

WHAT EVIDENCE EXISTS ABOUT THE SCALE OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN ENGLAND AND WALES?

EVIDENCE BRIEFING FOR THE NATIONAL POLICING LEAD FOR
CHILD PROTECTION AND ABUSE INVESTIGATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This scoping review was undertaken on child sexual abuse to inform the development of an overarching National Policing Action Plan on child protection. The context, aims, methodology, policy context and background can be found in an associated document¹. The purpose of this briefing, and other similar briefings, is to provide the National Policing Lead for Child Protection and Abuse Investigation with evidence for consideration in the development of a national strategy. This particular briefing focusses on what is known about the scale of child sexual abuse (CSA) in England and Wales based on the range of information available. Literature pertaining to the context of child sexual exploitation (CSE) (which is recognised as a particular form of CSA) will be written up separately in order to address the characteristic patterns and dynamics that make it a unique form of CSA.

1.2 There is no single source of data on the scale of child sexual abuse in the United Kingdom (UK). Our knowledge in the UK can be derived from three main sources²:

- 1) Self-report abuse and neglect studies (for example, population based studies such as the NSPCC study on child abuse and neglect in the UK; and to a more limited extent, self-report data from Childline)
- 2) The child protection system (child protection plans/registers); and
- 3) Recorded crime statistics on sexual offences.

1.3 All of these data sources have their own limitations that must be considered in making sense of the scale of child sexual abuse. It is widely recognised and accepted by child protection and abuse experts that all of these sources under-estimate the reality of the problem³.

2. WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE SCALE OF CSA FROM SELF-REPORT VICTIMIZATION STUDIES?

Key messages

- 1) There are a number of sources available for estimating and monitoring the scale and prevalence of child sexual abuse. However, all sources are problematic for different reasons. This means our ability to accurately estimate the number of children and young people experiencing sexual abuse is currently limited. What we *can* be confident about is that the figures on prevalence are likely to be under-estimating the reality.
- 2) Given all the limitations of the data, self-report prevalence data suggests that a significant minority of children worldwide have experienced some form of sexual abuse.
- 3) Experiences of abuse and violence need to be understood from a developmental perspective, given the evidence which suggests that contexts and perpetrators may change across the life-course. This is particularly important to understand in directing resources and efforts to tackle the problem.
- 4) According to the NSPCC study of prevalence, the majority of contact sexual abuse is perpetrated by peers or young people under the age of 18. The precise overlap between contact sexual abuse and the child sexual exploitation context remains unknown at present.
- 5) Sexual abuse perpetrated by a parent or guardian is less common than sexual abuse perpetrated by other known adults and strangers.
- 6) Contact sexual abuse is more commonly perpetrated extra-familially, with a considerable amount perpetrated by young people under the age of 18.
- 7) It is unknown whether IFCSA or EFCSA is more common when considering the broad definition of sexual abuse, including contact and non-contact abuse.

2.1 General population studies of the prevalence of CSA are considered to be the most robust and reliable source of information we have about the scale of the problem. General population studies should include a relatively representative sample of children and/or adults, including those who have not come to the attention of crime and social care agencies. While methodologies, samples and definitions vary widely across these types of studies and have particular limitations, crucially, they all highlight the limitations of officially recorded statistics⁴ and provide an indication of the 'hidden' abuse that exists.

2.2 Several recent systematic reviews of world-wide prevalence of CSA have been carried out within the last 10 years⁵. Despite the well-known difficulties in measuring its prevalence⁶ –

making cross-study comparison complex and difficult - these reviews identify relatively comparable global prevalence rates for boys (between 7.9% to 8.0%) and girls (between 15% to 19.7%). All of these reviews identify higher prevalence rates of CSA for girls than boys. Girls may well experience a much greater amount of sexual abuse than boys, but the discrepant figures could also potentially reflect a higher *reporting* rate among girls than boys.

