

**Relocation, relocation, relocation: home and school-moves for children
affected extra-familial risks during adolescence**

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Abstract

From sexual exploitation and serious youth violence, to recruitment into drugs trafficking lines, young people encounter a range of risks in their neighbourhoods. Safeguarding partnerships in England face a practical challenge in addressing these ‘public’ types of significant harm, when using a child protection framework designed to respond to risks within the ‘private’ space of families. In the absence of a safeguarding system equipped to reshape unsafe extra-familial contexts young people are moved away from them. Drawing upon cumulative evidence from 20 case reviews and audits of safeguarding practices in 14 local authorities this paper explores the extent to which such relocations have achieved physical, psychological and relational safety. In doing so it articulates how relocation following public-space risks can disrupt private-space safety and recommends the practice be reviewed to identify the conditions in which it is an appropriate safeguarding mechanism.

Keywords: relocation, care placements, adolescence, extra-familial abuse, exploitation, Contextual Safeguarding

Introduction

During adolescence young people navigate a range of risks that percolate in public spaces – such as sexual exploitation, gang-affiliation and serious youth violence (Barter, 2009; Catch 22, 2013; Pain, 2006; Pitts, 2013; Smallbone, et al., 2013; Valentine, 1997). This dynamic is one that differs from risks in earlier childhood where individuals’ experiences of abuse are largely perpetrated by family members or adults connected to their families (Sidebotham, et al., 2016). When young people encounter abuse within public spaces a desire for physical safety has motivated children’s services, policing departments and education providers in the UK to move young people away from the areas and schools in which they encounter harm (Firmin, 2017a; Shuker, 2013; The Department for Education, 2015; Schliehe, 2013). This paper examines ‘relocation’ as a response to extra-familial risks and the extent to which it achieves its primary motivation – safety. Analysing evidence of relocations through a multi-dimensional account of safety (Shuker, 2013) – that found in one’s relationships and psychology as well as physical setting – a more nuanced account of protection emerges. Through this lens the impact of relocation on young people’s private relationships (with peers, family members and their sense of self) can be examined, and geographical dynamics of abuse and protection are illuminated.

The relevance of ‘place’ to young people’s experiences of abuse, and the operational struggle safeguarding partnerships face in addressing environmental aspects of abuse, suggest that geographers have a role to play in improving child welfare practices. Geographical studies into child abuse (Willis, Canavan and Prior, 2015), children’s navigation of public-space (Pain, 2006; Valentine; 1997), and the significance of place and mobilities in ‘welfare’ service design (Disney, 2017; Schliehe, 2013) are built upon in this paper, through the specific study of welfare-intended relocations. Informing, and informed by, debates about the sufficiency of child protection systems to safeguard young people, (Firmin, 2017b;

Hanson & Holmes, 2015; House of Commons Education Committee, 2012; United Nations, 2015), this paper considers whether relocation occurs in the absence of welfare practices designed to engage with risk in public places, and whether the damage it poses to relationships in private spaces in fact undermines its very purpose.

Background

Adolescence is a socially constricted period in which individuals display an increasing desire for autonomy (Coleman, 2011; Holloway et al., 2018) - forming relationships in public spaces, beyond parental supervision (Pain, 2006; Valentine, 1998). While this is expected for growth and maturation, young people can also experience abuse in extra-familial settings and on occasion are relocated away from them in response.

'Public' nature of adolescent vulnerability

From sexual exploitation and being groomed into drugs trafficking (more recently termed criminal exploitation), through to locality or peer-based feuds that result in serious youth violence (and weapon-enabled crime), research and meta-case-reviews have documented an acceleration of community-based risks during adolescence (Catch 22, 2013; The Children's Society, 2017; Firmin, 2017a; Pitts, 2013; Sidebotham, et al., 2016).

Young people have reported to geographers, criminologists, environmental psychologists and sociologists that these exploitative street and school-based interactions are often publicly situated (Catch, 22; Pain, 2006; Pitts, 2013; Smallbone et al., 2013; Ringrose, 2011). Many localities where they come to harm are used by the public – transport hubs, malls, classrooms and estates etc. Secondly, incidents often occur in view of those using these spaces.

Therefore, to interact with and reduce these risks, responses need to engage with the public actors and settings of abuse.

