



**The
Children's
Society**

Old enough to know better?

**Why sexually exploited older
teenagers are being overlooked**

Summary
November 2015

By Iryna Pona and Donna Baillie

Letter from a young person supported by The Children's Society

If I could say anything to anyone who is a victim of sexual exploitation I would say that when you put a 'welcome' mat in the front of your house, no one blames you for being robbed, so there's no point blaming yourself for what you wear or who you hang around with. And I would say being exploited is something damaging. Maybe sometimes you can wear something others don't agree on, maybe you can have too much to drink and maybe you can do things that seem okay at the time but later on change your mind. Either way none of these reasons are acceptable enough to be subjected to such wreckage.

The underlying danger of sexual exploitation is just this: anyone can be a Prince Charming, there's no instruction manual on how to be one, but anyone can also be a sexual offender and a child exploiter – it's just the signs of an offender aren't as obvious as a Prince Charming. We all love to visit situations showered with the unknown and we all like affection, but just remember Prince Charming can be disguised as someone that will take your trust and take your innocence and use it to their advantage, and they won't return it.

The only way to survive a situation like this is to save yourself or remain unsaved. Everything that's happened to me has left a scar, it's not visible and it's not irreversible, but I just wish so much that I could have seen these people for what they really were and saved myself before it was too late.

Becky



Foreword

Twenty years ago The Children's Society published a ground-breaking report that drew attention to the scale of child sexual exploitation in Britain. It highlighted how children were being exploited and then criminalised for their involvement in commercial sexual exploitation.¹ Our subsequent The Game's Up campaign (which ran from 1995 to 1997) called for changes to legislation to recognise that children who are sexually abused and exploited need protection, not prosecution.

This year the law has finally changed. It is no longer possible to prosecute a child under the age of 18 for involvement in their own sexual exploitation and 'child prostitution' has at last been renamed as what it really is: child sexual exploitation.

Recently, after the exposure of horrific cases in Rotherham, Rochdale, Oxford and Bristol, we have observed raised awareness of the scale and nature of child sexual exploitation. We have seen the extent of organised criminal activity, the nature of grooming from supposed 'boyfriends' and the relentless and focused targeting of vulnerable young people such as those in care. In response to various historic abuses coming to light, there has been a welcome increased focus from the Government on tackling child sexual exploitation.

Despite this, at The Children's Society we regularly work with children whose stories are not being heard and for whom existing protections are not sufficient. This is particularly true for older teenagers: dangerous inconsistencies in the law mean that vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds receive neither the same basic protections as younger children to keep them safe, nor the same rights as adults.

Older teenagers who have experienced sexual exploitation face a triple whammy: they are more likely to be victims of sexual abuse, yet they are less likely to be regarded as children who need protection when they do report cases, and there is also less protection and support available when they have experienced harm.

Our Seriously Awkward campaign report earlier this year exposed how too often the most vulnerable older teenagers are being let down by the law and are not getting basic protections to keep them safe, healthy and happy. We made a case for the need to address the gaps in the law that mean older teenagers who remain vulnerable are treated as adults, when they still need protection as children.

This report once again demonstrates that the legal framework is not always on the side of vulnerable young people, particularly 16 and 17 year olds, when it comes to protecting them from exploitative adults. We see too many barriers to protecting young people at risk of harm.

16 and 17 are known as being awkward ages – but for the most vulnerable it is seriously awkward that we continue placing responsibility on older teenagers to keep themselves safe. The law

needs to change to recognise their vulnerability. That change needs to happen now. It cannot wait another 20 years.



Matthew Reed, CEO
The Children's Society

Executive summary

Introduction

This report will examine why older teenagers are particularly at risk of child sexual exploitation. It will analyse what can happen when a young person reveals they are being exploited and why existing protection is insufficient. And it will investigate what provision and support is available to help a young person recover.

Our Seriously Awkward campaign report published in June this year showed that being 16 or 17 is not only an awkward age, but also a time of heightened vulnerability for young people. It is a period of increased risks associated with adolescents' development, lack of experience, the desire to explore the world and pressure (mainly from peers) to take part in activities that may lead to harm, from drug and alcohol use to sending explicit pictures of themselves over social media.

