

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Bedfordshire		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA 20: Social Work & Social Policy		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Safeguarding young people from abuse		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 1 Jan 2006 – 31 Dec 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Elizabeth Ackerley	Research Assistant, The International Centre: Researching child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking (IC)	11.2015 - 09.2017
Dr Debra Allnock	Senior Research Fellow, IC	07.2012 - present
Dr Helen Beckett	Director, IC & Reader in Child Protection and Children's Rights	09.2011 - present
Dr Silvie Bovarnick	Research Fellow, IC	02.2016 - present
Dr Claire Cody	Senior Research Fellow, IC	11.2013 - present
Dr Carlene Firmin	Principal Research Fellow, IC	08.2013 - present
Dr Julie Harris	Principal Research Fellow, IC	09.2013 - present
Dr Jenny Lloyd	Senior Research Fellow, IC	05.2016 - present
Delphine Peace	Research Fellow, IC	07.2017 - present
Prof Jenny Pearce	Professor of Young People and Public Policy, IC	11.2006 - present
Joanne Walker	Research Fellow, IC	11.2015 - present
Dr Camille Warrington	Senior Research Fellow, IC	09.2008 - present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 1 August 2013 – 31 December 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Our research has led to significant changes in how child sexual exploitation (CSE), peer abuse and other forms of extra-familial harm (EFH) are understood and responded to by both statutory and voluntary sector bodies. It has led to these forms of abuse being formally recognised as safeguarding issues across the UK, and has influenced both practice responses and relevant policy and inspection frameworks. Our Contextual Safeguarding (CS) research, for example, has radically transformed how safeguarding partnerships respond to EFH, with one-third of local authorities in England implementing CS. CS has shifted the focus beyond the individual child/family to include interventions in the extra-familial contexts where the harm occurs.</p> <p>Our research has also transformed professional discourses around, and responses to, young people who experience abuse. It has challenged the partial conceptualisations of victimhood that have resulted in documented failures to protect from harm. It has supported practitioners to work with young people in a more rights-informed way; as partners in their own care rather than passive recipients of services. Both our research and our Young Researchers Advisory Panel (YRAP) have provided a forum for young people who have experienced CSE and other forms of abuse to use their experiences to drive improvements for others. This has helped challenge the stigma, silencing and disempowerment associated with experiences of abuse.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>The impact outlined in this case study draws on the cumulative learning from over 50 studies into CSE and other forms of child sexual abuse (CSA), peer-on-peer abuse and other forms of EFH, undertaken between 2006 and 2020. Our work has particularly focused on young people's experiences of abuse, as opposed to that of younger children, and in doing so has addressed an important gap in the evidence base around the experiences and needs of this age group. We have surfaced the importance of working with the increasing agency of older children, and the risks and opportunities associated with the increasing significance of extra-familial contexts in their lives. This has allowed us to add a distinctive thread of understanding to established child protection narratives that have traditionally focused on (younger) children experiencing harm in familial contexts. The full body of our work is available to view at <a href="http://www.beds.ac.uk/ic">www.beds.ac.uk/ic</a> on our publications and past and current projects pages. These provide context to the specific studies and programmes of research outlined below.</p>		

Our pioneering and expansive programme of research on CSE (2006-ongoing) initially drew attention to this 'hidden' form of abuse and the need for safeguarding responses to it. We have continued to expand and deepen our understanding of CSE since then, generating critical new knowledge about a range of factors including: the variable manifestations of CSE, the complex contextual dynamics at play, and the need to concurrently hold both victimhood and agency. We have also demonstrated the need for, and benefits of, a more rights-based approach to working with young people affected by CSE and other forms of abuse; one that sees them as active partners in their care, rather than passive recipients of services [see Beckett and Pearce's 2018 edited book on our CSE research; 3.1].