'Private' focus of child protection

In many Western countries statutory child protection systems have developed to safeguard young people at risk of abuse (Corby et al., 2012; Parton, 2014). These systems are designed to address risks posed by parents/carers (or adults connected to families) to children – such as neglect, physical and sexual abuse. Run by social workers, child protection or child safety services assess the needs and/or risks of parents/carers/families, and work with them to increase their protective capacity. In some instances, particularly where significant harm/abuse has occurred, these services may place children into the care of the state – and into residential, foster or adoptive care thereafter. This position has been built upon an international research agenda into child abuse, maltreatment and neglect that has evidenced the private world of families, and approaches to keep children safe. The effectiveness and ethics of family intervention have been – and continue to be – debated.

Firstly, the extent of a state's right intervene in family life is/has been contested (Corby, et al., 2012). Child protection systems emerged through an acceptance that, to protect children, the state had a role to play in influencing how they were treated by their parents. A range of country-created mechanisms determine the 'thresholds' for such intervention. For example, in the UK a parent who doesn't take their child to required medical appointments could be considered neglectful – a conclusion which could provide grounds for state support/intervention; whereas, a parent who doesn't permit their child to access sex and relationships education at school is not considered neglectful and is instead thought of as exercising parental choice.

Secondly, child protection systems that individualise what are ultimately social issues have been criticised. For example, neglect can be associated to poverty, and parental mental ill-health (and its impact) may be associated to wider social issues and/or ineffective medical support (Featherstone, et al., 2016). On these grounds, some scholars have admonished the political positioning of the family as form of 'welfare' and the separation of familial

vulnerabilities from wider social issues that impact family functioning (Featherstone, et al., 2016; Firmin, 2017a; Parton, 2014). Geographers too have noted wider public attitudes that hold parents responsible for abuse that their children experience – even abuse originating in places that are beyond parental control (Valentine, 1997). From the perspective of child protection systems (both how they are used and perceived), such debates turn on the question of whether social workers should focus on addressing social issues impacting families or changing familial behaviours within unchanging social contexts to safeguard children.

The chasm between the private and the public – adolescent vulnerability and relocation

The aforementioned debates centre on the premise that child protection systems are largely concerned with abuse occurring in private spaces and private (familial) view. Yet during adolescence much of the abuse that young people experience occurs in public spaces and public view. Within this chasm sit young people who are abused in public spaces and are processed through a system ill-equipped to affect contexts beyond their families. While criminal justice systems can offer some form of protection –investigating and where possible prosecuting individuals responsible for abuse – the ability for a wider network to proactively safeguard young people at risk is largely wanting. For example: families can be assessed, and interventions utilised to reduce risks within them; but school, community or peer contexts are rarely assessed through this safeguarding lens, and multi-agency plans to increase safety in places – rather than with families – are rarely put into action (Firmin, 2017b). In the absence of approaches that increase safety in abusive extra-familial settings, young people are relocated away from them.

In England, children (up to the age of 18) can be placed into the care of the state via a court order (and their legal removal from families) or via a voluntary agreement between a parent and a local authority (acting on behalf of the state). In the case of the latter a local authority may place child into care without a court order with a parent retaining parental responsibility

for that child – although the logistics of this process, particularly issues of consent and processes for returning children to families, are subject to ongoing debate and legal challenge (Supreme Court, 2018). According to regulations for care placements in England (The Department for Education, 2015), children’s services departments (via the approval of a Director of Children’s Services in a local authority) can place a child ‘at a distance’ from where they live to protect them from the physical risks posed by extra-familial issues such as sexual exploitation (The Department for Education , 2015, pp. 56-58). Beyond physical welfare, these regulations consider the impact of placements on family and peer relationships:

... some relatives also live hundreds of miles from the child’s home. While the chance of developing a secure attachment with a relative may be of key significance to a younger child, the same may not be true of a teenager who may resent being cut off from peer networks or being obliged to change schools at a critical time and lose the local roots which may become a protective factor later on. ... Moreover, those young people who have been drawn into a gang culture or become involved with a delinquent peer group may benefit not from being near home but from being offered the chance to develop new relationships and skills in a different environment. (The Department for Education , 2015, p. 53)

In this sense relational safety – protection through the security of relationships – also informs placement decisions.

