



**BOYS THINK GIRLS ARE TOYS?:  
AN EVALUATION OF THE NIA PROJECT PREVENTION  
PROGRAMME ON SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**

**Final report**

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## Introduction

This report presents the findings from an evaluation of a prevention programme on sexual exploitation, delivered by **the nia project** in partnership with the Children's Society (TCS). The programme was delivered across London from September 2007 to December 2010<sup>1</sup>, with three broad aims:

- To increase the number of young people at risk of being abused through sexual exploitation accessing appropriate support;
- To increase the number of professionals that are able to identify young people at risk of sexual exploitation and take appropriate action;
- To increase the number of agencies aware of the issue and able to address it.

The evaluation was commissioned by **the nia project**<sup>2</sup> to focus on the three core strands of the programme: workshops with young people, delivered in schools and youth settings, to mixed or single gender groups; training for professionals on sexual exploitation; training of young people to be co-facilitators in sessions for professionals. Two conferences were also held as part of the programme, the first in 2009, led by young women for young women, and the second for professionals in 2010, themed around hearing young people's voices. Preliminary findings from the evaluation were presented at the latter.

There was a small budget available for the evaluation, which was commissioned in the last year of the programme. It was not possible therefore to undertake an in-depth process evaluation, or to have input from the outset in how feedback was gathered and outcomes measured. There are further limitations for how we can report on the professionals training, as it is likely they had moved on in the intervening time. Even where a 'snapshot' evaluation is all that is possible, it is worth considering engaging with researchers at the outset as this can enhance documentation and measurement within service delivery.

### *Structure of the report*

The first section of this report is an overview of prevention work on violence against women in schools/youth settings, to contextualise **the nia project** programme in the current evidence base and policy frameworks. The second section details the methodology for the evaluation, while the third presents feedback from young people. Section four discusses the young trainers element of the programme, and the fifth presents analysis of responses from professionals who attended training sessions. The final section draws the findings together and outlines key lessons.

### *Policy context*

Over the last decade sexual exploitation has been recognised as an issue that requires a proactive multi-agency approach to identifying and supporting victim-survivors and tackling abusers (Pearce, 2009). Guidance for local authorities and the Sexual Offences Act 2003 make it clear that young people under the age of 18 are to be viewed as victims of abuse rather than criminalised under offences related to prostitution (DoH, 2000; SOA, 2003; DCSF, 2009), although research shows that

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<sup>1</sup> This included a three month period when the post of Sexual Exploitation Worker was vacant, when the original worker was internally promoted.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the report, we refer to '**the nia project** programme' as the evaluation focuses on those aspects that they delivered although some were jointly delivered with the Children's Society. Where findings relate to both organisations, we specify this.

the line between protection and sanction can be ambiguous (Phoenix, 2002). Reviews of how guidance has been implemented also reveal that many areas lack the required multi-agency protocols and are in only initial stages of developing approaches to investigating and disrupting perpetrators (Swann & Balding, 2002; Jago & Pearce, 2008). Interim findings from a survey of Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LCSBs), addressing the implementation of the 2009 updated guidance, reveal that while there is 'increased activity', less than a quarter of areas have current multi-agency protocols in place, only a quarter of areas have a thematic subgroup on sexual exploitation and in less than a third is there an identified lead professional (National Working Group, 2010).

While there are specialised support projects for sexually exploited children in the UK, these are geographically sparse and most are provided by voluntary sector organisations operating on insecure funding (Coy et al, 2009; NWG, 2010). Statutory agencies including health, housing, education, Social Services and youth offending teams are daily points of contact for some sexually exploited young people, but levels of awareness of risk indicators/signs of vulnerability vary widely (Jago & Pearce, 2008). This is unsurprising given that (LSCBs) rarely prioritise the issue of sexual exploitation (ibid). There is, as we have also noted with respect to links between teenage pregnancy and non-consensual sex, a danger of a vicious circle here, with the absence of initiatives ensuring continued limited evidence and absence of data precluding practice initiatives (Coy et al, 2010). Enabling agencies to develop their knowledge base and effective response strategies therefore entails training on the spectrum of sexual exploitation to be built into vocational qualifications and ongoing professional development. Similarly, equipping young people to recognise abusive behaviours and 'strengthen protective behaviours' is also crucial (Jago & Pearce, 2008).

### ***Development of the programme***

The prevention programme was developed out of two separate, but parallel, bids by **the nia project** and TCS, submitted to Comic Relief in 2006 for funding to develop preventative work around issues of sexual exploitation. **the nia project** is a community based women's organisation that provides holistic services for survivors of violence in three main service areas: safe accommodation; children and young people's services and advocacy. While specific work with young women has long been a core element of **nia's** service provision, the impetus here was to address the gap identified in preventative work. A preliminary scoping exercise confirmed their practice experience – that although pockets of direct support for sexually exploited young people were being delivered by a small number of organisations, preventative work was uncommon.

The Children's Society is a national organisation that provides wide range of services for children, including: advocacy; legal advice; work in schools, children's centres; and specialised provision for disabled children, those from gypsy/traveller communities, runaways, refugees and young carers. As with **nia**, TCS provides training and consultancy to policymakers and statutory and voluntary sector agencies.

Both organisations were encouraged by Comic Relief to combine their proposals and deliver the programme jointly, albeit that each take responsibility for particular strands that reflected their respective strengths. TCS thus drew on their extensive experience of youth participation to develop the train-the-trainer programme, while **nia** led on delivering the prevention work with young people in schools/youth settings. Any potential tensions in terms of organisational ethos,

specifically **nia**'s feminist roots and practice, were resolved through open communication and respect for expertise. Overall, the partnership between **nia** and TCS was perceived by both as mutually beneficial. Reflecting on lessons from this piece of work, **nia** have sought to build participatory approaches into their service delivery more widely. Another joint project with TCS, 'Safe Choices', has been initiated, aiming to reduce and prevent violent offending by young women. For TCS, the benefits included developing expertise on sexual exploitation that complemented their existing work with vulnerable young people. Finally, the pan-London reach of the programme led to both **nia** and TCS forming strong links in several boroughs that facilitate their ongoing multi-agency working.

### ***Programme content***

Content was developed from a combination of: what has been termed 'practice-based evidence'<sup>3</sup> (Fox, 2003) from long histories in both organisation of supporting vulnerable young people and women; research evidence on prevalence, contexts and legacies of sexual exploitation; existing resources and toolkits on prevention and intervention; consultation with 31 sexually exploited young (and adult) women. The latter ensured young people's voices and experiences were at the heart of the programme, and specifically addressed the skills, attitudes and knowledge that professionals need to identify and support young people.

In keeping with **the nia project**'s principles as a feminist organisation and reflecting the global evidence base, the definitions and framings of sexual exploitation used were explicitly gendered, (see following section for an overview). This does not mean, as is commonly thought, that boys/men are never positioned as victims nor that women are not sometimes perpetrators; rather, it alerts us to disproportionality – that the majority of victim-survivors are girls/women and perpetrators boys/men (see UN, 2006). Gender is also relevant to the legacies of sexual exploitation, with different potential for boys, including specific discussion of how homophobia is implicated. We discuss throughout this report the tensions, challenges and insights raised by drawing on a gendered approach.

The term sexual exploitation is associated with economic gain and/or commercial elements of sexual activity. In the prevention programme it was used in a wider sense, to cover coercive behaviours in intimate relationships and peer networks that might lead to, or be a constitutive part of, sexual exploitation (see also Kelly et al, 2000). While content of the programme was adjusted for specific groups, core themes included:

- social constructs of gender;
- masculinity and links with coercion/pressure;
- the spectrum of sexual exploitation;
- media representations and messages about gender and sexuality;
- appropriate behaviour in respectful and consensual relationships;
- signs of potentially abusive or exploitative dynamics;
- legal contexts, including the Sexual Offences Act 2003;

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<sup>3</sup> The term 'practice based evidence' is proposed by Fox (2003) to describe the development of collaborative research with practitioners. We use it here to reflect knowledge accumulated by specialised organisations from their experience of supporting women and children over many decades. For instance, deliverers reported that the ongoing prevention work with young people fed into the delivery of training for professionals throughout the duration of the programme.

- boundaries of personal space and the body;
- how to find support from informal networks and specialised services.

For young people of secondary school age, the programme was six sessions, five for children of primary school age. Content was thus developmentally tailored for younger age groups (under 13s), under the umbrella of 'healthy friendships', with core themes of appropriate touch, risk taking and rights and support, in the aim that these translated into intimate relationships when required. As US researchers have concluded with respect to prevention work on violence in intimate relationships,

*it is possible that activities with the youngest adolescents may better fit their needs when focusing on general themes of communication and conflict-resolution skills rather than applying those themes within the context of dating relationships* (Noonan & Charles, 2009: 1099).

In addition, young people may also define their intimate partner in a looser sense than adults (Hickman et al, 2004). Recent research with young women associated with gangs in London found multiple layers of relationships with their own associated meanings and behaviours: labels such as 'wifey' denoted ongoing steady commitment and 'link' a more casual, less respected status (Firmin, 2010). Understanding these as vocabularies and landscapes within which young people negotiate their connections and relationships was key to the development and delivery of the sessions in the programme.

To engage young people, and enable them to apply key messages to their own lives and contexts, the sessions involved a range of activity based learning, including drama/role plays, case studies and creative exercises. In opting for a more participatory approach, the intention was to encourage young people to interact and work through their own (mis)perceptions in order to relate the content to their own lives.

For the training of professionals, content centred on the skills and knowledge necessary to extend awareness, identification and appropriate responses, including an exercise on 'the ideal professional' to encourage attendees to think about what young people need and want. That sessions lasted longer than those with young people allowed for issues to be explored and discussed in more depth. In the second year, the programme was adapted into a modular form, with an initial session on awareness raising including vulnerability, risk and the 'ideal professional' available free of charge, and more topics offered on a fee basis: the sexual exploitation spectrum; legal frameworks; safeguarding; disrupting perpetrator behaviour; exploitation of boys and young women ; prevention; intervention and support. More material on how sexual exploitation affects young lesbian, gay and bisexual people was also built in during the second year of the programme. This focussed on how sexuality and homophobia might shape barriers to disclosure.

