

# Vulnerable Children and Young People Sexual Exploitation Through Prostitution



---

---

# Vulnerable Children and Young People

## Sexual Exploitation Through Prostitution

© Crown copyright 2003

ISBN 0 7559 0923 2

Published by  
Scottish Executive  
St Andrew's House  
Edinburgh

Produced for the Scottish Executive by Astron B31012

Further copies are available from  
The Stationery Office Bookshop  
71 Lothian Road  
Edinburgh EH3 9AZ  
Tel: 0870 606 55 66

The text pages of this document are produced from 100% elemental chlorine-free, environmentally-preferred material and are 100% recyclable.

## Introduction

1. We know that children and young people (boys and girls) are sexually exploited through prostitution across Scotland. We do not know how many are involved but we know that it is happening. We also know that children and young people may not always recognise that they are being abused or exploited and may find it difficult to accept the fact that this is happening.

## Definition

2. Sexual exploitation through prostitution is difficult to define. It may include the provision of sexual services in exchange for some form of payment, such as money, drink, drugs or consumer goods or even a bed and a roof over one's head for a night. In some cases there may be no exchange of material goods and the child or young person may not recognise that they are being sexually exploited. The relationship, however, will generally be characterised by coercion and intimidation.

Tink Palmer in *No Son of Mine! Children abused through prostitution* published by Barnardo's, offers the following definition which may be helpful:

**Any involvement of a child or young person below 18 in sexual activity for which remuneration of cash or in kind is given to the child or young person or a third person or persons. The perpetrator will have power over the child by virtue of one or more of the following – age, emotional maturity, gender, physical strength and intellect.**

3. This definition of sexual exploitation through prostitution includes young people aged 16 and 17. There are a number of different definitions of a child in Scottish legislation. However, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child defines a child as below 18. **For the purposes of this document references to “children” and/or “young people” includes all those under the age of 18.** Local authorities have responsibilities under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 to provide services to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need who are defined as those under 18. Local authorities also have responsibilities to children in need of protection from neglect and abuse.

## Why is sexual exploitation through prostitution of such concern?

4. Sexual exploitation through prostitution is abuse. The fact that some form of remuneration may take place should not imply consent on the part of the child. Children cannot consent to their own abuse and exploitation. Sexual exploitation through prostitution robs a child of their childhood.

## Prevention

5. There is a lack of information on why children are drawn into sexual exploitation through prostitution. However, children who are sexually exploited through prostitution are likely to be experiencing other problems. These problems may include parental disharmony, physical violence, relationship problems, sexual abuse, bullying, truancy or substance misuse (either by the child or by a member of their family).

6. It is important that the needs of children sexually exploited through prostitution are not seen in isolation. It is important that action is taken to address all of these underlying issues which can increase a child's vulnerability and potentially lead to their involvement in high-risk activity.

### **Awareness raising**

7. We do not know how many children and young people are sexually exploited through prostitution in Scotland and we lack information about the routes in and what works in supporting young people in exiting this situation. Children may not be visible on the streets and it is therefore difficult to gather meaningful data. While we do not have information on the number of young people we do know that it is happening. **Research will be commissioned by the Scottish Executive as a priority on the scope of the problem in Scotland to raise general awareness amongst professionals working with children. It is important that this research also addresses the needs of young men involved in sexual exploitation.**
8. The work undertaken by organisations in raising the public profile of this issue is to be welcomed. It is important to challenge the attitude that young people sexually exploited through prostitution have made a lifestyle choice. The focus of the criminal justice system should be targeted on adults who abuse and coerce children. Consideration should always be given to the possibility of taking criminal action against those adults. It is also important that professionals working with children and young people provide support and empathy for those who are abused through prostitution and do not seek to punish or stigmatise them.
9. Some young people may not recognise that they are in an exploitative relationship although this may be clear to those around them. It may be very difficult for a child or young person to accept that someone they trust is seeking to exploit and manipulate them and they may need support to help them to deal with these issues. It is important that professionals are aware of the potential indicators that a child may be involved in sexual exploitation through prostitution, and are equipped to deal with, and to treat any complaints or concerns from a child, parent or carer seriously.
10. Services for those who are sexually exploited through prostitution often focus on the needs of girls – but this is not just an issue for girls. Boys and young men may also be sexually exploited through prostitution. It is important that professionals working with young people are fully aware of the risks to boys and young men and that their needs are not overlooked. The routes into sexual exploitation may be very different for boys and young men and they may be unwilling to access support targeted at girls.