Legal provision is also made in section 25 of the Children Act 1989 to place a child in secure accommodation for welfare reasons. This decision must be approved by a court and is made on the basis that the child is likely to ‘abscond’ and will be at risk of significant physical harm if they do or are likely to injure themselves or others. In the former category the legislation primarily speaks to young people likely to come to physical harm when missing due to extra-familial issues such as sexual or criminal exploitation.

It is against this backdrop that the body of work outlined below was developed – work which provides cumulative learning about how relocation is used and experienced. The centrality of place in experiences of both abuse and relocation require that this work is informed by, and

informs, geographical contributions to knowledge and practice concerning child-welfare – and this paper provides one route to achieving this. In particular, it contributes to wider geographical discussions regarding: young people’s controlled mobilities as a form of ‘care’ (Disney, 2017; Schliehe, 2013); nuanced accounts of agency and capacity in childhood, by recognising choice in relation to spatial and temporal constraints (Holloway, et al., 2018), and; wider accounts of public-space risk during adolescence, the approaches young people take to navigating such challenges, and the response of parents and professionals who seek to secure children’s welfare by controlling their movements (Pain, 2006; Valentine, 1997).

Methodology

This paper presents cumulative findings from studies into the contextual (situational, environmental and relational) dynamics of abuse that young people experience in extra-familial settings. The studies are part of a research programme, initially launched in 2011, that is building conceptual, strategic and practice frameworks for contextualising child protection systems; studies have included:

- 19 contextual reviews of peer-on-peer abuse cases
- 14 area-wide practice audits of responses to peer-on-peer abuse
- The identification of levers for addressing harmful sexual behaviours in schools
- An exploration of the contextual dynamics of group-based harmful sexual behaviours
- An embedded study of the adoption of Contextual Safeguarding in one local authority

Across these studies, Bourdieu’s (1992) concepts of, ‘capital’, ‘social field’ and ‘habitus’ have provided a theoretical scaffold for exploring relationships between young people’s experiences of abuse, the social rules operating in locations/contexts of such abuse, and the ability of professionals to respond. Firstly, they illuminate interplays between a) the rules in social spaces (fields), b) the actions young people take within them, c) how these behaviours contribute to the rules of those spaces – and how these interplays shape abusive experiences. Secondly, they serve to illustrate the varying weights of influence that different social fields

(including family, peer, schools and community/neighbourhood settings) have on young people's behaviours. In doing so, they offer a lens to examine whether safeguarding responses identify, assess and intervene with the social rules that interplay with abusive behaviours in peer group, school and community settings.

This research programme has been used to build child protection approaches that identify, assess and intervene with the social conditions of abuse – an approach referred to as Contextual Safeguarding (Firmin, 2017a) and adopted into statutory child protection guidance in England in 2018 (DfE, 2018). According to proponents of Contextual Safeguarding, child protection systems need to expand to change the public/peer-and-community as well as private/familial spaces in which young people encounter harm – thereby creating safer environments in which they can exercise a broader, and safer, suite of choices – rather than creating safety through the control of young people's behaviour, residence and associations. Despite policy advances, various aspects of Contextual Safeguarding and the implications of the approach for child protection systems requires further consideration; one such example being the use of relocations. Specifically, should social workers be intervening with young people - moving them away from harmful contexts - or increasing safety in harmful contexts and allowing young people to remain within them?

Study and data overview

How is relocation used when young people experience extra-familial risks – and does it adequately safeguard their welfare? To explore this question data has been drawn from two studies in the aforementioned programme. The first involved reviews of 19 cases of peer-on-peer abuse over four phases – cases involved a range of abusive experiences including peer-or-community-based murder, group and sole-perpetrated rape, online sexual abuse, non-fatal physical assaults and weapon-enabled conflict. Using a contextual case review template, police investigation, children's services and voluntary sector case files were accessed.

