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**The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of
Children and Young People: An Overview
of key literature and data**

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Summary

This overview of key literature and data was prepared by the Thomas Coram Research Unit (TCRU), Institute of Education, University of London at the request of the Steering Group which oversees the National Plan for Safeguarding Children from Commercial Sexual Exploitation. The Group is currently chaired by officials in the Department for Education and Skills, but consists of:

- representatives from the voluntary sector (including the NSPCC, NCH, NCVCCO, Barnardo's, ECPAT (End Child Prostitution and Trafficking), Child Line and the Children's Society); and
- representatives from interested professional organisations (including the Association of Directors of Social Services and the Association of Chief Police Officers); and
- policy makers from across Government (including the Department of Health, Home Office, Department for Education and Skills, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department) and the devolved administrations.

The overall aim of this review was to provide an accessible overview of information relevant to the commercial sexual exploitation of children and young people in the UK, including policy and legislation, published and unpublished literature, and statistical data relating to: the extent of commercial sexual exploitation of children and young people in the UK; the characteristics of those affected and those known to perpetrate exploitation; the types of preventive strategies; and the approaches that assist young people to exit and recover from abusive situations.

Three main areas of exploitation were focused upon: abuse through prostitution; abuse through pornography; and the trafficking of children and young people to and through the UK for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation. A combination of library and Internet searches were used, combined with sources of data identified through the National Plan steering group. The review begins with definitions of key terms used in relation to the commercial sexual exploitation of children and young people. It then considers the international and national policy and legislative frameworks for protecting children and prosecuting perpetrators of abuse.

Overall, the largest amount information was found in relation to young people exploited through prostitution. This highlighted the range of vulnerability factors, the processes used to engage young people in prostitution and the types of support strategies available to those exploited or at risk of exploitation. This showed that although comprehensive support services are provided in some places, provision is patchy. Furthermore, there has been little impact evaluation to date on the outcomes for those accessing support services.

Rather less information is available on the scale of child pornography or the links between the use of pornography and other forms of sexual abuse. The Internet as a modern technology for proliferating child pornography is discussed, alongside its role in providing opportunities for paedophiles to access and 'groom' children for sexual purposes. The complexities of providing adequate protection for children as they gain wider access to the Internet through mobile phones are also discussed.

Finally, the review provides a summary of key findings in relation to the trafficking of children to and through the UK for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation. It

highlights that there is limited available data on the scale of the problem and limited protocols or mechanisms in place to support those at risk.

The study concludes with a summary of research that is currently underway that will go further towards supporting the research base for this important area of work. A number of recommendations are made in order to fill apparent gaps in knowledge. These include further research on the issues surrounding young asylum seekers and their vulnerability to abuse through prostitution; further strengthening the knowledge base on effective practice in supporting vulnerable young people; further research on British born children being moved across the country for the purposes of sexual exploitation; and further research on the relationship between use of the Internet and other forms of abuse against children and young people, including grooming for prostitution.

1. Introduction

1.1 In recent years, there has been an increasing awareness of the extent and scale of abuse of children and young people through sexual exploitation, both internationally and in the UK. Much of this awareness can be attributed to the work of key local and international voluntary and non-governmental organisations that have lobbied for recognition of the problem. These organisations have also undertaken most of the limited research that exists to support policy and legislative changes aimed at protecting children and young people from such exploitation. The Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE) of children and young people within the UK falls into three key areas:

- Abuse through prostitution, both on the street and, more commonly, hidden forms of prostitution;
- Abuse through involvement in pornography;
- The trafficking of children and young people to and through the UK for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation.

1.2 The negative impact on young people of abuse through prostitution and the complexities surrounding the contexts in which this takes place in the UK have now been well documented (Palmer, 2001; Barnardos, 2002; Pearce, 2003). However, there is still little hard data on the scale of the problem (Swann & Balding, 2001; Pearce, 2000). Less has been written about other forms of sexual exploitation of children such as child pornography and related activities, or the trafficking of children for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

1.3 In early 2003, the Steering Group which oversees the National Plan for Safeguarding Children from Commercial Sexual Exploitation identified the need for a review of literature and data on the commercial sexual exploitation in order to guide future work in the area and assist in formulating a three-year programme of work. Subsequently, the Children's Safeguards Unit, then part of the Department of Health (now part of the Department of Education and Skills) requested the Thomas Coram Research Unit (TCRU) at the Institute of Education, University of London to provide an overview of existing research and data on the sexual exploitation of children and young people in the UK.

Aim

1.4 The overall aim of this review is to provide an accessible overview of information relevant to the commercial sexual exploitation of children and young people in the UK, including policy and legislation, published and unpublished literature, and statistical data. It aims to cover:

- The extent of commercial sexual exploitation of children and young people in the UK.
- The characteristics of those affected and those known to perpetrate exploitation.
- Preventive strategies and approaches that assist young people to exit and recover from abusive situations.

The review also aims to identify common themes and issues arising from the literature and to identify gaps in the research base.

Methodology

- 1.5 The overview draws on a number of data sources to develop a current ‘snap shot’ of activity in this field.
- 1.6 All members of the *National Plan Steering Group* were contacted initially and asked if they were aware of any key literature (including unpublished or ‘grey literature’) that they felt should be included in the review. This was also an opportunity to identify research in progress, findings from which were not available within the timescale of this exercise. Contact was made again with all members of the group towards the end of the review, so that any key omissions might be identified and key issues discussed.
- 1.7 A telephone discussion was held with the Research and Development Statistics Directorate at the Home Office to identify any sources of statistical information on the extent of commercial sexual exploitation of children and young people in the UK. This was also an opportunity to identify relevant on-going developments in data collection that might support this area of work in future.
- 1.8 A review of published literature within the UK was carried out through Web and literature searches. As a starting point, the Child Data Abstracts database and library at the National Children’s Bureau was used, which offered good coverage of this topic. Around 160 articles were identified using the search term ‘sexual exploitation of children’. In addition the electronic library for social care (eLSC) was searched. Key search terms used on this site were ‘Child Sexual Abuse’, which provided over 2,000 references including those relating to ‘abuse through prostitution’. A further search using the term ‘prostitution’ identified 146 references, including those relating to children. Interestingly, on this site there was no specific search category for ‘pornography’, although a few articles focused on this issue as it related to other forms of sexual abuse. From these two main data sources, a snowballing approach was used to follow up on particular articles. In addition, key websites of all organisations and charities known to play a direct role in working with children who are sexually exploited were used. Finally, recent searches were made on the *Guardian Group* website.
- 1.9 The review was able to draw on a scoping exercise on trafficking of children, recently completed by a colleague at TCRU for the Save the Children Fund UK. This provides an up-to-date and comprehensive overview of trafficking of children to and through the UK.
- 1.10 Qualitative information is also included from a recently completed research project conducted by TCRU: *Teenage Pregnancy among Young People in and Leaving Care: Determinants and Support for the mother, father and child* (Chase *et al.*, forthcoming). The interview schedule used in this study with professionals and carers explored their experiences and views of addressing the sexual health needs of young people in care, including their experiences of working with young people where there were concerns about exploitation or potentially abusive relationships¹. Quotations from this research have been incorporated into the current review to provide concrete examples of the issues discussed, and to illustrate some of the difficulties experienced by professionals in responding to situations of potential sexual exploitation.

¹ In this study seventy eight professionals and carers were interviewed in four research sites across England

- 1.11 Although the focus here is primarily on the commercial sexual exploitation of children and young people in the UK, a selective review was also conducted of relevant international literature, with a particular focus on Europe. This helped to provide an overview of current international policy, to which the UK is a signatory, and a context for policy, legislation and practice developments within the UK.

Scope of the review

- 1.12 The sexual exploitation of children and young people is a complex issue and it was necessary early on to set some boundaries for the scope of this review. The terms 'abuse' and 'exploitation' are frequently used synonymously both within the literature and in popular parlance. Abuse of children and young people can take many forms including incest, prostitution, involvement in the production of pornography, date rape and peer sexual violence. While these are all linked by the fact that they involve children in sexual activity, using the term 'child sexual abuse' to cover all forms of sexual violence against children and young people can lead to confusion, as these activities are different in many ways, each requiring their own context-relevant solutions (May & Herczog, 2003).
- 1.13 For the purposes of this review, therefore, we have made a distinction as far as possible between abuse of children *per se* and the commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) of children and young people. However, it is important to also state that CSE in itself is not always a distinct area of abuse and there are emerging 'grey areas' as to what constitutes commercial and non-commercial types of exploitation. A case in point is the very recent emergence of the notion of 'peer to peer' dissemination of pornographic images of children through the Internet (Gillen, 2003). This extreme form of exploitation is potentially highly lucrative for those involved but, in order to protect their own identity and avoid prosecution, there appears to be no financial exchange between those disseminating and those receiving this material.
- 1.14 This review therefore aims to provide an overview of the types of commercial sexual exploitation and their scale; the mechanisms employed to exploit children and young people in the UK; the interface between different forms of exploitation (such as pornography or trafficking and exploitation through prostitution); and the personal impact that such exploitation has on the lives of children and young people. It then goes on to discuss the types of approaches that offer protection and support to children and young people involved in prostitution, as well as those that appear to be effective preventative mechanisms. Throughout the review, the question of achieving a balance between the time and resources spent by professionals in identifying and quantifying the scale of sexual exploitation and the time spent offering appropriate and adequate support is discussed, since this appears to be a key area of concern to those involved in frontline work. This concern mainly relates to the fact that recent changes in legislation under the Sexual Offences Bill, for example, will enable closer monitoring and quantifying of relevant convictions, but that this will not necessarily translate into direct protection and support services to children and young people who are vulnerable to or who experience exploitation.

