methodological quality. Table 3 summarises information related to the sample, risk and/or protective factors, and key findings extracted from the studies. The studies included in the review were of qualitative and quantitative design. A mixture of studies collected data by speaking directly to young people who have experienced exploitation, and some collected their data by speaking to professionals directly working with young people, who have been or are at risk of exploitation. This review included studies that looked at a large sample size, the largest being over nine thousand participants, and some were based on a smaller number of participants involved in semi-structured interviews (the smallest sample size across the included studies was N= 8). The majority of the studies researched CSE, with only five of the 17 researching solely CCE. Additionally, two studies considered the crossover between the two types of exploitation. As a collective, the studies tended to look at risk factors for exploitation. Four studies focused predominantly on risk factors but gave some consideration to protective factors.

Given the large variation in the studies that were included, the aims of the individual studies were not always in line with the aims of this review. Individual studies have had aims such as reviewing intervention programmes, analysing transcripts of online abuse to understand offenders, and comparing the experiences of young people who have been sexually exploited to those who have engaged in harmful sexual behaviour towards others. In some cases, the findings extracted as relevant to this review were a small part of a much larger study that considered different aspects of abuse or exploitation. This has meant that the studies included here are not easily comparable and cannot be combined. There is little consensus about how exploitation has been defined, and in most cases the definition used has

not been shared in the study. Many have commented however that there needs to be a general or national definition that all agencies and researchers can use as guidance. Narrative synthesis was used in this review to synthesise the findings of these diverse studies, and to summarise the findings in a narrative format.

Table 3

Summary of Data from Relevant Studies

Authors	Assessed Quality	Type of Child Exploitation	Population/ Sample	Methodology/ Research design	Risk Factors Identified	Protective Factors Identified	Key Findings
Alderson, Ireland, Khan, Ireland, & Lewis (2022)	Moderate	Sexual exploitation	Three studies of young adult (mainly) women, Study 1 n=263 Study 2 n=138 Study 3 n=211	A series of online measures	Primary caregiver perceived as lacking in warmth and affection	N/A	Approximately half of the children under 16 had been approached sexually by an adult. One in four were subsequently exploited. Those who disclosed their CSE and received a negative response had anxious attachments and greater relationship anxiety as adults. Poly-victimisation was associated with maladaptive schemas. Long term difficulties may be related to a cumulative effect of adversity and abuse. Neutral language when asking about CSE may have led to a higher number of disclosures in the study.
Ashton & Bussu (2020)	High	Criminal exploitation	15 young people (male) who had been identified as at risk of gang involvement	Thematic Analysis of semi-structured interviews	Older criminal influence, family facilitation, being	N/A	The participants identified peer groups, street gangs and the involvement of adult criminals as distinct categories of offending

					manipulated or coerced into criminal behaviour by peers, deprived living context		groups. Some were involved in multiple groups to perform different categories of crime. Participants displayed an awareness of exploitation and described successful exit strategies from criminal groups.
Boulton, Phythian & Kirby (2019)	Moderate	Criminal exploitation	8 practitioners involved in preventive intervention (6 males, 2 females).	Thematic Analysis of semi-structured interviews	Criminality, lacking positive role models, school absence, location, poverty, trauma.	N/A	Programmes should also include longer term engagement plans (a minimum of two years). Interventions should focus on building a trusting relationship between the young person and a specialised youth worker with credibility, and flexibility to individual needs.
Cockbain, Ashby, & Brayley (2017)	High	Sexual exploitation	9,042 users of child sexual exploitation services in the United Kingdom (1/3 male, 2/3 female).	Quantitative – exploratory data analysis of individual level data	Youth Offending Service involvement and going missing	N/A	The relationship between CSE and service users' gender is both complex and nuanced. The boys in the sample were, in comparison with the girls, more likely to be referred by criminal-justice agencies and less likely to be referred by social services; more likely to be referred because of concerns related to going missing, several months younger on

							average; more likely to have recorded disabilities; more likely to have criminal records; and less likely to have peers also thought to be affected by CSE.
Franklin & Smeaton (2017)	High	Sexual exploitation	34 professionals and 27 young people with learning disabilities who were at risk of, or who had experienced CSE (Young people: 7 male, 20 female).	Qualitative and quantitative - online surveys and semi structured interviews	In relation to LD - over protection, disempowerment, social isolation, lack of sex and relationships education and knowledge concerning sexual exploitation, failure of adults to recognise CSE.	N/A	Young people with learning disabilities are at particular risk of CSE due to invisibility of young people with learning disabilities to services, gaps in national and local policy and a lack of implementation of existing guidance.
Hallett (2016)	Moderate	Sexual exploitation	9 young people identified as having experienced sexual exploitation. Sample was aged fourteen to seventeen at the time of the	Qualitative – thematic analysis of semi structured interviews	Experiences of being in care/looked after, young people's need for more therapeutic relationships with the professionals	Early intervention, in the form of support to families, in order to help them provide better care, as well as support to children and	There is an urgent need for care responses to address the complex underlying issues behind CSE, and to open up the possibility of interventions beyond narrow child protection responses.

			research (8 female, 1 male).		around them. Young people without care from protective adults, and who are not permitted as active agents in setting the terms of their own care and support.	young people in the form of counselling and mentoring relationships.	
Hallett, Deerfield, & Hudson (2019)	High	Sexual exploitation	1550 children and young people with experiences of child sexual exploitation or who are displaying harmful sexual behaviours (CSE sample predominantly female, HSB sample predominantly male).	Quantitative-exploring referral data	Prior abuse experience, trauma in the form of physical, sexual or emotional abuse; witnessed domestic abuse, unaddressed wellbeing needs, care status, expressions of despair.	N/A	CSE and HSB are different welfare concerns, but the children and young people referred to services for CSE and HSB may have similarly high levels of similar past trauma. Behavioural responses to trauma can be different for boys and girls and may lead to different risk trajectories. Practitioners should be encouraged to be reflexive about their assumptions of sexual norms and behaviours among children, particularly in relation to gender and their ideas about vulnerability and risk. Practice would benefit from recognising and

							responding to trauma experiences, and from directing attention to the specific wellbeing needs of individual children and young people, regardless of the presenting areas of concern. There was a lack of tailored intervention resources available to address the specific lifestyles and behaviours. Consideration should be made in how practitioners can become better equipped to take on the challenge to intervene with an approach that focusses on both safeguarding the welfare of a child and undertaking necessary disruption/enforcement activity, criminal prosecution in parallel.
Hurley & Boulton (2020)	Moderate	Criminal exploitation	18 young people who have risk factors or an identifiable link to a mapped Organised Crime Gang (all male).	Qualitative – "deep dive" (a process that looks at significant life events that have occurred, from the individual's birth up to the present day)	Familial links or close non-familial links to Organised Crime (OC), resident in neighbourhoods with known OC activity. Violent crimes (suspected, reported or convicted). Low educational attainment. Exposure to violence in the home. Impulsiveness/risk-taking behaviour. Parent hostility towards authority	N/A	

					figures/lack of engagement with professionals. Involvement in antisocial behaviour. Not in mainstream education. Exclusions from school. Substance abuse. Trauma/bereavement		
Kloess, Hamilton-Giachritsis & Beech (2017)	High	Sexual exploitation	23 children aged between 11 and 15 who had experienced online sexual grooming and abuse (17 female, 6 male).	Qualitative-thematic analysis of interview transcripts	younger than 16, severe psychological problems, considerable dependence on positive feedback and encouragement, a lack of confidence, vulnerability, mental health issues, sexual abuse, interpersonal difficulties	N/A	While the majority of young people in this sample appeared to engage in such interactions for reasons of curiosity and sexual exploration/experimentation, other cases involved serious offences of sexual abuse. The victims in these cases presented with a number of vulnerability factors

					and/or problems with her caregivers		
Mythen & Weston (2023)	Moderate	Sexual exploitation	17 members of a multi-agency team delivering early intervention CSE initiatives	Qualitative – grounded theory analysis of semi-structured interviews	Disrupted familial background, victimised or harassed at school, physical isolation, poor self-esteem, learning difficulty, social disadvantage, accessibility and use of online digital technology, naivety online, unaware/naïve parents.	N/A	Blurring between constructions of risk and vulnerability in practitioners' understandings. Universal vulnerability and specific risk factors. Iatrogenic effects at the intersection of health and criminal justice. Lack of cohesive understanding of an individual in need. Tendency for blame culture, possibly increasing mechanisms for social control. Side effects of criminal justice interventions.
Neaverson & Lake (2023)	High	Criminal exploitation	13 youth practitioners working with young people involved with county line gangs (8 males, 5 females).	Qualitative – thematic analysis of online focus groups and semi structured interviews	Lack of prosocial relationships, lack of legitimate pathways (hope), school exclusions, lack of trust and continuity with	Continuous representation of a positive role model.	Disagreement with the definition of CLG, no uniform approach, need for national guidelines. Multi agency difficulties with data sharing, and lack of funding exacerbate the problem. To address this issue (CCE) responses need to come from every part of society that encounters young people.

					agency responses,		
Olver & Cockbain (2021)	Moderate	Criminal exploitation	11 professionals working on addressing county lines	Qualitative – reflexive thematic analysis of semi structured interviews	Mental health problems, social status, disconnection from community, marginalised young people.	Educating young people, engaging with communities, focused intervention with the young person's network as family and friends may be targeted next.	Participants disliked the term county lines, and felt it masked the crime and exploitation involved. The victim offender dichotomy needs rethinking. Dealing with victims' vulnerability ought to be a priority. Parallels between CCE and CSE. The focus can be on physical safety rather than relational or psychological needs.
Radcliffe, Roy, Barter, Tompkins & Brooks (2020)	Moderate	Sexual exploitation	36 practitioners from a range of professional groups working directly with CSE	Qualitative – thematic coding of focus group transcripts	Long-term economic decline of home town, concentration of different vulnerable and marginalised population groups, parental disinterest, parental neglect in the context of poor-quality housing, limited financial and social support	N/A	Assessment tools are insufficient in isolation to identify CSE risk. This study illustrated that social media has opened up new modes of communication. The very wide range of social, personal, psychological, family, environmental, and technological factors that make young people vulnerable to CSE demonstrates the complexity of defining and designing appropriate responses.

					and issues related to mental and physical health and welfare. Deficits in education and youth service provision, and reduced welfare provision.		
Shaw & Greenhow (2020)	Moderate	Sexual and criminal exploitation	36 participants from a range of agencies involved in children's social work and youth justice	Qualitative – thematic analysis of focus groups and semi-structured interviews	Being in care, or care experienced, going missing, overlap between CCE and CSE, peers who are exploited	N/A	The process of reporting and referring children to the NRM is often not followed. The lessons of the English CSE scandals have not been learned. For victims of CSE and CCE to receive the relevant support, it is necessary to recognise their victim status. Despite official acknowledgement of the power dynamics that enable and maintain CCE and CSE, it was confirmed that too often children and young people are treated as offenders rather than victims as a result of criminal behaviour stemming from their exploitation. There needs to be a consistent

							commitment from all agencies to recognise the vulnerability of children in care.
Thomas, Hamilton-Giachritsis, Branigan & Hanson (2023)	Moderate	Sexual exploitation (technology assisted)	10 child victims of technology assisted sexual abuse, predominantly female.	Qualitative – thematic analysis of interview transcripts	Low resistance environment/isolation	Education on internet safety, recognising abusive situations, confidence, education on healthy and unhealthy relationships.	This study looked primarily at victim resistance strategies, and how offenders tried to overcome these. A variety of strategies were used to de-escalate, resist, and end abuse.
Thompson (2019)	Moderate	Criminal and sexual exploitation	42 practitioners and 19 young people were consulted.	Qualitative – themes from semi-structured workshops and unstructured focus groups	Grooming, friends involved, LD/SEN, role models. Need for money, social status, sense of belonging, power, dignity and protection. A lack of alternative opportunities, peer pressure, boredom, desire for independence	Employment or education opportunities, the support of a professional that appears to be 'on their side' are important factors to getting out	Many young people with LD were vulnerable to exploitation by criminal groups. Reasons for young people becoming involved in organised crime were complex including a desire to provide for their families in a climate of austerity and unemployment. Positive relationships with professionals and long-term support were significant for youth crime prevention. While these (government) priorities clearly recognised young people's vulnerability to exploitation, many of the

					and lack of opportunity, aspirations and self-belief. Protecting/providing for family.		significant interventions remain largely punitive. New preventive interventions need to involve a range of agencies working in partnership with an overall focus on safeguarding. They should focus on relationship-based practice with the opportunity for long-term support.
Ward, Hughes, Mitchell, Rogstad (2019)	High	Sexual exploitation	466 children aged 13– 15 years old, predominantly female	Quantitative – conditional logistic regression of online questionnaire	Bacterial or protozoal Sexually Transmitted Infection	N/A	7% of children aged 13–15 years old attending SHCs in England with a bacterial or protozoal STI were highly likely or confirmed to have experienced CSE, and their odds of CSE were almost four times higher than in non-STI controls. They showed an association between STI diagnoses and concurrent CSE, which they suggested could be used to improve CSE detection.

Sample

The largest studies in the review tended to be of quantitative design. Cockbain et al. (2017) had the largest sample. They reviewed a database containing 9,042 users of child sexual exploitation services in the UK. All were aged 17 or under. One third of their sample was male, and gender was associated with statistically significant differences in many variables in their study. Boys, for example, were over-represented among those with a disability, with almost three times as many boys than girls having a recorded disability. This included behavioural based disabilities and autism spectrum disorder, amongst others. More males were known to have a criminal record, compared to females in the sample. A significant gender difference was observed in terms of referral agencies. Boys were more likely to be referred by criminal justice system and less likely to be referred by children's services.

Hallett et al. (2019) used a similar database of 1550 children and young people, aged 17 and under, with experiences of CSE or who were displaying harmful sexual behaviours (HSB). Whilst this study included young people who may not have been referred to the service for exploitation reasons, the authors commented that following in-depth investigation, they discovered that this may have been down to the gender of the young person referred, with males being more likely to be referred to the HSB service despite having very similar experiences of trauma, abuse, and exploitation. In general, across all studies in this review, there seems to be an overrepresentation of females in studies with greater focus on CSE or sexual abuse, and of males in studies where the focus is on CCE or gang related activity. It is noted, however, that gender of participants tended to be divulged if the participants were youths, and was not as frequently mentioned if the participants were adults/professionals.

Ward et al. (2019) examined information from a large existing database of N= 466 participants n, but this sample had a much narrower age range of 13- to 15-year-olds. This study varies somewhat from the rest included in this review as it used medical information to consider the link between Sexually Transmitted Infections and CSE.

Two studies by Shaw and Greenhow (2020) and Radcliffe et al. (2020) used a sample of 36 practitioners working directly with young people who have been or are at risk of exploitation, and gathered data primarily through focus groups. Whilst the Radcliffe et al. (2020) study considered only CSE, the study by Shaw and Greenhow (2020) considered sexual and criminal exploitation. Boulton et al. (2019) used a sample of eight practitioners who were involved in preventative intervention for Child Criminal Exploitation. Similarly, Olver and Cockbain (2021) interviewed 11 professionals whose work involved addressing county lines, and Neaverson and Lake (2023) conducted focus groups with 13 practitioners working with young people involved in county lines gangs. Mythen and Weston (2023) interviewed a sample of 17 members of a multi-agency team whose role was to deliver CSE focused early intervention initiatives.

The studies involving children and young people directly tended to have smaller samples. Kloess et al. (2017) examined transcripts of online conversations from 22 children aged between 11 and 15 who had experienced online sexual grooming and exploitation. Similarly, Thomas et al. (2023) used transcripts of ten children who had experienced technology assisted sexual abuse. Hallett (2016) interviewed nine young people who had experienced sexual exploitation. They were aged 14 to 17 at the time of the research being conducted.

Alderson et al. (2022) collated information from three separate studies on child sexual exploitation. Their sample therefore consisted of three different groups of n= 263, n= 138, and n= 211 young adults. They commented that the majority of those in the combined sample

were young women, and that the majority participated through online questionnaires.

The final two studies primarily considered CCE. Hurley and Boulton (2020) looked at file information of 18 young people with links to Organised Crime Gangs. Ashton and Bussu (2020) spoke directly to 15 young people who had been identified as at risk of criminal exploitation through gang involvement.

Risk Factors

The risk factors identified in the studies were as varied as the studies themselves, though there are some factors that were identified across studies.

Family/Care

Family appears to be an important factor when it comes to risk of exploitation. On further examination, the risk factors identified in this theme included family links and associations to criminals (Ashton & Bussu 2020; Boulton et al., 2019; Hurley & Boulton, 2020), parental disinterest or problems in the relationships with caregivers (Alderson et al., 2022; Franklin & Smeaton 2017; Hallett, 2016; Hurley & Boulton 2020; Kloess et al., 2017; Mythen & Weston 2023; Radcliffe et al., 2020), and family facilitation of the exploitation (Ashton & Bussu 2020). Similarly, being looked after or in the care system was identified as a risk factor (Hallett 2016; Hallett et al.,2019; Shaw & Greenhow 2020), which also suggests an early onset of difficulties within the family. Being in care may be a risk factor, in its own right, or may be a consequence of pre-existing family dysfunction.

Poverty and Deprivation

Living in areas of deprivation and experiencing poverty was suggested as a risk factor by Ashton and Bussu (2020), Boulton et al. (2019), Olver and Cockbain (2021), Mythen and Weston (2023), Radcliffe et al. (2020), and Thompson (2019). These factors may relate to socio-economic issues, possible family struggles or lack of financial security.

Abuse and Trauma

Childhood experiences of abuse and trauma was identified as a risk factor in many studies included in this review (Hallett et al., 2019; Hurley & Boulton, 2020; Kloess et al., 2017; Radcliffe et al., 2020; Roy et al., 2020). It seems that this factor is quite wide ranging, involving many different types of abuse and trauma. This overlaps somewhat with the risk factor of experiencing violence, in the form of domestic violence and in forms outside of the home, possibly as a victim, witness, or perpetrator of violent acts in the community (Hallett et al., 2019; Hurley & Boulton 2020). There may also be a cyclical nature in these factors, and some of the risk factors may lead to exploitation, which in turn increases the likelihood of trauma, violence, and family tensions.

Isolation/Peer Influence

Social isolation was identified as a risk factor by Mythen and Weston (2023) and Thomas et al. (2023). This could be, for example, due to learning disabilities leading to a lack of opportunity to socialise, spending significant time online, trying to make friends through forums and gaming, or having moved home many times (possibly through being in the care system) and not having been able to maintain friendships. Franklin and Smeaton's (2017) study also found social isolation to be a risk factor in young people with learning disabilities. It is worth mentioning that these three studies focused on sexual exploitation, and therefore social isolation may not be a risk factor for criminal exploitation. Conversely, peer influence was also identified as a risk factor by Ashton and Bussu (2020), Shaw and Greenhow (2020) and Thompson (2019). All three of these studies considered criminal exploitation. Perhaps related to the factor of social isolation and/or peer influence is the risk factor of being outside of mainstream education, being educated through pupil referral units, or being excluded from school (Boulton et al., 2019; Hurley & Boulton, 2020; Neaverson & Lake, 2023; Radcliffe et al., 2020; Thompson, 2019).

Antisocial Behaviour

Antisocial behaviour and criminality were also identified as risk factors (Boulton et al., 2019: Cockbain et al., 2017; Hurley & Boulton, 2020) and it is worth considering whether gender has any impact on this risk factor, as studies have shown a link between this and referrals to services for boys. Low self-esteem and low self-belief were also thought to be a risk factor for exploitation by Kloess et al. (2017) and Thompson (2019).

Sexually Transmitted Infection (CSE only)

The risk factors identified by Ward et al. (2019) were not found in any of the other studies included in this review. This is because they looked at medical information that may have been difficult to obtain in other studies, or was not the focus of the research aim. They found an association between STI diagnoses and concurrent CSE, which they claimed could be used to improve CSE detection. The specific risk factor was bacterial or protozoal Sexually Transmitted Infection in 13 to 15 year olds.

CCE Only Risk Factors

When considering the five studies that focused on CCE only, there are some common themes. The majority of the five studies highlighted risk factors related to family problems/disconnection and lack of positive role models, poverty and deprivation, school exclusion/absence, and trauma/Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (Ashton & Bussu, 2020; Boulton et al., 2019; Hurley & Boulton, 2020; Neaverson & Lake, 2023; Olver & Cockbain, 2021).

Summary

In summary, the studies identified several unmet needs that children and young people, who are being exploited or are at risk of exploitation, may present with, as well as a lack of professional support or alternative ways available to them to help them meet these

needs. For many young people it may seem that the exploitative relationships they have (with gangs, criminals, or sexual abusers) are the only options available to them, and they have few experiences of healthy and appropriate relationships to compare these with.

