



## **Vulnerability factors for all professionals to consider in relation to the risk of sexual exploitation**

### **Aim of briefing paper:**

This briefing paper aims to share the key risk factors to consider in relation to working with children, young people and vulnerable adults who may be at risk of sexual exploitation.

The risk factors have been identified and gathered from knowledge of working within this area, information gathered at a number of multi-agency Complex Abuse Strategy Meetings and through the multi-agency Risk Management Group. The meetings have given increased knowledge and understanding of the nature and profile of sexual exploitation in Northumberland. They have covered the rural and urban areas of Northumberland, including the following: Beadnell, Alnwick, Amble, Ashington, Bedlington, Cramlington and Blyth.

### **Vulnerability factors:**

All children, young people and vulnerable adults may be at risk sexual exploitation; however, evidence in Northumberland and supported from a regional police problem profile, shows that females between the ages of 12-16 seem to be more vulnerable to sexual exploitation. It is important to note that males are also at risk of sexual exploitation; however, for a number of reasons, they are less likely to report or share their experiences, or view themselves as victims. There is also a difference in the age range of male victims, who tend to be between the ages of 14-18.

Most children, young people and vulnerable adults do not see themselves as victims of sexual exploitation and do not usually disclose sexual exploitation until well into adulthood. It is therefore important that all professionals are aware of the risk factors and signs of sexual exploitation,

share relevant information, no matter how small or insignificant it may appear to be, to enable victims to be identified and supported at the earliest opportunity and to disrupt and prevent sexual exploitation. If in doubt, you should seek advice from your line manager / safeguarding lead.

Vulnerable children, usually become vulnerable adults. The significant police investigation in Newcastle started off with a disclosure from a vulnerable adult, who had not been known to children's social care. Many children, young people and vulnerable adults travel between Northumberland, North Tyneside, Newcastle and Sunderland, which increases their vulnerability and the risk of sexual exploitation. In addition to this, other local authorities (neighbouring and further afield) place children and young people in Northumberland due to the risks around sexual exploitation. It is therefore essential that we make links between victims and share information with colleagues from neighbouring local authorities to disrupt and protect. The gathering and sharing of information from the independent Return Interviews when children and young people go missing is vital to capture and share this intelligence.

Adults seem to be at an increased risk of sexual exploitation if they have had poor childhood experience, disrupted education, low attendance and achievements, have a learning difficulty or learning disability and have or are experiencing emotional health issues. Involvement in alcohol and drugs will inevitably increase the risk of sexual exploitation.

**The following are the key vulnerability risk factors that we have identified from the multi-agency Complex Abuse Meetings and the multi-agency Risk Management Group meetings that have taken place in Northumberland:**

- Perpetrators are extremely socially skilled
- Children and young people living with vulnerable parents and carers who have been targeted by perpetrators to gain access to their children
- Children and young people who maybe living in neglectful home circumstances, including not prioritising school attendance and supporting important health or CYPS appointments
- Parents and carers who do not report their children as missing
- Looked After Children
- Children and young people placed in Northumberland from other local authorities, particularly those from local authorities further afield, often due to concerns around sexual exploitation
- Looked After Children and young people in residential care settings
- Children and young people who have had multiple placement moves
- Young people who have left care and are in unsuitable or unstable accommodation

- Children and young people who have left secure units
- Special Educational Needs
- Children and young people not in education
- Children and young people who have had multiple school moves or excluded from school
- Children and young people with poor school attendance, on partial or reduced timetables, in alternative education provision or not engaging in any meaningful education
- Missing from home, care or education (including missing from school for an hour and then returning)
- Poor home school communication/liaison
- Unknown adults dropping off and collecting children and young people from school
- Presenting as tired, withdrawn, irritable or angry in school.
- PMH or CYPS involvement and non-attendance or engagement with these services
- Involvement in the criminal justice system
- Association with an older peer group
- An older partner, or multiple partners
- Secrecy around their partner(s)
- Antisocial behaviour within the community
- Attendance at house parties, especially where alcohol and drugs are available
- Preoccupied or obsessed with mobile phone use and social media, likely to have multiple mobile phones
- A high level of secrecy around mobile phone and internet use
- Having money and gifts that they would not ordinarily afford
- LGBTQ, is an additional layer of vulnerability, the lack of family, friends and community support
- Children, young people and vulnerable adults not seeing the risks and not viewing themselves as victims of sexual exploitation
- Adults who may not have the capacity to keep themselves safe

Low self-esteem	Emotional well-being
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very quiet, shy, not coming to the attention of teachers or any other professionals</li> <li>• Weight loss/Obesity</li> <li>• Body Image, e.g. scars, birth marks &amp; acne</li> <li>• Perceived by self and others to be unattractive/unpopular</li> <li>• Socially isolated</li> <li>• Hair loss</li> <li>• Disability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Known to PMH or CYPS</li> <li>• Not being brought to or not engaging with PMH or CYPS appointments</li> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Bereavement</li> <li>• Self-harm</li> <li>• Attachment issues</li> <li>• Domestic abuse</li> <li>• Bullied/bullying</li> <li>• Disability</li> </ul>
Physical	Sexual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self- harm</li> <li>• Injuries</li> <li>• Bruising</li> <li>• Domestic abuse</li> <li>• Vague symptoms: headaches, abdominal pains</li> <li>• Genital symptoms: STI/pregnancy, partners, older 'boyfriends'</li> <li>• Behavioural changes/physical change in appearance</li> <li>• Disability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pregnancy</li> <li>• Emergency contraception / termination / contraception at a young age</li> <li>• Sexually Transmitted Infections</li> <li>• Multiple partners / older partners</li> <li>• Adults who may not have the capacity to keep themselves</li> </ul>

**What young people say (taken from Brooke SCR Bristol LSCB 2016):**

- *We don't see ourselves as victims*
- *If our behaviour is challenging, question why?*
- *It's really hard to talk about sexual experiences with adults, especially if those experiences hurt*
- *If we do talk about sex, it's really important not to look embarrassed*
- *Some people become really important to us leading up to court and when the trial's over we will miss them*

- *Be clear it's hard to say what is happening and we worry it'll get back to our families or we may get hurt by the people who did this if they find out we've talked*
- *It is difficult to trust teachers but we want them to notice behaviour changes and try to talk to us*
- *Mental health workers just want to talk about the past and that is too difficult. If you want us to share, do stuff with us, find places outside your offices, not just McDonalds*
- *If we go missing, our families need advice quickly on what to do. Our parents shouldn't get angry with us but make us feel loved*
- *The public need to be aware of what can happen and report what they see, if children are with a group of older males in a hotel, this is not normal, ring and tell the police*
- *Have services available on demand and at night, this is when we really need you*
- *Once we're over eighteen we will still need help*
- *Passing on information makes us really anxious, we know you need to do it but it puts us in a risky situation if it gets passed around the community*

**Messages for other children:**

- *Stay away from Facebook*
- *Don't try to fit in with your friends by using drugs and smoking*
- *Go home and call the police, tell someone – don't worry about being embarrassed, it happens to others and they will understand*
- *Speak to teachers and counsellors and try not to dwell on things*
- *Having someone work with your Mum and family really helps*
- *Finally, if you feel someone is not safe (what is described as the Jimmy Savile feeling), tell someone, you are almost certainly right*

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