Young people and sexual exploitation: an exploration of young people's workers' experiences of providing support in Merseyside

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Abbreviations

CADT	Central Advice and Duty Team
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
D(A)AT	Drug (and Alcohol) Action Team
IDVAs	Independent Domestic Violence Advisors
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender
LJMU	Liverpool John Moores University
LSCB	Local Safeguarding Children Board
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
PSHE	Personal, Social, Health and Economic
RASA Centre	Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre
SCIP	Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution
SERA	Sexual Exploitation: Risk Assessment
THINK	Teenage Health in Knowsley
YPAS	Young Person's Advisory Service

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1. Executive summary

1.1 Introduction

Until recently, the literature regarding sexually exploited young people has primarily focussed upon the sexual exploitation of young people through prostitution and familial sexual abuse. However, the Department for Children, Schools and Families' (DCSF) guidance regarding safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation acknowledges broader and more subtle forms of sexual exploitation (DCSF, 2009). Within this document the following definition of child sexual exploitation is used which was developed by the National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People.

> *"Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability."*

(DCSF, 2009, p.9)

This research aimed to explore young people's workers' experience of supporting young people who have been sexually exploited in these broader and more subtle ways. Throughout this research the term *'swapping' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts'* is used to describe the sexual exploitation of children and young people as defined above.

1.2 Methods

The aim of the research was to explore young people's workers' experience of supporting young people who have 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts' in Merseyside.

The objectives of the research were to:

- Identify current theory, policy and practice regarding young people who 'swap' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts' and support available to such young people;
- Explore professional experience of supporting young people who have 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts' in Merseyside;
- Identify support available to young people who have 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts' and to identify gaps in service provision in Merseyside.

The research adopted a cross-sectional design using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The research involved distributing questionnaires to and conducting semi-structured interviews with workers who support young people (under the age of 25

years) in Merseyside. A questionnaire was distributed to those who work directly with young people (under the age of 25 years) across a wide range of young people's services in Merseyside. The types of services invited to participate were:

- accommodation providers;
- Connexions;
- sexual health;
- substance use;
- young runaways;
- youth projects facilitated by the voluntary and community sector; and
- youth services.

1.3 Findings

1.3.1 Questionnaires distributed to young people's workers

- There were 191 questionnaires distributed to young people's workers and 57 were completed and returned (30% response rate).
- The greatest number of the young people's workers were from organisations that focussed upon substance misuse.
- A greater number of the young people's workers had experienced young people *suggesting* to them rather than *directly* informing them that they had 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts'.
- More of the young people's workers had experienced young females informing them that they had 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts' than males.
- The greatest number of the young people's workers had experienced young people informing them that they had 'swapped' sexual activities for alcohol; followed by illicit drugs and money.
- The young people's workers reported that the most common age group for young people 'swapping' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts' was 16 to 17 years.
- The majority of the young people's workers stated that their screening and assessment processes were designed to obtain information about sexual exploitation.
- Approximately half of the young people's workers were aware of projects in Merseyside which helped to inform young people about the issues relating to sexual exploitation.
- The majority of the young people's workers had not received formal training which specifically focussed upon sexual exploitation.
- The young people's workers stated that the support they received, their training, and their own knowledge and awareness assisted them to support sexually exploited young people.

1.3.2 Semi-structured interviews with young people's workers

- Eight young people's workers were interviewed and the findings were thematically analysed. Key themes are summarised below.
- The young people's workers described the 'gifts' and 'favours' which young people had informed them they had 'swapped' for sexual activities. They most frequently discussed affection. Young people's workers described how young people who were looked after by the local authority; living in hostels; or living in 'chaotic homes' were particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation because they often lacked necessary affection. The young people's workers stated that young people had informed them about other 'gifts' and 'favours' they had 'swapped' for sexual activities such as accommodation; drugs; 'being kept' (i.e. being provided with a home, food, and an acceptable standard of living); alcohol; settling drug debts; access to night clubs; and receiving lifts in cars.

- The young people's workers discussed the constrained choices and circumstances which contributed to young people becoming sexually exploited. The most commonly cited explanation was a lack of alternative desirable housing options. One young people's worker also described the limited opportunities for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender (LGBT) young people to socialise with other LGBT young people of a similar age. Two of the young people's workers also explained that young people are often seen to be 'making choices' by those responsible for safeguarding children and young people and therefore their exploitation was often not recognised.
- Young people's workers described how they identified sexual exploitation. A key subtheme was the use of open informal discussions with young people. Young people's workers stated that sexual exploitation could not be identified through the use of screening or assessment forms but could be recognised over a sustained period of time as the working relationship developed and trust was established. Young people's workers also stated that discussions concerning young people's safer sex practises assisted them to identify those young people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, sexual exploitation. Young people's workers who facilitated large group sessions, rather than providing one to one support, stated that there were limited opportunities for young people to disclose sexual exploitation to them.
- The young people's workers explained the methods they adopted to support young people who were being sexually exploited. These included 'planting seeds' with young people with the aspiration that over time they would begin to recognise that they were being sexually exploited. The young people's workers also emphasised the importance of addressing the immediate risks, creating protective factors, and maintaining the relationship between the young people's worker and the young person.
- The young people's workers discussed preventing the sexual exploitation of young people. They emphasised the importance of raising young people's self esteem. Other subthemes identified were encouraging young people to explore the 'rights and wrongs' of issues relating to sexual exploitation; the 'patchy' sex and relationship education in schools; and increasing awareness of sexual exploitation amongst young people and young people's workers. None of the young people's workers had received any specialised training regarding sexual exploitation.

1.4 Conclusion

The guidance produced by the DCSF in 2009 regarding safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation recognised the range of complex ways in which young people could be sexually exploited. There is a need for monitoring data to be collected regarding young people who are sexually exploited in order to understand their situations more thoroughly and provide evidence for suitable support services.

The findings of this research indicate that the young people's workers across services in Merseyside were being informed by young people that they had 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts'. These situations varied greatly in context and included young people being 'groomed' for commercial sexual exploitation; young people being in exploitive sexual relationships; and young people being sexually exploited by peers on 'one off' occasions. Young people more frequently *suggested* to the workers who participated in the research that they had 'swapped' 'favours' and 'gifts' for sexual activities rather than *directly* informing them. The young people's workers reported that young people who disclosed 'swapping' sex to them were most likely to be females and between 16 and 17 years old. The young people's workers who completed the questionnaire identified that alcohol and drugs were the most frequently 'swapped' 'gifts' or 'favours'. However, when the young people's workers were provided with the opportunity to discuss this issue in more detail, the most frequently referred to 'gift' or 'favour' 'swapped' was affection. The young people's workers

acknowledged the constrained choices which contributed to young people being sexually exploited including a lack of alternative desirable housing options.

The majority of the young people's workers stated that their screening and assessment processes aimed to identify if young people were experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, sexual exploitation. However, they stressed the importance of open informal discussion with the young people for identifying sexual exploitation. The majority of the young people's workers had not received any specialised training which specifically focussed upon sexual exploitation; however the extent to which issues regarding sexual exploitation were included within other training programmes was unclear. Raising young people's self esteem; increasing awareness of the sexual exploitation of young people; and improving the quality and consistency of sex and relationship education were considered by the young people's workers to be useful means of preventing the sexual exploitation of young people.

1.5 Recommendations

These recommendations have been made in light of the findings of research conducted with young people's workers within young people's services in Merseyside. Unfortunately young people were not consulted for this research. This should be taken into account when considering the recommendations.

1.5.1 Young people's workers should have access to specialist training regarding sexual exploitation and training needs assessments regarding sexual exploitation should be conducted.

1.5.2 The Sexual Exploitation: Risk Assessment (SERA) should be used to increase young people's workers' awareness of the signs that young people may be being sexually exploited or at risk of sexual exploitation.

1.5.3 Consideration should be given to how the sexual exploitation of young people could be minimised via the introduction of compulsory sex and relationship education as part of Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE).

1.5.4 The perspectives of young people, who have been sexually exploited and live in Merseyside, regarding how young people become sexually exploited and effective methods of support should be obtained. Young people's well-being should be prioritised throughout the research process.

2. Introduction

The needs of vulnerable young people have received increased focus in the UK over recent years and are a priority area in New Labour's social policy agenda (Ward & Petal, 2006). Vulnerable young people have been described as those who are under the age of 25 years and include those whose family members misuse substances; those with behavioural, mental health or social problems; those excluded from school and truants; young offenders; looked after children; those who are homeless; those from some black and minority ethnic groups; and those involved in commercial sex work (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, NICE, 2007). In recent years, the involvement of young people in commercial sex work has been acknowledged and attempts have been made to address this form of exploitation (Melrose, 2004). The literature, until very recently, had focussed on the commercial sexual exploitation of young people and there is a lack of research regarding more subtle forms of sexual exploitation.

The authors' experience of evaluating young people's substance prevention interventions across England provided the initial impetus for this research. Whilst conducting these evaluations, anecdotal evidence of young people being sexually exploited in subtle ways was obtained. Staff members discussed young people's involvement in sexually exploitive relationships including young women being provided with substances by older men who they considered to be their 'boyfriends' and young people being supplied with substances by older peers and then becoming sexually involved with them (Lushey, Stredder, Wareing & Sumnall, 2008). Furthermore, during a study conducted by the authors regarding the needs of homeless and vulnerably housed young people, staff reported examples of young people trading sex for a place to stay (Shaw, Stredder, Woolfall & Sumnall, 2008). This research aimed to explore the experiences of young people's workers in Merseyside of supporting young people who had been sexually exploited in these more subtle ways.

3. Background

3.1 Government policy

Every Child Matters: Change for Children described the Government's strategy for ensuring services are built around the needs of children and young people. It outlined how all services should work together to ensure children and young people are protected from harm and have their needs met. In particular, it specified that all children and young people's services should be working towards the five key outcomes of: *be healthy*, *stay safe*, *enjoy and achieve*, *make a positive contribute* and *achieve economic well-being*. Each of the Every Child Matters outcomes are relevant to work with sexually exploited young people; however, because of their vulnerability *staying safe* is of particular importance. One of the key aims described as part of the *stay safe* outcome is that children and young people are *safe from maltreatment, neglect, violence and sexual exploitation* (Department for Children, Schools and Families [DCSF], 2004a). The *Staying Safe Action Plan* stresses the importance of workers being aware of signs which may indicate sexual exploitation and where to go for more specialist information (DCSF, 2004b). Pearce (2009) has argued that by implementing the aims of the *Every Child Matters* guidance (i.e. developing a genuine multi-agency approach to child protection that does not view the protection of children as the remit of child protection social workers) a sustained approach to safeguarding can be established which continues to safeguard young people through the transition to adulthood. The legal underpinning for the *Every Child Matters* document is provided by the *Children Act* (2004) which outlined the structure of services to safeguard children and young people (DCSF, 2004a).

