

The Adapted SIPPS for CSE: Evaluation of a Pilot Project in a South London Borough

Practitioner's Insight

The Adapted SIPPS for CSE: Evaluation of a Pilot Project in a South London Borough

Craig Barlow*

Abstract: The Systemic Investigation, Protection and Prosecution Strategy (SIPPS) was developed by the author and colleagues as a prototype of a methodology for use within the criminal justice system in responding to Modern Slavery and Trafficking of Human Beings. The positive impact on the process of prosecution of such cases has led to a number of convictions of Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) and individuals. The principles were developed for practical use by social workers responding to child sexual exploitation (CSE) in one south London Borough. The adaptation of the theoretical principles of the SIPPS for CSE is described and the impact of the pilot project is discussed along with proposed future directions.

Keywords: child sexual exploitation; trafficking; safeguarding; risk assessment * Craig Barlow Msc.FPC, BA Hons, DipSW.

University of Hull; Wilberforce Institute for the study of Slavery and Emancipation (WISE) Contact: C.Barlow@2016.hull.ac.uk

The European Review of Organised Crime 4(2), 2017, pp. 101-127. ISSN: 2312-1653

© ECPR Standing Group of Organised Crime.

For permissions please email: european.review.oc@gmail.com

Introduction

This is a descriptive account of a project that had as its objectives the development of a child sexual exploitation (CSE) risk assessment protocol for social workers in a South London borough. The protocol that emerged from this project was the Adapted Systemic Investigation, Protection and Prosecution Strategy (SIPPS) for CSE.

The project was not designed as research but a pragmatic process of professional practice

development for qualified social workers within a Children and Families Department of the local authority social services. As such, the project aimed to provide a framework for structured professional judgement and decision making based on an understanding of CSE as emerging from complex systems. The underlying premise is that the sexual exploitation of children is constantly changing: it adapts to new pressures and opportunities but at the same time maintains its cohesion based upon the characteristics of suitable targets for exploitation, the needs and motivations of those that exploit, the context in which the exploitation occurs and the relational dynamics of these elements over time. This therefore has implications for all agencies working to identify, prevent, investigate and prosecute trafficking and exploitation cases. The project produced a risk assessment protocol and training program that educated practitioners in the nature of child sexual exploitation, victimology, behavioural patterns of both individual perpetrators organised groups or networks of perpetrators, and relevant civil and criminal law.

This article will describe the genesis of the project and provides a narrative account of its development: the training programme that supported the roll out of the Adapted SIPPS across all operational children's services, and its impact upon the service. This article also describes how the Adapted SIPPS for CSE was originally rooted in the author's professional practice in the criminal prosecution of trafficking and modern slavery cases. It explains how this experience led to the development of investigation and prosecution strategies that were adapted for application to CSE risk assessment and management.

The South London Borough project refers to the roll out of the Adapted SIPPS as a Risk Assessment protocol which was supported by a comprehensive training programme. The data that informs this article is feedback from participants in the training course obtained from course evaluation forms and direct feedback from participants in person or via email once they had administered the Adapted SIPPS tool in their casework. The course evaluation forms were designed as management feedback mechanisms rather than quantitative and qualitative research methods. Thus, the forms used a combination of simple Likert scales and free text that offered participants the opportunity to make comments and suggestions to inform the ongoing design and delivery of the training program and comment upon the SIPPS tool.

A detailed overview of the Adapted SIPPS and its underlying theoretical principles is provided. The initial, face validity of the model is discussed and future directions for its ongoing development and application are suggested.

Context to the Project

In 2014 -15 the statutory responses to the problem of exploitation of children were based upon flawed constructs concerning the children that are exploited, the perpetrators and processes of the exploitation. These constructs have been perpetuated by an abundance of so-called indicators of

trafficking and exploitation which are insufficiently differentiated from markers for other forms of abuse and neglect. As a result, understanding of the problem was, and remains, reductive and interventions limited in terms of scope and flexibility situating the problem primarily with the child. This leads to restrictive safeguarding plans based upon reducing accessibility to the child, a “target hardening” approach that offers relatively few positive, long-term outcomes for children that have been identified as trafficked and exploited.

As a secret or hidden phenomenon, the trafficking and exploitation of children, be that through sexual exploitation, forced criminal activity, or forced labour and domestic servitude, is surrounded by myths assumptions and false perceptions that are reinforced by political agendas, sensationalist reporting and representations of victims both within the news and popular media. Organisations that aim to safeguard children from sexual exploitation can also reinforce a narrative that portrays stereotypical images of victims in need of rescue, even though such children can be resistant to such interventions and often have a tendency to run away from the care and protection such organisations endeavour to provide (Shipton et al., 2016). These elements coalesce to form complex systems in which abuse and exploitation is maintained.

In 2015, after serious cases of child sexual exploitation (CSE) had emerged in Rochdale, Rotherham, Oxfordshire and the Midlands, professionals were under increasing pressure and criticism for not identifying children as victims of CSE (Stevenson, 2015). Despite this criticism, little by way of practical advice and guidance was available. Checklists and “signs and indicators” of CSE could realistically apply as descriptions of the behaviours and lifestyles of many children known to social workers. Terminology such as “missing from care”, “trafficking” and “exploitation” were used to describe some of the aspects of this form of child sexual abuse but a lack of consistency in measures, definitions and descriptive language across agencies created confusion among practitioners. The lack of an effective framework for risk assessment of cases of child sexual exploitation in one London Borough led the Head of the child safeguarding department to commission an effective, research based tool and an accompanying training programme. This resulted in the development of the Adapted SIPPS for CSE based on the model that was being developed by the author and barrister Caroline Haughey for prosecuting cases of modern slavery.