Protective Factors

With only five of the studies discussing protective factors for child exploitation, there was considerably less overlap between the studies.

Safe Supportive Adult

Four of the five studies suggested that a healthy relationship with a safe and supportive adult could protect against exploitation in any form. Hallett (2016) suggested that early intervention was necessary and could be provided to families to support their children, but also that consideration should be given to provide counsellors or mentors for the young people. Olver and Cockbain (2021) also suggested that a wider focus on prevention and protection may be needed. They argued that family and friends of the exploited young person could be targeted for exploitation and so interventions with the young person's network, as well as engaging with local communities, would be beneficial.

Thompson (2019) suggested that the safe relationship may come from outside of the home in the form of a professional that appears to be on the side of the young person and supports them, as echoed by Neaverson and Lake (2023), who suggested any continuous long term positive role model would have a protective function.

Education

Thompson (2019) also suggested employment and education opportunities would be useful protective factors. With their focus on technology assisted exploitation, Thomas et al. (2023) recommended education on internet safety, recognising abusive situations, and

knowledge of healthy and unhealthy relationships could, and in their research did, act as protective factors.

Key Findings

Given that the studies included in this review had limited homogeneity, their study aims, and therefore their key findings, varied. There are some areas of overlap between them, however, and to some degree, a continuation of themes across studies. Many of the studies (such as Cockbain et al., 2017; Hallett, 2016; Hallett et al., 2019; Kloess et al., 2017; Radcliffe et al., 2020; and Thompson, 2019) discussed child exploitation in terms of vulnerability to being exploited, factors that perpetuate exploitation, and the complexities that need to be understood to intervene and help people to avoid or recover from it. Alderson et al. (2022) also reported the longer-term difficulties victims may face due to the cumulative effects of poly-victimisation and experiencing multiple sources of adversity and abuse. This poly-victimisation seems likely for many young people, when considering the overlapping and linked aspects of many of the risk related factors discussed in this review.

Many of the studies commented on the lack of agreed definitions of CSE and CCE and the impact this has on research and practice (Mythen & Weston 2023; Neaverson & Lake, 2023; Olver & Cockbain, 2021; Radcliffe et al., 2020). Alderson et al. (2022) were mindful to use neutral language in their study and named behaviours objectively rather than using words such as exploitation and abuse. They believed this may be why they had such high numbers of the sample disclosing that they had been approached sexually by an adult while they were a child. They found that half of their sample had been approached sexually by an adult as a child and one in four were subsequently exploited or sexually abused. This would suggest that child abuse and exploitation, at least in terms of sexual exploitation, could be impacting half of the UK population. This figure is likely to be much larger if one also includes criminal exploitation.

Radcliffe et al. (2020) suggested that assessment tools currently used are insufficient to correctly identify those who are at risk of or are being exploited. Whilst they were referring specifically to tools that assess for CSE, it is known that many CCE screening and assessment tools were created from CSE tools. Participants in the study commented that tools can produce false positives, when they use risk factors that are common in adolescence and related to general risk taking and identity development. They also reflected on the many young people that would not be highlighted by the tools due to coming from middle class backgrounds and not being previously known to services. These young people may be targeted by exploiters, specifically because they are less likely to be identified by police and children's services. It was not made clear how the participants were recruited, and whether the recruitment process could have introduced any bias.

When considering the risk factors collated in this review, there are some that could be attributed to developmentally appropriate adolescence or are at least commonly found in adolescents who are not being exploited or abused, such as low self-esteem and family tensions. It is also clear that many of the risk factors suggested in this review may not highlight a middle-class child from wealthy parents, for example, those factors relating to poverty and deprivation. Many of the risk factors could apply to either end of this spectrum, however, and therefore need to be weighted or ranked accordingly, based on the economic or contextual demographics of the young person should further evidence suggest.

Participants in the Radcliffe study also suggested that new responses to child exploitation are needed (Radcliffe et al., 2020), but again there was no discussion of how researcher bias may have influenced the analysis and thematic findings. Gender is likely to play a part in the identification of young people who are being exploited. Cockbain et al. (2017) found that boys were more likely to receive a criminal justice response, whilst girls were more likely to have involvement from children's services. This study received the

highest score in the quality assessment used in this review, in part due to their large sample and the thoroughness of the description of their analysis. The gendered response found by Cockbain et al. (2017) is echoed in the study by Hallett et al. (2019) who found that similar levels and types of traumas in the lives of young people could still lead to different trajectories, based on their gender and the response given by practitioners. The Hallet et al. (2019) study was assessed as a high-quality study using a large sample. Although it seems as though gender is a factor in the responses that young people receive, it is unclear whether this is based on actual risk or perceived risk. The impact of these perceptions may cloud the judgement of exploitation of males and females. It is also unclear whether therefore non-binary or transgender young people may be at increased risk of either type of exploitation. Olver and Cockbain (2021) suggested that the offender-victim dichotomy needs further consideration, as this can cause many issues for young people in their contact with services. Being seen, and therefore responded to, as either an offender or victim when someone may be both, can cause many additional problems for young people. This is particularly problematic if their gender impacts that perception.

Franklin and Smeaton (2017) suggested there may be gaps in the policies that guide practitioner's responses, particularly when considering children and young people who have a learning disability. Hallett (2016) echoed this, saying that there needs to be a broader consideration when working with children and young people, and that interventions should be considered beyond narrow child protection responses currently used. Olver and Cockbain (2021) suggested that the focus is often on the physical safety of the young person being harmed by exploitation, and little consideration is given to psychological safety. Shaw and Greenhow (2020) found that many practitioners were not responding in the way they should, for example, by not referring young people to the NRM for exploitation and trafficking. They felt that lessons have not been learnt over recent years, and were concerned that many young

people still receive a youth justice response rather than being seen as victims of exploitation, requiring a welfare response. It should be kept in mind, however, that there are some concerns regarding the quality assessment of this study. For example, Shaw and Greenhow (2020) did not explain how their data was analysed or by whom, which leads to questions about the possible biases that may have impacted their findings.

Hurley and Boulton (2020) suggested that there should be consideration as to how practitioners can become better able to intervene in a way that balances both the welfare of the child, and the disruption and enforcement needs that may be necessary. Hurley and Boulton (2020) also failed to show any consideration of bias in their study, which impacted on their quality assessment score. As their study was a 'deep dive' of files, the person/people collating the information may have influenced what was collected and analysed. Hallett (2016) asserted that young people who have been exploited or are finding themselves in need of additional care and support, should be encouraged to have agency in the decisions being made about them. Mythen and Weston (2023) pointed out that there can be iatrogenic effects[2] at the intersection of health and criminal justice, which can result in an increase in unnecessary social control. Whilst Mythen and Weston (2023) linked their findings to current literature on exploitation, their study was not assessed as high quality, as they had not considered their role in the study, potential biases and influence they may have over results. The potential for these biases to have impacted their study is significant, given that their study was an evaluation of an early intervention programme that was designed and delivered by their participants.

In terms of prevention programmes and intervention, many of the studies included in this review argued the need for relationship building between young people and

[2] The use of the term iatrogenic here is used to suggest complication or ill effect due to assessment or intervention.

practitioners/professionals involved (Boulton et al., 2019; Hurley & Boulton, 2020; Thompson, 2019). Boulton et al. (2019) also suggested that interventions need to be long term to have the best outcomes, or as suggested by Neaverson and Lake (2023), at least provide long-term positive role models. Hurley and Boulton (2020) advised that more resources, targeted at the population they are intending to help, are needed. They suggested that interventions should be flexible and based wherever possible on the needs of the individual. Preventative work is best carried out with networks around the young people too, to empower the family and the community, and reduce the likelihood of peers being exploited (Olver & Cockbain, 2021).

Discussion

Main Findings

The aim of this review was to consider Child Exploitation by exploring factors related to risk and protective factors for children and young people in the UK, using a systematic approach. The review found that in the UK there is a lack of clear and agreed definitions for forms of child exploitation.

Whilst not all studies stated the gender of their participants, and some researched professionals and practitioners only, there remained an obvious gender split in the findings. In research, as in practice, females tend to be viewed through a CSE lens, whilst males are viewed through the lens of CCE. This is supported by the conclusions drawn by Hallett (2019) and Cockbain et al. (2017) included in this review. It may be that young people themselves are more comfortable with this split, at least in terms of who is being labelled a victim and who is being labelled as an offender, as it appears that young males who have experienced CCE in particular dislike the label of victim and prefer to see themselves as an active participant that is not 'weak'. This, and the 'good victim' narrative that professionals may have, will undoubtedly impact whether a NRM is completed, and whether they access support services. Alderson et al.'s (2022) use of neutral language in their research may be one way of avoiding this unnecessary labelling and the biases it may produce during data collection. Further research should explore if, and how much, this might have changed in recent years, and also to consider how the growing number of adolescents who identify as gender queer or non-binary would be considered through this lens.

The majority of studies in this review researched risk factors, with fewer considering protective factors. Even then, the distinction between protective factors and factors that aid resilience and recovery after abuse or exploitation is not clear. As already mentioned, many studies and assessment tools have been criticised for blurring the lines between *at risk of* and

harmed by exploitation and between *risk* and *vulnerability*. Again, careful consideration of definitions and terminology would be useful for future research in this area. Improved risk assessment and screening tools, as well as improved interventions, will need a robust evidence base to aid its development. Having recognised and agreed definitions of CCE and CSE may be the best starting point for this.

Limitations and Further Considerations

This review only included research conducted in the UK. As previously mentioned, there are no agreed or legal definitions for forms of child exploitation. When considering studies conducted outside of the UK, additional issues such as varying ages of consent and the age at which a person is considered an adult, or criminally responsible, would need to be considered. For this reason, the current study focused on the UK population only. It is acknowledged that this limits the generalisability of these findings to other countries.

Whilst the studies that met the inclusion criteria focused on CSE and CCE, there are additional types of child exploitation that were not included in this review. For instance, radicalisation of vulnerable children could be seen as a form of exploitation but was not included in the search terms. Furthermore, Sharp-Jeffs (2016) has discussed forced marriages and the links with exploitation and running away. In their example, girls had run away to avoid a forced marriage and had then been exploited, and for some families a marriage might be a solution for their child who has been exploited outside of the family. These studies did not meet the inclusion criteria for this review but add valuable information regarding risks, vulnerabilities and protective factors. Broadening the inclusion criteria, could have given additional perspectives or suggested factors that were not considered in papers that were included in the review. Similarly, consideration of the role of culture may warrant further exploration in future research. This could be considered from the perspective of gang culture or from the role of family based CCE. Young people from collectivist cultures may have

differing vulnerabilities to CCE as mentioned by Baidawi et al. (2020). No papers identified in the search covered less common types of criminal exploitation such as forced begging, organised shoplifting, or gang related activity such as destroying criminal evidence or intimidating witnesses. Whilst this was beyond the scope of the current review, future research should consider whether such papers exist and whether there is merit in broadening the original search terms to include a wider variety of papers. Consideration should also be given to the definition of child exploitation, whether these additional areas meet this definition, and if so, how to adjust the search terms to capture these studies.

CSE seems to be the most researched and written about form of child exploitation, as it has been discussed and reflected in law and policy for some years. Therefore, it is to be expected that the review would have included a higher number of papers regarding this type of exploitation. As other areas of exploitation become more easily identified and accepted in policy and practice over time, it is anticipated that greater research regarding other forms of child exploitation will feature within the literature and widen the current evidence base.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Practice

The current review explored risk and protective factors for child exploitation and found that whilst some risk factors were discussed in more than one study, overall, there is a lack of clarity and cohesion in this respect. Even fewer articles considered protective factors for preventing exploitation.

This review consolidates risk and protective factors previously identified in research, however, many areas remain that have not been researched. Additionally, research would benefit from agreed definitions, and from identifying risk factors that emerge organically rather than looking for assumed risk factors based on practitioners' prior understanding, or those that are borrowed from similar fields, such as child sexual abuse. There may be somewhat of a cyclical nature in the risk factors that are considered and then subsequently

found. This is particularly problematic if risk factors for CCE have been taken from the CSE field, which may not be as relevant as first thought, particularly given the gender biases that have been evidenced between the two types of exploitation. Whist there may be overlapping risk factors, this needs to be carefully considered and further evidenced to strengthen the validity and reliability of risk assessment tools, and identification of potential victims.

Practice would also benefit from clear guidelines and resources for responding to the experiences of child victims of exploitation. This could, in turn, prevent repeat victimisation, and may encourage survivors of exploitation to work with professionals to help them better understand their needs from a lived experience perspective. Attention should be placed on the specific wellbeing needs of young people, regardless of the type of exploitation they are experiencing or have survived.

Whilst this is a relatively new phenomena, particularly CCE, more research in these areas is much needed. The cost of exploitation to children and young people, their families, and wider society should not be underestimated.

CHAPTER THREE:
Empirical Research Study

Practitioner Experiences of Identifying and Working with Child Criminal Exploitation

Abstract

Background: Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) is a form of child abuse whereby children are coerced to partake in criminal activities, including the movement of drugs or money. Whilst this has been evident in society for centuries, the use of adolescents by organised city-based gangs, for dealing drugs in suburban and rural areas, has become widely known in recent years, possibly due to the sensationalism and overuse of the term 'county lines' in the media. The true complexity of the CCE phenomena may be clouded by this and may impact on how Youth Offending Team (YOT) practitioners view CCE, and how they work with it.

Method: Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) was used to analyse interviews with 9 YOT practitioners across England and Wales. The aim of the study was to explore how Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) identify young people who may be being criminally exploited, how they work with young people who may be being criminally exploited, and what the challenges of this work are.

Results: The themes captured insights around the importance of relationship building, barriers between professionals and young people, formal assessments and frameworks, policies and practices that might hinder the work, and the strategies employed by exploiters.

Conclusions: The findings highlight the experiences of YOT practitioners who work in this area, and their commitment to effective practice. Further research may wish to consider the experiences of young people who have experienced CCE and the interventions that were offered to them.

Keywords: Youth justice; child exploitation, adolescents; safeguarding; qualitative research.

Introduction

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) can be defined as a form of child abuse whereby children are coerced to partake in criminal activities, including, but not exclusive to, the movement of drugs or money. Exploitation can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and is often accompanied by violence or threats of violence. It is typified by power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the exploitation (All Wales Practice Guide, 2019). Exploitation typically results in personal gain for the perpetrator, group, or organised criminal gang. It involves an element of exchange of goods between the youth and the perpetrator and can still be considered as exploitation even if the activity appears consensual. This is because young people are considered by the law and psychological literature to be unable to give informed consent. Moreover, exploited children frequently have additional vulnerabilities (Franklin & Smeaton, 2017; Hurley & Boulton, 2020; Thompson, 2019) that are taken advantage of by the perpetrator. Therefore, it is important to formulate theories, ideas, and practice that aim to protect the vulnerable.

Whilst criminal exploitation of children and young people has been evident in society for centuries (Baidawi et al., (2020) use Oliver Twist as an early example), the county lines model of exploitation is much more recent. The use of adolescents by organised city-based gangs, for dealing drugs in suburban and rural areas, has become widely known in recent years, possibly due to the media sensationalism of it. Robinson et al. (2019) suggest that media interest in this gang activity has made CCE newsworthy now. Whilst the county lines model has helped to raise awareness of the criminal exploitation of children and young people, the model has also become a term used interchangeably with CCE as whole. The true complexity of the CCE phenomenon is clouded by the popular model of drug trafficking to the extent that many practitioners view CCE as primarily a drug or gang problem. County lines, therefore, possibly overshadows other forms of CCE, such as forced theft and assaults.

This may mean that many young people are being wrongly criminalised for the acts they have committed whilst being exploited by others more powerful than them.

Maxwell et al. (2019) were tasked by Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel to assess what is known in the literature about CCE. They were particularly interested in the early identification of children vulnerable to CCE and in identifying key messages for an effective service response. Their review found that this could not be achieved as there was so little academic research relating to CCE directly. When trying to establish risks and protective factors for county lines involvement, Windle et al. (2020) turned to literature on human trafficking due to its abundance in comparison to literature on criminal exploitation. There is clearly a need for more research and literature on the subject of CCE as a whole.

Maxwell et al. (2019) agree that while children of all ages can be criminally exploited, older youth may be perceived as more autonomous, therefore, their involvement in the criminal activity is often seen as more of a lifestyle choice than a safeguarding issue. This was previously the case with Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), where sexually abused youth were blamed for their experiences, until more was written about their vulnerabilities and people began to understand CSE as a form of child sexual abuse. Maxwell et al. (2019) remind us that criminally exploited young people can be both the victims and perpetrators of violence with, for example, young people carrying weapons to protect themselves, which makes it more likely that they will be used.

Overlap with Other Forms of Exploitation

Weston and Mythen (2021) found in their study with practitioners that whilst they were able to formally verbalise their understanding of CSE and its risk factors, referring to policy and guidance, practitioners regularly constructed the risks associated through informal ways in practice. The authors found in their interviews with practitioners in the CSE field that

personal experiences and pre-conceived notions of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour were often used to consider risk of and vulnerability to exploitation.

Recent research by the charity Missing People found that there was a strong link between incidents of young people going missing and their involvement in CCE (Missing People, 2019). According to the families they spoke to in their research, almost no consideration was given by police and other professionals as to whether these children could have been exploited whilst they were missing. Those spoken to felt that their children were assumed to be making choices and were often viewed as criminals. The Missing People report (2019) recommended that the government and exploitation programmes being developed to tackle these issues think about the wider issues of those who go missing and are being exploited. The report suggested that the poor engagement with services may be at least in part due to the young people having been told to distrust and not to cooperate with services. They also suggested that attention be paid to the links between CCE and CSE, and the impact of exploitation on a young person's mental health.

Bovarnick (2010) found a split in the views of professionals working with trafficked young people. Those professionals who had a 'child-centred' approach usually viewed these children as in need of protection. Conversely those professionals with an 'immigration-centred' approach were more likely to view them as abusing the system. Weston and Mythen (2021) suggest that the outcome or intervention a young person receives will be influenced by both the personal views and the cultural perspectives that a professional has, and this may not be adequately challenged by any training they receive. This may be one reason as to why Reisel (2017) found inconsistencies in safeguarding practices. Similarly, Philips (2019) found that the language used when discussing young people who had been sexually exploited often suggested that the young people were responsible for their exploitation and abuse. It was

often mentioned how the young people presented themselves, and their behaviours were judged accordingly.

Problems Faced

Walsh et al. (2011) reported that young people who offend or who are at risk of offending in the community have considerable mental health needs and these needs often go unmet. They suggested that this is particularly the case when it comes to early intervention (Chitsabesan et al., 2006) for mental health, which in itself is rare. Harrington et al. (2005) suggested these needs are not recognised by service providers and more should be done to aid identification. There may be other factors at play however, as to why young people do not get the help they need. In a study of young adolescents' views of helping professionals (Freake et al., 2007), themes emerged around confidentiality concerns, a lack of trust, and poor continuity of care.

The theme of a lack of trust was echoed in a study by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel in 2020. The review examined case files for 21 young people who had died, or been seriously harmed, where criminal exploitation was a factor. The children were described as guarded and were thought to be protecting others by not telling practitioners what was happening in their lives. In all 21 cases, they were said to present as warm and polite, but only engaged with practitioners on a superficial level. Practitioners consistently reported that building a trusted relationship is key to any successful engagement with this group of children and communication between child and worker is vital to manage risk. Walsh et al. (2011) and Macdonald (2006) asserted that the provision of services needs to be accessible, confidential and delivered in a non-judgmental way. Young people in contact with YOTs value relationships with professionals that feel personal and where the same person is available to them over a reasonable period of time (Neaverson & Lake, 2023).

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2020) also expressed concern that in the local authorities involved in their study, effective practice is often not known about and not widely used. Where there are some examples of good practice, they are not shared. Even in cases where risk of criminal exploitation is identified, practitioners often do not know how to help the young people who are being exploited or are at risk of criminal exploitation. Shaw and Greenhow (2019) also found that professionals felt they did not have the knowledge or resources to recognise and respond to CCE. This lack of cohesion could sometimes lead to disagreements between professional groups, when deciding how best to respond. Similarly, Maxwell et al. (2019) reported three main issues in regard to the effective response of services to CCE – the minimal research into what works, the lack of statutory definition, and often a lack of protocols for CCE. Neaverson and Lake (2023) found that lack of agreed definitions and uniform approach, and a dearth of national guidelines caused disagreements and difficulties with multi-agency responses to exploitation. According to Firmin (2015) there is varied practice across the UK, with some young people being re-routed to youth justice services in the absence of a national strategy (Firmin et al., 2019). Where nationwide procedures exist to identify and support victims, such as the NRM, these are commonly underused, and where they are utilised they are often ineffective (Setter & Baker, 2018).