## **Sexual Exploitation Prevention Work: An Overview**

This section contextualises **the nia project** prevention programme with an overview of approaches to, and previous evaluations of, prevention and evidence of the prevalence of sexual exploitation and coercion. Given the paucity of specific prevention work on sexual exploitation, and the framing of it within the **nia** programme as a form of violence against women, we focus here on a broader discussion in which the limited data on sexual exploitation programmes later in is presented.

### ***Introduction***

Prevention of VAW has to date followed the three layers of public health approaches: primary, seeking to prevent violence before it occurs by changing attitudes; secondary, based on early intervention to change behaviour; and tertiary, implemented after violence has occurred to address the legacies and reduce escalation (WHO, 2002). **The nia project** sexual exploitation programme training for professionals addresses the latter two, through an emphasis on developing skills to identify and respond to potential victims and perpetrators, whilst the work with young people is principally primary prevention. Some sessions were universal in scope, for entire year groups or classes, while others were targeted where risk of victimisation or perpetration was deemed higher by schools/youth settings.

A range of policy frameworks mandate primary prevention of violence against women (VAW), given the international recognition as ‘a major impediment to achieving gender equality’ (United Nations, 2006:9). The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), for example, requires state parties to develop integrated measures to prevent and eliminate VAW through education, including addressing attitudes towards gender roles in schools (ROW, 2010). Yet work on prevention has been weak, with no central government steer, and stymied by the ‘silo’ approaches to VAW that undermine a coherent approach. Women’s organisations and campaigners have long been pointing out that prioritising prevention ‘would encourage professionals and agencies to think beyond the reactive management of dangerous individuals, to imagine how to create deeper and longer term change’ (Coy et al, 2008: 38).

It is encouraging, therefore, that the Coalition government identifies prevention as ‘the core’ of a strategic approach to ending VAW, with sexual consent an ‘important theme’ in the curriculum (HM Government, 2010: 9). Prevention networks have recently been established by the women’s sector in Scotland<sup>4</sup> and England<sup>5</sup>, and in the latter a mapping exercise of promising practices is currently underway. The lessons from this evaluation can inform these new developments.

### ***Young people’s experiences and perceptions of coercion and exploitation***

An extensive evidence base exists on the range of contexts in which young people experience sexual coercion and exploitation, as illustrated by selected key findings:

- 21 per cent of girls and 11 per cent of boys had experienced some form of sexual abuse (May-Chahal & Cawson, 2005).

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.vawpreventionscotland.org.uk/>

<sup>5</sup> A new initiative by the End Violence Against Women Coalition ([www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk](http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk)).

- Young women are subject to emotional pressure/manipulation to consent to sex by partners and peers, whilst also reporting instances of rape and assault (Hoggart, 2006a; 2006b; Hoggart & Phillips, 2009; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2009; Noonan & Charles, 2009).
- One in ten young women experienced attempted sexual assault and three per cent had been forced to have sex by partners (Burman & Cartmel, 2006); one in 14 young men considered 'forcing a partner to have sex' as 'something that just happens' (p32).
- Sexual violence and exploitation is common among young people, with rape (and threats of rape) used against girls involved in gangs and their female family members (Firmin, 2010).
- One in three teenage girls has experienced sexual violence from a partner, for a minority on an ongoing basis (Barter et al, 2009).

While commercial sexual exploitation of young people 'is clearly a form of sexual abuse in childhood, it also embodies additional dynamics and realities' (Kelly & Regan, 2000:15). The recently formulated definition by the National Working Group identifies a range of contexts and common features of sexual exploitation.

*Sexual exploitation of children and young people under the age of 18 years 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 performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example, the persuasion to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones with no 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 resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child's or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability (cited in Pearce, 2009: 102/103).*

Through the consultation work with young women to develop the content of the programme, a 'young people' friendly definition was devised following extensive consultation with young people and used throughout sessions:

*Someone taking advantage of you sexually, for their own benefit. Through threats, bribes, violence, humiliation, or by telling you that they love you, they will have the power to get you to do sexual things for their own, or other people's benefit or enjoyment (including: touching or kissing private parts, sex, taking sexual photos).*

Estimating of the extent of commercial sexual exploitation is problematic for a number of reasons: the clandestine/hidden nature; lack of recognition by agencies; unsystematic record-keeping; climates of stigma and shame for victim-survivors (Kelly & Regan, 2000; Jago & Pearce, 2008). Certain contexts are, however, known to be conducive to sexual exploitation: histories of sexual abuse (Coy, 2008; Pearce, 2009); backgrounds or episodes in local authority care (O'Neill et al, 1995; Friedberg, 2001; Pearce et al, 2002; Coy, 2008, 2009a); running away (Melrose et al, 1999; Pearce, 2009). These contexts are exacerbated by homelessness, substance abuse and poverty. The common currency here is absence of material, and emotional support, which in turn renders young women vulnerable to manipulation and abuse by predatory men and/or resorting to selling

sex as a pragmatic survival option (Melrose et al, 1999; O'Neill, 2001; Coy, 2008). Research has identified three stages of risk with respect to exploitation: risk taking behaviour such as getting in cars with boys; swapping sexual acts for gifts, alcohol, peer approval; and involvement in more formalised prostitution (Pearce et al, 2002). Prevention work therefore needs to be nuanced to these behaviours, especially the first two which may be normalised among peer networks and not viewed as potentially risky or abusive by young women themselves (Coy, 2008). Another significant route into sexually exploitative relationships and environments is the 'grooming process'<sup>6</sup>, where older men target young women to gain their trust with affection, isolate them from family and friends and use manipulation, persuasion and coercion to push them into selling/exchanging sex (Swann, 1998). Again preventative and diversionary programmes with young people should highlight and unpick how these abusive dynamics develop. In the **nia** workshops, a case study of a young woman was used to illustrate the stages of the grooming process.

Sexual exploitation in online environments<sup>7</sup> mirrors many of the dynamics of offline exploitation, facilitated by rapid advances in digital media technology. The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) reports increases in the amount and frequency of young people sending sexualised images of themselves to strangers (CEOP, 2010), and a recent survey of young people found two fifths (40%) of 13-18 year olds know peers that engage in 'sexting' and almost a third (30%) knowing of adverse impacts (Phippen, 2009). Participation in such activities can contribute to conducive contexts through marking young women as 'easy' or the material itself being redistributed in an exploitative way.

Research on young people's attitudes also reveals adherence to gendered codes of behaviour for women and men (Noonan & Charles, 2009), with a minority endorsing notions of masculinity based on sexual conquest, and condoning VAW in certain circumstances (see also Burton et al, 1998; Regan & Kelly, 2002; Burman & Cartmel, 2006; Coy et al, 2010). For instance, young men in a recent survey reported that it 'might be acceptable to pressure a young woman into sex if he thinks she 'wants it', is drunk or is his girlfriend. Here context and vulnerability appear to legitimise coercion; where there is a relationship, boundaries of consent are blurred; where it is possible to take advantage of intoxicated young women, nearly half of boys [who responded thought it was] acceptable to do so' (Coy et al, 2010: 41, see also Burton et al, 1998). Young women's sexual reputation is also influential (Lees, 1993, Holland et al, 1998), with just over a third of young people completing the survey believing that if a young man thinks a girl is 'easy' it is, or might be, acceptable to pressure her into sex (Coy et al, 2010). A key task for prevention work here, therefore, is to unpick these beliefs about gender, sexuality and power, and this was central to the **nia** sexual exploitation programme.

Finally, the sexualisation of popular culture is another important feature of the landscape in which young people navigate their sexual relationships, and understandings of 'doing gender' (Renold,

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<sup>6</sup> The recent case of men in Rochdale and Derby convicted of grooming young women for sexual exploitation has led to increased media attention and debate, with Barnardos identifying grooming occurring at younger ages amongst the young people they work with.

<sup>7</sup> The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) runs an 'Ambassadors' programme for professionals to train peers to deliver the 'ThinkuKnow' course to 11-16 years olds. Content here focuses on young people's safety and risk taking behaviours in online environments (see [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk)).

2005). Policymakers and researchers have raised concern about the current saturation of sexualised imagery and motifs in popular culture, for example in advertising, music videos and products such as Bratz dolls and Playboy stationery/fashion (APA, 2007; Gill, 2007; Coy, 2009b; Papadopoulos, 2010). Again, prevention work needs to be mindful of how young people make sense of sexualised media and how it informs their sense of self and gender expectations. In the **nia** programme, one of the themes was media messages about men and women that young people absorb and/or resist.

### ***Prevention in education and youth settings***

*Prevention work in schools needs to be mainstreamed and begin from fostering an understanding of VAW and sexual harassment as a cause and consequence of gender inequality. Building on this, educational interventions should focus not only on protection advice for girls, but as importantly boys, across different cultures and communities, need to be invited into exploration of how practices of masculinity and approaches to relationships can be based on principles of human dignity (Coy et al, 2008: 35).*

That young people receive minimal or inadequate information on issues of violence/abuse, coercion and exploitation in schools is well documented, as lessons on sexual health and relationships tend to focus on biological aspects - what has been termed the 'plumbing and prevention' approach (Coy et al, 2010). Almost all (93%) of young people in one survey (n=1,820) received no information about sexual abuse in sex education (NSPCC, 2006). A larger survey of over 20,000 young people revealed that two fifths (40%) rated Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) as poor, and almost half had received no sessions about relationships (UKYP, 2007). In a recent poll conducted for the End Violence Against Women (EVAW) Coalition, almost a third (29%) of 16-18-year-old girls had experienced unwanted sexual touching at school, and nearly three-quarters (71%) of all 16-18-year-olds reported hearing sexual name-calling (language such as 'slut' or 'slag') towards girls at schools on a daily basis or a few times a week. Of most concern, however, was that a quarter (24%) of young people had never heard teachers saying that unwanted sexual touching or sexual name calling are unacceptable. Echoing previous research, two fifths (40%) had not received lessons or information on sexual consent (EVAW, 2010).

