

“Yes, but there are other children actually being abused”

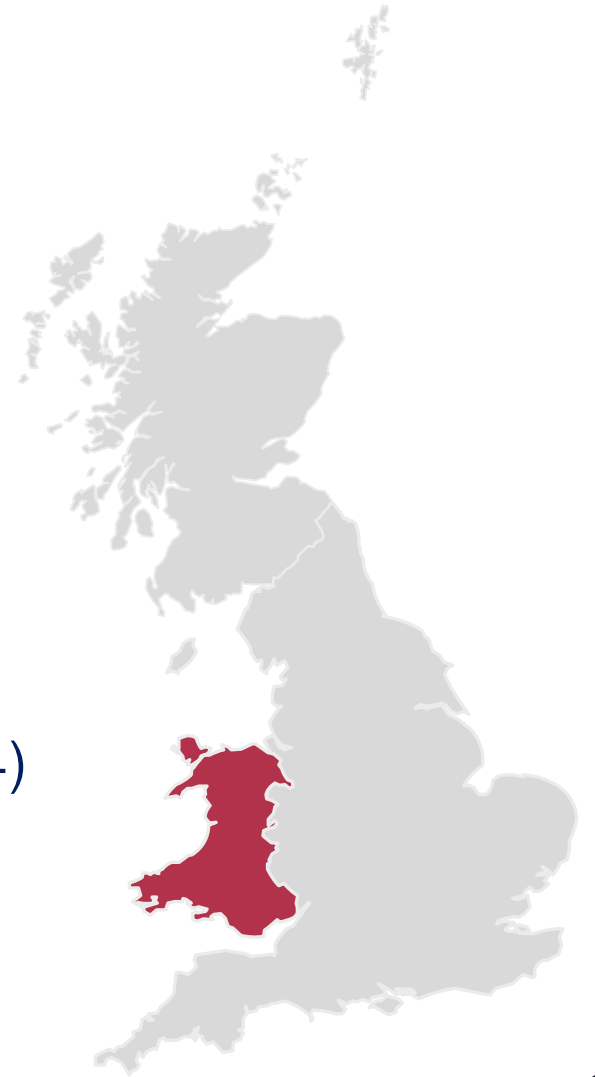
Using simulation to examine how professionals identify and respond to the criminal exploitation of children

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Background

- **No exact figures about prevalence**
 - No statutory definition or clear service pathways
 - Inconsistencies across services
- **Failed by the systems designed to protect them**
 - Local authorities 'give way' to the police (Jay Review, 2024)
 - Children must prove their victimhood
 - Contrasts with welfare principle



Study aims

- To provide insight into the referral routes and service pathways for criminally exploited children and how best to support them
 - Examine the referral and service pathways for criminally exploited children
 - Explore the education, health and social outcomes associated with service provision
 - Identify what factors influence professional decision-making about service pathways

Methods

Chronological case study framework 2022 - 2025

Phase one: Data collection

One Welsh local authority

Referred to a multi-agency exploitation meeting: 2021 to 2023
(n = 162)

Phase two: Analysis

Data linkage with administrative datasets: CSC, education, health
(n = 162)

Simulation data extraction and development (n = 15)

Phase three: Results

Visually mapping chronologies using linked data

Professional decision making with two Welsh local authorities (n = 28)

Simulation

- Children referred to an exploitation panel meeting (n = 162)
 - Timelines (n = 15)
- Peer researcher with lived experience of exploitation
 - Training: research ethics and data analysis
 - Data: second stage of anonymization and further synthesis
 - Analysis: Indicators, actions, similarities and differences
- Data map

Case study

- Known to services from birth – rapid escalation of risk
- **Indicators**
 - Young carer – kinship care – foster carer
 - Disengagement from school
 - Challenging behaviours
 - Seen with known drug dealers
 - Missing episodes
 - Victim of violence
- Case file – 26 documents, 201 pages

The simulated task

- **Participants**
 - 25 professionals from multi-agency roles
 - 3 young people (16-18 years)
- **The task**
 - Review case file (60 minutes)
 - Think aloud technique
 - *What do you think is happening for Charlie?*
 - *What actions do you think should be taken?*
 - Survey

What are
you
thinking?

Navigating the file

- **Data management**
 - Lack of familiarity with case files
 - Missing and incomplete data
 - Selective rather than sequential
 - Formal rather than informal documents
- **Historical data**
 - Average = 8 documents, range 1 to 18
- **Incoming data**
 - All 25 participants

“it’s like CSI trying to figure it all out”

Gender stereotypes

“I just assumed because she took on the caring role of a mum in the beginning that she was a girl, but she doesn't have to be a girl. She could be a boy, which throws a different slant on it altogether, doesn't it, if she was a boy, because she would...or would it ... No, she'd get the same support”



Different interpretations

*“So he's **off the rails**,
bless him, isn't he?
Attempted break-in,
attempted theft”*

*“...claimed they had been
forced to break in by an
older male, but they
couldn't give a description.
So again, I'm just making
notes there in terms of
**possible child criminal
exploitation** which is being
referenced there”*

*“Okay, so pretty low level. I
wouldn't go as far as to call
it trying to break into a
shop, could have just been
to steal some sweets, could
have actually been to **nick
some stuff for the house,
food**, whatever, you know,
it's perfectly possible”*

Welfare versus justice

- **Disconnect between think aloud and survey responses**
 - Child in need of care and support plan (n = 23/96%)
 - Child protection plan (n = 21/84%)

“We've got all these CCE concerns which are being passed on as a youth justice problem because I think that's how CCE is seen, it's seen as crime, and a police thing so ‘youth justice service can sort that out’ because I don't think people see it as abuse” (Stephanie)

Proposed actions

“focused on his behaviours and what he's doing wrong, but actually, nobody's kind of saying, well, why and what can we do to fix this?”

(Stephanie)

- **Multi-agency strategy meeting**
 - Partner roles and responsibilities
 - Prevent – unknown males
 - Protect – ‘who validates you?’
- **School exclusion**
 - Zero tolerance policy

Thank you for listening

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