Still Hidden?

Going missing as an indicator of child sexual exploitation

Nicola Sharp

missing people

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Background

In 2012, Missing People received grant funding from **Comic Relief** and the **Esmee Fairbairn Foundation** to develop its response to child sexual exploitation.

The aim of the three year project is:

> ***To protect more children through increased awareness of the link between missing and sexual exploitation, and to increase the national capacity of Missing People to safeguard young people who are missing and sexually exploited, or at high risk of sexual exploitation and going missing.***[1]

An important element of this work is to develop a clear understanding of the knowledge base which links going missing with child sexual exploitation. As such, a desk-based research review was undertaken to provide policy makers and practitioners with an overview of the literature that connects these issues and which has emerged in the UK over the last decade.

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Contents

1. Introduction

In 2011-12, 128 of the children and young people who contacted Missing People were identified as either experiencing or being at risk of child sexual exploitation.[2]

Analysis of the cases for which details of age and gender were known revealed that all the victims were female and the majority were aged between 13 and 17.[3] This reflects what is understood nationally about the profile of sexually exploited children and young people (CEOP, 2011; Jago et al. 2011; Berelowitz et al. 2012). The experiences of exploited young people further reflect recognised methods of coercion, including being coerced by people and/or by circumstances to exchange sexual acts for accommodation, grooming and use of the internet. Exploitation was initiated by strangers, older 'boyfriends', relatives and networks of perpetrators.[4]

The number of children and young people affected by child sexual exploitation and receiving support from the charity is almost certainly an underestimate. As Jago et al. (2011) note, sexually exploited young people are often described as 'hidden'. Their experiences can go unrecognised or be misunderstood, particularly in the case of older teenagers. This is because the coercive nature of exploitative relationships may hide or confuse what is really going on for practitioners and young people alike. In addition, the exploitative process may lead young people to display behaviour that masks their vulnerability.

As a consequence, a key principle in responding to the exploitation of children and young people is to take a proactive approach (Pearce, 2009; Jago et al. 2011). This includes increasing recognition of the indicators of child sexual exploitation and being able to respond appropriately. The Office of the Children's Commissioner for England notes this in its interim report on chid sexual exploitation in gangs and groups and urges that immediate action is taken in relation to circulating details of the warning signs to all professionals who come into contact with children and young people (Berelowitz et al. 2012). Of the 11 warning signs identified by the inquiry report, 'missing from home or care' is noted as representing 'particular concern'.[5]

2. What is 'going missing'?

'Going missing' is not an easy phenomenon to define (Biehal et al. 2003) and is often used interchangeably with the term 'running away' when referring to children and young people. Researchers have therefore attempted to distinguish between the two terms in order to provide clarity.

Rees and Lee (2005) are clear that there is a difference between running away and young people being 'missing'. It is argued that this is because the majority of children and young people who run away are not formally reported, with a recent survey suggesting that only three in ten children who run away come to the attention of the police (Rees, 2011).

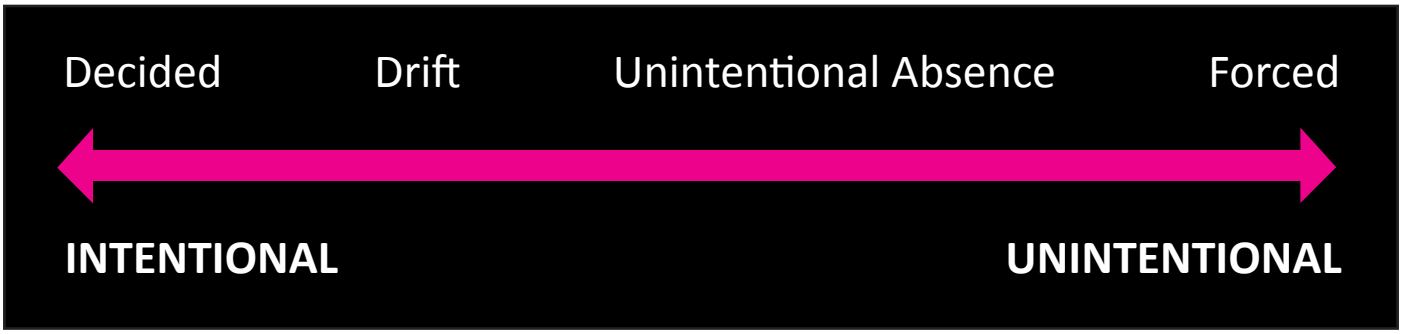
It is further observed that many children and young people who are reported as missing do not fit the definition of running away (Smeaton, 2011). Indeed Plass (2007) notes how the spectrum of 'missing children' events is quite broad, ranging from: children abducted by family members or strangers, to teenagers who leave home to 'escape' something, to children who are 'misplaced' for periods of time – such as getting lost when out shopping.

