

CSAFE Project

The experiences and perspectives of children and young people who have been sexually abused in the family environment

Ethical Statement on children and young people's interviews

A. Introduction: About the CSAFE research project

The CSAFE research project focuses on the experiences and perspectives of children and young people who have been sexually abused within the family environment. It is undertaken by a partnership between the *'International Centre: Researching Child Sexual Exploitation, Violence and Trafficking'* at the University of Bedfordshire, and the NSPCC.

The project runs from March 2015 – July 2016 and is funded by the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England (OCCE). The project forms part of the OCCE's wider inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in the Family Environment (CSAFE), further details of which are available at:

http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications/content_866

B. Rationale for the research

The OCCE's inquiry has identified that very little research has been undertaken which directly captures the views of children and young people who have been sexually abused, and that the needs of particular groups of children and young people affected by sexual abuse are not well understood, including those with disabilities, particularly young children, BME children and young people and LGBTQ children and young people.

This CSAFE research project is focused on eliciting the views of children and young people affected by sexual abuse with the aim of:

- improving understanding of participants' experiences of:
 - recognition, identification and disclosure
 - help-seeking and support
 - contact with services as a result of reporting/identification of CSA
 - care systems, and
 - criminal justice procedures; and
- ascertaining children and young people's views on how such processes could be improved.

C. Approvals and Oversight

The guiding ethical principle for the research is that no harm should come to any individual as a result of their agreement to facilitate or take part in the research. The wellbeing of research participants, gatekeepers and researchers will be a primary concern throughout.

The research will be subject to ethical approval from the following bodies:

- The Institute of Applied Social Research Ethics Committee;
- The University of Bedfordshire Ethics Committee;
- The Association of Directors of Children's Services Research Group;
- NSPCC's Research Ethics Committee and
- Relevant local authority research ethics committees.

Ethical considerations will also be kept under on-going review throughout the duration of the project by the overarching Research Project Advisory Group (RPAG), and the Young People's Advisory Group (YPAG) which is managed by NSPCC.

D. The Research Team

The research team is led by Dr. Helen Beckett and overseen by Professor Jenny Pearce. The project is managed by Camille Warrington and supported by Megan Walker (NSPCC therapeutic practitioner seconded to the project). All the team have extensive expertise in sexual abuse research and/or practice with children and young people. All members of the research team are DBS checked and will abide by the University of Bedfordshire, NSPCC and OCCE Safeguarding and Research Ethics policies throughout the duration of the research.

E. Methodology

The main strand of the research will involve qualitative face-to-face interviews with children and young people (aged 5 – 18yrs) who are known to services as having experienced CSA within the family environment. Participants will come from a minimum of four different geographic areas in England.

In order to minimise the intrusiveness of the research, and the potential distress for participants, interview topics will be approached through a 'third person' lens. For example, participants may be asked to draw on their experiences to consider how a fictional child or young person might experience aspects of the child protection or criminal justice system. This is not to say that participants cannot share details of their personal experiences, but to ensure that they do not feel any requirement to do so. In addition participants will be offered options within interviews to express their views through talking methodologies, arts/play based techniques or a combination of the two, according to their needs and preferences.

Interviews will be conducted within a framework that prioritises the needs and welfare of research participants. Most interviews with children and young people will be conducted on an individual basis, but a number of small group based interviews (4 participants max) may also be run where assessed as preferential, appropriate and safe for all participants.

Interviews will be planned on a case by case basis in partnership with project workers, to enable the inclusion - where safe and feasible - of potential participants with diverse levels of comprehension (ensuring for example the participation of younger children and those with learning difficulties) and those with additional needs for support with communication.

F. Identifying, assessing and engaging potential participants

Children and young people would only be engaged in the research through specialist services (hereafter referred to as 'facilitating agencies') that can appropriately:

- Fully risk-assess children and young people's potential involvement in the process;
- support potential participant's informed decision making about participation in the research;
- prepare them for involvement;
- support children and young people's inclusion in the research, as appropriate;
- support the research team to adapt any materials necessary if required; and
- provide professional follow up support for participants.

