Systematic Review Protocol

Safeguarding practice for young people and young adults (aged 16-25) who have experienced CSE before or during transition: a qualitative systematic review protocol.

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Summary

CSE is a key area of concern for local authority children's services and, more recently, adult services with safeguarding duties towards victims and survivors. Understandings of 'transition' and transition planning by and between Children's and Adults Services varies, with different statutory duties and protocols on information sharing. Some young adults aged 18 and over are vulnerable to exploitation or were being exploited before turning 18 and the exploitation has continued. Eligibility for support from Children's Services ceases and there is no legal duty to support young people, unless they have care and support needs. The Jay Report (2014) and a number of Serious Case Reviews have recognised a gap in statutory services where young people were experiencing violence, abuse and exploitation but were left without adequate support. Without a planned transition into Adult Services young people are open to significant issues. There is a need for joint and multi-agency working across all partners to address this issue to enable young people to be safe, to access appropriate channels of support and to fulfil their potential. Whilst moving between statutory services that are focused on children and those focused on adults can be problematic and this is widely known, there is no one source of social work led evidence which can be drawn on currently, although there is evidence of proactive work in some localities. Transition pathways for young people relating to mental health, learning disability, preparation for adulthood are familiar in service provision, the perception of CSE as an issue affecting children has meant that it has not been as familiar in adult social care and safeguarding. This review will serve to establish evidence and articulate concerns that are being experienced by a range of practitioners and academic researchers. seeking to present a way forward.

A systematic review in this field can provide evidence which can inform improved responses to young people and young adults in need. Implications for practice will be drawn out from this

The structure for this protocol template draws on the PRISMA-P (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic review and Meta-Analysis Protocols) 2015 checklist

review, with an over-arching focus on improving outcomes for children, young people and young adults. This review will lead to:

➢ Increased understanding of referral and assessment processes with children's and adults' social care and other agencies to safeguarding sexually exploited young people and young adults.
➢ Identification of successful transition outcomes and challenges for young people and young adults who have experienced sexual exploitation.
➢ Increased understanding of challenges in this area of social care practice and opportunities for change, through identification of ways of organising safeguarding and support for children, young people and young adults.
➢ Recommendations for practice that close gaps and increase success of safeguarding and support

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Part 1) Rationale and question formulation

| Rationale | It can be argued that the challenges which are present in managing CSE during childhood and adolescence become more complex as young people progress towards adulthood and beyond the legal remit of child safeguarding systems (Holmes, 2018). Various forms of exploitation can continue into adulthood (Coy, 2009; Holmes, 2018) and some young people may be more vulnerable to extra-familial exploitation than others. For example, young people who are in care, leaving care or care experienced (Hallett, 2015; Franklin, Bradley, Brady, 2019), and children and young people with learning disabilities may be particularly socially isolated and vulnerable to grooming (Franklin and Smeaton, 2017), which can continue after the age of 18 is reached. Under The Care Act (2014) young people are assessed as to whether they meet the definition of an adult at risk when turning 18, which calls into question thresholds used to define 'risk'. There are a number of 'unchallenged assumptions' (Phoenix, 2019) which underpin CSE practice, policy and the regulatory framework.

Professionals working in the field of CSE are keen to improve practice, recognising that there is room for improvement. An important first step is to collate what is currently happening for young people that continue to need support post 18 or disclose previous CSE after 18. The way in which some young people present to services can mean that they may fall through the gaps and do not receive an appropriate response, for example, the framing of 'risk' for disabled and neurodiverse young people (Franklin, Brady, Bradley, 2020) and Black and minority ethnic young people (Barnard, 2019) may lead to inequality or some children's |