### **Internet safety**

11. The internet has brought many opportunities and benefits but it is also an important element in the sexual exploitation of young people through prostitution. In some instances, the internet is used as a means of arranging assignments especially when children or young people are kept in rooms for the purposes of sexual exploitation. This can increase the invisibility of these young people and make it more difficult for them to develop support networks or access

services. The use of pictures and film may be part of the on-going sexual exploitation of a child or young person. Adults can also use the internet to gain the trust of unsuspecting children and young people with the aim of seeking to exploit them. Internet safety campaigns have been developed to alert young people to the dangers of paedophiles on the internet.

## Services

12. It is important that the needs of children sexually exploited through prostitution are not viewed in isolation. Children are lured into sexual exploitation through prostitution because of a range of issues which may include abuse, family breakdown and conflict, low self-esteem, poverty, substance misuse and truancy. A range of interventions may therefore be required to address the child's underlying problems.
13. Children and young people may welcome the opportunity to discuss issues via a telephone helpline. The use of a helpline allows the child to remain anonymous and to retain control of the discussion. They may choose to terminate the discussion at any time. It is important that children and young people know that they can contact a helpline and that these are freephone numbers. **Consideration should be given to increasing the advertising of helplines in areas where vulnerable children may congregate.** The Scottish Executive will discuss practical ways of taking this forward with the national helpline organisations. The use of web-based information and support can also be helpful.

### ChildLine Scotland

ChildLine Scotland is a free 24-hour confidential helpline for children and young people. Childline has a very high recognition rate amongst children and young people.

### Parentline Plus

Offers support to anyone parenting a child – the child's parents, stepparents, grandparents and foster parents. Parentline Plus runs a 24-hour confidential freephone helpline.

### Message Home

Message Home (provided by the National Missing Persons Helpline) is a free 24-hour confidential helpline for anyone who has left home. Its freephone number is in every BT telephone call box in the UK. It provides a means of communication between missing people and those who are missing them, and callers can seek confidential help and advice.

### Get Connected

Get Connected is a free UK-wide helpline that finds help and support for young people. The helpline worker listens to the young person then talks through the range of options and suggests services which may be able to help. Get Connected can then provide a free connection to the service.

14. There is no single model of provision which will meet the needs of all children sexually exploited through prostitution. It is important that a range of services is available to young people which may include outreach support, sexual health services, support to address substance misuse, counselling and mental health services. Children sexually exploited through prostitution may be wary of statutory agencies and therefore voluntary sector agencies may have an important role as an initial point of contact. However, this will not always be the case and some young people may have very positive relationships with statutory agencies. Much will depend upon the quality of individual relationships.

*"Well do you think I just woke up one day and thought 'I know, I'll be a rent boy today?' Thousands of things have happened to get me here – mum leaving, no-one at home, hanging around the pub late and waiting to go home with dad, having blokes try to touch us up, seeing boys do tricks and getting cash and fags. If you want to change me, you're probably going to have to do thousands of things too, to balance it out."*

Words of 14-year-old boy abused through prostitution quoted by Tink Palmer in *No Son of Mine! Children abused through prostitution* published by Barnardo's.

15. Some organisations are developing packages for use in schools on sexual exploitation and prostitution. If handled appropriately, this can be a helpful way of exploring difficult issues with children and young people in a non-stigmatising way. It is important that teachers are provided with suitable materials to allow them to discuss these issues and to deal with any problems which may arise.

### **Refuge provision**

16. Young people sexually exploited through prostitution may need access to safer accommodation as part of the process of support. Secure accommodation is one way of seeking to provide young people with safer accommodation. However, there are concerns that this may be viewed by the young person as a punishment and may not be the best option for all young people. The Executive has identified £57,000 for a feasibility study led by Barnardo's that will seek to identify effective services for young people who are being sexually exploited through prostitution.

### **Guidance for professionals**

17. The planning and development of services for children sexually exploited through prostitution should be taken forward within the wider children's services planning process. It is important that professionals work in collaboration with each other across agency boundaries and in partnership with children and young people and for young runaways. Local protocols should be developed to support children sexually exploited through prostitution and to identify and agree the roles of different agencies. Guidance on the content and development of local

protocols is attached at **Annex A**. Progress reports on protocol development, monitoring and evaluation will be considered as part of the child protection reform programme. It is important that this issue is not seen in isolation and further work will be taken forward as part of the wider reform of child protection.

18. Professionals working with vulnerable young people should be aware of the risk that children may be targeted by adults within the community seeking to exploit them and in partnership with the police consider what preventative action should be taken. Young people may have an important role in these discussions.

