

One-minute guide

Learning from an Oxfordshire Serious Case Review

January 2021

Overview

In April 2019 16-year-old Jacob was found dead in his bedroom, with the coroner's report indicating he was intoxicated and distressed with insufficient evidence that he had intended to end his life. Jacob and his Mum had returned to live in Oxfordshire in July 2017 and since this time it is believed he was groomed into a world where he was criminally exploited and exposed to serious levels of youth violence.

Jacob was a child missing education, not on roll at any education provision despite requests. This is due to his perceived behaviours and risks to other children. His family shared that he wanted to be in school, wanting to buy a school uniform and walk into a school *"to just feel like others"* his age.

There were numerous concerns of Jacob being criminally exploited to sell drugs. Jacob went missing 20 times (escalating over a period when he was in care), owned at least 3 mobile phones, was seen with large amounts of cash, was observed selling drugs and it was suspected he was accruing mounting drug debts. Jacob was also the suspect or offender in numerous police reports including drug supply, possession of weapons and assaulting others. Jacob's Mum experienced verbal and physical assaults. Jacob attended the Emergency department on 3 occasions for injuries including lacerations to his face believed to be knife injuries and had other significant injuries which he did not seek treatment for.

Jacob's was well known to Mental Health Services. He had no history of self-harming or suicidal behaviours but did have a range of complex emotional and behavioural needs which he was not accessing services for and his drug use and alcohol levels were not fully known.

The review concluded that Jacob was significantly harmed in the months prior to his death and felt trapped in a world he could not escape, having been coerced and controlled for many months by organised criminals operating County Lines.

Findings

Criminal exploitation

- Investigations into Jacobs criminal behaviour did not proceed due to lack of evidence and victims not wishing to press charges. He shared how he felt “*untouchable*” to the police and youth justice services.
- A referral to the Youth Justice National Referral Mechanism was made in March 2019, just a month before Jacob’s death.
- This left him highly vulnerable as a “*clean skin*” and those who exploited him knew he was not being monitored closely by professionals. Interventions might have resulted in preventative work and in Jacob becoming “*too hot to handle*”.
- Jacob was never linked to county line networks in the area and those who exploited Jacob were also “*untouchable*” to the Police as their details remained unknown to all agencies.
- Missing Children’s Panel oversight was typically to review matters in a month’s time, with little consideration to the reasons for his behaviour, risks exposed to while missing or how to disrupt exploitation risks to him.

Education

- Systemic and enduring drift and delay across the education sector and lack of responsibility and accountability resulted in Jacob being without an education provision for almost 2 years.
- No formal dispute resolutions were raised by Children’s Social Care and escalation did not take place.