Risks and Vulnerabilities

A report into the criminalisation of children in care found that children in residential care may be targeted by criminals due to their vulnerability and a lack of adult oversight (Howard League, 2020). They admit, however, that this is currently anecdotal evidence, as professionals are not consistently identifying and recording CCE. The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2020) found that, with the exception of exclusion from school, many of the commonly assumed vulnerability factors were not present in the lives of the young people they examined.

The Home Office (2018) states that being in care can heighten the risk of becoming a victim of CCE, just as it can for CSE. Similarly, indicators of CCE are also considered to include when children regularly go missing and when they are found outside of the area in which they are meant to reside (Shaw & Greenhow, 2020). According to the Children's Society (2018) children who have been exploited show multiple vulnerabilities, such as being the victim of physical and emotional violence, neglect, sexual abuse, modern-day slavery, human trafficking and domestic abuse, and often multiple offences.

A more recent report by the Children's Society (2019) warns the age at which children are being targeted for CCE is getting younger. Despite the age bracket for increased risk of CCE being considered as 14-17, primary school-age children are being involved in more cases. Wroe (2021) considered the emerging literature on the criminal exploitation of children via county lines and found that many gang members that are considered abusers and perpetrators are young people who have been victimised themselves. McClean et al., (2020) suggests that there is often no clear line between the exploited and the exploiters. Perceptions of vulnerability can differ greatly, and are influenced by the knowledge, training, and moral judgements of the practitioner. Goff et al. (2014) suggests that some agencies may not see age as an indication of vulnerability, particularly if the person being judged is a black male teenager. According to Davis and Marsh (2020) opportunities to support such children have been overlooked, as services and professionals can be too focused on risks and forget that these vulnerabilities apply to children, often with unmet basic needs. Welch (2007) suggests this may also be due to stereotypes around gender, race, and criminality.

Increasing inequalities in social conditions lead to higher levels of need and deprivation (Marmot et al., 2020). Recent data indicates a deterioration in child health (physical and mental) in the UK, and according to the Children's Society (2019) young people in the lower social strata are, therefore, at increased risk of gang involvement and

CCE. Young people in poverty are also more likely to experience other ACEs than their peers (Felitti et al., 1998; Social Mobility Commission, 2017). In addition, children and young people with additional educational needs constitute 40% of criminally exploited children, as perpetrators may specifically target pupil referral units (PRUs) or other special education facilities (Longfield, 2019; Children's Society, 2019). Amongst gang associated young people, mental health issues are consistently represented in higher-than-average proportions. This may be a result of, but is at least a correlation with, living in a violent environment and exposure to the criminal justice system (World Health Organisation, 2019).

Youth Justice

Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) were introduced in the UK in 2000 to address the needs of young offenders and to prevent and reduce crime, by providing a national framework. This, therefore, seems an ideal place for research to begin addressing the specific needs of the different groups of young offenders (Chitsabesan et al., 2006), including those who are wrongly criminalised for their vulnerability and unmet needs.

Many of the young people who have been criminally exploited will come to the attention of the youth justice system, possibly due to the crimes they have been coerced to commit. In recent years there has been movement towards viewing those young people as victims rather than offenders. By their entry into the youth justice system however, even as a preventative or supportive measure, they are marked as offenders within the justice system (Marshall, 2023). Case and Bateman (2020) suggest there are tensions within youth justice between the dual needs of welfare and justice.

The NRM for modern slavery is a framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery (including exploitation) to the authorities. It is hoped that this will ensure they receive the appropriate support. Victims under the age of 18 do not have to

consent to be referred, and government guidelines advise they must first be safeguarded and then referred into the NRM process. It would be expected that young people known to the Youth Justice Service would be assessed, either formally or informally, for CCE and an NRM completed if necessary. Ideally this would take place in time for the information to be presented at court, if the offence warrants a court appearance. There has been a rise in the number of referrals made each year, although this slowed somewhat during the Covid-19 pandemic. These rises are likely to be an indicator of increased awareness of criminal exploitation and the NRM process. Prior to October 2019, the NRM data included criminal exploitation in figures detailing labour exploitation. This has now been rectified, and criminal exploitation data are recorded separately to labour exploitation. In addition, potential victims can also be recorded as experiencing multiple exploitation types. Since January 2020 a 'flag' within the NRM digital casework system identifies county lines referrals. It is acknowledged that various factors have an ongoing impact on the number of cases reported, and these changes can distort the figures when considering the rise in cases since NRM began.

The Modern Slavery Act (MSA) 2015 provides a statutory defence for victims of child trafficking and slavery accused of certain offences. Young people who have been identified as victims of CCE should receive the appropriate support, and potentially the legal defence of Section 45. There are, however, numerous offences to which the Section 45 defence does not apply. These include serious violence, robbery and aggravated burglary, amongst others. Shaw and Greenhow (2020) expressed concern that the law seems to recognise the impact of exploitation in certain situations but not others. They suggested that this means being classed as a victim of CCE under the MSA is "contingent on having committed the 'right' kind of offence" rather than considering the exploitative circumstances in which the crime was committed.

Stone (2018) also found that statutory protection is less likely if the child is seen as close to adulthood, has a criminal history, and where the child declines to name those who have exploited them. Thus, the protection of a child in this situation depends on judgements regarding the 'worthiness or value' of particular children who have experienced exploitation (Shaw & Greenhow, 2020).

Weston and Mythen (2021) recommended that further research be conducted to clarify how practitioners operate in regard to CSE risk and intervention, and whether their response is being influenced by their moral landscape and the social and political landscape their organisations operate in. Such factors no doubt impact on their routine knowledge and practices. Their research was based on those employed within criminal justice but suggest the same consideration should be asked of other occupations. They also suggest those working in these types of organisations tend to be risk focused, but this should be balanced with protection and welfare.

According to Burland (2017) children continue to be arrested and prosecuted rather than protected and supported, despite legislation designed to protect the welfare of children such as the NRM and Section 45 defence, international conventions to address trafficking and exploitation, and internationally agreed principles concerning the non-prosecution of victims of trafficking that have been forced to engage in criminality. Davis and Marsh (2020) express concern that in one recent serious case review a 13-year-old boy received a youth justice response, receiving a conditional caution for 'possessing a firearm, a knife and some cannabis', instead of a welfare response given the seriousness of the offences and his age at the time. They believe that this is an indication that the services involved do not provide a coordinated child-centred response, giving weight to the numerous suggestions that youth justice services struggle to manage the needs of young people who experience criminal

exploitation. Consequently, there remains a tendency to give criminal response rather than a welfare response.

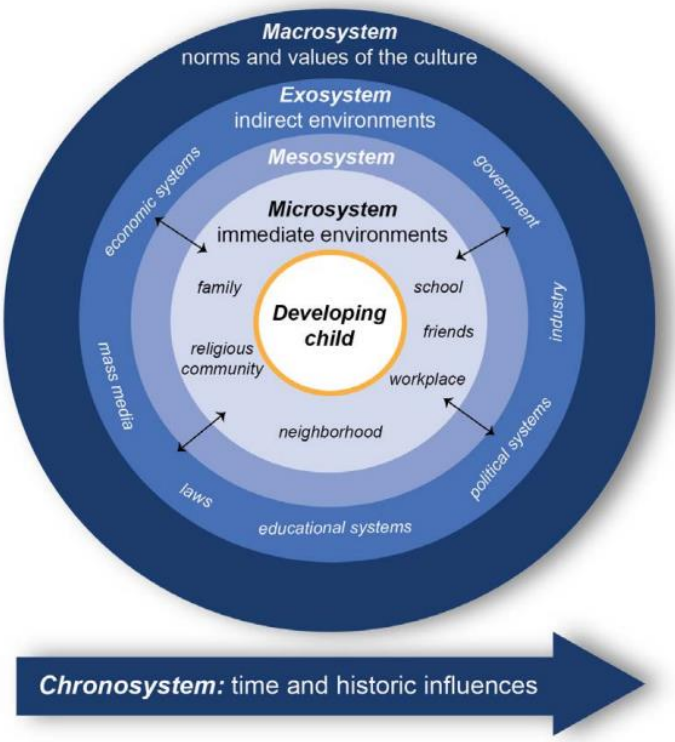
Theories and Models

In the last century Bronfenbrenner studied and wrote extensively on child development, and expressed concern that many studies were considering the child in isolation, and in laboratory style situations, rather than considering children in real life contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1998, 2006). He was keen to develop a model of child development that took into account bi-directional relationships that children had, and saw them as active participants in their development in the interplay they had with the wider world. Bronfenbrenner's 1979 model included biological aspects of development as well as socio-cultural aspects.

His original Ecological Model of Human Development (1979) considers 4 systems that interact in a child's development, starting with microsystems such as the family and familiar settings, such as school. The mesosystem involves communication and interactions between the elements of the microsystem, such as how close family members might interact with school or other systems close to the child. The exosystem refers to systems slightly more removed, such as policies that might impact on the child. The macrosystem shows the influence of more distant factors such as societal factors, values, and cultural views. Bronfenbrenner later added a fifth system, the chronosystem, to account for the influence of time, both in relation to the individual child (such as life transitions) but also time in relation to history (Bioecological Model of Human Development, 1998/2006).

Figure 2.

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Human Development (Nicholson & Dominguez-Pareto, 2020)



This model can be used to consider CCE, and the various factors that may come in to play to influence the likelihood of a child experiencing exploitation. Such factors may include attachment to caregivers (microsystems), being out of mainstream education or having additional learning needs that impact on education and from tension between carers and education staff (mesosystem), policies (exosystem) that mean the child may be moved to a PRU or be permanently excluded and so increase the risk of exploitation, and cultural views of current society about teenagers who are not in education, possibly labelled as 'trouble' and treated accordingly by the media (macrosystem). The chronosystem in this example may mean the time of transition in teenage years. The chronosystem could also mean the period of

time we find ourselves in, where young people have access to social media, which is largely not understood by caregivers, and is unregulated by government.

This early model suggests the importance of the environment and situations which the child or young person may find themselves in, both inside and outside of the family home. Firmin (2017, 2020) also saw the importance of this in her model of Contextual Safeguarding, which emphasised the role of the child's wider community of peers, neighbourhoods they frequent, the impact of social media, and their schools. Contextual Safeguarding considers influences on extra-familial harm that a child may experience (such as exploitation) and that young people's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine their relationships with their parents or carers (Firmin & Owens, 2021). This is of particular importance in adolescence, where the child typically spends increasing amounts of time away from their family, socialising and striving for independence. Firmin acknowledges that there will be some bi-directional effect between extra-familial contexts and the child's home. Experiencing or witnessing abuse in the home, for example, may lead to the child developing social norms that inform their social relationships, and may lead to them spending more time in the community, increasing their exposure to criminality and violence (Wikström et al., 2018). These experiences may also mean a reduction in the capacity of professionals and caregivers to keep them safe (Hickle & Shuker, 2023).

The Circles of Analysis systemic model (Barlow et al., 2021) evolved from The Systemic Investigation Protection and Prosecution Strategy (SIPPS) for CCE, developed by Haughey (2014, adapted by Barlow in 2017) as an approach to using evidence in cases of modern-day slavery. This was refined and formalised to include assessing risk for CSE (Barlow, 2017) and is used to map the complexity of child exploitation patterns of behaviour and harmful impact.

Circles of Analysis expands on contextual safeguarding to include the perpetrator. The model suggests that patterns emerge from the interactions between the child and their environment, the motivated exploiter and the environment, and the interactions between the targeted child and the motivated exploiter (Jennings, 2014). Barlow et al. (2021) stress the importance of considering the exploiters in these situations; those who participate in the recruitment, control, and exploitation of children and young people in a variety of contexts. The environment that the child and exploiter share over time may be a community space or may be an online platform. Barlow et al. (2021) propose there is no typical perpetrator of CCE, but they are diverse, with a range of motivations, and potentially multiple roles, such as enforcement or transportation. They add that these perpetrators may include the child's peers or relatives, and therefore these patterns and interactions can show as varying amounts of complexity. Interventions must target all three intersections (child, perpetrator, environment) and their relationships simultaneously, to be effective.

Whilst it was not developed specifically with children in mind, nor with regard to exploitation, the Power Threat Meaning Framework (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018), could also be useful in considering the exploitation of children. It was developed as an alternative to the medical model of psychiatric diagnosis to understand mental health. The model encourages consideration of how power (economic, relational, legal etc.) operated in someone's life, how this affected the individual (whether this threatened safety etc.), the meaning the individual made of this, and the responses to this and how they learned to survive. Rather than using a (likely permanent) diagnosis to make sense of the individual's life, the framework encourages the use of a story or formulation to knit these factors together, to make sense of difficulties, and to acknowledge the ever-changing nature of this narrative. The Power Threat Meaning Framework could therefore be a useful way to understand the life stories of young people

who have been exploited, to make sense of the ways they have learnt to cope with these threats, and to work with hope that things can and will change.

In Summary

CCE, as with other forms of child abuse and exploitation, is concealed, and victims are often hidden. Those that have been exploited do not necessarily recognise themselves as victims, particularly when they are still being exploited, when they have been sufficiently groomed, and when exploitation is normalised. There are currently no fixed variables that increase a child's vulnerability to or risk of exploitation. This makes it difficult to identify with any certainty which children are at increased risk. The effects of socioeconomic inequality, the criminogenic effects of public policy and legislation and the far-reaching consequences these have on outcomes for young people (Marmot et al., 2020) should also be considered.

Most published research appears to have investigated CCE from the narrowed down perspective of the county lines phenomena. The current research will build on this limited view by exploring CCE from a broader perspective, that of criminal exploitation in all its various forms. It will consider wider societal contexts and perpetrators, and not only the individual who may be at risk of, or has experienced, exploitation.

The published research and stories in the media relating to CCE and county lines has the potential to influence opinions and attitudes of professionals engaged in rehabilitative work with young offenders. The preconceived opinions and attitudes, otherwise known as stereotypes, may manifest in the way professionals identify and support criminally exploited youth. For example, screening interviews with offending youth may be hypersensitive to the drug trafficking and sexually abusive types compared to other, less recognised types of exploitation, for example, those involving thefts. Consequently, support and intervention

plans may be misguided. The current research sets out to qualitatively investigate the potential misconceptions in individuals who have frequent work contact with criminally exploited children, namely Youth Offending workers.

This research will explore the following questions -

1. How do Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) recognise or identify young people who may be being criminally exploited?

2. How do YOTs work with young people who may be being criminally exploited, and what are some of the challenges of this work?

Understanding the barriers to identification of the various forms of CCE, and misconceptions that professionals may hold whilst working with CCE, will lead to more effective work with these young people. It could, ultimately, help to reduce rates of victimisation and rates of re-offending.

Ethical Approval and Considerations

Ethical approval has been sought from the University of Birmingham Ethics Committee. This was submitted in November 2020. A response was received in April 2021, which suggested some minor adjustments. These were made and ethical approval was granted in November 2021.

Advice was given by University of Birmingham ethics team to investigate the possible need for ethical approval for the project to be granted by a Local Authority overseeing YOTs (e.g., Birmingham City Council). This was investigated with a small sample of potential Youth Offending Teams. Responses were received from three Local Authorities (in England and Wales) informing that the decision for staff to engage in the study is dependent on YOT managers and that the Authorities are not interested in reviewing the ethics of the current study.

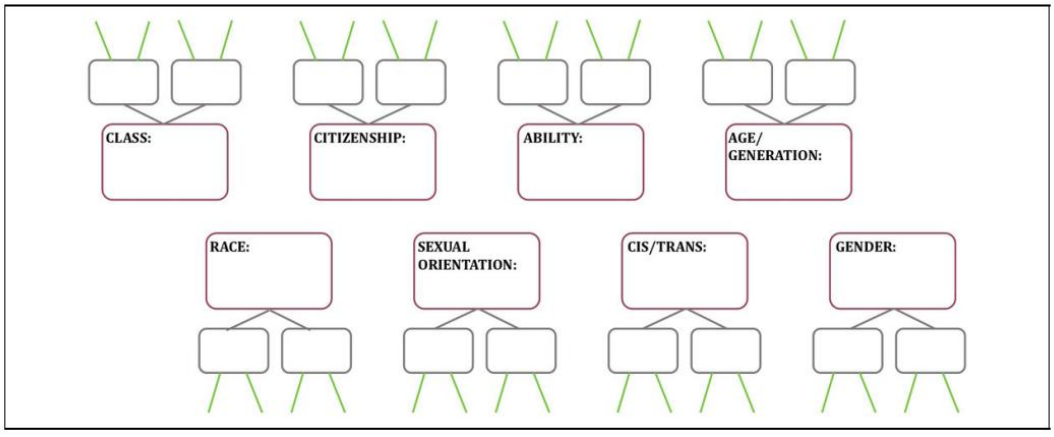
Method

Researcher Position and Reflexivity

Jacobson and Mustafa (2019) report that it is important to highlight researchers' motivations for conducting research and also how their background and experiences impact this motivation. It is also valuable to consider how the researcher views the world around them, as this will impact on how the research and the participants are approached. It is important to be aware of this, as it will affect the questions that are asked, how they are asked, and how data is interpreted. Finlay (2021) states that research is therefore jointly produced by the researcher and participant, dependent on their relationship. Another researcher asking the same questions would hear a different story. Finlay suggests that this process of developing self-awareness is vital for the integrity of qualitative research. Jacobson and Mustafa (2019) have developed a mapping tool to assist in this process.

Figure 3.

Positionality Map (Jacobson and Mustafa, 2019)



The researcher/interviewer in this study is a white British female from a working-class background, non-disabled and cisgender. The age of the interviewer may have impacted on the research, possibly in a favourable way as they were in the middle of the age range of

participants. The interviewer has, for over 15 years, worked in similar fields to the interviewees and so there may be some mutual understanding, but this could also have meant assumptions were wrongly made during the interviews. The interviewer's introduction as someone with practice experience may have influenced the participants, but this was felt to be important to share. The interviewer's experiences of working with young people who have been part of the youth offending system may also have impacted on the research. Any shared experiences of young people reporting feeling let down by services etc., had the potential to cloud the judgement of the researcher. Due to experience, there was also an expectation of hearing dismissive attitudes and stereotypes based on family history and gender. There were, however, advantages to having experience and prior understanding of the topics discussed, as participants could use acronyms and other short terms freely in their speech without the need to clarify and adapt their language as they might for someone with no experience in the field.

A reflexive journal was used throughout each stage of the data collection and analysis to collate the interviewer's thoughts and feelings, and to help identify any attitudes and reactions that may have an impact. In addition to this, the interviewer had supervision at least monthly, where this could be identified and explored further.

Sample

Youth Offending Team members who work closely with youth who are at risk of, or have been, criminally exploited were recruited via email. Contact was made with YOTs in South Wales, Birmingham, Bristol, and Solihull, due to having existing links with YOTs in those areas. When the rate of responses was low, the contact was extended to additional teams based in England and Wales, including London and surrounding areas. Follow up emails were sent when the sample numbers were low (less than 10), until a decision was made to proceed with existing number of participants due to time constraints. The size of the sample was therefore influenced by the availability of participants and resources (time).

All recruitment was carried out by email, which requested participants for a study on experiences of working with CCE. A detailed information and consent sheet was appended to the emails. Initially the emails were sent to Team Managers, and they were asked to cascade to their teams where possible. The primary researchers contact details were highlighted in the email and the forms. Individuals were invited to use the email to arrange an interview or ask for clarification on the study. The researcher responded to the participants promptly, and arrangements were made to meet through preferred online meeting platforms. Participants were also given the opportunity to take part by telephone, if they preferred.

In purposive samples participants are chosen according to common criteria. Participants in this study were adults working in professional roles within YOTs in England and Wales. They each had a current caseload of young people, some of which may have been criminally exploited. It was not essential for the case workers to have experience of working with CCE but it was expected that they have the responsibility of and possibly are trained to identify CCE. To be included the professionals needed to be on a minimum 20h/w contract and to have worked in the role for a minimum of one year. These requirements were stated in the consent/information sheet. No restrictions on age or gender were imposed.

The aim was to interview 10 to 12 professionals, as this number is reportedly a good sample size for Reflective Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Guest et al. (2006) found that data saturation had largely occurred by the analysis of twelve interviews. Braun and Clarke (2016) also suggest that appropriate sample size cannot be predicted, and that it should be approached with flexibility.