Organisation of information

- 1.15 The review begins by presenting and discussing some important definitions used by policy makers and practitioners. This includes a definition of *commercial sexual exploitation of children* and the various ways in which children and young people are

exploited. It then goes on to discuss current knowledge on the commercial exploitation of children as it relates to:

- international and national policy and legislative frameworks for work on this subject:
- available quantitative data within the UK
- findings from key qualitative research studies conducted in this area and their findings
- overriding principles and approaches which appear to help prevent the exploitation of children or support the 'victims' (drawing on both international and national sources)
- the interface between exploitation and other social issues such as drug and alcohol dependency, homelessness and violence.
- apparent gaps in knowledge and research

1.16 Finally, the review identifies on-going research (work in progress) that is likely to produce findings relevant to this subject in future, and the implications of the findings from this review for further research and exploration.

Definitions

1.17 The term '**child**' is used as defined by United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 1 as "*every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier*". (United Nations, 1989). In this review, while adhering to the focus on under 18 year-olds, we will talk about '**children and young people**' in order to draw some distinction between different ages and reflect the fact that many young people, particularly those in their teenage years, will not consider themselves as 'children'. This is of particular relevance since age differentiation, as will be discussed later, is clearly included for the first time within the Sexual Offences Bill (Home Office, 2003), with different penalties given to 'abusers' of children according to the age of the 'child'.

1.18 The **sexual abuse of children** involves practices by which a person, usually an adult, achieves sexual gratification, financial gain or advancement through the abuse or exploitation of a child's sexuality by abrogating that child's human right to dignity, equality, autonomy, and physical and mental well-being, i.e. trafficking, prostitution, sex tourism, mail-order-bride trade, involvement in pornography, stripping, battering, incest, rape and sexual harassment (Estes, 2001).

1.19 The term **commercial sexual exploitation** (henceforth CSE) is distinguished from sexual abuse *per se* by focusing on the use of children for some form of 'pecuniary advantage', understood in the wider sense to include cash and rewards in kind so long as there is some means of accounting in monetary terms. The Declaration and Agenda for Action of the World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Stockholm 1996) provided this definition of the practice in general:

'The commercial sexual exploitation of children is a fundamental violation of children's rights. It comprises sexual abuse by the adult and remuneration in cash or kind to the child or a third person or persons. The child is treated as a sexual object and as a commercial object. The commercial sexual exploitation of children constitutes a form of coercion and violence against children, and amounts to forced labour and a contemporary form of slavery'.

1.20 The focus is therefore on a vulnerable group of children and young people who are induced or coerced into unlawful sexual activities for the commercial advantage of

others. Ultimately, commercial sexual exploitation constitutes a violation of children's fundamental human rights.

- 1.21 **Child prostitution** refers to “the sexual exploitation of a child for the remuneration in cash or in kind, usually but not always organised by an intermediary (parent, family member, procurer, teacher etc” (Estes 2001). It involves the sexual exploitation of the vulnerability of children for cash or some other form of pay. The exchange is exploitative because it comes about in a relationship of unequal economic, cognitive, and psycho-social power.
- 1.22 In recent years, many of those informing and those responsible for formulating policy in this area of work have rejected the term ‘prostitute’ when referring to children and young people. This is because the term implies that the child or young person maintains control over situations where they exchange sex for money or other gain, and implies a criminal act by the child or young person (i.e. that of soliciting). In the UK, these terms have been replaced by others such as ‘*children abused through prostitution*’ or ‘*children exploited through prostitution*’. Similarly, in the USA there has been a rejection of terms such as ‘*child prostitution*’ or ‘*juvenile prostitution*’ and these have been replaced by terms such as ‘*sexually exploited youth*’ or ‘*prostituted youth*’ (Spangenberg, 2001).
- 1.23 Proponents of changing laws and policy surrounding child prostitution have highlighted the need to focus on more effective prosecution of coercers (the pimps) and the offenders or abusers (those paying to have sex with children) as well as better support to victims (children abused through prostitution) (Home Office/ Department of Health, 1998; Barnardos, 2002). The shifts in terminology and focus define children and young people more as passive victims of the processes of prostitution, rather than as ‘active participants’. As well as impacting at a policy level, there are clear legal implications for this shift in language and approach, which are discussed later in the review (see ‘UK policy and legislative framework’).
- 1.24 **Child pornography** is any representation, by whatever means, of a child engaged in real or simulated explicit sexual activities or any representation of the sexual parts of a child for primarily sexual purposes” (Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2002).
- 1.25 In 2000, **trafficking** became enshrined in international law for the first time through the Palermo Protocol within the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. Article 3 of the protocol defines trafficking as:

“the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at the minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs”

- 1.26 With respect to children, the protocol goes on to say:

“The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered ‘trafficking in persons’ even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) (i.e. the previous paragraph) of this article”.

2. Policy and legislative frameworks

International frameworks

- 2.1 Before exploring current literature, knowledge and data on the various forms of exploitation that exist here in the UK, it is important to look briefly at the international and national policy and legal frameworks within which such activity takes place and to discuss the 'protective' mechanisms available to children and young people and those that work with them.

The First World Congress on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

- 2.2 This Congress, held in Stockholm in 1996 was initiated by the international non-governmental organisation (NGO) End Child Prostitution and Asian Tourism (ECPAT). It involved the participation of a wide range of national and international leaders, professionals and activists from a range of disciplines, and several UN and other international bodies and agencies, thus recognising commercial sexual exploitation as a human rights, labour, health, education and law enforcement problem. This Congress focused on three main elements of the commercial sexual exploitation of children: child prostitution, the trafficking and sale of children for sexual purposes, and child pornography.
- 2.3 Its primary purpose was to create awareness and to draw international attention to the problems of commercial sexual exploitation of children, and to promote the development of national plans to combat all forms of such abuse in the specific contexts in which they occur. The opening congress statements highlighted the complexities of how exploitation is carried out within different contexts across the world, but also underlined the extent to which, across the globe, general vulnerability, poverty and exclusion were inextricably linked to commercial sexual exploitation. The most marginalized and disadvantaged children and young people were those most likely to be exploited².

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

- 2.4 The Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) has provided the basis for an international response to the sexual exploitation of children. The Convention, ratified by the UK in 1991, contains several articles of relevance to the protection of children from sexual exploitation and was central to guiding the first international conference held in Sweden.
- 2.5 One hundred and eighty seven countries had ratified the convention at the time of the first international conference in Stockholm in 1996. They were consequently required to protect children from:
- All forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, including sexual abuse by parent(s), guardian(s) or caretaker (article 19)
 - Economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development' (article 34)
 - The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity (article 34 (a))

² <http://www.usis.usemb.se/children/csec/background.html>

- The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices (article 34 (b))
- The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials (article 34 (c)).

2.6 In addition, *article 35* states that ‘parties shall take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form’. Moreover, the Convention protects the rights of children in conflict with the law, ensuring that ‘no child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily’ (article 37); it provides for the ‘physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse’ (article 39). Finally, the Convention recognizes the right of every accused child ‘to be treated in a manner consistent with the promotion of the child’s sense of dignity and worth ... and which takes into account the child’s age and the desirability of promoting the child’s reintegration and the child’s assuming a constructive role in society’ (article 40).

The Second World Congress on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

2.7 The second Congress held in Yokohama, Japan in December 2001, took stock of progress that had been made over the previous five years and reaffirmed the commitment to protect all children from sexual exploitation and abuse. The Yokohama Congress applauded the progress made by member states in terms of the legal and policy measures adopted in order to protect the rights of children and young people, including protection from exploitation, but acknowledged that there was still much work to be done.

2.8 Key important international developments that had occurred since the first international congress and that were particularly valued by the second congress included:

- The International Labour Organisation (ILO)’s Convention No. 182 Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (November 2000)
- The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (2000)
- A supplementary Protocol to the above, to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (the Palermo Protocol) (2000).
- The European Council Framework Decision on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Combating the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography (2000)
- The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography (January 2002)
- The Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime (2001), particularly the relevant article 9, relating to child pornography³.

³ This convention is described later under the section on child pornography

UK policy and legislative framework

A number of key UK laws and policies are relevant to this review.

The Children Act (1989)

- 2.9 The Children Act 1989 provides a comprehensive framework for the care and protection of children in UK. It places duties on local authorities to protect all children (including those temporarily in the UK). Of particular relevance are:
- section 17: to safeguard and promote the welfare of children;
 - section 20: to provide accommodation to any child who is lost or abandoned, who has no person with parental responsibility to care for them, or where the person who has been caring for the child is prevented from providing suitable accommodation or care;
 - section 47: to make enquiries where they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare.
- 2.10 The framework for protecting children provided by the Act provides the basis for safeguarding children from commercial sexual exploitation in the UK. Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs) are responsible for developing and agreeing local policies and procedures for interagency work to protect children, within the national framework. The *Every Child Matters* Green Paper (HM Treasury, 2003) set out the Government's plans to replace ACPCs with *Local Safeguarding Children Boards*. These will be multi-agency boards, chaired by the Director of Children's Services, with the overall aim of co-ordinating the functions of partner agencies in relation to safeguarding children.

Working Together to Safeguard Children

- 2.11 This guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (Department of Health et al, 1999), replaced previous guidance published in 1991. For the first time, the guidance introduced the issues of organised abuse, child pornography and the Internet, and children involved in prostitution. It also drew on new research highlighting the particular vulnerabilities of children living away from home, those who go missing, and children with disabilities.

Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution

- 2.12 This 'Supplementary Guidance to Working Together to Safeguard Children' (Department of Health et al., 2000) provided a protocol for an inter-agency approach towards: recognising the problem of child prostitution; protecting and supporting children; providing exit strategies for those involved; effectively prosecuting those who coerce and/or abuse children. This Guidance was based on guidelines previously developed by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO 1997), which had been successfully piloted before becoming ACPO national policy.
- 2.13 In 2001, the Department of Health commissioned a review of this guidance to assess how well the Guidance was implemented across the country. It aimed to assess the overall effect that the guidance has had on preventing children from becoming involved in prostitution, in providing opportunities for those involved to leave, and its

impact in terms of prosecuting those who coerce children through prostitution (Swann & Balding, 2001).

National Plan for Safeguarding Children from Commercial Sexual Exploitation.