A Possible New Approach

The Systemic Investigation, Protection and Prosecution Strategy (SIPPS) had its roots in a 2013 complex case of child sexual exploitation. Although successful, investigators noted difficulties at the prosecution stage. Live monitoring of a prosecution by the author raised questions about the way in which evidence was presented and the way witnesses and defendants were treated and behaved in Court. Of particular interest was the way in which jurors responded to the evidence and examination of witnesses.

As a response to these difficulties, the SIPPS was initially developed by the author as a pathway for the investigation and prosecution of cases of modern slavery and trafficking of human beings and has supported the successful prosecution of 20 offenders from 3 separate and unconnected organised crime groups during the period of 2015-2016. It has also contributed to effective assessments of risk and safeguarding plans (including a successful application to the Judge for Public Interest Intervention to protect a vulnerable witness in one criminal trial). During this period there were also wider developments in the national response to the trafficking and exploitation of children and vulnerable adults.

In the UK, The Modern Slavery Act 2015 finally provided a statutory definition of the trafficking of human beings, slavery, servitude and exploitation of children and adults. In addition to the definitions and statutory framework set out in the Modern Slavery Act, the Serious Crime Act 2015 provided a clear definition of what constitutes serious crime and an organised crime group. Based upon these definitions, the sexual abuse of children by two or more people working together for this purpose over time could constitute an organised crime group and make them liable to the associated statutory sanctions.

The new legislation provided a legal framework by which these crimes against vulnerable people can be identified, prevented or disrupted by the use of Slavery and Trafficking Prevention and Criminal Behaviour Orders (STPOs and CBOs). However, to do so requires understanding of the complexities of such cases; the varied forms of exploitation, vulnerabilities, interpersonal dynamics, roles and responsibilities the nature of child sexual violence within the context of youth gangs and comparisons with other forms of organised crime group, network or joint enterprise.

The author and colleagues discussed the need for a new approach to assessing and presenting evidence in the preparation for trial: the following guiding principles were applied:

1. Context gives meaning to behaviour. The young people in the complex case of 2013 had made many decisions that had brought them into contact with their abusers and, to some extent, they had been “uncooperative” with police and social workers for example: being untruthful, avoiding or missing agreed appointments, being hostile and aggressive and at times protective of their abusers. Whilst this behaviour was hard to work with understanding the young person’s adverse early life experiences and the level of violence exerted against them or witnessed by them in the course of the sexual exploitation meant that many of their decisions were rational given the circumstances under which they were made. Analysis of the young person’s history, behaviours and beliefs about their relationship with and to the defendants could be used to develop the vulnerable witness interview strategy and prosecution strategy.

2. The nature of coercive and controlling behaviour by the offenders and relationships

between members of the group also needed to be understood to formulate hypotheses for their motivation to target and sexually abuse young teenage girls. Sexual gratification was an inadequate explanation for the degree of aggression and violence exerted by some of the offenders. Modus operandi and a suspect's known criminal history could be analysed and used to inform suspect interview strategies and understand victim impact. Subsequently, this analysis could be used to develop cross examination strategies in Court.

These investigative and analytical principles were established and then refined through practice during the prosecution of R-v-M and others in 2014 - 2015. Central to the offending were the multiple rapes of a young (18 year-old) female sex worker who had come under the control of an Organised Crime Group (OCG) that was controlling prostitutes in brothels in South London. The SIPPS Model was developed at this stage as a conceptual framework for: (i) obtaining the evidence from the complainant that reflected what had happened to her and; (ii) the cross examination of the defendants in the most effective and compelling way possible.

The same strategy was applied to a similar case in June 2015. The case involved a much larger organised crime group and a larger number of adult female victims that had been trafficked from Hungary for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Prosecuting counsel used this approach to explain and describe some of the relationships within the organised crime group, focusing on one especially sexually violent offender and his effect upon the dynamics of the group as a whole. The approach also enabled counsel to unravel the paradoxical and dependent relationship between some of the trafficked women and their exploiters.

Also in 2015, the SIPPS model was used during the first successful prosecution of a case of domestic servitude in a marriage context. The SIPPS approach was proving to have a clear utility to police officers and prosecutors in the context of human trafficking, modern slavery and associated organised crime. However, it still was not formalised in terms of a protocol or set of guidance for investigation and prosecution of modern slavery offences or as an approach to risk assessment and safety planning. The opportunity to develop such a protocol emerged out of a separate project to produce a child safeguarding risk assessment protocol for the South London Borough.

Development of the Adapted SIPPS for CSE

During 2014 work was completed on another risk assessment protocol: the Family Risk and Safety Assessment (FRaSA). The tool was a response to concerns among safeguarding social workers about the lack of a robust model for risk assessment. The FRaSA is a structured professional judgement tool that is designed to tap risk for physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect. The tool was well received by social workers, supervisors and managers who reported on its utility as a risk assessment framework, supervision tool and report structure. However, it was not designed to

assess risk for sexual abuse and exploitation.