In recognition of these different scenarios, Payne (1995) has developed an analytical framework which identifies 5 different 'types' of going missing. According to this analysis, being a 'runaway' refers to a situation where a missing person is not in control of what is going on around them and responds to an immediate pressure by leaving.

Acknowledging an early distinction made by Rees (1993) between children who make a decision to run away from home and those who are forced to leave by their parents, Payne identifies a second group of missing people as 'pushaways'. This refers to people who are forced to go missing due to a situation where the behaviour of members of the person's social networks means that they perceive that they have no choice but to leave, for example, where sexual or physical abuse of children is going on in a family.

Other categories within the Payne (1995) classification include: 'throwaways' – those people thrown out of their home, often by parents after some misdemeanour; 'fallaways' – which refers to people who have drifted out of contact with their family and social networks; and 'takeaways' – people forced out of contact as a consequence of kidnap for criminal intent (such as sexual or physical violence) as well as abductions, including both stranger and parental.

Biehal et al. (2003) have expanded Payne's framework to develop the 'missing continuum'. This incorporates the different forms that missing episodes can take into a spectrum of intent, distinguishing between people who do not intend to go missing and people who do (Forsyth, 1990). In the middle of these two extremes are those who have 'drifted' out of contact and 'unintentional absence' which may include vulnerable people who have wandered off without intending to do so, people who are lost or people who have come to harm.



For the purposes of this analysis, the Biehal (2003) missing continuum is adopted. This is because it acknowledges both different degrees of intent on the part of the missing person[6] and the role played by external factors – for example, the influence exerted by other people within the missing incident (Holmes, 2008). This latter point is important to recognise since the police definition of missing requires that someone can only formally be classified as missing by those they have left behind, potentially disguising serious or legitimate reasons for a disappearance.

3. What is child sexual exploitation?

Ongoing research suggests changing and emerging forms of child sexual exploitation, leading Jago et al. (2011) to conclude that there is no 'one model' of how young people are sexually exploited and no 'one method' of coercion. Since varying definitions of the boundaries of child sexual exploitation exist it is impossible to 'neatly segment' it into different forms (CEOP, 2011). This review therefore adopts a wide understanding of the term in order to ensure that it considers all of the relevant literature.

The following definition encompasses a number of different possible scenarios and is used by the National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People. It is also in line with the definition used in statutory safeguarding guidance on child sexual exploitation (DCSF, 2009):

> ***'Exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (for example, food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of performing sexual activities and/or another performing sexual activities on them…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'.***

It is important to note that before the Sexual Offences Act (2003), child sexual exploitation was labelled 'child prostitution' (Adams et al. 1997). However this term ignored the inverse power relationships between adults and children, thereby dismissing the exploitive nature of this crime (Barrett, 1997). The Act extends the protection of the law so that no-one under the age of 18 can consent to sexual activity where exploitation is involved. This means that child sexual exploitation is now considered to be a form of child abuse (Jago and Pearce, 2008; Jago et al. 2011) and should never be considered to be a free 'adult' choice, leading to a lack of protective action (Harper and Scott, 2005).[7]

Beckett (2011) notes that the issue of choice can often appear complicated in practice. For example, some of the professionals who participated in her research on child sexual exploitation reflected that it can be difficult to see a young person as a victim in cases where they appear to

be 'in control' of the situation (see also Melrose, 2004). Yet as Beckett (2011) goes on to observe, many sexually exploited young people have limited choices as a consequence of previous experience of abuse, including by multiple parties. In these circumstances the 'decision' to sell their bodies cannot be viewed as a free or informed choice since it more often represents a means of accessing what the young person needs (for example, drugs and alcohol) to block out the trauma of past experiences of abuse and/or cope with present difficulties and constraints.

This theme is also recognised in the report of the Children's Commissioner for England which observes that the language used by professionals to describe sexually exploited children and young people reflects a worrying perspective, 'namely that children are complicit in, and hence responsible for their own abuse' (Berelowitz et al. 2012:47). The Office of the Children's Commissioner goes on to state that coercion is not always identified or even considered by professionals.