Sixteen is also the legal age of consent to sexual activity. Although many laws (such as the Children Act 1989) declare that any person under the age of 18 is a child, the law protecting children from sexual crimes does not afford young people age 16 and 17 the same level of protection as younger children.

The law protects 16 and 17 year olds in cases of familial sexual abuse, sexual abuse by people in a position of trust (such as a teacher or medical professional), pornography and child sexual exploitation (what was until the Serious Crime Act 2015 known as 'prostitution related offences').

But when it comes to opportunistic sexual exploitation where there is a clear imbalance of power, coercion and control, or where adults use drugs and alcohol to groom a child to submit to sexual exploitation, the law does not provide any additional safeguards for 16 and 17 year olds. It does not take into account their age-related vulnerabilities, such as emotional and physiological changes and brain development in adolescents, and lack of experience. It also does not take into account any other factors that make them vulnerable to abuse, for example previous experiences of neglect and abuse, mental health problems, being in care or living away from their birth families.

The ability of 16 and 17 year olds to consent to sexual activity – without a clear definition of what true informed consent is in cases where an adult targets a vulnerable 16 or 17 year old for sexual favours – can make professionals reluctant or unsure about the course of action they should undertake. In some cases, there is a perception that once a child is 16, 'they can look after themselves' or have chosen to put themselves in exploitative situations, even where a relationship is clearly exploitative. The legal age of consent also makes it very difficult for the police to bring predatory adults to justice. This can leave 16 and 17 year olds who are groomed or sexually exploited completely unseen, unprotected and unsupported.

From The Children's Society's case notes:

'Comment was made by [a professional with safeguarding responsibility] that young person is capable to plan and get to males' houses, so she can do other things like get herself to appointments. I challenged this and said that meeting the males is another form of self-harm and that this is easier for young person to do as it hurts her. I said I think it's unfair to place the same ethos on her doing positive activities.'

This is extremely concerning. As we know from numerous reports, serious case reviews and our own practice, adults who want to exploit vulnerable teenagers will go to great lengths to befriend and groom young people, whether it's waiting for them outside places where young people live, such as children's homes or hostels, or befriending them on social networks and enticing them with promises of fun, love and affection.

We know from our direct work with young people that adults seeking to exploit will target one young person after another,

moving swiftly on to a new target when professionals attempt intervention. As our practitioners report, sometimes this leaves professionals feeling powerless to disrupt the conveyor belt of sexual abuse they may be witnessing.

This report explains why we believe that young people aged 16 and 17 need additional protection. The report is based on analysis of:

- the Crime Survey for England and Wales
- responses to Freedom of Information requests, sent to police forces in England in August 2015
- analysis of 30 stories of 16 and 17 year olds who we have supported
- interviews with 10 practitioners from our projects.

It also includes a FOI response from the Crown Prosecution Service and analysis of FOI responses from mental health trusts conducted for our Access Denied report.²

Responses to our Freedom of Information requests from 30 police forces show that in the last four quarters, across those forces around 3,900 crimes of a sexual nature were recorded where the victim was aged 16 or 17. Based on this, we can estimate that across all police forces in England the number of recorded offences where the victim is 16 or 17 is around 4900. The actual number may be a lot higher.

However, the number of 16 and 17 year olds who are victims of sexual offences is much higher than the number of recorded

offences. Females aged 16 to 17 are at the highest risk of being a victim of a sexual offence (8.6%) compared to those aged over 18.³ But there is significant under-reporting, as analysis of the Crime Survey suggests and as we know from our direct work with older teenagers. Our analysis of the Crime Survey for England and Wales shows that of the 16 and 17 year olds who do not report sexual abuse to the police, around 50% consider the abuse to not be worth reporting, while others state that they don't report sexual abuse because they don't want to go to court, or because they do not want the perpetrators of the abuse punished. Some young people, as we know from our direct work with them, do not report out of fear of not being believed or being judged, others out of fear of the perpetrators, and others out of uncertainty of what constitutes crime, consent and sexual exploitation.