Information was anonymised and transferred into three sections of the template – the incident that occurred and the young people involved; the contexts associated to each young person (family, peer, school and neighbourhood), and; the nature of the professional response. 216 young people featured across the 19 cases – 30 who were identified as the primary complainants/victims in the cases, and 29 who were subject to some form of relocation (some of whom were witnesses and suspects as well as complainants). The case review methodology and the principle findings of the study have been published elsewhere (Firmin, 2017a). However for the purposes of this paper the data has been reanalysed to specifically consider the use of relocation in the cases (approach to re-analysis detailed later in this paper)

The second study, conducted in two phases, involved a mixed method audit of multi-agency responses to peer-on-peer abuse in 14 local authority areas. Through practitioner observation, narrative reviews of policies and procedures, interviews and focus groups with practitioners and with young people (Table 1) the extent to which a local partnership was equipped to address extra-familial abuse was assessed, and findings reported to local safeguarding partnerships. The audit methodology and data collection resources have been published (Lloyd, et al., 2017). For this paper, data collected during observations of multi-agency practitioner meetings (n=96) has been re-analysed to explore practitioner, parent and young people's perceptions of the relocations used by participating sites.

Analysis

In 2013, Lucie Shuker identified the multi-dimensional dynamics of safety that informed placement decisions for young people exploited by adults or peers. According to Shuker there were three ways in which safety was experienced by young people: physical safety, relational safety and psychological safety. Physical safety refers to protection from physical harm (in the form of sexual or physical abuse); relational safety refers to protection through a child

having trusted and secure relationships – with family members, peers or professionals, and; psychological safety refers to a young person’s mental and emotional well-being.

Data from the two studies outlined above was analysed to identify evidence of relocations. ‘Relocation-data’ was then coded in NVivo against Shuker’s framework with reference to: the initial purpose of the relocation; safety considerations raised by professionals, young people and parents, and; the discussed or recorded outcome.

Having re-analysed data from both studies through this process, their cumulative evidence was considered through a Contextual Safeguarding lens to identify what the findings suggest about the ability of traditional child protection frameworks to safeguard young people abused in extra-familial settings.

Ethics and limitations

Both studies received ethical approval from the University of Bedfordshire, and the case reviews received additional approvals from participating police force or safeguarding board governance processes. The approach taken to publication and dissemination of data from these studies is informed by this ethical process – with the upmost care taken to preserve the anonymity of children, families and practitioners featured in cases and to carefully present the sensitive subject matter. For these reasons no cases are published in full and details of the abuses experienced by young people are only presented as required. Finally it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this paper and the studies from which it is built. In the absence of a national dataset which records the number, purpose and outcome of relocation decisions in England it is not possible to frame the data presented in this paper within a wider national picture of relocation and placement decisions. The data used cannot be considered as representative of all relocations used to safeguard young people in England and conclusions cannot be drawn from it in isolation. Instead data is framed within wider debates about the

ability of child protection systems to safeguard young people and provides one lens through which to assess existing practices

Findings

Across the two studies it was possible to identify evidence of 144 relocations (table 2). A range of relocation methods were used including moving whole families, taking children into the care of the state (and placing them in residential children's homes or foster care) as well as moving children across schools. In 12 instances local authorities secured a court order to place a young person into a secure children's home on welfare grounds for three-six months. All relocations into care occurred following a voluntary agreement between parents and the local authority (as outlined previously) rather than through legal proceedings to remove young people from families. There was also some evidence of families initiating relocations independently of statutory intervention.

Using Shuker's multi-dimensional account of safety it is evident that the priority for professionals, and for some young people and families, at the time of relocation was physical safety in (for the most part) public, community or school contexts. Either a young person's physical safety was in jeopardy or it was believed that they posed a risk to the physical safety of someone else. On some occasions the physical safety of parents who had been assaulted by young people triggered relocations – but these examples of private-space violence were informed by abuse in public spaces, such as a young person's experiences of gang-affiliation, sexual or criminal exploitation. Following relocations, it was often the relational or psychological safety of a young person that undermined interventions – and led young people to either return to areas they had left or forge new, unsafe relationships in the areas they had been placed. This in turn increased risks to their physical safety. In all examples however it was the young person's private residence (the space where they lived) which was disrupted

through relocation in order to address the risks that they faced, or posed, in predominantly public spaces.

Physical safety

Across both studies the primary purpose of relocation – as described by practitioners – was either to secure the physical safety of a young person or to disrupt the risk that young person posed to the physical safety of someone else.