- 2.14 The National Plan evolved as a result of the UK government's participation at the first conference (and subsequent) international conference in Stockholm on the commercial sexual exploitation of children. It was first published by the Department of Health and the Home Office in 2001 and outlined all the work being done in the UK, both by the Government and its partner agencies, to safeguard children from commercial sexual exploitation. An update paper and two-year work programme were published on the Area Child Protection Committee website in 2003. These documents represent, in effect, a revised National Plan for Safeguarding Children from Commercial Exploitation for 2003-05.

Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002

- 2.15 This Act introduced an offence of '*Traffic in Prostitution*' (Part 7, Section 145). The legislation reads:

"A person commits an offence if he arranges or facilitates the arrival in the United Kingdom of an individual (the passenger) and (a) he intends to exercise control over prostitution by the passenger in the United Kingdom or elsewhere, or (b) he believes that another person is likely to exercise control over prostitution by the passenger in the United Kingdom or elsewhere".

- 2.16 The maximum sentence for this offence is 14 years for anyone who

'for the purposes of gain exercises control, direction or influence over a prostitute's movements in a way that shows he is aiding, abetting or compelling the prostitution'.

The Act makes no distinction between the trafficking of a minor for prostitution and the trafficking of adults. The phrase 'purposes of gain' has until now proved a major loop hole in developing evidence to convict someone accused of trafficking in prostitution since convictions fail if there is no proof of gain by the accused.⁴

- 2.17 However, the Act is considered to be a temporary measure prior to the finalising of the Sexual Offences Bill.

The Sexual Offences Bill

- 2.17 The Sexual Offences Bill received Royal Assent on 20 November 2003 and represents a major overhaul and review of the Sexual Offences Act (1956). New legislation as a result of the Bill will be introduced in May 2004. The Government White Paper, *Protecting the Public* (Home Office, 2002) provided the basis for reform leading up to the Bill and outlined the need to reform the law on sexual offences since it was 'archaic, incoherent and discriminatory', and mostly a consolidation of nineteenth century law with some piecemeal reforms tagged on to it. Two chapters contained in the paper were of particular relevance to the protection of children and young people from commercial sexual exploitation: chapter 4: 'The Special protection

⁴ The term 'purposes of gain' has now been removed from the Sexual Offence Bill in order to avoid this loop hole and facilitate successful convictions.

for children and the most vulnerable'; and chapter 5: 'Offences involving commercial sexual exploitation, including commercial exploitation of a child, and trafficking people for commercial sexual exploitation'. The Bill defines a child as someone below the age of 18 years, and not 16 years as in the previous Sexual Offences Act (1956).

2.18 A new offence of '*commercial exploitation of a child*' contained within the proposed Bill implies legal protection for children up to 18 from exploitation through prostitution and pornography. It includes a number of new offences with very strict penalties, and for the first time clearly differentiates between children and young people, with harsher penalties incurred for those exploiting younger children. The most relevant offences outlined in the review are:

- Section 49: buying the sexual services of a child for which the penalty is life imprisonment when the child is under 13, 14 years imprisonment when the child is 13-15 years old and 7 years when the child is aged 16 to 17;
- Section 50: causing or encouraging a child into commercial sexual exploitation; facilitating the CSE of a child;
- Section 51: controlling the activities of a child involved in prostitution or pornography; all of which can incur a maximum penalty of 14 years;
- Section 52: Arranging or facilitating child prostitution or pornography;
- Section 58: Trafficking into the UK for the purposes of any of the above offences;
- Sections 59 & 60: Trafficking within the UK, and out of the UK for the purposes of the above relevant offences.

2.19 Other important changes in the Bill which are also of relevance to the protection of children from exploitation include: Clause 17, introducing the offence of sexual 'grooming' of children; and Clause 110, introducing a new 'Risk of Sexual Harm Order'. However, there appears to be some concern among those working in the area that the offence of 'sexual grooming' may end up being predominantly enforced in relation to Internet grooming, and that less emphasis will be placed on the highly effective direct grooming mechanisms used by adults to engage children and young people in exploitative situations.

2.20 The Sexual Offences Bill, at the time of writing, had just received Royal Assent (November 2003). It is significant in being the first time that legislation will specifically address the problem of child prostitution in England and Wales. The Bill only creates criminal offences, and does not contain any specific provisions for monitoring abuse. By creating child-specific prostitution offences, however, it should enable more useful information to be obtained from analysis of the crime statistics for England and Wales which are released each year by the Home Office.

Forms of commercial sexual exploitation (CSE)

2.21 As stated earlier, children and young people are known to be exploited in the UK in a number of ways: through prostitution; through pornography (especially using the Internet); and through trafficking. These three areas are reviewed separately in the following three chapters, although there are clear links and overlaps between them. Children and young people are also known to be used in other areas of the sex industry such as stripping and phone sex although there appears to be little written and known about these areas of work.

3. Abuse through prostitution

- 3.1 Of all the areas of commercial sexual exploitation of children and young people, the issue of prostitution has been the most documented. As a general pattern, young people's involvement in prostitution, although sometimes visible through work on the street, is often also hidden away in brothels, massage parlours and saunas. This makes it extremely difficult to quantify the scale of prostitution affecting children and young people in the UK. Furthermore, exploitation through prostitution comes in many forms and reflects a continuum of activity. It involves children and young people of different ages, both male and female, and encompasses a range of exploitative behaviours, many of which combine extreme and degrading forms of physical, emotional and sexual abuse (Barnardo's, 1998; Barnardo's, 2002).

Available Data

- 3.2 There are clear practical constraints and ethical issues in conducting research in relation to young people who are exploited through prostitution, which make it difficult to provide any close estimate of the scale of the problem (Melrose, 2002; Melrose *et al.*, 2002).
- 3.3 The Home Office publishes annual data on all criminal offences presented to the courts across England Wales. These statistics detail the numbers of people convicted by age and sex for each of the offences listed in the offences code. Because they only cover cases that come to court, and offences relating to prostitution are not generally notifiable, the statistics available are of limited use in estimating numbers involved. Furthermore, offences concerning child abuse do not currently distinguish those where commercial sexual exploitation is a factor, although this should be rectified through the forthcoming Bill.
- 3.4 In 2001, there were 3,135 charges of prostitution at magistrates courts, of which in 2,847 cases the defendant was found guilty (breakdown by age unavailable); 52 charges of procuration (which includes involving children under 16 years in prostitution) and 14 convictions of brothel keeping. In the Crown courts, there were no convictions for prostitution; 47 cases of procuration and no convictions of brothel keeping. In terms of cautions for 2001, there were 735 cautions for prostitution ('offence by prostitute'). Of these 8 cautions were against young women between the ages of 15 to 18 years, and 159 cautions were against young women between the ages of 18 and 21 years. (National Statistics, 2002)
- 3.5 The Crime and Disorder Act (1998) sought to end the practice of cautioning or convicting a female under the age of 18 for prostitution, which largely explains the fact that there were only 8 cautions reported against young women under 18 in 2001. Consequently, figures are no longer available in police records of cautions given to young people caught 'soliciting'.
- 3.6 As discussed earlier, crime statistics do not provide an accurate picture of the true extent of the problem. However, on the basis of police and Home Office statistics, Bluett *et al.* (2000) have estimated that, in any one year, there are around 2000 young people involved in prostitution in the UK. One third of them are thought to be aged under 16 and 200 to 300 of them to live in London. Other estimates have been higher: up to 5,000 young people involved at any one time in Britain (Barrett, 1998). In a study conducted by Barnardo's, a conservative estimate by 48 agencies potentially coming into contact with children and young people involved in prostitution was that they knew at least 55 boys and 267 girls under 16 years-old and 94 boys

and 338 girls between the ages of 16 and 18 years, who were involved in prostitution (McNeish, 1998).

- 3.7 The 2001 Guidance review (Swann & Balding) provided data for the first time on the perceived scale of children involved in prostitution at a local authority level. Over three quarters (76%) of all Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs) in England said that there were children involved in prostitution in their area, and another five per cent did not know. Of those that identified young people involved, over 91% said that girls were involved; and 62.2% indicated that boys were involved in prostitution in their area.

The profile of offenders

- 3.8 There is currently little data on offenders who abuse children and young people through prostitution, partly because there is no one category of convictions that covers this. Examples of relevant convictions might include 'Procuration' (see 3.4 above), 'Brothel Keeping', or unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under 13 or under 16 years. There is currently no national Sex Offenders Register, although each police force does collect data on sex offenders. Research tools used for conviction studies more generally are two-fold. Firstly, there is a database of all court disposals relating to standard list offences since 1963 in England and Wales. Secondly, in 1995, the Police National Computer was launched. This is an operational database for the UK, excluding Northern Ireland. This database has additional information on cautions, warnings and dates of offences. There are plans currently underway to merge these two sets of information into a single data source (Francis, 2002). This will mean that all registers will be brought into a single domain and become a living data base for all offenders. In practice, this will have extensive research potential to collect detailed data on characteristics of offenders by age, sex, ethnicity etc. and make it possible to track patterns of offences more easily.

The profile of young people

- 3.9 In recent years, there appears to have been a decrease in the age at which children and young people are first exploited through prostitution (Spangenberg, 2001; Palmer, 2001), with girls as young as nine and boys as young as six known to have been abused in this way (Barnardo's, 2002)
- 3.10 Although children and young people involved in prostitution are not a homogenous group, many share similar characteristics prior to their entry into prostitution. Several studies have highlighted the complex disadvantages experienced by many young people both prior to and during their involvement in prostitution. Reasons for becoming involved are closely associated with a range of factors including: family problems; arguments at home; abuse and/or violence; running away from home or from substitute care; truanting from school; peer pressure; drugs; sleeping rough and losing contact with family and social networks. There is undoubtedly a link between being prey to commercial sexual exploitation and facing these other forms of vulnerability, and it is clear that children and young people who are most easily targeted have few other alternatives available to them (Melrose *et al* 1999; Pearce 2000; Department of Health *et al* 2000; Stein and Wade, 2000; Valios, 2001; Taylor-Browne, *et al.*, 2002; Phoenix, 2002; Pearce, 2003; Scottish Executive, 2003).
- 3.11 Other reasons for entry into and continuing in prostitution are less tangible, and relate to issues of necessity, or because young people want things that they cannot afford through other means. This leads in some cases to their own decision to become

involved in prostitution (Melrose *et al.*, 1999). There are also clear indications that, once involved, some young people experience a particular lifestyle that affords them things that they could not otherwise have (Taylor-Browne *et al.*, 2002)

- 3.12 A number of writers stress underlying poverty as a cause of vulnerability to prostitution. In such circumstances, sex may be exchanged for favours, shelter or food (Phoenix, 2002; Pearce, 2003). This was also a theme in a recent study of teenage pregnancy among young people in and leaving care conducted within TCRU (Chase *et al.*, forthcoming). Here, one voluntary sector project worker in this study commented:

“there are difficulties in defining what is an abusive relationship. For example, a lot of care leavers have nowhere to stay and so will stay with a 'friend' and will exchange sex even though they don't want to have sex”

One young woman commented that she ‘would sleep with people that were attracted to her, and she to them, so that she had somewhere to spend the night’.