Working together to safeguard children (HM Government, 2006) established how services should work in partnership to protect children. It provides both statutory and non-statutory guidance and describes the processes and policies involved including: the management of cases; the roles of Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs); and training requirements. It includes a specific section on children abused through prostitution. It specifies that LSCBs should identify the extent to which this occurs in local areas and promotes the development of local action plans for when it is suspected that children are involved in prostitution.

The following definition of sexual abuse was provided within *Working together to safeguard children.*

> *"Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, including prostitution, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (e.g. rape, buggery or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual online images, watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways."*

> (HM Government, 2006, p. 38)

The document entitled *Safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation* (DCSF, 2009) provided supplementary guidance to *Working together to safeguard children*. It replaced *Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution* (SCIP) (Department of Health, Home Office, Department for Education and Employment, National Assembly for Wales, 2000). *SCIP* changed the focus from treating young people involved in sexual exploitation as criminals to victims of abuse (Melrose, 2004; Brown, 2006; Ward & Patel, 2006; Pearce, 2009). The updated guidance (*Safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation*) considered broader issues of sexual exploitation rather than simply focussing upon commercial sexual exploitation. It attempted to develop an understanding of sexual exploitation that moved away from the narrow view of a young person standing on the street selling sex. *Safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitatio*n included a broader definition of child sexual exploitation than previous guidance had adopted which is outlined below.

> *"Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability."*

> (DCSF, 2009, p.9)

The key principles outlined within the *Safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation* guidance were: a child-centred approach; a proactive approach; parenting, family life and services; the rights of children and young people; treating those who are sexually exploited as victims and not criminals; an integrated approach; and sharing

responsibility (DCSF, 2009). It specified that every local authority should have a working protocol on how to support sexually exploited young people; however, the guidance was neither accompanied by a mechanism for data collection nor a process for reviewing progress. Consequently, some local authorities do not have a working protocol to oversee provision nor a dedicated service to support the young people concerned (Pearce, 2009).

A legal framework exists to protect children and young people from sexual exploitation. A child under the age of 13 years old is not legally capable of consenting to sexual activity. Penetrative sex with a child under the age of 13 is classed as rape. It is also an offence for sexual activity to occur with a child under the age of 16 and every case of sexual activity involving a 13 to 15 year old should be considered carefully. Careful consideration should be made as to whether a referral should be made to social care. This should include consideration of the level of maturity and understanding, age imbalance, the use of substances and coercion (HM Government, 2006). *The Sexual Offences Act 2003* created tougher sentencing for perpetrators of sexual abuse against young people (Lowe & Pearce, 2006). The law protects children and young people from sexual exploitation whether it is actual or intended. Children and young people are protected from non-consensual sexual activity and from someone over the age of 18 causing or inciting a child under 16 to engage in sexual activity. Meeting a child following 'grooming' is an offence whether or not the sexual activity takes place (Pearce, 2009).

The UK Government announced its intention to make Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education statutory in October 2008. Consequently, an independent review was conducted to explore the most effective means of implementation. The review concluded that PSHE education should become part of the statutory National Curriculum, in both primary and secondary schools (MacDonald, 2009). The PSHE curriculum would include sex and relationship education. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is developing guidance regarding school, college and community based PSHE which is due to be published in January 2011 (NICE, 2009). Pearce (2009) highlighted the need for preventative work in schools to also enhance awareness of the potential for young people to go on to sexually exploit others.

3.2 The number of sexually exploited young people

Pearce (2009) stressed the need for increased information regarding how many sexually exploited young people there are in the UK: *"There is a genuine lack of knowledge and awareness of the nature and scale of sexual exploitation; of the way to respond if the stone is turned and cases are revealed; and a fear of the implications for resource allocation where services are already stretched"* (Pearce, 2009, p. 30). There is a perception that the sexual exploitation of young people is increasing; however, it is difficult to identify the numbers involved (Ward & Patel, 2006). This can lead to challenges in securing funding for research and service provision (Scott & Harper, 2006). Efforts of identifying the numbers of children and young people being sexually exploited are impeded by local areas assessing prevalence in different ways; children being unable to recognise that they are being abused due to the sophisticated techniques often adopted by abusers; and workers' lack of awareness of indicators of sexual exploitation (DCSF, 2009). For example, within Scott and Harper's research (2006) a worker identified a 13 year old girl with a 24 year old boyfriend who made her have sex with his friends in exchange for drugs, as only *possible* sexual exploitation. It was further identified within this research that some workers had incorrectly considered children and young people's involvement in sexual exploitation to be free choice (Scott & Harper, 2006).

Overall, 1758 cautions and 1435 convictions were issued to young women under 18 years old in England and Wales for prostitution related offences between 1989 and 1993 (Pearce, 2009). In addition, 111 of the 146 Area Child Protection Committee districts were identified as including children and young people who were known to suffer from sexual exploitation. Within these districts an average of 19 females and three males were identified as being sexually exploited at any one time in any one area (Swann & Balding, 2002). However, other evidence from smaller studies suggests that this underestimates the numbers involved (DCSF, 2009). For example, Harper and Scott (2005) used statistical modelling to estimate the total number of under 18s at risk of sexual exploitation in London at any one time. They concluded the figure was 1002. Despite uncertainties concerning the precise numbers involved, it is known that children are sexually exploited across all parts of the UK and that both young men and women are being abused (Melrose, 2004). In prior research, it has been identified that workers do not necessarily focus their concerns on young men and therefore the numbers of young males being sexually exploited is unknown (Scott & Harper, 2006). Lillywhite and Skidmore (2006) have argued that it is not possible to state that young men are at low risk of sexual exploitation due to a lack of evidence.

The National Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and the University of Bristol examined partner violence in teenage relationships. They found that a quarter of females and 18 percent of males reported some form of physical violence; approximately three-quarters of females and half of males reported some form of emotional partner violence; and one in three females and 16 percent of males reported some form of sexual partner violence. The authors identified that having an older partner, particularly a 'much older'[1] partner, was a significant risk factor for female teenagers. Three-quarters of females with a 'much older' partner experienced physical violence, 80 percent emotional violence and 75 percent sexual violence. The authors concluded that violence in young people's intimate relationships should be viewed as a significant child-welfare problem (Barter, McCarry, Berridge & Evans, 2009).

Efforts are being made to collect data regarding young people and sexual exploitation. The National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS) collates data regarding individuals accessing structured drug and alcohol treatment (National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse [NTA], 2009a). In April 2009, it introduced a number of additional questions specifically for young people's providers to be asked at treatment start and treatment exit. This included the question *'young person involved in sexual exploitation?'* Examination of the first six months of available data submitted by young people's treatment services in Merseyside (April to September 2009) illustrated that there were 239 out of 406 responses to this question at treatment start (59%) and 98 out of 244 responses to this question at planned treatment exit (40%) (Data obtained by request from the North West NDTMS [April 2009 to September 2009]). We cannot be sure of the reasons for these low response rates, however, possible explanations include that new monitoring systems may take time to be implemented and/or workers did not feel comfortable asking about sexual exploitation. At treatment entry, only six out of the 239 responses indicated that the young person was involved in sexual exploitation (3%). At planned treatment exit, only two out of the 98 responses indicated sexual exploitation (2%) (Data obtained by request from the North West NDTMS [April 2009 to September 2009]). The data from treatment entry and exit has not yet been linked hence it is currently unknown whether receiving structured drug and/or alcohol treatment was associated with a decrease in the incidence of sexual exploitation. Furthermore, it is not known how workers posed these questions or if there were differences of opinion between the worker and the young person regarding definition and occurrence of sexual exploitation. It has been stated that the young person's response should prevail in the recording of such circumstances (NTA, 2009b) which may lead to under reporting. This

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[1] This was defined by the young female participants of the study as being at least two years older than them (Barter et al., 2009).

illustrates some of the challenges in identifying the numbers of young people involved in sexual exploitation.

3.3 Explanations for how young people come to be sexually exploited

The existing literature has predominately focussed upon how young people become involved in commercial sexual exploitation. This is often due to a range of complex and interconnected individual and environmental factors (Melrose, 2004). There has been some debate over the degree of choice young people have in becoming involved in commercial sexual exploitation. The 'grooming model' argues that young people are coerced into prostitution and the 'agency' model acknowledges the choices that young people make for themselves (Melrose, 2004). The 'grooming model' was developed by Barnardos to explain routes into prostitution (Swann, McNosh & Edwards, 1998). It described how an abusive adult entices a young person to become dependent upon them. Frequently, these young people will feel as though they are in love with the adult abuser. The abuser will provide the young people with accommodation, attention and a range of gifts. The abuser often attempts to isolate the young people from their family and friends, and encourages drug and alcohol use in an attempt to make the young person dependent upon them. The young person is then forced or coerced into 'swapping' or selling sex to raise money for the abuser who they believe is their 'boyfriend'. Pearce (2009) argues that the 'grooming model' is only one way in which children and young people are sexually exploited. Pearce (2009, p. 95) explains that in some instances *"the young person will be very vulnerable and manipulated to the point that they will lose any sense of agency, while in others the young person will still be involved in intricate negotiation and manoeuvring around their developing relationships."* The 'agency model' incorporates the evidence that involvement in prostitution is associated with the young person's social networks and acknowledges that the young person's social choices are often limited. The Children's Society published a key report in 1995 entitled *The Game's Up* which acknowledged the range of factors that contributed to young people's involvement in prostitution (Lee & O'Brien, 1995). Chase and Strantham (2004) further developed understanding via the notion of 'constrained choices'. Pearce (2009) explained how there were a range of reasons for young people becoming sexually exploited including familial problems such as drug and alcohol dependency; economic inequality and mental health problems; problems experienced by looked after young people; and individual problems such as self-harming behaviour, and problems with attachment and low self-esteem.