In total 9 people were interviewed for the research. The participants consisted of 6 females and 3 males, ranging in age from 20s to 60s. Four participants worked in England, and 5 in Wales. Five participants were based in cities, and four in towns. The length of time participants had worked for YOT ranged from 1.5 years to 21 years, and all participants

stated that they worked full time hours. All participants had been educated to at least university level, with all having degrees and four having post graduate qualifications.

There was no prior relationship with any of the participants, but as previously mentioned, there was some familiarity with some of the participants due to working in a similar field and area.

Procedure (including data collection & data analysis)

A consent form (see Appendix J) was sent along with the participant information sheet (Appendix I), and participants were asked to sign and return these prior to the interviews. The interviews were conducted online via Teams and started with introductions and checks that the participant could hear clearly and was in a place where they could speak openly. The participant was then given the opportunity to ask questions about the research prior to the interview being recorded. At the start of the recorded interview the consent form was read, and the participants were asked to verbally state that they understand the arrangements of the study and agree to take part and then state their name out loud. The verbal consent was recorded separately from the interview and stored safely in a different computer-based location. Participants were reminded that the interviews were recorded and about the withdrawal arrangements and given a unique code to identify themselves.

One to one semi-structured interviews were then conducted, consisting of open-ended questions with prompts if necessary. As previously mentioned, these questions have been discussed with tutors from the University of Birmingham, and with managers from the Youth Justice Service, to check that they are appropriate and are asked in a suitable format.

Interviews were considered the most suitable method of gathering the data, as they allowed participants to speak freely about their experiences, in as little or as much depth as they liked. Interviews also allowed prompting and clarification if needed. Face to face

interviews were initially considered, as this would allow a further element of familiarity and for body language to be observed. However, given the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, it was safer to conduct the interviews by telephone or online video call. This also meant more freedom with appointment times and that participants from different locations could be interviewed more easily.

The researcher was based at their home for the interviews, with nobody else present. The YOT participants were either at work or home, wherever they felt most comfortable. The information sheet advised the participants to choose a private location for the interview, to prevent anyone overhearing the conversation. As some Covid-19 restrictions were still in place during this time, most participants chose to be interviewed while they were working from home. By the time the interviews took place, most employees of YOTs were comfortable with video calls, as these had been used over the preceding year on a daily or weekly basis for team meetings, and for contact with young people on their caseload.

The participant information sheet informed about the basics of the study, including a generic aim and nature of the questions asked. This was to prevent participant bias, whereby participants purposefully provide a pattern of responses that they think is best to achieve a desirable outcome. This can be particularly pertinent when participants think their professionalism is potentially being judged. To reduce the likelihood of bias the forms clearly stated that the information obtained was governed by a confidentiality agreement.

At the end of the interview (schedule can be found in Appendix K), participants were given the opportunity to ask any further questions. Following the end of the meeting, an email with a debrief sheet (see Appendix L) attached was sent to the participant. The debrief included more details about the study, and information about psychological support available should they need it.

Due to the length of the early interviews, the interview schedule was amended. Questions that were deemed more important for the research question were highlighted, so that these were prioritised. The remaining questions could be asked if time allowed, but it was often the case that the information was provided during the answers to other questions.

Interviews took place between December 2021 and September 2022, and were recorded using an encrypted Dictaphone provided by the University of Birmingham. Interviews ranged in length from 40 minutes to one hour and 45 minutes, with a mean time of 60 minutes. Notes were made during and immediately after each interview, capturing topics from the interview and views that the participant seemed to express more passionately. Reflections of the interview as a whole were also noted.

It was made known that there would be no consequences for the participant if they wished to withdraw from the study. If they chose to withdraw during the allotted timeframe, then their data would be identified and discarded from the study by deletion of relevant files from the secure storage.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, although care was taken to not type any identifiable information. An adapted version of the Jefferson Transcription System (Jefferson, 2004) was used for notation in the transcript. Data were analysed and manipulated within a secure environment, on the researcher's computer. Due to the nature of the research question, the information collected from the interviews, and the number of participants, it was decided that Reflective Thematic Analysis (RTA) would best suit the study. RTA gives the user a degree of flexibility in approach and theoretical framework, and can capture people's experiences and views, practices, and/or rules and norms that govern practice. The goal is not to analyse objectively and to remove bias, but rather to capture subjectivity and experience as a tool to be used. This analysis allows the relationship between the experiences, values, and

assumptions of both the participant and the interviewer to influence one another, and accepts that this two-way conversation would influence the way in which the questions were asked, and the how the data were interpreted. Both semantic and latent meanings would be captured.

Analysis

According to Braun and Clarke (2022) there are six phases to RTA: (1) becoming familiar with the data and writing familiarisation notes; (2) generating data codes; (3) generating initial themes from the coded and collated data; (4) developing and reviewing the themes; (5) refining, defining and naming the themes; and (6) writing up. With the first phase (familiarisation with the data), once all interviews were conducted and transcribed, all transcripts were re-read to become familiar with them as a data set. Potential meanings and patterns were considered as they were read, and reflective notes were also made as the process progressed.

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that analysis in RTA is not linear, and that there should be movement in both directions between the six phases. There was considerable movement between the next phases, of developing codes and themes, and reviewing and refining the themes that were developed. Themes were developed from across the dataset and codes relating to them were found in the interviews of more than one participant. In reviewing the initial potential themes, some themes were aggregated together. The research questions were also considered as part of this process.

Results

The purpose of this section is to convey the narrative of participants' experiences of CCE, with particular emphasis on how they identify and work with young people who have been exploited in this way. The reflexive thematic analysis led to the development of seven themes, and five subthemes.

Table 4: Summary of Themes and Subthemes Developed from Interviews

Themes	Subthemes
1 Professional curiosity	
2 Relationship building	Building relationships with young people Building relationships with peers and colleagues
3 The assurance from formal assessment, guidance, and frameworks	
4 Multi-agency working towards shared goals	
5 Barriers between professionals and young people	Internal barriers Relational barriers No safe place
6 Bureaucracy helps and hinders	
7 Strategies employed by exploiters	

Whilst the results have been divided into these themes and subthemes, and relevant quotes shared, there is at times some overlap between the themes. In these instances, the quotes have been used in the sections related to themes they were felt to best fit.

Professional curiosity

A number of the practitioners shared their views around professional curiosity. Many said that they felt it was an integral part of their job to 'see below the surface' and the usefulness of acting on a 'gut feeling'. They felt that being curious often led to more information being discovered, but also to young people feeling that they were taking an interest in them, by asking questions about them and not just about the behaviour of concern. Using this as a tactic, acting as though they did not know what a young person was talking about, could often elicit more information from them.

> We need to go back to having curious professionals. It feels like people used to be more curious about things but now they just don't have the time. They seem to be waiting for the concrete evidence or the young person to tell them, but often the young people can't tell them because the young people don't recognise that they are being exploited themselves" (Participant 1)

> He's talking about wanting to go on holiday with the boys, and get a car, I'm asking him how he's going to pay for all these things and he's being vague. I don't know if he genuinely doesn't have much concept of money, or it's more along the lines of someone's going to give it to him, so it's just keeping an eye on it… (Participant 8)

Whilst formal training can tell practitioners obvious indicators (unexplained money, expensive clothes, getting taxi's and ubers, staying in hotels), the benefits of spotting what is missing, not just what is present, was also discussed. It was felt to be a 'professional responsibility' to notice such things. This was suggested to help identify vulnerabilities, such as social isolation, not naming friends, and being vague with answers.

> They (exploiters) see a vulnerability in that child and it could be the sense of belonging for children who haven't got a friendship group or aren't part of something (Participant 5)

> All the children that I've worked with on an NRM are all very vague about their whereabouts, vague about what they are doing, what they are up to, who they are with… (Participant 7)

Relationship building

Every participant spoke about the importance of developing relationships with others and how this benefited their work in multiple ways. All participants seemed to value these relationships. They spoke of the need to build trusting relationships with two groups of people, those on their caseloads and those they worked alongside.

Subtheme: Building relationships with young people

Devoting time and energy to building relationships with young people was said to have underpinned and enhanced the work they did with them, often by "finding small ways to connect" (Participant 7). Within this, practitioners spoke of good communication, honesty, trust, and authenticity. It was acknowledged that other factors, such as time and caseloads could impact on relationship building, but a desire to "get back to old fashioned ways… of getting to know the child" was expressed instead of focusing on the crime or behaviour they displayed; thus, working from the perspective of "child first".

> You build the relationship with the young people before you try to modify their behaviour, before they trust you, respect you. It takes time (Participant 9)

> …help them look forward and giving them hope for the future because they might not see a way out … and being consistent with them even though they'll try to push you away (Participant 7)

Relationship building helped with both assessment and identification of CCE, but also with interventions and helping them to make a change in their life. This was particularly important when the person was faced with negative labels and stereotypes, and their criminal/ exploitative behaviour might be the only time they feel good at something.

> You praise these young men and these young women and you can just see a sort of change in their personality. You see courage, positive affirmations, all that sort of stuff. But we don't seem to have any of that, it's all sort of like, every time a young person puts on the TV, you know, young people are out here running amok killing people…" (Participant 3)

Subtheme: Building relationships with peers and colleagues

Building relationships with peers and colleagues was also felt to be important, as it was felt to be beneficial in accessing support from colleagues, but also in multi-agency working.

> Case reflection with colleagues is really helpful, you know, reflecting on different circumstances and experiences of the complex cases… it helps to have that togetherness in the team. People can, you know, lean on each other and share their knowledge, which is really helpful (Participant2)

> I think it's (CCE) quite difficult to recognise, if you don't know what you're looking for, and I don't think I'm the most experienced person at doing that. So I looked at colleagues that had been there longer than me or had more experience with this (Participant 9)

The assurance from formal assessment, guidance, and frameworks

Not every team had formal specific assessment tools for assessing CCE, but these were felt to be useful where they were accessible.

> …they went in and sort of got away from that and developed their own toolkit. And that's been redeveloped a little bit as well. So yeah, … That's a sort of progress… The new toolkit I think is really good (Participant 6)

Also useful was the ability to use procedures such as (multi-agency) strategy meetings, safeguarding procedures, and panels.

> The other things we do to kind of support is we have panels… any cases where they show high vulnerability for safety and well-being or risk of serious harm … we have to go through, you know, the action plans and case formulations that we've identified for that young person … and with their wealth of experience they can tell us what should be happening and what we can do (Participant 2)

There was also an acknowledgement that these were sometimes used as a way of preventing blame, or protecting oneself, by deferring and referring on. The majority of respondents mentioned that they had access to toolkits and/or guidance. Sometimes, however, these tools were felt to be out of date by the time they were used, or not always capturing the risk of some young people who may present differently.

> Services are very crisis led, they use screening tools and cut-off points and somebody might be being exploited but might not reach their criteria (Participant 1)

> I see the CCE toolkit and … I read it and it's almost like as if that child and this CCE are existing in a vacuum, and they don't. CCE does not exist in a vacuum (Participant 7)

There seemed to be a lack of consistency in screening and assessment tools, and some interviewees mentioned that young people sometimes needed to be referred to external agencies or third sector organisations to be assessed. Overall, it seemed that although there

were some inconsistencies between different areas of England and Wales, that formal guidance was something that could be relied upon in times of increased anxiety or pressure, a way of sharing responsibility.

Multi-agency working towards shared goals

There were times that multi-agency working did not work as smoothly as the participants would have liked, particularly where confidentiality may cause information not to be shared, or where participants felt excluded from some processes. Sometimes participants felt they were not trusted with pieces of information, or that they needed more information to ensure they could carry out safeguarding duties, as they could not always trust that these would be done sufficiently by other agencies.

Overall, it seemed that multi-agency working was valued, particularly where the other services had shared goals and values, such as children's services. During multi-agency meetings additional information was often shared, when it was felt "protecting children is a shared goal". At times YOT practitioners may be more aware, or more experienced with CCE, and in these cases they felt it important to share knowledge and empower other agencies for the benefit of the wider community.

> I'm an advocate of multiagency working because that's the point isn't it, we need to meet young people's needs and we haven't all got the right answers, the right resources… (Participant 4).

Some spoke of the additional flexibility and resources that could be employed by non-statutory services, and how these services could complement the work carried out by YOTs, or could act in cases where statutory services were not able.

> …they've got a little bit more leeway, they don't have to fit in the confines that we have to in statutory services. So, they can be a bit more flexible… (Participant 4)

There was a feeling from some participants that sometimes other agencies appeared to have competing goals, such as punishing or excluding young people "the people that are on the streets are the police and ASB and all that, they are not necessarily seeing it from the same lens" (Participant 4). This could impact negatively on the young person, pushing them further into criminal behaviour and increasing the risk of criminal exploitation.

> When young people go to PRU's, they are more likely to be criminally exploited because there is more of the pro-criminal identity and people that surfaced within that environment, and for me if somebody goes to a PRU it's very hard to deter them from that way of life, of getting involved in substance misuse, of getting involved in gangs and negative peer associations. Getting involved in carrying weapons, and I've seen that a lot, when they go to pupil referral units (Participant 2).

When multi-agency working went well, there was a feeling of shared responsibility, of people piecing together a jigsaw, and of support from the networks of other professionals working towards the same goals of supporting and protecting children and young people.

Some of this came from retaining connections with previous places of work, but also with making an effort with colleagues from other agencies. This included building relationships with other professionals across agencies, and working towards shared goals.

> I think it's the relationship we've got … the information sharing is brilliant, we've all got a really good relationship … so when you sit in a strat (strategy meeting) we're on first name terms because we know each other (Participant 6)

> …if we had a risk management meeting and there was information that came from other agencies, we would then say well is this child being exploited? Can X and Y do an NRM? Can we refer to (third sector agency)? (Participant 4)

One area where it was felt there was less communication was with agencies involved in finding and dealing with adult perpetrators. Many participants felt that they were unaware of government or police strategies for this, and felt it too should be a shared goal to further protect young people.

> I don't know how much is being done to pursue the perpetrators of this kind of behaviour…I'm wondering how much is done to pursue the people responsible for this exploitation, and I'd like to see that being taken extremely seriously, because that would help the young people I work with (Participant 9)

> …more work needs to be done with the exploiters and… we could do more to tackle those people that are exploiting children, like go higher up the chain. Prevent exploitation that way (Participant 5)

More information sharing about what agencies working with adult perpetrators do might help those working with children to see the whole picture.

Barriers between professionals and young people

The theme of barriers was discussed in a number of different ways, and in relation to a number of different contexts. There were barriers related to the YOT workers sense of self, those related to the relationship between the worker and young person and beliefs about how that should be. Thirdly, there were barriers that were surrounding the young person, that might make it particularly difficult for them to engage with services.

Subtheme: internal barriers

The need to be aware of unconscious bias was felt to be important, as was accepting their limitations and to not fear imperfection. It was felt that "professional vanity" could sometimes act as a barrier when working with young people in this area.

> Lots of people today seem to be fearful of saying the wrong thing or getting into trouble, having an opinion that doesn't quite fit the mould, but sometimes it might be that they've picked up on something other people haven't (Participant 1)

Subtheme: Relational barriers

Many of the participants spoke of overcoming barriers between them and the young people they work with, accepting their differences "we're adults, we see the world differently", but using that as a mechanism to open up dialogue, for example. Professionals' expectations were sometimes felt to be unrealistic, and it was important to work to manage and reduce risk rather than try to eliminate it.

> We have to accept that there is a level of risk that has to be managed with teenagers, and generally with CCE (Participant 7)

Language could often be a barrier, in terms of words and phrases that were often used in work settings, that were not child friendly or that could raise anxiety levels for young people. Many people spoke about young people not wanting to be seen as 'victims' or 'exploited' as those terms made them feel weak and/or vulnerable. Some language used could also be considered victim blaming, or of indicating a gendered response that was deemed unfair and unjust.

> …when professionals didn't really know a lot, the language that was being used was really bad. The way they described children … It was terrible when you think back. That kind of language takes the emphasis away from the child being a victim (Participant 5)

Those who have been criminally exploited are often deemed 'difficult to work with', Being able to take time, to work slowly, and to be consistent and persistent were offered as

methods of engaging young people and breaking down some of those barriers in the relationship.

> Time and trust …Probably all of my cases with teenagers but more specifically with my cases of CCE you can spend the first two or three months arguing, they say they aren't doing it (engaging) … you need that consistency and that predictability and reliability, you need to turn up when you say you will (Participant 7)

There is some overlap between these two subthemes. Some professionals see these barriers in the relationship building as a challenge, and develop a sense of pride when they are able to engage them. This then impacts favourably on the worker's view of themselves and their ability.

> I'm good at it ((laugh)) I persist, and I persist, and I try… It's that process of trying to break barriers down very slowly… I think I'm pretty good at it. I try my best. I have been shut off a few times but, rarely. But then that's a challenge, I love it. The bigger the challenge the better (Participant 6)

Subtheme: no safe place

Within this theme of barriers, there seemed to be a third subtheme of many young people not being safe in places where they typically should, such as home and school. It was felt that education settings are "meant to be a place of safety" and should be a place where many professionals have their eyes on a young person. Education was felt to be "key, permanent exclusion is not the answer". It was acknowledged that family could be a protective factor, but were often powerless against exploiters, and that for some young people their home was also a "hostile environment". Where exploitation was carried out by family members, there was less of a response by services, possibly due to the decreased risk of harm of serious violence.

> …they might find it difficult to trust you. Because of their own experiences. They might find it difficult to trust or difficult to feel safe because of some of those experiences (Participant 5)

No safe place was felt to be a barrier to working effectively with young people, as without safety it was difficult to focus on anything else of any meaning.

> …on top of that (CCE) they become homeless and there's no accommodation for them, so one day you literally pick them up off the street… so you've got CCE concerns, accommodation concerns, homeless, drunk, incidents of self-harm to the point of ligatures and cutting, they've got a child who is subject to care proceedings that they can't see… So this CCE does not exist in a vacuum, the homelessness doesn't exist within a vacuum, the poor family relationship, and substance misuse, mental health, …they all rolled into one very complex and unpredictable life. If you view that entire life, can you imagine if you are sat on the side of the pavement… you cry every day (Participant 7)

It was shared that it could feel futile to try to work with a child on elements of their criminal behaviour, as directed, when the child was facing homelessness or other, more critical matters. This is evidenced by many trauma informed models of working, where physical and emotional safety should be established before any other interventions are considered. Again, it is acknowledged that their may be some overlap and interplay between these three subthemes. They are likely to impact on each other.

Bureaucracy helps and hinders

This theme encompassed national issues around funding, government cuts to services, and the increased amount of paperwork that was expected of them.

> The youth centres have shut down, youth clubs shut down … so it's almost like you're taking away more and more and more (Participant 3)

Some of the participants felt reassured by the procedures and administrative tools in place, and felt this largely as supportive in nature.

> …we have to go through the action plans and case formulations that we've identified for that young person that we're meant to be working towards and they review it and with their wealth of experience they can tell us what should be happening and what we can do (Participant 2)

> Having those platforms and panels is really helpful to the role and how I come to some of the decisions I come to (Participant 2)

> …there's different sections which ask you about concerns in regard to criminal exploitation, concerns regard to sexual exploitation, and then throughout the assessment it basically asks the same questions, so it just makes you think of it at different times (Participant 3)

Participants also spoke of unfair categories, such as age, and screening tools that relied on scores, that might prevent a child from accessing services.

> The other hindrance as well, going back to that question, is when a young person turns 18, whether they are developmentally 18 or not, I honestly don't know where the switch is on the day of their birth, you know, that they are automatically not vulnerable anymore, but you can't do anything. Once they turn 18, all, everything goes out of the window. And actually, that young person is probably even more vulnerable at that point because no one can do anything (Participant 4)

> I don't think they work as well as they should because I've also had experience of a young person potentially criminally exploited and there was an NRM put forward for him, however he went to court for offences and was sentenced … without the NRM being seen through, so I was trying to push the case that … his outcome may have been different if the results of the NRM were known before the court case… that was a system that was meant to help but almost hindered him because it took so long to come to fruition that he did his sentence (Participant 9).

> I think one of the biggest blockages, and I'm not even saying it's from youth offending service, I think it's more from like a government or… It's the National Referral Mechanism. I remember I did one and I didn't get a response for about four months. What kept happening was the young man kept going back to court and it was like has the NRM come through and I was like nope, so we'll adjourn for another month… the judges are now saying that just because you've had say a positive NRM, which says you have been criminally exploited, they don't have to take that into account (Participant 3)

Whilst they acknowledged that sometimes official procedures and paperwork could feel supportive and reassuring, it was more strongly felt that administration could take time away from the young person on their caseload.

> …that can be a challenge within itself, balancing the admin and the interventions. At times you can feel that you're lost in the admin but then you want to make time for the young person. So it's about getting that balance right … there is a lot of admin … that's definitely a challenge (Participant 2).

