

# BOYS 2

Supporting Boys and Young Men to  
Develop Healthy Sexual Relationships



**Key Findings**



Throughout the life of the Seraf Service only 9% of CSE referrals were for boys and young men, leaving us to consider ‘Where all the Boys had gone?’

# Why The Need for Boys 2?

Boys 2 was a one year research project undertaken by Barnardo's and funded by the Home Office. It was a national project managed between Barnardo's Better Futures Cymru and Barnardo's Base Project in the South West of England.

Better Futures Cymru, formally known as the Taith and Seraf Services, provides, across Wales, assessment and longer term therapeutic services for children and young people with sexualised histories, including young people who have been the victims of sexual abuse (CSA); young people who display problematic or Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB); and young people who are at risk of or are abused through Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE).

As a general background, Barnardo's Cymru launched the Seraf CSE Service in October 2006, a new service to work with children and young people who are at risk of or abused through sexual exploitation in Wales. In the initial Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework pilot (2006/2007) 40% of young males were identified as 'high risk' of CSE. Throughout the life of the Seraf Service only 9% of CSE referrals were for boys and young men, leaving us to consider 'Where all the Boys had gone?'

Barnardo's were aware that boys and young men were under-represented in being identified as victims of CSE and referral for support, and that there was a need to raise professional awareness of boys and young men as victims of CSE.

The purpose of this research was to build upon Barnardo's existing expertise in the field by working alongside boys and young men at risk of CSE using their voices and experiences to improve identification, assessment and intervention.

# What We Did

- A systemic literature review in the areas of CSE and CSA was carried out on males and examined what is currently known regarding risk and vulnerability factors in male victims of CSE and CSA.
- We engaged with 32 professionals across front line agencies including social work, childcare disability service, family support services, youth homelessness, youth offending, psychology services, secure estate, and CSE Safeguarding hubs.
- A review of historic and current case file information was undertaken for the boys and young men who participated.
- Semi-structured interviews with 17 boys and young men.
- The development of a brief set of questionnaires to be administered to boys and young men impacted by CSE.
- Standardisation of the questionnaires with boys and young men within mainstream education aged 12 to 17 years old.
- Co-production of a workbook resource to support professional engagement, assessment and intervention with boys and young men at risk of CSE.

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# What We Found

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing research in this area is heavily biased towards girls and young women. Males were typically viewed as perpetrators of abuse resulting in very little being known about the impact of CSE and CSA for boys and young men. From the literature available, areas identified as key influences for risk and vulnerability were difficulties with self-esteem, difficulties with emotional loneliness or connectedness to others, the presence of thinking errors, sexual knowledge deficits, and disability and depressive episodes. Characteristics related to risk-taking behaviours, inappropriate or illegal acts, and learning disabilities and/or Autistic Spectrum Disorder were also found. In contrast, little evidence was found related to empathy problems and locus of control; perpetrator typologies and behaviours; and criminality arising from CSE.

## PROFESSIONAL FOCUS GROUPS

Three one day long focus groups, as well as seventeen one-to-one interviews, were held with professionals as a way to capture views and opinions around boys and young men at risk of CSE. General themes arising from the focus group included.

- **Assumptions:** Assumptions that the term abuse applies to males in a physical sense rather than sexual; CSE being associated with white teenage females rather than males, influencing gender assumptions that females are abused and males are abusers.
- **Identification and engagement:** CSE was viewed as harder to identify for boys and young men. Professionals felt that it takes longer to build up rapport with males as opposed to females. If the boy does not engage or shuts down, then it was felt that cases are closed more quickly. Greater focus is given to criminal behaviour or anger management for boys and young men. Their own behaviour is seen as the priority, and hence the most obvious thing to focus on.
- **Time constraints:** If the boy was not working with the professional specifically around risk of CSE, it was felt that due to competing priorities, limited resources, increased case-load etc, there is no time to delve deeper and consider CSE.

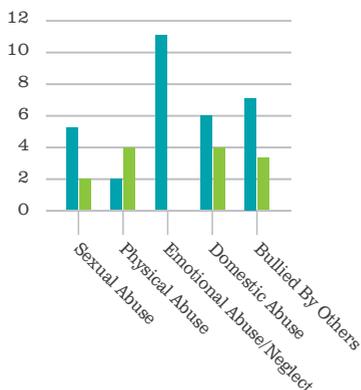
- Professionals' lack of confidence in their own expertise:** There is a lack of confidence around 'going off script' or outside of their usual role. Workers reported that there is nowhere to go for guidance and support; they were worried about being laughed at for considering boys being victims of sexual assault, because boys are seen as sexual, perpetrators, of wanting sex, and/or are 'horny teenage boys'. Concerns about appearing homophobic: the professional noted that, 'What if it's just exploration? What if it's their right to explore? There was a fear of 'getting it wrong.'