It is widely acknowledged that perpetrators of sexual exploitation use well organised and sophisticated methods. This may include targeting areas where young people gather without adult supervision (such as cinemas, parks and bowling alleys) or targeting adult venues such as pubs and clubs. Young people may introduce other young people to the perpetrators of abuse in order to detract attention from themselves. The perpetrators may also befriend young people's families to enable them to become trusted. Young people may become involved in exploitive relationships and may therefore be unaware that they are being abused. Some young people exchange sex or sexual acts for money or accommodation as a result of being homeless or experiencing poverty (DCSF, 2009).

It has been suggested that young people may be encouraged or coerced by perpetrators into 'party-lifestyles' during which they come into contact with drugs and alcohol (DCSF, 2009). The links between drugs use and commercial sex work have been widely reported. In particular, young people who use substances such as crack cocaine and heroin have described how they used commercial sex work as a means of funding their drug habit (Melrose, 2000). Research suggests that heroin, crack and amphetamine use appears to be more frequent among younger people being abused through prostitution than those aged 26 or above (Melrose, Barrett & Brodie 1999). Research has also indicated that abusive adults

provide young people with substances in order to coerce them into prostitution (Melrose, 2004). Equally, we are unaware of the extent to which substances are used as a coping mechanism for sexual abuse (Drink and Drug News, 2009).
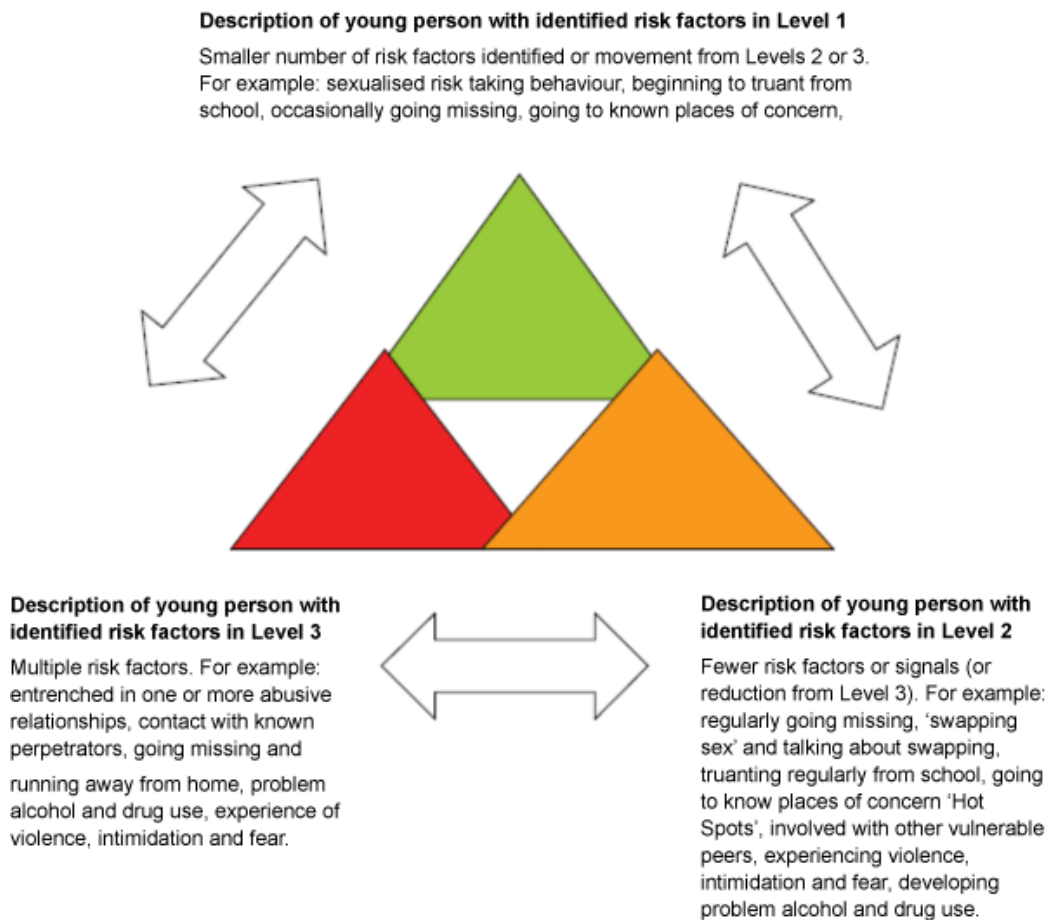
3.4 Risk and protective factors for sexually exploited young people

It has been recognised that young people with certain characteristics are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation (Pearce, 2006). Adults involved in commercial sexual exploitation have reported difficult childhoods which have involved domestic violence, familial child abuse and low educational attainment and being in care (DCSF, 2009). The situations which led to young people being in care may make them vulnerable to sexual exploitation; moreover the actual experience of living in care is considered to increase the likelihood that young people will become sexually exploited. Explanations for this include the social stigma and marginalisation which being in care can create (Lee & O'Brien, 1995; Cusick, 2002). Running away from home is also a key risk factor for sexual exploitation (Cusick, 2002; Pearce, 2006; Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board, 2007). Specific risk factors for young males are less well known than those for females due to a lack of research (Pearce, 2006). It is often the risks associated with the exploitive relationship (i.e. the emotional and psychological welfare of the young person and their physical well-being) that should be focussed upon rather than the sexual activity itself (Pearce, 2009).

Pearce (2009) questions whether we should be focussing on the risks to young people as it may prevent us from adequately considering protective factors. She states that it is important to protect young people from risk; however, equally, it is imperative that young people are supported to develop their own protective factors. Young people should be encouraged to understand the risks that they face. Research regarding risk, resilience and protective factors states that the needs of the individual, family and the environment should all be considered to adequately support sexually exploited young people (Pearce, 2009). Furthermore, Pearce (2009) argues that it is never too late to support a young person who is being sexually exploited as protective factors can be developed throughout the trajectory of young people's exploitation.

The National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People developed a Sexual Exploitation: Risk Assessment (SERA) model to assess risk factors based upon the findings of research conducted by Pearce, Williams and Galvin (2002) (Figure 1). Three levels of risk factors were identified. Level one, the lowest level of risk, included risk factors such as: sexualised risk taking behaviour; truanting from school; occasionally going missing; visits to places which are known to be risky; getting in to cars; receiving gifts; and early indicators of alcohol or drug use. Level two generally encompassed: regular occurrences of the risk factors included in level one and also involvement with other vulnerable young people; experiencing violence; intimidation and fear; and 'swapping sex' and talking about 'swapping'. Level three encompassed young people displaying multiple risk factors. Those risks, not mentioned within the other levels, included being involved in one or more abusive relationship and being in contact with known abusers.

Figure 1. Sexual Exploitation Intervention Diagram

Description of young person with identified risk factors in Level 1

Smaller number of risk factors identified or movement from Levels 2 or 3. For example: sexualised risk taking behaviour, beginning to truant from school, occasionally going missing, going to known places of concern,

Description of young person with identified risk factors in Level 3

Multiple risk factors. For example: entrenched in one or more abusive relationships, contact with known perpetrators, going missing and

running away from home, problem alcohol and drug use, experience of violence, intimidation and fear.

Description of young person with identified risk factors in Level 2

Fewer risk factors or signals (or reduction from Level 3). For example: regularly going missing, 'swapping sex' and talking about swapping, truanting regularly from school, going to know places of concern 'Hot Spots', involved with other vulnerable peers, experiencing violence, intimidation and fear, developing problem alcohol and drug use.

Source: (Sexual Exploitation: Risk Assessment [SERA] Model developed by The National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People, 2008 based upon the findings of research conducted by Pearce, William & Gavin, 2002)

Five key points regarding the SERA have been described and are detailed below.

1. SERA should be read alongside the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) but should function independently. SERA should be used as an assessment framework for every child at risk of sexual exploitation, whether or not child protection procedures are deemed to be required in the first instance.
2. LSCBs can include SERA within their protocol for safeguarding sexually exploited children and young people to enable those who work with children and young people to be aware of the indicators of harm.
3. Young people can fluctuate between and within the different levels of the SERA. Movement between levels is not necessarily progressive e.g. young people can move from risk level one to three and vice versa.
4. Outreach services (assertive outreach and therapeutic outreach) targeted at the level three groups are effective in engaging and supporting sexually exploited young people.
5. Exit from sexual exploitation is possible no matter which level of risk the young person is demonstrating. Where LSCBs have an active protocol, a sub-committee monitoring young people's progress and a dedicated service, young people can be supported away from sexual exploitation.

(Pearce, 2009)

3.5 Service provision for sexually exploited young people

Considerably more research is required to develop our understanding of sexual exploitation, and to develop accessible and appropriate services (Pearce & Lowe. 2006). Services to support young people involved in sexual exploitation are considered to be inconsistent and underfunded (Melrose, 2004; Scott and Harper, 2006). Specialist sexual exploitation services exist in some geographical areas in the UK but not in others (Pearce, 2009). Pearce (2009) has emphasised the need to address the range of social inequalities that can result in young people becoming vulnerable to sexual exploitation in addition to their individual needs. The importance of considering different cultural contexts when planning support provision has also been highlighted (Ward & Patel, 2006). It has been argued that accessing safe, supported and permanent accommodation is key to preventing young people from becoming sexually exploited and returning to sexually exploitive situations (Pearce, 2009).

It is essential that those who work with children and young people (within education, health and housing services for example) are trained to identify those at risk of, or experiencing sexual exploitation (Pearce, 2009). Scott and Harper's (2006) research has identified that it is imperative that workers are aware of the issues regarding sexual exploitation in order to identify those at risk. It is also beneficial if workers are prepared to persist with supporting young people who have indicated that sexual exploitation has occurred but exploitation has not been confirmed (Scott & Harper, 2006). Importantly, research suggests that workers are reluctant to proactively identify sexual exploitation because of a lack of services to refer them to. It has been further identified that training of practitioners to proactively identify sexual exploitation was needed. Many sexually exploited young people continue to have their needs unidentified and unmet (Pearce, 2009).

Child protection services were primarily established to deal with familial sexual abuse rather than the complexities involved in other forms of sexual exploitation (Pearce, 2009). Pearce (2009) argues for 'sustained safeguarding' to protect children and young people throughout the trajectory of exploitation. She states that this can only be successful if genuine multi-agency working regarding child protection and safeguarding is conducted. She stated that Local Drug (and Alcohol) Action Teams (D(A)ATs) should be fully integrated into the sub-

committee for sexually exploited children and young people in order to support this process (Pearce, 2009).

