

Ben

Ben required communication support, but interpreters were not always used by professionals. Family members such as Ben's father were relied upon which compounded Ben's isolation and lack of voice. Ben's father was extremely controlling and both parents also physically assaulted Ben and his siblings. Absence from education increased his vulnerability and isolation.

There was a stark difference in how risk and need was 'framed' between Ben and his Sibling. At 12, Ben was referred to as being 'sexually active' with a 16-year-old whilst his sibling was referred to as 'sexually abused.' The review considered how different responses may have been if Ben was a girl.

Fiona

Fiona came from a home with significant domestic abuse. Her families concern about possible sexual exploitation, was not investigated.

Fiona came into care but was not referred for CSE support. She went missing from every placement and was involved with adult males who supplied her with alcohol and drugs.

Fiona became pregnant to a man the mother believed to be a paedophile. There is no record of follow up action.

She reported visits from men who assaulted her and it was said the property was "a brothel and smelt of Cannabis".

When Fiona was 18, her child was made subject of a care order and subsequently adopted, compounding the impact of her sexual exploitation, causing lifelong trauma.

Fiona asks, "Why was my child removed from me because of concerns over me being a victim of CSE but I, still under the age of 18, was left to carry on being abused"?

Fiona described the impact professionals as being as "bad as the abuse"

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is the sexual abuse of children and young people under the age of 18.

CSE happens when children are encouraged (or forced) to take part in sexual activity and receive something in return.

CSE does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur using technology.



One Minute Guide

Learning from a Bradford Thematic Child Safeguarding Practice Review

Child Sexual Exploitation

July 2021

Samara

Samara grew up in a home with domestic abuse and where parental mental health issues were a factor. Her parents recognised the warning signs of CSE (changes in behaviour; staying out late; being evasive) from males online when she was 12. Professionals described Samara as "putting herself at risk" and encouraging men by lying about her age. Her brothers blamed her for her abuse.

The consistent relationship with the Sexual Health Practitioner (SHP) meant that Samara's voice was heard and understood. The SHP effectively used professional challenge, including challenging agencies on how Samaras Child Protection Plan had not been progressed, and kept excellent records

Anna

Anna had an older abusive boyfriend aged 18 - 27 and services appeared to support a religious marriage with him, with a social worker attending the ceremony and assessing that her marriage was likely to reduce the risks incurred when she went missing (which occurred on over 70 occasions). Anna had no confidence in her social worker who talked in Urdu to her 'father-in-law' and excluded her from the conversation. They also set up a foster placement with his family outside of normal processes. Anna had two children whilst she was still a looked after child.

During the time Anna was in care, she was being sexually abused and exploited by dozens of adult males known to her "boyfriend/husband"

Anna said: 'I was failed for more than two decades'

'This could have ended in a homicide case as I was suffering from severe domestic violence.'

'If only the authorities had done what was recommended for me, (secure unit or accommodation) I wouldn't have been subject to sexually and physical abuse for many years.'

Ruby

Ruby experienced significant mental health issues and a physical condition impacting on her behaviour and was described as 'an eight-year-old in an 18-year old's body'. She experienced 14 different placements. Too much emphasis was on the impact of her behaviour rather than the cause. Services did not keep her safe.

Ruby prolifically self-harmed, requiring hospital admissions. There were numerous missing incidents and belief she was sexually exploited.

When Ruby began to dress in "Muslim clothing" and talk of getting married in Afghanistan under a false passport this was not responded to.

Missing from Home Episodes

In the non-recent cases there was little evidence of follow up, contrasted in more recent cases like Ruby's where there is far greater emphasis on evidence gathering opportunities (digital media, forensic opportunities).

The Philomena Protocol was adopted in Bradford in response to the review. It is a scheme that asks carers to identify children and young people who are at risk of going missing, and to record vital information about them that can be used to help find them quickly and safely.

Domestic Abuse Incidents Involving a Child

Most of the children considered in the report experienced domestic abuse in the family home prior to being exploited. Whenever a child is present at a domestic abuse incident, information is now shared with CSC. If the child is in education, their school is also informed so that they can monitor the impact of domestic abuse on the child.

Teenage Pregnancy and Looked After Children

Half of the female children considered in this review became pregnant as a result of their abuse. Two of the babies were placed for adoption and all were subject to child protection arrangements. Typically, the victims of CSE do not recognise themselves as victims and if they do become pregnant it may be many years before they consider their pregnancies within the context of their sexual exploitation. There is also evidence (including from Anna) that children born as a result of CSE may be used by the perpetrator as a further means of control and coercion.

As part of midwives' training any looked after child who presents as pregnant needs to be referred to the safeguarding midwife and referred to CSC for a pre-birth assessment.

Recognising and Responding to Online Abuse

The use of the internet and mobile phones to groom and commit offences was a feature in all cases in the review. Mobile phones were used by abusers to contact and control the young people. In some cases, phones were given to the victims for exclusive contact with the abusers. Similarly, the internet was used to contact and coerce the young people to arrange meetings.

The Role of Drugs and Alcohol

The use of drugs and alcohol as tools of exploitation was present in all cases. None of the children were referred to specialist services.

Partners should display professional curiosity in the use of alcohol and drugs,

Possible Radicalisation and Prevent Referrals

Ruby and Anna suddenly began to wear Muslim dress, spoke about becoming Muslim, married Muslims and in Ruby's case discussed getting a passport and moving to Afghanistan. This sudden change occurred when it was known by agencies that they were being sexually exploited. This sudden and dramatic change was not considered as a possible sign of grooming or coercion and Prevent Strategies were not used. In Anna's case it was described as '*confusion about her identity*'. In Ruby's case the change was recorded but not analysed or explored.

Response to Young People with Disabilities and with Behavioural Problems.

The impacts of physical, sensory and learning or cognitive disability on children and young people compounded the risk to them of becoming exploited and abused.

Four of the children experienced being arrested and held in custody and some have been convicted of offences in response to their behaviours. Their early histories of abuse, neglect and trauma resulted in them displaying very challenging behaviours but there was little contextualising of the offences. Trauma informed approaches were not consistently used.

Disruption to Education

All the children experienced significant disruption to their education. The impact of this is threefold: Their basic human right to receive an 'effective education' was not met; Protective factors provided by regularly attending school were lost; 'Normal' social interactions with peers are denied to children not in education.

Reframing Vulnerability

When considering what 'good would look like' for Ruby and Ben their responses focused on positive aspirational outcomes including: Consistency with key workers; Peer supports; Long term therapy and holistic plans.

Much direct preventative work in CSE involves efforts to 'reduce vulnerabilities' of children to protect them from a sex offender, who is assumed to only target children with vulnerabilities. The perception that children 'put themselves at risk' of CSE is still widely held.

Key Contacts and Further Information

- [Coventry Safeguarding Childrens Partnership](#)
- [The NSPCC guidance 'Protecting Children from Radicalisation'](#)
- [2018 National Protocol for Reducing Unnecessary Criminalisation of Looked After Children and Care Leavers](#)
- [Exploitation One Minute Guide](#)
- [Exploitation Pages and Indicator Tool](#)
- [Read the full report here](#)