*"More agencies need to learn to listen to young people's ideas on sexual exploitation and how they can keep themselves safe."*

Young person from FACE

FACE (Fighting Against Child Exploitation) is a young people's forum set up in partnership with young people. It is joint funded by Barnardo's Scotland, Dundee City Council Social Work Department, the Corner Young People's Health and Information Project and the WEB project through monies from X-Plore (SIP). FACE aims to empower young people whose lives have been affected by Child Sexual Exploitation to raise awareness of the issues. It seeks to help young people talk and get adults to listen.

### **Legislative framework**

19. Sexual offences against children are covered by both statute and common law and a child under 16 cannot legally consent to sexual activity. The Criminal Law (Consolidations) (Scotland) Act 1995 contains a number of provisions that apply to children including some that relate to indecent behaviour and unlawful sexual intercourse. The primary aim of agencies should be to provide support to the child and to take action against the child's abusers. Information on the legal position relating to children abused through sexual exploitation is provided separately, to assist professionals working with children and young people.

## **GUIDANCE FOR PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SEXUALLY EXPLOITED THROUGH PROSTITUTION**

### **Introduction**

1. This Guidance is for police, health, social services, education and all other agencies and professionals that may work with children.

#### **Principles**

- Children's welfare and safety must be the paramount consideration when decisions are made about them.
- Sexual exploitation of children through prostitution is abuse.
- Children and young people cannot consent to their own abuse and exploitation.
- Children and young people have the right to be protected from abuse and exploitation.
- The focus of the criminal justice system should be targeted at adults who abuse and coerce children and young people.
- Children and young people have the right to safety, stability and security of care.
- Children and young people have a right to express their views and for their views to be taken into account when decisions are made about them.
- Agencies should work in partnership with children and young people.
- Agencies should work in partnership with parents/carers.
- Agencies should work in collaboration to protect and support children and young people.
- Children and young people have a right to express concerns in confidence in so far as their safety, and that of others, is not compromised.

### **Identifying Children at Risk of Sexual Exploitation**

2. Children sexually exploited through prostitution may not be visible on the streets. It is important that professionals are aware of the potential indicators that a child or young person may be involved in prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation. A list of potential indicators is at **Annex B**.

### **Local protocols – development**

3. Local protocols should be developed to respond to children sexually exploited through prostitution. It is for local agencies to decide whether they wish to develop a separate

protocol or a joint protocol for vulnerable children. It is important that any protocols are placed within the wider spectrum of services for children in need. Child Protection Committees have a key role in the development and monitoring of any protocols.

Protocols should be developed involving representatives from:

- local authorities (education and social services);
  - health services (including hospitals (A&E));
  - the police;
  - the criminal justice service;
  - Scottish Children's Reporter's Administration;
  - relevant voluntary agencies; and
  - the local inter-agency domestic violence forum.
4. Child Protection Committees may wish to involve other agencies with a relevant interest in this issue, including relevant local and national voluntary organisations (where they have a local presence). Consideration should be given to involving relevant other professionals such as local Sheriffs and the Procurator Fiscal. Young people who have experience of being sexually exploited through prostitution and who are willing to help and advise, should also be involved, as appropriate. However, young people may need support to enable them to contribute to this process.
5. Statutory agencies have specific duties in relation to children in substitute care and while the protocols make specific reference to the needs of children in care, it is important to recognise that the risk of sexual exploitation through prostitution can affect all vulnerable children. **It is important not to overlook the needs of those children not in care.**

## Local protocols – content

### Prevention

Protocols must:

- **Include a clear statement that sexual exploitation through prostitution is abuse and should be treated accordingly.**
- **Include information on the roles and responsibilities of individual agencies and recognise the legal responsibilities of parents and carers.** Parents have responsibility to safeguard and promote the health, development and welfare of their children.
- **Stress that all young people in residential care should be provided with advice on sexual health, drug misuse and other matters relating to their personal safety and**

**welfare.** Staff (residential and foster carers) should be equipped to discuss matters of sexuality and sexual health, drug or alcohol misuse, running away, offending or other high-risk behaviour with the young people in their care and to respond to young people's concerns. Young people should be able to discuss these issues in confidence, provided there are no concerns about their safety.