In the case of the former, practitioners requested the relocation of young people who had been: sexually exploited by peers in their schools and local communities, as well as by adults; seriously injured by peers in the context of serious youth violence, gang-affiliation and criminal exploitation, or; witnesses in such scenarios and were either providing evidence for the prosecution and/or had intervened during the incident (or in the aftermath).

Case review data, and meetings observed in area audits, evidenced the sense of urgency with which many of these decisions were made – with both the police and social workers arguing that without relocation they couldn't be confident that the young person in question would not come to severe or even fatal harm

A move must be facilitated so that the family can leave (the local area) and avoid all possible threats and recriminations (Case 4, minutes from child protection meeting regarding young woman who was being sexually exploited by peers)

For some, relocation also offered a means by which to control a young person who kept 'running' from their home. Practitioners feared that if some young people went missing they didn't know when they may return: during audits examples surfaced of young men and young women who had been missing for weeks and in a few cases months. In this sense relocation was seen as a preventative, as well as reactive, safety measure.

For the most part young people were relocated on their own. In some cases, particularly where young people had been victimised in a serious incident that was subject to a police investigation (were victims in attempted murder or rape cases) or were witnesses in such investigations (or to murders) the police worked with the local authority to arrange for whole families to be relocated. Young people, and their families, also requested relocation in some of these instances – stating a need to be moved to be kept safe or to ‘move-on’ from their experiences of abuse

I know most of the boys arrested in connection with this offence and if it became public knowledge that I have assisted police and provided evidence against them I would be subjected to serious violence before or after the trial... I would fear for my safety, my family's safety and our property (Case 1, view of bystander who intervened during a rape)

In this sense, practitioners, young people and parents were often of the view that the only way to keep safe was to leave the context in which safety had been compromised, and furthermore, that securing physical safety equalled feeling ‘safe’.

As noted at the outset of this section, young people were also relocated when they posed a risk to the physical safety of others. There were two primary motivations for this type of relocation in the data available. The first was when young people posed a risk to their families and the second was when young people were suspected of grooming or influencing peers into exploitative networks (in cases of both sexual exploitation and gang-affiliation)

It is a] priority to relocate whole family out of X [as it is a] priority to move suspects of CSE [child sexual exploitation] as opposed to victims and mum is keen to get out of X [due to] younger sibling (12 year old girl) also being drawn in by a well-known older young woman (Observation Site G, movement of a family where eldest daughter has

been exploited and is now exploiting others, discussed multi-agency gangs panel meeting)

Taking the latter example first, practitioners were observed discussing decisions to move young people away from the local area to disrupt wider networks of exploitation. Young people who were described as ‘lynch-pins’, ‘recruiters’ and ‘leaders’, and who were believed to be central actors in groups of young people who were being sexually exploited or were involved in serious youth violence were moved to disrupt the dynamics of wider groups. It was believed that taking this young person out of the network would better place practitioners to engage with and safeguard other young people who were following that individual. Such was the strength of feeling about this approach that practitioners were observed expressing anxiety when proposals were made to allow a young person to return to an area from where they have been moved, and the likely risk this would pose to all of the peers to whom they were connected:

Police attendees stated that risk to over five young women would increase if this young woman returned to the area and challenged social work colleagues to keep them placed at a distance on a permanent basis. The social worker present stated that the young woman was going missing from her distance placement and was rumoured to be back in area but was under the radar of staff so the relocation was not necessarily reducing risk at this present time (Observation Site A, multi-agency sexual exploitation meeting)

Likewise, the welfare of parents and younger siblings was found to motivate the relocation of young people who had become abusive within the home environment. During local area audits and in case reviews young people came to the attention of statutory services for having physically assaulted their parents who were refusing them access to the family home. These incidents predominantly followed attempts by parents to respond to the impact that extra-

familial risks were having on their children, and when this was unsuccessful parents asked for their young people to be removed.

Placed into emergency foster care and then into foster care out of the neighbourhood aged 12 as a result of her smashing up furniture in her grandmother's house (although she had requested to be moved for 10 months prior to this instance as a result of exploitation in the local area) (Case 5, social worker history summary ahead of review meeting of a young woman being sexually exploited by peers)

In three such cases this was the first time the young person had come to the attention of children's social care. For example, one young woman was in an abusive relationship with a boy of a similar age – when her mother attempted to stop her from seeing him she assaulted her mother and damaged furniture; police were called and contacted children's services. As a result, the young person was placed in semi-independent accommodation. Likewise, her partner, who had been abusing her, was also being exploited to traffic drugs to different parts of the country and had been threatened with weapons. He too assaulted his mother and sister – and was ultimately taken into care during the intervention period.