Pearce (2009) has suggested that strategies that inform domestic violence services can be utilised to work with young people who are being sexually exploited, albeit within a child safeguarding agenda. She explains that, as is often the case when supporting victims of domestic violence, sexual exploitation is not a one off event and requires long term intervention. Pearce (2009) emphasised the need for specialist trained staff to work with young people who have been sexually exploited and suggested the adoption of a similar model to that of Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs). IDVAs' role involves advising and supporting victims to ensure their safety. They are independent of any organisation to ensure that they focus on victims' safety rather than any particular organisation's performance targets (e.g. prosecution, arrest etc.). IDVAs offer intensive support in attempt to ensure victims' short and long term safety (Home Office, 2005).

If support services for children and young people are to be effective they need to be funded for the medium and long term to allow workers to develop positive, trusting working relationships with the young people (Melrose & Barrett 2004; Chase & Stratham, 2004; Scott & Skidmore. 2006; Pearce, 2009). If young people are aggressive, manipulative and reject the support process it may be difficult for workers to view them as victims of abuse (Pearce, 2009). Persistence and non-judgemental approaches in trying to engage young people involved in sexual exploitation are imperative (Melrose, 2004). A positive relationship with a reliable adult who can listen to the young person is beneficial for young people who have been sexually exploited as it allows them to feel valued and experience a non-abusive relationship with an adult. The adult in the positive working relationship should not tolerate unacceptable behaviour without critique and should continue to develop the relationship even when the young person is reluctant to engage (Pearce, 2009).

Pearce (2009) argues that offering an appointment at a regular time each week in a location selected by the worker may not be the most successful means of engaging a sexually exploited young person, particularly in the initial stages of the working relationship. Pearce (2009) recommends the use of therapeutic outreach for working with young people who have been or are being sexually exploited. Therapeutic outreach is an intervention approach that aims to meet the gap between disrupted and planned engagement with children and young people who have been sexually exploited. Therapeutic outreach incorporates opportunity led work where workers have the capacity to identify and use the opportunities that arise in everyday activities and discussions with young people. A further concept involved in therapeutic outreach is 'holding the young person in mind' within which sustained contact is made outside of appointment times and continual efforts are made to contact the young person (Pearce, 2009). The Sheffield Safeguarding Children's Board (2007) explained how young people who have been sexually exploited often believe they are better off looking after themselves as prior adult relationships have been poor and they therefore need to see that their worker is dedicated to supporting them before they will engage. If they feel that their emotions and circumstances are too extreme for their worker to deal with, they will be left isolated and will not successfully engage. Sheffield Safeguarding Children's Board (2007) explained that young people who are sexually exploited need the opportunity for *"'sounding off' (a need to be able to rant and complain), for 'popping in' (just need to know you're there when I need you) for 'outreach' (letters, texts, phone calls, active searching, visits), for 'crisis' (I need you to help me NOW), for 'holding' (staying with me where I am now) and for 'long term' (expecting nothing from them but constantly encouraging them)"* (Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board, 2007, pp10-11). Workers who are listening to the traumatic experiences of young people may require support themselves; this will help to maintain the relationship between the worker and the young person (Pearce, 2009).

4. Methodology

In accordance with the definition of child sexual exploitation developed by the National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People (see page 6), this research aimed to explore the more subtle forms of sexual exploitation i.e. when a young person receives 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing and/or another or others performing, sexual activities on them. Throughout the report, this will be referred to as young people 'swapping' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts'; however, it is important to acknowledge that such 'swapping' takes place in a context where the exploiters have power over the young person involved and which often involves the use of coercion, violence and/or intimidation (DCSF, 2009).

4.1 Aim and objectives

The aim of the research was to explore young people's workers' experience of supporting young people who 'swap' sexual activities for 'favours' and/or 'gifts' in Merseyside.

The objectives of the research were to:

- Identify current theory, policy and practice regarding young people who 'swap' sexual activities for 'favours' and/or 'gifts' and support available to such young people;
- Explore young people's workers' experience of supporting young people who have 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' and/or 'gifts' in Merseyside;
- Identify support available to young people who have 'swapped' sex or sexual activities for 'favours' and/or 'gifts' and gaps in service provision in Merseyside;
- Inform teaching and learning for academic delivery staff and students on this topic.[2]

4.2 Research design and methods

The research adopted a cross-sectional design using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The research involved distributing questionnaires and conducting interviews with young people's workers in Merseyside.

4.2.1 Questionnaires distributed to young people's workers

A questionnaire was distributed to those who work directly with young people (under the age of 25 years) across a wide range of young people's services in Merseyside. The types of services invited to participate were:
- accommodation providers;
- Connexions;
- sexual health;
- substance use;
- young runaways;
- youth projects facilitated by the voluntary and community sector; and
- youth services.

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[2] A lesson plan and materials will be produced for the module entitled *Equality and Empowerment: Working with girls and young women* which is delivered as part of a diploma in Youth and Community Work at Liverpool John Moores University.

Employees of NHS services were excluded from this research because the National Research Ethics Services' permission could not be obtained within the available time frame. The questionnaire was distributed by email and by post (in accordance with the preference of the services' managers). Follow-up emails and letters were also sent. The two page questionnaire is appended (appendix 1). Data was inputted into the computer software package SPSS and descriptive statistics were produced.

4.2.2 Semi-structured interviews conducted with young people's workers

Those workers invited to complete the questionnaire who had experienced a young person (under the age of 25 years old) *suggesting* to them or *directly* disclosing to them that they had 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts' were also invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. The invitation to participate in interviews was delivered via email; through meetings with managers; and was detailed on the questionnaire itself. The interviews lasted approximately one hour, were audio recorded, and were held at the interviewees' workplace. The interview guide is appended (appendix 2). Interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed using the computer software package NVivo. Conceptual mapping was conducted which involved identifying key themes and organising these into broader themes. Key themes were selected due to reoccurrence across interviewees or because they were deemed to be important by the research team (Gribch, 2007).

4.3 Ethical issues

Ethical permission to conduct the research was obtained from Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) Ethics Committee. Participants were provided with an information sheet and written informed consent was obtained for the interviews. Participants were informed about confidentiality and anonymity. All data will be held according to LJMU's data protection policy (LJMU, 2007).

5. Findings

5.1 Questionnaires distributed to young people's workers

One hundred and ninety one questionnaires were distributed to young people's workers and 57 were returned (30% response rate). The findings from the workers' questionnaire are presented below.

Young people's workers were asked to state the main focus of the organisation they were employed by (Figure 2). The modal response was substance use (20 workers, 35%); followed by education/employment/training (15 workers, 26%); accommodation (12 workers, 21%); sexual health (6 workers, 11%); criminal justice (1 worker, 2%); counselling (1 worker, 2%) and outreach (1 worker, 2%).

**Figure 2. The main focus of young people's workers' organisations**
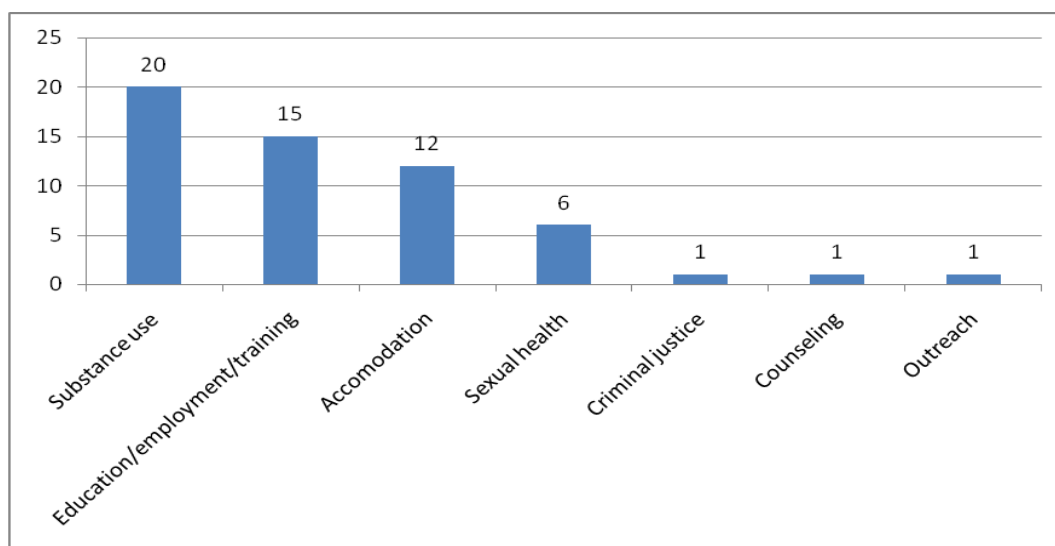
More workers reported young people *suggesting* to them that they had 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts' (24 workers, 42%) than *directly informing* them (8 workers, 14%). Six workers stated that between one and five young females had *directly informed* them that they had 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' and 'gifts' in the last 12 months (11%). Three workers stated that between one and five young males had *directly informed* them that they had 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' and 'gifts' in the last 12 months (5%). None of the workers stated that more than five young people had *directly informed* them that they had 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts' in the last 12 months.

Twenty workers stated that between one and five young females had *suggested* to them but not *directly informed* them that they had 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts' in the last 12 months. There was one worker who stated that between six and ten young females had *suggested* this to them in the last 12 months. Fewer of the workers stated that males had *suggested* that they had 'swapped' sexual activities. There were 13 workers who stated that between one and five young males had *suggested* they had 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' and 'gifts' in the last 12 months. No workers stated that more than five young males had *suggested* to them that they had 'swapped' sex in the last 12 months.

The young people's workers were asked which 'gifts' or 'favours' young people had *suggested* to them or *directly informed* them they had received in exchange for sexual activities (Figure 3). The modal response was alcohol (16 workers, 28%); followed by illicit drugs (15 workers, 26%); money (8 workers, 14%); cigarettes (7 workers, 12%); shelter/accommodation (7 workers, 12%); mobile phones (4 workers, 7%); holiday/breaks (4 workers, 7%); food (3 workers, 5%), clothes (3 workers, 5%) and affection/love/attention (1 worker, 2%).