A distinct and important aspect of our research on CSE and other forms of CSA is the prominence given to learning directly from children and young people; a cohort traditionally excluded from such opportunities due to concerns about their 'vulnerability' and the 'sensitivity' of the topic. Through studies such as Making Noise [3.6: 2015-2016; funded by the Children's Commissioner for England] and Making Justice Work [3.2: 2014-2015; internal university funding] we have elicited the views of over 1300 children and young people. In doing so we have obtained unique experience-based insights that have helped us better understand young people's needs, wishes and experiences and what this means for professionals trying to prevent and respond to abuse. These studies, and our wider body of work on youth participation in the field of abuse, have clearly demonstrated the importance of learning directly from young people and facilitating their right to have a say about matters that affect them. These studies have also produced important transferable learning for how other consultations with young people, on potentially sensitive topics such as abuse, can be facilitated in a safe and ethical manner, through adopting a trauma-informed approach to engagement and use of techniques such as risk and needs assessments, creative and third-person methodologies and wrap around support [see for example, 3.3].

Our research on peer abuse (2011-ongoing) has been seminal in drawing attention to this type of harm, alongside that perpetrated by adults. Projects such as MsUnderstood [2013-2016; funded by The Esmee Fairbairn Foundation], our gang-associated sexual violence research [2011-2013; funded by The Children's Commissioner for England] and Beyond Referrals [3.5; 2016 - ongoing; funded by The Esmee Fairbairn Foundation] have elucidated the various forms that peer abuse can take, the range and significance of the contexts within which young people can experience this and the distinct considerations for professional responses to such harm [see, for example, 3.4]. Emphasising the importance of contextual understandings of, and responses to, abuse is a common theme across our portfolio of research. Since 2013, we have tested and developed contextual approaches to child protection through a series of action research projects with local authorities (LA's), leading to the publication of the CS framework in 2016 [summarised in 3.4]. The CS framework offers a pioneering approach to understanding and responding to young people's experiences of EFH. It moves beyond a focus on individual instances of harm, to explore how the contexts in which such harm occurs can be made safer for all young people inhabiting them. Through a National Lottery grant, the CS framework has been adopted, and continues to be tested, by one-third of LA's in England, with learning shared and integrated on an ongoing basis through our embedded research programme.

### 3. References to the research

3.1: Beckett, H. and Pearce, J. (eds) (2017) *Understanding and responding to child sexual exploitation* London, Routledge

3.2: Beckett, H. and Warrington, C. (2015) *Making Justice Work: Experiences of criminal justice for children and young people affected by sexual exploitation as victims and witnesses* University of Bedfordshire (<https://uobrep.openrepository.com/handle/10547/347011>)

3.3: Bovarnick, S. with Peace, D., Warrington, C. and Pearce, J. (2018) *Being Heard: Promoting children and young people's involvement in participatory research on sexual violence: Findings from an international scoping review* University of Bedfordshire (<https://uobrep.openrepository.com/handle/10547/623282>)

3.4: Firmin, C. (2020) *Contextual Safeguarding and Child Protection: Rewriting the Rules* London, Routledge

3.5: Firmin, C., Lloyd, J. and Walker, J. (2019) 'Beyond referrals': levers for addressing harmful sexual behaviours between students at school in England' in *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 32(10) p.1929-129 DOI: [10.1080/09518398.2019.1659442](https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2019.1659442)

3.6: Warrington, C. with Beckett, H. and Ackerley, L., Walker, M. and Allnock, D. (2017) *Making Noise: Children's voices for positive change after sexual abuse* The Children's Commissioner for England (<https://uobrep.openrepository.com/handle/10547/621999>)

#### 4. Details of the impact

Our "highly-regarded and often boundary-pushing knowledge...and tenacious engagement of diverse stakeholders to collectively understand and develop collaborate solutions to pressing problems...has heavily influenced the sector's thinking and practice regarding CSE and EFH" [Director, Research in Practice; 5.1]

Our research has benefitted professionals (including over 20,000 directly engaged with through presentations, training and our practitioner forums since 2013) across a range of disciplines (social care, criminal justice, education, voluntary/community sector), through enabling them to better fulfil their duties to safeguard young people from abuse. Young people have also benefitted from the better safeguarding responses and more rights-based approaches to their care that have emanated from our work. They have also benefitted through direct engagement with our work, allowing them to use their experiences to benefit others, to challenge the stigma and silencing associated with abuse, and to directly influence policy and practice responses.