2.3 The best self-report data available in the UK is a study of prevalence, carried out by the NSPCC and can be found in the main report which was published in 2011⁷. The study collected data from three age groups:

- 2,160 parents or guardians of children under age 11;
- 2,275 young people aged 11 to 17; and
- 1,761 young adults aged 18 to 24.

2.4 Table 1 below presents key figures on CSA, drawn from the most up-to-date publication of this study⁸ where possible. In some cases, however, the figures in Table 1 are drawn from the main report which provides a more detailed analysis of perpetrator identity.

2.5 The advantage of this study is that it is possible to examine prevalence – to some degree – within different contexts (for example, the home versus the community) and by different perpetrators (for example, parent or guardian versus other adults or peers). The figures in Table 1 have been examined to compare rates of reported abuse that occurs ‘within the family environment’ (that would include perpetrators such as parents/guardians, others living within the family home, and relatives living outside the family home) with abuse that occurs ‘outside the family environment’ (and will include other known, un-related, adults living outside the family home, strangers and institutional perpetrators/ people in a position of trust). Several observations can be made from the available data from this prevalence study:

- The published data⁹ does not allow us to make a definitive statement about whether intra-familial child sexual abuse (IFCSA) or extra-familial child sexual abuse (EFCSA) is more common, using a broad definition of sexual abuse, although some comparisons between abuse perpetrated by parent or guardians and non-resident adults can be made. Extra-familial CSA is, however, more common when considering narrower definitions of contact sexual abuse¹⁰.
- There are clear developmental patterns evident in experiences of sexual abuse. Experiences of abuse accumulate over time, and also highlight shifting contexts and patterns of abuse over the life course. The percentages of respondents who reported that they experienced sexual abuse increases as age increases. Additionally, the contexts of abuse and perpetrators of abuse appear to differ in significance among the three age groups, thus all ages/stages must be considered together.

2.6 Table 1 below presents lifetime and past year rates of any sexual abuse (including contact and non-contact abuse) – and contact sexual abuse separately - reported by parents/guardians of under 11 year olds and 11 to 17 year olds, and lifetime rates only for 18 to 24 year olds. A discussion will follow, incorporating other literature as relevant.

Table 1: Any sexual abuse (including contact and non-contact) and contact only sexual abuse, lifetime and past year rates

| Contact and/or non-contact sexual abuse, lifetime and past year percentages | | | | | |
|--|--|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | Parents/carers of children under 11 | | 11 to 17 year olds | | 18 to 24 year olds |
| | Life time | Past Year | Life Time | Past Year | Life Time only |
| Contact or non-contact abuse by any adult or peer | 1.2% (Females 1.3%/Males, 1.0%) | 0.6% (Females, 0.5%/Males 0.7%) | 16.5% (Females 20.8%/Males 12.5%) | 9.4% (Females 12.2%/Males 6.8%) | 24.1% (Females 31.0%/Males, 17.4%) |
| Contact or non-contact abuse by a parent or guardian | 0.1% (Females 0.1%/ Males 0.0%) | 0.0% | 0.1% (Females, 0.3%/ Males, 0%) | 0.0% | 0.6% (Females 1.5%/ Males 1.0%) |
| Contact or non-contact abuse by a non-resident adult | 0.3% (Females 0.4%/ Males 0.3%) | 0.2% | 1.4% (Females 2.2%/ Males 0.7%) | 0.3% | 5.3% (Females 9.2%/ Males 1.6%) |
| Contact sexual abuse only, lifetime and past year percentages | | | | | |
| | Parents/carers of children under 11 | | 11 to 17 year olds | | 18 to 24 year olds |
| | Life time | Past Year | Life Time | Past Year | Life Time only |
| Contact abuse by any adult or peer | 0.5% (Females 0.7%/ Males 0.3%) | 0.2% (Females 0.4%/Males 0.0%) | 5.1% (Females 7.2%/ Males 2.8%) | 2.1% (Females 2.9%/Males 1.3%) | 12.5% (Females 18.6%/ Males 5.3%) |
| Contact abuse by a parent or guardian | 0.1% (Females 0.1%/ Males 0.0%) | 0.0% (Females 0.0%/Males 0.0%) | 0.1% (Females 0.2%/ Males 0.0%) | 0.0% (Females 0.0%/Males 0.0%) | 0.9% (Females 1.50%/ Males 0.4%) |
| Contact abuse by a non-resident adult | 0.1% (Females 0.3%/ Males 0.0%) | Exact figures unavailable | 0.7% (Females 1.2%/ Males 0.4%) | Exact figures unavailable | 2.8% (Females 4.7%/ Males 1.1%) |