Figure 3. The 'favours' and 'gifts' young people's workers reported that young people 'swapped' for sexual activities
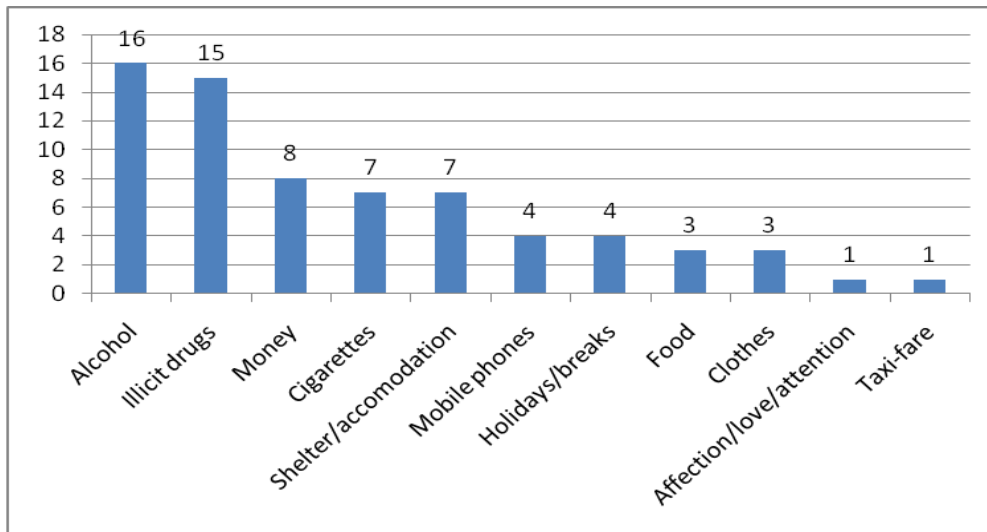
The young people's workers were asked which age group most frequently reported 'swapping' sex (Figure 4). The modal response was 16 to 17 years old (16 workers, 28%). This was followed by 13 to 15 year olds (6 workers, 11%) and 18 to 25 year olds (4 workers, 7%). None of the young people's workers stated that the age group to most frequently report sexual exploitation was under 13 years old.

Figure 4. The most common age group of young people who had informed workers that they had 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts'
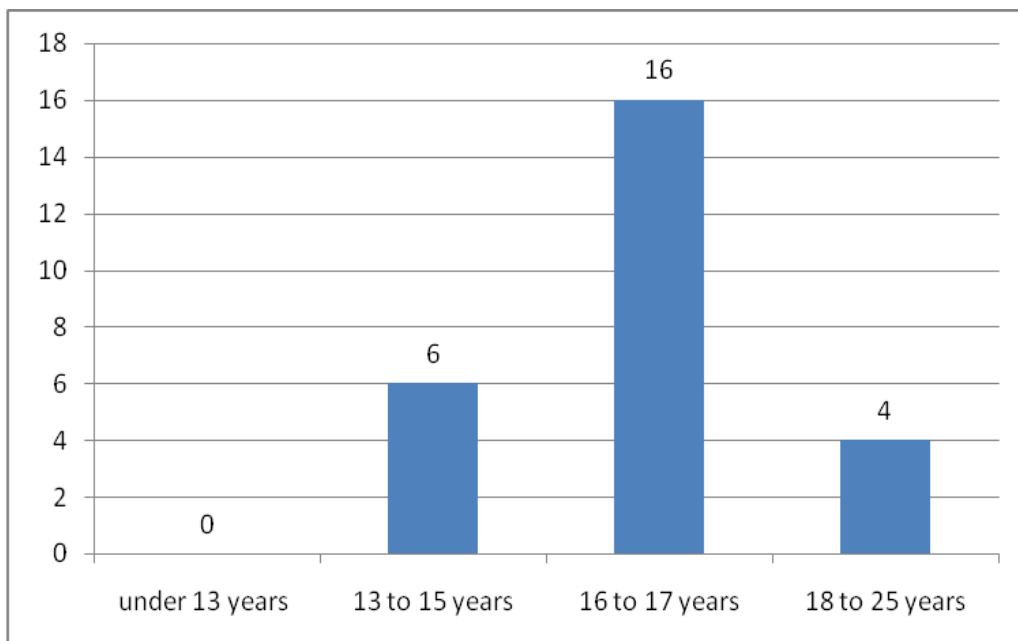
Thirty seven of the workers (65%) stated that the screening and assessment tools that they used obtained information about whether a young person was experiencing or at risk of experiencing sexual exploitation. In addition, eleven of the workers (19%) had received formal training which specifically focussed upon sexual exploitation. Twenty nine of the workers (51%) were aware of projects in Merseyside which helped to inform young people about the issues relating to sexual exploitation.

Workers were asked to name organisations that helped to inform young people about issues relating to sexual exploitation (Figure 5). The organisation named by the highest number of workers was the NHS Armistead Centre (12 workers, 21%). There were four organisations mentioned by four workers (7%); these were Barnardos, Brook, Young Person's Advisory Service (YPAS) and So to Speak. The Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre was named by three of the workers (5%). The names of three organisations were provided by two workers (4%); namely Wirral Youth Theatre; THINK (Teenage Health in Knowsley); and Young Runaways. There were nine organisations that were named by one worker (2%); these were ISIS, Youth Service, Abacus, Safeguarding Children's Services, Social Care, Streetwise, Sure Start and the Police Sexual Exploitation Unit.

Figure 5. The projects that young people's workers stated aimed to inform young people about issues relating to sexual exploitation
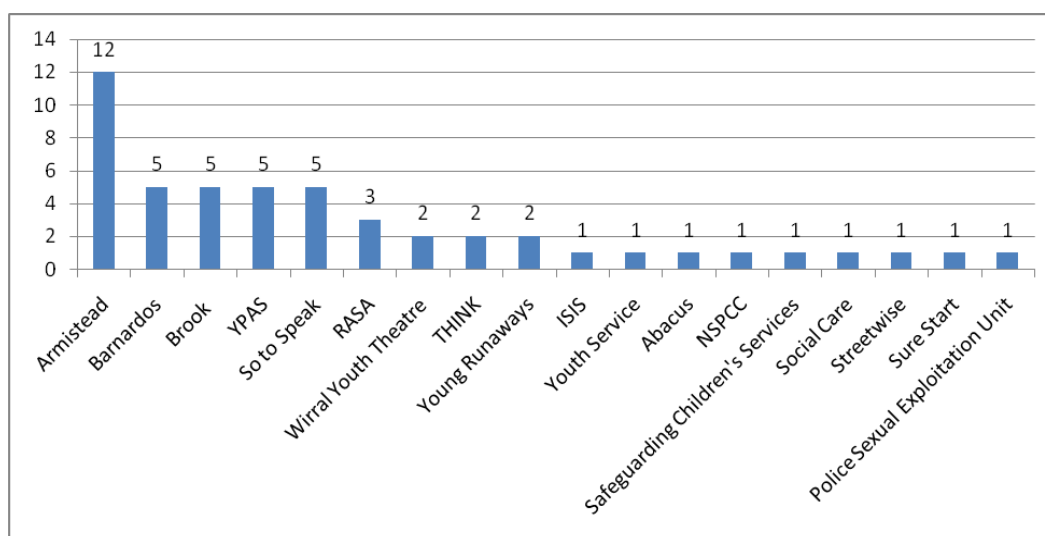
Workers were asked what, in their professional opinion, currently helped them to support young people who had 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts'. This was an open question. The themes and subthemes identified are described below.

Support for young people's workers (21 workers)

Twenty one comments were made regarding the support available for workers. Subthemes included the support workers received from colleagues (13 workers); the support workers received from their line manager (5 workers); and the support received from external supervisors (3 workers).

Training (18 workers)

Eighteen comments were made regarding training. Eight of the workers stated that training supported their work with young people who had 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' and 'gifts'. Six workers specifically stated that child protection training supported their work; two stated sexual health training assisted them and one worker stated that training regarding domestic abuse had supported them in their role.

Knowledge and awareness (17 workers)

Seventeen workers stated that their own knowledge and awareness supported them in their work with young people who 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts'. Five workers stated that general knowledge supported them; four reported that knowledge about available services supported them; three workers specifically mentioned how knowledge of housing services supported them. Two workers stated that awareness of child protection policies were important. Two workers explained how knowledge and awareness of the issues the young people who 'swap' sex encounter assisted them in their role. One worker stated that knowledge about training available to young people was beneficial and one worker stated that it was useful to have knowledge about IDVAs.

Methods of support (16 workers)

Sixteen workers described the methods of support that they felt assisted young people who 'swapped' sex. Three workers mentioned counselling; two stated 'activities'; and two stated improving self esteem. The following methods of support were each mentioned by one worker: advice sessions for young people; advocacy; consistent work; education; exploring young people's substance use; setting goals; providing leaflets; mediation; and developing routines for young people.

Policy and protocols (9 workers)

Nine of the young people's workers stated that the existence of policy assisted them in their work. Eight of these workers specifically mentioned how child protection policy assisted them. One worker specified that assessment protocols supported them in their work with this group.

Staff attributes (8 workers)

Eight workers described how professional experience supported them to work with young people; four described how their experience of working with young people and developing trusting relationships was important; one worker described how confidence in their abilities supported them and one described how their used their personal knowledge and intuition.

Services (7 workers)

Seven of the workers named specific services or types of services that supported them in their work with young people who 'swap' sexual activities for 'favours'/'gifts'. Six of these workers referred to sexual health services; they specifically named Armistead, THINK service and Brook. One worker specifically stated that children's charities supported them.

Partnership working (5 workers)

Five workers stated that partnership working assisted them in their work with young people who 'swap' sexual activities. Two workers referred to partnership working in general. Two of the workers stated that child protection strategy meetings supported them in their work, and one worker stated that being able to signpost young people to other services supported their work with young people who 'swap' sexual activities.

Referral mechanisms (3 workers)

Three of the workers stated that referral mechanisms supported them in their work with young people who 'swap' sexual activities for 'favours'/'gifts'. Two of these workers provided more details, one referred to the benefits of being able to make referrals to the Central

Advice and Duty Team (CADT) (local authority) and one worker stated that referral pathways to housing services were particularly beneficial.

5.2 Semi-structured interviews conducted with young people's workers

Eight interviews were conducted with young people's workers and the data were thematically analysed. The identified themes and subthemes are described below.

'Gifts' and 'favours'

Workers described the 'gifts' and 'favours' that young people had informed them (directly or indirectly) that they had received in return for sexual activities. The 'gifts' and 'favours' identified included: affection; accommodation; drugs; 'being kept'; alcohol; settling drug debts; access to nightclubs; and lifts in cars.

Affection (5 workers)

Five of the workers referred to young people 'swapping' sexual activities for affection. A number of the workers described how looked after children were vulnerable to becoming involved in exploitive relationships with older men because they craved love and affection. One worker also described how some young women were in relationships with men and felt pressurised into having sex in order to receive love and affection. In addition, one worker described how 'bed hopping' occurred between young people living in hostels because these young people craved affection.