Given the complexities around supporting those affected by CSA ; the inclusion of individuals with additional needs in the research; and the potential to further damage children and young people through inappropriate responses, the two preferential access routes for this element of the research will be NSPCC sexual abuse ('Letting the Future In' services) and other specialist CSA services. In all cases facilitating agencies will be required to meet criteria set by the research team and sign a service level agreement. In some cases it may be possible to engage potential participants through other non-CSA services where

children or young people have been identified and received support for experiences of CSA in the family environment and the facilitating agency meets the required criteria.

Should any significant potential risks or detrimental impacts be identified for a potential participant, that cannot be adequately mediated, engagement in the research will not be pursued. Similarly where potential participants have specific resource needs for meaningful inclusion that cannot be met, they will not be approached to participate. In all cases children and young people will only be approached about the research following advice of practitioners that it is safe to do so.

G. Promoting Inclusion

Where possible, and only when assessed to be safe, the project is committed to enabling the participation of younger children, those with learning difficulties, those who have English as a second language and those who use alternative communication systems. In such cases information sharing about the project, obtaining consent and interviews will be planned on a case by case basis with the support of practitioners working closely with these children and young people. Additional resources and/or the adaptation of information, consent processes and interviews will be planned accordingly to enable meaningful participation of as wide a group of children and young people as possible. As noted above, where an individual's particular needs cannot be met they will not be approached to participate

H. Sharing information about the project with potential participants

In all cases workers from facilitating agencies will make the initial approach to children and young people deemed suitable for inclusion in the research to ascertain interest in participation. Information will be provided by the research team to enable this. Researchers will only receive a child or young person's details when they have indicated informed consent to their worker to participate and any additional consents have been obtained (see next point).

I. Gaining and Recording Consent

Standard practice will involve active (opt in) parent (or guardian) consent being obtained for all young people under 16 years of age unless this is assessed by the referring agency to be contrary to the best interests of the child. This will be obtained in advance of the child's consent (to avoid a situation in which a child has agreed to participate and subsequently finds they are not allowed to do so). Parent or guardian consent will also be required for children and young people aged 16 years and over if they are deemed to be particularly vulnerable for example if they have a learning disability.

Should a facilitating agency require parental/guardian consents for young people aged 16/17, this can be facilitated so long as it is not contrary to the best interests of the child.

Initial verbal consent will be sought by the project worker responsible for sharing information about the project with a child or young person.

Prior to commencing an interview, the researcher will check that the child or young person fully understands what they have consented to, including the nature of the interview and project, what will happen to the information they provide and the limits to confidentiality applicable to this. Young people will be reminded that they can withdraw consent, or choose to pass on any questions, at any point during the interview. They will also be advised as to how to withdraw consent post-interview and the timeframes within which this is possible. A participant's consent will be recorded at this time via either completion of a consent form or using other formats as appropriate.

In addition specific consent for audio-recording will be obtained, where the child or young person is agreeable to their interview being recorded. It will be made clear to all participants that they can choose not to be audio recorded, in which case interviews will be recorded in a written/typed format.

J. Data collection

In most cases, children and young people will be interviewed on an individual basis so as to limit the number of people hearing what they share, but they may choose to have a worker/supporter present with them for support so long as this does not pose any increased risk. In some cases a risk assessed translator or communication specialist may also be present.

Interview questions and data collection tools for children and young people (aged 10yrs and above) will be piloted with the young people's advisory group to ensure appropriateness of language and sensitivity of questions. Example interview questions and information for younger children (under 10 yrs) and those with additional communication needs will not be piloted but will be developed and reviewed in partnership with experienced practitioners working with these age groups. This is to avoid exposing younger or more vulnerable children to unpiloted interview questions.

As noted above, in order to minimise the intrusiveness of the research, and the potential distress for participants, interview topics will be approached through a 'third person' lens. For example, participants may be asked to draw on their experiences to consider how a fictional child or young person might experience aspects of the child protection or criminal justice system. This is not to say that participants cannot share details of their personal experiences, but to ensure that they do not feel any requirement to do so. In addition participants will be offered options within interviews to express their views through talking methodologies, arts/play based techniques or a combination of the two, according to their needs and preferences.