Thus, although care must be taken not to further victimise young people through invalidating their understanding and perspectives:

> **'*…professionals should not dismiss the abusive nature of such situations just because a young person does. The statutory responsibility to safeguard these young people and uphold the law is not dependent upon their desire to be safeguarded*' (Beckett, 2011:52).[8]**

4. Defining missing in the context of child sexual exploitation

For the purposes of estimating scale, 'running away' has been most commonly defined by researchers as 'children and young people who have either run away or been forced to leave home and have stayed away overnight on at least one occasion' (Rees & Lee, 2005; Rees, 2011). This definition is applied only to young people aged 15 or under (see for example Rees, 1993; Smeaton, 2011) since young people aged 16 and above are generally not restricted from leaving home and seeking independent accommodation.

This definition is problematic in the context of child sexual exploitation for several reasons. To begin with, emerging evidence suggests that a missing child is believed to be at risk from child sexual exploitation, irrespective of the length of time they are away from home or a caring environment (Plass, 2007; CEOP, 2011b). Indeed there is growing consensus that those children and young people who are sexually exploited are likely to go missing from home or care on a regular basis and for short periods of time (CEOP, 2011; OCC, 2012; Berelowitz et al. 2012).

Furthermore, statutory guidance on children who run away and go missing from home or care and the extended provisions set out in the Sexual Offences Act (2003) both protect children up to the

age of 18 (DCSF, 2009). Whilst some 16-17 year olds may choose to leave home, this age group continues to face restrictions in accessing welfare benefits and accommodation making the reality of independent living a challenge (Liabo et al. 2000). Research with detatched children and young people notes that many 16-17 year olds have reservations about using accommodation services for the adult population and may only do so when they are desperate (Smeaton, 2009).

This creates a scenario in which young people aged 16-17 often fall between children and adult services. Furthermore, because perception of capacity to consent appears to increase with the age of young people, it is also noted that the police may be reluctant to intervene in cases of sexual exploitation involving older children (Harris and Robinson, 2007; CEOP, 2011). Jago et al. (2011:51) observe evidence to suggest that 'practitioners are failing to identify exploitation, to the extent that 16-17 year olds are rarely recognised as deserving of protection'.

Scott and Skidmore (2006) believe that this is particularly likely to be the case where victims may not feel that they have been exploited as a result of having been groomed to believe that they are in a romantic relationship. Perceptions in relation to consent therefore have a knock-on impact in relation to the identification and reporting of child sexual exploitation and contribute to the 'hidden' nature of this crime (CEOP, 2011).

Other reasons why the issue of child sexual exploitation may stay hidden include: climates of stigma and shame around the issue (Kelly et al. 1995; Kelly and Regan, 2000; Jago and Pearce, 2008); notions of 'dishonour' (Pearce et al., 2009; Berelowitz et al. 2012); feelings of complicity or guilt as a result of having been compelled to commit criminal activity and engage in sexual behaviours; and being subject to threats and intimidation from the exploiters (Beckett, 2011).

Against this backdrop it is unsurprising that what is currently known about child sexual exploitation is believed to reflect a substantial under-representation of its true scale in the UK (CEOP, 2011).

5. Evidence of the links between going missing and child sexual exploitation

Risk factors indicating child sexual exploitation are well established in the research literature and are supported through analysis of child sexual exploitation cases (Beckett, 2011; CEOP, 2011; Jago et al. 2011; OCC, 2012; Berelowitz et al. 2012). They are also believed to be reflected in risk assessment tools (CEOP, 2011) although Jago et al. (2011) note that training of frontline practitioners in identifying and assessing risk cannot always be assumed.

Whilst in practice there is substantial variation in the experience of particular risk factors among sexually exploited children, with individual cases characterised by a complex interplay of these factors[9] and in some cases none of them (CEOP, 2011) 'going missing' is recognised as a risk factor for sexual exploitation within successive research and evaluation studies (see for example, Kelly et al., 1995; Newiss, 1999; Pearce et al. 2002; Hedges, 2002; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2003; Scott and Skidmore, 2006; Barnardo's, 2009; Barnardo's, 2011; Barnardo's, 2011b; Beckett, 2011;

CEOP, 2011; Jago et al., 2011; Phoenix, 2012; OCC, 2012, Berelowitz et al. 2012). Furthermore, children and young people experiencing definite and current sexual exploitation are believed to be at the greatest risk of going missing (Scott and Skidmore, 2006).