> *"I would say in the hostel, there is 'bed hopping' as well, a lot of the young people who are seeking affection, they find that when they go there, they are getting attention off other people as a way of making friends and feeling popular and a way of feeling popular is to then go and have sexual relations…we get to find out because there is suddenly an outbreak of Chlamydia or Gonorrhoea and then we are asked to go in and then that's basically what's been happening…It's about wanting to have someone to be with that night, having someone to be with and they might not necessarily want sex but it is about sharing that horrible space with somebody rather than being alone. It's sad you know."*
>
> [sexual health worker]

> *"It was three looked after children who were there and two who were in homes but such chaotic homes, they didn't have anyone, they didn't have the love and affection they craved but they had to have that. So you can see how these people* [perpetrators of sexual exploitation], *they can smell it a mile away these people. They can sense it, very intelligent, very sad individuals but they prey on the poor young people."*
>
> [substance misuse worker]

Accommodation (3 workers)

Three of the workers described how young people had 'swapped' sexual activities for accommodation. These situations varied in context. Workers described how young people sought older partners in order to have a place to stay. Workers also discussed situations where young people would be provided with a flat to stay as part of the 'grooming' process.

One worker also described a situation where young people would 'exchange' sex for a place to stay if they had missed the last train home after a night out socialising.

> *"She* [a young woman supported by the worker] *was 18 by this time and she was having sex with another male, she would say it was her boyfriend but we knew the other male, this was his MO* [modus operandi]*, this was something he did with a lot of young women. He would pick them up off the streets, he would let them stay in a flat and around violence drug and alcohol abuse, and then feeling obliged. She would say 'he is my boyfriend', she would argue that, but we would know that he would give young women a place to stay."*
>
> [substance misuse worker]

Drugs (3 workers)

One worker described how young women living in hostels were being provided with cocaine whilst socialising in bars and night clubs, and were not paying any money for this cocaine. Three of the workers discussed how young people they had supported had exchanged sexual activities for drugs. However, none reported that young people had directly and knowingly 'exchanged' sexual activities for drugs. Two of the workers described how providing drugs to young people had been part of the 'grooming' process. The workers reported that these young people were being lied to about the substances they were being provided with.

> *"We have got an incident at the moment with a young woman who is not at the moment getting exploited by this young man but this young man is known to us because he works with other young women. He is very violent, very aggressive, once he gets a female into his clutches they won't get away. So now she mentions his name and it's like 'oh he is just me mate, he is boss, he deals drugs and I get mine for nothing'. We know that's part of the way he works and gets young people into these relationships. The thing with him was his level of violence is absolutely atrocious, he has got no boundaries, we took a bit of a chance I suppose because she could go back to him and say, but we had enough evidence to know that he had been violent towards young women, and the threat of violence."*
>
> [substance misuse worker]

'Being kept' (3 workers)

Three workers described how young people sought sexual relationships with individuals with money, who were usually older, because this allowed them to have a desirable standard of living. They described this as the young people 'being kept'. This included being provided with somewhere to live, being taken out for meals, and receiving gifts.

> *"One of our young men, wasn't really attracted to this guy but then as soon as he found out the guy was a lawyer, he arranged to kind of meet up with him and for him it was 'like but he has got money, he can look after me' and as hard as that is it's the reality for people who are under the poverty line, who have got nothing, they don't have families they are living in hostels, it could change their life. Do they value sex as something precious and something to really think about or is it something to give away easy and not think about so much."*
>
> [sexual health worker]

Alcohol (2 workers)

Two of the workers described how alcohol was used as a tool for sexual exploitation. One of the workers described how it was used as part of the 'grooming' process and one explained how young males were providing young females with alcohol whilst socialising in parks at night. The worker believed that the young males intended to sexually exploit these young females.

> *"Then we have had a phase of a few different quite young women. We are talking about 14 to 17* [years old] *who were accessing a lot of males who were either Kurdish or Turkish, basically a lot to do with kebab shops mainly over in Liverpool. That involved young women basically the males themselves would not drink but they would offer them drink or coke* [cocaine].*They wouldn't always know what they were taking and often males would slowly be introduced and they would have sex with them and then other males would be brought in. We had young women who were told they were going to be taken on a day out to Blackpool but stopped off in Blackburn on the way and again were kind of plied with alcohol for sex. It's very very subtle."*
>
> [substance misuse worker]

> *"It's more just older peers, just older peers. Because at the moment, I am a bit disgusted by this, lads are doing this for a purpose as well in parks, which is disturbing really…because they are doing it on purpose with a bottle of vodka. There is intent behind this. It's not young people getting drunk and having sex out of inhibition, this is with intent. So there is a means to an end about getting young girls drunk and sexually assaulting them because they are not aware of what's happened and they can't really identify anybody because you are too drunk to identify anybody and its upsetting me because the intent behind it…. because the young person will go off on their own and then the young person is on the phone as well. So there is sort of the indecent real nasty stuff where it's been passed round the classroom on the phone and it's been online as well. Really nasty stuff actually when you are talking about say somebody 12/13 and 15 year olds. It tends to be 15 year old males or 16 year old male groups and 13 or 14 year old one or two females. They can sense that there is a vulnerability there and 'we can have a jolly with this'. That is the sickening part of it all. They are 16 years old so really that is an age where really something could be done to stop that, they are adults now."*
>
> [substance misuse worker]

'Settling drug debts' (1 worker)

One worker described how they had supported some young people who had engaged in sexual activity with those who provided them with substances in order to settle their debts. Some young people had told them this directly and in some instances the worker was aware of anecdotal evidence to support this.

> *"I mean we recently had a young mother who had her cocaine debt which somebody had paid him off with couple of blagged* [counterfeit] *20 pound notes. He then came to the project and he was kicking off and the next minute they got*

off into the van with him and came back 20 minutes later and it was all done and dusted."

<div align="right">[substance misuse worker]</div>

Access to night clubs (1 worker)

One worker described how young people deemed it to be desirable to have a sexual relationship with security staff at night clubs in order to gain access to them.

> *"I think maybe a few of them* [young people] *have said they have started going out with like bouncers at night clubs. So it is about maybe access to clubs rather than alcohol but you know basically going out with people who can get them into clubs, seems to be a pretty desirable thing to urge for and then give them a lift home afterwards."*

<div align="right">[sexual health worker]</div>

Lifts in cars (1 worker)

One worker described how the young females they supported would often get into cars with young men.

> *"Young girls who were like 15, 14, 13* [years old] *were going to like parts of Liverpool...the sexual favours were you know just down to jumping in the cars with them, getting lifts more than anything."*

<div align="right">[substance misuse worker]</div>

Young people's circumstances and constrained choices

Workers discussed the circumstances that led to young people 'swapping' sexual activities for 'favours' and 'gifts' and the constrained choices they were forced to make. Subthemes identified were a lack of desirable alternative housing options; and limited opportunities for LGBT young people to socialise. One worker also stated that young people were often seen to be making free choices and their exploitation was consequently not recognised.

Lack of desirable alternative housing options (3 workers)

Three workers described the lack of desirable alternative housing options available to young people if they were removed from sexually exploited relationships.

> *"It's sad you know, and then the alternative we are offering young people is shit. You know we say we feel you are being exploited by this 35 year old women who is basically taking advantage but the option is to leave her and maybe live in a hostel, get some benefits…There is nothing appealing about option B."*

<div align="right">[sexual health worker]</div>

Limited opportunities for LGBT young people to socialise with other LGBT young people (1 worker)

One worker described how LGBT young people have limited opportunities to meet other LGBT young people and may therefore engage in relationships with older people who they

meet on the internet or in public houses or night clubs.

> *"I think with LGB young people there is a different culture that goes with being gay, lesbian. They are meeting people in bars so people are often older, they are meeting people online so people are older. There is not as much readily available, people for them to go out with in the street, in McDonalds, in school. So you are seeking people out in pubs, in clubs and online and that brings different types of people into your life that other young people might not experience in the same way."*
>
> [sexual health worker]

Young people seen to be making choices (2 workers)

One worker described how young people were often seen to be making choices by those working within the local authority and their exploitation was not recognised.

> *"Even though they are still legally under 18, and so in the eyes of the law they are still a child, they are seen to be making choices by whoever and if you put a CADT [Central Advice and Duty Team] referral in, I think the problem is when you have got a scale of 0 to 10 who are actively going out and doing things voluntarily even though they are at risk and you know they are at risk, what do you do, because they are seen to be making their own minds up...Even though in the eyes of the law they are under 18 it is really difficult, if they are under 16 then there is a little bit more leeway with them."*
>
> [substance misuse worker]

Identifying sexual exploitation

Workers described how they were able to identify when a young person had been or was being sexually exploited through informal open conversations and discussing safer sexual practices. Workers also discussed the limited opportunities available for young people to disclose sexual exploitation.

Informal open discussions (5 workers)

Workers stressed the importance of open informal discussion which helped to build relationships and allowed young people to feel comfortable about discussing issues relating to sexual exploitation.

> *"You can't just sit down with a client and say 'oh yes by the way, you know are you swapping sex for drugs or what have you'. In my mind if that was put on an assessment form that would be a real no no. It's about developing relationships, like anything we do, its trust and those things come eventually. Some people are more open than others."*
>
> [substance misuse worker]

> *"You want to work with the young person and not the* [assessment] *form."*
>
> [substance misuse worker]

Discussing safer sexual practices (2 workers)

Workers described how they would ask questions about safer sex practices and how these discussions aided workers' understanding of whether young people were being sexually exploited.

> *"We would not ask that question directly but we would ask it in a way where we talk about sexual health, we would talk about partners, we would talk about other things, we find that if we go straight down the middle, most young people don't actually identify it as an issue, so if you said are you involved in any sexual exploitation they would just look at you as if...They see it as part of their way of life as part of what they do, young people like to think of themselves as streetwise, so they wouldn't think of themselves as getting into that situation."*
>
> [sexual health worker]

Limited opportunity for in-depth discussion (2 workers)

Workers supporting young people at a tier one or tier two level described how they had limited opportunities for in-depth discussion with young people and therefore there were limited opportunities for young people to disclose or suggest sexual exploitation was occurring.