It is recognised that bringing young people together in a group interview environment involves additional risks. For this reason a) group interviews will only be run with existing groups of young people identified by referring agencies as appropriate for involvement in this phase of the research and b) participants in group interviews will be discouraged from sharing their personal experiences in this context, given the presence of other young people in the group, but provided with details of alternative opportunities and routes through which to talk about the issues raised in a personal capacity.

In addition to the main interview questions a series of basic demographic and background data will be requested from each child or young person. Alternatively this can be sought from their project worker if the participant provides permission for them to give this to the research team.

K. Follow up support

Care will be taken to ensure that appropriate follow up support is available, and actively offered for all young people who participate. As noted above, children and young people will only be engaged in the research through facilitating with the capacity to actively provide follow up support, as stated within their service level agreement.

L. Reciprocity

Unless the policies of referring agencies prohibit this, all young people who participate in the research will receive a £10 voucher as a token of thanks for their contribution. If the provision of a voucher is in conflict with the policy of the referring agency, alternative forms of reciprocity will be explored.

M. Limits to Confidentiality and dealing with disclosure

The research team are bound and guided by the safeguarding policies of the University of Bedfordshire (Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy) the OCCE and the NSPCC, as well as those of local facilitating agencies.

Information shared by young people will remain confidential to the research team unless they disclose information to suggest that they (or another young people or vulnerable adult) is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm.

In instances where the researcher is unclear whether the threshold of 'significant harm' has been met, information will be shared with the researcher's line manager and person responsible for ethical oversight (Professor Jenny Pearce) and the PI /Research Manager (Dr Helen Beckett) to assist with an assessment of the appropriate response. In this event all decision-making will be recorded and stored by both parties. Where further advice is required the NSPCC professional helpline will be used to discuss this on an anonymised basis.

In the event of any disclosure identifying a risk of significant harm, wherever possible the researcher will remind the participant of their duty to pass this information on, explain how they will do this, who this will be passed to and when this will occur. Where possible, information will not be passed on without the participant being informed that this is going to happen.

In cases where there is a duty to follow child protection procedures this will follow local facilitating agency and LSCB child protection procedures.

N. Storage and Use of Data

All data will be handled in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act. Primary data (written notes, audio recordings and any other material produced during interviews with children and young people) will be securely stored on password-protected computers and as password protected files. Hard copies of data are stored in locked cabinets. All original primary data (handwritten notes, recordings etc) will be securely destroyed six months after the completion of the project.

Participants will be clearly informed that when any information they share is to be used publicly (in research reports, presentations etc) no information that could potentially identify them will be included - through the use of pseudonyms for interview participants and the anonymisation of fieldwork locations and service details.

O. Outputs and dissemination

Regular updates will be provided to the funders, RPAG and YPAG throughout the duration of the research. An interim report will be produced in November 2015. Full research findings will be made publicly available by summer 2016, together with a summary of the same. Young people's outputs will also be developed and disseminated at the end of the project.

P. Further information

For further information about the research, please contact Dr Camille Warrington (Lead Researcher) at camille.warrington@beds.ac.uk or by telephone at 07912 778318 or Dr Helen Beckett (Research Manager) at Helen.beckett@beds.ac.uk or by telephone at 07725 217231

Q. Complaints

If you have any complaints about the conduct of the research these can be addressed in the first instance to Professor Mike Fisher (Director of the Institute of Applied Social Research at the University of Bedfordshire) at mike.fisher@beds.ac.uk.

Alternatively if you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, the NSPCC has established a complaints procedure. To complain about the study, you can do so to any NSPCC member of staff, volunteer, or local office. Alternatively, please email comments@nspcc.org.uk, call 020 7825 7445, You can then ask to speak to Patricia Bojang and inform them that the name of the project is:

To help us respond to your comment or complaint effectively, please tell us which of our studies it relates to. Also, please include your full name, contact details, and let us know how you would like us to contact you.

You could also write to the NSPCC Information Service at:

Arnold House

21-33 Great Eastern Street

London

EC2A 3EJ

Further details of our complaints procedures can be found here: http://www.nspcc.org.uk/help-and-advice/enquiries/frequently-asked-questions_wda83770.html#complaint