Fears of opening a 'can of worms' is cited by many schools and teachers as a reason to shy away from addressing violence and abuse (Mahony & Shaughnessy, 2007), yet one study of over 4,000 young people in schools in England found that over half requested more information and advice on how to resist sexual pressure and coercion (Forrest et al, 2004), and young people from BME communities in London highlight SRE as a particularly crucial source of information, ideally focussing on emotions and relationships (Testa & Coleman, 2006). A scoping exercise on sexual exploitation recommended the integration of sexual exploitation into PSHE (Jago & Pearce, 2008). In October 2008 the previous Labour government announced that PSHE would be made statutory in schools in England in 2011, following a review of SRE programmes (DCSF, 2008), although the bill fell when the election was announced in April 2010. Despite the commitment by the new Coalition government to highlighting sexual consent in the school curriculum, there are no indications yet that this will be achieved by placing PSHE on a statutory basis.

There are clear and compelling reasons to address the emotional dimensions of the landscapes in which young people are forming relationships and negotiating consent through embedding VAW

prevention work in education and youth settings. In the next sections key findings from previous evaluations of such work are presented to contextualise **the nia project** programme.

### ***Evaluations of previous school-based programmes***

The majority VAW prevention initiatives that have been evaluated focus on abuse within relationships and seek to change attitudes and perceptions of equality, respect and consent (WHO, 2009). While there is fairly extensive data available from the US and Canada, that prevention work in the UK is underdeveloped means that there is less research from which lessons can be drawn. Evaluations are also beset by difficulties in obtaining sufficient pre-and post programme data to extract robust findings (Ellis, 2004).

Key findings from existing evidence include:

- toleration of VAW is most successfully challenged when embedded in a gendered analysis (Ellis, 2004; Mahony & Shaughnessy, 2007)<sup>8</sup>.
- a 'whole school' commitment to gender equality and elimination of VAW embeds classroom work in wider and consistent messages (Mahony & Shaughnessy, 2007).
- programmes are more effective if they are delivered in multiple sessions rather than one-off presentations (WHO, 2009).
- whilst knowledge of forms and contexts of VAW increases, there is little evidence on if or how this influences to current and future behaviour (Ellis, 2004; Hickman et al, 2004; Dubois & Regan, 2006; Crooks et al, 2007); young women report enhanced negotiation skills and confidence to resist coercion, when compared to those who did not attend specialised prevention sessions (Crooks et al, 2007).
- Some evaluations suggest that mixed groups yield more effective outcomes than single, while others suggest that greater change is found in all male groups (WHO, 2009).
- Creative methods of participation, such as theatre and arts work lead to more positive engagement from young people (Ellis, 2004).
- The majority of programmes operate on a short term funding basis (Ellis, 2004).

The **nia** programme reflects these lessons from promising practice, drawing on a gendered analysis and using creative, participatory exercises. The majority of work with young people was also delivered in multiple sessions and in combinations of mixed and single sex groups where requested/deemed appropriate.

Awareness work with young people about sexual exploitation specifically is very limited (NWG, 2010). One of the few specific initiatives that has been evaluated<sup>9</sup> was an innovative series of

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<sup>8</sup> A barrier here is resistance from teachers who perceive that this is discriminatory towards boys and men (Dubois & Regan, 2006), yet engagement from teachers is crucial for achieving sustainable mainstreaming of the messages (Ellis, 2004).

drama workshops, from the West Midlands, *Sex, Lies and Love?*, run during 2003. The programme was jointly delivered by community arts, empowerment theatre and a specialised support project for sexually exploited young women, aiming to raise awareness of abuse through prostitution and grooming, prevent young women from engaging in risky behaviour and increase understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships (Campbell & O'Neill, 2004). The evaluation found significantly enhanced understanding of: grooming; vulnerability to exploitation; signs of abusive relationships; confidence in approaching adults for support. Three young women were trained as peer educators, identified as a particularly promising practice, along with the drama basis of the programme. Recommendations included: ensuring support was available for young trainers; engaging boys in preventative work; statutory funding for prevention programmes; delivering training for professionals (ibid). These lessons are reflected in **the nia project**, showing that at the design stage existing knowledge has been drawn on.

### ***Training for professionals on sexual exploitation***

Training for professionals is limited in both vocational qualification and ongoing development, although a recent survey suggests that a 'significant' proportion of local authorities provide some form of training (NWG, 2010). Specialised support projects for sexually exploited young people frequently offer training to local agencies, and the CEOP Academy provides courses and access to academic qualifications on various aspects of sexual abuse/exploitation and investigation of child sex offenders. These fee-paying courses tend to be available to professionals whose role involves safeguarding children and/or investigation of sexual offences committed against children<sup>10</sup>.

A recent scoping exercise raised important points about professional training (Jago & Pearce, 2008):

- It has a potential number of positive outcomes - raising awareness; enabling the identification of signs/risk indicators of exploitation; and the development of appropriate interventions, including referral pathways to specialised support services;
- Many local areas report having poor knowledge about sexual exploitation and coercion (see also Coy et al, 2010).
- Myths and misunderstandings about young people's capacity to consent to exploitation persist despite a legal framework that defines under 18s as victims of abuse, reducing capacity to recognise vulnerability (see also Coy, 2008).
- The lack of available training means that some professionals turn to internet searches for information and advice.

The review concluded that 'a more systematic approach is needed to ensure that every local area has access to awareness raising programmes, to advice on how to develop a local strategy to tackle sexual exploitation, and on investigative techniques in order to disrupt and prosecute offenders' (Jago & Pearce, 2008: 36). One of the intended outputs from the ongoing research by

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<sup>9</sup> Some specialised support projects for sexually exploited young people deliver sessions in schools, but few have had sufficient resources to commission evaluations.

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.ceop.police.uk/Training/Training-courses/> for details.

the University of Bedfordshire and National Working Group on sexual exploitation is a training strategy (NWG, 2010).

The following sections of the report present the methodology, followed by evaluation findings drawing out promising practices, addressing each element of the programme in turn.

## **Methodology of the evaluation**

There were five core strands of data collection: an online survey of professionals who attended the training; interviews with young trainers who co-delivered the training for professionals; interviews with **nia** staff who delivered the training and the sessions with young people; interviews with advisory group members; and focus groups with young people. In addition, the ongoing practice logs kept by project workers were analysed using NVIVO, to identify core themes. The practice logs provided an immediate immersion in the issues and ensured that the evaluation explored some of the more complex issues from the outset, rather than only noting these as findings at a later stage.

### ***Online survey of professionals***

Online surveys are an effective route to reach busy professionals/practitioners who have limited time, enabling them to participate at their convenience. The survey used here sought to probe respondents' roles and remit, perceptions of the training content and delivery, and any changes to their conceptualisation of sexual exploitation and practice responses to young people. The first set of questions asked about: when they attended the training; type of organisation they worked for; age groups of children/young people they worked with; whether this was girls/young women and/or boys and young men; definitions of sexual exploitation; if they worked with sexually exploited young people, and if so how many in the last 12 months, how many since they attended the training, and in forms of support/intervention they provided; and the same questions about working with abusers/exploiters. Respondents were then asked to indicate whether or not the training had met their expectations with respect to nine specific issues. Subsequent questions explored: what was most and least useful about the training; if confidence in responding to sexually exploited/abusers had increased; if they had implemented increased knowledge and skills in practice and any barriers to doing so; and if they would recommend the training to others.

A link to the survey was emailed by **nia** to all those on their database of attendees, with follow up reminders sent twice. A total of 26 professionals/practitioners responded of the 479 who attended training sessions. Survey data was then imported into SPSS for analysis.

### ***Interviews with young trainers***

Initially the aim for young trainers was to conduct telephone interviews to explore their experiences of completing the 'train-the-trainers' programme and their subsequent experiences of delivering the training to professionals. Following discussion with some of the young trainers, a preference emerged among some for completing the questions by email and the interview guide was thus adapted for self-completion. Two young trainers took this route, with another two completing a telephone interview, almost a third of the 14 who completed the train-the-trainers programme.

### ***Interviews with nia deliverers***

The two deliverers at **nia** were interviewed together in October 2010 to build a picture of the process of developing the content of the prevention programme, challenges to gaining access to schools/youth centres; delivering the workshops with young people; managing disclosure; reflections on how young people responded to the content. The discussion was digitally recorded, transcribed and analysed using the NVIVO software package.

### ***Interviews with advisory group members***

The advisory group for the prevention programme was convened jointly between **nia** and the Children's Society. Members include staff from **nia** and the Children's Society; social workers in both practice and academia; a consultant with expertise in participatory approaches to working with sexually exploited young people. Three members of the group were interviewed for the evaluation, and key points are included in relevant sections of the report.

### ***Focus groups with young people***

This strand of data collection proved the most problematic, yet was the most significant, to enable the voices of young people to be at the core of the evaluation. The original intention was to conduct two to three focus groups with five-10 young people, and include those who had participated in general and targeted sessions. An online survey for young people was also developed using the same framework as the topic guide for the focus groups, and fliers distributed by **nia** deliverers at several sessions in schools and youth centres. Despite this method proving successful to engage young people in previous research (see Coy et al, 2010), no young people completed the survey. Efforts were then redoubled to conduct focus groups. Intensive liaison with schools/youth centres resulted in one taking place at a school in July 2010 with seven young women aged 12 years, all of African-Caribbean heritage. Despite ongoing negotiation by **nia** with a range of schools/youth centres, it did not prove possible to arrange any further focus groups.