Comparison with other studies

2.7 The adult psychiatric morbidity study, published in 2007¹¹, is another source of data on prevalence of sexual abuse in England only, and is not entirely comparable with the NSPCC data:

- The morbidity study included respondents age 16 and over, with no upper age limit, whereas the NSPCC study included respondents up to the age of 24 only.
- The morbidity study used a different age (16) as the cut-off point for CSA; any reports of abuse over the age of 16 were defined as adult sexual abuse. The NSPCC study, alternately, considered childhood sexual abuse up to the age of 18, thus including two more years than the morbidity study.
- Finally, the questions and measures used in the two studies were different. All of these differences in samples and methodology are likely to explain the differences observed in the figures for contact and non-contact sexual abuse.

2.8 The morbidity study reported that 12.5% of the respondents experienced any form of sexual abuse (contact or non-contact) in their lifetime, which is comparatively lower than the 24.1% of 18 to 24 year olds in the NSPCC maltreatment study. Similarly, the morbidity study reported a lower rate of 8.3% of respondents reporting either sexual touching or forced intercourse (contact abuse) as compared to the 12.5% of 18 to 24 year olds in the NSPCC study.

2.9 The differences between the two studies may be partially explained by the nature of the samples; those aged 18 to 24 in the NSPCC study may have had better recall than the older participants in the morbidity study and they may have been more willing to report abuse experiences than older participants. Indeed the authors of the morbidity study found that older respondents (aged over 64) reported less sexual abuse overall than younger respondents.

Abuse by any adult or peer

2.10 The table above shows that nearly a quarter of young people aged 18 to 24 reported some form of sexual abuse in childhood. Although the figures for both lifetime and past year abuse reported by parents/carers of under 11s are low, they increase significantly for the older age groups. Just over half of young people who reported experiencing any kind of sexual abuse reported contact sexual abuse (although there will inevitably be overlap with some respondents experiencing both forms).

Abuse by parents or guardians

2.11 The figures for abuse by parents or guardians as reported by the NSPCC study are low, but lifetime rates show an upward trend as the ages of respondents increase. Almost all the rates of lifetime or past year abuse by a parent or guardian are lower than lifetime or past year abuse by a non-resident adult.

2.12 It is also notable that no respondents reported sexual abuse by a parent or guardian in the past year. Given that the data was collected in the home, young people may have been unwilling to report current or recent abuse by their parent or guardian if they were living in the home with them. Although there remain mixed findings in the research regarding whether relationship to perpetrator predicts non-disclosure, at least some authors have found evidence that CSA disclosure is less likely for children who experience intra-familial abuse versus those who experience extra-familial abuse¹².

2.13 A recently published study by Survivors in Transition of adult survivors of child sexual abuse found that, of 395 respondents, 68% reported that their abuse occurred in the family home. Unfortunately, the report did not state who the perpetrators were and, without this information, it is not possible to know whether the abuse that occurred within the family home was perpetrated by a parent/guardian, a sibling, other family members, family friends, or even peers within the home environment¹³.

