

Institution: Cardiff University		
Unit of Assessment: Sociology (21)		
Title of case study: Transforming policy, practice and understanding of child sexual exploitation in the UK and Australia		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Sophie Hallett	Senior Lecturer	18/07/2013 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 26/11/2013 – 31/12/2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Hallett's research, investigating why and how child sexual exploitation occurs, and how professionals and carers prevent and respond to it, transformed understanding of this form of abuse. She identified the need to address safeguarding responses, as well as ways to intervene and prevent abuse from happening. The Welsh Government's new policy definition of child sexual exploitation and accompanying statutory guidance was based on this research. Hallett's work also directly shaped the practices and procedures of those tasked with helping victims and stopping offenders, including social workers, police forces and charities, in Wales, the UK, and Australia. As a result, vulnerable children are being better supported due to increased understanding of a complex, highly sensitive issue.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is an emergent social policy area. When it was formally introduced to UK safeguarding policy in 2009, there was a lack of awareness about what constitutes this kind of abuse, what can be done to prevent children from harm and what support should be offered to those affected. Hallett's research filled this knowledge gap by exploring what CSE is, and how best to intervene and prevent this type of abuse.</p> <p>2.1 Understanding child sexual exploitation</p> <p>Hallett's research on CSE included a) work directly with young victims [3.1] and b) Keeping Safe, the first ever UK longitudinal and in-depth study of the outcomes of provision of support to young people experiencing CSE [3.2, G3.1]. Key findings include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSE is a much wider and complex problem than is often reported [3.1, 3.4]; • It is distinct from other forms of child sexual abuse in involving an element of exchange, including when a child exchanges sex for something tangible, such as money or a safe place to stay, and/or the meeting of an emotional need [3.1, 3.2, 3.3]; • It has become synonymous with 'grooming', which frames children and young people as the passive victims of predatory <i>adult</i> perpetrators. This framing has serious implications for societal and professional responses to child sexual exploitation and can silence those young people whose experiences do not fit the grooming model [3.1, 3.2, 3.3]. The tendency to link CSE with grooming also means that some cases are missed [3.1, 3.3]. <p>2.2 Tackling child sexual exploitation</p> <p>Hallett identified that limited understanding of CSE has important implications for how the problem is addressed. For example, her 2017 review of CSE policy in Wales [3.3, G3.2] found that common misunderstandings around CSE meant practitioners were unable to respond appropriately to young people. This was especially true in situations that did not fit the grooming model, where young people did not see their relationships as exploitative, or when abusers were peers [3.3]. Safeguarding responses were too narrowly focussed on protection and on educating young people to keep themselves safe. Hallett's key findings include:</p>		

- The **exchange element needs to be acknowledged** if practitioners are to respond appropriately [3.1, 3.2, 3.3];
- CSE is connected to inadequate care (relationships, systems, and acts). For some young people, exchanging sex is a 'solution' to the problem of an absence of care or support. As current policies do not acknowledge the exchange element, child protection responses are not focused on meeting the needs driving the young person towards this 'solution' [3.4, also 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 3.6];
- The current risk-based approach to tackling CSE focuses on short-term measures to manage young people's 'risky' behaviours. This can unintentionally reinforce the problem as young people can experience these safeguarding measures as punitive. Further, these measures may not lead to better outcomes in the long-term as they are not responding adequately to or addressing wider issues. The research supported a move away from the current focus on risk to a wellbeing model which identifies and responds to the unmet care and support needs that leave young people vulnerable to exploitation [3.2, 3.5, 3.6].

In 2017, Hallett received the Social Research Association Early Career Researcher of the Year award for this body of work.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[3.1] Hallett, S. (2017) *Making sense of Child Sexual Exploitation: exchange, abuse and young people*. Bristol: Policy Press. Available in REF2.

[3.2] Hallett, S., Verbruggen, J., Buckley, K., and Robinson, A. (2019) *Keeping Safe? An analysis of the outcomes of research with sexually exploited young people in Wales. Final research report*. Cardiff University.

https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1553596/KEEPING_SAFE_FULL_RESEARCH_REPORT_2019_ENG.pdf

[3.3] Hallett, S., Crowley, A., Deerfield, K., Staples, E., Rees, A. (2017) *Review of the Safeguarding Children and young people from sexual exploitation (CSE) guidance*. Cardiff: Welsh Government. <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/136903/3/171115-review-safeguarding-children-young-people-sexual-exploitation-en.pdf>

[3.4] Hallett, S. (2016) 'An uncomfortable comfortableness': 'care', child protection and child sexual exploitation.' *British Journal of Social Work* 46(7), pp. 2137-2152. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcv136>

[3.5] Hallett, S., Deerfield, K. and Hudson, K. (2019) The same but different? Exploring the links between gender, trauma, sexual exploitation and harmful sexual behaviours. *Child Abuse Review* 28(6), pp. 442-454 (10.1002/car.2591)

[3.6] Hickie, K. and Hallett, S. (2016) 'Mitigating harm: considering harm reduction principles in work with sexually exploited young people.' *Children & Society* 30(4), pp. 302-313. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/chso.12145>

Selected grants:

[G3.1] Hallett, S. (PI), Keeping safe? An analysis of the outcomes of work with sexually exploited young people in Wales. Welsh Government, 2016-19, £237,890.