#### Enhancing professional responses to abuse

Our research has an extensive positive impact on the systems and structures within which professionals respond to CSE and EFH, including peer abuse. As Wiltshire Council observe "As a result of [our engagement with CS] we are now rethinking traditional models of CP [child protection] and making the systems fit for modern day purpose and practice, rather than trying to make the children, young people and families 'fit' the system." [5.3]. A third of local authorities in England, as well as four in Wales and two in Scotland, are using the CS framework [5.4] to redesign their child protection systems - resulting in the first peer, school and neighbourhood child welfare assessment and support plans in response to EFH in the UK. The Council of International Schools (740 schools in 122 countries) has integrated our body of research into peer abuse and CS [including 3.4 and 3.5] into its global safeguarding guidelines and over 20 schools in England have undertaken self-assessments of their responses to harmful sexual behaviours using our Beyond Referrals toolkit and invested in bystander interventions, to ensure the situations in which peer-abuse occurs in schools are addressed.

In 2018, Barnardo's, the largest children's charity in the UK, commissioned us to support the development and implementation of their national CSA transformation programme. This included a redesign of their whole organisational approach to risk assessment using our interconnected conditions of CSE model [cited in 5.10] and the CS framework [3.4]. This risk work has led to the development of good practice guidelines that have been internally adopted by all (50 plus) Barnardo's services, and provided the basis for Barnardo's external-facing work in this field, including their input into the CSA strategy for England and Wales. They also commissioned us to use our learning [3.6, and a rapid evidence review they commissioned] to support project staff to develop approaches and skills to work with younger children and parents, to build new pathways of support; and to use our body of knowledge on CSE [3.1, for example] to review their staff training programme on CSA, that will be rolled out to 8000 staff. As the Assistant Director of Impact on CSA observes "the consistent quality of the work completed, the comprehensive understanding of the team on how to effectively enable practitioners to use evidence to improve practice has over the past few years and undoubtedly will continue to have a significant impact on improving our identification and support of some of the most vulnerable children in society" [5.2]

Our research on criminal justice responses to abuse [3.2, for example] has directly informed the work of the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme, enhancing regional and national policing responses to abuse. As the NPCC lead for Child Protection and Abuse Investigation (CPAI) reflects: *"the International Centre is widely recognised for their expertise in child sexual exploitation and I have sought to capitalise on this expertise within my portfolio in order to apply current and cutting-edge evidence to my area of business."* [5.5] Our expertise has also led us to be asked to provide professional advice in a range of forums, including the Crown Prosecution Service CSA Stakeholder Forum, and to deliver training to police forces and prosecutors to support them to better engage with young people who have experienced abuse.

Our research has also led to significant policy improvements. As a result of our CSE research [3.1, for example], we were commissioned to write the 2017 revised national CSE guidance for England [5.10]. Drawing directly from our wide body of research, this guidance advances more nuanced and inclusive understandings of CSE and the needs of those who experience this, that directly tackle the issues identified as failing young people, in repeated serious case reviews.

Our CS work [3.4] has also had an extensive and direct impact on policy and inspection/oversight frameworks. The 2020 draft national child protection guidance for Scotland explicitly references CS, noting its potential to enhance understandings of, and response to, risks to teenagers [5.7]. CS is also cited in the 2018 version of England's statutory child protection guidance, linked to noting the importance of EFH and the need for contextual assessments and interventions in such cases and in DfE's 2018 advice on peer sexual violence in schools [5.7]. Ofsted commissioned us to write a briefing on our learning on CSE and associated vulnerabilities to inform the development of the Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAI) into CSE. This work is cited in both that JTAI report and the subsequent 2018 JTAI into child exploitation, outlining the need for a contextual understanding of exploitation [5.8]. The Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner's 2020 Statutory Defence report commends our work on CS, noting it to be 'essential' in cases involving children [5.8]. The triennial analysis of serious case reviews 2014-2017 also cites CS when highlighting the need for different responses to EFH [5.8]. We have also been called to give evidence, on the basis of our CS and CSE research, to a range of Inquiries including the Home Affairs Committee 2019 Inquiry into Serious Youth Violence and IICSA's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised Networks Investigation [5.9].