Many practitioners reported working over their contracted hours in order to try to meet the demands of both their organisation and their cases.

Strategies employed by exploiters

Finally, there was a theme around the way those exploiting others worked, and how this was something to always be expected, but also out of the control of the practitioners. Exploiters often had more knowledge and power over the young person. There were also considerations given to more powerful exploiters and organisations using a business model in their exploitation.

> …these are organised criminal groups, these are organised sophisticated adults, they know what they're doing, and this is a business, they are out for money (Participant 7)

It was felt that the exploiters could adapt more quickly than services to new situations such as the covid-19 pandemic.

> …obviously a lot of young people were kind of grounded to their home area, a lot of things moved online, a lot of things were being done through social media (Participant 9)

> I think that's the issue, isn't it? Like the tendrils go all over the place… it's almost like it's something you don't see, we've got brambles in our garden, you can dig and dig up a root ball, but it will sprout somewhere else, and it's a bit like that (Participant 4)

It was also shared that exploiters could see vulnerabilities in young people that professionals may miss, and services may not be able to respond to. This was exacerbated by themes previously mentioned such as the young person not meeting thresholds for services.

> We need to accept that we are behind the curve, that when we talk about children at risk of exploitation the grooming process has probably already begun (Participant 7)

This was particularly the case when exploiters used novel ways to exploit young people, such as using activities which on the surface may appear to be 'legitimate' such as

part time jobs or sporting tournaments. This theme, along with the theme of bureaucracy, seemed to lead to feelings of great frustration from the participants.

When considering the interviews as a whole, there are a few points worth noting. The way CCE was defined by practitioners varied greatly, as it does in the literature. Although participants recognised that criminal exploitation could happen to any gender, the use of the pronouns him/his/he were used significantly more in the responses. Similarly, there was a recognition of various types of criminal exploitation, and respondents described less common forms of exploitation that they have been aware of. Despite this, the most common forms of CCE raised in responses was drug dealing, followed by transporting drugs and carrying weapons. Respondents indicated, however, that county lines was seen very little, if at all, in their caseloads. They felt that the term was overused and often clouded judgements and responses of other agencies.

There was a lack of consistency in regard to screening and assessment tools, and some young people are referred to external agencies to be assessed. Where there are screening tools, it was unclear how these risk factors have been identified and whether this was evidence based on CCE, or evidence of other forms of abuse and exploitation.

All respondents valued building relationships, investing time, and working with the individual. Respondents also felt constrained by a lack of time, the ability to be flexible and respond to individual needs, and have criticised the lack of community resources for young people.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to explore the experiences of YOT practitioners when working with young people who have experienced, or at risk of Child Criminal Exploitation. Two key research questions guided the study:

1. How do Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) recognise or identify young people who may be being criminally exploited?

2. How do YOTs work with young people who may be being criminally exploited, and what are some of the challenges of this work?

Those interviewed worked in Youth Offending Teams in both England and Wales, across both towns and cities. This helped to get varied views and build an understanding of child criminal exploitation across different areas. Seven themes, and five subthemes, were uncovered during analysis of the data. It was felt important to show professional curiosity, to ask additional questions, and take an interest in young people's lives. This also linked in with the importance of relationship building, to develop trust both with young people on their case load, but also with their colleagues. Assessment tools for CCE, and the guidance they received from more experienced colleagues and managers helped to feel shared responsibility for the risk involved in these cases, as well as reducing worry in managing complex cases.

Multi-agency working was largely seen as beneficial, however there was some acknowledgement of the difficulties this could bring, particularly when working across geographical areas and different computer systems. Sharing the goals of protecting children and young people meant information and resources could be shared, leading to better outcomes. The nature of CCE is that it is often hidden, and that young people are told not to trust professionals, and know that they could be prosecuted if they are honest about what is happening in their lives. This means that the relationships with YOT workers have barriers

from the start. An added barrier is that these children and young people often have other more critical factors at play, such as homelessness, mental health difficulties, or experiences of abuse. They are likely to have 'no safe place', particularly if they do not attend mainstream school, and have difficult or abusive relationships with their parents, or are in the care system.

Vicarious trauma and the practitioners own mental health and wellbeing were seen very much as an afterthought, if they were considered at all. It is possible however that compassion fatigue may also act as a barrier between professionals and the young people they work with.

Respondents also spoke about bureaucracy that was put in place to help, but could at times hinder their relationship with the young person and could hinder the availability of resources and support for the young person. Lastly, outside of the control and influence of YOT practitioners was the motivation and strategies of the exploiters themselves. It was felt that they often had more time, more resources, and could respond quicker than the professionals that were trying to extricate young people from exploitation. These themes showed that there are formal and informal ways of identifying those who have been criminally exploited. A blend of both approaches is beneficial, as over-reliance on one or the other may mean that some young people fall through the gaps and are not recognised as being exploited. The ways in which these young people were worked with related to both the policies and direction of government and local authorities, but also personal values and skills that helped workers to relate to the young people and increase the effectiveness of interventions. There was some frustration around this, however, with many people expressing that they would like to be able to do more, and they would like other services and agencies to support this work. The ways in which exploiters themselves operated was out of the control

and influence of the YOT practitioners, and many expressed that they were unaware of how this was being tackled by police and government agencies.

When considering previous research in this, and related areas, there are some similar findings. Weston and Mythen (2021) found that whilst practitioners were able to formally verbalise their understanding of CSE and its risk factors, referring to policy and guidance, they regularly constructed the risks associated through informal ways in practice. This study echoes those findings in a CCE context. Whilst risk factors and formal guidance were mentioned, informal ways were also valued. There may be some disconnect here between those who write policies and guidance, and those who work directly in the field. As more than one respondent suggested, there are risk factors that are currently unknown, but may be known about 6 months from now. Practitioners are likely to see those dynamic risk factors and indicators much sooner than research can study and disseminate findings. This would be particularly the case where there may be local indicators that are not found nationally.

The respondents in this study voiced opinions that agreed with The Missing People report (2019), which recommended that the Government and exploitation programmes think about the wider issues of those who go missing and are being exploited. They expressed the harm that could be done by 'working in silos' and by not considering wider factors, the whole person, or even the whole family and system. The interviews in this study also made links between CCE and CSE, and the impact of these on a young person's mental health and wellbeing.

Bovarnick (2010) found a split in the views of professionals working with trafficked young people, between those who had a 'child-centred' approach (these children need protection) and those with an 'immigration-centred' (these children are abusing the system). The current study found a similar split in those who favoured a child-centred focus and those

who favoured a focus on tools and policies, though not to the same extent. Professionals in this study commented that these more extreme attitudes of children and young people abusing the system were seen in the views of others, outside of their teams. They also commented on the language that was used, acknowledging that this had improved greatly, but often suggested that the young people were responsible for their exploitation and abuse. This victim blaming language was consistent with findings in existing literature (Philips, 2019).

Unmet needs were talked about by almost all respondents in this study. This reinforces the findings of Walsh et al. (2011), who reported on the considerable mental health needs that often go unmet in those young people who offend or are at risk of offending. Consistent with the findings within this study, practitioners consistently expressed that a trusted relationship is key to any successful engagement with this group, and communication between child and worker is vital to manage risk effectively (Walsh, 2011). Furthermore, the provision of services needs to be accessible, confidential and delivered in a non-judgmental way (Walsh et al., 2011; Macdonald, 2006). Young people in contact with the Youth Offending Teams value relationships with professionals that feel personal and where the same person is available to them over a reasonable period of time. Practitioners in this study spoke about consistency and reliability as necessary for building trust.

The respondents in this study suggested that there has been improvement in how CCE is responded to, and the knowledge and resources they feel they have to address it. In 2020 the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel expressed concern that in the local authorities involved in their study, effective practice was often not known about and not widely used, and that even in cases where risk of criminal exploitation is identified, practitioners often do not know how to help the young people. The findings of this study did not support Shaw and Greenhow (2020), that professionals felt they did not have the knowledge or resources to recognise and respond to CCE. This could be as a consequence of the respondents in this

study volunteering to be interviewed because they felt particularly knowledgeable and confident in this field. This study was, however, in agreement with Setter and Baker (2018), that nationwide procedures to identify and support victims, such as the National Referral Mechanism, are commonly underused or often ineffective.

The Ecological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is a helpful framework to contextualise the interviews in this study. Participants mentioned in their interviews many factors that could be mapped on to the systems in the model. Attachment to caregivers, relationships with family, and a hostile home environment were mentioned in the interviews, potentially refer to Bronfenbrenners's microsystems. Being out of mainstream education, particularly if educated through a Pupil Referral Unit, was talked about extensively, suggesting additional learning or behavioural needs that impact on education and possible tension between those involved in the care of the young people and education staff (mesosystem). These were particularly pertinent to the themes of 'no safe place' found in the analysis of the interviews.

Government and local authority policies, frameworks, and guidance was referred to as a possible help but also a hinderance (exosystem) which could decrease or increase the risk of exploitation depending on how they applied to the young person and the context. Cultural views of current society about teenagers labelled as 'trouble' and misrepresented in the media could be considered as part of the model's macrosystem. This was discussed in the theme of relationship building, as some practitioners felt they had to compensate for this and work harder to find and celebrate the strengths and qualities of the young people they worked with. The advancement of technology and the part it plays in exploitation currently was mentioned in the theme of strategies of exploiters. This is in line with Bronfenbrenners's chronosystem, the time of transition in teenage years and the period of time we find ourselves in.

The Circles of Analysis systemic model by Barlow et al. (2021) suggested that interactions between children and their environment were not sufficient to understand exploitation, and that interactions between the child and exploiter, and exploiter and environment, should also be taken into account. The strategies and motivations of the exploiters surfaced as a theme and were mentioned as important by every participant interviewed. Overwhelmingly, participants in this study agreed that it is important to consider in these situations those who participate in the recruitment, control, and exploitation of children and young people in a variety of contexts. Many participants mentioned that they were unaware of what was being done to target perpetrators, particularly adult perpetrators, as they were only aware of what was being done in relation to children and young people. It was felt that if those 'higher up the chain' could be targeted it may be possible to prevent some of the exploitation from occurring. Barlow et al. (2021) suggest that interventions must target all three intersections and relationships simultaneously to be effective. Data from this study would appear to agree, as it is largely felt that when a child is removed from the exploitation another child takes their place.

The Power Threat Meaning Framework (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018) could be a useful way for academics and practitioners to consider child exploitation. Although this would be used outside of the mental health field it was initially written for, there are similar, sometimes permanent, labels used in the fields of youth justice and exploitation. Working with the child or young person to establish how power has operated in their life, and conversations about the different types of power that are relevant to each person's story, could help to develop insight for both practitioners and young people. Discussing how they have made sense of their experiences could help to form a collaborative understanding and a much fuller picture, away from the labels of criminal, victim, and/or perpetrator. Understanding mental health difficulties, antisocial or criminal behaviours, and maladaptive coping strategies and

understandable responses to threats that helped the young person to survive could remove some of the stigma associated with the labels, and could help to build better relationships between professionals and the young people they are working with.

Limitations

This study provides a thematic representation of the experiences of YOT practitioners who work with CCE. This new knowledge adds to our understanding CCE, from the people who are tasked with identifying and working with it. CCE is a relatively new phenomenon, and as such research on the topic is not extensive. The sample for this qualitative study was restricted to full time YOT workers who are involved in direct work, in the UK. There were limitations from the sample, as participants volunteered to take part and as such may have been more confident in the area of CCE, or had a particular interest. This sample, therefore, may not be representative of YOT workers as a whole. Efforts were taken to recruit participants from England and Wales, and from towns and cities, to broaden the geographical characteristics as much as possible. The data highlighted inconsistencies across different areas, which are to be expected, but also may limit the generalisability of the findings.

Future research may wish to broaden the sample size and focus more on either identification or intervention. Further research may also wish to consider the views of young people who have been criminally exploited, and the interventions that were available to them.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to gain a better understanding of the experience of YOT workers in relation to their work in CCE. YOT workers in this study were keen to learn as much as possible about CCE, in order to better serve the children and young people they work with, and to improve their practice. This study may be used to inform practitioners working in youth justice, sharing evidence of good practice, and to highlight where there may be gaps in knowledge that can be addressed through training or peer support.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Critique of a Psychometric Assessment

Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children (TSCC)

John Briere (1996)

Introduction

Children and young people often experience trauma, as both one off events and ongoing events such as abuse and exploitation. The types of young people known to youth justice are said to have changed in recent years, due to diverting first time offenders and those with lower levels of need. This means that there is now a disproportionate level of young people presenting with more complex needs, including ACEs and trauma (Youth Justice Board, 2020a). Trauma was also found to be a risk factor for CSE and CCE, as shown in a previous chapter (Hallett et al., 2019; Hurley & Boulton, 2020; Kloess et al., 2017; Radcliffe et al., 2020; Roy et al., 2020).

Psychological trauma can be defined as "a circumstance in which an event overwhelms or exceeds a person's capacity to protect his or her psychic wellbeing and integrity" (Cloitre et al., 2006, p.3). Therefore, both the event and the individual's personality (or capacity at that time) are factors that influence the level of trauma experienced. There is a complexity to understanding this, which involves subjective aspects of the individual's response to the characteristics of the traumatic event (Koenen et al., 2010). Depending on their age and stage of development, children and young people may be less likely to understand the event, less able to avoid or escape the event. They, therefore, have less capacity to protect themselves from the impact of the trauma. A number of behavioural and emotional symptoms may characterise their presentation and they are likely to need additional support to make sense of, process, and heal from their experiences. Taking a trauma-informed approach by the screening and assessment of children and their families exposed to potentially traumatic events can identify those most in need of services. This in turn can reduce the economic burden that can be found throughout families, communities, and mental and physical health services (Donisch et al., 2021).

There are a variety of measures designed to assess symptoms of trauma in children. Some of these consider the symptoms that are noticed by adults involved in their care and some, such as the Child Traum Questionnaire (CTQ, Bernstein et al., 1994) are self-report measures that are completed retrospectively as an adult. The Child Children's Impact of Traumatic Events Scale - Revised (CITES-R, Wolfe et al., 1991) for example, focusses on the impact of child sexual abuse, rather than trauma in a broader sense. This review examines the Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children (TSCC) by Briere (1996). This was chosen for its consideration of trauma symptoms experienced at the time of completion, measuring impact and possible changes in this due to additional trauma or intervention. It was also chosen due to it being a self-report measure, and therefore able to be completed by the person experiencing trauma symptoms and by those who do not have adequate carers. Its scientific properties, its applicability to therapeutic settings, and its research uses will be explored.

Overview of the Tool

Testing Procedure

The TSCC is a measure designed to assess multiple dimensions of trauma-related symptoms in children aged eight to sixteen years who have experienced potentially stressful events, including sexual abuse. Briere (1996) considered commonly identified and theoretically important aspects of trauma and devised a measure consisting of 54 items across six clinical scales: Anxiety, Depression, Anger, Posttraumatic Stress, Dissociation (with subscales of Overt Dissociation and Fantasy Dissociation), and Sexual Concerns (with subscales of Sexual Preoccupation and Sexual Distress). The TSCC also contains two scales to detect over-responding (Hyperresponse) and under-responding (Underresponse).

An alternative version of the TSCC, the TSCC-A is only 44 items and does not refer to sexual issues (Briere, 1996). It is recommended that the full TSCC is used, unless there are reasons that would suggest a measure without sexual items would be more appropriate.

Within the measure, as previously mentioned, the validity scales measure Underresponse (UND) and Hyperresponse (HYP). High scores (above the cut-off point) on the Underresponse scale would suggest a tendency toward denial, or a need to appear remarkably symptom-free. High scores on the Hyperresponse scale would suggest a need to appear markedly symptomatic, or possibly the child being in a state where they are overwhelmed by traumatic stress (as stated in the manual).

The clinical scales measure symptoms of trauma such as those related to anxiety (ANX) such as generalised anxiety, worry, specific fears (e.g., of men, women, of being killed), and a sense of impending danger. The depression (DEP) scale considers feelings of sadness, loneliness, episodes of tearfulness, self-injuriousness and suicidality. Anger (ANG) is measured through symptoms such as angry thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, including feeling mean, hating others, wanting to yell at or hurt people, arguing or fighting. Symptoms relating directly to posttraumatic stress (PTS) include intrusive thoughts, memories of painful past events; nightmares; fears; and cognitive avoidance of painful feelings.

The items on the dissociation scale (DIS) are split further into two subscales DIS-O (Overt Dissociation) and DIS-F (Fantasy). Symptoms on these scales include mind going blank, emotional numbing, pretending to be someone else or somewhere else, daydreaming, and memory problems.

The sexual concerns (SC) scale is also split further into to subscales SC-P (sexual preoccupation) and SC-D (sexual distress). Symptoms on these scales include sexual thoughts

or feelings occurring at a more than normal frequency; sexual conflicts; negative responses to sexual stimuli; and fear of being exploited or harmed sexually.

Whilst it is preferred that the measure be self-administered, it is possible for the interviewer to administer the measure, if need be, for example if the child has difficulty reading the items. The TSCC consists of a list of thoughts, feelings and behaviours that could be indicative of symptoms of trauma. The child is given the TSCC and asked to mark on the sheet how often each of these things happens to them. The options are presented on a four-point scale from 0 (never) to 3 (almost all of the time). The TSCC is intended to be suitable for completion by most children in around 15-20 minutes. The measure can be administered and scored by individuals who have formal training in psychology or related fields, such as a university degree. It can also be used in an individual or group setting, providing that privacy can be given to those completing the measure.

Included in the measure are eight 'critical items', statements which examine situations that may suggest increased risk if they are endorsed. These include items considering wanting to hurt themselves or others or fearing for their safety. Ideally the interviewer should check the answers to these critical items either during the interview or as soon as possible following, so that if these items are endorsed additional checks can be made with the child and followed up if necessary to ensure the child's wellbeing and safety.

When scoring the TSCC if the total of missing items is 6 or more the measure should be considered invalid. Each item is transcribed into the relevant spaces, and then written on the profile form and a score is calculated for each clinical scale. Raw scores are converted into Standard Scores (T scores) depending on the age and gender of the child who completed the measure. For all clinical scales except sexual concerns and its subscales, T scores at or above 65 are considered clinically significant. T scores from 60 through 65 are suggestive of difficulty in that area. For the sexual concerns scale and its subscales T scores at or above 70

are considered clinically significant. The interpretation of the scores should also be given extra consideration if the scores on the under-response (UND) and hyper-response (HYP) are above a critical level (T>70 for underresponsivity, T>90 for hyperresponse scale) as this may mean that the answers are not a true indication of the level of symptoms that are present.

Related Symptomology

Trauma in children can often be misdiagnosed as other disorders, such as anxiety or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (Rodriguez, 2018), particularly if the clinician assessing the child is unaware of the traumatic stressors or experiences that have occurred. According to Perry (2007) a child exposed to chronic traumatic events, such as sexual abuse, domestic violence and physical abuse, may have multiple diagnoses given over multiple previous evaluations. There may be added complexity due to the cumulative effects of these traumas or adverse experiences, which may suggest complex needs and multiple treatment approaches that match these diagnoses, or careful consideration of the order of any interventions. The TSCC considers symptoms of these overlapping disorders also, rather than relying solely on symptoms listed as a requirement for a diagnosis of PTSD. Most other measures of trauma symptoms in children use a Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM, American Psychiatric Association, 1980, 1987, 1994, 2000, 2013) as anchoring criteria (Hawkins & Radcliffe, 2006). Not relying on symptoms linked to the DSM that was being used at the time of the development of the TSCC (DSM–IV, 1994) also means that the TSCC can remain relevant through subsequent changes in the DSM criteria. It can also remain relevant for those that use alternative criteria such as those found in the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (World Health Organization, 2016, 2019).

Assessing symptoms of trauma, rather than diagnosis of PTSD, may also be useful for working with those that do not meet the criteria for PTSD, but still require intervention to

manage their symptoms and increase wellbeing. In this case, the TSCC could be used in assessment to identify treatment needs, and pre and post intervention to measure change (Calleja, 2020). The TSCC has been used in a wide variety of contexts, including adolescents in a psychiatric hospital (Sadowski & Friedrich, 2000), outpatient settings (Wherry & Herrington, 2018), incarcerated juveniles (Martin et al., 2008) and schools (Cerni Obrdalj et al., 2013). A survey of professionals working specifically with traumatic stress (Elhai et al., 2005), showed that the TSCC was the most widely used self-report measure of trauma symptoms among children and adolescents.