An area of growing concern for the safeguarding department was the issue of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and a lack of risk assessment protocols in this area. A number of risk assessment tools were reviewed by the author and colleagues within the department and found to be inadequate. All examples were based substantially upon the Banardo's Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (Clutton & Coles, 2007). This framework had been criticised by Baroness Jay in her Serious Case Review of Child Sexual Exploitation cases in Rotherham between 1997 and 2013 (Jay, 2014).

Based upon the feedback concerning the FRaSA and the success of the emerging SIPPS Model in R-v-M, a risk assessment protocol for CSE was commissioned by the Head of Safeguarding Services in December 2014. By February 2015 the first draft of the Adapted SIPPS for Child Sexual Exploitation was produced (so called as it was adapted from the developing SIPPS concept for trafficking and modern slavery). This draft was agreed and an initial training course on the Adapted SIPPS was run for 14 social work managers from the Child Safeguarding and the Looked After Children (LAC) services within the borough in February 2015. The managers consequently provided positive feedback and suggestions, which were used to develop a three-day programme that was rolled out across all operational children's services between May 2015 and January 2016 (see Table 1).

Table 1. Evaluation by PGLs of The Adapted SIPPS Tool at the end of the first training course (n=14)

Source: author's own.

From this training, feedback forms were returned by 72 participants between September 2015 and January 2016 within which the utility of the SIPPS tool, their satisfaction with the tool and the training, and detailed evaluation of the content of the training programme were rated. 65.3% of respondents rated the Adapted SIPPS tool as Excellent. 34.7% rated the tool Good. 58.3% of respondents reported that they were extremely satisfied with the training that supported the Adapted SIPPS tool, 40.3% reported that they were very satisfied and 1.4% were neutral.

Direct feedback from practitioners using the SIPPS model “in the field” is equally positive as it has been used to inform direct work, professional meetings, case conferences and to structure supervision meetings. In one case, practitioners identified a vulnerable adult as possibly being a victim of human trafficking and /or sexual exploitation with sufficient evidence to warrant a referral to the National Referral Mechanism, or Home Office Notification (under section 51 The Modern Slavery Act), indicating practitioners' ability to apply the model to other areas of safeguarding.

Description of The Adapted Systemic Investigation, Protection and Prosecution Strategy (Adapted SIPPS)

The Adapted SIPPS for CSE provided practitioners with a new approach to the investigation or assessment of, and intervention in, cases of Child Sexual Exploitation. It draws on the Systemic Investigation, Protection and Prosecution Strategy (SIPPS) for Modern Slavery (Barlow and Haughey 2015—unpublished) and supports the Government's Modern Slavery Strategy (2015) and the UK Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner's Strategy for 2015-2017 (Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, 2015).

The Adapted SIPPS is a structured professional judgement protocol to assist social workers and officers in the assessment of risk for CSE. Rather than providing a checklist of signs and indicators for CSE, the protocol evaluates vulnerability to sexual exploitation along a developmental and temporal pathway characterised by Historic (static) Conditional Factors, Current Conditional (dynamic) Factors and Consequential (acute dynamic or “trigger”) Factors.

It provides practitioners with an approach to collecting and, importantly, analysing information to develop a progression of relevant question towards a realistic description of a child's past and current circumstances, and an estimation of the likelihood of them being sexually exploited either imminently or in the future. This approach enables practitioners to account for the unpredictable dynamics of the abusive and exploitative relationship and environmental factors that may facilitate or mitigate abuse and exploitation.

The model might be described as an emergent constructivist approach to assessment and investigation. As such it is informed by the four fundamental tenets of Grounded Theory research described by Charmaz (2008) and adapted here as:

1. Minimising preconceived ideas about the case and its characteristics.
2. Simultaneously using information gathering and analysis to inform each other.
3. Remaining open to varied explanations and/or understandings of the information.
4. Focuses on information analysis to construct middle-range theories.

The Adapted SIPPS for CSE approach to risk assessment, intervention and management does not provide a rigid list of “signs and signals” and numerical rating systems or risk categories, such as those that were criticised by Baroness Jay. Rather the items are arranged in a worksheet that is used as an *aide memoir*, an approach inspired and influenced by similar protocols such as the HCR-20 assessment of violence risk (Webster et al., 1997) and the Risk of Sexual Violence Protocol (Hart et al., 2003). The worksheet is intended to prompt thought and analysis of the available information and using this to undertake the next step in the assessor’s enquiry (finding gaps and questions, identifying the next relevant source of information).

The SIPPS Worksheet was developed to provide a framework within which practitioners could organise complex evidence systemically: It organises Historic Conditional Risk Factors, Current Conditional Risk Factors and Consequential Factors in the following domains

- Education
- Home / Environment
- Behaviour
- Psychological / Mental Health
- Physical Health
- Sexual Health

The Worksheet addresses factors associated with suspected or potential abusers and organises data according to the following domains:

- Personal Details (any identifying information)
- Social Network (identifying links between the suspect and the children and potentially other associated offenders that might constitute an organised crime group or network)
- Environment /Situation (areas where they may have contact, interaction with the young person)
- Police Record
- Behaviour (Overcoming Internal Inhibitions)
- Victim Accessing
- Context of Abuse:
- Coercion and Control

The guidance notes and worksheet provided suggestions of causes for concern in each of the

domains based upon current research and professional literature from the disciplines of social work, law enforcement, forensic psychology, criminology, sociology, law. In order for practitioners to identify evidence and understand its relevance they needed to develop their professional knowledge of CSE as a form of child sexual abuse, the existing and incoming new legislation and the relevance of suspected abuser's forensic histories to risk for CSE.