Scott and Skidmore (2006:23) describe going missing in the context of child sexual exploitation as 'the most immediate indicator of vulnerability'. Following an evaluation of Barnardo's sexual exploitation services, interventions with exploited young people were seen to result in substantial reductions in risk on measures of going missing. In fact Barnardo's (2011) identifies going missing as one of the 'top four' risk factors for child sexual exploitation and estimates that around 50 per cent of the sexually exploited children and young people it worked with in 2009/10 went missing on a regular basis.

Within its national scoping study on localised grooming, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre describes going missing as particularly 'striking' (CEOP, 2011:47). Despite information not being available for victim experiences of running away or going missing in slightly over half of cases in the CEOP dataset, the majority of victims in the remaining cases had a history of running away from home and being reported missing on multiple occasions. For those cases in the CEOP dataset where the victim did not appear to have a history of going missing or running away, it is suggested that incidents may not have been reported by the parent or carer.

Similarly, Jago et al.'s (2011) exploration of what actions are being undertaken by local partnerships to address child sexual exploitation found that a high proportion of sexually exploited young people 'go missing'. Snapshot data showed that well over half of the sexually exploited young people using child sexual exploitation services on one day were known to have gone missing and, of those, over half had gone missing more than ten times.

Most recently, the interim report of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups notes 'going missing' as a particular area of concern (Berelowitz et al. 2012). Here, 58 per cent of call for evidence submissions stated that children had gone missing from home or care as a result of child sexual exploitation. During all 14 site visits conducted as part of the inquiry, children who were being sexually exploited were also repeatedly going missing, in some cases three or more times within a two week period. Furthermore, of the sexually exploited children interviewed, 70 per cent had gone missing from home.

6. The nature of the links between going missing and child sexual exploitation

Data illustrating the links between going missing and child sexual exploitation gathered by CEOP (2011) was unable to show whether all missing incidents recorded fell before, during or after the period of exploitation. Some children and young people began running away from home after having been groomed by an offender, while others were already engaged in a pattern of repeatedly

running away prior to sexual exploitation.

This is consistent with the research findings of Jago et al. (2011) and Beckett (2011) who suggest that child sexual exploitation can operate in two directions. Children or young people may seek to get away from something (push factors); or to get to somewhere, someone or something (pull factors). This reflects the literature on running away and going missing which identifies 'push' and 'pull' factors as reasons for leaving. As such sexual exploitation is considered to be both a cause and a consequence of going missing (CEOP, 2011).

6.1 Push factors: towards child sexual exploitation

Children and young people may be 'pushed' from their place of residence for a number of reasons. Surveys undertaken by The Children's Society have identified variations in running away rates for young people living in different types of homes and different family structures (Rees, 2011). For example, there is significant evidence that young people not living with their family are more likely than average to run away (see children in care below). In addition, the lifetime running away rates for children living with a lone parent is nearly twice as high compared with young people living with both birth parents. Running away rates are even higher among children living with a parent and a step parent in one home or across two homes (ibid).

Other issues identified within the child sexual exploitation literature that lead young people to be 'pushed' out of home include neglect, physical or sexual abuse, or a general deficit of parenting (Scott & Skidmore, 2006). Some parents or carers of young people may have chaotic lives, involving substance abuse, mental health problems or the experience of domestic violence from a spouse or partner. Sudden changes such as bereavement have also been indentified as factors that might cause difficulties in families, leading to children and young people to go missing or run away (CEOP, 2011).

Only a small proportion of children and young people who run away access help from statutory agencies (Rees, 2011) due to issues of trust and confidentiality and concerns about being immediately returned home if they are under the age of 16. Despite the existence of Section 51 of the Children Act (1989) which allows a young person to stay in refuge for a maximum of 14 consecutive days and a maximum of 21 days in any three month period, this form of support is inaccessible to the vast majority of young people.[10]

Many young people will therefore stay with families or friends (Rees, 2011). However a number will find themselves in risky situations (Barnardo's, 2009) and will be vulnerable to the risk of sexual exploitation (Pearce et al. 2002; Jago and Pearce, 2008; Pearce 2009; CEOP 2011). Plass (2007) suggests that running away from home, almost by definition, places any child in an unprotected and risky situation in which the likelihood of encountering a motivated offender is greatly increased.