### PERSONAL HISTORIES

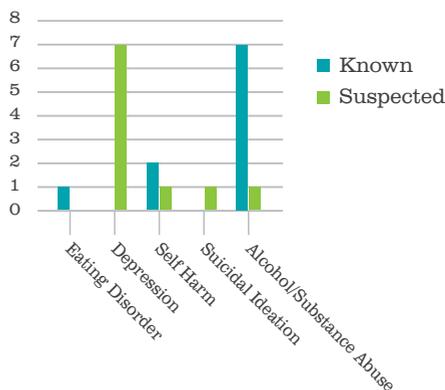
Seventeen boys and young men participated in the research; the boys were aged between 13 years old and 29 years old with the average age of the boys and young men who participated being 15 years old. All of the boys and young men identified themselves as White British. Almost a third of those who participated were known to have a diagnosed learning disability or difficulty, with a third receiving support in relation to a behavioural based disability such as ADHD. A quarter of those who participated continued to reside with their parents with a third being cared for by the Local Authority and the remaining boys and young men either being in independent living (26%), within Youth Justice Systems (7%), or the secure estate (7%).

Of those who participated 43 % had previously been subject to or were currently subject to Child Protection Registration. At the time of the research, 56% of the boys were receiving social work support and almost half (43%) had previous or current involvement with the Youth Justice System. A significant number of the participants (63%) either did not accept or minimised the concerns held by professionals about CSE when this was initially highlighted with them.

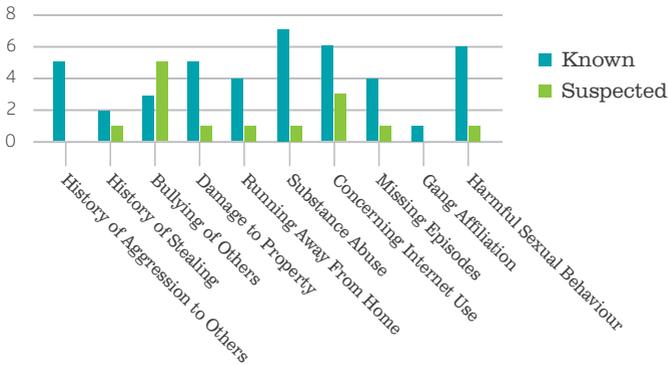
#### Trauma History



#### Emotional Wellbeing

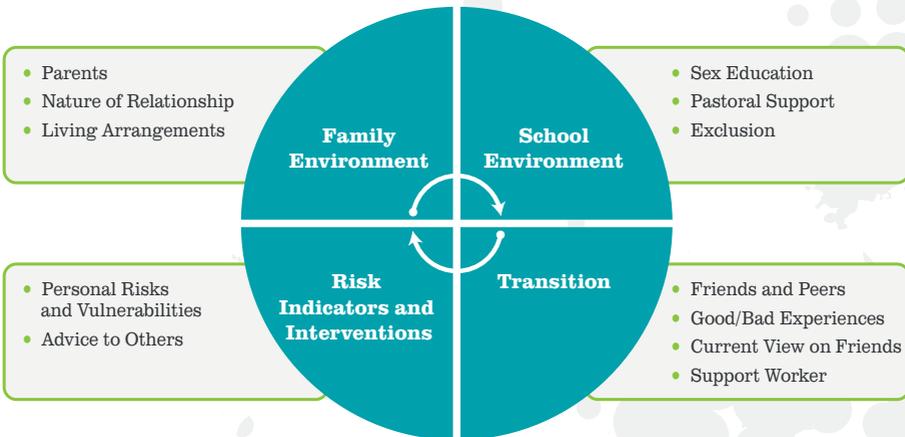


## Behavioural Issues



## SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH BOYS AND YOUNG MEN

Interviews were carried out to explore pathways of risk, abuse, exploitation, and journey into service, in order to identifying key engagement and intervention points. Seventeen interviews were carried out. The analysis that was carried out was thematic analysis (TA) with 4 main themes being identified.



## THEME 1 - FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

This theme concerned the way boys and young men talked about experiences of their family environment. Three sub themes identified were parents, nature of the relationship and living arrangements.

