



National Strategy for Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse Johann Lamont member's debate

Joint briefing from Barnardo's Scotland, Children 1st & NSPCC Scotland

Our organisations welcome the debate. We would like to highlight:

- The positive impact of the Strategy on survivors.
- Child sexual abuse is happening within all our communities in Scotland.
- There is significant work to do in breaking the silence around child sexual abuse, which we are concerned still remains a 'taboo' issue.
- We need more therapeutic services for children in Scotland to address the trauma caused by sexual abuse. Despite resource pressures we must ensure that children have access to appropriate support in all parts of Scotland.
- Increased action is needed in Scotland to prevent child sexual abuse before it occurs.
- We strongly advocate that, as part of the programme of action and child protection being carried out by the Cabinet Secretary for Education & Lifelong Learning, consideration is given to developing a new strategy to prevent and address child sexual abuse in Scotland.

Introduction

Barnardo's Scotland, NSPCC Scotland and Children 1st welcome the opportunity to recognise the significance of the National Strategy for Survivors of Childhood Abuse, and in particular, the work of the Cross Party Group on Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse in establishing the Strategy. We also applaud the work of SurvivorScotland over the last decade, in raising awareness, developing training and providing funding for services for survivors of sexual abuse.

Our organisations all work with victims of child sexual abuse, both children and adults. We have extensive expertise in this field and know that child sexual abuse is widespread within our communities: child sexual abuse is both historical, and, sadly, very much happening today. The devastating impact of child sexual abuse on victims and their families, in terms of psychological trauma, mental and physical health problems, is well documented.

Prevalence of child sexual abuse

The most recent NSPCC study on the prevalence of child sexual abuse (Radford et al, 2011) found that 16.5 percent of 11–17-year-olds reported having experienced sexual abuse, of which 4.8 per cent had experienced contact child sexual abuse. These figures rose to 24 per cent and 11.3 per cent when 18–24-year olds were asked if they had

experienced sexual abuse as children. Lampe (2002) looked at the prevalence of child sexual abuse across Europe and found overall prevalence rates of 6–36 per cent in girls and 1–15 per cent in boys under 16. The Council of Europe states that “available data suggest that 1 in 5 children in Europe are victims of some form of sexual violence” (Council of Europe, 2014). It is difficult, however, to know the exact prevalence of child sexual abuse, since so much abuse is underreported. A recent report from the English Children’s Commissioner on sexual abuse in the home, launched last week, suggests that much child sexual abuse goes unreported and missed¹. In addition, NSPCCs last Childline report showed that across the UK calls relating to child sexual abuse have increased by 8%².

Child sexual abuse: the last decade

Ten years ago, when the Strategy was published, child sex abuse was then described as a ‘taboo’. Since, much work has been done to ensure the voices of survivors are heard in Scotland through initiatives such as the National Confidential Forum in order to try and break the silence around child sexual abuse.

Meanwhile, child sexual abuse has increasingly been in the public eye. After the disturbing revelations about Jimmy Saville, there have been a series of high profile historic cases widely reported in the media. Public awareness of child sexual exploitation (one aspect of child sexual abuse) has also grown following exposure about large scale abuse in Rotherham, Rochdale, Oxford, Northern Ireland and other areas. In Scotland, a National Action Plan to Tackle Child Sexual Exploitation was published one year ago. There is also a greater understanding of the need to explicitly tackle online child sexual abuse as children’s internet access grows. Furthermore, Scotland’s Historical Abuse Inquiry, established in October of this year, will soon begin taking evidence from survivors of child sexual abuse who were in care. The Inquiry will create a national public record and commentary, on abuse of children in care in Scotland, from living memory up until, potentially, December 2014. We welcome the inquiry, a landmark moment for Scotland; and an opportunity to listen to people who were failed as children. We hope that the Inquiry will give survivors of abuse in childhood an opportunity to tell their story, and lead to better services for them.

Moving forward: therapeutic services and prevention

Despite all of the above developments, our organisations are concerned that child sexual abuse within communities is *still* a taboo issue and widely misunderstood. We are concerned that there is not sufficient access to therapeutic sexual abuse recovery services for children when they need them. Many children get little support until their needs escalate to the point at which they need Child Adolescent Mental Health Services

¹ <http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publications/protecting-children-harm-%E2%80%93-full-report>.

² <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/services-and-resources/research-and-resources/2015/childline-annual-review-2014-2015-always-there/>

(CAMHS) intervention, which may address the mental health need but not the underlying trauma. Sexual abuse is such a particular violation of dignity, physical integrity and abuse of trust, that the impact of it needs to be addressed specifically. Research has clearly demonstrated an association between childhood sexual abuse and a subsequent increase in rates of childhood and adult mental disorders³.

Our organisations are all too aware of the funding and resource pressures on therapeutic services due to long waiting lists. Children also need rights based, child centred practice which allows them to disclose abuse at their own pace, an approach being piloted by the Children 1st initiative, Stop to Listen. Also, despite the growing acknowledgement of the seriousness and prevalence of child sexual abuse within our communities, we are concerned that more could be done to prevent child sexual abuse from happening in the first place.

A National Strategy for Child Sexual Abuse

Rightly, much attention has been paid to getting justice to those who have suffered abuse in the past. In tandem with this, we need to look forward to prevent abuse, and to support children who experience it to recover from trauma. As part of its remit, the Historic Abuse Inquiry will consider what changes may be necessary to protect children in future.

The new statutory duties around Getting It Right For every Child, set out in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, also have a key role to play in addressing child sexual abuse. Section 96(2) of the Act lists the eight wellbeing indicators, and the first of those indicators, which should be used in any assessment of wellbeing, is 'Safe – protected from abuse, neglect or harm at home, at school and in the community'. In order to carry out this role of early identification of the warning signs of abuse, Named Persons, will need appropriate training and support, and a clear understanding of what targeted interventions are available locally to support those children at risk of, or victims of, child sexual abuse. We also recognise that the workstreams emerging from the Equally Safe Strategy may also be looking at child sexual abuse, within the context of violence against women and girls.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education & Lifelong Learning has also made a welcome commitment to develop a programme of action and improvement for child protection. We strongly advocate that, as part of this work, consideration is given to developing a new strategy to prevent and address child sexual abuse in Scotland. Such a strategy would draw together the good work that is ongoing nationally; prioritise tackling of child sexual abuse within all communities in Scotland; and crucially, put in place effective primary prevention plans to prevent child sexual abuse from occurring and secure provision for abuse recovery services for children who need them, across Scotland.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you wish to discuss any of our comments further:

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