As a consequence of being pushed from a place of residence, a child or young person may spend an increasing amount of time on the streets where exploitative adults have unsupervised and unlimited access to vulnerable young people (Payne, 1995; Liabo, 2000). They may also become

involved with other vulnerable young people and exploitative adults through a need for somewhere to hang out and to achieve acceptance (Scott & Skidmore, 2006). Whilst a frequent form of child sexual exploitation in this context is the opportunistic abuse of a young person in need of help by an adult offering accommodation in return for sex (Stein et al. 1994; Payne, 1995; Barrett, 1997; Goulden & Sondhi, 2001; Harris & Robinson, 2007; Jago et al. 2011) it is also noted that, in some cases, perpetrators may specifically target locations that runaways are known to frequent (Kelly et al. 1995).

The most recent 'Still Running' report by the Children's Society (Rees, 2011), found that one in nine young people said they had been hurt or harmed while away from home on the only or most recent occasion. One in six young people said that they had slept rough or stayed with someone they had just met for at least some of the time they were away. One in nine said they had done 'other things' in order to survive (beyond stealing and begging). In addition there was significant overlap between these different experiences i.e. being hurt or harmed, sleeping rough or with someone the young person had just met and risky survival strategies (Rees, 2011).

6.2 Pull factors: as part of child sexual exploitation

As well as being a situation that puts young people at risk, going missing can be a 'symptom' of sexual exploitation (Jago & Pearce, 2008; Jago et al. 2011). The involvement of young people in sexual exploitation does not begin overnight and overt force is rarely used by third parties (Scott & Skidmore, 2006). Instead children and young people may be groomed by the offender to stay away from home for a short period of time, perhaps at the residence of the offender.

In this scenario, the offender becomes a significant 'pull factor' and cultivates a sense of trust and affection with the child before coercing them into sexual activity with friends and associates, leading to them being kept away from home for longer periods of time (CEOP, 2011). Gifts received as part of the grooming process such as clothes, accommodation, money and mobile phones are also observed to enable young people to 'survive' away from home (Melrose, 2004).

CEOP (2011) draws attention to the fact that victim behaviour may be altered as a result of being groomed. Offenders may encourage children to go missing from home with the aim of deliberately causing conflict with parents/carers and creating an atmosphere which would encourage the victim to run away for longer periods of time. It is noted by CROP (2009) that even when victims of child sexual exploitation do not have a dysfunctional family life, the grooming process and subsequent changes in the behaviour of the victim can place families under significant stress.

Repeatedly going missing can therefore indicate a crucial transition period during which young people move back and forth 'between worlds'. Research by Beckett (2011) noted that some young people returning from missing episodes were observed to be tired, unkempt and undernourished and frequently agitated, upset or withdrawn. Furthermore, there was evidence that a number of young people were seriously self-harming on their return and this was suspected to be a reaction to some distressing experience while missing.

Some young people will be reported missing from home or care dozens of time over a year or more. Although agencies may perceive that children or young people who repeatedly go missing from home or care are perhaps at less harm because they are 'streetwise' it is clear from the

evidence that this assumption cannot be sustained (Barnardo's, 2009). Repeated missing episodes may in fact suggest that a child or young person is being groomed and therefore at very high risk of being sexually exploited (CEOP, 2011). It is suggested that around 90 per cent of children and young people who have been subject to sexual grooming will go missing at some stage (DSCF, 2009).

Barnardo's (2011) state that is vital for professionals to recognise this, since all too often the people who exploit children in this way are aware of how the system works. For example, CEOP's (2011) review notes that some perpetrators deliberately return victims home before their curfew in an attempt to avoid detection. Similarly young people who go missing overnight will be returned to their residence in the morning (Evans et al. 2008) and are therefore not currently reflected in local authority reporting to central government if their absence is for less than 24 hours (Berelowitz et al. 2012)[11].

7. Missing from care

Research identifies that looked after children are at particular risk of sexual exploitation (Wade & Biehal, 1998; Rees, 2011; Beckett, 2011, Berelowitz et al. 2012). A number of reasons are noted for this, including heightened risks associated with going missing.

Beckett (2011) notes in her study of child sexual exploitation that one in five of an overall sample of children and young people had been missing overnight or longer within the last year, but that this had risen to three out of five for the residential care population. In some cases, the pattern of going missing had been established prior to entry into care; in others it commenced after young people came into the system (see also Rees, 2011). Some young people appeared to be going missing on their own; whilst others were known to be with other residents or friends from outside their placement.

This reflects findings of the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England that children who are being sexually exploited may introduce other children within children's homes to their exploiters (OCC, 2012). Particular reference has been made to networks of young people within care (and sometimes extending outside the care community) from different areas running away together, having previously met in secure accommodation or via other placements (see also Hedges, 2002).