	experiences being rendered invisible. There are a number of issues relating to transition between those services appropriate for children and those more appropriate for adults, largely unexplored in peer reviewed literature, more often exposed in wider grey literature. However, this range of studies, reports, practices and responses remains largely undetected as they are disparately located, inter-disciplinary, spanning academia and practice. It is a timely moment to draw together what is currently known about safeguarding children and young people aged 16-25, from the past 20 years of CSE evidence. This review will highlight complexities and contradictions in safeguarding and support provided to children, young people and young adults. It aims to increase understanding of this field of social care and make recommendations for research, policy and practice which enhances support.
Research question(s)	As the review will be qualitative, we will be using PICo, which is more suitable and aligns with the approach outlined by the Joanna Briggs Institute. The PICo mnemonic stands for the Population, the Phenomena of Interest and the Context. Population: Young people and young adults (aged 16-25) Interest: Safeguarding victims and survivors of Child Sexual Exploitation Context: Transition Year Over-arching question: What does the literature say about safeguarding practice for young people and young adults (aged 16-25) who have experienced CSE before or during transition? ➢ *How is safeguarding from 16 years onwards organised and how is risk assessed in this age group?* ➢ *What do we know about continued need for services and support post 18 years amongst young people who have experienced CSE?* ➢ *Is the evidence clear about thresholds for action across universal, targeted and specialist services?* ➢ *What facilitates or constrains a successful transition for young people who have experienced CSE?* Population: We include young people aged 16-25, taking a fluid approach to transition as it is not a one-off event and can extend into young adulthood. This is the age up to which young people (including those with long term health conditions, disability, care leavers) can receive social care support. Interest: There is no globally recognised definition or an agreed UK definition of CSE (Kelly and Karsna, 2017), therefore, for the purpose of this review we will use the 2017 Department for Education in England government definition:

	Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology (DfE 2017: 5). Context: Transition is defined as a process of moving from child to adult, legally defined as at age 18, increasingly understood as less binary. Safeguarding services are often oriented to either children or adults. The scope of this review will include studies on transition from children's to adults' social care services; transition from foster care to independent living; transition from being a Looked After Child to independent living; transition from child to adult as safeguarding is not only or always a statutory intervention**.** Safeguarding - Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 places duties on a range of organisations, agencies and individuals to ensure their functions, and any services that they contract out to others, are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Under The Care Act 2014 Safeguarding adults means protecting a person's right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect. An adult at risk is any person who is aged 18 years of over and at risk of abuse or neglect because of their needs for care and support.

Part 2) Identifying relevant work

Search Strategy

Electronic databases	• PsychINFO • ASSIA • Social Sciences Citation Index • Pubmed • Google Scholar (ordering search results by relevance and reviewing only the first 200 results) • Open grey • DAPHNE
Other sources	Key stakeholders/academics to be approached via email • Child welfare inequalities network • British Sociological Association Childhood Studies Group • (NWG) National Working Group on Child Sexual Exploitation • National Organisation for the Treatment of Offenders (NOTA)

	• Universities of Bedford, Birmingham, Brunel, Cardiff, Edinburgh, London Met, Middlesex, Queens, Sussex • End Violence against Women coalition • Family Rights Group • Women's Aid • Research in Practice Key websites to be searched
Key search terms	(Child OR "young people" OR youth OR adolescents OR Juveniles OR teen* OR service user OR service-user) AND (abuse OR "sexual abuse" OR exploitation OR neglect OR violence OR justice OR prostitution OR trafficking OR "emotional abuse" OR pornography OR "abuse images" OR Maltreatment OR harm OR criminal OR trauma OR prostitution) AND (Transition OR transitional OR lifespan) AND (Safeguarding OR protection OR planning OR pathways OR support OR welfare needs)
Draft search strategy	We will use the search string above and apply the inclusion/exclusion criteria stipulated below. Due to the qualitative and broad nature of the review we will not apply any limiters.