> *"So we don't always have the opportunities to get to the deep routed stuff with each person. The ones that we do, I would say it was quite rare for us to get a situation like that in our project, although I am not saying that it doesn't happen, you know it has probably happened more than we believe and that is probably down to young people not sharing it."*
>
> [sexual health worker]

Methods of support

Workers described the methods they adopted to support young people who were being sexually exploited. These included 'planting seeds' with young people; addressing the immediate risks; creating protective factors; and maintaining the relationship between the worker and the young person.

'Planting seeds' with young people (2 workers)

Two workers described how they would 'plant seeds' with young people i.e. they would provide them with pieces of information that may help them to recognise that they were being sexually exploited in the future.

> *"We will often talk about cultural difference anyway because they* [the young people] *would talk about how these men pray at certain times and whatever and so what we would say to them is 'you need to look at different cultures, women are treated differently in different societies and different cultures around the world', not to necessarily think that they aren't treated differently in our own society I suppose, you know what I mean. We talk about inequalities in general for young women and obviously different cultures but for young women who have got involved and got in a little bit deeper have found that they have told them to go home that they are dressed inappropriately. So things like do come to fruition, so hopefully over a period of time, the seed that you planted, that you*

might not be allowed out, that you might have to dress differently, when they come in short skirts and low cut tops maybe you know, in certain cultures and society it is just not acceptable, you have to cover up. It's like that when we talk about that and they say 'he said I am fine whatever'. It might be in a period of time when they have been abused or threatened or whatever because of the way they are dressed it starts to link up and then hopeful once one thing starts to link up the other things come in to play, the other things you have been talking about, not being on your own, not getting isolated, things like that and just trying to keep people safe."

[substance misuse worker]

Addressing immediate risks (1 worker)

One worker explained the importance of addressing the immediate risks to the young person.

"In terms of the young women, there was a few of us who worked in unison and we would do some quick interventions some quick work around keeping safe and trying to get the message across, 'what happens if you go over there drink vodka and refuse to have sex', she was like 'that will never happen' 'but what if it does?'"

[substance misuse worker]

Creating protective factors (1 worker)

One worker described how they would try to ensure protective factors such as training or education were in place. This was deemed to be particularly important as young people were unlikely to acknowledge that they were being sexually exploited immediately and therefore could not be prevented from socialising with the perpetrators of the sexual exploitation.

"For us it would probably be to try and put protective factors back in place. It might be that it is family mediation, we will try and put them into education and training, we will try and secure them a place to stay. If they had had traumatic experience then we will try and look at some counselling. If it is more specialised then we have got things like RASA [Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre] and they will do more specialised work which we have used in the past. So if a young person has actually been raped or sexually abused then we will do that. It's not one thing, each young person is an individual, is so different. Sexual health, we run through all of that and get that set up. The more protective factors you can put in place the less risk to the young people. They will often go and cling to these adults because these adults treat them as, what they see as treat them really well. They won't see this exploitation and they won't see that. It's about getting them back into education and training. So we will put all those protective factors back in place, not just about drugs and alcohol but protective factors against other things."

[substance misuse worker]

Maintaining the relationship between the worker and the young person (1 worker)

One worker discussed how they would use a *"softly softly"* approach when working with young people who were being sexually exploited. They stressed the importance of being non-judgemental to maintain a positive working relationship with the young people.

> *"I was trying to keep our relationship going and I knew that if I gave her an inkling of an idea that I felt it was inappropriate what she was doing or what she was becoming involved in, then she would just disengage."*
>
> [substance misuse worker]

Preventing sexual exploitation

Workers discussed preventing sexual exploitation. Subthemes identified included encouraging young people to explore the 'rights and wrongs' relating to sexual exploitation; raising young people's self esteem; the 'patchy' nature of sex and relationship education in schools; increasing awareness of sexual exploitation amongst young people and workers; and a lack of specialised training for staff.

Raising young people's self esteem (4 workers)

Workers described the importance of developing young people's self esteem to reduce the likelihood of them becoming sexually exploited. They felt that the promotion of self esteem may help to reduce the likelihood that young people would consider sexually exploitive relationships to be acceptable or desirable.

> *"Sorry to go on but there is not enough of it, we need a self-confidence service for every young person in the school, every school now, like now or like a year ago. Because that is the reason that comes up, such low self esteem, such low self worth they really have!"*
>
> [substance misuse worker]

Encouraging young people to explore 'rights' and 'wrongs' (3 workers)

Four workers described how they encouraged young people to explore their moral standing in relation to issues such as sexual relationships between individuals who differ greatly in age and exchanging money for sex.

> *"We will have group discussions about that* [relationships between individuals of a significantly different age] *and then yeah we might just invite people in one to one to talk about those issues further, which I think we have done with all of them in terms of their relationships they have been having with older people, yeah we have always followed up."*
>
> [sexual health worker]

'Patchy' sex and relationship education in schools (2 workers)

Workers discussed how the sex and relationship education provided in school was considered to vary greatly between schools, with respect to content and quality. They felt sex and relationship education was an important part of preventing the sexual exploitation of young people.

"I would say for me the biggest issue is it's [sex and relationship education] *too random, the relationships and the way relationships work should be taught."*

[substance misuse worker]

Increasing awareness of sexual exploitation amongst workers and young people (2 workers)

Workers described how they felt it was important that awareness of issues relating to sexual exploitation was increased amongst young people and those who work with them.

"I think it would be good to be more aware of it [sexual exploitation] *because like when we arrange the meeting, you know it is happening but you don't actually see it as, you hear girls talking and you hear them say, they got me alcohol and it's as if they are together and they are drinking it as well but really the chances are she might be drinking it and he is not drinking it. I think you should be made more aware of it* [sexual exploitation] *I think it would be really good, you know."*

[sexual health worker]

"Young people or workers?"

[interviewer]

"Both I think."

[sexual health worker]

Lack of specialised training

The majority of workers had conducted child protection training; however none had completed any specialised training regarding sexual exploitation.

"I think it has just been trial and error really through listening to clients, thinking about it, we don't have training around that [sexual exploitation], *maybe that is something that we should be looking at more."*

[substance misuse worker]

6. Discussion

The response rate for the questionnaires was 30 percent. It should be acknowledged that this was low and it is possible, as with all questionnaires, that those with particular experiences of, or views regarding, sexual exploitation may have been more likely to have completed the questionnaire. However, 37 questionnaire respondents (54%) stated that they had not experienced a young person *suggesting* or *directly informing* them that they had 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts'. Although the questionnaire was not distributed to a representative sample, most groups of professionals likely to work with sexually exploited young people in Merseyside were targeted and it is likely that the responses obtained reflect a broad range of current experiences.

It was originally anticipated that young people would be invited to participate in semi-structured interviews as part of this research. Through discussions with young people's workers, it was decided that only those aged between 18 and 25 years old who had experienced 'swapping' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts' and who were receiving support would be invited to participate in the interviews. However, initial discussions revealed that workers had numerous concerns about inviting these young people to participate in this way. These concerns were preventing any data from being collected from the young people's workers. It was therefore decided that the interviews with young people

would be pursued in follow up research. It is important that research is conducted with young people who have been sexually exploited in order to better understand how they became involved and what support assists them to escape the exploitation, and manage the emotional and/or physical harm caused. It is however, important that the wellbeing of young people is prioritised. Key ethical guidelines such as those provided by Barnardos (n.d.), the British Sociological Association (2002) and the British Psychological Society (2009) should be strictly adhered to when conducting research with such a vulnerable group.

Within the questionnaires, the young people's workers were asked which 'gifts' or 'favours' young people had disclosed or suggested they had 'swapped' for sexual activities. The modal response was alcohol followed by illicit drugs. However, it should be acknowledged that the highest number of workers were employed within organisations that focussed upon substance misuse which may have led to a particular focus on substances. Furthermore, when the young people's workers had the opportunity to discuss the issues in more depth via the interviews, the most frequently discussed 'gift' or 'favour' workers talked about young people 'exchanging' was affection. Although some may argue that exchanging affection for sexual activities is a 'normal' part of adult sexual relationships, affection is specifically mentioned within the definition of child sexual exploitation developed by the National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People (DCSF, 2009). As the definition explains, the limited power of the young person (as a result of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources) and the use of violence, coercion and intimidation, may make the 'exchange' exploitive. In accordance with the notion of 'constrained choice' which was used by Chase and Stratham (2004) to describe how young people came to be exploited via prostitution, within the interviews workers described how young people came to be sexually exploited as a result of their circumstances and a lack of alternative desirable options.

A higher number of workers had experienced young people *suggesting* to them that they had 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts' than *directly informing* them. This illustrates that it is important that those working with young people are appropriately trained to identify those at risk of experiencing sexual exploitation (Pearce, 2009). The majority of the workers had not received formal training which specifically focussed upon sexual exploitation. However, it was not possible to determine the extent to which training regarding related issues (such as child protection and vulnerable young people) sufficiently prepared workers to identify and support young people who had been sexually exploited.

In accordance with other study findings regarding the estimated number of sexually exploited young people (i.e. Swann & Balding, 2002), workers had experienced fewer males than females informing them that they had 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts'. However, as suggested by Scott & Harper (2006) workers may have had a tendency to focus their concerns more on young females than males and therefore young male victims of sexual exploitation may have been less easily identified.

The young people's workers stated that 16 to 17 year olds were most likely to inform them that they had 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts'. This is of particular interest because 16 and 17 years olds are legally able to consent to sexual activities but the definition of child sexual exploitation (see page 6) refers to those aged under 18 years old. Consequently, supporting sexually exploited young people who are aged 16 and 17 may be more complex then supporting those who are younger.

Pearce (2009) stressed the importance of supporting those who work with sexually exploited young people in order to provide long-term protection for young people. In accordance with the literature, workers who completed the questionnaire emphasised the usefulness of the support they received from colleagues. The importance of the professional and personal relationship between the worker and the young person has also been stressed (Melrose,

2004; Pearce, 2009). In agreement with the literature, in these interviews workers highlighted the importance of maintaining the relationship with the young person and being non-judgemental.

The young people's workers described how they considered sex and relationship education to be inconsistent across schools; they stated that some schools delivered high quality sex and relationship education whereas others only provided the basic sex and relationship education delivered as part of the science curriculum. The proposed introduction of PSHE into the national curriculum in both primary and secondary schools (MacDonald, 2009) will provide a useful opportunity to enhance the provision of sex and relationship education, in terms of quality and quantity. Furthermore, the guidance to be published by NICE in January 2011 regarding sex and relationship education may help to enhance standards.