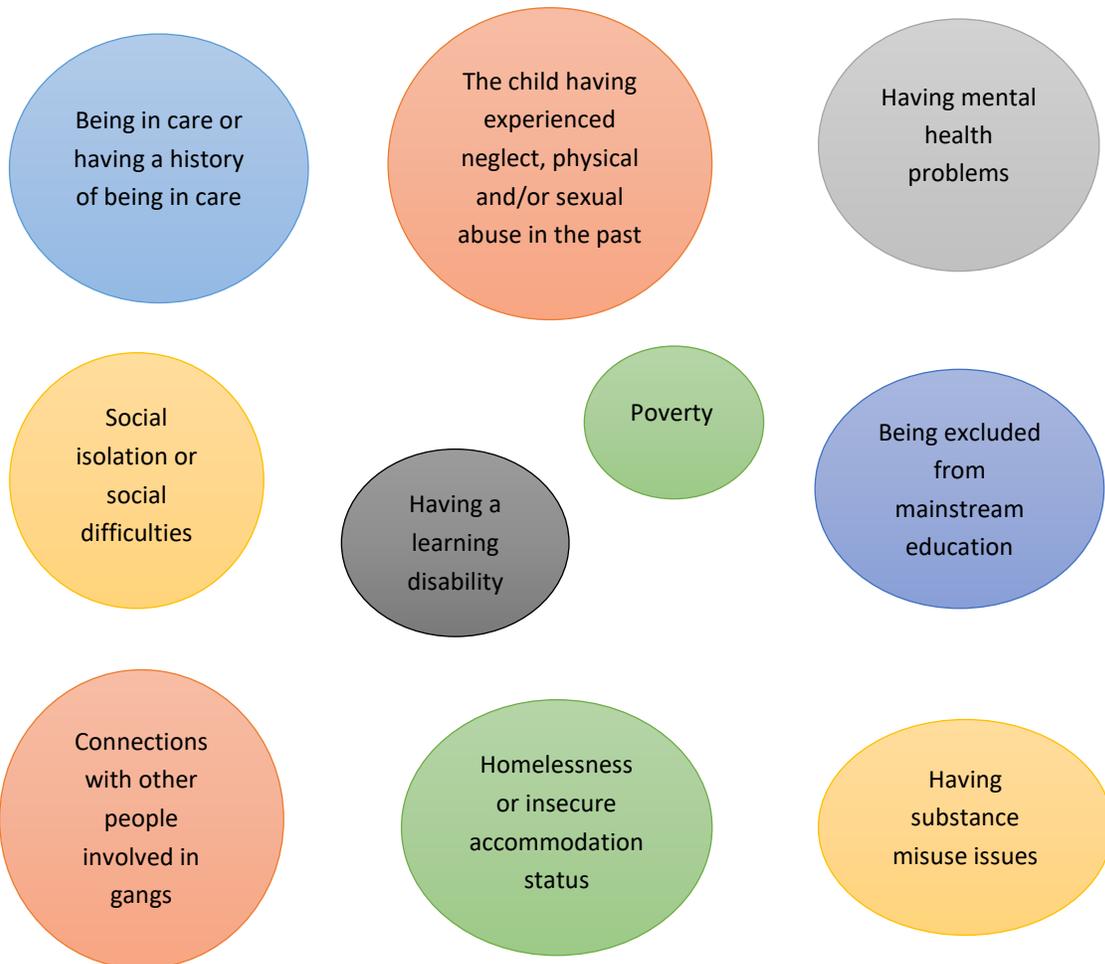
Working Together

- Some warning indicators to Jacob’s safety and well-being were regularly shared between the statutory agencies, risk assessed by individual agencies and plans established however multi agency work was fragmented and some partners were noticeably missing from discussions.
- There were extensive efforts of the mental health service to raise concerns with lead statutory agencies about the risk Jacob posed to himself and others and the service held the clinical view that Jacob was high risk due to his vulnerabilities and were clear Jacob was not safe with a community plan.
- There were practitioners who knew Jacob well, saw him often and had built a relationship of trust with him where he would seek their support. They worked flexibly and creatively, and took considerable time, skill and persistence in their care for Jacob.
- Practitioners obtained Jacob’s views, wishes and feelings on several occasions by spending 1:1 time with him and wishes to stay in the local area with family were considered in strategy discussions.
- Practitioners and Managers were worried for Jacob’s well-being but felt at a loss to know what to do. Some professionals shared openly about not feeling experienced or sufficiently confident to work with such complexity, even with adequate supervision arrangements and support.
- Escalation and dispute resolution procedures could have been instigated on various matters including the use of unregulated placements, lack of education provision and drift and delay in care planning.
- Jacob’s Mum felt frustrated by a lack of community resources and practical guidance on how best to manage the situation both at home and in the community.

Who is vulnerable to Criminal Exploitation / County Lines Exploitation?

Any child could potentially be at risk criminal exploitation by a county lines gang. It is important to look beyond behaviours to understand a child's needs, be aware of unconscious gender bias (some evidence shows males tend to be perceived as perpetrators while females are perceived as victims) and act on critical and reachable moments in a child's life such as school exclusion.

Factors that make a county lines gang more likely to target, groom and exploit a child include:



Key Contacts and Further Information

Please find a copy of the full review here - <https://www.oscb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CSPR-for-Jacob-.pdf>

Coventry Safeguarding Children Partnership website - <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/cscp>

Escalation policy - <https://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/local-content/4gjN/escalation-policy-resolution-of-professional-disagreements/?b=Coventry>

Escalation One Minute Guide - https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/31161/escalation_policy

Safeguarding Procedures around gang activity and youth violence:

<https://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/pkpzs/regional-safeguarding-guidance/children-affected-by-exploitation-and-trafficking-including-gangs#s594>

County lines One Minute Guide - https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/30440/county_lines