Characteristics/ Insight into Trauma Experiences

The TSCC is designed as a self-report measure, meaning that responses are typically completed by a client. There are costs and benefits to asking clients to recall and report trauma history (De Prince & Freyd, 2006). Parents and carers may be unaware of or may underestimate the impact of traumas that their children have experienced (Stover et al., 2010), which makes the case for asking children and young people directly. However, answers on self-report measures could also be considered experiential rather than factual, (Moul et al., 2004), which may suggest complications with validity, and the impact of subjective understanding of thresholds to answers. Briere may have attempted to account for this, by suggesting answers are based on frequency of the item applying. Young children may also lack the language and terminology to express their symptoms well (Perry, 2007), therefore, assessment, particularly of younger children or those with reduced cognitive ability, should be well planned and handled with care.

It has been reported widely that those who are experiencing complex or enduring trauma, or those who have experienced intergenerational trauma (trauma transmitted across generations, either directly or indirectly, Isobel et al., 2019), may have come to normalise their experiences to some extent (Fulu et al., 2017). There may also be an adaptive element to

their trauma, whereby they cannot acknowledge and process their experiences until they have been removed from the traumatising environment (Skuse, & Matthew, 2015). The Trauma Recovery Model (Skuse & Matthew, 2015) would suggest that physical and emotional safety should be the priority for young people who have experienced trauma. The delayed-onset subtype of PTSD was formally described in 1980. Its inclusion in DSM-III was informed by literature which indicated that many soldiers do not develop symptoms until they return home, as stress reactions are not adaptive in combat situations (Andreasen, 2004; Andrews et al., 2007). Given that the TSCC relies on self-report, it may be reasonable to consider that the young person completing the measure may not be fully aware of the trauma they have experienced, may not yet have developed symptoms indicating the impact of the trauma, and may not recognise their experiences as abusive or traumatic until they learn what it is to be safe. This may impact on their ability to self-report symptoms on any measure.

Briere suggests that the outcome of the TSCC should not be considered in isolation, but as a part of a battery of relevant tests or in the context of clinical interviews. Jaffee and Gallop (2007) used the TSCC alongside other measures such as the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach, 1991) Children's Depression Inventory (Kovacs, 1992) to assess adolescent's wellbeing in a National Survey.

According to Kline (2015) a psychometric test can be considered good if it has at least an interval scale, and if it can be considered reliable, valid, and discriminating. It should also have good norms or be expertly designed for the population it is designed for. Whilst the TSCC appears to meet these criteria, it will be examined in more detail below.

Reliability

If a test is considered consistent and stable, then it may be said to have good reliability (Coolican, 1996). Reliability is divided into internal reliability (whether it is consistent within itself) and external reliability (whether it is stable from one use to another).

Internal Reliability

Cronbach's alpha is a model of internal consistency (reliability), whereby a number is given for the average level of correlation between items on the scale. A score of 0.7 or above is considered acceptable (Taber, 2018).

Briere (1996) reports that the TSCC scales in the normative sample demonstrated high internal consistency for five of the six clinical scales (.82 to .89), with the sixth clinical scale (sexual concerns) being moderately reliable (.77). The manual provides a summary of the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each of the scales within the TSCC (See Table 5).

A study by Sadowski and Friedrich (2000) also found the TSCC to have high reliability when it was tested in a sample of 119 adolescents in a psychiatric hospital. When considering the scales, subscales, and total scores, the coefficients alpha ranged from .71 to .91.

In a study conducted in Sweden, Nilsson et al. (2008) found the internal consistency for the total scale was .94 in both normative (N=728) and clinical groups (N=91) involved in the study. The Cronbach's alpha for the clinical scales varied between .85 (DEP) and .78 (ANX) in the normative group. In the clinical group the range was between .89 (PTS) and .74 (SC). The total scale and the clinical scales had approximately the same standard as Briere (1996).

Table 5

Internal Reliability (Chronbach's alpha) for the TSCC (Reproduced from the TSCC User's Manual, Briere, 1996)

TSCC scale (number of questions)	Standardisation Sample (N=3008)	Child Abuse Centre 1 (N=105)	Child Abuse Centre 2 (N=399)	Child Abuse Centre 3 (N=103)
Underresponse (10)	.85	-	-	-
Hyperresponse (8)	.66	-	-	-
Anxiety (9)	.82	.86	.83	.84
Depression (9)	.86	.89	.85	.85
Anger (9)	.89	.89	.87	.89
Posttraumatic Stress(10)	.87	.86	.85	.87
Dissociation (10)	.83	.89	.80	.88
DIS-0 (7)	.81	-	-	-
DIS-F (3)	.58	-	-	-
Sexual Concerns(10)	.77	.78	.67	.78
SC-P (7)	.81	-	-	-
SC-D (4)	.64	-	-	-
Mean Clinical Scale[e]	.84	.86	.81	.85

Crouch et al. (1999) used the Children's Impact of Traumatic Events Scale - revised (CITES-R) and the TSCC with a sample of young people who had experienced sexual abuse. They found an at least adequate internal consistency for the six scales of the TSCC, with alpha coefficients ranging from .69 to .87.

Li et al. (2009) used the TSCC to evaluate children affected by HIV/AIDS in China. They reported that the Cronbach alpha coefficients for all six clinical scales (among entire

sample) were in the .80s except for the anxiety scale, which was slightly lower but still more than adequate, at 0.79. The Cronbach alpha coefficients for all sub-groups within the sample ranged from .77 to 0.87, indicating moderate to high reliability.

When considering the figures produced by all of the above studies, it would seem that the TSCC has an at least acceptable level of internal consistency.

External Reliability

In terms of test-retest reliability, no data could be found in relation to the TSCC from Briere or his colleagues. However, Nilsson et al (2008) reported r = .81 for the total scale and for the clinical scales: Anxiety r = .75, Depression r = .81, Anger r = .75, Posttraumatic stress r = .75, Dissociation r = .67 (Dissociation-overt r = .61 and Dissociation-fantasy r = .67) and Sexual Concerns r = .81 (Sexual concerns-preoccupation r = .86 and Sexual concerns-distress r = .51). The minimum level of 0.7 should be achieved to show good external reliability, suggesting mixed results for the TSCC in this sample, although Nilsson et al. (2006) consider this reliability to be good overall, despite the results of the dissociation scale and the sexual concerns distress subscale.

Practitioners can therefore use the scale overall with confidence but may wish to proceed with some caution if relying on the scale (Dissociation) and subscales (Dissociation-overt, Dissociation- fantasy) that had slightly lower levels of external reliability, and increased caution when considering the Sexual concerns -distress scale. This may however change if and when additional tests of this measures test-rest are produced.

Validity

The validity of a test refers to how well it measures what it intends to measure (Collican, 1996). There are numerous different measures of validity, the most pertinent of which, for this measure, will be considered below.

Content Validity

Content validity refers to the extent to which a test represents all aspects and/or adequately covers the construct it intends to measure. According to Briere (1996) during the initial construction of the measure, 75 items were initially developed, but after consultation with specialist clinicians 21 items were discarded as redundant or less meaningful indicators of the six domains of interest. The 54 remaining items were then included in several studies of the impact of child abuse, from which analysis suggested there was no further need for refinement of the items on the measure. Whilst this is based only on the results from the development of the measure, content validity is related to other forms of validity, as discussed below.

Construct Validity

As a measure of trauma and symptomatology related to trauma and PTSD, the TSCC should correlate with other measures of a similar nature, but also scores on the individual scales should be higher in samples of children with traumatic histories. This would suggest it accurately assesses the underlying theoretical concept. Scores on the measure should increase in the presence of more severe trauma and decrease following the application of effective therapeutic interventions. Briere (1996) reports that this is the case, and that in the child abuse and trauma centre samples included in the sample, several studies provided data that supported the construct validity of the TSCC.

A study by Fricker and Smith (2002) compared the TSCC with a more generic measure, the Personality Inventory for Youth (PIY; Lachar & Gruber, 1995). When comparing children with PTSD diagnosis, they found that TSCC scale scores suggested that the TSCC was more sensitive to the wide variability in level of distress among sexually abused children than the PIY. They suggested that the TSCC was better able to capture the assortment of symptoms of trauma and distress that sexually abused children typically

experience. Furthermore, the PIY suggested that sexually abused children with PTSD appeared as a more homogeneous group.

Nilsson et al. (2008) performed a confirmatory factor analysis to test construct validity in their Swedish sample. Despite some problematic results from the Anxiety scale, which had the weakest construct, they reported an outcome similar to Briere's (1996) factors and clinical scales overall. In China, the study by Li et al. (2009) found that children who experienced five or more traumatic events scored significantly higher than those who reported 4 or fewer traumatic events. This was found on all TSCC clinical scales and subscales ($p < 0.001$). Overall, these studies suggest that the TSCC has good construct validity, and is able to capture the symptoms of trauma in children and young people, including those in children outside of the United States.

Convergent and Discriminant Validity

Convergent (similarities with other measures of the construct) and discriminant (differences with measures of other constructs) validity were established by analyses of covariance with other available measures at the time of construction of the measure (Briere, 1996). TSCC scales had higher correlations with scales of similar content, suggesting high concurrent validity, and lower with scales of less similar content, suggesting high discriminant validity.

The TSCC manual reports that a study by Briere and Lanktree (1995) found significant intercorrelations (Table 2) between the TSCC and the Youth and Parent Report versions of the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), and the Children's Depression Inventory (CDI).

Table 6

*Correlation of TSCC Clinical Scales with CBCL and CDI Scores in a Child Abuse Centre Sample (N's range from 51-66 because of missing data. *p=<.05, **p<.01)*

	ANX	DEP	PTS	SC	DIS	ANG
CBCL-Parent-1	.16	.22*	.23*	.08	.09	.08
CBCL-Parent-E	.31**	.26*	.22*	.21*	.13	.27*
CBCL-Youth-1	.78**	.82**	.75**	.51**	.68**	.55*
CBCL-Youth-E	.47**	.48**	.53**	.62**	.65**	.68**
CDI	.54**	.73**	.64**	.45**	.60**	.59**

TSCC scales tended to correlate best with CBCL Youth-report scores, compared to CBCL Parent-report scores, as could be expected.

In a later study by Lanktree et al. (2008), the TSCC and the Trauma Symptom Checklist for Young Children (TSCYC) were compared. The scales appeared to converge in their assessment of symptomatology in children for most scales. This was especially the case for measures of anxiety, depression, anger, dissociation, and sexual concerns. In each instance, despite different information sources (caretakers responded for the TSCYC), equivalent scales were typically most highly correlated with one another.

There were however two instances when the TSCC and TSCYC scales did not converge. The TSCYC PTS-AV scale failed to correlate with any of the TSCC scale. The authors suggest that this is because the PTS-AV scale requires the caregiver to notice avoidance, therefore the absence of something, which may be difficult to detect for the observer. Secondly, the PTS-AR scale correlated with the TSCC ANX scale, but not with the PTS scale. The authors suggest that the PTS-AR scale does not consider hyperarousal, as this is covered entirely in the ANX scale, which is why there may be a correlation between PTS-AR and the TSCC ANX.

The authors conclude that source of information may affect the outcome of such measures, as child and parent-report of the child's trauma symptoms were only moderately correlated. They add that these different sources of information converged on most of the underlying symptom dimensions shared by the TSCC and TSCYC, thereby reinforcing each measure's discriminant validity.

Crouch et al. (1999) found significant shared variance between the PTS scale of the TSCC and the PTSD scale of the CITES-R. There was a moderate association between the CITES-R Avoidance subscale and the Overt Dissociation subscale of the TSCC suggesting that these were measuring similar construct. It was considered, however, that the association may have been stronger unless they were measuring differing aspects of avoidance. They also found convergent validity and significant association between the CITES-R Eroticism scale and the TSCC Sexual Concerns (Preoccupation) subscale. The above studies suggest that the TSCC has reasonably good convergent and discriminant validity as long as care is taken to consider the types of measures that are being compared, and in particular who is completing the measure.

Criterion/Predictive Validity

This type of validity refers to the ability of the checklist to measure or predict future outcome or results. Briere (1996) reports in the manual that there is evidence that the TSCC taps posttraumatic distress from two studies where TSCC scores are highest after more severe trauma.

Nilsson et al. (2008) found significant differences between the normative and the clinical groups on almost all of the clinical scales and subscales, except the subscale measuring sexual preoccupation, when adjusting for gender and age. To evaluate the validity of the TSCC further, 341 adolescents in the normative group also completed the Trauma scale on Dis-Q Sweden. The TSCC scores from adolescents with self-reported trauma experience

(n = 42) were compared with the scores from adolescents with no self-reported trauma experience (n = 299). The adolescents who had reported having experienced trauma had higher scores on the clinical scales of TSCC.

Briere's confidence in the measure's predictive validity has been supported by Nilsson et al's (2008) more recent study. It can be assumed that the TSCC is able to predict future outcomes.

Normative Data

According to Briere (1996) the TSCC was standardized on a large and diverse sample (3,008) of children. They varied in terms of economic background and race, and were from urban and suburban environments in the United States.

Normative data for the TSCC comes from 3,008 children from three non-clinical samples. These include 2,399 school children participating in a study regarding neighbourhood violence and its impact, in six different locations, both urban and suburban (Singer et al., 1995); 387 school children who were part of a larger study on the effects of stressful life events (Evans et al.,1994); and 222 children who were relatives of medical patients undergoing routine examinations (Freidrich, 1995).

The manual reports that the sample represents gender (53% female) and race (44% Caucasian, 27% Black, and 22% Hispanic) well. Gender was found to be an important variable to standardise in the TSCC scales. There was a small variance for race differences (ranging from 0.1% - 1.5%) which were deemed insufficient for separate norms to be derived. Normative data with T score conversions were derived from age and gender groupings (Briere, 1996). This suggests that the measure is able to be used with young people from a varied background, and of different genders.

Despite the number of measures available to assess trauma symptoms in youths, the TSCC is one of only a few that were specifically designed for, and standardised on, a large sample of children and adolescents (Butcher et al., 2015). The TSCC has now been used in additional countries, where similar findings are being reported, for example in Sweden and China. This would suggest that the original norms reported in 1996 may be relevant to diverse populations across the world. However, it would be prudent to collect data from more countries before making such claims.

Conclusion

Despite being constructed 25 years ago, the TSCC does not seem to have been updated or changed in that time. Whilst this may seem problematic, as many similar measures will have been amended in this time, and have multiple revisions, it has made comparison of the studies involving the TSCC much easier. Given that the TSCC is still being used, and studies are still reporting its value, it may be considered that the TSCC has tapped into elements of trauma that have remained stable and consistent over time.

The TSCC has been used in a variety of settings, community, psychiatric, and forensic, and has been used for research as well as treatment purposes. The TSCC has also been used in different countries across the world and has been translated into additional languages. Many psychological measures and theories do not translate well into diverse cultures, but the TSCC has been used successfully in countries as diverse as Sweden and China, among others.

Briere appears to have developed a measure that is largely accepted as being reliable and valid, although there are some gaps in the research to back up all aspects of reliability and validity, for example the lack of data available considering test-retest reliability. It

appears to be measuring good and varied aspects of trauma symptoms in children and considers more than symptoms solely identified as symptoms of PTSD. Briere has acknowledged that trauma can cause a variety of symptoms in children and adolescents, and that these expressions of distress can vary across types of trauma experience but also across the ages and genders of those who have experienced traumatic events.

The measure has an acceptable research base, and this continues to grow, and its use in research in more diverse countries and cultures should be encouraged. Whilst the TSCC may not prove to be useful in all situations and populations, it is only by conducting additional research and testing that these limitations will be discovered. The TSCC has been used for 25 years and may continue to prove useful for many more years. Additional research into its applicability, its validity and reliability would be useful. Research into its limitations would also be valuable.

As previously mentioned, the TSCC has also been used in therapeutic settings as a way to assess young people and to identify areas for intervention. The TSCC has also been used as a pre and post measure, to indicate change and to assess the effectiveness of interventions aiming to target symptoms of trauma. Practitioners can use this measure with confidence that it will give an accurate account of a young person's trauma symptoms at the time of testing. However, practitioners would also do well to keep in mind that this is a self-report measure and that brings some limitations. There remains some caution in its use with those young people that may not have acknowledged their trauma at the time of assessment. For many young people who have been abused and exploited by people they care about or have an ongoing relationship with, acknowledging their traumatic experiences can take many months. It is reasonable therefore to consider this when low scores are given, and to consider that the test may need to be retaken in time, when insight has developed.

Assessing a young person's trauma symptoms may be particularly helpful for professionals offering interventions with those who are involved with youth justice and/or those who have experienced criminal exploitation. The Trauma Recovery Model (Skuse & Matthew, 2015) for example would suggest that symptoms of trauma need to be understood and a young person needs to feel safe and build trusted relationships before they can develop insight and begin to process their trauma. This should be done before any attempts to deliver cognitive based interventions that would focus on crimes, anti-social behaviour, or any other behaviours of concern. This method has been piloted in parts of the UK as the ECM model (Cordis Bright, 2017; Youth Justice Board, 2020b). The TSCC therefore could be used as a tool to support this. Within a safe therapeutic relationship, the measure could also be used to generate discussion about some of the symptoms listed. It would assist professionals gathering information on trauma symptoms, monitoring progress, and could also be used as a tool to help young people themselves understand what they have been through and how it has impacted on their mental health and wellbeing.

If a practitioner is looking to identify a measure of trauma symptoms for use with children and young people, the TSCC provides a reliable and valid method for doing this. It also provides some flexibility in the way it can be used, and can be used with young people who have experienced a wide range of traumatic events, including exploitation.

CHAPTER FIVE:
Thesis Discussion

Discussion

Aims of the Thesis

As CCE is a relatively new phenomenon there is very little research on the topic, and it has only been studied in recent years. This thesis aimed to help guide professionals in their practice by expanding the understanding of CCE and related forms of exploitation. The limited research in this area means that much is needed to improve the evidence base around CCE, and the factors that impact on risk. Therefore, the aim was also to increase understanding by exploring the experiences of practitioners, and to inform policy and practice to strengthen the processes that support young people at risk of, or harmed by, exploitation. These aims have been achieved and evidenced by the preceding chapters. These chapters provided background and context for child exploitation, and explored the existing UK based literature, in particular studies published that explored the risk factors and protective factors for children and young people being harmed, or potentially being harmed, by sexual or criminal exploitation. Both types of exploitation were discussed in the interviews conducted as part of the empirical research. Although this research explored the views of practitioners in youth justice, who predominantly work with the criminal form of child exploitation, sexual exploitation was also widely discussed. Both the literature review and the research interviews discussed trauma as an important factor. A critique of a psychometric that measures trauma, the Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children (Briere, 1996), was therefore also included in this thesis.