Discussion during the focus group explored overall assessments of the programme and specifics of: whether or not young people preferred single or mixed gendered sessions; how content chimed with PSHE/SRE lessons; topics covered and what was useful or not; preferred modes of learning (case studies, role plays etc); if young people were able to access support during or after sessions; and if they would recommend the programme to friends. The focus groups were digitally recorded, transcribed and analysed using the NVIVO software package.

## Young People's Perspectives

This section presents findings from the focus group with young women. Given the difficulties in obtaining feedback from young people, we supplement data here with information from **nia**'s own monitoring processes. A brief section on the delivery of the sessions and significant lessons is provided to contextualise the young people's perspectives.

### *Delivery of the sessions with young people*

The programme for young people was mostly delivered in multiple sessions over time, ranging from full days to weekly workshops completed within a lesson period at schools. In total, 1450 young people across 20 schools/Pupil Referral Units attended programme sessions, with a further 267 across 17 community based settings. Over the three years of the programme, the specific settings and groups of young people included:

- single and mixed sex groups in schools
- an eight session programme with young men who had displaying abusive and exploitative behaviour in a school
- targeted sessions for young women identified by schools as at risk of sexual exploitation
- workshops for vulnerable young women engaged with youth services and youth clubs
- young people affected by domestic violence, who were taking part in **nia**'s summer play scheme
- sessions at specialised services for sexually exploited young women and for homeless young people.

Delivery was therefore covered by both universal settings and targeting of young people subject to a range of recognised markers of social exclusion: Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET); homelessness or living in supported housing; young people affected by domestic violence, as well as those displaying sexualised risk taking behaviours. Some more specialised work was also undertaken, with one session specifically requested by a school for a group of young men who had been involved in a sexual assault.

Managing the group interaction was a core task. Staff emphasised the importance here of 'valuing individual opinion' in order to create space for voices to be heard, mitigate disruptive individuals, and facilitate critical reflection. Young people's openness and willingness to talk was initially surprising to project workers, perhaps indicating the few opportunities available for this and the dearth of information young people receive on sexual coercion and exploitation. One frustration was that teachers would sometime eject disruptive young people, often precisely the young people **nia** most wanted to engage; those that might be using laughter to hide embarrassment or fear and would lose an opportunity to address this in a safe environment. Issues were also sometimes more difficult to explore in depth where teachers did not bring classes on time, or the groups were larger than anticipated. Keeping groups small, and consistent, over a series of sessions, was critical to avoid repetition of the same ground and to ensure common understandings.

In the feedback forms collected by **nia**, young people highlighted several valued aspects of the sessions: the openness of the deliverers; the opportunity to learn from each other through group participation; the arts and crafts; and space to reflect on their own lives and relationships. Issues of safety, consent and grooming were also identified as particularly useful, with some young

women reporting a much deeper understanding of consent in sexual relationships and ability to assert their own desires while resisting pressure. In some settings (e.g. with young people in Pupil Referral Units, Youth Offending Teams), the creative work and interactive style was foregrounded to prevent young people already subject to considerable adult scrutiny feeling further compulsion to engage with difficult issues. The organisations that **nia** liaised with to host the sessions, also praised the open and flexible style of deliverers, the supportive environment created, the breadth and depth of their knowledge and the accessible language used. It is clear, then, that this work with young people is lacking in both format and content in school and youth settings, yet is welcomed and valued when provided by specialised, relevant and knowledgeable organisations.

Engaging schools to host the sessions and teachers in the content was critical to gaining access to young people, as well as ensuring that key messages continued to be reinforced. Some schools and local authorities were resistant to **the nia project's** feminist ethos. Others were fearful that bringing in external organisations to address exploitation would signal that there was a 'problem' and negatively affect the reputation of the school. The prevention programme was therefore sometime marketed as 'sexual bullying' to fit into existing school policies and priorities. While a 'whole school' approach is viewed as the most effective (Mahony & Shaughnessy, 2007), **nia** acknowledged that their work could only be limited in this respect.

*If you're there for six sessions, you've only got one class in the whole school, you might give them a kind of slightly more nuanced understanding, but then they've got to go back out into the environment of walking down the corridor and getting harassed continually*  
(Project worker, **nia**).

**Nia** staff reported wide variation in how teachers responded to gendered framings of sexual exploitation, a theme reflected in evaluations of programmes on intimate partner violence and VAW (Dubois & Regan, 2006; check). While teachers appeared to have some understandings of discrimination and equality, lack of understanding about the dynamics of exploitation and victimisation was also evident. In some settings, **nia** were asked to talk to girls about 'letting boys' touch them and had to suggest to the school that they also spend some time with boys addressing their behaviours.

### ***Managing disclosures and follow up support***

Consideration of responses to disclosures of abuse was a vital part of programme development and delivery. Partnership agreements were drawn up with schools/youth settings about actions in the event of young people reporting abuse, and any concerns were discussed with senior management in **nia**. Young people were also informed that they were not expected to reveal personal information in the groups, albeit that deliverers were happy to talk and offer support on a one to one basis. One of the core themes in the programme was to enable young people to identify trustworthy adults to act as a support and signpost to support services. Write-ups from the sessions highlight different approaches to young people explicitly disclosing experiences of abuse, or suggesting this through identification with case studies. For some young people, engagement in the group sessions was a way for **nia** to ensure access to information about responsibility for victimisation, challenging stereotypes around 'victims' and some of the routes by which young people might find themselves exploited. For others, one to one discussions with **nia** staff enabled opportunities for support. Deliverers also emphasised that group discussions should

not refer to young people in the room where they perceived that young women were being teased or bullied because of rumours or knowledge about histories of abuse/exploitation.

In the first year of the programme, **nia** workers established a connection between a youth centre and a counselling service provided by a specialised VAW organisation. The majority of follow up support appears to have been provided through asking young people for permission to inform school/youth centre to staff, although referrals were also made to Safeguarding teams where necessary.

### ***Difference from PSHE***

Gaps in PSHE content addressing emotional intimacy, consent and gendered violence have already been noted. Supporting this, young women described the **nia** sessions as more open and informative than PSHE lessons, citing reluctance by teachers to engage in candid discussions of issues that were uppermost in young people's minds.

*In PSHE we'll talk about drugs, money... some things we talk about here, when I ask questions, Miss says "Ah, you lot are too young to ask about this" (Young woman, 12, focus group).*

The limited content on consent and coercion were also keenly felt by programme deliverers.

*I could really feel the difference between a school where this was part of an ongoing PSHE programme and where this was the PSHE for the term or the year... if they had ongoing PSHE, obviously it was probably varying qualities, but they had a context to put this information into, you could then focus a lot more on sexual exploitation without having to very quickly do some groundwork about what is a relationship, what's a healthy relationship... if they had ongoing PSHE they would have a much better vocabulary around things like healthy relationships and consent... [but] there were schools where this was their PSHE for the term. I mean I went to one school, and this was their PSHE for the term, and there were 90 of them in a room, and I had an hour (Project worker, **nia**).*

In sessions with boys, deliverers also encountered what has been revealed by research (Flood, 2009); that without a space to discuss sexual relationships, and have questions answered, boys will look to pornography for information. Together these observations reinforce the urgency of incorporating a gendered analysis of violence, consent and coercion into PSHE lessons, as a statutory requirement. This does not negate the need for specific preventative work to be delivered by specialised organisations; rather the two are complementary, with PSHE acting as a foundation on which those with in depth knowledge and expertise can build.

### ***Developing group process***

The young women who participated in the focus group spoke warmly about the opportunity to make connections with each other in a safe space outside of routine interaction, described by one young woman as her favourite aspect of the sessions.

*Even though I know these lot, having this group meant you know a lot more about them, because everyone's being honest, and some people are brave enough to talk about stuff (Young Woman, 12, focus group).*

For these young women, the single sex context was crucial for enabling them to talk and explore issues collectively without the fear of judgement or trivialisation.

*P1: If it was with boys, yeah, girls would find it harder to say things. Because when you're just around girls, you say things, and some boys are immature so as soon as mistresses [teachers] are like "How do you feel about relationships?" they start laughing...*

*P2: It makes you feel everybody looks at you... you don't want to say anything (Two young women, 12, focus group).*

The value of women-only space in schools/youth settings cannot be overstated. Feedback from the staff that hosted sessions at youth centres also highlighted the benefits of enabling women to meet together as a group, with positive outcomes in the form of friendships and closer engagement with the centre. Equally, deliverers noted that boys appreciated space where they could 'let barriers down and actually not to be worried about being a real man'. Echoing the findings from previous evaluation of VAW prevention work, **nia** saw value in both single sex and mixed sessions, as in the latter they were able to facilitate respectful dialogue between boys and girls. The point of engagement is critical here, creating safe spaces for young men and young women to explore the landscapes of relationships is a necessary precursor to subsequent mixed sessions, when confidence and insight has been enhanced.

### ***Doing gender***

Exploring how young people perceive and (re)produce roles was a core theme of the **nia** sessions. We are limited in what we can report on here, as the young women in the focus group struggled to articulate how they had discussed gender. Social expectations of how women and men should behave were mentioned, encouragingly in the context of a 'double standard' with respect to sexual behaviour which is well documented in research literature (Lees, 1993; Holland et al, 1998). The minimal discussions here may reflect the younger age of the young women who participated; gender roles might have been a more prominent theme in sessions with older adolescents. On the other hand it also the case that there is more limited critical engagement with gender issues than in previous decades, meaning that young people revert to more deterministic and rigid views on what it is to 'be' female or male.

However, the reflective practice logs supplied by **the nia project** offer some insights into young people's engagements with gender. Discussion and deconstruction of masculinity, in relation to sexual behaviours, and 'naturalisation' of gender roles appear to have been common. An obstacle reported by **nia** workers was the young people's focus on how they ascribed to stereotypes, without connecting these to wider social norms. This indicates the need for prevention work to be integrated, or at least in line with, existing lessons - perhaps sociology and/or PSHE, and for young people to be offered more information on how gender is constructed its variations across societies and individuals, how we 'do' and reproduce it in everyday interactions. For instance, boys in one session linked sexualised media to masculinity – 'it's what boys do'. It is precisely these notions of what being a man entails that should be explored as part of work on sexual exploitation, given the coercive potential for this predatory construction of masculinity to be played out.