Abuse by other family members living in the home

2.14 The NSPCC study unfortunately has not provided precise figures on other family members living in the home. An earlier NSPCC study published in 2000, however, found that sibling abuse was twice as common as abuse perpetrated by fathers to daughters¹⁴, and other international studies have also reported that sibling abuse is the most common form of IFCSA¹⁵. Recent and UK-based statistics on this issue are sorely missing however. Additionally, there are no robust figures on abuse perpetrated by other family members such as uncles/aunts, cousins or grandparents.

Abuse by non-resident adults

2.15 The NSPCC study reported that, of the 'non-resident adults' – and across all age groups - strangers were most frequently reported to be the perpetrator when considering the broad definition of sexual abuse as well as the more narrow definition of contact sexual abuse.

2.16 Regarding abuse by strangers, the NSPCC data show that 0.2% of parents/guardians of under 11 year olds reported CSA by a stranger; 0.8% of 11 to 17 year olds reported this; and 2.8% of 18 to 24 year olds reported CSA by a stranger. Other research has reported similar developmental trends:

- An analysis of Northern Ireland crime statistics found that strangers were common perpetrators among older aged victims¹⁶.
- A UK study using a university sample found that the most common group of perpetrators were extra-familial (known adults, peers and strangers)¹⁷; just over one-third of the sample identified strangers as their perpetrators.
- Another UK study¹⁸ of 2,420 school children aged 9-16 found that 19% of the sample reported any sexual abuse, while 6.7% reported that the last incident of sexual abuse was perpetrated by a stranger.

- 2.17 The NSPCC study found that other known unrelated adults such as neighbours, family friends or other unspecified known adults were the second most common non-resident adult perpetrator for the 18 to 24 year old group, although for the 11 to 17s and the under 11s, the figures for other known unrelated adults, non-resident relatives and institutional perpetrators were relatively similar, and the figures were low. No other UK studies exist which report on the prevalence of other known, unrelated adults.
- 2.18 Participants in the NSPCC study reported that 0.6% of CSA was perpetrated by someone in a position of trust, although the data is not disaggregated by institutional perpetrator or context. Other UK studies have attempted to gauge the prevalence of institutional perpetrators although they are generally focussed on single institutions/ contexts (e.g. foster care, schools).
- 2.19 However, one study in the UK sought to establish prevalence of all institutional abuse by using child protection and police records within 8 Local Authority areas, although the study is now over 15 years old. The authors identified 65 substantiated cases of institutional abuse across these 8 areas over a 5 year period. Extrapolating to the rest of England and Wales, the authors argued there could have been between 920-930 cases of institutional abuse overall during the same period. Substantiated institutional abuse cases made up one per cent of all child protection referrals to social services, and 3% of CSA referrals. Equivalently, they made up one per cent of all police referrals and two per cent of all CSA referrals. A majority of institutional cases (52%) occurred in community-based settings (e.g. schools, clubs and childminders homes), followed by foster homes (34%) and residential settings (14%).

Abuse by other young people under the age of 18

- 2.20 Although the NSPCC study provides only limited data on peer abuse at present, the authors report that peers were responsible for a significant amount of all contact sexual abuse of under 17s – 65.9%. Of this, it is not clear how much of this can be attributed to siblings, peers, strangers or interpersonal violence and abuse.
- 2.21 Sexual exploitation by peers will be addressed more fully in associated briefings, but it is worth mentioning some recent work in the UK which supports the NSPCC finding that a considerable amount of sexual abuse and violence is perpetrated by young people under 18:
- A study of 1,353 young people between the ages of 13 and 17 found that one in three girls and 16% of boys reported experiencing some form of sexual violence from their partner. The majority were single incidents, but a minority of young people experience more regular sexual violence within their intimate relationships¹⁹;
 - More recently, an international study of online and offline interpersonal violence and abuse found that, in England, 41% of females report sexual violence in relationships and 14% of boys report this. The figures for females in England constitute the highest rate of sexual violence among all of the countries included in the study²⁰;

- The UK inquiry into child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups gathered evidence on victims and perpetrators in these contexts. Although information on perpetrators is limited and evidence received patchy, the inquiry found that 29% of perpetrators were between the ages of 12 and 19²¹;
- Sexual violence occurring within gangs has recently been investigated in a large qualitative study in the UK, finding considerable levels of sexual victimisation. Young women were found to be particularly at risk²².