Summary of Findings

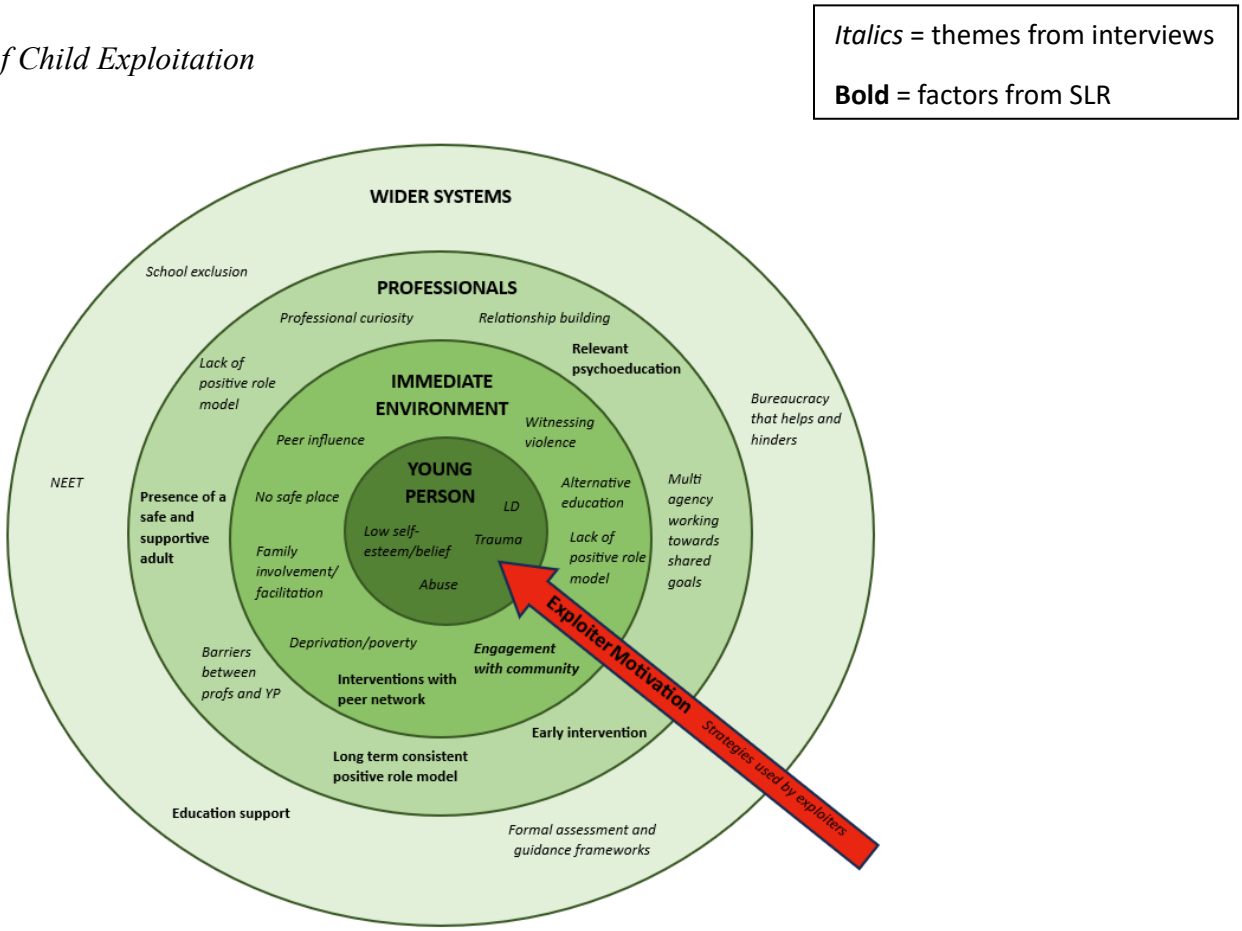
A systematic literature review explored risk, vulnerability, and protective factors for sexual and criminal forms of child exploitation. Despite all studies included in the review being assessed as moderate or high quality, the main finding of the review was that there was a lack of clarity and cohesion in the studies. Many studies did not state how they defined the

exploitation they investigated, but did comment on the lack of agreed definitions and the impact this has on research and practice (Mythen & Weston, 2023; Neaverson & Lake, 2023; Olver & Cockbain, 2021; Radcliffe et al., 2020).

The analysis of interviews with youth justice workers captured seven themes and five subthemes. The Ecological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) was considered as a framework to contextualise the themes, along with the Circles of Analysis systemic model (Barlow et al., 2021). The underlying concepts of these two models could be considered together, and used to create a new model, specific to the criminal and sexual exploitation of children, using the main findings of this thesis (Figure 4).

Figure 4.

Model of Child Exploitation



The child or young person is central to this model (see Appendix M). Risk factors discovered in the literature review relevant to the young person include experiences of trauma and abuse, low self-esteem and self-belief, and learning disabilities. Surrounding the young person are factors relating to their immediate environment. This might include parents, carers, and family, as well as school, and community. Risk factors such as deprivation and poverty, family involvement in criminal activities or family facilitation of exploitation, peer influence, witnessing violence, attending alternative education such as a PRU, and a lack of positive role models were all identified in the literature review. Protective factors, interventions with the peer network and professional engagement with the community, were also identified. From the interviews with professionals, the subtheme of *no safe place* fits here, as it directly relates to the relationships and environments in which the young person spends the majority of their time.

Outside of the immediate environment is placed the professionals that may be involved directly with the young person, or come into regular contact with them. These might include social workers, teachers, youth justice workers, police, mentors, and substance misuse workers, who are likely to be involved infrequently, short term, or who may see the young person for a short window of time if they are involved for longer (such as a teacher who may see the young person for an hour a week for up to a year). The literature review identified that a lack of a positive role model could be a risk factor for exploitation. As a role model may come from outside of the immediate environment and can also be found in relationships with professionals, this factor appears at both levels of the model. Many protective factors related to professionals were identified in the literature, such as a long term and consistent positive role model, the presence of a safe and supportive adult, relevant psychoeducation, and early intervention. Interview themes that arose relating to professionals

included *professional curiosity, relationship building, barriers between professionals and young people,* and *multi-agency working towards shared goals*.

Finally, there are systems in place that also have influence over child exploitation, such as the education system, ministry of justice, police force, laws, and government policies. The literature review identified that if a young person is excluded from school and/or is not in education, employment, or training (NEET), this can increase their risk. It also identified that education support could be a protective factor against exploitation. Two themes from the interviews relate to these systems: *assurance from formal assessment and guidance frameworks,* and *bureaucracy that helps and hinders*.

As suggested in the Circles of Analysis model (Barlow et al., 2021) it may be insufficient to consider only the young person and their environment. The exploiter themselves should also feature. Whilst the literature review did not raise any factors relating to the exploiters themselves, from the interviews emerged the theme of *strategies used by exploiters*. Exploiters are more able to take swift action, to adapt to new situations (such as the Covid-19 pandemic), and to take advantage of any of the factors mentioned above. The stronger the protective factors of the young person, and the stronger the carers, professionals, and systems around the young person, the less likely the exploiter is to reach them and successfully engage them. In addition, the motivation of the exploiter may be strong, in which case the protective factors also need to be stronger to prevent exploitation. An example is, perhaps, an exploiter who has limited access to young people/potential victims and so is more strongly motivated to exploit someone they do have access to, such as a family member or a child they are in regular contact with. They would then use strategies accordingly to overcome the protective factors in place and take advantage of risk factors. If, on the other hand, an exploiter has access to many potential victims, their motivation to exploit a specific child is likely to be reduced, and if they come up against a protective barrier they may choose

to turn their attention to a different young person. The stronger the motivation to target that specific young person, the more strategies they may employ. The weaker the barriers and protective factors around the young person, the more likely the exploiter is to succeed.

Whilst this model is in its infancy, and will require further attention to refine it and increase its applicability, it successfully knits together the risk and protective factors, and the experiences of professionals, into one model of exploitation. This model also shows how deficits in one area can be overcome by increasing protective factors in other areas. Wherever a person may be placed within this model there are ways that the likelihood of child exploitation, or further exploitation, can be reduced.

Other Considerations

In the literature review problems were uncovered in how some risk factors were identified and then subsequently looked for in additional studies, possibly leading to biases and distorted results. Many risk factors for CCE were initially identified in CSE research, and whilst the two do share considerable overlap, this should be examined carefully and evidenced before it is relied upon to identify potential victims of CCE. In this review, the majority of the 17 studies focussed on CSE, with only a third focussing on CCE. When considering only the five studies that focussed exclusively on CCE, common themes were related to family problems/disconnection/lack of positive role models, poverty and deprivation, school exclusion/absence, and trauma/Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), as evidenced in the above model.

Many of the published studies mentioned the complexities of child exploitation, such as the factors that drive it and varying vulnerabilities of those harmed by it (Cockbain et al., 2017; Hallett, 2016; Hallett et al., 2019; Kloess et al., 2017; Radcliffe et al., 2020; and Thompson, 2019). Alderson et al. (2022) highlighted the cumulative effects of poly-

victimisation and experiencing multiple sources of adversity and abuse. The interview responses given by practitioners in Chapter 3 echoed the complexities mentioned in the literature review. It was clear from this review that practitioners and researchers would benefit from consistent definitions, clear guidelines, and reliable resources for identifying and responding to victims. Consistent with the suggestion of the Home Office (2019) in their exploitation toolkit, this review recommended that attention needed to be given to various types of child exploitation and the specific wellbeing needs of individual young people, regardless of the identified and presenting concern.

The relationships that YOT workers have with children and young people face barriers from the start, as the exploiters will warn young people not to trust authority figures. In addition, these children and young people often experience potentially life-threatening situations of homelessness, mental health difficulties, or experiences of violence and abuse. This reinforces those factors found in the literature review and young people are likely to feel they have 'no safe place', particularly if they do not attend school and have a difficult relationship with their carers. The practitioners' commitment to the young people they work with and to effective practice was evident in their interviews, despite the difficulties they faced.

As in the research described in the literature review, unmet needs were talked about by most of those interviewed, which reinforces the findings of Walsh et al. (2011). They also voiced that it was important to think about the wider issues of those who go missing and are being exploited, agreeing with The Missing People report (2019) and suggesting that such action is taken by the Government and by those developing intervention programmes. Similar to the findings of Weston and Mythen (2021), this research found that whilst practitioners were able to formally verbalise their understanding of CCE and its risk factors, referring to

policy and guidance, in practice they regularly constructed the risks associated through informal ways.

As mentioned in chapter 1, the media has focussed on county lines exploitation, possibly causing a distraction from the many other, more common, types of exploitation. One interviewee suggested this may be due to the difference in the level of risk to the young person, especially the risk of serious harm and experience of serious violence, which is felt to be more likely in county lines exploitation.

Currently there are no reliable and valid measures that directly assess the risk of criminal exploitation, or that quantify the experiences of those who have already suffered harm through CCE. This would suggest that measuring factors related to the risk of exploitation and the consequences of exploitation may be useful until such CCE measures are developed and tested. Given that the preceding chapters have recognised trauma and adverse experiences as common factors in the lives of children and young people who have been exploited, it is important that trauma is able to be measured effectively and reliably in this population. This is important for identifying those most at risk of CCE, but also, depending on the measure and its applicability, may also be useful as a pre and post measure for intervention programmes.

The critique in chapter 4 investigated the validity and reliability of the TSCC (Briere, 1996). The measure has not been updated since it was developed more than 25 years ago, which aided the comparison of studies testing the TSCC over that time. It would seem that TSCC has tapped into elements of trauma that have remained stable and consistent over time, as it is still being used in practice, and still receiving favourable tests results. The measure was found to be reliable and valid, although there were some gaps in the evidence, for example the lack of data available considering test-retest reliability. The TSCC appeared to be measuring varied aspects of trauma symptoms in children, not only those symptoms related to

a diagnosis of PTSD. Whilst its use has not been tested specifically in a sample of young people who have experienced CCE, it has been used in therapeutic settings to assess areas to target in intervention and has been used as a pre and post measure, to assess the effectiveness of interventions targeting symptoms of trauma.

Given that the measure is self-administered there may need to be some caution when using it with victims of exploitation. Many young people have been exploited by people they have an ongoing relationship with and may have experienced grooming tactics as part of their exploitation. Acknowledging their traumatic experiences can take many months, therefore when low scores are given this may be due to a lack of insight or a lack of psychological safety. The measure may need to be retaken in time, when the young person feels safe and protected and has had some time to process their harmful experiences.

Implications for Practice

Given the relatively short period of time in which CCE has been studied, and therefore the limited amount of research on the topic, this thesis will benefit anyone with an interest in the exploitation of children. The thesis has considered CCE predominantly from a practice angle and will no doubt benefit those who work with young people at risk of or harmed by CCE, and possibly other forms of exploitation. It has added to the literature on exploitation, considered the risk factors, the real-life experiences of practitioners, and the possibility of incorporating psychometric measures. A model for child exploitation has been described, which may help professionals to understand exploitation as a wider concern, and to find ways that they can address the needs of young people they are working with. The thesis will also benefit academics, those who are involved in writing policy, and those who may be considering programmes of intervention. In turn, this could benefit the families and communities that experience CCE, and other forms of child exploitation.

The findings of the systematic literature review confirmed that there are many risk factors that can be considered for CCE, and that a large proportion of those written about so far are those that relate to the young person's environment and context. Whilst many interventions target the individual, additional benefits would likely be seen if the family and community factors could also be considered. If these factors were targeted also, it may be easier to effect positive change in the individual, knowing that they are living in a more stable and nurturing environment. The Trauma Recovery Model (TRM, Skuse & Matthew, 2015) would suggest that creating a more stable and consistent environment for young people, as well as building safe and trusting relationships with adults, should be the focus of any intervention before more direct trauma or CCE related intervention is attempted. This model has been piloted by the Youth Justice Service in some areas of England and Wales as part of its Enhanced Case Management system (ECM). There will be limits, however, to how much influence the Youth Justice Service can have on the family and community aspects of a young person's life. It could, however, be argued that this way of working would benefit young people before they come to the attention of the Youth Justice Service.

Interviews with practitioners in the empirical research project also showed the perceived benefit of working with the family and community, and of working in a trauma informed way to encourage engagement. The findings endorsed the need to consider the wider, unmet, needs of children and young people. The PTMF (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018) may be useful in considering these needs and experiences from the perspective of the young person who is being exploited. The findings also suggested that relationships were key to effective and efficient working, and investing and promoting this should be considered by managers and those involved in decision making for practice for youth services. Relationships with managers, colleagues, other services, and with young people themselves are thought to benefit the services, the practitioners, and service users. Consideration should

be given to how this could be expanded to relationship-building with communities and other places where young people spend a lot of time, such as schools. It is acknowledged though that this should not be the sole responsibility of the Youth Justice Service, but should be considered for all services and systems working with children and young people and families.

This thesis has highlighted the need for a more consistent way of approaching child exploitation, at least in terms of its definition. This would assist researchers and practitioners with clarity, and for comparability across studies. The need for additional CCE focused research is also evident.

Whilst a reliable and valid checklist or psychometric tool for CCE may be a possibility in the future, there is a need to examine in the meantime which existing psychometrics may be useful. Whilst checklists for identifying CCE are being used in some areas of the UK, it is unclear whether these factors are based on CCE evidence, or taken from other research, perhaps CSE or general offending research. If such overlapping research is to be used to identify and work with CCE, this should be backed up by specific research and evidence to be sure that it is useful in this context.

For current practice, the TSCC is a useful and well-developed tool that can help practitioners understand how trauma is impacting on the young people they are working with, and to generate discussions around this. It may be a useful way to normalise the symptoms of trauma in this population of exploited children, to start conversations about mental health and wellbeing, for example, and to introduce healthy coping strategies to manage the difficulties. The TSCC is well recognised, used in a variety of settings, and is relatively easy to interpret.

Although this thesis was developed with child exploitation in mind, it may be that increasing protective factors and decreasing risk factors and vulnerabilities identified here may also improve other aspects of the child's life. This could include identity and belonging,

prosocial behaviour, and mental health. Further research would be needed to investigate this. Further research may also wish to consider the exploiter in more depth.

Whilst risk factors and identifying factors would be useful for future research, there are other gaps in the knowledge base for CCE. It would be beneficial to speak to the young people who have experienced CCE, to understand their experiences and the factors that led to their exploitation. This would need to happen with great care however, so as to not cause more harm. Research involving adults who were able to disengage with exploitation would also be useful. Understanding what can be done to help young people to safely leave exploitative situations would help prevent further harm to them as well as reduce the offences they might be undertaking as part of their exploitation.

Strengths and Limitations

This thesis considered the risk and protective factors that have been researched in relation to CCE and CSE since 2016. While recent research provides strength in understanding these issues, exploring the factors for CSE alongside CCE may have led to factors being included that may not have been directly related to CCE. The lack of research on CCE risk factors only, and the overlap between the two meant that this considering both was necessary at this stage. This thesis is, therefore, limited by the low number of research articles that have been published on which it could draw. It is hoped that as research into CCE continues to build there will be sufficient studies to be able to replicate this research study using only CCE factors.

Speaking directly to those working with criminally exploited young people was a strength of this study, as they have direct experience of getting to know these young people, understanding their situations, and in some cases helping them out of it. The practitioners were from Youth Offending Teams from both England and Wales, and from cities and towns.

This meant that information was captured from a variety of environments and contexts, which improved the richness of the data. The themes captured are more likely to be generalisable to elsewhere in the UK because of this.

During the literature review, the inclusion and exclusion criteria strengthened the study by focusing the review and gathering information that could be compared. This also meant that there were some studies that may have been useful which were not included, because they did not meet the criteria for inclusion. Some of the studies excluded focused on specific types of exploitation, such as forced marriage or online extremism, others focused on specific populations such as those with a diagnosis of ASD. The omission of these studies may mean that important factors were not examined. However, extending the inclusion criteria may have weakened the findings.

There was a focus in this thesis on child exploitation in a UK context, thus making it more applicable to the unique UK population. This may, however, mean that valuable information from other countries was missed, and a comparison between UK CCE and the types of exploitation found in other countries that share some characteristics with the UK may have given some valuable insight.

Lastly, whilst focusing on those working in the Youth Offending Teams captured valuable experiences, the research had a relatively low sample size. This may have in part been influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic changing how people work, and impacting on their capacity to be involved in additional projects. Conducting research into the experiences of other professionals that work in the CCE arena would have meant that experiences of children who had not been caught and criminalised could also have been captured.

To summarise, this thesis makes the following recommendations:

- Consistent definitions, clear guidelines, and reliable resources for CCE are needed.

- Attention needs to be given to all types of child exploitation and the specific wellbeing needs of individual young people, regardless of the identified concern.
- There is a need to consider the wider, unmet, needs of children and young people.
- Relationships are key to effective and efficient working, and investing and promoting this should be considered. This includes relationships with managers, colleagues, other services, and with young people themselves. Consideration should also be given to relationship-building with communities and other places where young people spend time.
- The need for additional research, focussed solely on CCE, is evident.
- Further research may wish to consider the exploiter in more depth.
- Research with young people who have experienced CCE, to understand their experiences and the factors that led to their exploitation would be useful, as would research involving adults who were able to disengage with exploitation.

Conclusion

Children have experienced exploitation for centuries. In the last few decades more notice has been taken of this, mainly focusing on CSE. CSE, and the media surrounding it, created an awareness in the general public that was responded to by government and children's services. This created a pathway for the criminal exploitation of children to be noticed and similarly acted upon. The study of CCE remains in its infancy however, and research into the topic remains limited, and media portrayal may have caused confusion and misdirection as it did in the early years of CSE attention. This thesis has added to the literature on child exploitation and increased understanding of it, while making recommendations for a way forward in recognising and intervening in the harm that it causes.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Database search terms and hits

DATABASE	SEARCH COMPLETED	DATE	NUMBER OF HITS
Web of Science	1. TS=(Teen* OR adolescen* OR Juvenile* OR child* OR minor OR "young person" OR "young people") 2. TS=(Crim* NEAR/2 Exploit* OR "county lines" OR sex* NEAR/2 exploitation OR "transaction* sex" OR "sex traffic*" OR "domestic minor sex traffic*" OR "commercial sexual exploitation" OR "child sexual exploitation" OR "child porn*" OR "sex* NEAR/2 exchange*" OR "forced lab*" OR slavery OR "abuse image*") 3. TS=(vulnerab* OR risk* OR "risk factor*" OR "protective factor*" OR resilien* OR predict*) 4. 1 AND 2 AND 3 Limiters – removed computers, maths, optics, timespan 2010-present, English language, removed letters and book reviews.	22.06.21 02.07.23	165 62
SCOPUS	1. TITLE-ABS-KEY (teen* OR adolescen* OR juvenile* OR child* OR minor OR "young AND person" OR "young AND people") 2. TITLE-ABS-KEY (crim* AND exploit* OR "county lines" OR sex* AND exploitation OR "transaction* sex" OR "sex traffic*" OR "domestic minor sex traffic*" OR "commercial sexual exploitation" OR "child sexual exploitation" OR "child porn*" OR "sex* exchange*" OR "forced lab*" OR slavery OR "abuse image*") 3. TITLE-ABS-KEY (vulnerab* OR risk* OR "risk factor*" OR "protective factor*" OR resilien* OR predict*) 4. 1 AND 2 AND 3 Limiters – timespan 2010-present, English language, articles	22.06.21 02.07.23	38 96
PROQUEST (ASSIA)	1. Teen* OR adolescen* OR Juvenile* OR child* OR minor OR "young person" OR "young people" 2. Crim* Near/2 Exploit* OR "county lines" OR sex* Near/2 exploitation OR "transaction* sex" OR "sex traffic*" OR "domestic minor sex traffic*" OR "commercial sexual exploitation" OR "child sexual exploitation" OR "child porn*" OR "sex* Near/2	22.06.21 02.07.21	52 13

	exchange*" OR "forced lab*" OR slavery OR "abuse image*" 3. vulnerab* OR risk* OR "risk factor*" OR "protective factor*" OR resilien* OR predict*) 4. 1 AND 2 AND 3 Limiters – only included relevant subject areas, timespan 2010-present, English language, removed letters and notes and newspaper articles, UK		
OVID (APA, ovid full text, Psycinfo, Medline, Embase, Social Policy) (6 databases)	1. Teen* OR adolescen* OR Juvenile* OR child* OR minor OR young person OR young people 2. Crim* ADJ2 Exploit* OR county lines OR sex* ADJ2 exploitation OR transaction* sex OR sex traffic* OR domestic minor sex traffic* OR commercial sexual exploitation OR child sexual exploitation OR child porn* OR sex* ADJ2 exchange* OR forced lab* OR slavery OR abuse image* 3. vulnerab* OR risk* OR risk factor* OR protective factor* OR protect* OR resilien* OR predict* OR characteristic* 4. 1 AND 2 AND 3 Limiters – only included relevant subject areas, timespan 2010-present, English language, removed letters and notes and deduplicated.	22.06.21 02.07.23	466 175
Total hits across all databases 721 + 346 = 1067			

Appendix B

Articles removed when read in full as they did not meet inclusion criteria:

Annan, L. G., Gaoua, N., Mileva, K., & Borges, M. (2022). What makes young people get involved with street gangs in London? A study of the perceived risk factors. *Journal of community psychology*, *50*(5), 2198-2213.