Addressing homophobia was a pervasive theme, particularly with young men, and also featured in the focus group. The young women reported ambivalence about discussions of sexuality, as the majority were raised in religious families where church teachings about same sex relationships as sin were prominent. Following participation in the sessions with **nia**, they reflected that while their value base had not changed, they were now more able to frame their responses in terms of respecting, although not accepting, difference. For deliverers, approaches to homophobic statements varied; where there was little time, they focussed on the legal sanctions for discrimination and harassment on the grounds of sexuality, linking this to debates around racism, and attitudes towards disability. Conversations about the roots of homophobia and the underpinning social norms were also reported, but deliverers felt young people's attitudes were so deeply embedded that the sessions would have little impact. This lack of knowledge and frequent voicing of stereotype and discriminatory attitudes is undoubtedly part of why two thirds of young people who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual experience homophobic bullying at school (Hunt & Jensen, 2007). Again this underscores the importance of PSHE addressing sexuality in the context of equality and human rights, and for a whole school approach to underpin more targeted discussions<sup>11</sup>.

### ***Friendships and relationships***

Whether the sessions on abusive dynamics related to relationships or friendships varied according to age. The young women in the focus group, all aged 12, had focussed on friendships and talked about new framings of trust (being sure that private information would not be spread), honest communication and refusing to engage in gossip and rumours. They praised the 'what is a good friend' exercise here and role plays as particularly engaging, demonstrating the value of creative approaches. One young woman suggested that observing boys' friendships with each other was a way to gauge how they might behave in a relationship.

*You have to look at how they treat any other [person] – sister, brother, how they treat friends or something, and the way that they treat them. I just don't see how boys treat girls like they say that they love them, yeah, but really they don't. They treat them like they're garbage (Young woman, 12, focus group).*

However, young women acknowledged that having the information did not necessarily mean that they would be able to put this into use, a tension described by Janet Holland and colleagues (1998) as the difference between 'intellectual' and 'experiential' empowerment.

*Some people say that they will do things, but you don't know what you're going to do til you get there (Young woman, 12, focus group).*

Deliverers also recognised this and hoped that the information would be a 'reference point' for later decision making.

*What I hope the work does is plant a seed really, because we haven't always had time to do long term work with young people... but starting that conversation with young people who*

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<sup>11</sup> One school in London claims to have eliminated homophobic bullying by using life stories of high profile gay and lesbian historical figures to enhance teachers' confidence to tackle discrimination, initiating conversations with young people and unpicking intolerance (Shepherd & Learner, 2010).

*haven't necessarily had those conversations – at least they've got that as a reference point. And it may be that they don't use that information straightaway in their lives, it may mean it's not until they're older that it comes back to them, but they've got it (Project worker, nia).*

One way to strengthen the value of what has been termed 'empowerment through knowledge' (Coy & Kelly, 2010) in order that it might be translated into action is to combine information with case studies requiring application. For instance, an exercise in the programme asked young people to respond to invented letters written to Agony Aunt columns and give their advice on healthy/unhealthy relationships. In part the aim here was to enable self-reflection, but in a way that was removed from personal experience.

*It's absolutely crucial that if we're working with young people we can help them to critique their relationships (Project worker, nia).*

Young women were positive about the value of self reflection, as the following exchange between four of them illustrates:

*P1: It actually makes you look at yourself -*

*P2: Look inside yourself –*

*P3: It's true. Even when we leave the sessions I found myself thinking about what they said to me*

*P4: I think this group is key because it had me thinking about life. Like the person I wanna be, in the future. [I think] 'why am I going to do that'? What am I getting out of it? In that if it's not helping me, I might as well just stop.*

Feedback forms reveal frequent references to seeing relationships (their own or those of friends) differently, to the extent that some reported having the information earlier might have prevented them being involved with abusive men.

Finally, a measure of success for young people identified by **nia** was that they could identify where to seek support if they felt uncertain or uncomfortable about their own (or peers') relationships. Young women all reported increased confidence about approaching adults, including mothers, sisters and aunts.

### ***Exploitation and landscapes of consent***

Disappointingly our data on core concepts is limited from young people, and we can only rely here on analysis of other material. The young women in the focus group referred only very briefly to violence in the context of relationships; there was, however, consensus about 'crossing the line' to coercive sex:

*It don't matter what age, from when you're saying 'No, No' and they still do it, that's rape (Young woman, 12, focus group).*

For the **nia** workers, consent was considered the most beneficial subject for young people to have space to explore.

*[There are] really worryingly low levels of understanding of what consent is in the context of relationships, and what impacts on somebody's ability to give consent. I think almost it would be just as valuable to go round and just do sessions on 'what is consent?' (Project worker, **nia**).*

Evaluation forms from young people also frequently mentioned legal frameworks about consent as useful (addressed in a Legal/Illegal quiz). Important as this is to delineate what constitutes criminal behaviour, contextualising this in discussions of 'space for action' to resist pressure and/or assert wishes is also essential. It is encouraging therefore that practice logs from the sessions refer to discussions with boys and girls about understandings of consent such as 'being allowed to do something', 'agreeing to do something' and 'choosing to do something'. Discussions of power were also evident, in terms of what might inhibit someone being able to give consent. Some sessions also included challenging rape myths about women's culpability for victimisation, and 'beating' women during sex. While deliverers reported confidence in deconstructing these perceptions, we are not able to confirm this from young people's perspectives.

### ***The media, sexualisation and pornography***

While the focus group did not refer to the media, **nia**'s reflective practice logs indicate that a common theme for boys and girls was an equation of sexualisation (glamour modelling etc) with empowerment and choice. This is a strong motif of sexualised popular culture (Gill, 2007; Coy, 2009b; Coy & Garner, 2010). Whilst seeking to unpick this, constraints of time and, on occasion, feeling unprepared limited engagement. One tactic was to shift the conversation back to sexual exploitation as *not* involving choice, and while useful pragmatically, there are missed opportunities here to explore the wider backdrop of what has been termed 'McSexualisation' (Jyrkinen, 2005) as it shapes the landscape in which young people develop their values. In a mixed session the legal and ethical framework of pornography was raised, and the practice log suggests that young people acknowledged, but wanted to discuss in more depth, the disjunction between 'porn sex' and 'real sex', as well as the emotional aspects of relationships that are absent in pornographic representations. Encouragingly, many boys here expressed a wish for their own relationships not to be modelled on pornography. Addressing sexualisation in a wider sense might be facilitated here by introducing the debates around whether 'pornification' more accurately captures the messages of sexualised popular culture (for instance, McRobbie, 2008). Exploring to what extent young people are able to identify with or critique advertising and music videos would be a useful addition here.

### ***Personal space***

A core theme of the sessions was to explore boundaries of the body and personal space, to enable young women to develop a robust sense of ownership of the body that may in turn offer a protective buffer against intimate intrusion. Exercises here included 'body mapping', where young people marked zones of the body as areas of inappropriate touch, and physical activities to test personal space.

*Where both people are there, you had to keep on walking forward to them and where they felt uncomfortable you had to say "Stop" and then if they didn't say "Stop" and you felt*

*uncomfortable you had to say “Stop.” Because basically you were learning about where that person’s boundaries were, and how close you can get to them (Young women, 12, focus group).*

One young woman reported reflecting, following this exercise, on how harassment from strangers in public space, manifested in close proximity and ‘girl watching’ (Quinn, 2002) made her feel uncomfortable. **Nia**’s own reflections on discussions of the body indicate that boys were less easily engaged with this and tended to veer towards making jokes, perhaps as a way of masking discomfort, perhaps revealing that bodily integrity is less of an issue for boys than for girls.

### **Summary**

Although we can present limited findings from our direct engagement with young people who had attended sessions, those from the focus group reveal that the programme was highly valued in both content and format. The opportunity for frank and explicit discussion of sex, relationships and boundaries was, supporting previous research, particularly welcomed by the young women. Positive outcomes in terms of reflection on what constitutes healthy and unhealthy connections with others are evident, as is the paucity of PSHE content addressing violence and exploitation. In future programmes, the context of sexualisation of popular culture should be fully integrated, given its prominence in many media sources and current policy agendas.

## Young Trainers

This section presents findings from interviews with four young trainers who co-facilitated sessions for professionals (and for one, also with young people), and the developers and deliverers of the prevention work who were involved in training young people to become co-facilitators.

### *The young people*

Two waves of young people were trained by TCS and **the nia project** as co-facilitators of the sessions for professionals. Nine young people participated in the first (eight young women and one young man), and five young women in the second, slightly fewer than the target of 10 per wave set at the beginning of the programme. Both cohorts were recruited through existing contacts with **nia**/TCS, and advertisements to relevant organisations. Of the four that were interviewed for the evaluation, three were women, aged 17, 18 and, and one young man aged 22. All had been co-delivering the training for between two to three years, with the minimum range of completed sessions six, and the maximum over 30. In addition to delivering sessions to professionals, the young trainers gave presentations and facilitated workshops at conferences held as part of the programme, and one also co-delivered sessions with young women at a youth centre.

Personal experience of exploitation was not a criterion for involvement. One important lesson here for both **nia** and TCS was that time spent responding to young people's complex needs, both practical and emotional, was not initially factored into the train-the-trainer programme delivery. For example, responding to young people's insecure housing status or financial hardship often involved a considerable amount of time dealing with paperwork, clarifying and securing their entitlements (see also Campbell & O'Neill, 2004). On occasion, the circumstances of young people's lives necessitated making Child Protection referrals; that young people had received training sessions themselves on these issues smoothed the process.