### **Promoting young people's voice and influence**

Through our research [3.2 and 3.6, for example] and YRAP we have enabled over 1300 children and young people in UK and Eastern Europe to have their say about CSE and other forms of CSA, and in doing so helped them realise their right to have their say about matters that affect them. Such opportunities are often denied to young people who have experienced abuse, due to concerns about their 'vulnerability' and the 'sensitivity' of the topic. However finding safe and ethical ways to create space for the voices and experiences of those who have experienced abuse is critical in counter-balancing the stigma, silencing and disempowerment associated with abuse, and re-establishing the validity of young people's needs, perspectives and rights. As one of our YRAP explains: *"From my own lived experience I have been challenged by barriers to listening to young people affected by sexual violence. The IC continue to take big steps to overcome these barriers and the YRAP support them in this mission...Being a member of the YRAP has brought a lot of meaning and purpose to my life that may not otherwise have been there... [It] has made me seriously consider becoming an academic myself"* [5.4]. Young people have particularly noted the benefits they have derived from being able to draw on their negative experiences (both of abuse, and unhelpful service responses to this) to help others: *"We [are] like the people who are emerging from the fire of hell bearing buckets of water for the ones who are still suffering of that fire"* [5.4]

We have also facilitated many opportunities for young people to directly input into policy development and service design. A project with young people with lived experience of sexual violence in Moldova, for example, has supported them to influence service design, leading to the

integration of participatory principles as a core value in an organisation's new strategic plans and a youth-advocate informed training programme for child protection officials.

Similarly, our Marginal Gains project brought young people and police together to co-develop training materials on how police could better engage with young people; these have been used in police training across England and Wales.

In response to a request from some research participants to become further involved in our work, we created a Young Researchers Advisory Panel (YRAP), as part of our staffing team, in 2016. As well as informing our work priorities, our YRAP have been training professionals on CSE, advising external bodies (such as the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, and the Lighthouse service) on their engagement of children and young people, and advocating for the importance of participation in the field of sexual abuse [5.4]. They have also consulted on the content of the Home Office CSA Strategy (published Jan 2021, consultation in 2020); with the Home Office reporting that *"the insight and experiences offered by the group were invaluable in helping shape the Strategy's focus and contents"* [5.6].

Our integration and promotion of young people's participation has also provided important foundations and impetus for other organisations to adopt a more participatory approach to service and policy design [5.1]. Our guidelines for ethical participation work in the field of sexual violence (Warrington, 2018; <https://www.our-voices.org.uk/assets/images/IC-CYP-participation-ethical-working-paper.pdf>) are being used in seven different European countries and have been disseminated globally via Childhub and the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI). Our participatory research on criminal justice responses to CSE [R2] led to (what was then known as) Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary soliciting the views of children and young people in their child protection inspection for the first time in 2015; work they commissioned us to do in recognition of our expertise.

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

5.1: Impact statement from Director, Research in Practice *provided as PDF*

5.2: Impact statement from Assistant Director of Impact for CSA and Wider Exploitation, Barnardo's *provided as PDF*

5.3: Impact statement from Wiltshire Council *provided as PDF*

5.4: Statements on impact of involvement in our work on young people, including statement from Young Researcher Advisory Panel member *provided as PDF*

5.5: Impact statement from National Police Chiefs' Council Lead for Child Protection and Abuse Investigation (CPAI) *provided as PDF*

5.6: Impact statement from The Home Office on contribution of YRAP to their CSA consultation *provided as PDF*

5.7: Example citations in policy documents *provided as PDF*

5.8: Example citations in Inspection and oversight reports *provided as PDF*

5.9: Example citations in Inquiry hearings and reports *provided as PDF*

5.10: Beckett, H, Holmes, D and Walker, J (2017) Child sexual exploitation: Definition and guide for professionals: Extended Text

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