When the relocation of one young person was used to increase or preserve the physical safety of young people's families or wider peer networks risk was located in that young person rather than in any place or space. As such, the contexts of concern were deemed to be safer once that young person was removed, and the disruption of this young person's private/familial space was believed to create safety in public/peer/community contexts.

Relational safety

While practitioners across both studies discussed concerns for the physical safety of young people and families when justifying relocation, there was little evidence that relational safety motivated decision-making. Furthermore, despite placement regulations outlined at the outset

of the paper referring to relationships, the negative impact that relocations could have on young people's relational safety was given minimal consideration – if at all. And yet, when relocations occurred young people's relationships were often severed. This dynamic was exemplified in three ways.

Firstly, when young people were abused within their schools, peer groups, or in community contexts they often did not experience comparable risks within their home/family context. For example, young people in the sample who had been sexually exploited in their community or sexually assaulted at school were not also experiencing sexual abuse within their families. Likewise, most young people who were being used by gangs to traffic drugs did not live with criminally-involved families - although for some the involvement of older siblings in criminal behaviour did blur the line between public and private-space risk. Save such exceptions, relational safety in relatively physically safe, private circumstances was compromised through relocations to realise physical safety in public spaces.

Secondly, risk was rarely a feature of all the relationships that a young person had. For example, some had safe, as well as risky, peer relationships. Even those whose peer relationships were all associated to the risks that they faced secured some sense of belonging and connection from these same friendships to the extent that binary categorisations of risky or safe relationships provides a clumsy and largely inaccurate account of their lived reality. Research has routinely documented the significance of peer relationships for individuals during adolescence (Barter, 2009b; Coleman, 2011; Warr, 2002), for both a sense of self and for status; a loss of these created a relational safety deficit. Besides from peers and families, young people also had relationships with professionals they trusted – particularly those in educational, youth and community service settings. While a young person's social worker would continue to visit them, relocations disrupted trusted relationships with this broader

network of practitioners – something that wider research has identified as a crucial component of adolescent safeguarding.

Thirdly, and compounding the above losses, young people struggled to achieve relational safety in areas where they had been placed. Young people often didn't know anyone where they had been placed. When they moved schools they also had to form new friendships – and many young people who moved as a result of victimisation in a previous school were bullied in their new schools as rumours travelled with them.

In the absence of peer and family relationships the risks of grooming were particularly potent and young people became targets for exploitation in their placement location. Some began to go missing with other young people living in the residential or semi-independent accommodation where they had been placed. Others engaged in behaviours that they had become accustomed to at home, such as socialising in public spaces where they became networked with groups who faced similar risks to those they encountered prior to relocation.

The ability of professionals to monitor and enable relational safety during this process was rarely considered. Where it was, it was evident that there was increased opportunity for placement safety. For example, when one young person was moved a considerable distance from their home local authority the advocate who had worked with them previously continued to travel and visit them to offer relational stability. Such examples were rare and occurred at a considerable cost in terms of finance and capacity to the professionals involved.

In the absence of relational safety in their new placements many young people routinely returned to their 'home' local authority. For some this was to see parents or siblings, and for others it was to see peers. This was true even for young people who had experienced difficulties in family, as well as community, contexts. The minority of young people who had been exposed to domestic abuse, parental substance misuse or experiences of neglect at home

also lost forms of relational safety within families upon relocation. For the most part these experiences within families would not, on their own, have warranted a care placement (these young people were not a risk of significant harm within their families). However, challenges within families, coupled with escalating community risk, could be used as justification for relocation without due consideration to the consequential loss of relational safety. As was the case with peer relationships, negative experiences within families did not nullify any protection (particularly through attachment and belonging) that this context offered.

Even for young people who didn't physically return on a frequent basis, most remained connected to peers through online contact. When young people were moved from schools, practitioners in multi-agency meetings discussed the fact that they were returning to their original schools and standing outside of the school gates – waiting to see peers who they were either in conflict with or with whom they had friendships.