In general, social work training for child safeguarding practitioners does not include criminological theory or criminal law. Empirical research on violence, sexual violence, child sexual abuse, trauma informed practice, criminal behaviour and organised crime was cited in the guidance notes that accompanied the training and the worksheet in support of the relevance of types of evidence that might be located in each assessment domain. This guidance and the exploration of perpetrator behaviour, the structure and dynamics of organised crime groups and organised crime networks was considered crucial to developing professional knowledge and understanding of CSE. Systems Theory is the dominant theory informing social work practice and practitioners responded well to understanding CSE in the context of dynamic networks and the processes of the criminal justice system. Understanding key concepts of organised crime facilitated an understanding of police policies and procedures and the nature of evidence required for both civil and criminal justice interventions.

The worksheet facilitates the assessor/investigator in writing progressively analytic (as opposed to purely descriptive) notes and records. When a systematic, comparative, and interactive approach is taken to the initial part of the assessment (gathering the immediate information and identifying the main concern) open ended strategies begin to emerge: The assessor/investigator can make conjectures and check them against empirical data and with colleagues and witnesses. This inevitably leads to deductive reasoning as the assessment/investigation proceeds. It prompts early analytic thinking and keeps practitioners interacting with their information and sources as well as their initial, loosely formed case hypothesis.

The Adapted SIPPS model emphasises that CSE can be placed upon both a temporal and developmental continuum.

- **It presupposes a past:** Child Sexual Exploitation does not happen in a vacuum. It exists because there are adults that are motivated to engage in sexual activity with children or identify an opportunity to gain by providing children to adults that are seeking children to sexually abuse. Some children may be more likely to be exploited than others. Therefore, it is crucial to make sense of the context from which the child and abuser have come. The context provides the "Historic Conditional" Factors that predispose the child to vulnerability to CSE such as previous maltreatment or exploitation, a history of psychological, emotional and behavioural problems, history of family problems, health problems or disability. Such factors may increase the child's visibility and accessibility to predatory adults. These factors are fixed in so much as they cannot be influenced by intervention or environmental factors.

- **It assumes the immediacy of the present** and the situation or context in which all the protagonists now find themselves: How do they make sense of their predicament, what are their beliefs and relationships to and with each other? In this regard direct interaction with children, their support networks and even the perpetrators is essential to understand their respective constructs. This requires the assessor / investigator to listen to and analyse the discourse of Child Sexual Exploitation for example: the perception of and portrayal of children that have been exploited as being completely without agency, patterns of peer on peer sexual violence and exploitation such as occurs in gang contexts, the racialisation of the problem in terms of victims and perpetrators, and the role of protective agencies.
- **Finally, this model implies a future:** What will happen in the short, medium and long term both with and without intervention? What are the most likely scenarios? What needs to happen in order to keep the child or children safe and reduce the likelihood of re-victimisation or transition from victim to perpetrator?

Use of the Adapted SIPPS for CSE

CSE incorporates acts of sexual and non-sexual violence and intimidation. The acts can vary with respect to such things as relationship to the victim(s), severity of physical or psychological harm, use of weapons and implements, motivations etc. Child sexual exploitation assessment is defined as the process of evaluating individuals to:

1. Characterise the risk/threat that a child is being or is likely to be sexually exploited based upon characteristics of the child and potential exploiter or exploiters.
2. Develop interventions to manage and reduce that risk.

The purpose of risk for sexual exploitation assessment and risk management should be the prevention of sexual violence and the consequent harm that it causes. This must address not only the characteristics and behaviours of the child (for example through “target hardening” safety plans that aim to reduce the visibility and accessibility of a vulnerable child to motivated abusers). The assessment should also address the behaviours, routines, motivations and victim accessing patterns of perpetrators and other human and environmental factors that collude with, or unconsciously facilitate, the abuse for example: the use of mini-cabs and hotels to transport and accommodate children for exploitation, flawed assumptions of police officers and social workers or the marginalisation of children living in extreme poverty, lacking protective supervision and support from adults or those with difficult and anti-social behaviours. It is therefore, the daunting task of professionals to understand how and why a person has come to be harmed or to harm others in the past to determine whether the antecedents to that event might lead to similar events reoccurring.

This assessment and investigative procedure needed to be reliable by producing replicable,

consistent results. It was used to identify, evaluate and prioritise health, social care and law enforcement/legal services that can work together to manage the risk of child sexual exploitation. The training programme was developed to ensure the consistency of assessment and decision making between practitioners and different teams.

The Adapted SIPPS for CSE model is one of structured professional judgment, reflecting the growing consensus of support for such models in safeguarding risk assessment work (Barlow et al., 2012); it is a model that supports professionals in making clearly articulated, transparent, defensible decisions and interventions.

Scope of the Adapted SIPPS for CSE

The Adapted SIPPS for CSE deliberately set out to not provide any test or scale and so does not utilise cut-off scores or norms as do actuarial tests and non-discretionary scales. The Adapted SIPPS for CSE is designed to be accessible and useful to practitioners engaged in the assessment of risk in the child safeguarding arena, investigation and prosecution of suspected CSE cases, and recovery programmes that reduce the risk of re-victimisation or transition from exploited young person to a perpetrator or recruiter role.