Responses from police forces to our FOI request also reveal that around 1 in 5 crimes of a sexual nature in relation to 16 and 17 year olds result in charge, summon, caution or community disposal (local community based resolution). And around 8 out of 10 crimes recorded get closed without any further action.

The journey of the young person from identification of sexual abuse or exploitation to seeing justice done can be long, emotional, at times perilous and may not necessarily produce a positive outcome. Not all cases that go to court result in convictions. The Crown Prosecution Service's response

to our FOI request, though unable to identify specific outcomes in cases where the victim is 16 or 17, showed that around a quarter of all cases of child sexual abuse result in 'no prosecution' decisions and around 1 in 4 cases that are prosecuted are unsuccessful.

From The Children's Society's case notes:

'Court verdict - Not guilty. [The police officer] discussed that she was sorry this was the outcome and stressed that young person had done very well and they all still believed her. I asked if she knew what swayed it and [the police officer] explained that we as professionals are aware how vulnerable the young person is, however the jury is not and she explained that the defence's summing up said, "we have heard that young person is vulnerable but she is able to go on the internet and she is able to get a train.'

Irrespective of how far justice is pursued, teenagers who experience sexual abuse should be recognised as recovering from trauma and deserve adequate therapeutic support – yet this support is not readily available either. Our interviews with

² Abdinasir, K and Pona, I. Access Denied: A teenager's pathway through the mental health system. The Children's Society, 2015

³ The Children's Society's analysis of ONS data

practitioners highlight severe shortages of therapeutic support services for young people who experienced abuse. Local policies vary considerably from area to area. It is frequently the case that a child who has experienced abuse will not get access to mental health support unless, or until, they have a diagnosable condition – this is simply too late to prevent suffering. In many areas, long waiting times put off older teenagers whose lives may be volatile and the window of opportunity to engage with them may be very short. Very few mental health trusts have a policy of fast-tracking children who are victims of abuse for child and adolescent mental health services.

From The Children's Society's case notes:

'Young person told me several times she deserves everything she has experienced because she shouldn't have been born and that when she tried to take an overdose, if she was successful then it would have been better for everyone.'

The 30 stories of 16 and 17 year olds we supported in our practice that we explored for this report provide the most compelling evidence of why things need to change. These are tragic tales of family conflict and early experiences of neglect or abuse, with high levels of mental health needs and self-harm in

response to sexual exploitation – irrespective of whether the young person believed that they were exploited or not. Disturbingly, these stories highlight that sexual abuse in itself was sometimes described by some young people as a form of self-punishment or self-harm, as something they 'deserve'. Studies show this is particularly the case where young people have experienced abuse in their early years. Worryingly, some professionals do not acknowledge the impact of earlier trauma on a young person's perception of a situation and therefore can perceive a situation of exploitation as 'a young person making a choice' and therefore not in need of protection or help.

'Kids like me deserve this'

from the statement of a young person who disclosed abuse

At their best these are stories of professionals trying their hardest, with the limited legal tools at their disposal, to make things better before a child legally becomes an adult and children's services have to step away. At their worst these stories tell of attitudes of indifference, of a waiting game until the child reaches 18 and is out of sight and mind of professionals tasked with safeguarding children. But in either scenario, the picture is of all services being stretched and having limited resources, resulting in a high turnover of the staff that young people encounter and patchy work that aims to address the crisis only. This ultimately impacts on a young person's ability to engage

with support, trust professionals, disclose their experiences and believe that things can change.

The police currently lack the tools they need to intervene early to disrupt sexual exploitation of older teenagers.

