Research Proposal

Background
A review of the literature around child sexual exploitation (CSE) identifies issues with how victims of child sexual exploitation are viewed by the professionals involved in safeguarding them. There is extensive evidence of these views negatively impacting on safeguarding (see Coventry, Rotherham, Rochester and Oxford Serious Case Reviews into child sexual exploitation). However, as child sexual exploitation is an emerging field of research, there is limited information about the experiences and perceptions of the young people affected by child sexual exploitation in relation to working with professionals (Warrington, 2013). In addition, the research that has been undertaken to date the voice of the child is often missing (Warrington, 2013).

CSE Definition
For the purposes of this study, child sexual exploitation will be defined as follows:

“The sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive ‘something’ (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of performing, and/or others performing on them, sexual activities.

Child sexual exploitation can occur through use of technology without the child’s immediate recognition, for example the persuasion to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones with no immediate payment or gain. In all cases those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability”

(Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009: p. 9)
**Objectives**

1. Critically analyse the changing narratives of child sexual exploitation from the Victorian era to today using a Children’s Rights approach.
2. Critically examine the voices of victims of child sexual exploitation in relation to their experience of working with professionals.
3. Investigate how victims of child sexual exploitation perceive they are viewed by professionals.
4. Critically evaluate whether victims perceive the attitudes of professionals’ have impacted their experience.

**Research Methodology**

As the aim of this research is to investigate the narratives of victims of CSE using a child-centred approach, the study will be underpinned by Children’s Rights, participatory methods and take a narrative approach to data collection. Therefore, the study will be shaped by one-to-one, date collection sessions with victims of CSE. To ensure that the study remains child centred, an existing Young Person’s Project Board (YPPB) will assist in the research design.

![Diagram](image)

**YPPB Consultation**

An advisory group will be consulted in relation to the method of data collection. The session will be run creatively by the researcher with the provision of craft materials and snacks. The session will focus on the development of forms (including information sheet, consent form), themes for the data collection sessions and the structure of these sessions. This consultation will use mind-mapping, discussion, writing and drawing to access the views of the YPPB. The YPPB members are peers of the research participants and can therefore ensure that information is provided in
an accessible format, and that the themes and structure of the data collection sessions are age appropriate and not patronising (National Children’s Bureau, 2015 and Smith, 2010).

**Data Collection Sessions**

To be eligible to take part in the study research participant’s must be over the age of 16 years and in recovery from child sexual exploitation. Recovery is understood to be a situation where the individual is no longer being sexually exploited and is receiving support to address the impact of the abuse (Turner, 2008). Gatekeepers will make an assessment with regards to whether an individual has moved into recovery, and whether they are emotionally resilient enough to take part prior to them being invited to join the study (Pirskanen et. al, 2015).

The aim of this piece of research is to enable young people to share their own experiences and to be given a voice. Two sessions will be offered to the research participants, the first will elicit their narratives and the second will provide an opportunity for member checking and for reflection on the data collection process. To ensure the data collection sessions are child-centred, they will be creative and interactive (Mudaly and Goddard, 2009).

The first session will begin with the research participant being invited to create a timeline of their interaction with professionals. This activity will serve as an ice-breaker and a story prompt for the remainder of the session (Driessnack, 2005 and Fargas-Malet et al., 2010). Pens, felt tips, colouring pencils and coloured paper will be provided for this activity. Pirskanen et. al, (2015) used a similar technique in their study into children’s family relationships, and found that visual methods can help to make the research participant more comfortable, support the interview process by providing a foundation for discussion and an alternative method for communication.

The remainder of the session will focus on collecting the narratives of the research participants using the timeline as a guide for discussion. The discussion will be led by the young person with the researcher asking open questions to elicit their views on working with professionals. Using a guide for discussion, has been referred to in literature as the interview guide approach and is consistent with eliciting narratives (Rubin and Babbie, 2008). Using a timeline as a discussion guide allows the session to remain informal and conversational whilst ensuring relevant topics are covered (Rubin and Babbie, 2008). The session will be concluded by asking the participant...
about a positive topic to bring them back to every-day life and avoid leaving them thinking about past difficulties (Save the Children, 2004).

Following this initial session, research participants will be invited to meet with the researcher on a further occasion. During this session, the participant will be provided with a summary of the information they disclosed in the initial session to confirm whether they are happy with what has been recorded, correct mistakes and to provide an opportunity to disclose any additional information (Goldblatt et al., 2011 and Koelsch, 2013). This process of meeting with participants to ensure that their narratives have been accurately interpreted is commonly referred to as member checking (Goldblatt et al., 2011 and Koelsch, 2013). The outcome of member checking is that misinterpretations of the data are minimised and in line with a participatory approach, participants are actively involved in the study (Goldblattt et al., 2011). In addition, during this session, participants will be asked to reflect on their experience of being involved in the study (Koelsch, 2013).

Gatekeeping organisations will be asked to make the research participants project worker available before, during and after these sessions to provide the individual with emotional support and to address any safeguarding concerns that may arise. Participants will have the option of whether they would their project worker present during the data collection session. The research participant will also have the opportunity to debrief with the researcher at the end of each session to address any concerns that have arisen as a result of taking part in the study.

At the end of the research, participants involved in the study will be given a thank you card and a £10 high street voucher to thank them for their time and contribution. There is some debate over whether children and young people should be provided with monetary compensation for their involvement in research due to concerns that this could coerce individuals to take part (Clark, 2011). To address this concern, potential research participants will not be made aware that they will receive a voucher until after the data collection sessions are completed. Clark (2011) found that providing a monetary token of appreciation to children involved in her research was a positive experience for them, or as she puts it, “an empowering token of performing a valued act of self-contribution” (p.33).

**Thematic Analysis**

This research is concerned with the perceptions and experiences of victims of child sexual exploitation and, therefore, thematic analysis will be used (Riessman, 2008).
Thematic analysis is a method of analysing subjective narratives (Katz and Barnetz, 2014). The unit of analysis is the research participant’s understanding of their experience of working with professionals (Riessman, 2008). The focus is on the content of the narratives rather than how the narratives are expressed (Katz, 2013). In thematic analysis, the narratives will be analysed as a whole rather than fragmented into thematic categories as is the case with grounded theory (Reisman and Quinney, 2005).

The data will be analysed inductively drawing semantic themes directly from the participant's narrative (Katz and Barnetz, 2014). Semantic themes come directly from the surface meaning of the narrative rather than from an interpretation of the data by the researcher using pre-existing theories or models (Katz and Barnetz, 2014). In other words, research participants’ narratives are taken at face value. Data collection sessions will be compared to identify whether there are commonalities in themes amongst the research participants' narratives (Riessman, 2008).
References


Save the Children, (2004) ‘So You Want to Involve Children in Research?’. Sweden: Save the Children