Gender of CSA perpetrators

2.22 The majority of perpetrators in the recent NSPCC study, across all perpetrators and context type, were males. Studies of female-perpetrated abuse support that females constitute a small percentage of offenders²³.

Gender of CSA victims

2.23 Across nearly every measure, and across all age groups, females reported higher rates of sexual abuse than males. Teenage girls aged 15 to 17 reported the most sexual abuse overall in the NSPCC study. This was also found to be the case in the adult psychiatric morbidity study and the recent Survivors in Transition survey.

2.24 In summary, the recent NSPCC data provides some important insights into the scale of abuse both within and outside the family environment. It indicates that abuse occurs across a range of contexts, and that abuse experiences must be analysed developmentally to understand where the risks are and how they change across the life course. The published data is currently limited however, and does not address other important contexts such as CSE in either the online or offline environment. Despite these limitations, there is supporting evidence from other recent studies in the UK and abroad to strengthen some of the key themes that have been drawn out in this briefing.

3. WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT CSA FROM SELF-REPORTED ABUSE? CHILDREN'S CONCERNS REPORTED TO CHIDLIN AND THE PUBLIC'S REPORTS TO THE HELPLINE

Key messages

- 1) Although Childline data does not provide a representative view of children who have experienced sexual abuse, it provides valuable data about the concerns of children who call because of child sexual abuse.
- 2) More children than ever are calling Childline about sexual abuse.
- 3) Childline is counselling more children than ever about sexual abuse.
- 4) More people are calling the NSPCC Helpline for advice and information about sexual abuse than ever before, and make up the third most common reasons why calls are made.

3.1 Both Childline and the NSPCC Helpline monitor trends in calls to both services and a very recent report²⁴ on indicators of child abuse and protection have included up-to-date findings which include the following:

- Calls from children worried about sexual abuse/online sexual abuse has increased to become the most common concern, comprising 45% of all abuse-related concerns²⁵ (it was the second most common concern in 2012/2013²⁶).
- Childline are counselling more children in relation to CSA. In 2014/2015, the number of children receiving counselling from Childline for CSA increased by 8% on 2013/2014²⁷.
- Calls to the Helpline have also been increasing since 2009/2010. Over 8,000 calls made to the Helpline in 2014/2015 were related to sexual abuse, which was the third most common reason why calls were made overall.
- Further, calls about sexual abuse which resulted in a referral rose by 14% on 2013/2014.
- Overall, the largest group of callers to the Helpline is 'the public' (53% of calls), which may mean that awareness of abuse and neglect is increasing and that more people are willing and/or confident to speak out or seek advice.

4. WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT CSA FROM RECORDED SEXUAL OFFENCES?

Key messages

- 1) Police recorded crime underestimates the actual scale of sexual offences against children, because it only captures reports of abuse that are made to the Police.
- 2) In 2013/2014, the Police recorded more sexual offences against children than ever before.
- 3) This increase is likely due to increased reporting as a result of high profile cases in the media of historical sexual abuse by people in power and of widespread sexual exploitation in a number of British cities, all of which have garnered considerable media attention.
- 4) Police recorded crime related to sexual assaults in schools show significant numbers of physical assaults and rapes being reported.
- 5) Crime statistics are currently underutilised in monitoring trends in sexual abuse and current data reporting omits important information on children whose cases do not proceed to an outcome; thus limiting our ability to learn about why this may be and monitor system response.

4.1 There has been a tendency for policy makers and practitioners to focus on child protection statistics for trends in abuse, despite evidence that more children are in contact with the police as victims of crime than with social services in relation to maltreatment²⁸. Police records of sexual offences, however, represents another important source of information about these offences against children.