50,000

the estimated number of females aged 16 and 17 who report having experienced a sexual offence in the last 12 months*

4,900

the estimated number of sexual offences against 16 to 17 year olds reported to the police in England in the last 12 months

860

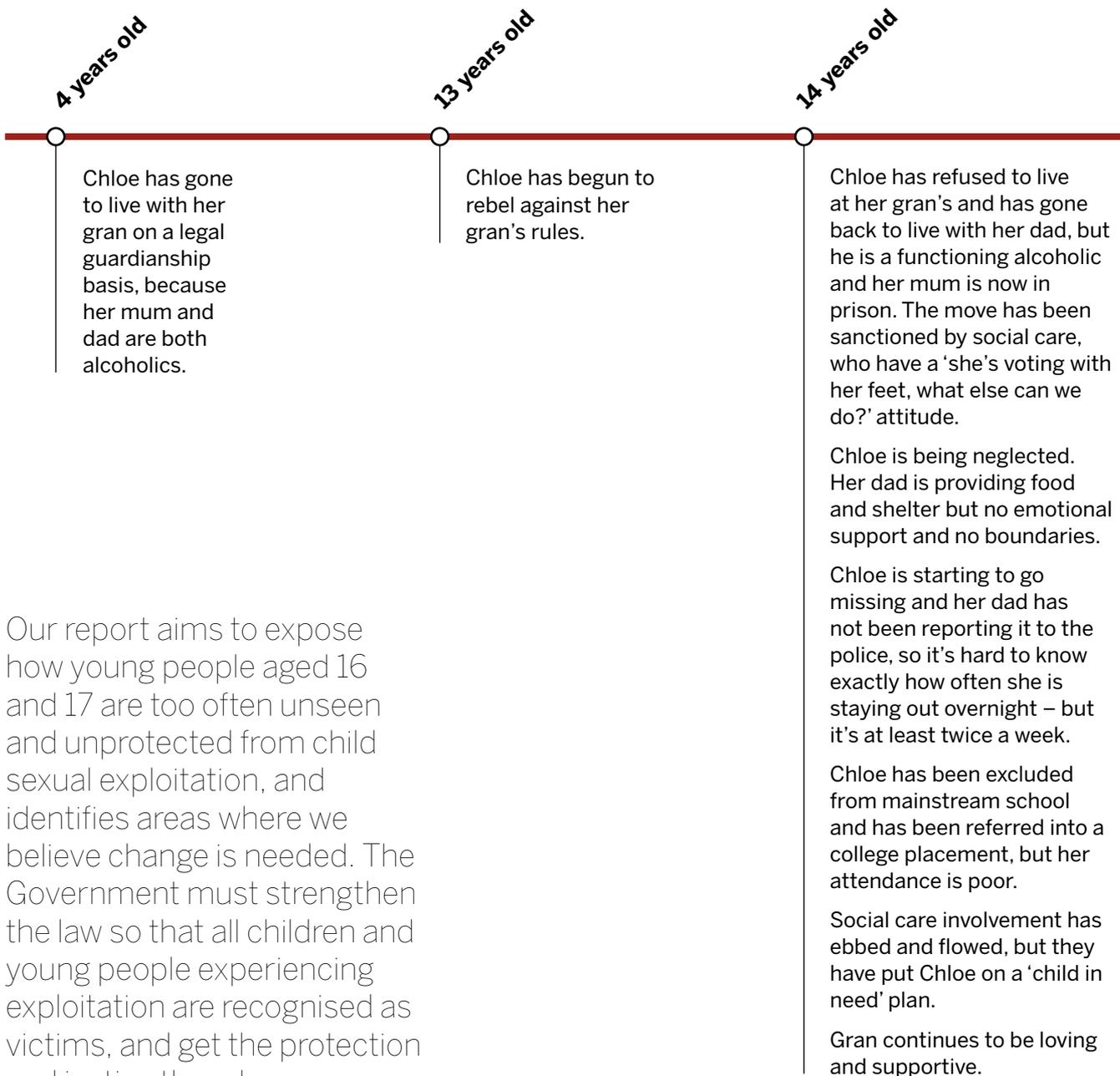
the estimated number of the reported sexual offences against 16 to 17 year olds where someone was charged or received a summons or community disposal



How many get a successful prosecution when the journey to justice is so difficult for a vulnerable young person?

Case study: Journey of vulnerability

This case study is taken from interviews with practitioners about vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds they have supported. Names have been changed to preserve anonymity.