7. Conclusion

The guidance produced by the DCSF in 2009 regarding safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation recognised the range of complex ways in which young people could be sexually exploited. There is a need for monitoring data to be collected regarding young people who are sexually exploited in order to understand their situations more thoroughly and provide evidence for suitable support services (Pearce, 2009).

The findings of this research indicate that workers across young people's services in Merseyside were being informed by young people that they had 'swapped' sexual activities for 'favours' or 'gifts'. These situations varied greatly in context and included young people being 'groomed' for commercial sexual exploitation; young people in exploitive sexual relationships; and young people being sexually exploited by peers on 'one off' occasions. Young people more frequently *suggested* to the workers who participated in the research that they had 'swapped' sex rather than *directly* informing them. Workers reported that young people who disclosed 'swapping' sexual activities to them were most likely to be females and between 16 and 17 years old. Workers who completed the questionnaire identified that alcohol and drugs were the most frequently 'swapped' 'gifts' or 'favours'. However, when workers were provided with the opportunity to discuss this issue in more detail, the most frequently referred to 'gift' or 'favour' 'swapped' for sexual activities was affection. Workers acknowledged the constrained choices which contributed to young people being sexually exploited including a lack of alternative desirable housing options.

The majority of the young people's workers stated that their screening and assessment processes aimed to identify if young people were experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, sexual exploitation. However, they stressed the importance of open informal discussion for identifying sexual exploitation. The majority of the workers had not received any specialised training which specifically focussed upon sexual exploitation; however the extent to which issues regarding sexual exploitation were included within other training programmes was unclear. Raising young people's self esteem; increasing awareness of the sexual exploitation of young people; and improving the quality and consistency of sex and relationship education were considered by workers to be useful means of preventing the sexual exploitation of young people.

8. Recommendations

These recommendations have been made in light of the findings of research conducted with workers within young people's services in Merseyside. Unfortunately young people were not consulted for this research. This should be taken into consideration when considering the recommendations.

8.1 Workers should have access to specialist training regarding sexual exploitation and training needs assessments regarding sexual exploitation should be conducted.

8.2 The Sexual Exploitation: Risk Assessment (SERA) should be used to increase workers' awareness of the signs that young people may be being sexually exploited or at risk of sexual exploitation.

8.3 Consideration should be given to how the sexual exploitation of young people could be minimised via the introduction of compulsory sex and relationship education as part of PSHE.

8.4 The perspectives of young people, who have been sexually exploited and live in Merseyside, regarding how young people become sexually exploited and effective methods of support should be obtained. Young people's well-being should be prioritised throughout the research process.

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10. Appendices

10.1 Appendix 1: Young people's workers' questionnaire

Young people 'swapping' sex and sexual acts for 'favours' and 'gifts': an exploration of experiences and support needs in Merseyside

Questionnaire for staff members working directly with young people

Please note, for the purpose of this questionnaire, young people 'swapping' sex or sexual acts for 'favours' and/or 'gifts' includes any situation where a young person receives a 'favour' or 'gift' such as alcohol, drugs, mobile phones, clothes, money, accommodation etc. in return for sex or a sexual act. The young person may not be aware that an exchange is taking place and may not describe it as an exchange themselves.

1. Please tick the main focus of the organisation you are employed by (optional question).

Accommodation	☐	Sexual health	☐	Education/employment/training	☐
Substance use	☐	Criminal justice	☐	Prefer not to say	☐
Other (please state)					

2a. Within your current job role, have any young people (under the age of 25 years old) <u>directly told you</u> that they have 'swapped' sex or sexual acts for 'favours' or 'gifts'? (Please tick)

Yes ☐   No (please go to question 3a) ☐

2b. Approximately how many <u>females</u> (under the age of 25 years old) have <u>directly told you</u> they have 'swapped' sex or sexual acts for 'favours' or 'gifts' in the last 12 months? (Please tick)

1 – 5 females	☐	6 – 10 females	☐	11 – 15 females	☐
16 – 20 females	☐	21 – 25 females	☐	26 + females	☐

2c. Approximately how many <u>males</u> (under the age of 25 years old) have <u>directly told you</u> they have 'swapped' sex or sexual acts for 'favours' or 'gifts' in the last 12 months? (Please tick)

1 – 5 males	☐	6 – 10 males	☐	11 – 15 males	☐
16 – 20 males	☐	21 – 25 males	☐	26 + males	☐

3a. Within your current job role, have any young people (under the age of 25 years old) <u>suggested to you but not directly told you</u> that they have 'swapped' sex or sexual acts for 'favours' or 'gifts'?(Please tick)

Yes ☐   No (if no please go to question 4) ☐

3b. If yes, approximately how many <u>females</u> (under the age of 25 years old) have <u>suggested to you</u> that they have 'swapped' sex or sexual acts for 'favours' or 'gifts' in the last 12 months?

1 – 5 females	☐	6 – 10 females	☐	11 – 15 females	☐
16 – 20 females	☐	21 – 25 females	☐	26+ females	☐

3c. Approximately how many <u>males</u> (under the age of 25 years old) have <u>suggested to you</u> that they have 'swapped' sex or sexual acts for 'favours' or 'gifts' in the last 12 months? (Please tick)

1 – 5 males	☐	6 – 10 males	☐	11 – 15 males	☐
16 – 20 males	☐	21 – 25 males	☐	26 + males	☐

4. If you answered yes to 2a or 3a, please tick the 'favours' or 'gifts' that these young people told you/suggested they 'swapped' for sex or sexual acts (please tick as many responses that are relevant). If you answered no to 2a and 3a please go to question 6.

Alcohol	☐	Food	☐	Shelter/accommodation	☐
Illegal drugs	☐	Mobile phones	☐	Money	☐
Cigarettes	☐	Clothes	☐	Holidays/short-breaks	☐
Other (please state)					

5. **If you answered yes to question 2a or 3a, please tick the most common age group of the young people who have told you/suggested they have 'swapped' sex or sexual acts for 'favours' or 'gifts'?**

Under 13 years old [   ]   13 to 15 years old [   ]   16 to 17 years old [   ]

18 to 25 years old [   ]   26 years old + [   ]

6. **Do the screening or assessment tools your organisation use aim to obtain any information about whether a young person is experiencing or at risk of sexual exploitation?**

Yes [   ]   No [   ]

7a. Are you aware of any projects in Merseyside which help to inform young people about the issues relating to sexual exploitation? (e.g. information sessions, distribution of leaflets, theatre productions etc., please tick)

Yes [   ]   No (If no, please go to question 8a) [   ]

7b. If yes, please provide details of these projects.

Name of project	Organisation delivering project	Nature of project

8a. Have you received any formal training which specifically focussed on young people and sexual exploitation? (Please tick)

Yes [   ]   No (If no, please go to question 9) [   ]

8b. If yes, please provide details of training.

Name of training programme	Training provider	Date completed

9. **In your professional opinion, what currently helps you to support young people who have 'swapped' sex or sexual acts for 'favours' or 'gifts'? (Please provide details e.g. training, knowledge, child protection protocols, support from colleagues…)**

10. **What (if any) further support should be made available for young people who have 'swapped' sex or sexual acts for 'favours' or 'gifts' in the Merseyside area?**

10.2 Appendix 2: Young people's workers' interview guide

Background information

1. Could you tell me about the service?
2. What age groups does the service support?
3. What criteria do young people have to meet to be supported?
4. What referral processes do you use?
5. Can young people self refer?
6. What support is offered to them? (methods, period of time etc.)
7. How is the service funded?
8. Could you tell me about your role?

Identification of issues faced by young people

9. Within your work, have you supported young people who have swapped sex or sexual acts for favours or gifts (such as mobile phones, money, drugs, alcohol or shelter) either knowingly or unknowingly?
10. If yes could you provide a brief overview of what had happened? (i.e. what favours or gifts were swapped, what sexual acts were swapped, over what period of time, how did young people become involved in such a situation?)
11. In such cases, was the swapping of sexual acts for favours or gifts the main reason the young person became engaged in your service?
12. Do you think the young people realised they had been sexually exploited? What makes you think this?
13. Have you come across young people who have been sexually exploited that are males, females or both?
14. What ages were these young people?
15. How did you find out that the young people had experienced this sexual exploitation?
16. How willing have young people been to discuss such experiences with you?
17. Do you have a screening or assessment process?
18. If yes, does this screening or assessment process include questions regarding sexual exploitation?
19. If yes, what is asked?

Support provided

20. What action did you take when the sexual exploitation was disclosed?
21. Did you have to follow any particular policies/guidance? If so which ones?
22. What type of support have you provided to these young people?
23. For how long was the support provided?
24. How did you feel about discussing the sexual exploitation with the young people?
25. What do you feel are the most successful aspects of support you provide to young people who have been sexually exploited?
26. What are the least successful aspects of support you provide to young people who have been sexually exploited?
27. How can the support you provide to young people who have been sexually exploited improve?
28. Do you signpost/refer young people who have been sexually exploited on to another service for further support?
29. How successful do you feel the support provided by these services was?
30. Are you aware of any specialised services in Merseyside for young people who have been sexually exploited?

31. Are you aware of any specialised services in Merseyside for young people who have been sexually exploited?
32. If yes, could you provide contact details for these services?
33. Are you aware of any specialised services for young people who have been sexually exploited outside of the Merseyside area?
34. If yes, could you provide the contact details for this service?

Partnership working

35. What services do you work with to support young people who have been sexually exploited?
36. In what ways do you work with other services to support young people who have been sexually exploited?
37. What aspects of partnership working, to support young people who have been sexually exploited, have been particularly successful?
38. What aspects of partnership working, to support young people who have been sexually exploited, have been less successful?
39. What could be done to improve partnership working in Merseyside to support young people who have been sexually exploited?
40. Do you work with the Local Area Safeguarding Board regarding supporting young people who have been sexually exploited? If so how?
41. What are the most successful aspects of this working relationship?
42. What are the least successful aspects of this relationship?
43. Is there anything that can be done to improve partnership working with the Local Area Safeguarding Board to support young people who have been sexually exploited? If so what?

Perspectives upon gaps in support and preventative measures

44. What measures have been established in Merseyside in an attempt to prevent young people from being sexually exploited?
45. Are there any gaps in measures being taken in Merseyside to prevent young people from being sexually exploited?
46. What support measures are currently in place in Merseyside for young people who have been sexually exploited?
47. Are there any gaps in service provision for young people who have sexually exploited? If so could you explain what services you feel are required?

48. Is there anything else that we haven't covered regarding supporting young people who have experienced sexual exploitation?