



**Barnardo's Scotland –**  
**Public Understanding**  
**of Child Sexual Exploitation**

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**Believe in  
children**  
 **Barnardo's  
Scotland**

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# 1. Summary and key messages

This report contains the results of a pilot national survey of public understanding of child sexual exploitation in Scotland. There is and has been considerable activity to develop awareness of child sexual exploitation, with aims of ensuring that children affected by exploitation are able to reach help and that all people play an active role in the prevention of child sexual exploitation. The purpose of this survey is to explore where we might want to know more about public understanding of child sexual exploitation in Scotland.

The survey was conducted by YouGov Plc in March 2018 through their Scotland omnibus. 1,007 adults (18+) took part. The results were weighted to be representative of the Scottish adult population.



## Key findings include:

- Public understanding of child sexual exploitation is complex – different concepts appear salient in different contexts, sometimes in contradictory ways;
- Men appear less engaged with the topic of child sexual exploitation than women;
- While people acknowledge in general that child sexual exploitation is an issue, people are less likely to think that it is an issue in their local area – most likely reflecting a public narrative of child sexual exploitation as ‘other’ rather than something we can all play a role in preventing;
- There are particular messages about child sexual exploitation that do not appear well embedded in public understanding, including that older children (16/17 year olds) can be affected, and that children may carry out exploitation.

These findings provide policy makers with information when considering prevention strategies involving public understanding work, in particular around where we might want or need targeted messaging for particular groups in society or about particular aspects of child sexual exploitation.

## 2. What is child sexual exploitation?

### **Scotland's definition of child sexual exploitation**

“Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse in which a person(s), of any age takes advantage of a power imbalance to force or entice a child into engaging in sexual activity in return for something received by the child and/or those perpetrating or facilitating the abuse. As with other forms of child sexual abuse, the presence of perceived consent does not undermine the abusive nature of the act.”

The Scottish Government, 2016a, p.2.

The Scottish Government published a definition and practitioner briefing paper for child sexual exploitation in 2016; this definition was developed with the National Child Sexual Exploitation Working Group and written by Helen Beckett and Joanne Walker. Beckett and Walker (2018) note that common to the definitions of child sexual exploitation across all nations of the UK is the understanding of child sexual exploitation as a form of child sexual abuse, and the idea of exchange (the receipt of something, as in the Scottish definition above).

Hallett (2017) describes child sexual exploitation as officially entering practice and policy discourse in the early 2000s, as part of a deliberate shift to recognising and providing a child protection response to abuse of children in situations where previously children had been blamed for, or even criminalised for, the abuse they were experiencing. There is considerable debate and discussion about the definition of child sexual exploitation, including its utility for practitioners and its impact on children affected by exploitation (see for example Beckett and Walker, 2018; Lovett et al, 2018; Eaton and Holmes, 2017; Hallett, 2017; Interagency working group on the sexual exploitation of children, 2016). It is not the purpose of this report to review these debates, extensively covered elsewhere; instead, this report provides empirical data on the less discussed topic of public understanding of child sexual exploitation.



### 3. Public understanding and prevention

- Child sexual exploitation, as all forms of child sexual abuse, is preventable;
- A public health approach to prevention of child sexual abuse seeks to activate communities to take up their role in prevention – public understanding is part of this goal.



Barnardo's Scotland, like many others, believes that child sexual abuse, including child sexual exploitation, is preventable.

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**“Violence is not an intractable social problem or an inevitable part of the human condition. We can do much to address and prevent it.”**  
**(World Health Organisation, 2002)**

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Public health approaches to preventing child sexual abuse recognise the potential for all people to contribute to the prevention of abuse (Brown et al, 2014). There is considerable interest in the role that awareness raising activities can play in activating the wider community to take up their role in

prevention; Stop it now! Scotland (2013, p.4) describe the importance of people having accurate information about child sexual abuse for successful prevention, which “depends on adults within families and the wider community taking responsibility for identifying behaviours of concern and taking early measures to prevent abuse occurring.” Berlowitz et al (2013) noted the achievements of awareness raising activities – in areas where training had taken place, impacts included an increase in the identification of children and young people at risk or affected by child sexual exploitation and the disruption of perpetrators.

Previous work has identified a number of particular barriers to public engagement in prevention around child sexual abuse

which stem from our understanding of this issue. The Frameworks Institute (2013) identified a key barrier as a sense of ‘fatalism’, the idea that abuse is everywhere and there is nothing that can be done about this. Paluck et al (2010) describe the potential for, and actual occurrence of, public awareness campaigns contributing to such fatalism or inadvertently licensing the behaviour they seek to reduce but suggesting it is everywhere and normal. They note the importance of providing people with information about what to do to achieve change as well as about the problem.