*We had done Child Protection training with them, the Train the Trainer programme included what happens if a young person discloses to you, what do you have to do, what's your obligation? They were even more clear than other young people would be who worked with us about what our obligations are in terms of the issue of information sharing and Child Protection... you're not starting from scratch in terms of what your obligations are (Developer/deliverer, **nia**).*

The strong relationships with **nia**/TCS were also considered crucial to address the possible repercussions here, as strong bonds of trust were built and nurtured, that in turn enabled these tensions and tests to be withstood.

### *The train-the-trainer programme*

The 'train-the-trainer' programme aimed to equip young people with knowledge and information on sexual exploitation, and creative ways to engage participants in the learning process. The programme was initially developed by TCS, with **nia** having more input in content and format at a later stage, and involved 30 hours of training sessions.

Keeping young people engaged with the train-the-trainer programme posed challenges, requiring understanding of the multiple demands on their time, and flexibility on the part of **nia** and TCS.

*We decided to deliver on Saturdays and over weekends, we actually discussed with the group of young people who signed up what is the best time for you to meet, and therefore if it's weekends we'll do weekends, because we wanted to increase the chance of them coming. There were times when their attendance was sporadic so we had to do catch-up sessions (Developer/deliverer, nia).*

The hectic circumstances of the young trainers' lives also reduced the amount of training sessions that they delivered, as nia were not always able to contact them with sufficient notice to book time.

Specific activities focused on how to enable professionals to recognise the emotional legacies of exploitation, the shame and fear that prevent young people from seeking or accepting support, and how responses might alleviate or compound this. All young people who attended received vouchers, and an additional incentive was the opportunity to complete a Youth Achievement Award. The time and energy demands of the required portfolio for the award proved unrealistic for some young people; five of the first cohort completed it with a great sense of pride and accomplishment, but none of the second.

Young people were overwhelmingly positive about the skills and knowledge gained from the train-the-trainer programme. In the first instance, all felt equipped for delivering sessions, but also valued learning about the realities and dynamics of sexual exploitation.

*The training was fantastic, I learnt many things I didn't know about sexual exploitation, how it takes place, who's involved and some of the consequences. Most of the sessions that I have co-facilitated successfully I would have not been able to do if I hadn't already had training (Young woman, 18).*

*It was good. It was enjoyable. [We] learned lots of different techniques... just learning about sexual exploitation because I hadn't really come across it, and it's kind of surprising to me because it obviously is a big problem... you sort of know a bit about it, but not as much as I know now. So, it's opened my eyes more (Young woman, 19).*

While one young trainer acknowledged that actually delivering the training was 'different from learning about it', another was reassured that 'the co-facilitators from nia were on hand.

*There was always someone on hand to answer any concerns or queries that I might have had (Young woman, 18).*

The skills gained from the programme were also valued for their applicability to other situations, and described as an asset for future employment.

*The whole experience of teaching professional just taught me how to, I think, talk to big groups and the small groups and just to be aware of my body language and how I come across to different people (Young woman, 19).*

One young trainer particularly valued the 'interactive' format of the train-the-trainer programme, where young people were encouraged to contribute to content and learning styles. It was clear

that this approach conferred a sense of worth and recognition of his position as 'knower', and is a strong endorsement of the aims set by **nia** and the TCS to enable young people to shape the programme.

*There was a real buzz throughout the days, there were a group of young people who were all pretty vulnerable in their own way, who had various levels of conflict in their lives and their relationships, coming into a situation together and actually learning about each other and learning about how to have relationships where you can, find out about what somebody else thinks, and actually listen and put your sort of ideas on hold for a minute to try and learn a new perspective... And we'd say "OK why was that uncomfortable, and why did you feel like you were under attack when somebody just had a different opinion than you?" And so it was also about really deconstructing the process that we were taking them through as well as just delivering the content (Project worker, **nia**).*

### **Delivering the training**

Young trainers reported mixed responses and levels of engagement from professionals. Two noted that although they were supportive of the young people co-facilitating training, they also appeared resistant to learning.

*The professionals congratulate how far we've come and tend to be surprised that we know so much at such a young age... [but they] know most of what we're telling them and like to act stuck up when they hear it all again (Young woman, 18).*

*Some were really open, and some weren't... I found a lot of them were open, because they were there to actually see what it was about. Just a few were kind of stuck in their ways (Young woman, 19).*

In contrast, another young trainer perceived that their involvement gave the training enhanced credibility and motivated professionals to participate.

*The main advantage, especially when dealing with professionals, is that people actually take us seriously. They immediately become engaged and interested in the training and learning more about the subject... I feel [they] respond more positively, knowing that young people are involved in the training, seeing as young people are the affected group (Young woman, 19).*

This variation in response was also highlighted by staff from **the nia project** who delivered the train-the-trainer programme and sessions with professionals.

*[TCS trainer] had one particular instance where professionals were very rude really, in that they decided to have a debate about whether the young people should be there, in front of the young people. It was obviously nipped in the bud pretty quickly but, it had started, and they were quite difficult. But that was just one isolated training, I delivered a workshop with one of the young people at a conference, and the professionals there were really appreciative of a young person, and it wasn't just a kind of token "Ooh how exciting there's a young person," it was a genuine wanting to hear from them (Project worker, **nia**).*

Interestingly, deliverers from **nia** also reported that outside of the training room, professionals would ask if the young people had been sexually exploited. For some, it was clearly important to know this, perhaps to gauge and calibrate their own responses to the young people, but **nia** were firm in questioning what difference it would make to know, and stating clearly that any personal information would not be shared.

### ***Gaps in participants' knowledge and responses***

Young people were asked what they perceived to be the challenges for professionals in working with sexually exploited young people. Issues that were raised here echoed those from **nia**/TCS, and included: enhancing awareness of indicators of exploitation; enabling young people to name and define abusive relationships; and responding appropriately.

*Sometimes the signs aren't too obvious and that the danger or risk that they're facing may be much more than what the young person lets on (Young woman, 17).*

*Often some of the young people involved don't even know that are or that they are at risk of being exploited. Also sexual exploitation is a very sensitive subject (Young women, 18).*

### ***Hopes for the future***

*It was actually quite life-changing (Young Man, 22).*

All young people that were interviewed attributed significant changes to the young trainers programme, and appear to have blossomed as a result. Success for **nia** was that young people valued the experience of being involved with the project.

*For those young people, success to me would look like that first of all they have a clearer, or clear enough, vision of what they want their life to look like, both in terms of personal in terms of their intimate relationships, what do they want for themselves? And actually manage to move towards relationships like that, whether that means getting out of what doesn't reflect what they want for themselves, or whether they're much clearer when they go forward looking for a partner, what it is. But then also their professional vision, that they can clearly say for themselves "This is who I am, this is what I'm good at, this is what I achieve, and this is how I can get there." (TCS, Advisory Group).*

On both measures of vision and action the train the trainers programme has met these aims, at least for the young people who were interviewed for the evaluation. Three are continuing in higher education (taking A-levels and degree courses), and another has joined the management board of **the nia project**. One young woman is working on **nia**'s play schemes and three have been involved in recruitment of staff at the organisation. Together and individually they have helped organise conferences and events and delivered presentations on their experiences as young trainers.

### ***Summary***

The young trainers programme is one of the most innovative aspects of the **nia** prevention programme, a benefit of the partnership with the Children's Society (where the idea originated), and linked to the principle of participation enshrined in the Convention of the Rights of the Child

(UN, 1989). Young people who participated benefitted from: increased self-esteem; communication skills and confidence; knowledge of sexual exploitation. All those interviewed had drawn on these qualities in subsequent training and employment (see Campbell & O'Neill, 2004, for similar findings with respect to peer educators in prevention sessions with young people). Whilst the benefits for young people themselves and the reception of training is clear, the resources needed to enable and support young people should not be underestimated.

## Training for professionals

*The training was informative. Subject matter was difficult but delivered in a fun, thought provoking way (Social Services, Children and Families)*

This section presents results from the online survey of professionals that attended training co-delivered by nia, the Children's Society and the young trainers. The aims of the training were to enable practitioners to be responsive to young people, raise awareness of the need to recognise vulnerable young people in current caseloads, identify signs and risks of exploitation, and provide appropriate and effective support.

*Often what we know and what we hear is that it is those young people that have just a big front or really challenging behaviour, telling all sorts of professionals to go away and they're all right and they don't need them. [The training aimed] to really communicate that to professionals, that actually that doesn't mean you don't have a responsibility for these young people anymore, you have a responsibility to look at where does this behaviour come from, how can you in your very specific role as a social worker or mental health worker or police do something about it... who could you work with together to find a solution... I think our training provided a good mix of the actual exploration of the issue and professionals' responsibility (TCS, Advisory Group).*

Here, what is often reported as 'challenging behaviour', rather being a reason to withdraw was understood as a form of communication, which professionals need to reflect on and find new ways of engaging with (see Pearce, 2009).

### **Delivery of the sessions for professionals**

Over the three years of the programme, 479 professionals<sup>12</sup> attended training sessions, ranging from half day overviews to sessions integrated into existing training programmes; for social workers through an arrangement with Holloway University, and for police through an agreement with the Metropolitan Police Public Protection Desk. Nia's internal monitoring data shows that annual targets for numbers of professionals attending sessions were consistently exceeded, a strong indicator of the lacuna in current training on sexual exploitation.

Feedback forms were very positive about the training overall, with professionals reporting increased awareness ('eyes opened'), knowledge and confidence in identifying risks and signs of sexual exploitation. However, insufficient time was consistently reported as the least useful aspect, with some commenting that the sessions felt 'rushed', and others that time constraints meant they received only an overview. Another issue raised under 'least useful', perhaps linked to the lack of time, was inadequate information on interventions and support options. The challenges of covering a wide range of material led nia to develop a modular approach, as discussed in the introduction. While extending the duration of the training sessions to a full day would address these issues, few organisations were able to carve this amount of space in their schedules. Organisational and institutional commitment to training practitioners on sexual exploitation

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<sup>12</sup> The assumption used to gauge 'indirect' reach of the training was that every professional would have contact with three young people.

should, therefore, include recognising the need for a full day, and ensuring that practitioners are able to participate.