- **Recognise that when young people are involved in, or at risk of, sexual exploitation or abuse, practitioners will need to consider how to approach the issue with the young person concerned.** How the issue is tackled will depend on the young person's age, vulnerability and understanding and the specific circumstances of each case. It may be appropriate to consult with others about the child's circumstances, particularly if abuse is likely to be one of many problems that the young person is experiencing.
- **Encourage young people's residential units, in partnership with the police, to consider what protective action should be taken to ensure that vulnerable children in their care are not targeted by adults (or other young people) in the community who might wish to exploit them or involve them in high risk or criminal activities.** Consideration should also be given to any action to be taken if there are concerns about a young person's associates.
- **Include guidance on the sharing of information between agencies.** The need to ensure proper protection of children requires that agencies share information promptly and effectively when necessary. Guidance on sharing information is contained in *Protecting Children – A Shared Responsibility*.
- **Confirm that when discussing the issue with the young person the practitioner must be clear about how information will be dealt with and any limits to confidentiality.**
- **Provide information for professionals on the warning signs that might indicate that a young person is involved in prostitution.**
- **Include guidance on the importance of providing follow-up interviews for children who have returned home or to care having run away.** Staff should be aware of the signs of involvement in prostitution/sexual exploitation.

### **Immediate safety**

Protocols must:

- **Emphasise the importance of treating any complaints or concerns raised by a child or member of their family seriously.** Professionals should be aware of the risks that a child may be being groomed or lured into high-risk situations.
- **Advise the action that must be taken to protect the child if a professional believes that they may be involved in prostitution.** In many instances this will include the triggering of child protection procedures.

- **Emphasise that the priority must be to secure the best interests of the child. Any criminal justice action must focus on investigating and prosecuting those who are involved in abusing a child (this includes those who sexually abuse a child and those who coerce or are involved in the prostitution of a child).** Careful consideration should be given to whether a crime has been committed. Staff from any agency, who gain knowledge about the activities of abusers should ensure the police are informed, whilst ensuring the confidentiality of the young person is maintained. Police and social work staff will need to work together to ensure that if there are investigations into allegations of sexual abuse or exploitation, the young person is protected.

### **Support for the child**

- **Emphasise the need to support rather than stigmatise children who become involved in sexual exploitation through prostitution.**
- **Emphasise the importance of supporting young people leaving care to assist them in accessing accommodation/balancing finances and making the transition to independent living.**
- **Recognise that it may take time for a young person to move on from prostitution or a sexually exploitative relationship.** It is important to support them through this process. A child may need support for a range of issues over a significant period of time including safe and supported accommodation; access to employment, education or training opportunities; the establishment of a positive network of friends and relatives to offer continuing support; and drug or alcohol services. An exit strategy should be developed with the child that addresses the individual needs of that child.

#### **Barnardo's**

The Barnardo's Street Team provides a crisis-responsive service to vulnerable and at-risk young people in Glasgow city centre and surrounding areas who have nowhere to stay at night, have run away, are at risk of being abused through prostitution, or may be involved with drugs or alcohol. The Team operates a streetwork service at night as well as providing a follow-up service during the day, the primary aim of which is to link young people into mainstream services and advocate on their behalf. An underlying principle of the work is the practice of involving young people in developing their own solutions to allow them to retain control and choice.

## POTENTIAL INDICATORS OF INVOLVEMENT IN SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND PROSTITUTION

The indicators should not be read as a definitive list and should not, of course, be taken, in themselves, as an indication of involvement in prostitution or sexual exploitation. They are intended as a guide which would be included in a wider assessment of the young person's circumstances.

These indicators may include:

- Physical symptoms (bruising suggestive of either physical or sexual assault)
- Prevalence of a sexually-transmitted infection
- Young person known to be sexually active
- Reports from reliable sources suggesting the likelihood of involvement in prostitution
- Reports that the child has been seen in places known to be used for prostitution
- Evidence of substance misuse
- Leaving home/care setting in clothing unusual for individual child (inappropriate for age, borrowing clothing from older young people)
- Reportedly consorting with unknown adults outside the usual range of contacts and/or other children known to be involved in sexual exploitation
- Phone calls or letters from adults outside the usual range of social contacts
- Adults loitering outside the child's usual place of residence
- Significantly older "boyfriend"
- Accounts of social activities with no plausible explanation of the source of necessary funding
- Persistently missing or returning late with no plausible explanation
- Returning after having been missing, looking well cared for in spite of having no known base
- Missing for long periods, with no known base
- Possession of large amounts of money with no plausible explanation
- Acquisition of expensive clothes or other possessions without plausible explanation
- Low self-image
- History of physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect
- Truancy
- Entering or leaving vehicles driven by unknown adults
- Going missing and found in areas where the child or young person has no known links
- Possible inappropriate use of the internet and the forming of relationships, particularly with adults, via the internet.

Astron B31012-03



w w w . s c o t l a n d . g o v . u k