Repeat running away has itself been identified as the most significant factor leading to young women being placed in secure accommodation; and this could be a factor that accompanies known (existing) exploitation or raises concerns about possible (future) exploitation (Creegan et al., 2005; Harper and Scott, 2005). Benefits of placing young runaways in secure accommodation are perceived to be the possibility of breaking a cycle of behaviour, the opportunity to deliver services to a young person and the opportunity to provide respite from the influence and demands of abusers.

However there is also evidence to suggest that this intervention increases risk for young people. Positive relationships made before entering into secure accommodation may be disrupted as a consequence (Creegan et al., 2005) or negative relationships established whilst in secure

accommodation may be maintained following the young person's return to the community (Beckett, 2011). It is further noted that numerous young people told the Office of the Children's Commissioner's inquiry into child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups that being subject to such interventions meant that they felt professionals were punishing them for the abuse they suffered rather than attempting to identify and address the cause of their behaviour.

8. Trafficking for child sexual exploitation

8.1 Trafficking of children into the UK

A CEOP (2007) scoping report on child trafficking in the UK identifies migrant young people as a specific sub-set of children who go missing from care. This group is often called 'unaccompanied asylum seeking' or 'separated' children and is at particular risk of sexual exploitation, often having been trafficked into the UK for this purpose (Sillen and Beddoe, 2007; CEOP, 2010; Anti Trafficking Monitoring Group, 2010). The missing episode is therefore often the first indicator that the child has been trafficked (APPG, 2012).

Research undertaken by Pearce et al. (2009) suggests that trafficked children and young people frequently go missing at the port of arrival into the country and then again after being placed in local authority care. After looking retrospectively at cases involving vulnerable children from abroad, Beddoe (2007) found that many were known or suspected to have been trafficked into the UK. Of 80 such cases, 60 per cent of children went missing from social services, usually within the first 7 days of being in local authority care and in some cases within 24-72 hours.

A much larger scoping study by CEOP in the same year estimated that 56 per cent of 330 victims of trafficking had also gone missing without trace. For those trafficked children who went missing and were later found, suspicion or evidence of abuse was recognised in the intervening period (CEOP, 2007). Similarly, 183 of 220 victims of trafficking identified by the government over an 18 month period went missing from social service care (Sillen and Beddoe, 2007) as did over half of 60 trafficking cases identified in West Sussex (Harris and Robinson, 2007).

Going missing can therefore be seen as a part of the trafficking process (Pearce, 2009). Beddoe (2007) suggests that young people may go missing as a consequence of following pre-arranged instructions given to them by the trafficker who exerts control over the child and seeks to remove them as soon as possible. Once the child passes through immigration and is accommodated he or she is collected, suggesting that there are persons expecting them in the UK (CEOP, 2007) who effectively use the care system as a 'holding pen' until they are ready to pick the child up (HASC, 2009). CEOP (2007) notes that those trafficking children for sexual exploitation tend to be linked to organised groups at varying levels although there are also cases where children have been trafficked and sexually exploited by one person, highlighting individual opportunists who also engage in this trade.

Another common scenario for trafficked children in local authority care is for them to choose to run away themselves. This may be out of fear of being found by the trafficker (Beddoe, 2007) or it may be because they are afraid of the possible repercussions of revealing information that will implicate the traffickers (Pearce, 2009). It is also noted that young people may run away because they are disturbed by the emotional impact of talking about traumatic experiences (Pearce et al. 2007).

Whatever their reason for running, these children remain at risk of further abuse and exploitation since they will not have any financial resources or identity papers (Beddoe, 2007). Local authorities may not have recorded any information about the child in the form of photos or other identifying details making it difficult to look for them (Anti-Trafficking Group, 2010).

It has also been alleged that when trafficked children go missing, the police and children's services do not always respond in the same way as they would if a British child had gone missing (HASC, 2009). For example, local authorities may view child trafficking as an immigration issue (APPG, 2012).

Indeed, in a strategic threat assessment, CEOP (2010) estimated that almost two-thirds of trafficked children are never found. In some cases children may even be sexually exploited whilst still under the care of the authorities. For example, children may be put in unsuitable accommodation and be seen to be disappearing at regular times of the day (CEOP, 2007; Berelowitz et al. 2012). Evidence to a recent All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) inquiry into children missing from care heard that trafficked children are being accommodated in provision such as bed and breakfast, hostels and supported lodgings which do not have the level of supervision and specialist support needed to prevent trafficked children from going missing or being targeted for further exploitation (APPG, 2012).

