

Child Sexual Exploitation – what should we learn from Serious Case Reviews?

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What is a Serious Case Review?



A Serious Case Review (SCR) is a statutory review of practice across agencies when:

abuse or neglect of a child is known or suspected;

&

the child has died or has been seriously harmed

&

there is cause for concern as to the way in which relevant agencies have worked together to safeguard the child.

Adapted from Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013

What can SCRs tell us about CSE?



- A valuable insight into the experience of young people who have been victimised.
- Detailed, complex analysis of the nature of the services provided, their strengths and weakness
- Perspective from different parts of the country, different authorities – provides national insights.

but

- By its nature a very particularly defined part of the story – important, but not the whole picture.

From Derby to Rotherham – to Norfolk?



- Steady number of Serious Case Reviews in relation to CSE including:
 - Derby 2010
 - Rotherham (Child S) 2011
 - Torbay 2013
 - Rochdale 2013
 - Rotherham 2014 (Independent Inquiry)
 - Oxford – awaited.

Derby SCR Published July 2010



- Police investigation started 2008
- Two young people subject to the Review, but 25 others also identified
- Both young people known to agencies, including Children's Services, over a considerable period and had damaging early life experiences
- What was happening to them not recognised by agencies.
- Questions raised about significance of ethnicity and culture of both victims and abusers.

Rotherham Child S Published April 2011



- SCR following the murder of 17 year old who was believed to have experienced sexual exploitation.
- Boyfriend convicted of her murder.
- Child S, who had learning difficulties and damaging early life experiences, was known to 15 different services over a number of years.
- Another family member was understood to have been victim of CSE.
- Child S's vulnerability to CSE "*never properly tackled*".

Torbay SCR Published February 2013



- SCR followed a police operation which led to one man being convicted and another cautioned.
- Review considered a 5 year period and 5 young women. Two were in the care of another Local Authority.
- Significant number of young people known to have been victimised by these and other men
- Perpetrators not '*organised*' in the same way as other high profile cases – more opportunistic. Some connections between the young women and between the perpetrators.
- Abused by young white men, facilitated by drugs and alcohol.

Rochdale Published December 2013



- SCR followed a major police operation.
- The Review considered 7 young people who experienced CSE over several years. Many others identified.
- 17 agencies involved over nearly 8 years.
- 6 of the YPs had some degree of learning difficulty.
- 6 of the YPs came from families known to have significant problems including involvement of children's services.
- Poorly understood issues of race and culture and assumptions about the victims.
- 9 men identified as 'Pakistani' convicted at one trial
- 1 man identified as 'white' convicted at a separate trial

Rotherham August 2014



- Independent inquiry (not SCR) commissioned by Local Authority
- Estimated that 1400 children as young as 11 years old were exploited over a period of 16 years. A third previously known to services.
- Extreme abuse- sexual, emotional and physical, trafficking, multiple rape.
- From early 2000's some front line practitioners unsuccessfully tried to get an active response from senior managers.
- There were several initiatives to tackle CSE, but they were *'not well led or followed through'*
- Victims predominantly white British, perpetrators predominantly described as "Asian".

Common signs that the young people were victims or at risk.



- Significantly missing from Education
- Frequently missing from home
- Early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections
- Drug and alcohol misuse
- Self harm/overdoses
- Frequent A&E attendance
- Changes in behaviour/increasingly difficult behaviour

Common themes – strategic leadership



- Absence of strategic leadership at political and agency level – lack of support or direction for front line staff.
- Lack of political challenge and scrutiny.
- Policy, procedures and resources intended to tackle the problem, need to be part of an overall strategy, part of routine practice and supported at the highest levels.
- Good multi-agency working and shared understanding of risk absolutely crucial
- Need for an approach not only focussed on the risks to individual children but that makes links between them and the perpetrators.

Common themes – recognition of CSE



- For many years reference was to ‘Child Prostitution’ -part of the Statutory guidance.
- Repeated failure across many agencies to recognise CSE and the warning signs.
- Individuals in front line services struggling to get their concerns heard.
- The failure to respond was sometimes a lack of awareness but in some cases an unwillingness to see what was happening, despite clear evidence.

Common themes – understanding the nature of CSE



- Lack of understanding about the impact of CSE, its effects on victims and their ability to protect themselves.
- Lack of understanding about the nature of grooming, the degree of control exerted by perpetrators.
- The children often did not recognise they are being exploited:
 - “I thought they(the men) cared about methey (the professionals) go home at night to their families ... I had no-one, I was in a kids home.....” ”*
- Professional misunderstanding about consent and view of victims credibility.

Common Themes: Working with young people



- Weaknesses in engaging with and understanding young people.
- Inadequate understanding of family and social context or history.
- Assessments not involving the young people themselves.
- Focus predominantly on dealing with the young people's 'difficult behaviour' not enough consideration as to what was behind it.
- Failure to understand the needs of adolescents and the impact of **adolescent neglect**.
- Attitudes towards the YPs & assumptions about '*lifestyle*' choices.
- Lack of agency priority given to work with young people.

Common themes: Early Intervention



- The SCRs identified that many of the young people concerned were significantly known to services and had experienced problems or abuse earlier in life.
- In one of the SCRs it was recognised that early intervention with the perpetrators could have reduced the likelihood of abuse.
- Positive early intervention could have made a significant difference for some of the young people.
- Impact of limited resources and competing priorities.

Common themes: race, culture and class



- Several of the SCRS raise issues about the impact of race or culture in relation to perpetrators.
- Complex issue – no easy answers, but must not be avoided.
- History of polarised responses –
 - racist generalisations / refusal to accept evidence of a problem
- Low societal expectations and attitudes to class in relation to victims.

“it’s what they expected of our children”.

Safeguarding – everyone’s business?



“why dont ‘normal’ people do anything about it....they must have seen me getting into those cars”

Victim of CSE in Rochdale

What the victims of CSE need....



- Respectful, non judgmental approach '*patience, empathy and perseverance*' .
- Time spent building and maintaining relationships.
- Support not only during, but after any prosecutions.
- Access to post abuse, specialist therapeutic services which can work with post traumatic stress.
- Long term intervention, not short term responses.

Conclusions – so what does it mean for Norfolk?



- The demography, the extent of CSE will be different but two things will be the same:
 - The devastating impact on the victims
 - The difficulty that communities and agencies experience in responding effectively.
- Take a long hard look at the quality of services provided to adolescents.
- Invest in a multi-agency approach, but ensure that there is both specialist knowledge and wider understanding of CSE across services.
- Spread the message that everyone should be curious about what is happening to young people when they show signs of distress.
- The most important lesson from Rotherham? It is not that the structures are not in place – it is whether they are well led, staff are supported and the objectives delivered.

Finally - a word of caution



Be aware, be prepared, but be proportionate.

CSE must not dazzle us to such an extent that we lose focus on all the other risks and needs that children and young people are facing.