The SIPPS is a structured assessment protocol intended principally for use in the assessment of risk of CSE and can be used to contribute to Single Assessments, vulnerable witness interview strategies (known as ABE interviews) and disruption and prosecution strategies when there are CSE concerns. The assessment items are based upon empirically-derived risk factors. It contains 26 items that are supported by clinical research and consensus of practitioner experience.

The Adapted SIPPS for CSE Assessment and Intervention training programme was developed to establish reliability and consistency of approach to implementing the assessment. It was anticipated that it would work especially well in the context of multidisciplinary or team settings and be well suited to the Systemic Unit Model of Social Work and joint police and social care investigations. Nevertheless, it was important that the tool would be effective for individual practitioners as an initial assessment tool, as a method of monitoring and measuring progress by applying and coding the items periodically during the implementation of safety plans, and for direct work with children and families.

The resultant Adapted SIPPS for CSE became a set of guidelines developed to reflect current knowledge within the disciplines of social work, policing, civil and criminal law and child safeguarding. The guidelines that were drafted attempted to define the risk being considered; discuss the necessary qualifications for conducting an assessment; recommend what information should be considered; and identify a set of core risk factors that, according to academic and professional literature, should be considered as part of any comprehensive assessment of risk.

Key Principles of the SIPPS Risk Assessment Model

1. The assessment / investigation gathers information concerning multiple domains of the child and their family's functioning. It reflects the fact that families that are troubled or at risk of child sexual exploitation are not a heterogeneous group and child sexual exploitation is itself a multifaceted problem.
2. Over-reliance on a particular method can result in an incomplete or biased assessment and so this procedure emphasises the use of multiple methods of data collection e.g. case records from multiple sources, direct observations and interviews. The procedure gathers data from multiple sources because people often minimise or deny the harm they have caused or experienced, or feel under pressure to present a positive self-image or significantly over-estimate their strengths and abilities and under-estimate their vulnerabilities and limitations.
3. The procedure addresses vulnerability factors in children but also addresses risk factors associated with predatory adults and victim accessing behaviours.
4. The procedure allows practitioners to judge the credibility of various sources of information, identify, check and resolve contradictory information and judge whether information is sufficient to permit a valid decision.
5. It facilitates investigations and assessments in recognising that there can be frequent and rapid fluctuation with regard to the presence of risk factors and threats to a child's welfare and should be reevaluated at regular intervals or whenever there is a change to the status of the case.
6. The procedure aims to be comprehensible to people who must use the findings of the assessment for example, partner agencies, families, children and the courts.
7. The prevention of child sexual abuse through CSE is the primary goal of risk assessment. This procedure avoids static and rather meaningless evaluations of high/medium/low risk to develop responsive, flexible systemic interventions.

The Theoretical Framework for the Project

Information concerning CSE has been generated from quantitative and qualitative research, news reports, practice experience of professionals and the personal accounts of victims. There is a great deal of knowledge available to us about CSE but it is rather like having all the pieces of a jigsaw in a bag; the whole picture is in there somewhere but no one knows quite what it is meant to look like. Thus, knowledge alone is not enough. Theory is required. Theory goes beyond description to provide explanations; it provides a framework that develops understanding and make sense of observations; It helps to find explanations; and make informed judgments and interventions (Coulshed & Orme, 2012).

A Systemic Perspective on CSE.

At present there are difficulties associated with how CSE and trafficking cases are identified and differentiated from other crimes such as prostitution. This problem has been reflected internationally (van der Watt & van der Westhuizen, 2017). Due to the fact that trafficking and exploitation involves hidden communities, it has been extremely difficult for researchers to obtain sample groups that are representative of trafficked and exploited groups as a whole. The lack of research in general could be attributable to a lack of agreement concerning what exactly should be studied (Tyldum & Brunovskis, 2005).

The exploitation of vulnerable children does not happen in a vacuum. A single case of CSE happens in the context of a sophisticated system that is made up of many people with different roles and functions (van der Watt & van der Westhuizen, 2017). Protective agencies are also a part of that system. Tackling CSE therefore requires that we understand the nature of the problem from a systemic point of view: actions in any part of that system or network will have an effect throughout the whole of the network.

Reliance upon traditional methods of investigation and safeguarding of children in the context of any kind of organised exploitation is inadequate to the task. Existing methodologies are reactive; they are dependent upon the identification of or disclosure of abuse, an identifiable victim and perpetrator in which the abuse has been detected and investigation and intervention follows an inductive or “top down” process to explain what happened, how it happened and how it will be remedied.

CSE, by its nature is covert and its victims are often hidden. Children and young people that have been sexually exploited do not necessarily know that they have been, and if they do, may feel embarrassed about their predicament and do not trust law enforcement or social care agencies enough to report their situation. Indeed, some children and young people that are victims of sexual exploitation have been arrested numerous times for other offences such as prostitution, public order offences and petty crime before their real status has been recognised.

The level of violent coercion used by those that traffic and exploit children and young people is often under-estimated. Fear of retribution from perpetrators prevents disclosure and often causes victims to deny that they have been trafficked, falsely imprisoned or forced into sex work. The hidden nature of trafficking and sexual exploitation means that victims are kept in isolation and are often trapped by or dependent upon the abusers.