Another key barrier to people actively engaging in their role to prevent abuse is an embedded societal tendency to view abuse as ‘other’. Pearce (2018, p.33) states that “the baseline of meaningful and sustainable change is recognition that [sexual violence between and against children] is not ‘another’s problem’ but is instead everyone’s business.” She describes a variety of ways in which we look elsewhere to place responsibility and blame – at other communities, at the child protection system, at the child being abused – rather than taking ownership of our ability to be part of preventing abuse. Jago et al (2011) suggest that blaming children for the abuse they experience may be a particular barrier to people engaging in their potential to prevent child sexual exploitation in particular.

There is a commitment in Scotland to the public’s role in child protection in general and in relation to preventing child sexual exploitation specifically. Child Protection Committees Scotland has stated that “we are all responsible for child welfare in Scotland and should



take an active role in protecting children” (CPCScotland 2018). Meanwhile, the title to the systems review report of the Child Protection Improvement Programme reaffirmed societal responsibility: Protecting Scotland’s children and young people: it is still everyone’s job (Scottish Government, 2017).

Scotland’s National Action Plan to Prevent and Tackle Child Sexual Exploitation: Update (Scottish Government, 2016b) contains a number of activities around public understanding as contributing



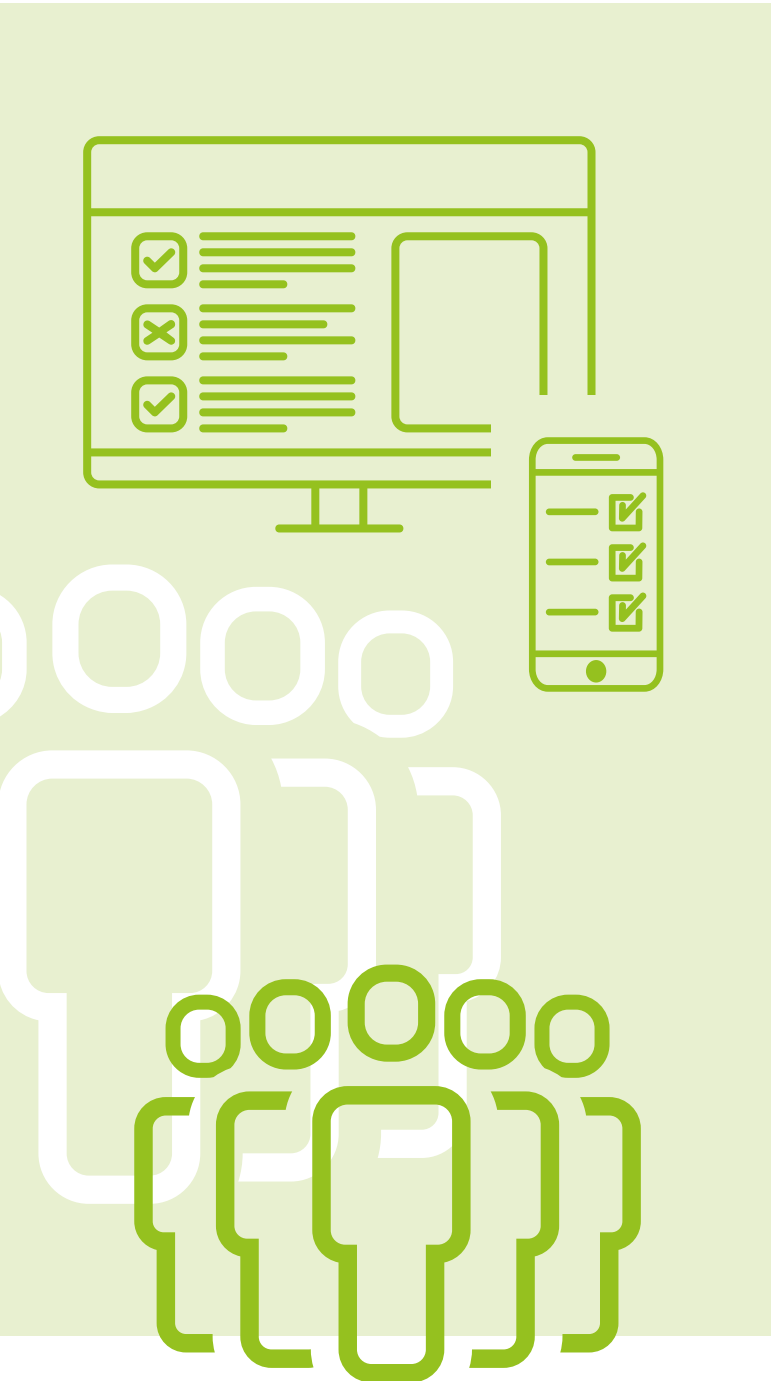
to its long term goal of the elimination of child sexual exploitation. The plan specifies the need for work with particular audiences (increased understanding amongst parents) and on specific topics (increased understanding that child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse, increased understanding that child sexual exploitation can affect boys and girls). Activity has included a national campaign (TV, social media advertising, and website – [www.csethesigns.scot](http://www.csethesigns.scot)) launched in January

2016 – designed to raise awareness amongst parents, carers and children and young people.