Our report aims to expose how young people aged 16 and 17 are too often unseen and unprotected from child sexual exploitation, and identifies areas where we believe change is needed. The Government must strengthen the law so that all children and young people experiencing exploitation are recognised as victims, and get the protection and justice they deserve.



16 years old

Chloe has developed a peer group who regularly drink and smoke cannabis, leading to petty crime issues. She was recently arrested for anti-social behaviour.

Chloe is associating with other young people who go missing and stay over at risky adult addresses. Chloe's name has been linked to a police operation to tackle CSE – a known perpetrator had her name and details on a piece of paper in his flat and had befriended Chloe online.

There is a major concern about Chloe hanging around with a woman in her 20s. An attempt has been made to see if the police could issue a harbouring notice to stop the woman seeing Chloe, but this option is not available now because Chloe is 16.

Gran now refuses to have Chloe back as she feels that she can no longer manage the behaviours that Chloe is showing.

Chloe still has a 'child in need' plan – but it seems to change daily.

Chloe's dad is in supported accommodation and because of Chloe's behaviour there is a risk of him losing his current address, so he has said she can no longer live with him.

The response from social care is inadequate. There is a sense that the social worker has just been waiting until she can transfer Chloe to the 16-plus team and progress her to 'independent' living.

Chloe says she wants her own accommodation, which has led to differing views from social care and housing: both are saying that the other is responsible for sorting her out with some accommodation; neither are taking ownership and actually progressing some support.

If Chloe gets her own flat and is supported to live independently, there are real questions about the risks she may face and her ability to succeed under such arrangements.

Chloe is being treated as an adult but she still faces huge risks which date back to inadequate support throughout her teens. Now this support is dwindling even further, leaving her abandoned and vulnerable when she is at a crucial transition point between childhood and adulthood.

'Social care seem to have hung on until Chloe reaches 16, when she will just be progressed on to independent living. But she is still at risk and things are getting worse.'

Practitioner

Methodology

This report has been based on the following sources of information:

- Freedom of Information requests sent to 39 police forces in England. These requests inquired about sexual offences recorded where the victims were aged 16 or 17, the outcomes in relation to crimes where young people were aged 16 or 17, the number of cases where 16 and 17 year olds were flagged as being at risk of sexual exploitation and policies for when young people at risk of CSE turn 18. Out of 39 requests for information sent, 30 responses were received – a 77% response rate.
- Analysis of the Crime Survey for England and Wales. Data in relation to 16 and 17 year olds from the last three crime surveys has been accessed and analysed, April 2011 – March 2014. Data from the most recent survey (2013-14) was used to calculate the percentage of girls aged 16 and 17 who said that they were victims of a sexual offence in the last 12 months.
- Structured interviews with 10 practitioners from The Children's Society's specialist projects supporting children affected by child sexual exploitation, located in seven different areas. The interviews explored the local processes in place to identify and respond to young people affected by CSE, disruption and child protection responses to young people aged 16 and 17, and availability and access to therapeutic support for victims of CSE. Interviewees were also asked to identify and make recommendations for change.
- Analysis of 30 case notes reflecting direct work with 30 young people aged 16 and 17. The case notes we accessed originated in five specialist CSE projects.
- Freedom of Information responses from 53 mental health trusts which informed our Access Denied report. For this report we analysed questions that focussed on access to services and response to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.
- This work contains statistical data from ONS which is Crown Copyright. The use of the ONS statistical data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the ONS in relation to the interpretation or analysis of the statistical data. This work uses research datasets which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates.