8.2 Trafficking of children outside of the UK

Links between going missing and trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation tend only to be recognised in cases where a young person has been trafficked into the UK and who then subsequently disappears from local authority care (Arocha, 2010). Yet another form of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation is increasingly being recognised in the context of young British Nationals being forced into marriage abroad (CEOP, 2010; see also Sharp, forthcoming).

This is based on the argument that forced and under-age marriage is a form of child sexual exploitation since it too may be motivated by a third party receiving financial gain and is undertaken in the knowledge that movement of the child will almost certainly result in sexual violence (Mikhail, 2002; Asquith and Turner, 2008; Bokhari, 2009; HM Government, 2009).

The Child Exploitation Online and Protection (CEOP) Centre notes that it is possible that this trend is under-reported as forcibly removing a young person from the UK for the purposes of marriage abroad may not always be considered to qualify as 'trafficking'. However a strategic threat assessment of child trafficking undertaken by the Centre identified a number of cases in which girls were believed to have been trafficked and forced into marriage (CEOP, 2010).

There are therefore scenarios in which a young person may go missing from school (House of

Commons, 2008; HM Government, 2009; HM Government 2010; NPIA, 2010) and their social networks for this purpose.

8.3 Trafficking of children within the UK

It is recognised that child trafficking for the purposes of child sexual exploitation does not have to involve crossing international borders (Sillen & Beddoe, 2007). Research undertaken by Pearce at al. (2009) suggests that trafficking can be divided between children and young people who are trafficked from abroad and then internally trafficked within the UK (see also CEOP, 2007) and indigenous UK nationals who are trafficked within the UK. Under section 58 of the Sexual Offences Act (2003), being moved for the purposes of child sexual exploitation within the UK is recognised as internal trafficking, regardless of the triviality of the distance moved. The first successful prosecution of this practice took place in May 2012.

The purposeful movement of children for sexual exploitation within the UK is noted by Barnardo's (2009) which states that, when a child or young person goes missing regularly or for several days at a time, their case worker is always alert to the possibility that the young person may have been taken away to other towns. Some young people may report having been moved to a different location, others may be found in areas with which they have no known connection (Barnardo's, 2011). CEOP (2011) notes how this can have a disorientating effect on the victim and is consistent with observations that movement into an unfamiliar area means that previous coping mechanisms based on local knowledge become undermined.

Barnardo's (2011) further describe how young people (who are often connected) are passed through networks, over geographic distances and between towns and cities where they may be forced into sexual activity with multiple men. In some cases internal trafficking for child exploitation may even involve the organised 'buying and selling' of young people by perpetrators who may not always be engaging in sexual activity themselves, but arranging for others to do so (CEOP, 2011).

Beckett (2011) identifies trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation in her exploration of the issue in Northern Ireland. In this study, a number of cases were reported of young people across the border of Northern Ireland after going missing, with concern expressed as to how young people were able to travel such distances, without any obvious resources to do so. In some cases, abusers were reported to be explicitly facilitating this, through transporting young people themselves, arranging taxis and/or providing money for transport.

Taxi firms have certainly been implicated in a number of sexual exploitation cases (see Pearce et al. 2002; Barnardo's, 2011; OCC, 2012). Offenders are reported to be picking victims up from near their homes, on the street or from parks and driving them to other locations. In a number of cases, the taxi itself can be the location of the exploitation (CEOP, 2011).

CEOP also notes how moving children and young people around the country may be part of a deliberate strategy by the perpetrator to prevent any single police force area obtaining a picture of the complete pattern of offending behaviour (at the very least, the disorientating effect of being moved to multiple locations makes it harder for victims to report the identities and numbers of perpetrators involved – Berelowitz et al. 2012). It is therefore unsurprising that questions have

been raised about effective information sharing between Local Safeguarding Children Boards and police to identify and track young people who go missing, including those abducted and forcibly moved within the UK (Jago et al. 2011).

9. Missing from home

As the report of the early findings from the Office of the Children Commissioner's Inquiry (England) into child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups observes, the research literature consistently notes that the victimisation of children in care may be easier to identify than children at home (OCC, 2012). Yet detailed analysis of data submitted to the Inquiry found that for sexually exploited children the majority of missing reports were for children missing from their family home (see also Berelowitz et al. 2012). Moreover it was found that on occasions when missing incidents are unknown, children are living at the family home with or without social worker involvement.