Despite the interest in affecting public understanding of child sexual abuse, including child sexual exploitation, we know relatively little about the current state of public understanding. While some programmes of awareness raising include evaluation, these may be specific to that programme, leaving us without a coherent sense of the overall level and nature of Scottish understanding from which to effectively plan prevention work.

This report presents the results of a pilot survey of Scottish public understanding around child sexual exploitation to contribute to what we know about public understanding. The results of the pilot survey demonstrate the complexity of public understanding around child sexual exploitation, with different concepts appearing salient in different contexts, sometimes in contradictory ways. The survey results also highlight key information about child sexual exploitation that does not appear well embedded in public understanding, and differences in public understanding relating to particular groups in society. The survey also suggests the tendency to ‘other’ child sexual exploitation, in that people viewed child sexual exploitation as taking place in the world, but not in their local area. These results suggest areas where we may want to focus further research around public understanding and provide insights for policy makers considering prevention strategies around, for example, groups in society that might benefit from targeted messaging.

## 4. About the survey



The survey was conducted by YouGov Plc through their Scotland omnibus, an online panel conducted with adults (18+). Fieldwork took place between 15 and 19 March 2018. 1007 people took part.

YouGov has a panel of more than 800,000 adults as potential survey respondents. When a survey is run, a subset of the panel is invited to participate based on the criteria for the survey (e.g. a representative sample of Scottish adults). Panel members earn points for taking part, which can be turned into cash. YouGov administers the omnibus survey, with standard demographic questions for all participants; the survey questions cover a variety of topics, depending on the organisations that have purchased questions for that particular omnibus.

Before this section of the omnibus, participants were informed that they were going to be asked questions about child sexual exploitation and if they were happy to continue. 38 people (4%) declined. In addition to being able to withdraw at the beginning of the survey, people were provided with don't know/prefer not to say options during the survey. Information about support organisations was also provided to support the wellbeing of



those taking part. YouGov research is conducted according to Market Research Society Guidelines.

The results were weighted by YouGov to be representative of the Scottish adult (18+) population. Weighting is carried out on age, gender, and social class.

This report summarises the responses from the representative sample to basic questions about child sexual exploitation. In addition, differences in the responses relating to the respondent's age, gender, parental status and area of Scotland have been reported where these are particularly relevant to the discussion. All differences described are statistically significant at the 95% level (this means that the likelihood of finding this difference between groups in the survey, if there were no actual such difference in the Scottish population, is less than 5%).

The full text of the questions and the results are provided at the end of the report. Those who declined to take part have not been represented in the charts in this report to avoid clutter. Similarly, where relevant in the report text, response categories may have been amalgamated to make the information clearer.

This was a pilot survey, designed to be a first look at potential areas of questioning around public understanding and how these might be asked; it is not a comprehensive study of public understanding of child sexual exploitation. Nevertheless, particularly as there is little other work currently available on public understanding of child sexual exploitation in Scotland, the results reported here provide important insights into the current state of public understanding in Scotland, and valuable information around areas for further exploration.

## 5. Public understanding of child sexual exploitation in Scotland

- Public understanding of child sexual exploitation does not match the formal definition;
- There may be particular concepts which people associate more and less strongly with child sexual exploitation – situations involving the internet were often viewed as child sexual exploitation, situations involving other young people carrying out the abuse were rarely viewed as child sexual exploitation;
- Public understanding varies in relation to context, sometimes in contradictory ways;
- Men appear to be particularly disengaged from the topic of child sexual exploitation.

This section summarises the results of the pilot survey. Scottish public understanding of child sexual exploitation is described in relation to:

- What people think child sexual exploitation is;
- Where people think child sexual exploitation is happening; and
- Who people think child sexual exploitation is happening to and being carried out by.

### Public understanding of what child sexual exploitation looks like

Respondents were asked what they understood to be the relationship between the terms child sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse. The Scottish Government defines child sexual exploitation as a form of child sexual abuse (Scottish Government, 2016a). The ‘correct’ answer was therefore that child sexual exploitation is a type of child sexual abuse. Over half of respondents chose an ‘incorrect’ answer; less than two fifths chose the ‘correct’ definition. Women were significantly more likely than men to choose the correct definition – 42% compared to 33%.