Study selection criteria

Inclusion criteria	*Study characteristics* • Young people aged 16-25 years • Victims or Survivors of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) • Have experienced child to adult transition *Report characteristics* • Published in English language only • Published from 1 January 2000 onwards • Studies obtainable within 2 weeks • UK literature first and then relevant international literature (report separately) • Peer reviewed plus grey literature from identified websites • Snowballing to maximum number which can be read and analysed in timeframe • Maximum number that can be read and analysed in the available time (n=100).
Exclusion criteria	• Non-European, Non-AUS/NZ and Non-North American studies • Non-English language • Published prior to 2000 • Studies which have been carried out unethically.

Process of study selection	Toft will take the lead on performing the searches, gathering and collating the master list, bringing together the results from all the searches. Toft will then apply the broad inclusion/exclusion criteria as specified above (e.g. publication date, language etc.). Additionally, at this point any literature that is clearly not relevant will be removed through examination of article titles. Brady and Toft will then work to read the article abstracts to focus the included articles further. At this stage the expertise of the whole team will be accessed to assess the inclusion articles into what would be a final 'master list', based upon relevance towards the research questions. Brady and Toft will distribute the selected articles amongst the team (each article will be given to at least two members) who will assess eligibility and begin the extraction process. Toft will retain the master list to ensure that duplication does not occur. This will also allow for the assessment of any repeating articles. Our methodological approach is inclusive of studies which report empirical data. Studies outside of this will not be included in the systematic review as they will not contain data for extraction. To include such studies would result in a mixed methodology. Articles, reports, policy briefings, reviews, grey literature that do not include or report data are regarded as important to this review and will be used to provide context to the systematic review.

Study records

Data collection	The team will use a standardised extraction sheet to tease out the key findings from each article. This will ensure consistency of the data across the research team. This approach has been successful in our previous projects and compliments the meta-synthesis approach we have used. Each member of the team will be given guidance by Brady/Toft, including examples of how to use the extraction sheet. The extraction sheet will allow the team to record observations about the articles (including: methods used, key findings, conclusions, ethical information, the participants) alongside specific findings in relation to the research questions (and related sub-questions) that have been highlighted. Such an approach makes the process of writing and synthesising the report more streamlined.
Data management process	The team will initially store results in Endnote. Endnote allows for easy access (e.g. downloading) of title and abstract, whilst been able to manage results from multiple sources. Throughout this process result numbers will be logged for transparency and replicability. After removal of obviously irrelevant articles and the first stage of exclusion (by reading titles and abstracts for relevancy) the records will be transferred to an Excel 'master list'. An excel list will allow for

	easier access across the team. Toft will be responsible for holding this master list and collecting completed extraction forms.
Data items	As the review is qualitative in nature the team will focus upon the research questions in relation to the data. In practice this means that the following 'variables' will be collected: - Participants - Research methods - Key findings - Conclusions - Implications for the UK
Outcomes and prioritisation	- The review will deliver clear articulation of what qualitative research tells us about responses within children's and adults' social care, and other agencies, to safeguarding sexually exploited children, young people and young adults aged 16-25. - A robust assessment of transition experiences and outcomes for young people and young adults that have experienced sexual exploitation, including identification of constraints to successful transition. - Increased understanding of challenges in this area of social care practice and opportunities for change, through identification of ways of aligning safeguarding and support for children, young people and young adults.

Part 3) Risk of bias assessment

Risk of bias assessment criteria	We will use Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2017) principles and template for qualitative research to assess bias and validity of studies. This will be undertaken at the study and outcome level. **https://casp-uk.net/casp-tools-checklists/**
Purpose of risk of bias assessment	As the articles collected will be qualitative, measuring potential risk of bias is important when presenting the synthesised report. It will allow us to preface any arguments within the context of the way in which studies gathered, analysed and presented their data.