None of the above is surprising given what we know about the tactics young people use to navigate unsafe environments – their reliance on peers, local knowledge and networks, and individual status and reputation to achieve some sense of 'safety' when faced with risk (Firmin, 2017a; Pain, 2006; Pitts, 2013; Schliehe, 2013; Valentine, 1997). However, in these attempts to reconnect with people and places young people compromised both their own and others' physical safety. This risk to physical safety prompted professionals to focus on identifying ways to keep young people in, or return them to, their new placements – controlling or restricting their agency rather than creating contexts in which they could experience protective relationships and exercise agency. Case review notes recorded examples of social workers tasked with convincing young people that a relocation was in their best interests:

She continues to state that she doesn't want to move and so I explained to her that sometimes we have to do things that we don't want to do but that will make our lives better. She feels as if we are punishing her and not the boys who have done this to her

(Case 4, social worker notes in supervision with line manager)

During observations it was evident that some professionals recognised the pull of relational safety and on occasion suggested that the young person be returned to their original local authority. In these incidences their colleagues communicated anxiety about the risks that would escalate if a return was approved, and in no meeting observed by the research team was such a recommendation acted upon.

In the available dataset it was evident that when they were relocated the relational safety experienced, or desired, by young people was compromised. While some practitioners recognised this tension, and on a small number of occasions attempted to maintain their relationship with a young person to preserve one protective relationship, recognition of the issue was insufficient to drive a response which prioritised it. Instead the risks posed to the physical safety of young people motivated decision-making, and in many ways a desire for relational safety was viewed first and foremost as a risk to a young person's welfare rather than a contributor to it. The challenge for professionals was that relational safety for young people was often located in contexts that were physically unsafe – either families who lived in unsafe neighbourhoods, or peer relationships that had formed in unsafe schools, or subsets of protective peer relationships within wider harmful peer networks. This led professionals to disrupt the private relationships that young people formed by taking them away from the public spaces that had hosted them.

Psychological safety

The psychological welfare of young people was connected to both their physical and relational safety, as well as it being a point of consideration in its own right.

In six cases young people themselves expressed concerns for their physical safety, and impact it was having on their emotional well-being. Likewise, professionals across 36 observations and 14 cases talked about the psychological impact of abuse– as well as young people’s fears of further harm.

To this extent, professionals acknowledged the risks posed to the psychological welfare of young people as secondary justification for relocation: risk posed to a young person’s psychological welfare (secondary) from the physical risk (primary) posed by the abuse was the lens through which this dimension of safety was considered.

However, this was not the only risk posed to young people’s psychological well-being within the dataset. Relocations themselves compromised the emotional well-being of young people – in two key ways. Firstly some young people communicated that by having to move they were being blamed, or held partially responsible, for the risks that they faced. For example, a 12 year old girl who was being exploited by in excess of five 14-15 year olds boys at school and in her neighbourhood was moved into foster care at-a-distance from her home local authority; she asked her social worker why the people who had abused, and continued to threaten, her were not the ones who had to move away.

These feelings of self-blame, and the harbouring of (partial) responsibility for their experiences of abuse, were not solely the consequence of relocation. Many young people who had been sexually abused adopted wider institutional and societal discourses of victim-blaming. However, the act of relocation did little to undermine those feelings and to some extent reinforced the message that the young person had, in part, caused what had happened: once *they* moved the risk would reduce. Such examples of ‘welfare’ intended interventions

were experienced as punishments – echoing wider studies geographical studies in carceral mobilities associated with orphanages and secure children’s homes for example. (Disney, 2017; Schliehe, 2013)

The impact that relocation had on relational safety – as outlined earlier in this paper – was also interwoven with young people’s psychological welfare. Social isolation is known to compromise emotional well-being (Coleman, 2011; Shuker, 2013). Placing young people in areas, families and schools where they didn’t know anybody created situations of social isolation for young people at a time where they were in increased need of relational support. On the occasions this was recognised, and professionals made attempts to sustain trusted relationships that they had with young people – as previously outlined – some of this isolation could be mitigated. Professionals who were aware of this risk identified opportunities for young people to build new peer relationships through extra-curricular activities for example. However, for the most part the loss of relational security from young people’s home authorities/schools was not addressed during the placement process – creating additional risks for their psychological safety.