CSE is a wide-reaching term that is essentially about the varied exploitation of vulnerable children, from and within a variety of contexts. It is a conduit to abuse but one that relies upon the mutual co-operation of those that trade and use children, the utilisation of legal loopholes, the inherent weaknesses and gaps within organisational structures and protocols, and the corruption of officials and coercion of the victims.

As a secret or hidden phenomenon, it is surrounded by myths, assumptions and false perceptions.

All these elements coalesce to form complex eco-systems in which abuse and exploitation is maintained. Like any ecosystem, CSE is constantly changing, adapting to new pressures and opportunities but at the same time maintaining a coherence: changes in the various elements fit together to meet the needs and goals of the group that is perpetrating the abuse. This therefore has implications for all agencies working to identify, prevent, investigate and prosecute cases of Child Sexual Exploitation.

Instead of simply focusing upon the victim there needs to be recognition that the victim, their abusers *and* those agencies form a larger system. An effective response to CSE therefore cannot be one that “*gives*” an intervention to the victim but rather one that promotes movements or perturbations in the entire system, identifies the effects and reveals the next relevant step in the enquiry (Dallos, 1992). This necessitates a change in our approach whereby we become more exploratory, looking for connections, themes and dependencies. Gradually, as the reality and extent of the case becomes clear, key members and mechanisms of the network are identified (whether they are perpetrators or victims), relationships and dependencies become understood and motivations and modus operandi emerge. By so doing we can simultaneously protect actual and potential victims, identify, disrupt and remove offenders and improve safeguarding and prosecutorial outcomes and reduce the risk of re-victimisation.

When a systematic, comparative, and interactive approach is taken to the initial part of the assessment (gathering the immediate information and identifying the main concern) open ended strategies begin to emerge: The assessor/investigator can develop professional opinions and check them against empirical data and with colleagues and witnesses. This inevitably leads to inductive reasoning as the assessment/investigation proceeds. It prompts early analytic thinking and keeps practitioners interacting with their information and sources as well as their initial, loosely formed analysis.

Thus as an emergent constructivist model of assessment and intervention the Adapted SIPPS for CSE provides a new approach to the assessment of, and intervention in, cases of trafficking, modern slavery and exploitation. It begins with the systematic, inductive approach to collecting and, importantly, analysing information to develop the next relevant questions towards a theory of what has been, or is happening within the child's system. This approach enables practitioners to account for the complex relational dynamics between the child, motivated perpetrators of sexual abuse, the environment and fluctuations and movements in these relationships over time.

Preparatory Work on the Project

An initial scoping exercise was carried out by the author in consultation with Caroline Haughey, Barrister at Law of Furnival Chambers and DC Mickey Hafford of the Metropolitan Police Trafficking and Kidnap Unit.

A literature review was undertaken and the formulation of a theoretical framework to underpin

SIPPS for Modern Slavery had already been completed. This foundation was then adapted to focus specifically on CSE. Relevant case law was identified with the assistance of Caroline Haughey and Former Detective Inspector (Metropolitan Police Child Protection Unit) Alec Love.

Validity of the Adapted SIPPS

The first draft of the Adapted SIPPS Worksheet was given to two social workers who were engaged in assessing risk of CSE in two separate cases. Feedback was positive and their experiences and suggestions were taken to continue the developmental work and inform the training programme. The Adapted SIPPS for CSE training programme was designed and delivered to the London Borough's Practice Group Leads (PGLs) by the author and Alec Love in February 2015. Training led to the initial validation of the Adapted SIPPS for CSE and implementation across all operational children's services.

Feedback was positive with constructive suggestions and comments for the ongoing development of the tool and the training programme.

Table 2. Comments from the PGLs following the First Training Course

Source: author's own.

The Adapted SIPPS tool and a description of the SIPPS for Modern Slavery was presented to Kevin Hyland, the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner who confirmed its face Validity. Subsequent consultations took place with Mr Hyland, Fiona Cunningham of the Centre for Social Justice, Christopher Ansell at the Office of the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner and Police Colleagues at Northamptonshire Police Training and Development Team and West Midlands Police Training Department. The Concept was presented to Robbie Kent, Home Office Head of Modern Slavery Unit 10th March 2015 following an introduction by Kevin Hyland.

A meeting with Graham Richie at the Office of the Children's Commissioner took place on March 24th 2015 to present the Adapted SIPPS in response to the Office of the Children's Commissioner's criticisms of social workers and their failure to detect child sexual exploitation. At the conclusion of the meeting, Mr Richie stated that the Adapted SIPPS for CSE was "An example of excellence in practice". The Adapted SIPPS for CSE has also been presented to Dr Helen Beckett at Bedford University, Deputy Joint Director, International Centre: Researching Child Sexual Exploitation, Violence and Trafficking. Her views were sought with regard to the validity of the SIPPS and its use in comparison with the Banardo's Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (SERAF). Dr Beckett was supportive of the SIPPS model and the assessment tool in its application to CSE.

Based upon these interviews and direct expert feedback, the Adapted SIPPS for CSE has strong face validity i.e. it appears to do what social workers need it to do.