Summary of key findings

Identification

- 16 and 17 year olds are a group of young people who are at high risk of being victims of sexual crimes. Our analysis of the Crime Survey for England and Wales has identified that females aged 16 and 17 are at the highest risk of being a victim of a sexual offence – with nearly 1 in 10 (8.6 %) of them reporting that they have experienced a sexual offence in the last 12 months. If these findings were reflected across the population this would equate to around 50,000 16 and 17 year old girls who had experienced a sexual offence in the last year in England and Wales.
- Our analysis of the Crime Survey for England and Wales also shows that of the 16 and 17 year olds who do not report sexual abuse to the police, around 50% consider the abuse to not be worth reporting, while others state that they don't report sexual abuse because they don't want to go to court, or because they do not want the perpetrators of the abuse punished.
- There is a clear lack of data on how 16 and 17 year olds experience crimes. For the Crime Survey reports and in official crime statistics their numbers are grouped with crimes reported by all adults 16 to 59, which makes it impossible to get the full picture about this very vulnerable group of young people.
- Data from 30 police forces

in England shows that in the last four quarters around 3900 crimes of sexual nature – including rape, sexual assaults, sexual exploitation, pornography and trafficking – have been recorded where the victim was 16 or 17. This is on average 4.7 crimes per 1,000 16 and 17 year olds. Across England, this would add up to around 4,900 sexual offences recorded where the victim is 16 or 17.

- The FOI responses and interviews with practitioners in our projects showed that the data on children flagged as being at risk of CSE is patchy, and that there is no consistent approach to recording and sharing this data. Of 30 responses, six police forces that provided information stated that 676 children are, or have been flagged – with 143 presently flagged in one police force that did not have breakdowns per year. A further six forces either do not record information this way or it is not easily retrievable. Three forces did not answer the question, and the remaining 15 forces refused.
- Interviews with practitioners and analysis of 30 stories of 16 and 17 year olds we have supported show that often, because of their age, these young people are not always recognised as victims of child sexual exploitation – either legally or by some professionals responsible for keeping children safe. In cases where young people are recognised as victims,

there is sometimes confusion about what interventions can be undertaken, particularly because the law fails to address how the age of consent interacts with grooming and exploitation.

Response

- Data from the police forces shows that around 1 in 5 cases of sexual crimes recorded by the police where the victim is aged 16 or 17 result in charges, and 8 in 10 result in no further action. The major reasons for no further action (where specified) included the lack of evidence and the victim not being willing or able to progress.
- The data on the number and outcomes of court proceedings for crimes of sexual nature where the victim was aged 16 or 17 is not available. But CPS data indicates that around a quarter of cases where the offences are related to child abuse result in a 'no prosecution' decision – and that in 1 in 4 cases of child abuse the prosecution is not successful. In the majority of cases the reason given is acquittals (65%) while 'victim issues' make up 13% of unsuccessful prosecutions (eg victim retraction, victim non-attendance, evidence from the victim not supporting the case).
- Interviews with practitioners and analysis of case studies revealed that there is no consistent child protection response in cases of 16 and 17 year olds who are identified as

at risk of CSE. In some cases these young people become looked-after, in others they are put on a child protection plan or are subject to a 'child in need' plan or 'child at risk of sexual exploitation' plan. In many cases children will not have any specific status of vulnerability which determines the response they receive from professionals.

- There is an inconsistent response to disruption of CSE. We did not come across evidence that new sexual harm orders or sexual risk prevention orders are being used extensively to disrupt sexual exploitation of 16 and 17 year olds. The interviews did highlight that the absence of a disruption tool such as Child Abduction Warning Notices (CAWN) is a major problem, as those allow rapid disruption response. Currently, CAWNs can only be used where the child is under 16, which means police cannot use these tools for 16 and 17 year olds who are at risk. In relation to 16 and 17 year olds, the disruption appears to rely more on working with the young person to enable them to disengage themselves from exploitative adults and/or enabling the young person to make a disclosure.

Focus on young people's experiences

- Interviews with practitioners and analysis of cases from our practice show that the use of drugs and alcohol, along with the prevalence of mental health issues, are the factors present

in the majority of cases of child sexual exploitation of 16 and 17 year olds.

- Analysis of interviews and case studies shows that alcohol and drugs, including legal highs, are used to groom young people for sexual exploitation. Interviews and case studies confirm what is already known from a range of reports, serious case reviews and court cases: that perpetrators specifically target vulnerable young people – those from broken homes, experiencing mental health issues or living away from their birth families – for sexual abuse or exploitation.
- The law is unclear in the treatment of such cases, so it can be difficult to seek justice for this age group. Professional attitudes can perceive these young people as resilient when they are vulnerable, or as choosing to enter into these relationships, so they are not seen as child sexual exploitation victims. Interviews and case studies suggest that there is confusion on how consent is viewed in cases where a young person uses drugs and alcohol and relies on an adult for supply. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in some cases – including in some court cases – consent to use drugs and alcohol is viewed as consent to take part in sexual activity.