- **Parents:** participants reflected on how their parents had not taught them about basic life skills. Equally, the complexity of experiencing or witnessing physical abuse in the home further supports the suggestion that adverse early malfunction may effect development.
- **Nature of the relationships:** Parents' complex issues were being experienced whilst participants were growing up and they themselves were experiencing equally complex issues around growing up which included self-esteem, sexuality and social integration and validation. Crucially, most participants described a firm understanding for the lack of attachment that they were experiencing. A number talked about not being able to express themselves openly to their family in terms of their sexuality. One participant in particular, actively sought parental advice around sexuality through social media.

**Living arrangements:** These varied widely from what could be described as the traditional nuclear family, to individuals being in and out of foster systems. Living with relatives, such as grandparents, was touched on by a small number of participants but in the main, living arrangements were what could be described as unstable and interspersed with a form of abuse. Shared house or hostel accommodation was also described as initially appearing to be a safe place until they were exposed to exploitation, substance misuse and criminality. Living arrangements were also talked about in terms of need.

## THEME 2 - SCHOOL

This theme concerned the way young boys and men talked about their experiences of school. Three sub themes identified were sex education, pastoral support and exclusion.

**Sex education:** A perception of good sex education was the exception rather than the rule with all but one participant saying that they had received no memorable sex education, or education about relationships. This research went on to explore where knowledge about sex and relationships was gained from, in this population, if not from school. Participants' responses fell into two broad categories: people and virtual. Where parents were talked about, the detail of that interaction would need exploring further to establish whether the answer of 'parents' was given because it was where the individual felt they should be able to get advice or whether it was an actual source. Virtual sources of information varied and as the name suggests were not interactive and did not involve

actually speaking to another person. The internet in general and more specifically pornographic websites were suggested as the main virtual sources, along with many other forms of popular culture.

**Pastoral support:** Participants talked about difficulties at school tending to begin when they decided to come out as gay and this varied in terms of age, the youngest was in Year 8. Rather than describing a pastoral support system in school, individuals spoke about being referred by the school. The initial introduction or meeting was spoken of in different ways but was generally talked about as not wanting to talk to anyone. The reasons behind not wanting to speak to anyone revolved around low self-esteem and opinion that the future was bleak.

**Exclusion:** Inevitably for some participants, being excluded was part of the school experience, against a backdrop of family malfunction and growing up. It should be highlighted that exclusion may present a further risk factor in CSE vulnerability.

### THEME 3 – TRANSITION

This theme concerned the way young boys and men talked about transitional periods in their lives. Sub themes identified were friends/peers and support worker.

**Friends/Peers:** Friends were talked about in terms of familiarity and stability in an otherwise tumultuous family and living environment. For others, friends were spoken about in more transient terms and also in terms of difference. Throughout the discussions around experiences of friends, emotional loneliness was evident particularly around a participant's time of transition which, for many individuals, was linked to living arrangements or expressing themselves in terms of sexual preferences. This period of transition was talked about in terms of significant change: on reflection, from those who had got involved with the wrong people there was acknowledgement that these individuals were not helpful to them. From hanging around with the wrong people, descriptions escalated; consequently new social networks derived from contacts at school or through temporary living arrangements were described as including significant levels of criminal and sexual exploitation as well as associating with unsafe adults. Significantly, the combination of searching for meaningful attachment, establishing identity and gaining social validation from friends, meant that these new social networks of friends included links with perpetrators of CSE.

**Support Worker:** Whilst the actual manner in which an individual was engaged with was very personal, the process of engagement by a Barnardo's worker was held up as an example of the right way to approach a young man, without judgement and seeing them as a person rather than the concerns raised or their own behaviour.

#### THEME 4 – RISK INDICATORS AND INTERVENTIONS

This theme concerned the way young boys and men talked about CSE risk and vulnerability indicators. Sub themes identified were personal risks and vulnerabilities and advice to others.

**Personal risks and vulnerabilities:** Homelessness as a result of parents 'kicking their child out of the family home', was described. For the older participants, drugs, money and partying behaviours had been clear indicators for them personally. In addition to the visible indicators, breakdown in communication between teacher and pupil. A further indication that someone is being sexually exploited is the mention but, continual absence, of a boyfriend. Further risk indicators included aggressive behaviour with little understanding why such behaviour may exist. Specific groups of young boys and men that were talked about as being at risk of CSE, these included being young and gay and also those who are, or have been, in the care system.

**Advice to others:** It was recommended that an adult should be talked to about any experiences. Interestingly, this was not necessarily a parent as illustrated through the use of the word 'caring' but deliberately left wide open to take into account the many differing circumstances that young boys and men find themselves in and the adults they may feel able to turn to.