***The respondents***

While a total of 26 practitioners responded to the survey, not all completed every question, so base numbers for those that did are indicated for each question. Just over two thirds (n=16<sup>13</sup>, 70%) had attended the training in 2010, five in 2009 and two in 2008. Where relevant we comment on how this might impact on their responses - for example, with reference to numbers of cases of sexual exploitation since they attended the training and any associated changes in practice. It was not possible from responses to identify which sessions they had attended.

***Organisational background and remit of respondents***

Just over two fifths of respondents worked for (SSCF) teams (n=11, 42%), as Table 1 shows.

**Table 1: Organisational background of respondents**

Organisation	N	% <sup>14</sup>
Social Services Children and Families	11	42
Education settings (schools, welfare officers)	3	12
Youth Offending Teams	3	12
Youth workers	2	8
Support projects for young people	2	8
Arts work	1	4
Health	1	4
Housing	1	4
Support for people with learning disabilities	1	4
Unspecified voluntary sector	1	4
Total	26	100

Respondents were also asked what age range of young people that they worked with. While this open-ended question generated a wide range of age brackets (see table 2), the largest proportion work with children using the definition commensurate with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, under 18s, (n=6). For four, their role is restricted to over 16s and two focus on under 13s. Only one worked with young people that would in legal and policy frameworks defined as adults (over 18).

The majority (n=24, 92%) indicated that they worked with both boys and girls, with only one working mainly with boys and young men. Of the two remaining respondents, one worked with adults with learning disabilities and another with ‘families’.

***Defining and responding to sexual exploitation***

Respondents were asked what they understood sexual exploitation to mean, and if this had changed following the training session(s). The definitions that were provided therefore reflect post-training knowledge, and 19 provided answers. Common themes here included: age

<sup>13</sup> Three missing responses.

<sup>14</sup> All percentages are rounded up.

differences, including defining sexual exploitation as relating only to under 18s; lack of consent; abuse of power and trust; coercion and force; economic or material gain for exploiters; the grooming process. One respondent equated sexual exploitation with sexual abuse, while another explicitly acknowledged the continuum of sexual violence (Kelly, 1988).

*It involves varying degrees of coercion, including people facing unwanted pressure from their peers to have sex, sexual bullying and people being groomed into sexual activity (Organisation supporting people with learning disabilities).*

Only one respondent referred to gender in their definition, perhaps indicating that this aspect was less prominent in the training, or not so readily absorbed by those who attended. Interestingly, deliverers from **nia** perceived that the gender analysis of sexual exploitation used in the programme was uncomfortable for some professionals. The issue was less about hostility to a gendered approach than a lack of understanding of gender as a social construction, with some retaining strong views that biological differences between men and women which legitimated rigid gendered roles. The trainers sought to overcome this by drawing on research evidence about gendered patterns of sexual exploitation, and discussing how this focuses attention less on individual pathology and blame, to a wider understanding of the context of victimisation and perpetration.

Age disparity was interestingly more commonly mentioned by respondents as underpinning power inequalities.

*Sexual exploitation is when young people are exploited by older people, it could vary from one thing to another, it could be using young men to exploit their girlfriends (Social Services, Children and Families).*

Drawing on the definition that respondents supplied, they were asked if they worked directly with sexually exploited young people, and how frequently. Table 3 shows that the over half (n=11) work with sexually exploited young people occasionally, with only a minority doing so on a daily basis, and thus the majority (n=18) provide support/interventions with victim-survivors as part of their remit. In contrast, two fifths (n=8) state that working with abusers/exploiters is not within their professional remit, and just one delivers this work on daily basis.

**Table 3: Work with sexually exploited young people and abusers/exploiters**

Frequency	Sexually exploited young people		Abusers/exploiters	
	N	%	N	%
Daily	3	14	1	5
Occasionally	11	52	6	30
Not part of remit	3	14	8	40
Part of remit but not had case yet	4	19	5	25
Total	21	100	20	100

When linked to professional role, two of those who work with sexually exploited young people on a daily basis were youth or support workers, and one a social worker, with those specifying

occasional work split between Social Services Children and Young People’s teams, education settings, youth offending teams and support/intervention projects.

Those that reported working with abusers/exploiters were mostly social workers in SSCF teams, but included support projects, education professionals, and youth offending teams. Interestingly here, those that stated such work was not their remit were evenly divided between SSCF teams, health, education, and support projects. This indicates inconsistency in the extent to which sexual exploitation is relevant to practice, despite the fact that encouraging agencies to recognise vulnerability in their service user group was a key aim of the training.

Respondents were also asked to specify the ways in which they worked with sexually exploited young people (Table 4) and abusers/exploiters (Table 5). For both, referral to other agencies was the most common response. Unsurprisingly, given that the majority of respondents were from SSCF teams, common responses related to Child Protection procedures.

**Table 4: Ways of working with sexually exploited young people**

Form of support/intervention*	Sexually exploited young people	
	N	%**
Referrals to other agencies	1	67
	2	
Child Protection referral	8	44
Emotional support	8	44
Instigating Child Protection proceedings	8	44
Sharing intelligence/information	8	44
Practical support	7	39
Advocacy	5	28
Common Assessment Frameworks	3	17

\* multiple responses possible.

\*\* percentages calculated as a proportion of those who work with sexually exploited young people, base n=18.

Reflecting the less prominent focus on work with abusers/exploiters among respondents, fewer forms of intervention were identified here.

**Table 5: Ways of working with abusers/exploiters**

Form of support/intervention*	Abusers/exploiters	
	N	%**
Referrals to other agencies	5	36
Child Protection referral	3	21.4
Instigating Child Protection proceedings	5	35.7
Sharing intelligence/information	6	42.9
Risk management (i.e. MAPPAs, probation)	6	42.9

\* multiple responses possible.

\*\* percentages calculated as a proportion of those who work with abusers/exploiters, base n=12.

### ***Understandings of sexual exploitation***

One way to explore the impact of the training was to ask how respondents' understandings had changed as a result of attending the sessions.

For 14, their understanding of sexual exploitation had changed, with all identifying the 'range of contexts in which sexual exploitation occurs' as one of the transformations here. Nine respondents specified that their knowledge 'what counts as sexual exploitation' had also changed, and for seven, their understandings of the gendered dynamics, albeit that it not clear whether this referred to developing a gendered analysis or not.

It is clear, then, that attendance on the training broadened and deepened professionals' conceptualisation of sexual exploitation. This is significant for their practice, as they may be more able to recognise and define abusive contexts/dynamics affecting young people that they encounter.

### ***Enhancing confidence and skills***

Respondents were asked to identify the specific ways in which the training had enhanced their confidence of both knowledge and skills. Table 6 shows that the aim of the programme to increase professionals' ability to respond to sexually exploited young people was almost universally met, as all reported greater confidence overall in their knowledge of sexual exploitation.

**Table 6: Ways in which confidence and skills were enhanced**

Area of confidence/skills	Yes	Yes, a little	Not sure	No
Overall knowledge of sexual exploitation	10	8	0	0
Ability to identify sexually exploited young people	9	8	1	0
Ability to respond to sexually exploited young people	12	4	0	1
Ability to identify abusers/exploiters	9	5	0	3
Ability to respond to abusers/exploiters	8	4	1	2

For some, the practical information was highly valued, as it equipped the practitioners with approaches and techniques to incorporate into their direct work with young people.

*I now have more information on the risk factors and signs that young people may be sexually exploited (Social Services, Children and Families).*

*This training and other training workshops have helped me to recognise the signs (Organisation supporting people with learning disabilities).*

This increased confidence in identification is positive, as this is vital for multi-agency strategies and protocols to be effective (NWG, 2010). Use of case studies was considered a useful means to

develop confidence and skills, as it enabled application of content into practice based situations, including what an appropriate response might be.

*Case scenarios in groups which prompted discussion and reflection [were most useful] (Social Services, Children and Families).*

*[I have a] much deeper understanding of sexual exploitation and what to do when working with either a victim or perpetrator (voluntary sector organisation for young people).*

At the same time, constraints in session length were seen by some to preclude application of techniques and knowledge.

*We didn't have enough time to go over and test the training materials i.e. what you can use to talk through with the young people (Education).*

Gain with respect to working with sexually exploited young people were most evident, suggesting scope to offer the module on disrupting perpetrators more widely to specific relevant roles (police, youth offending teams) as well as for all practitioners working with young people, both to give a more holistic picture and enhance multi-agency co-ordination.

In the initial consultation process with young people about the content of the training, the following qualities for professionals featured strongly as important: knowledge of risk factors; empathy; a non-judgemental attitude; ability to set and maintain boundaries; flexible persistence - 'not giving up'; building trust. It is encouraging to that in the professionals' survey responses at least some of these, namely knowledge of signs/risk factors, were gained, albeit it can only be inferred from references to 'deeper understandings' of how to support young people that some of the emotional relationship issues were also absorbed.

### ***Changing practice***

Respondents were asked if they had put into practice anything they had learned on the training, if so what this had been, and if it led to successful outcomes. Two fifths (41.2%, n=7) reported having implemented new knowledge and skills, which for six has resulted in successful outcomes. Length of time since attending the training did not seem to be relevant here. Examples offered here included both changes in practice with individual young people and more systemic approaches:

- Regular multi-agency meetings with Police (Social Services, Children and Families). Success for this respondent was enhanced recognition of sexual exploitation, and a concrete outcome in terms of the investigation and disruption of a network of exploiters.
- Accessing appropriate support e.g CAMHS (Social Services, Children and Families). The successful outcome here was the potential for long term positive change for a young man, that enhanced understanding by the practitioner was able to facilitate.