4.2 While this data is limited by representing only those offences which come to the attention of the police - and thus underrepresenting actual offences – it can provide valuable information on patterns of crime against children and case outcomes. Crime statistics should be interpreted with caution however, as the trends observed may be influenced by changes in policing or increased public awareness, rather than reflect actual increases in offences.

4.3 A Freedom of Information Act request to police forces by the NSPCC are now released, and show that:

- Police recorded 36,429 sexual offences against children in the UK in 2013/2014; 22,754 of these were in England alone;
- Across all four nations, police recorded the highest number of sexual offences against children in 2013/2014, greater than any year over the last decade;
- All four nations saw a sharp increase in recorded sexual offences against children in the last year;

- This increase may be due to increased recognition and reporting following high profile media cases over the last few years; and it may also be partially explained by improved compliance with recording practices from 2014²⁹.

4.4 A Freedom of Information Request by the BBC found that, in the last three academic years from 2012 to 2015, there were 4000 physical assaults recorded and more than 600 rapes recorded. At least one-fifth of these offences were reported to be perpetrated by children in peer-on-peer abuse. However, only 60 young people were excluded from schools for sexual misconduct.

4.5 As recent work on crime statistics in Northern Ireland has demonstrated, a wealth of information on crimes against children potentially exists in England and Wales, but statistics in England and Wales are not routinely disaggregated by victim age, and thus “crime committed against children remains largely invisible in annual crime reports and associated compendia”³⁰. Bunting criticises the lack of consideration of the patterns and trends of violent crime committed against children, despite governmental push to improve the system response to victims and witnesses of crime, particularly vulnerable victims such as children³¹. Bunting’s work underscores the possibilities for annual reviews of crime data in England and Wales to identify changing trends and monitor system response, thus making children more visible in annual statistics.

4.6 Further problems with crime data within some forces in England and Wales include failures to systematically record offenders/perpetrators, limiting the ability to comprehensively analyse patterns of crime across different contexts (e.g. intra-familial versus extra-familial child sexual abuse)³². Furthermore, important data on crimes which do not proceed to ‘outcomes’ (previously, detections) are not routinely recorded³³. Bunting recommends developing the data to account for crimes which do not proceed to an outcome, thus increasing the utility of the data in understanding why crimes do not achieve an outcome, understanding attrition and identifying areas for improvement.

5. WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT CSA FROM CHILD PROTECTION STATISTICS?

Key messages

- 1) Child protection statistics are an under-estimation of the abuse this actually occurring. It only reflects those children known to social care services. Self-report data such as the NSPCC study of child abuse and neglect indicate the gap between official statistics and abuse reported by the general population.
- 2) Child protection plans established for the category of sexual abuse have remained stable over a number of years.

5.1 Data from the child protection system shows the reasons why children deemed to be at on-going risk are subject to a child protection plan or are on the child protection register. Similar to recorded offences, these figures only show children who have come to the attention of professionals within social care. Key findings include the following:

- Current data (ending March 31st, 2014) for England shows that 2,100 (or 5% of children subject to child protection plans) were categorised as at significant risk of sexual abuse. This figure has remained relatively stable over a number of years. An additional 4,320 children, however, were categorised under the category of 'multiple abuse/neglect', which has also remained relatively stable.
- In Wales, 5% of children on the child protection register were categorised as at significant risk of sexual abuse, having remained stable since 2011/2012³⁴.

6. ARE TRENDS OF CSA CHANGING?

Key messages

- 1) We cannot be certain, based on current UK data, whether the amount of CSA occurring is changing over time. While the NSPCC prevalence studies in 1999 and 2009 show some decrease, the measures used to assess this are not fully comparable.
- 2) While great uncertainty remains about whether or not trends in sexual abuse prevalence are changing, recent evidence suggests that there has been an increase in *reporting* of sexual abuse, likely in response to recent high profile cases presented in the media. Increased reporting will inevitably exert pressure on public services to respond.