- Young people's access to therapeutic support is very patchy. We found evidence that vulnerable young people recovering from trauma were not able to access mental

health support services because they were not considered stable enough to engage, or because there were safeguarding agencies involved. Only 14% of trusts have procedures in place to ensure priority access to services for child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation.

- When 16 and 17 year olds do disclose abuse, the justice process can be both long and confusing. Analysis of case reports raises concerns about the large number of people involved, the long time it takes to progress the case and the lack of information and updates for young people on decisions made in the process.
- Young people's vulnerability does not stop at the age of 18 – yet many children's professionals stop being involved in their lives at this stage. Responses to our FOI request from the police forces ranged from stating that at the age of 18 the flag of child sexual exploitation is taken down as young people are no longer children and cannot be seen as being at risk of CSE, to those that continued the flag up until the level of risk was low. But very few could identify a clear vulnerable adult pathway that would be put in place instead.

around

1 in 10

16 and 17 year old
teenage girls said
they were a victim
of a sexual offence
last year.

1 in 4

prosecutions
of child sex
abuse cases are
unsuccessful.

8 in 10

cases of sexual
offences against
16 and 17 year olds
reported to the
police resulted in no
further action.

Teenage girls aged 16 and 17 are more likely to report being a victim of a sexual offence than any other age group.

But they have less protection in law than younger children.

Recommendations

In too many instances, 16 and 17 year olds do not have the same protections as younger children. In relation to child sexual exploitation, this can leave vulnerable older teenagers in grave danger, facing hidden abuse and harm. The Children's Society believes the Government has a crucial opportunity to make sure that all children and young people are no longer unseen and unprotected from child sexual exploitation, that they are recognised as victims, and that they get the protection and justice they deserve.

Our recommendations will benefit all children and young people, but they are aimed in particular at closing some of the gaps we have identified for young people aged 16 and 17, who currently linger in the grey area between childhood and adulthood, too easily falling through the cracks in protection and support.

Protection

- The Government should clarify that where the victim of a sexual offence is 16 or 17 this should always be considered an aggravating factor in the offence for sentencing purposes. The law should send a strong message that crimes against all children, including those aged 16 and 17, will not be tolerated.
- The Government should clarify that for prosecution and sentencing purposes, a young person's consent to take drugs and alcohol can never be viewed as consent to sexual acts.

- The Government should recognise that some vulnerable young people – including children in care, children recovering from trauma, and children with mental health problems or learning disabilities – are deliberately targeted, manipulated and coerced to consent to sexual acts by adults. Prosecution guidelines should clarify that vulnerabilities such as these should be considered when determining young people's capacity to consent. In cases of sexual offences, where a victim is in one of these groups, this should always be considered a further aggravating condition of the offence.
- The Government should raise the age for Child Abduction Warning Notices from 16 to 18 to ensure the police can intervene when vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds are targeted by predatory adults for the purposes of exploitation, either of a sexual or criminal nature. In particular, the use of CAWNs should be extended to cover vulnerable 16 and 17 year olds, including children looked after by local authorities where the parental responsibility remains with the parents, children recognised by the local authority as a 'child in need' and those living away from families because of risk of homelessness.
- The Government needs to revise the guidance on child sexual exploitation and make it statutory. The guidance should provide a clear explanation of what constitutes sexual

exploitation and grooming (particularly in the case of 16 and 17 year olds), provide clarity on how grooming and exploitation protections interact with the legal age of consent, and outline what safeguarding response should be expected.