Roll Out Across The South London Borough

The South London Borough commissioned training for all social work practitioners and managers in the application and administration of both The FRaSA and The SIPPS. A three-day training programme designed for police officers and social workers was prepared, and ran from June 2015 to January 2016. Only one police officer attended but, in addition to social workers, there have been non-social worker practitioners from Youth Services and Primary Health Services within the borough.

The training was supported by Surgery Days at the Safeguarding Team Offices once a month for 6 months during which practitioners could discuss issues, problems, provide feedback and obtain advice and guidance in relation to risk assessment. Up to 8 hours per month remote access was also offered. As anticipated, the need for support and advice reduced as the methods became more established. The consultant put practitioners in touch with their colleagues who had previously encountered similar issues and resolved them, encouraging a learning environment.

Attendees of the training between September 2015 and January 2016 (n=72) returned completed course evaluation forms. At the start of the training and as an introductory discussion, participants were asked what they hoped to gain from the training. Overwhelmingly, practitioners felt that they lacked knowledge and understanding concerning the nature of child sexual exploitation. Many felt pressured by their professional networks to "do something" despite very little or circumstantial

evidence that any child was being sexually exploited. The hopes and expectations of participants is presented below in Table 3.

Table 3. Hopes and Expectations

Source: author’s own.

At the end of the training participants were asked via the evaluation form to rate the usefulness of the Adapted SIPPS for CSE and the quality of the training. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive and is presented below:

Table 4. Feedback Section 2 Satisfaction

Table 5. Feedback Section 3 Recommendation of Tool and Training

Source: author's own.

Table 6. Feedback Section 4 Utility for Practice Rating

Source: author's own.

Table 7. Feedback Section 5 Evaluation of Training

Source: author's own.

Table 8. Feedback Section 6 Evaluation of Training Materials

Source: author's own.

Impact

The Adapted SIPPS has been used by social workers in the South London Borough and direct

feedback has been obtained from three practitioners. Two managed to rule out CSE using the tool and one used the model to clarify concerns, and conduct an investigation under S47 of the Children Act 1989 (Child Suffering or Likely To Suffer Significant Harm) and develop a proportionate safeguarding plan. In a facilitated workshop session, practitioners used the tool to assess risk in two active cases and two co-working social workers were able to identify one adult female as a possible victim of trafficking with sufficient evidence adduced to warrant a referral to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and local authority notification to the Home Secretary.

The Head of Safeguarding Services provided written feedback of her observations of the impact of the training and the use of the Adapted SIPPS Tool.

The SIPPS has been invaluable in the complex area of Child Sexual Exploitation. The SIPP's links with the FRaSA in the methodology of organising information to identify gaps and meaning, however the SIPPS has the multi-faceted dimension of drawing the practitioners' attention to issues of trafficking, exploitation, modern slavery in addition to risk of or actual sexual exploitation.

The SIPPS enables the objective analysis of behaviour and information to create multiple hypotheses for a young person. The SIPPS training provides an advanced level of knowledge regarding the legal options that the Police might use to disrupt the behaviour and encourages Social Work staff to make suggestions using this knowledge to their Police colleagues. Having a former Police Officer experienced in this area for part of the training brought that agency perspective to life and in my own view joint training with the Police would optimise the application of the strategy leading to greater impact on the protection of children.

I would also add that I have noticed recently in conversations with staff they are naming indicators of the trafficking aspects within disclosures i.e. young person going missing and turning up a significant distance away (South London to far North London) which is not usual behaviour. Connections between groups of young people are being made and the SIPPS theory to analyse extent of behaviours and relationships with suspected perpetrators are being made. Reference has also been made to 'using the triangle to understand CSE' showing that the teaching provided was being applied to practice.

Further Feedback regarding the SIPPS came from a social worker via e-mail:

I found the CSE risk assessment tool very useful. It helped me to organise the information that I already had about the case and highlighted areas that I did not have any / enough information about and needed to explore further; for example, it helped me to recognise that I needed to find out more information about the social networks of the other girls in the same foster placement as my young person.

Exploring the different possible risk factors for CSE enabled me to identify which areas of my intervention with the young person should be prioritised. The tool also helped in working with other

professionals on the case, I used the tool the tool to structure a strategy meeting and I think that this eased the anxiety of some of the other professionals because it enabled them to understand what Children's Services were doing and why, it also helped in being clear about the level of current risk to the young person rather than speculation which had previously led to professionals anxiously seemingly over-estimating the current level of risk to the young person.

Discussion

Many of the participants in the training reported feeling under confident and lacking knowledge in relation to child sexual exploitation. Over the course of the three-day training programme, confidence improved as they often discovered that they knew more than they, or other professionals, gave them credit for.

A significant area of uncertainty for social workers related to the criminal justice system in which they felt that their authority was undermined when engaging in discussions or requesting co-operation from Police colleagues. This was a particular problem when there was a need to question or challenge Police decisions. Hardly any of the participants in the training had undergone Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) Training and joint investigative working between Police and Social Workers was sometimes limited, though generally relationships with Police colleagues were described as good.

The enthusiasm and degree of participation in the training was impressive and this seems to be reflected in the positive feedback. Participants were relieved that the Adapted SIPPS worksheet is not simply another assessment form, rather a pragmatic tool to assist them in collating, organising, interpreting and presenting evidence in a variety of contexts. Having the SIPPS Worksheet as an *aide memoire* has been useful for practitioners enabling them to speak and present evidence with confidence in professional meetings, strategy meetings and case conferences.