In the end, advice came from personal experience and reflection and what really shone through was that for those participants who have received help and support from Barnardo's, they had finally been equipped with the resources to not only grow up but gain the knowledge and understanding of who they are as individuals, and to build their self-esteem, self-confidence and belief systems.



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# Results of Questionnaires

Seven questionnaires were given to boys and young men. These questionnaires assessed the following areas, loneliness, self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control, measures of cognitive and emotional empathy, sexual knowledge and overall attachment style. These questionnaires were also administered to a sample of 34 young people aged between 12 and 18 where there were no known concerns regarding CSE.

In comparison to the control group, boys and young men were:

- Significantly more emotionally lonely ( $p < .001$ ).
- Significantly more socially lonely ( $p < .001$ ).
- Showed significantly less problems with being able to handle negative emotions ( $p < .001$ ).

As for the other questionnaires, although not significant, the responses of the boys and young men who participated in the research, in comparison to the control sample:

- Have somewhat lower levels of self-efficacy.
- Report a somewhat more external locus of control.
- Have somewhat more empathic concern about others.

## ATTACHMENT STYLE IN THE TWO GROUPS

Attachment style Group	Boys 2	Control
Secure	33%	76%
Preoccupied	7%	-
Dismissive	7%	20%
Fearful	53%	4%

Overall, these results show that the boys and young men impacted by CSE were significantly less likely to have a secure attachment style than the control group. It is also of note that over half of those affected by CSE had a fearful attachment style where, as noted above, fear of rejection and avoidance of closeness may lead them to seek sex in an impersonal manner, again this result is significant ( $p < .0001$ ). In the control group a significant negative correlation was found between the sexual knowledge questionnaire and the social loneliness scale. This may be a consideration for the way sex education is taught within education systems.

### **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR PRACTICE?**

- Further research into CSA and CSE in males is required.
- Increased sample size of boys and young men and control group to complete questionnaires to increase understanding of dynamic factors.
- Research and practice guidelines to better understand disability as a variable in risk and vulnerability to CSE.
- Professional training regarding gender as a variable in CSA and CSE to aid in reducing barriers and assumptions in this area.
- Relational approaches to be used in engagement with boys and young men where there are indicators of CSE present.
- Resources designed to work across targeted areas of intervention with boys and young men, to include relationship repair where appropriate.
- Whole school approaches to sexuality and relationships education considered.
- Multi-agency approaches to be utilized to challenge our own and others practice.
- Consideration of child criminal exploitation where there are concerns around CSE or vis versa.
- Consideration of vulnerability to CSE where there are concerns around Harmful Sexual Behaviour.

“All of a sudden cos I didn't have control over who lived there I was like surrounded by you know people smoking crack, erm one guy was like a pimp like he was friends with the crackheads and stuff like that was going on and people on the run from prison just doing like bad shit basically...”

“...cos that's where you're gonna get the most support... it gave me a place to just kind of talk about how I was feeling some of my frustrations and it's just like a safe place to go and when I was feeling miserable it was just something to look forward to for the next week...”

“I was like... just wanted to go back home like to you know my friends and school and stuff...”

“I found a group of friends that did see what was going on and were like 'fuck that guy like hang around with us' and that's kinda how I got away from it...”

“Talk to the adults you know the ones that are caring for you.”

“I didn't really feel like I had any support from my parents like at this point like my dad like had found like his new wife and he was over there and he didn't really want to have much to do with me...”

“ I didn't really feel like there was like much of a future for me like so it's kinda like why I was burning the candle fast if you get what I mean. ”

“ ...weird innit all my mates wanna go to lessons. ”

“ A bad relationship with parents is certainly one of those things, er... it can make you feel—and certainly if you've got no outlets like I had—it can make you feel incredibly isolated. You know, I felt that until I found those outlets I was incredibly just uh lonely I guess. An' you know as a fourteen/fifteen year old you don't wanna be feeling like you've got nobody. ”

“ People stop listening to other people as well like teenagers are hard to get them to listen. But I didn't wanna listen to anything anyone had to say around me at all because I felt like they were just trying to put me back in a place I didn't wanna be, that I was trying to get out of... ”

“ The learning bit was good, I liked studying... I got bullied a lot. Ugh! God! Let me think, from like the age of seven 'til I left school, so that was about nine years of just like constant like every day something was being said about me... ”

“ I didn't want to talk to anyone. ”



“I think they need to stay being a kid and not really try growing up it seems to be like society’s just press ganging them and pushing them into... growing up too quickly... They just need to not rush.”

**Believe in  
children**



**Barnardo's**



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