In summary the psychological safety of young people was considered to the extent that provided additional justification for relocation. However, the impact of relocation on a young person’s psychological welfare, either due to self-blame or a loss/reduction of relational safety, was not explicitly considered. And yet, the risk posed to psychological safety as a result of relocation, rather than as a reason for it, was evident in both studies.

Public-space risk, private space safety and vice versa

The relocation decisions made by professionals in the two studies were primarily thought of as safeguarding the physical and psychological welfare of young people – dimensions of safety that were being undermined by abuse in neighbourhoods, schools and/or peer groups.

In these studies, removal from public-space contexts that compromised young people's physical safety was the route to securing safety. However, young people's private relationships – both protective and risky- were located within those same contexts – and these private relationships were disrupted by public space interventions. Furthermore, the individual psychology of each young person – which was informed by both their relational (private) and physical (compromised in public spaces – in these cases) welfare – was informed by these dynamics. So, to address public-space risk private-space safety was disrupted.

However, if interventions had been developed to intervene with the risky elements of public contexts – and thereby disrupt these spaces – then relational safety may have been secured; both through the safeguarding of protective relationships and the potential reshaping of unsafe relationships that occupied safer contexts. Furthermore, a reduction in physical risk alongside secure relational safety may have better protected young people's psychological safety.

Interventions with the public spaces in which risk escalated, rather than with the individuals who navigated those spaces, could have preserved relationships and safeguarded young people's emotional well-being – two dimensions of safety that were often compromised through the relocations featured in the dataset. Instead, by managing the impact of public-space risk through relocation, private-space safety was undermined.

Discussion – Implications

The challenges of relocation presented in this paper are interwoven with the purpose and functioning of western child protection systems - primarily designed to intervene with individuals and families to safeguard young people from abuse. Children at risk within families may also be removed from them. However, in cases of familial abuse social workers

may use many other interventions before this point to try and create safety while preserving the family unit and thereby create physical safety and relational safety and safeguard psychological welfare. There are comparably few interventions used for extra-familial risk and social workers are not trained/equipped to identify opportunities for intervening in peer, school or neighbourhood contexts as part of child protection practice. In the absence of contextual interventions, relocation is one tool that can disrupt relationships between 'risky' public spaces and a young person's welfare.

However, while relocation may provide some opportunity to secure a young person's physical safety it also poses a risk to their relational and psychological safety. Compromising these latter dimensions of safety can also undermine a young person's physical safety. The multidimensional nature of safety is neither considered explicitly in the practice of relocation nor is it catered for – despite mention in statutory regulation.

The findings presented in this paper suggest that further thought is required about the place, purpose and use of relocation as a mechanism for safeguarding young people. Geographers have a significant role to play in this regard. Firstly, the theorising of agency in childhood, the spatial and temporal influences on choice, and the decisions that young people make to navigate unsafe public spaces provide a foundation for considering how to work alongside, rather than intervene with (and move), young people affected by extra-familial risks (Holloway, et al., 2018; Pain, 2006; Valentine, 1997). Secondly, studies into carceral mobilities offer the foundations for a greater debate on the use of secure welfare beds as child protection interventions (Disney, 2017; Schliehe, 2013). Finally, the spatial nature of abuse and techniques for changing then nature of abusive places rather than people requires significant development in the field of social work – as do narratives of abuse and exploitation within geography (Willis, Canavan and Prior, 2015).

This paper does not suggest that relocations should never be used. As is the case with the removal of young people from families that remain significantly unsafe despite support – there may be public-space contexts in which safety cannot be created for a young person and relocation is required. However, the findings of this paper do suggest relocation can undermine other components of safety in a bid to secure physical security – and apparent inability for social workers to consider and address the psychological or relational safety of young people during the process of relocation warrants attention in research, policy and practice. Future work is required to identify the prevalence and cost of relocations decisions nationally – and the extent to which the nature of relocations nationally reflects those depicted in this paper. Through a national review of the nature and scale of relocations we will be in a greater position to articulate: a) the components of safe relocation, and; b) the need for interventions that create safe contexts and reduce the need for relocation away from unsafe contexts. Such inquiry appears requisite to address an international deficit in many neo-liberal child protection models, and to ensure statutory measures are in place that adequately safeguard young people who are abused in public, as well as private, places.

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