This indicates that, in some areas, agencies may be focusing exclusively on children in care or known to social services when seeking to identify children at risk or known to be sexually exploited. The evidence further suggests that children and young people who go missing are being exploited in a range of circumstances and that it is the relationships within homes and the pull factors of the exploitation outside of the home that will influence whether and how regularly a child runs away.

10. Abduction and kidnapping

There is evidence to suggest that victims of child sexual exploitation are abducted by their perpetrators (Pearce et al. 2002; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2003; OCC, 2012; Berelowitz et al. 2012). The Office of the Children's Commissioner for England (Berelowitz et al. 2012) notes that sexually exploited children may be abducted for periods of time and kept with limited access to food, water and washing facilities.

It has also been reported that children and young people in care may be abducted by their traffickers if they are about to disclose information about the abuse they have experienced or are in the process of doing so (Pearce et al., 2009). Similarly, sexually exploited young women have been kidnapped in order to stop them giving evidence in court (Swann and Balding, 2001).

As such, an important disruption technique used by the police is the issuing of a Child Abduction Warning which makes it an offence for any individual unconnected to a child under the age of 16 to take the child away without legal authority.

11. The 'need' to go missing - escaping from sexual exploitation

Little research has been undertaken into exit strategies for victims of sexual exploitation. However Firmin (2011) found in a study of girls being sexually exploited by gangs that the threat of violence extended to include choosing to exit, with some participants claiming to fear other females associated to the gang being sent into refuge provision to find them.

12. Summary

A number of key themes emerge from this research review which can be used to inform future thinking in relation to both policy and practice. These are outlined below:

- **Child sexual exploitation is linked to many different 'types' of missing incident.** Not only do missing incidents include running away from or being forced to leave home or care but also being trafficked into, out of and within the UK, being abducted and being kidnapped.
- **Going missing is both a cause and consequence of child sexual exploitation** and is a risk factor that is applicable to children missing from home and care environments. Evidence suggests that attention needs to be paid to the quality of relationships with care givers across different types of caring environments and addressing the 'pull factors' used by exploiters.
- **Repeated missing incidents, however long in duration, indicate a high level of vulnerability to child sexual exploitation**. Child sexual exploitation is not easily identified and therefore going missing even for short periods of time may indicate that a young person is moving back and forth 'between worlds'. Crucial windows of opportunity exist when a young person returns from a missing incident to investigate the missing incident further and to understand levels of risk and harm.
- **Over 16s are vulnerable to child sexual exploitation** in the same way young people under 16 years of age are. They too often lack access to accommodation and financial resources, but are less likely to be recognised as in need of protection due to their age and professional perception around 'consent'.
- **Child sexual exploitation and missing incidents can be linked to other issues** such as forced marriage.
- **Victims of child sexual exploitation may need to go missing** in order to escape their exploiters yet there is little support available that supports young people who seek to exert control over their situation – for example, safe specialist accommodation to flee to.

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[1] More details can be found at: https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/missing-people/about/projects

[2] These figures include young people up to the age of 24

[3] 22 cases were analysed; ethnicity was not recorded

[4] As defined/identified in Jago et al. 2011

[5] Missing from home or care; victim of a sexual offence; engagement in offending; lacking friends from the same age group; repeat sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy and terminations or poor mental health; recruiting others into exploitative situations; living in a chaotic household or history of abuse or children in care; absent from school; excluded from education; self-harm or thoughts/attempts at suicide; and drug or alcohol misuse.

[6] Although it is recognised that 'choices' can be limited, especially for sexually exploited children and young people (see page 5)

[7] The Office of the Children's Commissioner for England recommends that a review of all legislation and guidance which makes reference to children as 'prostitutes' or involved in prostitution should be initiated by the Government (OCC, 2012).

[8] See also Phoenix (2012:4) for a discussion on how misguided attempts to 'protect' can result in the criminalisation of sexually exploited girls and women.

[9] The interim report of the Office of the Children's Commissioner urges professionals to assess risk using multiple indicators; for example the use of 'going missing' as an indicator on its own will result in bias towards the identification of young women as girls are more likely to be reported missing from home than boys (Berelowitz, et al. 2012).

[10] There are currently only 2 refuge places available for young people across the whole of England (TCS, 2011)

[11] The Department for Education is currently reviewing this.

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