- 3.13 However, homelessness and poverty are by no means the only causes of vulnerability to exploitation through prostitution. In fact, Barnardo's claim that more than one third of young people seen by their services since 1995 lived at home with their parents⁵. However, the socio-economic circumstances of these families appears to have not been explored, and it is possible that there may be some link between family poverty and vulnerability to exploitation as well as other issues such as drug and alcohol problems and domestic violence.
- 3.14 There is a risk that children and young people who experience such disadvantage and vulnerability are viewed as somehow ‘deserving’ of what happens to them (Barnardos, 1998; Spangenberg, 2001). There are clear examples of how policing in the past has labelled young people ‘prostitutes’ and focused attention on prosecuting them, rather than prosecuting those controlling them or illegally buying sex from them. The net result of such punitive approaches to working with exploited children and young people, is that they do not trust authorities or services and are less likely to ask for or access support and help (Pearce, 2000; Barnardo's, 1998).

Boys and young men

- 3.15 Although there have been a number of studies of boys and young men involved in prostitution, much less has been documented about their personal experiences as compared to the personal experiences of girls and young women.
- 3.16 Many boys and young men exploited through prostitution have experienced similar disruption and difficulties in their lives to young women. These include family breakdown, absent parents, sexual and/or physical abuse, neglect and domestic violence. In the case of boys, these factors may coincide with further rejection or alienation resulting from them disclosing to a parent or carer that they are gay (Palmer, 2001; Barnardo's, 2002). Therefore, emotionally damaging episodes clearly impact on those who become involved in prostitution. Experience of residential care and vulnerability to exploitation through prostitution for boys as well as girls has been documented (Mathews, 2000). However, less is known about the experiences and support needs of boys and young men, and much exploitation is hidden as a result of more vigilant policing of child prostitution. Although going missing from their own or

⁵ <http://www.barnardos.org.uk/whatwedo/children/sexploit.jsp>

substitute homes places boys and young men at particular risk of abuse, some young people are exploited even though they are living at home (Palmer, 2001).

- 3.17 Palmer (2001) describes two main, but not exclusive, categories of boys and young men who get drawn into prostitution: those 'escaping' from a situation which leaves them vulnerable to abuse; and those who are somehow 'conditioned' into abusive activity which eventually leads them into a life of prostitution. Either way, they are perceived as vulnerable as a result of detrimental influences experienced during childhood.
- 3.18 Boys and young men who are conditioned into prostitution are thought to be either selected due to their vulnerability, or targeted at a very young age by, for example, a 'caring figure' throughout their early childhood. Those conditioned in this way are more likely to develop abusive lifestyles in their later teens and adult life, including pimping or abusing other vulnerable young people. Boys and young men who are said to be escaping untenable home situations, on the other hand, generally end up on the street trying to survive (Palmer, 2001)
- 3.19 Overall, boys and young men selling sex as 'rent boys' are thought to be far less visible than girls and young women, probably resulting from the additional stigma of homosexuality and of men selling sex. Sexual exchanges happen in less open places where they will not be identified such as public toilets, parks, bus and train stations, cruising areas and multi-purpose shopping areas and arcades. Mobile phones and the Internet provide further covert ways of making contact and enabling activity to remain hidden (Donovan, 1991).
- 3.20 The average age of boys involved in prostitution is on average younger than that of girls, and they also tend to leave prostitution in their early 20s, and seem to reach a 'sell-by date' much younger than girls. Boys who are younger are awarded a greater value, and boy virgins attract a particularly high price (Palmer, 2001).
- 3.21 There are clear differences in factors influencing young men's involvement in prostitution, which relate to age, class and social background. Kershaw (1999) makes a distinction between those marginalized and disadvantaged boys and young men involved for either survival or as part of a gang subculture, and those full or part time sex workers who are supplementing an existing income, and make an informed lifestyle choice to engage in prostitution. There are obvious differences between these categories in terms of motivation, conditions of work and degree of coercion. Undoubtedly, there are similar issues for girls and young women, although no such comparative research was identified.
- 3.22 Little is known about the profile of those buying sex from boys and young men, but anecdotally most are said to be heterosexual married men, bisexual or those not confident to be openly homosexual (McKegany and Bloor, 1990). Those adults who purposefully prey on children from an early age are reported to entrap boys and young men through providing treats, games and fun activities and then subsequently either groom them for sex or rape them. Whereas with girls and young women, adults often feign the fulfilment of emotional needs, with young boys the focus is on creating a dependency on facilities or drugs from which they find it difficult to escape. The key difference between boys and young men exploited in this way is that entrapment by the adult is gradual and that there is ultimately a pimp/abusing adult. Young people may well still be living at home or in residential care when they first make contact with this adult. This situation is dissimilar to boys

and young men already living on the street, who may enter transactional sex for survival reasons.

- 3.23 Generally, little appears to be known about the extent of sexual exploitation of boys and young men and knowledge of the issue is patchy and anecdotal. The policy review (Swann & Balding, 2001) found that 62% of 111 local authorities reporting incidences of children involved in prostitution, thought that boys or young men were involved. For the most part the extent is very unclear. Some examples of concerns about exploitation of young men emerged from the earlier cited TCRU study of pregnancy among young people in and leaving care. In one instance, a coordinator of an outreach project working with vulnerable young people said:

“I worked with one 14 year-old man who was a rent boy but not necessarily in his own terms gay. I was not knowledgeable about all the language that he used to describe the sex that he had been having, and some of the experiences he described were so abusive that I was horrified by them. Situations like this are far more difficult to manage.”

- 3.24 Another foster carer talked about a young boy in her care who was ‘having homosexual relationships with men as it was quite profitable’. She described a sense of powerlessness in terms of knowing what to do or how to handle the situation.

Girls and young women

- 3.25 Although prostitution and exploitation can be defined literally, they remain complex issues to delineate and address in practice. Pearce (2003) identified three categories of girls and young women exploited through prostitution: those who were at risk of being exploited through the types of lifestyles and relationships that they were involved in; those who swapped sex for favours such as shelter, food, things they felt they needed or wanted; and those who defined themselves as prostitutes.

- 3.26 This is again illustrated by examples from the study of teenage pregnancy. This research showed that young people in and leaving care were involved in forms of exploitative situations, but a major challenge for those working with them was in defining what constituted an exploitative relationship or situation. Various examples illustrate this point:

“we did have an example of an exploitative relationship where a young woman was being treated like a prostitute really by her partner. If she had sex with him she would get money from him for the nappies.”

- 3.27 Many of the interviewees in the teenage pregnancy study described having concerns about children and young people, but the onus being on them to provide proof before any action can be taken. One residential care worker said:

"A lot of times we've suspected young people are being prostituted or are being exploited and we've sometimes called in the local police. We had one young woman who we felt was being prostituted by another young woman in the home. We were actually told by other young people in the home that she was acting as her pimp. The young girl was very frightened of the other young woman so the information that she gave was quite sketchy. We called in the police, who weren't particularly helpful. The difficulty was in getting proof - it's always our problem".

3.28 Although most professionals interviewed in this study had received some child protection training, a number of them raised the question as to how in a real situation they could stop a young person from being exploited. One project worker at a crisis centre, talked about a situation where a 14 year- old had been made pregnant by an older man. The worker could not understand why the man could not be prosecuted and felt there were loopholes in the system. Although the new care standards required staff to alert all the authorities if they suspected that a young person was involved in prostitution, she was uncertain what was done with the information and felt that there was more emphasis on prostitution *per se* rather than the safety of the young person.

3.29 A social worker commented:

“a young girl who was 10 or 11 years-old had been physically abused and was putting herself at risk sexually in the community, engaging in all sorts of sexual activity with men. She was in foster care and was from a very dysfunctional family. She would be out on the streets until quite late and she would come in and her body would be covered in bites and clearly she had been having sex. The carer felt she could not continue caring for the girl as she wasn't protecting this young person, and felt the department was failing to protect her. She finally gave notice and the district put her [the girl] into a secure unit. Then she went into a succession of residential units, and eventually went back to a foster carer, which is where she is now, and she's pregnant at 13 years. I suppose it's probably a relief that she became pregnant at 13 and not at 10.”

3.30 A study by Barnardo's (1998) clearly highlights the complexities surrounding the exploitation of girls and young women through prostitution. Drawing on examples of face-to-face work through the Bradford Streets and Lanes Project, the charity illustrates how adults prey on the vulnerability of children and young people. Four stages of taking and maintaining control of the lives of girls and young women are identified. The first stage involves *ensnaring* a young person through providing gifts and an expensive lifestyle; the next stage is about *creating dependency* and encouraging cutting of ties with family and friends; the third stage involves *taking control* over all aspects of the young girl's life; and finally *total dominance* occurs with the creation of a 'willing victim' prepared to do anything including having sex with other men in order to please the 'boyfriend'.

3.31 Melrose *et al.* (1999) talked to 50 women reflecting on their lives in prostitution. The majority entered prostitution when very young. 36 of the 50 identified experiences of conflict and abuse in their birth families, with 21 identifying their first sexual experience in the context of abuse. More than 60% noted that their experience of education had been highly disrupted.

