

1) Young people over the age of 16 cannot be sexually exploited as they are over the age of consent.

FALSE - The age of consent in England and Wales is 16. Sexually exploited children over the age of 16 are often perceived as capable of consenting to sex and hence do not meet the thresholds for child protection. Young people can consent to sex, but they cannot consent to exploitation. The Children Acts 1989 and 2004 as well as the government guidance clearly state that all children under the age of 18 should be safeguarded. Consent is defined in section 74 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 as an agreement by choice where the person concerned has the freedom and capacity to make that choice. In almost all cases involving grooming the child's capacity is undermined by virtue of imbalance of power between her and her perpetrator, the control exercised and the manipulation or use of force. (Cropuk.org and Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation – Action Plan DfE 2012)

2) The age profiles for the majority of child sexual exploitation offenders is 18-24.

TRUE - Research conducted by CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Agency) indicated that offenders are disproportionately skewed towards young adults within the 18-24 age range, with almost half of the offenders being under 25 where their age is known. The relative youth of the offender population is a striking feature of the data that is distinct from a common profile of the older male abuser.

3) Girls are 6 times more likely to be at risk of becoming victims of sexual exploitation than boys.

TRUE – Barnado's two year research study, evaluating their work with young people in London, published in 2006, indicated that girls and young women were more than 6 times as likely as boys and young men to be identified as being at risk, but it was widely understood that actual risks to males were probably underestimated. (Puppet on a String, Barnado's 2011)

4) 'Trafficking' involves moving victims from one country to another.

FALSE – „Trafficking“ can involve victims being moved across borders, but it can also mean children and young people being moved around within a country, between cities, towns or even within a locality, between streets, for the purpose exploitation. There is increasing concern that child sexual exploitation is becoming more organised, with networks moving children from town to town, or locality to locality within a city, specifically to be abused. The UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) is working to raise awareness of this form of child abuse, which is identified in some cases as serious organised crime.

Section 58 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 specifies that trafficking within the UK for sexual exploitation is an offence punishable by up to 14 years imprisonment. However, the true extent of this crime has been difficult to measure because victims frequently feel too afraid or ashamed to make a formal complaint, or have been carefully and expertly groomed not to recognise themselves as the victim. (Puppet on a String, Barnado's 2011)

5) If a young person sends a sexualised image to a partner this is against the law.

If YP is under 18 this is classed as child pornography. Many C&YP are enticed online to send a couple of pictures or to pose for a webcam. This material is then used to black mail them into being exploited.

6) Child Sexual Exploitation mainly happens to children who are in care, or who come from dysfunctional families.

FALSE - All children from all kinds of families and backgrounds are equally vulnerable, by virtue of their age. Children from families where there may be problems could be additionally vulnerable as perpetrators tend to identify a child's vulnerabilities early on and exploit them to their advantage. Assuming the child's family background as the route cause of her abuse puts the focus of intervention in the wrong place and disempowers family members who often struggle to protect their child from exploitation. It is vital to remember that the specific support needs of all families around the exploitation of their child are not dissimilar, even though some may have additional support needs. (Cropuk.org)

7) Street gangs protect 'their own'. Child sexual exploitation is not an issue within gang culture.

FALSE – The extent of sexual exploitation of young women and young men in gang-affected neighbourhoods is hidden behind the apparent „normalisation“ of sexual violence, the fear of reprisal following disclosure of violence and a belief amongst young people that involvement in criminal activity negates their right to protection from the state.

North American studies of girls in gang-affected neighbourhoods suggest that the gang appears to offer a way out of and protection from, difficult family situations. This is called the „Seduction Model“ where the gang appears to offer inclusion, affection and protection.

These studies show that gang membership may be the “rational choice” in the face of the limited options and opportunities available to girls and young women.

Girls and young women engage in criminal activities to maintain status. If they lose status, they are vulnerable to assault and sexual exploitation by gang members, sometimes with the active support of their „boyfriends. Some girls and young women have been introduced to drugs in the gang and, once addicted, made to sell sex to pay for them, this is a clear form of sexual exploitation.

Once associated with a gang, links to „home“ and more conventional peers tend to be weakened.

When girls do leave the gang it tends to be the result of an event or a series of events that have altered the girls' perception of the gang as a safe place to be. This could be an arrest followed by incarceration, being badly beaten up, seeing this happen to a friend, or being forced into sexually exploitative behaviours, which they found unacceptable.

The most recent research in the UK echoes the North American research. (Firmin 2010) (Youth Gangs, Sexual Violence and Sexual Exploitation University of Bedford/Children's Commissioner 2011)

8) Over the past 5 years the average age of service users, accessing Barnado's services is 15 years old.

FALSE – Barnado’s 2 year London study in 2006 indicated that the peak age for exploitation was 15, although children as young as 10 were identified as being at risk. However, over the past 5 years the evidence shows that victims are getting younger, with the average age of service users falling from 15 to 13 years of age. (Puppet on a String, Barnado’s 2011)

9) Child sexual exploitation is very rare and only happens in a few locations, particularly big cities.

FALSE – CSE is far more prevalent than people imagine. It can happen anywhere, not just large towns and cities. However, it will be hidden, and only uncovered by people having a better knowledge of the risks, vulnerabilities, methods, and indicators, being vigilant and reporting their concerns. (Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation – Action Plan DfE 2012)

10) Young people are usually contacted via social media by perpetrators.

Usually groomed online.

Some children and young people are trafficked into or within the UK for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation can also happen to young people in gangs.