6.1 The 2009 NSPCC study found a decrease in some forms of sexual activity as compared to the NSPCC study carried out in 1998. The 2009 study used some of the same questions as the 1998 study in order to assess any changes, but in other cases, composite measures were used and must therefore be treated cautiously.

6.2 The researchers found that there was a reduction of statistical significance in the number of young people who reported being hugged and kissed in a sexual way (whether they wanted it or not), from 50.7% in 1998 to 47.5% in 2009³⁵.

6.3 There was an increase in those reporting oral sexual activity, from 22% in 1998 to 26.3% which may reflect changing patterns of sexual activity and not necessarily abuse.

6.4 A comparison of 'forced or coerced sexual acts' (derived from a composite measure rather than a single comparable measure, thus caution is needed in interpretation) found that the rate of forced or coerced sexual acts reduced from 6.8% in 1998 to 5% in 2009. While similar trends have been found in the United States³⁶, the data in the UK is not yet robust enough to conclude a real decline. There are a number of issues to consider here:

- Given greater public awareness and increased political attention to tackling CSA, the reduction in forced or coerced sexual acts may in part reflect this dynamic. Indeed, an NSPCC report has found evidence of improved awareness amongst the public via increased calls to the Helpline³⁷. However, child protection statistics show no parallel decline, a crucial piece of evidence cited by experts in the United States as supporting falling rates of abuse reported in national prevalence studies³⁸.
- The NSPCC study did not examine child sexual exploitation – either online or offline - where young people believe they are consenting to such activity and therefore may not view or report it as a forced/coerced sexual act.
- There may also simply be methodological differences in samples, recruitment and data collection between the 1998 and 2009 studies that explain the differences. The UK only

holds trends of the prevalence of sexual abuse at two points in time: 1998 and 2009 – which is not enough data to yet distinguish a pattern of ‘real’ change.

- While there is no further contemporary self-report prevalence data in the UK that is able to gauge changes in prevalence, there is compelling evidence to suggest that new, hidden and online sexual abuse poses a significant threat (this will be addressed in an associated briefing).

6.5 While it is not possible to detect trends in the prevalence of sexual abuse at this point in time, there has been some emerging evidence that the *reporting* of child sexual abuse is increasing. It is within recorded sexual offences that significant increases in reporting can be observed, as reported earlier in this briefing. Key findings to consider include:

- The FOI data released by the NSPCC found that recorded sexual offences had increased by 26% in 2013/2014.
- Recent monitoring data from Childline supports a rise in reporting, showing that referrals made about sexual abuse and online sexual abuse increased 124% on the previous year³⁹.
- Rape Crisis England and Wales (RCEW) reported a 50% rise in the numbers of sexual violence survivors receiving on-going support through RCEW services in the last two years and calls to their helpline have also increased by 27% from two years ago. While some of the RCEW-reported increase can be attributed to a rise in historical abuse survivors seeking support, 13% of their service users are under 18 which was an increase on service use by this age group two years prior⁴⁰.

7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 The information reviewed here presents the best available data on the prevalence and incidence of child sexual abuse in the UK. There is a clear gap between abuse reported officially to social care services and the Police and that which is self-reported by children, young people and young adults (reporting retrospectively). This indicates that not all children and young people tell someone about their abuse. It is also likely that the self-report figures do not tell the whole story either. This has significant implications for all services in working to effectively and sensitively identify children who are being abuse.
- 7.2 Further, the available data are limited in their ability to capture the diverse forms of sexual abuse that are occurring, such as online sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual exploitation in the offline environment. More research is needed which adequately disentangles different forms of abuse and abuse experienced in a range of different contexts.
- 7.3 The information reviewed here does highlight some important contexts regarding perpetrators involved in the commission of CSA. The limitations in the data, however, have implications for how services respond to the variety of contexts and settings in which CSA occurs. There is learning here from these limitations for police to ensure data recording accurately reflects the diversity in CSA contexts and perpetrators in order to direct investigations, staff and money in the right places.