Those that have supervisory responsibility, such as Advanced or Consultant Practitioners and Practice Group Leads have utilised the SIPPS worksheet as an effective tool and structure for group supervision; they have found that it helps to focus discussion on the most plausible hypotheses and develop clearer objective decision making and action plans.

Two co-workers found that SIPPS led them to identify an adult as a possible victim of Trafficking and/or Sexual Exploitation. The worksheet was also applied to a separate case of Domestic Servitude by the author. Both applications showed that the worksheet itself has utility for child sexual exploitation and other forms of modern slavery suggesting that it is the training that needs to be adapted to different contexts but the framework and tool has multiple applications, e.g. domestic violence. This raises the possibility that SIPPS has potential utility as a general model for child safeguarding practice across many domains.

The high average scores indicate that the course and structure is considered effective but can be improved in some areas. The Legislation section has been found by some to be too didactic. With some minor restructuring this can be better distributed so that key legislation is linked directly to separate topics and learning activities.

The course also needs to reflect the fact that online exploitation is now the greatest type of child sexual exploitation. The restructuring referred to above would develop this and offer the opportunity to apply SIPPS specifically to this challenging child abuse arena. The satisfaction rate for the Training Course and the SIPPS model are extremely positive with over 98% of participants prepared to recommend the SIPPS tool and training to a friend or colleague.

Future Directions

This project was not conceived for the purposes of research and therefore the data on which this article is based lacks academic rigour. However, the feedback that has been generated by the project suggests a strong face validity of the Adapted SIPPS for CSE as a set of risk assessment parameters and an aid to professional judgement and decision making. In this regard, it seems to do what practitioners need it to do. However, more robust and thorough testing of the framework is required to evaluate its reliability, replicability and consistency.

The SIPPS, as with any risk assessment and management tool, is a work in progress and has been developed as such so that it remains flexible and adaptable. Since the inception of the Adapted SIPPS for CSE, child exploitation via the internet has grown as the major form of child sexual exploitation as is the exploitation of children through forced criminal activity (such as cannabis cultivation, drug running, counterfeit DVD production, petty street crime and shoplifting and forced begging). The exploitation of children for criminal activity remains under researched but is a domain to which the SIPPS Model of assessment, intervention, prosecution and safeguarding appears to be well suited.

The model would appear also to have utility in safeguarding children and vulnerable adults from radicalisation and other effects of extremism (of any form) and interest in this application has been found abroad in Central Asia.

Following the South London Borough project, the author is now engaged in doctoral research concerning the forced criminal exploitation of children. This work began in September 2016. It is envisaged that this research will lead to further development, will refine the risk items within the SIPPS with regard to trafficking and slavery of children and adults in different contexts, and formalise a set of professional parameters for the effective prosecution of offenders and safeguarding of vulnerable and intimidated witnesses. Such developments can lead to the formulation of guidance for the evaluation of evidence and greater knowledge and advice concerning victim and perpetrator behaviour, activities of organised crime groups and networks, educational programmes for advocates and the judiciary, as well as investigators and allied support

agencies.

References

Barlow, J., Fisher, J. D. & Jones, D., 2012. *Systematic Review of Models of Analysing Significant Harm*, Department for Education.

Charmaz, C., 2008. Grounded Theory as an Emergent Method. In: *Handbook of Emergent Methods*. New York: The Guilford Press, pp. 155-172.

Clutton, S. & Coles, J., 2007. *Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework: A Pilot Study*, s.l.: Banardos.

Coulshed, V. & Orme, J., 2012. *Social Work Practice*. 5th ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dallos, R., 1992. *Family Belief Systems, Therapy and Change*. Bristol: Open University Press.

Department for Children Schools and Families, 2009. *Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation*, s.l.: HM Government.

Hart, S. D., Randall Kropp, P. & D., R. L., 2003. *The Risk of Sexual Violence Protocol (RSVP)*. s.l.: Pacific Psychological Assessment Corp. and the British Columbia Institute Against Family Violence.

Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, 2015. *Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner Strategic Plan 2015-17*, s.l.: Stationery Office.

Jay, A., 2014. *Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham 1997-2013*, Rotherham: Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council.

Shipton, A., Setter, C. & Holmes, L., 2016. *Heading Back to Harm: A study of trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing from care in the UK*, s.l.: ECPAT.

Stevenson, L., 2015. *Social workers to face five years in prison for failing to protect children from sexual abuse, warns Cameron*. [Online]

Available at:

<http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2015/03/03/social-workers-face-five-years-prison-failing-protect-children-sexual-abuse-warns-cameron/> [Accessed 20 August 2017].

Tyldum, G. & Brunovskis, A., 2005. Describing the Unobserved: Methodological Challenges in Empirical Studies on Human Trafficking. In: F. Laczko & E. Gozdzic, eds. *Data and Research on Human Trafficking: A Global Survey*. s.l.: IOM International Organization for Migration.

van der Watt, M. & van der Westhuizen, A., 2017. (Re)configuring the criminal justice response to human trafficking: a complex-systems perspective. *Police Practice and Research*, 10 February.

Webster, C. D., Douglas, K. S., Eaves, D. & Hart, S. D., 1997. *HCR-20 Assessing Risk for Violence version 2*. s.l.: Mental Health, Law and Policy Institute, Simon Fraser University.