Part 4) Summarising the evidence

Data synthesis	Qualitative data will be synthesised using a combination of a meta-aggregation and thematic synthesis approach, informed by the research team's previous reviews and the approach outlined by the Joanna Briggs Institute. This will involve the aggregation and synthesis of findings to generate a set of statements that represent that aggregation, through assembling the findings and categorizing these findings on the basis of similarity in meaning. In essence, such an approach is similar to a thematic synthesis, where patterns and occurrences are logged in order to understand the key messages emerging from the body of literature. Such categories are then subjected to a synthesis in order to produce a single comprehensive set of synthesized findings. This clear presentation can be used as a basis for evidence-based practice. The findings will be presented in thematic narrative form.
Confidence in cumulative evidence	As the research is qualitative and we will be aggregating and synthesising the findings in a thematic fashion, an adapted form of GRADE will need to be used. As a result we will use GRADE-CERQual, which we feel is the more robust and widely used tool to measure confidence in evidence. GRADE-CERQual focuses upon four main aspects: Methodological limitations, relevance, coherence, data adequacy. The team will grade the confidence of these individually and then collectively for the included articles, as per the guidance for using GRADE-CERQual. For ease of reporting and collation the assessments will be included in the data extraction sheet.
Reporting and interpreting findings	The final report will address the research questions and be structured in such a way as to be of use to researchers, commissioners of services, policy makers and all with an interest in this field of child and adult social care practice. The report findings will aim to increase understanding of the transition process for children, young people and young adults who have experienced CSE. Complete details of each study, including methodology, sample size, diversity, recruitment and key findings and recommendations will be included. A complete list of all excluded studies will also be provided. We will clearly define each stage of the review process and inclusion/exclusion criteria in order to aid interpretation of the findings. Implications for future research and policy will be considered. A full bibliographical references list will be included.

Registration

This systematic review has been registered with OSF on 101220, registration link https://osf.io/78edk/.

Personnel

- Dr Geraldine Brady (PI), Associate Professor Social Work, Nottingham Centre for Children, Young People and Families, Nottingham Trent University will lead the review, oversee delivery and liaise with WWCSC.

- Dr Alex Toft (Co-PI), Research Fellow, Nottingham Centre for Children, Young People and Families, Nottingham Trent University. Alex is a trained Joanna Briggs Institute systematic reviewer and will co-lead on design of the search strategy, provide guidance to the RA, be a second member reviewer, contribute to analysing, synthesising and writing up the final review.

- Researcher - Najiha Alam, researcher in Health Sciences (MSc 2019, Distinction) with training in systematic reviewing, including PRISMA guidelines. The literature searching will be conducted by Najiha, she will obtain copies of the papers that meet inclusion criteria, extract and record data. Najiha will work closely with Dr Brady and Dr Toft to synthesise findings and draft the systematic review.

- Professor Pam Alldred – Nottingham Trent University, is an expert in gender-based violence and young people. Pam will advise on definitions and methods, in the context of the wider field of sexual and gender-based violence and recognition of international differences in legal definitions and approaches (Alldred & Biglia 2015) and contribute to writing the final review.

- Dr Geraldine Brown - Consultant on race, diversity and inclusion, Assistant Professor, Coventry University. Dr Brown will support the project in identifying gaps relating to marginalised groups, drawing on her expertise and networks on race, diversity and inclusion.

- Professor Carrie Paechter - Director of Nottingham Centre for Children, Young People and Families - will comment on the review definitions, methods and draft review before final publication.

Timeline

Dates	Activity	Staff responsible/ leading
24/7/2020	Draft protocol submitted to WWCSC for review	GB/AT
13/11/2020	Final systematic review protocol completed, with feedback incorporated, ready for publishing on WWCSC website	AT/GB
10/12/2020	Protocol published on the Open Science Framework (OSF)	AT/GB
22/03/2021	Draft of the final systematic review submitted to WWCSC for peer review	GB/Full Team
20/04/2021	Final systematic review, with peer reviewer's feedback incorporated, submitted to WWCSC for publishing on website	GB/Full Team

References

This protocol template is informed by the following sources:

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