3.32 Research by May *et al.* (2000), and commissioned by the Home Office, highlighted the particular vulnerabilities of children and young people to exploitation through 'pimping'. This offence rarely attracts the attention of the criminal justice system, with only 188 people prosecuted for pimping nationwide, in 1997. This qualitative study, which involved discussions with 'sex workers', pimps and managers of brothels and massage parlours, highlighted the fact that, contrary to common perceptions, the majority of women involved in prostitution work for themselves. However, those who were managed by a pimp were highly vulnerable to emotional and physical abuse and forced into coercive relationships with the pimp. Off-street managers (of brothels and massage parlours), on the other hand, tended to hold a more contractual relationship with the women. More importantly, the Home Office study found that young 'sex workers' were more likely to be pimped and therefore subject to such abuse.

Drug use and sexual exploitation

- 3.33 The links between drug use and sexual exploitation was predominant in all of the key literature that was reviewed, with drug use frequently cited as either a cause or consequence of vulnerability to sexual exploitation. For that reason it was decided to look at the links between drug use and exploitation in more detail.
- 3.34 The relationship between the commercial exploitation of children and young people, and the use of drugs appears to work in two main ways. The first is that those looking to sexually exploit young people prey on the fact that they have a dependency on drugs and entrap them through managing their supply of drugs in return for payment through prostitution. Alternatively, various mechanisms of control or persuasion are used to hook young people into taking highly addictive drugs such as crack cocaine as a means to subsequently control their lives and their involvement in prostitution (Pearce, 1999; May *et al.*, 2000; Somerset, 2001; Barnardo's, 2002; Thompson, 2003). The YMCA Maze Marigold project (see page 21) claims that 90% of the young women they work with who are drug dependent were not drug users prior to meeting their first boyfriend who introduced them to drugs. Most were then subsequently 'coerced' into prostitution to pay for the drug habits of themselves and their pimps. There is evidence more broadly of increasing use of crack cocaine among women involved in sex work (Ward *et al.*, 2000).
- 3.35 One important study explored the relationship between drug use and routes in and out of prostitution (Cusick *et al.*, forthcoming). This was a retrospective study of women who had become involved in prostitution from an early age. It focused on: drug use; its associated vulnerabilities; the shared environment of problem drug use and sex work; factors which trap young people in drug use and sex work; and giving up sex work and problem drug use. The key findings were that young people involved in prostitution reported higher levels of drug use compared to respondents from the British Cohort Study. Importantly, 78% of the most vulnerable young people interviewed in the study (those that had been involved in prostitution before the age of 18 years) had previously been looked after by their local authorities. Two important factors were identified among those who successfully stopped sex work and drug use: the separation of private and commercial sex; and not having problematic drug use as the principal motivation for sex work.⁶
- 3.36 The links between drug use and exploitation were clearly borne out in the TCRU teenage pregnancy study, where many professionals talked about the involvement of young people in selling sex in order to feed a drug habit. For example, one leaving care social worker said:
- “there is a girl now that I have grave concerns about because she is doing an awful lot of casual sex with people that she doesn't know and is taking a lot of drugs....and I know that the money that we give her in terms of allowance isn't enough to cover what she is spending so I am quite fearful that she is actually prostituting to meet her drug habit. But if I sit down and talk to her about that, she is just going to deny it. So I really think that she is being exploited but she doesn't see it that way.”
- 3.37 Other professionals talked about some of the complexities of providing care to young people so entrenched within the world of sexual exploitation, drugs and crime:

⁶ A full report of this study will be published in December 2003.

“One young girl was well known up and down the road for giving the best blow job, and that was because her mother has put her out on the streets to feed her own (the mother’s) drug habit.” (Social worker)

“those kind of foster placements (where there is a drug problem) rarely last. It’s not that the carer isn’t able to offer something, it’s kind of what that young person might bring to the home. In the case of X she had stolen money, and there were dealers coming to the door looking for the money that she owed them. It was the fear of that which really ended the placement.” (Foster care manager)

- 3.38 The relationship between drugs and exploitation, however, appears to be part of a broader jigsaw of patterns and layers of vulnerability experienced by many young people, not just those exploited through prostitution. Other research has shown significantly higher levels of drug use among vulnerable young people generally, including those who sleep rough, are persistent offenders, those who run away on a serial basis, those not attending school or who are excluded from school (Goulden & Sondhi, 2001).

Strategies to protect and support children and young people

- 3.39 At a global level, the final statement of the Yokohama Conference in 2001 identified a range of action that could be taken by member states in order to protect children from commercial sexual exploitation. These included:

- Education and life skills development for all children and young people;
- Ensuring young people’s participation in all aspects of programming and legislation to prevent exploitation;
- The need for governments to fight corruption since this perpetuates sexual exploitation;
- The importance of a multi-sectoral approach;
- Comprehensive research to support action to combat commercial sexual exploitation;
- Greater harmonization of national legislation with international treaties and cooperation between law enforcement agencies;
- Effective use of the mass media;
- Comprehensive and accessible support services for victims of exploitation; and
- Ensuring that the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child is integral to all legislation, plans of action and services.

- 3.40 Pearce (2000) points out how diverse international lobby groups such as the ‘anti-violence’ lobby, who view prostitution as a form of sexual violence, on the one hand, and pro-rights groups, advocating for the right to work as a prostitute under non-discriminatory or decriminalised systems on the other, are unified in their view of the need for greater protection of children. Both sides argue the importance of safeguarding children from the feminisation of poverty and against vulnerability to sexual exploitation through prostitution.

At a national level in the UK, the following initiatives are relevant to these goals.

Child Protection procedures

- 3.41 There is currently some debate about the relevance and adequacy of child protection procedures (established primarily to protect children and young people from physical,

emotional and/or sexual abuse) in protecting children and young people from *commercial* sexual exploitation and providing adequate support to those exploited. Some authors highlight the inadequacies of inter-agency child protection systems to adequately address abuse through prostitution or other forms of perceived exploitation (Ayre and Barrett, 2000).

- 3.42 This view was shared by several professionals and carers interviewed in the TCRU teenage pregnancy study (Chase *et al.*, forthcoming). A social worker commented:

“My issue is that at a certain age child protection doesn’t step in, child protection stands by helpless wondering what on earth they (Area Child Protection Committee) can do because this young person feels that they are exercising their free will. Then it is about relationships and protection and nurturing and helping and actually providing all the things that makes that young person feel ok because if they’re not ok, they will look for it wherever. The key is going back to the young person’s network and the safety and the nurturing, the discipline, control, all of those things that young people actually want, because that is what they are looking to that person that they have fallen for (i.e. who is ‘exploiting them’) to provide”

- 3.43 One of the key issues for practitioners appears to be disentangling what does and does not constitute exploitation. Doing the ‘right thing’ for young people is juxtaposed against an increasingly strong agenda of children and young people’s rights. Young people often do not see themselves as being exploited at the time (Barnardo’s, 1998), and may only see the situation this way in retrospect, after perhaps having experienced a different kind of relationship.

- 3.44 A specialist nurse for looked after children described the difficulties of intervening where there is suspected exploitation or abuse:

“it is a fine line in terms of child protection. There is often conflict between the field social worker and the residential social worker about whether or not the issue should go to child protection. Generally, the field social worker would hold back but the residential social worker would prefer to see it acted upon. If the young person is saying ‘I am in love, its not exploitative and the field social worker says ok’, then it can’t be taken any further. The balance between rights and protection is a difficult one. I find it difficult because those young people are in the home to be protected, and it could be frightening that in order to uphold their rights, it means they are not being protected”

- 3.45 A more critical appraisal of this approach (Phoenix, 2002) questions the relevance of ‘simply transposing the problem of youth prostitution into a problem of child (sexual) abuse’ and claims that this ignores the complexities surrounding ‘youth prostitution’. Phoenix argues that a distinction is often made between those ‘deserving’ of protection and support because they accept services and support offered, and those who continue to be involved despite being offered support to stop their involvement in prostitution. She argues that many young people sell sex without the involvement or control of a pimp, as a survival mechanism. The negative association of social services held by many of these young people (who often have been known to social services for many years) provides a barrier to them accessing support and help.

- 3.46 Aside from the political debate of the relative merits of different approaches to protecting young people, there is also a highly practical debate in that young people involved in prostitution in many cases will not perceive themselves as being victims of abuse, nor will they define themselves as ‘child prostitutes’ since they view the term degrading, labelling and stigmatising (Calder, 2001). Indeed, some young people may view their current involvement as a short-term survival mechanism.

Furthermore, there are questions as to whether current child protection systems have the capacity to adequately address the issues of abuse through prostitution (Green, 2000)

The Sexual Offences Bill

- 3.47 Reforms under the Bill have for the most part been greatly welcomed by organisations and agencies concerned with the safety and protection of children (Leason, 2002). However, it is also felt that reforms do not go far enough to protect vulnerable children from exploitation, particularly in relation to children exploited through trafficking in the UK (UNICEF, 2003)
- 3.48 There is a general view emerging that proposed strategies and policies surrounding the abuse of children and young people through prostitution are inadequate, and largely concerned with the improvement of monitoring and data collection systems. Limited attention is given to the actual provision of services available to young people to help them leave and survive their experiences of prostitution. A similar lack has been identified in the USA (Spangenberg, 2001).
- 3.49 Similarly, legislative reform alone is not an adequate protection of children and young people. Pearce (2000) highlights this point in an overview of highly 'pragmatic' legislative changes in the Netherlands in 2000. These included the removal of a ban on brothels; brothel inspections to ensure that minors are not employed; a new section 250a of the criminal code creating an offence for forms of commercial operation of involuntary prostitution and prostitution involving minors; and the abolishment of the 'complaint requirement' for sexual acts involving children between 12 and 16, meaning that a prosecution can be made without a child making a statement.
- 3.50 However, such changes have to go hand in hand with extensive training and awareness-raising in order for them to have the desired outcome of better protection of minors, and to prevent any adverse consequences for young people.