*The young person is now opening up in his therapy sessions about the abuse that occurred which he did not do in his 'Achieving Best Evidence' (ABE) interview. This has helped him to settle into his foster placement better and at school'.*

For other members of a Social Services Children and Families (SSFC) team, the successful outcome was specifically related to practice, and generating debate on gender inequalities. While a less straightforward translation to practice is evident here, that this discussion is taking place is no small achievement, and has the potential to lead to transformations at both institutional and individual levels. One respondent who worked in 'arts' had taken away some of the activities from the training and used them in their team, fulfilling the intention of participants cascading information through their organisations.

*For professionals the success would look like that when they encounter young people they ask themselves "Could this young person be sexually exploited? Is there any signs, any risk factors present that I should look at more closely?" And that they just don't do that individually but that they might start talking to colleagues in their agencies when they're in meetings... that they ask those questions to their colleagues. So both individual professionals that it translates into action, but also that they are almost ambassadors to carry forward the message to others as well (TCS, Advisory Group).*

Evaluation forms supplied by nia from six trainee social workers who attended sessions as part of their course were mixed about changes to practice; four described using new knowledge with a sexually exploited child, or with colleagues while one hoped for more experience and learning before they were confident enough to use them in practice. Two settings that hosted sessions with young people (a school and a group for vulnerable young women) reported that they would use the information and materials in future work.

The most common barriers to implementation of lessons from the training were lack of resources (n=5) and time (n=4). Interestingly no respondents identified resistance from within their organisation as a barrier. This suggests that organisations are open to learning about sexual exploitation and amending practice in light of enhanced information.

### ***Overall assessment of training***

The overall assessments of the training were extremely positive. All (n=17 responses) said that they would recommend the training to others.

*It should be more widely available in the community (Youth work)*

That the training drew on empirical studies of the extent and contexts of sexual exploitation was also valued.

*The learning is evidence based, and uses research. This gives it substance and professional credibility (Social Services, Children and Families).*

Deliverers also perceived statistics useful to challenge myths and misperceptions with professionals and young people. One example related to the recent dramatisation of *Secret Diary of a Call Girl*, featuring a glamorous young woman who sells sex. When raised in sessions, deliverers invited discussion of how representative this was of women's experiences, and that the average age of initial involvement in prostitution is under 18 years (May et al, 2000; Hester & Westmarland, 2004).

When asked about the most useful content, respondents focussed on the benefits of learning from each other, described as 'group discussion' and 'networking' by some and 'being amongst other professionals from other disciplines such as Youth and YOT to compare and discuss'. The dynamics and legacies of sexual exploitation were also mentioned as valuable topics, again a reflection of the gaps in knowledge.

*The examples that were given, as well the recognition of some of the behaviour of sexually exploited young people (Social Services, Children and Families).*

*I found the 'Grooming Line' information very interesting and the vulnerability factors and risk indicators were very useful (Social Services, Children and Families).*

However, for one respondent, the limited time available meant that preparatory work to devise and hone how responses might be put into practice was curtailed.

*It was very useful training, it would have helped to perhaps have some more case studies and talk through steps we would take (Youth Offending Team).*

Only one 'least useful aspect' was raised by a respondent from Social Services who was already familiar with legal and policy frameworks. However, this was identified by a youth worker as the most useful aspect. This is perhaps inevitable given that the training was pitched to a wide range of professionals, and deliverers were not aware in advance of previous levels of knowledge and experience. One way forward might be to tailor future training programmes to the needs of specific groups, although this will require sufficient resources to identify these needs ahead of the training and to adjust content accordingly, perhaps thinking about different levels (basic and advanced).

### **Summary**

Feedback from professionals who attended the training demonstrates that both content and delivery style were highly valued, with significant lessons for their practice. Information on how to identify signs of exploitation was most commonly referred to as useful, but for many this was contextualised by knowledge of how young people are sexually exploited and their associated needs. Almost all reported increased confidence in identifying and responding to sexually exploited young people, facilitated by the use of case studies and group exercises, role plays and discussion. Fewer reported increased confidence in identifying and responding to abusers/exploiters, suggesting the scope for a programme to be developed that focuses on these challenges. However, it is also possible that these responses were from professionals whose agencies did not opt for the module on disrupting perpetrators.

That some professionals, in a range of agencies, continued to report sexual exploitation as beyond their remit underscores the need for further training initiatives. There is an important role here for Local Safeguarding Children Boards to provide a steer by prioritising sexual exploitation and commissioning training accordingly (see also Jago & Pearce, 2008), including ensuring that time allocations are sufficient to allow for application of knowledge to practice contexts.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The dearth in preventative work with young people and training for professionals on all issues of VAW, and sexual exploitation in particular, is well documented (Coy et al, 2008) and reflected in responses from those who participated in this evaluation (see also Jago & Pearce 2008). **The nia project** and TCS programme is thus timely and fills a significant gap. Both content and the participatory, creative format were valued by young trainers, professionals and young people alike.

Involving young trainers in the delivery of the sessions provides an opportunity to develop their skills and capacities, and here the benefits are unequivocal; with young people completing awards and attributing their ongoing education and training and enhanced self-esteem directly to participation in the programme. It also led to professionals engaging with young people as 'knowers', which in itself confers credibility on the young trainers, and hopefully cascades wider to the young people with whom they work. This approach sat at the core of the prevention programme, evolving from the partnership from the Children's Society where participatory engagement has long been a guiding principle. As one **nia** worker observed:

*I think that the whole process we go through with young people and the way that we work with young people through the group work and the tools that we use, I hope that that brings a level of empowerment, because it supports young people to say "Well actually your ideas are valid, they are worth listening to and here's a space for us to do that" (Developer/deliverer, **nia** project).*

Findings also reveal an overwhelmingly positive view of the programme from both young people and professionals. The latter reported increased knowledge and awareness of the dynamics of sexual exploitation, potential risk indicators and contexts, and more confidence in identifying the signs of sexual exploitation and responding appropriately and effectively. Almost a quarter of (n=6) had implemented the new knowledge into their practice, with a range of positive outcomes. Embedding research evidence about sexual exploitation into the content gave the content credibility for professionals and provided strong ground for deliverers to explore myths and stereotypes. Equally, drawing on 'practice-based evidence' lent a depth to how aspects such as impacts and meanings of exploitation, links with gender inequality and violence against women more generally were addressed. The myths that surround sexual exploitation – young women's culpability, notions of choice and consent – necessitated careful attention to the discourses that both professionals and young people drew on in order to deconstruct them within the programme activities. As one of **the nia project** deliverers noted, 'it's not necessarily what they say that you need to challenge, but the assumptions that go underneath'. This was as true for young people as it was for professionals.

While we have limited feedback from young people directly, the young women that were interviewed valued the sessions enormously, particularly the opportunity to spend time together without boys and explore issues of friendships, ownership of the body and reflect on their sense of self. Tellingly, boys' attitudes to girls were described as disrespectful and predatory: the title of this report – boys think girls are toys – is a direct quote from one young women participant. Their experiences of gendered interactions and enjoyment of the prevention programme, and the practice logs supplied by **nia**, clearly demonstrate that young people want and need information

on the emotional aspects of sexual relationships, alongside explicit discussion of consent and coercion. Even if PSHE lessons were to address more comprehensively the contexts and landscapes in which young people navigate their lives, the need for more focused sessions/workshops on exploitation and violence delivered by knowledgeable specialists is evident. Also evident was the care and thought that had gone into preparing the content of sessions with young people and the ability of those delivering sessions to engage meaningfully with those attending. The cliché that ‘it’s not what you do, but the way that you do it’ seems appropriate here, although we might say that it is both. We have noted gaps and potentials for enhancing content, but as with the training this requires significantly more time than currently possible.

Being able to gather feedback from older young people, for whom content was more explicitly focussed on sexual exploitation, and those accessed through more diverse youth settings, would have built a stronger picture of programme impact. Similarly, interviewing boys about their perceptions of the sessions would add to, and possibly alter, our conclusions. Another limitation of a snapshot end of project evaluation is that changes in professional practice and young people’s perspectives over a longer period of time cannot be measured. One advisory group member noted ‘the real impact of work that we do is you want to see it over the long term as well, not just the short term’.

With these caveats in mind, our recommendations emerge from the evidence that was collected and analysed.

### ***Recommendations***

- In line with the new government violence against women strategy, prevention work should be prioritised in two ways: integrated into PSHE and SRE lessons and augmented by sessions/workshops delivered by knowledgeable specialised organisations and addressing consent to sexual activity as a core theme. Local Safeguarding Children Boards have a vital role to play here in commissioning and supporting specialised organisations to develop and deliver this work.
- Sexual exploitation prevention work with young people, highlighting the grooming process and routes into abusive and exploitative relationships and peer networks, should be recognised as an essential component of wider VAW prevention work. Again this should be addressed in both PSHE/SRE and in specific sessions provided by specialised organisations, available universally for all young people and targeted for those identified as at risk of victimisation or perpetration.
- Local Safeguarding Children Boards should also commission and support prevention work for young people who are disengaged from schools – including but not limited to pupil referral units and youth centres – as research shows these young people are especially vulnerable.
- Local Safeguarding Children Boards should commission training on sexual exploitation for all professionals involved in work with young people, again delivered by specialised organisations with relevant expertise.

- Training for professionals should be at least one full day in order to address the range of issues associated with sexual exploitation, including information about interventions, diversionary approaches and specialised support services, and offering space to apply learning to practice situations. One possibility here is layered courses, to enhance knowledge and expertise, including follow up sessions where professionals can share ways that they have applied learning and barriers to change.
- Specific sessions on disrupting abusers and perpetrators should be developed, given the gaps identified by respondents in this study and others (see Jago & Pearce, 2008).
- Involving young people as trainers, particularly on issues affecting young people, is a promising practice that should be widely adopted, but the resource implications need to be factored in.

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