¹ See Allnock (forthcoming 2015)

² Harker, L., Jütte, S., Bentley, H., Miller, P. and Jetha, N. (2014) *How safe are our children?* The NSPCC: London.

³ Gilbert, R., Spatz-Widom, C., Browne, K., Fergusson, D., Webb, E. and Janson, S. (2009) Burden and consequences of child maltreatment in high-income countries, *Lancet*, 373, 68-81;

⁴ Gilbert, R., Kemp, A., Thoburn, J., Sidebotham, P., Radford, L., Glaser, D. and MacMillan, H. (2009). Recognising and responding to child maltreatment. *Lancet*, 373, 167-180.

⁵ Barth, J., Bermetz, L., Heim, E., Trelle, S. and Tonia, T. (2013) The current prevalence of child sexual abuse worldwide: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *International Journal of Public Health*, 58, 469-483; Stoltenborgh, M., van IJzendoorn, M., Euser, E., and Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. (2011) A global perspective on child sexual abuse; A meta-analysis of prevalence around the world. *Child Maltreatment*, 16, 79-89; Pereda, N., Guilera, G., Forns, M., and Gómez-Benito, J. (2009) The prevalence of child sexual abuse in community and student samples: A meta-analysis. *Child Psychology Review*, 29, 328-338.

⁶ Interested readers can find out more about these difficulties elsewhere. See for example, Radford *et al.* (2011); Barth *et al.* (2013); Collin-Vézina, D., Daigneault, I. and Hébert, M. (2013) Lessons learned from child sexual abuse research: prevalence, outcomes, and preventive strategies. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health* 2013, 7:22.

⁷ For detailed methodology and results, see: Radford, L., Corral, S., Bradley, C., Fisher, H., Bassett, C., Howat, N. and Collishaw, S. (2011) *Child abuse and neglect in the UK today*. The NSPCC; London.

⁸ Radford, L., Corral, S. Bradley, C. and Fisher, H. (2013) The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment and other types of victimization in the UK: Findings from a population survey of caregivers, children and young people and young adults. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 37, 801-813.

⁹ We do not know enough, from the published data, about all perpetrators reported in this study. Dependent upon overall responses to victimisation experiences, some respondents would not have received follow-up questions about the context of their abuse. Thus there is some missing data for some of the respondents relating to perpetrators. Additionally, as the report identifies, some respondents will have experienced abuse by more than one perpetrator and this will impact on the overall figures. It is not possible to precisely disentangle these issues from the data provided in the published report and therefore, it is not possible to state whether IFCSA is more or less common than EFCSA when considering all reported experiences of contact and non-contact abuse. Key groups of perpetrators for which no data has yet been published include: siblings, other resident adults but who are not parents or guardians (e.g. uncles, aunts, or un-related residents) and only limited data is currently available for peers.

¹⁰ The NSPCC report frames contact abuse by any adult or peer as 'severe'; however, in recognition that 'severity' is subjective, from this point forward in the briefing it will simply be referred to as 'contact sexual abuse'.

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¹⁹ Barter, C., McCarry, M., Berridge, D. and Evans, K. (2009) *Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships*. The NSPCC, London and The University of Bristol, Bristol.

²⁰ Barter et al. (2015) *Safeguarding teenage intimate relationships (STIR). Briefing paper 2: Incidence rates and impacts of experiencing interpersonal violence and abuse in young people's relationships*. University of Bristol and Daphne III European Commission.

²¹ Berelowitz, S., Firmin, C., Edwards, G. and Gulyurtlu, S. (2012) *'I thought I was the only one. The only one in the world': The Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups. Interim Report*. The Office of the Children's Commissioner, London. Available at:

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³⁰ Bunting (2014) p. 201

³¹ See Bunting (2014) for references to Violence Against Women and Children strategy

³² The Children's Commissioner (forthcoming); Bunting (2014)

³³ The Children's Commissioner (forthcoming 2015)

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