Interventions to support young people and provide exit points

- 3.51 A number of studies highlight the complex difficulties faced by young people trying to exit prostitution. One study involving in-depth qualitative research with 47 young and older people (all involved from an early age in prostitution) described how in order to exit and recover from such exploitation, they had to overcome significant difficulties.⁷ These included financial difficulties and debt; drug dependency; single parenthood; lack of qualifications and training to enable them to look for alternative employment; housing problems; criminal convictions (through prostitution); and abusive partners and/or pimps. Furthermore, many experienced low self-esteem, depression and other mental health problems (Taylor-Browne *et al.*, 2002). The longer young people remained involved, the more entrenched became the patterns of behaviour that kept them exploited, making it difficult for them to find a way out, particularly when they had lost contact with family and friends and their most direct peer groups were also all involved in prostitution (Taylor-Browne *et al.*, 2002; Palmer, 2001).
- 3.52 Other studies highlight the difficulties of supporting young people involved in prostitution. The barriers experienced include denial by young people; drug use and dependency; and the difficulty of balancing choices and rights with effective

⁷ This research: 'Voicing our Views' was the basis for the Taylor- Browne et al report: 'One More Chance'

protection (see, for example, Swann & Balding, 2001). Many young people are reluctant to use existing services because of fear of prejudice or being returned to violent homes (Cusick, 2002, Pearce, 2003). In fact, many avoid contact with such services as a result of their previous experiences of care or abuse. Services which provide local outreach and drop-in support, so called 'recovery' services (Department of Health *et al* 2000), and those that adopt a strong multi-agency approach, appear to be the most effective in both protecting young people from exploitation and collecting evidence to be used against abusers (May *et al.*, 2000)

- 3.53 In their study on 'pimping', (described earlier) May *et al.* (2000) highlight the importance of specialist 'vice' or policing services. These services are highly knowledgeable about the area of work and were found to be more likely than mainstream police services to respond quickly to complaints of coercion and abuse made by girls and women against their pimps. Also, they were more likely to develop strong and supportive relationships with specialist agencies supporting women and young people involved in prostitution, and to work effectively together against coercive pimps. Generally, however, the study highlighted a lack of protection offered by the criminal justice system when reporting pimps for violence and abuse, and a need to 'fast track' young people experiencing such abuse.
- 3.54 There is an increasing amount of literature about the types of support and exit strategies that exist for young people who have been, or at risk of being, exploited through prostitution. A number of core principles underpin these strategies:
- Holistic support that takes account of their wide ranging needs;
 - Non-judgemental support that recognises the complexities of their lives and that ending involvement in prostitution is not simply a question of changing of lifestyles or moving away;
 - Practical support that provides them with adequate shelter, food, safety for themselves and their children;
 - Medical support to assist with physical and mental health issues including drug or alcohol dependency and mental health;
 - Social health support that reduces their vulnerability to harm and violence;
 - Outreach support that engages with young people over a period of time and enables them to access and ask for the help that they need.
- 3.55 Barnardo's (2002) currently has 12 front-line projects across the UK working with children and young people abused through prostitution. These services provide holistic emotional and highly practical support to young people in accordance with their individual needs. Many young people, when first accessing the service, do not consider themselves to be victims of exploitation. Exit strategies require support over time with young people, the opportunity to build trusting relationships, and the capacity to provide holistic and comprehensive support.
- 3.56 Through its Maze Marigold project⁸ in Tower Hamlets and Hackney, the YMCA provides support to girls and young women from the age of 13 who are involved in prostitution. Services include outreach addressing issues such as homelessness, violence and drug problems as well as a drop-in centre.
- 3.57 The NSPCC's Breaking Free project in East London works with young women at risk of sexual exploitation and those already being abused through prostitution. The

⁸ www.ymca-b.org.uk/maze/activitiesandservices.asp

project workers provide sexual information and advice, and help the project users to break out of the situation that is putting them at risk. Underpinning the project is a harm minimisation strategy that promotes safer sex alongside other measures to protect young people from the adverse affects of being involved in prostitution.

- 3.58 The *FACE* (Fighting against child exploitation) project in Dundee is a young people centred initiative to raise awareness of the exploitation of children and young people through prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation. Young people with experience of exploitation are involved in writing articles, training professionals and lobbying for policy changes in Scotland. The success of the project revolves around the central participation and organisation by young people in a process that ultimately empowers them and raises their self-esteem (Miller, 2003).
- 3.59 A review of the use of the Department of Health Guidance highlighted the importance of training and support, such as how to go about setting up multi-agency protocols, or how to alert professionals to key warning signs that a young person is involved in prostitution or vulnerable to such exploitation (Valios, 2001; Swann and Balding 2001).
- 3.60 Overall, however, a recent survey conducted across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (Phoenix 2003) showed that support for young people at risk of prostitution is patchy. The study found that across the UK, there were 43 specialist projects (or projects with specialist workers) concentrated in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Newcastle, Middlesborough, Doncaster, Leeds, Liverpool, Derby, Nottingham, Leicester, Norwich, London, Bournemouth, Southampton, Bristol and Birmingham. Across Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, only seven cities have any specialist support working with young people at risk.
- 3.61 The study also found that services provided in the North east of England were mainly through drug projects, whereas in South East and Central England they were mainly sexual health outreach projects. Furthermore, despite there being clear multi-agency policies and protocols in place, in practice many voluntary agencies (who predominantly run support services), described difficulties in joint working including problems in agreeing definitions of risk and confidentiality, and a lack of response by social services and police to protect young people unless they were in immediate danger or under the age of 16 years.
- 3.62 A couple of forthcoming publications will further document effective practice on working with young people exploited through prostitution. These will be available early in 2004 (Patel & Pearce, forthcoming; Pearce, forthcoming) and will build on findings from the earlier Joseph Rowntree Foundation funded project (Pearce, 2003).
- 3.63 Until now, there has been limited 'impact' evaluation of the types of initiatives to support young people at risk of, or exploited through prostitution. Most reports are descriptive accounts of the types of services that are provided and the types of young people that they support. However, Barnardo's plans to develop a common system of monitoring outcomes, using a national evaluation strategy (Barnardo's, 2002)⁹ and there is clearly a recognised need to strengthen the evidence base in terms of interventions as they relate to outcomes for young people exploited through prostitution.

⁹ A further description of evaluation plans is given below under 'Work in Progress'.

4. The Internet as an exploitative technology

Available data

- 4.1 The Internet can contribute to commercial sexual exploitation through providing a means of access to children and young people, and through the sale and transfer of pornographic images. There is little reliable data about the extent of sexual 'grooming' (see below) via the internet, or its role in distributing pornography.
- 4.2 Convictions relating to the production and distribution of child pornography have until recently been limited. During 2000, there were a total of 81 convictions of '*possessing obscene material for gain*' (Obscene Publications Act 1959); 218 convictions of '*taking or making indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of children*' (Protection of Children Act 1978); and 77 convictions of '*possessing an indecent photograph or pseudo-photograph of a child*' (Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1988) (Home Office, 2002)
- 4.3 More recently, high profile police investigations such as Operation Ore, have seen the arrests of hundreds of people on charges of possessing child pornography, downloading and making pornography on the Internet. In January 2003, 1,300 arrests were made after credit card details used to access pornographic materials gave police direct leads on 250,000 people in the UK, from every walk of life (BBC News Online, 2003). The magnitude of the operation was thought to be beyond the current capacity of the police force.

Sexual 'grooming' via the Internet

- 4.4 'Grooming' is defined in the new legislation as:

'A course of conduct enacted by a suspected paedophile, which would give a reasonable person cause for concern that any meeting with a child arising from the conduct would be for unlawful purposes' (Home Office, 2002)
- 4.5 There has been increasing concern and media coverage of the role of the Internet in enticing children into sexual activity with paedophiles, as well as into broader exploitative situations such as prostitution (Barnardo's, 1999). Images of children being sexually abused are increasingly being accessed through Internet pornography sites, and the Internet is used to traffic and sell children (Barnardos, 2002).
- 4.6 Sexual grooming through the Internet has become a mechanism whereby perpetrators of abuse gain access to children and young people, and can lead to 'offline' offences of sexual abuse and/or exploitation. Under current law, there is no protection for children from on-line grooming. The only relevant existing legislation is the Indecency with Children Act (1960). In the past, therefore, where perpetrators have been intercepted prior to an offence being committed, the police have been unable to press charges despite the evident intent (backed up by email correspondence) to commit such a crime.
- 4.7 Clause 17 of the Sexual Offences Bill should enable the law to step in before any physical harm or damage is done to a child. In addition, Clause 110 of the Bill includes a new Risk of Sexual Harm Order whereby an adult can be charged for harassing a child on the Internet even if they have not yet arranged a meeting with the child. Similar safety provisions for children already exist under United States federal law, and in parts of Australia and Canada (Childnet International, 2003).

- 4.8 A study conducted over five years in chat rooms intended for children and teenagers highlighted how communication technologies can be used for exploitation and abuse. (O'Connell 2003). The changing nature of technologies provides the potential for criminal activity to diversify. For example, advancing technologies such as mobile phones and the Internet make it easier to hide abuse and are increasingly being used to engage children and young people in various forms of sexual exploitation. Previous limited protection through having a computer in a living room where parents are present, for example, is overridden by access to the Internet through mobile phones which are used everywhere and at all times (O'Connell, 2003). The term 'cybersexploitation' is coined by the author to cover 'adults or adolescents engaging children in varying degrees of sexually explicit conversations which may or may not progress to 'fantasy enactment'. Grooming is defined as a subset of cybersexploitation, since the intention with grooming is to sexually abuse a child in the real world, but one of the points of contact occurs in cyberspace.
- 4.9 O'Connell (2003) provides in-depth insight into how the grooming process works including: how victims are selected; how paedophiles collaborate together to identify children that meet desirability criteria, often using profile information that the chat room requests of participating children; and patterns of grooming conversations from relationship building through to engaging the child in sexual fantasy enactment, which tend to involve coercion, control and aggression.