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Ireland, C. A., Alderson, K., & Ireland, J. L. (2015). Sexual exploitation in children: nature, prevalence, and distinguishing characteristics reported in young adulthood. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, *24*(6), 603-622.

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Robinson, G., McLean, R., & Densley, J. (2019). Working county lines: Child criminal exploitation and illicit drug dealing in Glasgow and Merseyside. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, *63*(5), 694-711.

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Appendix C

Studies that met the inclusion criteria:

Alderson, K., Ireland, C. A., Khan, R., Ireland, J. L., & Lewis, M. (2022). Child sexual exploitation, poly-victimisation and resilience. *Journal of criminological research, policy and practice*, *8*(1), 53-74.

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Hallett, S. (2016). 'An uncomfortable comfortableness': 'Care', child protection and child sexual exploitation. *British Journal of Social Work*, *46*(7), 2137-2152.

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Hurley, M., & Boulton, L. J. (2021). Early identification and intervention with individuals at risk of becoming involved in serious and organised crime (SOC). *Safer communities*, *20*(2), 73-84.

Kloess, J. A., Hamilton-Giachritsis, C. E., & Beech, A. R. (2017). A descriptive account of victims' behaviour and responses in sexually exploitative interactions with offenders. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, *23*(7), 621-632.

Mythen, G., & Weston, S. (2023). Interrogating the deployment of 'risk' and 'vulnerability' in the context of early intervention initiatives to prevent child sexual exploitation. *Health, Risk & Society*, *25*(1-2), 9-27.

Neaverson, A., & Lake, A. (2023). Barriers experienced with multi-agency responses to county line gangs: a focus group study. *Journal of Children's Services*, *18*(1), 61-77.

Olver, K., & Cockbain, E. (2021). Professionals' Views on Responding to County Lines-Related Criminal Exploitation in the West Midlands, UK. *Child Abuse Review*, *30*(4), 347-362.

Radcliffe, P., Roy, A., Barter, C., Tompkins, C., & Brooks, M. (2020). A qualitative study of the practices and experiences of staff in multidisciplinary child sexual exploitation partnerships in three English coastal towns. *Social Policy & Administration*, *54*(7), 1215-1230.

Shaw, J., & Greenhow, S. (2020). Children in care: exploitation, offending and the denial of victimhood in a prosecution-led culture of practice. *The British Journal of Social Work*, *50*(5), 1551-1569.

Thomas, K., Hamilton-Giachritsis, C., Branigan, P., & Hanson, E. (2023). Offenders' approaches to overcoming victim resistance in technology-assisted child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *141*, 106143.

Thompson, N. (2019). 'It'sa No-Win Scenario, either the Police or the Gang Will Get You': Young People and Organised Crime–Vulnerable or Criminal?. *Youth justice*, *19*(2), 102-119.

Ward, C., Hughes, G., Mitchell, H. D., & Rogstad, K. E. (2019). Association between STI and child sexual exploitation in children under 16 years old attending sexual health clinics in England: findings from a case–control study. *Sexually transmitted infections*, *95*(6), 412-415.

Appendix D

QA Checklist

Paper for appraisal and reference: ……

……

1. Was a well-defined question posed? Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?

Yes ☐

Can't tell/partially ☐

No ☐

Comments:

2. Is the methodology appropriate for the goal?

Yes ☐

Can't tell/partially ☐

No ☐

Comments:

3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research? Have they discussed how they decided which method to use?

Yes ☐

Can't tell/partially ☐

No ☐

Comments:

4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research? Discussions around recruitment/selection/inclusion?

Yes ☐

Can't tell/partially ☐

No ☐

Comments:

5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue? Clear? Justified? Discussed?

Yes ☐

Can't tell/partially ☐

No ☐

Comments:

6. Have relationships been adequately considered? Potential bias and influence? Implications of any changes in the research design?

Yes ☐

Can't tell/partially ☐

No ☐

Comments:

7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration? Discussed issues raised by the study? Effects of intervention reported comprehensively?

Yes ☐

Can't tell/partially ☐

No ☐

Comments:

8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous? In-depth description of the analysis process? Sufficient data are presented to support the findings?

Yes ☐

Can't tell/partially ☐

No ☐

Comments:

9. Is there a clear statement of findings? Discussed in relation to the original research question? Were all important outcomes considered? Do the benefits outweigh the harms and costs?

Yes ☐

Can't tell/partially ☐

No ☐

Comments:

10. How valuable is the research? Contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding? Identify new areas? Findings can be applied to your local population/other populations and contexts?

Yes ☐

Can't tell/partially ☐

No ☐

Comments:

Score ☐

Additional thoughts or comments:

Appendix E

Quality Assessment Outcomes for the 17 Studies Meeting Criteria

	Author(s)	**Year**	**Score**
1	Alderson, Ireland, Khan, Ireland, & Lewis	2022	7.5
2	Ashton & Bussu	2020	9
3	Boulton, Phythian & Kirby	2019	7
4	Cockbain, Ashby, & Brayley	2017	10
5	Franklin & Smeaton	2017	9.5
6	Hallett	2016	7.5
7	Hallett	2019	9
8	Hurley & Boulton	2020	8
9	Kloess, Hamilton-Giachritsis & Beech	2017	9
10	Mythen & Weston	2023	7.5
11	Neaverson & Lake	2023	8.5
12	Olver & Cockbain	2021	8
13	Radcliffe, Roy, Barter, Tompkins & Brooks	2020	8
14	Shaw & Greenhow	2020	7
15	Thomas, Hamilton-Giachritsis, Branigan & Hanson	2023	8
16	Thompson	2019	7.5
17	Ward, Hughes, Mitchell, Rogstad	2019	9

Appendix F

Data Extraction Form

Reviewer initials		Comments
Title of article/study -		
Study aims/ purpose		
Sample (age, gender, type)		
Sample size		
How was exploitation defined?		
Method/ procedure		
Data collection methods		
Analysis used		
Key findings		
Factors discussed		
Limitations		
Conclusions		
Additional comments		

Appendix G

Manager's Email Template

Practitioner experiences of identifying and working with Child Criminal Exploitation

We would like to invite staff within your team to take part in a study exploring Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) from a broad perspective. The staff will be asked to take part in a short interview, via phone or video call, in which their experiences of working with those at risk of CCE will be explored. The interview will be recorded, and all information will be treated as confidential. Several Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) throughout England and Wales have been invited to take part, in the hope that a broad spectrum of views and experiences can be gathered. The outcomes may impact development of policies and service provision. Ultimately, this may lead to a reduction in reoffending rates.

If you think the study is suitable for you and your team members, we kindly ask for the attached documents to be circulated amongst them. The documents contain an invitation and some more details about the study.

The study is part of a doctoral research affiliated with the School of Psychology, University of Birmingham. All data collected will be stored securely and used according to university standards If you wish to ask further questions about the study please contact the researcher Rachel Marcarian

Appendix H

Email Template

Topic: Kindly consider taking part in research titled *Practitioner experiences of identifying and working with Child Criminal Exploitation*

We would like to hear about your experience of working with young people who may be at risk of Child Criminal Exploitation or who may have been exploited in this way. If you decide to take part in the research, we will ask you to attend a short interview, via phone or video call. The interview will be audio recorded to make sure all vital information is saved. The outcomes may impact development of policies and service provision. Ultimately, this may lead to a reduction in reoffending rates in time.

To be eligible you will have been working for a YOT for at least a year in a capacity that enables direct contact with youth, and currently work at least 20 hours per week there.

The study is part of a doctoral research affiliated with the School of Psychology, University of Birmingham. All data collected will be stored securely and used according to university standards. The recording of the interview will be destroyed once it has been transcribed.

If you wish to take part in this study, or if you would like to find out more details about the study, please contact Rachel Marcarian on [redacted].

Thank you.

Appendix I

Participant Information Sheet

Practitioner experiences of identifying and working with Child Criminal Exploitation

What would taking part involve?

If you consent to take part, you will be asked to attend an interview, by phone or video call. This will take no more than an hour in total. The interview will involve answering a few questions about Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and your experience of working with young people who may be at risk of CCE or who may have been exploited in this way. For example, you will be asked how you feel about criminally exploited children. The interview will be recorded, for the sake of accuracy, but the recording and all remaining information will be confidential. The recording will be deleted once it has been transcribed. You will receive a debrief on the purpose of our study at the end of the interview.

Can I take part?

We would like to speak to people who been working in Youth Offending Teams for at least a year, with direct contact with young offenders, and who work at least 20 hours per week currently.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be helping us to understand Child Criminal Exploitation as it impacts on young people working with Youth Offending Services and the professionals working with them. We hope that the findings of the study will help us to understand CCE in a much broader way than is written about currently. The findings may also help to shape policy, help to reduce offending rates through earlier identification, and reduce reoffending rates by improving how we work with young people affected by CCE. Results of the study may be published in an academic journal, to share the findings.

What are the possible risks and disadvantages of taking part?

Whilst we do not envisage any risks or disadvantages, there is the possibility that being asked multiple questions about your role and talking about your experiences could be upsetting. We would not want you to feel that you must talk about anything that might prove difficult for you. There will be no pressure to answer any of the questions asked and you can pause or stop the interview at any time.

Further supporting information:

- You can terminate your involvement in the study at any time during the interview without explaining your decision. You will also have 2 weeks following the interview to withdraw your participation. If you withdraw, we will delete the recorded interview and any other information related to your participation. To withdraw, please contact the researcher (contact details underneath). Your participation is voluntary.

- The data collected in this study will be used only for the purpose described in this form and will be available only to the research team and other personnel involved in this study. The project will be compliant with the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- The study is part of a doctoral research affiliated with the School of Psychology, University of Birmingham. All data collected will be stored securely and used according to university standards.
- Every effort will be taken to protect the confidentiality of the participants in this study. All information you provide will be kept confidential. Your name or any other identifying information will be stored separately from your responses and will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this study. Your name and contact details will be deleted two weeks after participation.
- If you take part, we ask you to choose a private location for the interview. This is to prevent anyone overhearing the conversation and reduce the possibility of COVID transmission.

Who should you call with questions about this study?

If you wish to take part in this study, or have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Rachel Marcarian on [redacted]

If you consent to participating in this study, please read the underneath form.

Appendix J

Consent Form

Practitioner experiences of identifying and working with Child Criminal Exploitation

Your consent to take part in the study will be obtained during the video/phone call. To ensure that you provide informed consent, please read the underneath information with care, and take note of the title of this document. During the call, you will be asked to verbally acknowledge that you have read and understood the current document and the associated *Information Sheet.* Your verbal consent will be recorded and stored separate to the rest of your data.

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet titled "*Practitioner experiences of identifying and working with Child Criminal Exploitation*"
2. I confirm that I have worked for the Youth Offending Service for at least one year and work at least 20 hours per week.
3. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered to my satisfaction.
4. I understand that I may feel distressed during the interview.
5. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during the interview and for a period of two weeks following the interview.
6. I understand that the information collected is confidential and will only be used for the purposes of the study and shared only with the researchers involved.
7. I agree to having my voice recorded for the purpose of obtaining consent and for the duration of the interview.
8. I understand the recording of the interview will be destroyed once transcribed.
9. I understand that the findings of the study may be published in an academic journal.
10. I agree to take part in the study.

Appendix K

Interview Schedule

My name is Rachel Marcarian, I will be interviewing you on the topic of "Practitioner experiences of identifying and working with Child Criminal Exploitation". The interview should take about one hour. If you consent to this study, I will ask multiple questions and may ask for clarification on some of your answers. In the interest of time I may occasionally stop your response and ask a different question. If there are any questions you don't wish to answer, please feel free to say that. Are you ready?...

Consent

- I will first ask for your consent to take part. This will be recorded and stored separately from the interview data. I will give you an *ID code and state this at the start of the interview, but for now y*ou will need to state your full name. Are you fine with that? (Y-proceed, N-terminate).
- Have you read and understood the Consent and Information sheets entitled "*Practitioner experiences of identifying and working with Child Criminal Exploitation*" (answer yes or no)
- Yes - Please state your name followed by: 'I consent to take part in the study entitled "*Practitioner experiences of identifying and working with Child Criminal Exploitation*"

From now on, please try to remember not to disclose any information that may identify you and people you work with.

ID code stated

Demographics

Before we begin, I'd like to ask you some demographic information.

- How long have you worked for Youth Offending?
- How many hours a week do you work there? (as a YOT member)
- What age group would you place yourself in –
    - 20s, 30, 40s, 50s, 60s? prefer not to say?
- What is your highest level of educational attainment?
    - completed secondary school, diploma, degree, master's, etc.
- With which gender do you identify?

Interview

Recognition/ identification

1. How would you define child criminal exploitation?
    a. Be as broad or specific as you can.
2. How do you recognise whether a child/young person may have been criminally exploited?
    a. Do the children have specific characteristics?
        i. Early, mid, late signs
        ii. Behavioural, cognitive, emotional, sociological
3. Can you tell me what types of CCE your clients are typically involved in?
    a. What other types of criminal exploitation are you familiar with?

(If one of the main types is not addressed then define the type/s)

4. Do the young people who have experienced exploitation in the defined way have specific characteristics?
    a. Early, mid, late signs
    b. Behavioural, cognitive, emotional, sociological
5. Are there any organisational systems that support or challenge identification?
    a. How are they typically identified?
6. How does information about criminal exploitation typically emerge?
    a. How is the information circulated?
7. What steps can be taken to improve identification?
    a. Personal, institutional

Working with

1. In your experience, how does a young person come to be criminally exploited?
    a. How does it start?
    b. How does it continue?
    c. How does it stop?
2. In what way (if any) does realising that a young person is a victim of child exploitation change the way you view them?
    a. Do different types of CCE alter that?

3. What challenges do you face when working with young people who have been criminally exploited?'
4. What have you found to be helpful in your work with young people who have been criminally exploited? (prompts – training? Processes? Experience? Chatting to colleagues?)
5. What challenges do young people who have been criminally exploited experience?
6. In your experience, what has helped the young people who have been criminally exploited?

Closing Questions

1. In an ideal world, what do you think needs to be improved (if anything) in order to better identify and support young people who have been criminally exploited?
2. Do you have any other thoughts or comments on young people who have been criminally exploited?

Debrief

Thank you. This is the end of the interview. Do you have any questions at this time?

I will send you a debrief form shortly after we disconnect.

The form contains some useful info that I would like you to read.

Thank you very much for your contribution.

Appendix L

Debrief Form

Practitioner experiences of identifying and working with Child Criminal Exploitation

Thank you for participating in this study.

You have been invited to take part in this study because of your extensive experience of working with youth who may have been criminally exploited. We intend to speak to people in Youth Offending Teams in various locations in England and Wales to help us see the wider picture.

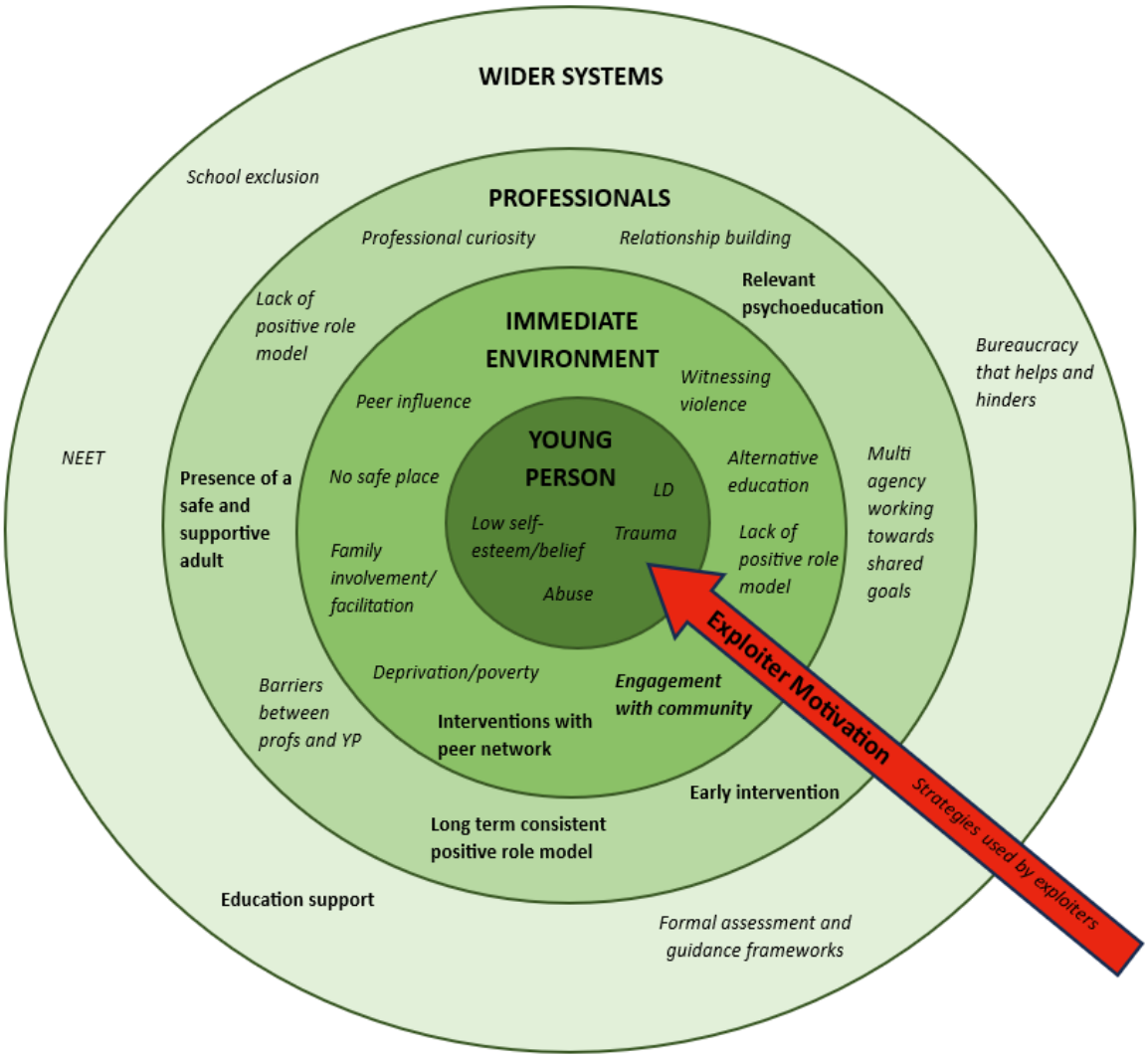
Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) can be defined as a form of child abuse whereby children are coerced to partake in criminal activities, including the movement of drugs or money. CCE has been heavily publicised recently, particularly from the perspective of the County Lines model of organised gangs exploiting young people through the selling of illegal substances outside of the gang's resident area. The true complexity of the CCE phenomena is clouded by the popular model of drug trafficking to the extent that some practitioners view CCE as a primarily a drug problem. The narrowed down perspective of CCE has the potential to influence opinions and attitudes of professionals engaged in rehabilitative work with young offenders. The preconceived opinions and attitudes, otherwise known as stereotypes, may manifest in the way professionals identify and support criminally exploited youth. For example, screening interviews with offending youth may be hypersensitive to the drug trafficking and sexually abusive types compared to other, less recognised types of exploitation, such as those involving thefts and violence. Consequently, support and intervention plans may be misguided. Understanding the barriers to identification of the various forms of CCE and misconceptions that professionals may hold could help us shape training and development for staff in contact with the youth. This can ultimately lead to reduction in offending and reoffending rates. Results of the study may be published in an academic journal accessible on the internet.

If anything you discussed today has left you feeling concerned or upset, there are many avenues of free support, such as The Samaritans (Tel: 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org). If you have any further questions about the study or would like to withdraw your participation, please contact the doctoral researcher, Rachel Marcarian[redacted]

Please do not discuss the aims or content of this study with your colleagues as they may be participating later.

Appendix M

Model of Child Exploitation



Italics = themes from interviews

Bold = factors from SLR