Support

- We recommend that the Government should ensure that all victims of sexual crimes aged 16 or 17 have access to specialist therapeutic or mental health support.
- The Government – through the supplementary 'Working Together' guidance on child sexual exploitation – should define how young people who have been identified as at risk, or victims of, child sexual exploitation or sexual abuse should have a clear transition plan to enable them to access services for vulnerable adults when they turn 18 and ensure that they have their needs met and have continuous support needed to recover. This should include enabling a young person to develop a supportive relationship with a consistent professional through the transition process and beyond.
- Police, children's services, health and education staff should receive better initial and continuous development training on child sexual exploitation, the emotional impact it has on a child, and how to work with and support victims of child sexual abuse and exploitation. All services should be adequately

resourced to respond effectively to children who display indicators of sexual exploitation and ensure that they can provide consistent support for young people.

- We recommend that the Government introduces standard data collection on child victims of sexual crimes under the age of 18, to ensure that there are the same standards of flagging and identifying victims on all police systems, and that the progress of cases via the justice system – from the recording of crime to court proceedings – can be effectively monitored.

Participation

- We urge the Government to introduce victims' legislation to ensure that the principles outlined in the EU Victims Directive that comes into force on 16 November 2015 are enshrined in law and are implemented in relation to children and young people. It should introduce clear standards on how young victims of crimes of a sexual nature are kept informed about the progress of investigation and court processes.



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About The Children's Society

It is a painful fact that many children and young people in Britain today are still suffering extreme hardship, abuse and neglect. Too often their problems are ignored and their voices unheard. Now it is time to listen and to act. The Children's Society is a national charity that runs local projects, helping children and young people when they are at their most vulnerable, and have nowhere left to turn. We also campaign for changes to laws affecting children and young people, to stop the mistakes of the past being repeated in the future. Our supporters around the country fund our services and join our campaigns to show children and young people they are on their side.

In 1995, The Children's Society published *The Game's Up*, one of the UK's first pieces of research highlighting the issue of child sexual exploitation (CSE). Since then The Children's Society has been a leading voluntary sector provider of support for young people affected by CSE. We now deliver direct services in 16 projects which cover 25 local authorities across England.

The Children's Society provides independent confidential services that offer a genuine alternative to statutory-based forms of support but at the same time work in partnership within multi-agency teams and other arrangements that allow delivery of high-quality services that secure positive outcomes for children, young people and their families.

In the last 12 months, through our programmes we worked with 696 young people affected by child sexual exploitation – 261 of them were aged 16 or 17 and 123 were over 18.

The internal stakeholder review of The Children's Society's child sexual exploitation services carried out by the University of Bedfordshire in 2015 stated that the following principles of our direct service:

'cohere strongly with the values/principles of practice identified by existing research as enabling effective support for young people affected by CSE:

- Relational: trustworthy, non-judgemental, reliable
- Holistic support: advocacy, strength-based, dual focus on protection and prosecution
- Access: perseverance, flexible provision, voluntary engagement
- Child-centred: inclusive, rights based, participatory
- Rights-based advocacy and participatory approaches.'

The range of direct CSE services delivered includes: awareness-raising, targeted support for individual young people, targeted work with groups of children at high risk, and support for parents. Those services have been organised around the following themes, which are now recognised in most strategies designed to tackle CSE:

- Prevent
- Protect
- Prosecute

The Children's Society service model adds a fourth 'P' – Participation. Our services are based on ensuring children and young people have a voice to ensure their views will shape the services and the ways in which practitioners engage with them.

It is a painful fact that many children and young people in Britain today are still suffering extreme hardship, abuse and neglect.

We work with some of the most vulnerable teenagers, facing issues like child sexual exploitation, family neglect, domestic abuse or mental health problems.

Help us change the law to protect 16 and 17 year olds from harm, abuse and neglect:

#SeriouslyAwkward
childrenssociety.org.uk/seriouslyawkward

The logo for The Children's Society, featuring the text "The Children's Society" in a serif font, centered within a white square that is part of a larger black cross shape.

**The
Children's
Society**

For more information on this report,
please contact:
Iryna Pona
Youth at Risk Policy Adviser
e. iryna.pona@childrenssociety.org.uk
t. 020 7841 4400

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Names used in this report have been changed to maintain anonymity. All photographs posed by models.