Child pornography

- 4.10 A recent review of the evidence on child pornography conducted by the NSPCC (Renold *et al.*, 2003) highlighted the fact that there is currently very little UK research that examines the relationship between child prostitution and child pornography. There is also little research or knowledge on the impact of child pornography on children, and little systematic and reliable data available on the problem of child pornography and the Internet.
- 4.11 While the sale and transfer of pornographic images of children existed long before the existence of the Internet, the Internet has added a 'virtual' variable to the problem of the sexual abuse of children, particularly in relation to pornography and paedophilia. At the same time it has removed the communication constraints and social sanctions previously surrounding pornography and paedophilia (Arnaldo, 2001). At the touch of button, child abusers can access thousands of exploitative and even live images (Downey, 2002; Hill, 2003)
- 4.12 There are also other complex issues emerging around the production and dissemination of pornographic material depicting the abuse of children. While such images can have considerable commercial value (Wyre, 2003), they are often traded or exchanged between paedophiles rather than sold (Estes, 2001). There is increasing evidence of a proliferation of such material being disseminated free of charge and world-wide through 'peer to peer' transfer (Gillan, 2003). Therefore there appears to be no direct financial gain in these transactions, although it can be argued that they in fact bolster the demand for pornography and indirectly perpetuate and extend the abuse of children for these purposes.
- 4.13 Wyre (2003) points out how the proliferation of illegal pornographic material, and the ease with which it can be accessed, result in the boundaries between legal and illegal sites becoming blurred. Adults may find themselves in some cases inadvertently accessing illegal pornographic material of children to which they subsequently become 'addicted'. He argues that the addictive qualities of sex, the

freedoms of the Internet and widespread access to computers have come together with 'explosive consequences'. As a result, adults who would never have considered buying pornographic material, have access to it in the safety of their own homes.

- 4.14 Little has been written about the links between the availability of imagery and the actual practice of abuse of children. However, there is evidence that the Internet provides the potential for new forms of sexual abuse of children that present serious challenges for traditional policing methods and community safety strategies (Kennison & Read 2003). Such crimes, including child pornography and grooming, are committed privately and away from regulation. Child pornography in particular has been shown to attract people from every walk of life, even those who work with children, and many of whom have no previous convictions. Most importantly, Kennison and Read (2003) point out how the Internet has created new larger social networks with fewer controls. Virtual cyberspace allows paedophiles, previously socially marginalized, to communicate freely with each other, thereby endorsing and validating behaviours that are exploitative of children. The Internet allows them to subvert their identities and to assume fictitious names, ages, descriptions and intentions in order to lure children. Furthermore, chat rooms provide a safe haven for collecting child pornography, exchanging pictures, images and video footage. Above all, they facilitate more direct contact with children through the use of direct email or mobile phones.
- 4.15 However, the potential links between the possession of child pornography or the taking of indecent photographs of children and actual abuse are rarely acknowledged, or are played down. Edwards (2000) demonstrated how in both magistrates and Crown courts, a clear distinction is made between the taking of pornographic photographs of children and the abuse of children. Defendants charged with possession or distribution of child pornography were said to successfully minimise their actions in the eyes of the court, while judges failed to recognise the danger posed by defendants convicted of possession and distribution. This was reflected in the very short prison sentences often given to those found guilty.

Strategies to protect and support children and young people

- 4.16 Various strategies have been explored in recent years to combat the proliferation of child pornography through the Internet, with variable success. Such strategies include: legal and regulatory approaches imposed by governments; policies of self-regulation adopted by the Internet industry; and action by individuals, parents, civic groups and NGOs - or a combination of all of these.
- 4.17 The Council of Europe's *Convention on Cybercrime* (2001) was signed by 30 member states including the UK in December 2001.¹⁰ The overall aim of the convention is to pursue "a common criminal policy aimed at the protection of society against cybercrime, *inter alia* by adoption of appropriate legislation and fostering international cooperation". Article 9 of the Convention is concerned with offences related to child pornography, and calls on each signed up state to adopt such legislative and other measures as may be necessary to establish as criminal offences under its domestic law, when committed intentionally and without right, the following conduct: producing child pornography for the purpose of its distribution through a computer system; offering or making available child pornography through a computer system; distributing or transmitting child pornography through a computer system; procuring child pornography through a computer system for oneself or for another;

¹⁰ <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/185.htm>

possessing child pornography in a computer system or on a computer-data storage medium.

- 4.18 In the UK, the Children's Charities Coalition on Internet Safety (CHIS), launched in 2000, is made up of ChildLine, Barnardo's, NCB, NCH, NSPCC, NCVCCO and the Children's Society. The coalition campaigns to raise awareness of the hazards children may encounter when using the Internet; to get companies in the Internet supply chain to adopt child safety policies; and to lobby Government for action - including changes in the law if necessary. The coalition developed and presented an Agenda for Action to the Government's Internet Safety Summit in March 2001.
- 4.19 Identifying and providing support to children and young people exploited through pornography is highly complex and in some cases impossible (Downey 2002a; Gillen 2003), since children who are portrayed in pornographic images can be anywhere in the world and some of the images have existed for many years. Previous attempts to trace children have proved time consuming and unproductive. Even when children are identified, they often do not want to press charges and feel completely out of control of the images of them that are in circulation and cannot be stopped (Downey, 2002a).
- 4.20 There is a general view of the need for extensive training for professionals to help them to deal with the specifics of abuse through pornography. Although social workers receive high quality training in child protection, they are often unaware of the dangers posed by the Internet (Downey 2002a).

5. Child Trafficking

- 5.1 Although this review is not primarily concerned with international trafficking of children, there is clearly an overlap in the UK between trafficking of children and sexual exploitation of children. A recent review of information on trafficking of children and young people to and through the UK (Candappa, 2003) provides a comprehensive account of some of the complex issues of trafficking and their interface with the sexual exploitation of children and young people.
- 5.2 The overview found that trafficking generally takes place in two major ways: cross-border international trafficking, and internal trafficking within the borders of a country or state. Normally, a clear distinction is made between smuggling (where people are willing partners in the illegal movement across borders) and trafficking, where coercion is implied. However, such distinctions are not always clear and there is evidence of women willingly being 'smuggled' across borders only to find themselves subject to the same types of exploitation as those who have been coercively trafficked (Kelly, 2000)
- 5.3 Cross-border trafficking is pertinent to this review, since there is a clear interface between children and young people being trafficked into the UK (brought under false pretences of a better life and opportunities) and their later exploitation by pimps to work either on the streets or hidden away in brothels or massage parlours (Kelly, 2002; Arie, 2003).
- 5.4 Certain factors are known to foster international trafficking. These include: globalization of transport, markets and labour; women's socio-economic inequality; economic transition (especially in the Former Soviet Union, social dislocation as a result of conflict; and demand factors (Candappa, 2003). Pearce (2000) outlines how economic and political changes that have taken place in both central and eastern Europe, and within Western European economies, have brought specific forms of 'feminised poverty; and have seen the increasing movement of impoverished children within and between European countries. Added to these are increasingly restrictive migration and refugee and asylum politics in the countries to which children and women are trafficked (Wolthius and Blaak, 2002), which make the trafficking of humans across borders a lucrative business.
- 5.5 Other questions remain to be answered, however, such as why certain countries with pre-disposing factors do not always become a focus for trafficking; or why some regions, or countries within regions, are both exit points for women and children and points of entry for the purposes of trafficking, as is the case in parts of Central and Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia. Patterns of continuity and change can to some extent be explained by the expansion of sex markets in some areas, and the fact that routes are adapted to take account of stronger immigration controls, law enforcement activities and political circumstances (Kelly, 2002).

Available data

- 5.6 Overall, even with regard to the trafficking of adults, data on the numbers involved in trafficking either as victims or perpetrators, are very unclear and largely guesstimates (IOM 2001; Kelly, 2002). Furthermore, figures for women and children are usually combined. The US Department of State (2002) estimates that, globally, 700,000 women and children are trafficked per year. However, as a rule, different studies do not cross-reference or complement each other to provide a solid research base,

there are seldom explanations of how figures are arrived at, and no account is taken of whether these are incidences of trafficking or re-trafficking (Kelly, 2002).

- 5.7 Hardly any data exists at all on the trafficking of children for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation, although an estimated 10-30% of those trafficked are thought to be minors (Kelly, 2000). Research on international trafficking is still very limited and is restricted to mapping of the problem, reviews of frameworks and policy responses.
- 5.8 Since the first awareness of trafficking in the UK in the mid 1990s, when the UK was identified as part of the trafficking route from West Africa through to Italy, other routes have emerged from the newly independent states of the Former Soviet Union (FSU) and Eastern Europe, and from China. Despite the difficulties in collecting data on this issue, it is known that at least 250 children have been trafficked to the UK in the last five years (UNICEF, 2003). However, this figure is thought to largely underestimate the actual number of trafficked children, most notably because of the relative newness of trafficking as a phenomenon and the fact that many local authorities are only just beginning to keep records of trafficking incidences. The number also excludes many of the children that go missing from social services.
- 5.9 Many children accompanied by an adult are in fact arriving for legitimate reasons such as education, re-unification with family or fleeing war or other conflict situations. In the majority of cases, the adult with the child is allowed to enter the UK. If, however, there are concerns about the child or the relationship between adult and child, then various steps are taken to protect the child, including taking the child into social services' care or returning the child to their family in the country of origin.
- 5.10 Most of the limited information on child trafficking in the UK relates to children who are unaccompanied, and who come to the attention of the authorities at the point of claiming asylum. Although there are useful descriptive accounts of young asylum seekers and their vulnerability to exploitation (UNICEF, 2003; Kelly, 2002), there is very little concrete data on the scale of the problem. The lack of clear identification of people who are trafficked means that they are often classified as 'undocumented', 'illegal immigrants', or, if trafficked for the purposes of prostitution, as 'prostitutes' and subjected to either deportation or detention in an immigration facility.
- 5.11 It is thought that unaccompanied children and young people who have not been trafficked but who are seeking asylum may be particularly vulnerable to exploitation once they arrive in the UK, especially when their immigration status is uncertain and they are not sure of their situation. At that point they have no money, they are often placed in hostel-type accommodation where they are highly vulnerable and easily targeted for exploitation, yet are cut off from appropriate support. This is particularly the case when they are housed away from the local authority with responsibility for them.
- 5.12 Other children are brought into the country for the purpose of exploitation. Children from Africa tend to disappear from social services care, while a trafficker or third party usually meets those from Eastern Europe at the point of entry. Others enter clandestinely in the backs of lorries, some who are older arrive with a student visa, others arrive with a man claiming to be a boyfriend, and the age of the girl or young woman is disguised. Once in the UK, they may be used in prostitution or domestic exploitation, or they are trafficked through the UK to other European countries. Children and young people entering the country via these routes only usually come to the attention of authorities after they have been exploited.