[G3.2] Hallett, S. (PI), Review of the Safeguarding Children and young people from sexual exploitation (CSE) guidance. Welsh Government, 2017, £40,000.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Hallett engaged with policymakers and practitioners to educate them about CSE, a complex and often misunderstood form of abuse. Her research changed policy definitions, professional understanding, and practice responses in Wales, the UK and Australia.

4.1 Transforming policy understanding of child sexual exploitation in Wales

Following her 2017 review of CSE policy [3.3], Hallett chaired the Welsh Government's Task and Finish Group assigned with developing a new CSE definition, guidance, and assessment protocol

for Wales. The new definition directly references Hallett's key findings and, unlike the older definition, states that **an element of exchange** is fundamental to this kind of abuse [5.1].

[Text redacted]

A professional working in CSE intervention in Wales, themselves a survivor of exploitation, stated that: *"Dr Hallett's work has been instrumental in making a positive change from the systemic victim blaming issues in practice and policy around child sexual exploitation frameworks in the past to those of proper understanding and care for victims...this work means the world to me; it added recognition of my experience and that of the peers I had that were going through the same thing, and supported practices that were more appropriate and effective to the intervention and were not harmful to a young person"* [5.3].

4.2 Changing practices and improving responses in Wales and England

By filling knowledge gaps on CSE, Hallett's work informed both effective prevention and early intervention. For example, foster carer Dan Oliver noted that following Hallett's research, the improved understanding of CSE *"put us in a much stronger position...to put in place the right level of support for young people, specifically teenage girls we look after in our role as foster carers. If it were not for this intervention, a number of young people would have 'slipped through the net' so to speak and they would not have had the additional safeguarding measures, safety plans and support that they needed"* [5.4]. Based on her considerable expertise, Hallett was commissioned in 2020 by Welsh Government to develop a suite of training modules on safeguarding young people. These were based on her research and on the materials she had produced to share her research outcomes [3.2]. Multi-agency practitioners and foster carers reported positive changes they intended to make to their practice after the training. One participant wrote: *"I will refocus my reporting and interviews on what matters to the child"* and another *"I will not let a meeting go ahead without ensuring the voice of the child can be present in the room"* [5.5].

Additionally, in 2017-18 Hallett informed the work of various organisations, such as the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Exploitation/Abuse for England and Wales (commissioned by the Home Office to disseminate learning from academic research to practitioners in multi-agency fields). [Text redacted]. For example, Nick Marsh (a Centre Practice Improvement Advisor) used Hallett's research to create *"a robust, evidence-based case for a change in the focus and practice of professional work,"* with young people at risk of, or experiencing, CSE [5.7]. He confirmed that *"the overall messages of the Keeping Safe research have proven most powerful; moving from a focus on risk to one of wellbeing"* [5.7].

This led the Centre and partner agencies (The Children's Society, Greater Manchester Complex Safeguarding Hub, Greater Manchester Police, Barnardo's and the ten Greater Manchester local authorities) to use Hallett's Keeping Safe resources to underpin a project removing risk assessment tools from CSE work. The project, which has *"the ultimate aim of supporting changes in practice and professional attitudes in the work we do with young people at risk of CSE and wider exploitation (including criminal),"* is currently being piloted and evaluated, if successful it will be promoted nationally [5.7].

Hallett's work had direct impact on practitioners and services. For example, it led the Manchester Complex Safeguarding Hub, a large multi-agency service designed to work with young people at risk of exploitation, to introduce practice changes. Dr Mark Knowles, a psychologist within the Hub, acknowledged that *"We were able to incorporate your [Hallett's] research findings into our practice processes. For example, ensuring that our language reflected an unmet needs perspective... and ensuring that our multiagency team formulation approach focused on this important aspect of CSE"* [5.8].

4.3 Policing CSE across the UK

Hallett worked with relevant bodies to enhance police understanding of the complexities and challenges associated with CSE across the UK. For example, she is a member of the All-Wales Police CSE Threat group, as well as the only academic member of the Expert Reference Group which feeds into the England and Wales Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse.

[Text redacted]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[5.1] Wales safeguarding procedures all Wales practice guide – Safeguarding children from child sexual exploitation

[5.2] [Text redacted]

[5.3] Testimonial: Adam Kaps, CSE survivor and Youth Worker

[5.4] Testimonial: Dan Oliver, foster carer

[5.5] Welsh Government training feedback

[5.6] [Text redacted]

[5.7] Testimonial: Nick Marsh, Practice Improvement Advisor (Multi-Agency), Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Exploitation/Abuse for England and Wales.

[5.8] Testimonial: Dr Mark Knowles, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Core CAMHS and Complex Safeguarding team, Royal Manchester Children's Hospital

[5.9] [Text redacted]

[5.10] [Text redacted]