- 5.13 Once in the UK, young people are moved around to service demand in various parts of the country, although the picture of how and to where they are trafficked is actually very unclear and it is often only single cases that come to light in such diverse places as West Sussex, Newcastle and Glasgow (UNICEF, 2003). There does appear to be some diversification of trafficking routes within the UK to areas where authorities are less vigilant or less equipped to deal with the issue. Young people who arrive in the UK under false documentation organised through pimps have no rights to remain if they manage to escape from their situations or when the industry has no further use for them. Seeking help will most often lead to deportation.
- 5.14 Generally, routes and mechanisms for trafficking children are the same as those for women in general, and to date there are no known distinct routes solely for the traffic of children. There currently appears to be little evidence of trafficking of boys for the purposes of sexual exploitation (Kelly, 2002). Various strategies are used to recruit women, including young women, in their home countries. These include deception, promises of a better life and exploitation of the lack of opportunity and life chances available to them at home. Reportedly, those coming from West Africa are bound by 'curses' which they believe can only be lifted once the cost of their passage to the UK has been repaid (Downey, 2002b). Once recruited, various mechanisms are used to control and keep young women working including rape, assault, drugs, threats of harm to family members, and removal of identity documents. Although some women know they are being recruited for 'escort work', they are still deceived in terms of conditions of their employment and ability to pay off traffickers (Candappa, 2003)

Strategies to protect and support children and young people

- 5.15 Children arriving in the UK alone are entitled to protection under the Children Act, although there is evidence that generally this provision is insufficient to protect and support children and young people (Refugee Council, 2003). For complex reasons including experiences of abuse and rape, threats to family back home and other controlling mechanisms such as curses and 'voodoo', children taken into care who have been trafficked often flee to meet their trafficker or they are abducted. The accommodation provided by social services is normally inadequate to provide protection and support since victims of trafficking require 'round the clock' supervision and highly specialised support and counselling to enable them to flee their traffickers (Downey, 2002b). Furthermore, social services departments lack knowledge about the complexities of trafficking (Gillen, 2003).
- 5.16 For young people aged 15-17 years, it appears particularly difficult to seek protection and help. They often appear older than they are, easily pass as 18, and end up working in hidden, off-street establishments such as saunas and massage parlours where they do not attract too much attention (UNICEF, 2003). Agencies are reported to respond to them as if they were less vulnerable than those under 15 years, which is often not the case (Refugee Council, 2003). Furthermore, they only have access to provision of longer term support beyond 18 years if they have spent more than 13 previous weeks in local authority care (Leaving Care Act 2000). Protection through legal means has been uncommon. Under current legislation (prior to the introduction of the Sexual Offences Bill), prosecutions against traffickers have been very rare. This may be partly because children who are traumatised make poor witnesses: they may have inconsistent stories, have been told to lie or become confused.
- 5.17 As a result of increasing concern about the lack of protection for West African young women disappearing from social services care, a safe house was set up in 1999 in West Sussex. This was a joint venture between the police, immigration, social services and the Family Welfare Association. A safe, secure environment was

provided to protect the young women and help them realise the consequences of contacting traffickers. There was some evidence of success, with far fewer children and young women going missing (Downey, 2002b).

- 5.18 Similar 'safe house' models in Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands have been successful, but the safe house in West Sussex is at risk of closure, as the Council has reported a lack of demand, probably as a result of traffickers diversifying routes and avoiding West Sussex (Gillen, 2003). Instead, West Sussex Council intends to use foster carers to look after such children. Apart from this provision, no other prevention or rehabilitation programmes for trafficked children in the UK, by either voluntary organisations or the public sector, were identified for this review.
- 5.19 However, some local authorities have developed procedures for responding to the needs of vulnerable young people arriving from abroad, especially in areas where greater numbers have been received. Kent local authority has developed a clear multi-agency protocol for identifying and supporting vulnerable children and young people arriving from abroad, as well as a 'risk profile' of young people at risk of exploitation (Kent Social Services Department, 2002; Kent County Council, 2002). There is clearly scope to share good practice more widely, and promote a more proactive approach to addressing the issues.
- 5.20 The organisation ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Pornography, Trafficking) has highlighted steps that need to be taken to effectively combat trafficking in the UK and provide adequate support. Such steps include:
- The provision of safe houses, counselling and independent legal advice;
 - Placing vulnerable children under care orders;
 - Airline staff escorting unaccompanied minors;
 - Interviewing children arriving with a 'suspicious' adult separately; and
 - Clearer protocols between social services and immigration (ECPAT,2001).
- 5.21 A Counter-Trafficking Steering Group, initiated by the National Missing Persons Helpline, was set up in 2002 involving police, immigration, the Home Office, voluntary organisations and social services. One of three sub-groups is concerned with victim support and protection, and lobbies the government on aspects relating to the support needs of those who are trafficked. In addition, the Home Office has designed a web-based toolkit on trafficking, to raise the profile and understanding of the issues at a local authority level¹¹.
- 5.22 Current research underway by ECPAT UK to find out what London Social Services Departments know about trafficking, if they have had any cases and how cases have been dealt with. They have identified a need for clear guidelines for social workers on identifying and supporting trafficked victims. So far, the research has found that there is no clear lead within a particular part of social services to work with children who might be trafficked or exploited. (Somerset *et al.*, forthcoming)
- 5.23 In addition to specific measures to protect children, NGOs across five countries in Europe, including the United Kingdom, have begun to collaborate in voicing concerns about the lack of protection available to trafficked persons, including children (Anti-Slavery International, 2003).

¹¹ www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits

6. Moving forward

- 6.1 This overview identified a number of on-going research projects which should provide further information of relevance to future policy in this field, and also some significant gaps in the research base.

Work in progress

The following studies were ongoing at the time of writing (November 2003):

- 6.2 Barnardo's is currently working on a three-year evaluation of their services across the UK that provide support to children and young people experiencing commercial sexual exploitation. This study will provide further detail on the success and relevance of the types of approaches adopted through Barnardo's front line services for children and young people abused through prostitution, and will help to identify where the gaps remain in relation to this important area of work.
- 6.3 Barnardo's is also undertaking a two-year research project mapping services and needs of exploited children in London. This involves an audit of statutory and voluntary services specific and relevant to sexual exploitation of children, and will include drug projects and missing children projects. The study will obtain data on different vulnerable groups, such as children and young people in care and children that go missing.
- 6.4 The Crime and Policy Group within the Home Office is currently working on an overview of findings from the Crime Reduction Programme, Violence Against Women Initiative on 'what works' in tackling crime and disorder associated with prostitution. This work has included an evaluation of policing initiatives, exiting programmes and programmes working with young people. The findings from this work will be available in January 2004.
- 6.5 A scoping exercise is currently being conducted by the Home Office, which will prepare the ground for a review of prostitution. The review will look at routes in and out of prostitution and the links between prostitution and anti-social behaviour, drug abuse and serious crime.
- 6.6 Following on from 'Voicing our Views', the research that provided the basis for the report: 'One More Chance' (Taylor-Browne *et al.*, 2002), ECPAT UK is setting up a Youth Campaign with the Children's Society. This will ask young people involved in the earlier research about how they might influence the National Plan for Safeguarding Children.
- 6.7 A second study of trafficking is being undertaken by ECPAT. This will build on the earlier work in the UK (Somerset, 2001) in the form of a cross-national study involving 16 countries: eight partners/ ECPAT groups from Eastern Europe and eight from Western Europe.
- 6.8 A National multi-agency Working Group on Young People and Sexual Exploitation has been set up to support services for young people at risk of, or experiencing sexual exploitation, and to develop strategies for gathering evidence against and prosecuting those who sexually exploit young people. Further details can be found on the NSPCC website (www.nspcc.org.uk)

Implications and gaps in research

A number of issues emerge from this overview as warranting more in-depth discussion or exploration.

- 6.9 There is clearly a debate still to be had around the appropriateness of using child protection procedures to address abuse of children and young people through prostitution. There is a clear distinction between abuse that occurs within families etc. and that which takes place within a 'commercial' environment.
- 6.10 There is a need for greater exploration of the issues surrounding young asylum seekers and their vulnerability to abuse through prostitution. A number of systemic factors may underscore this vulnerability. Firstly, the way in which young asylum seekers are placed in hostels, makes it easy for them to become targets. Secondly, under current asylum law, young people are viewed as asylum seekers first and children second, so their needs and rights as children are overridden by the legal process of determining whether they have a right to remain and receive protection from the UK government. Thirdly, although as unaccompanied minors they become the responsibility of social services departments, they are often placed outside of receiving authorities where they may have little access to support.
- 6.11 While there has been an increasing amount of research exploring the position of the UK in international trafficking of children and young people, including that associated with the sexual exploitation of children, very little focus has been put on the provision of support services. There is a need to create a balance between defining and quantifying the various forms of sexual exploitation of children and young people, and providing adequate support services to children and young people who are victims.
- 6.12 More work is necessary in terms of capacity building, training and awareness-raising for a range of professionals, including immigration officers, social workers, the police and other professionals providing direct support to children and young people, about the scale of trafficking and how to best to provide protection and support to trafficked minors.
- 6.13 Very little appears to be known about the extent to which British children are being moved within the country. While there has been limited research on internal trafficking of children from other countries, there has been no exploration of the movement of British children around the country to feed demand in other areas.
- 6.14 Comparative research on how exploitation affects different groups, including children of different ethnic minorities, would be useful.
- 6.15 Further research and exploration is needed on the relationship between use of the Internet and other forms of abuse against children and young people, including grooming for prostitution.

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