## Perceived Relationship between the terms 'child sexual exploitation' and 'child sexual abuse'

Unweighted base = 1007

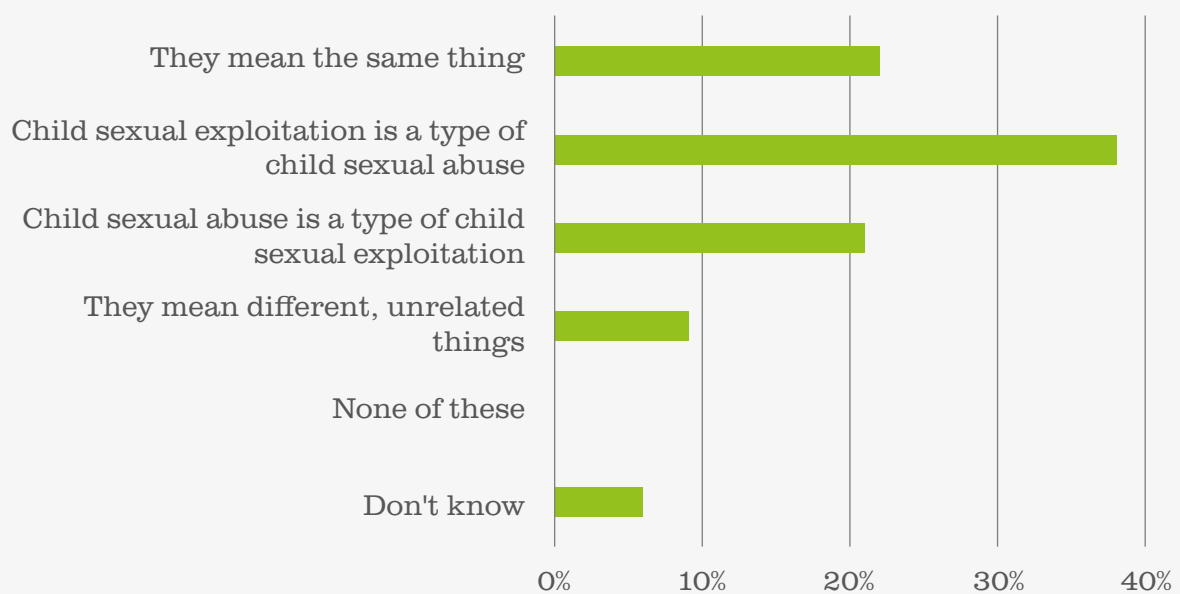


Figure 1: Perceived relationship between the terms 'child sexual exploitation' and 'child sexual abuse'. Unweighted base = 1007.

It is not necessarily unexpected that the general public understanding of child sexual exploitation does not match the formal definition – the definition is perhaps primarily aimed at practitioners (and is also relatively recently published). However, part of the reason why the term 'child sexual exploitation' came into use was to ensure that children being abused in ways that had historically

been considered the child's criminality were in fact recognised as children affected by abuse and in need of a child protection response (Hallett, 2017). The minority of people identifying child sexual exploitation as a form of child sexual abuse may therefore raise concerns about how well this recognition of an exploited child as in need of protection would be embedded in public understanding.

## Situations associated with child sexual exploitation

Survey respondents were also asked to select short descriptions of situations which reflected their understanding of child sexual exploitation. They were presented with ten statements, and could choose up to five which most represented their idea of child sexual exploitation. These statements were designed not to offer simple ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ descriptions, but rather to emphasise and overlap different concepts (such as the internet, exchange, peer abuse, victim blaming) to get an initial sense of aspects people associate more or less with child sexual exploitation.

The idea of ‘exchange’ might be considered a core component of the definition of child sexual exploitation (as reported above, Beckett and Walker (2018) note that this concept is common to definitions of child sexual exploitation across all parts of the UK). Two statements explicitly presented this idea (statements C and E) and appeared important to people’s understanding of child sexual exploitation – they were chosen by 63%

and 48% of respondents respectively. The idea of exchange does therefore appear to be associated with the child sexual exploitation in the public mind.

These two statements were designed to be very similar – but one from the perspective of the abuser (statement C) and one from the perspective of the child (statement E). The statement describing the abuser manipulating the child was chosen by more people than the statement describing the child being manipulated. This would be worth exploring further as there are important practical implications from possible explanations for this difference. For example, one potential reason for this difference is that people may be more familiar with descriptions of child sexual exploitation that are about the perpetrator (for example media coverage of a criminal prosecution) and less familiar with situations from the perspective of a child (for example a child seeking help). This could have implications for people’s ability to recognise child sexual exploitation where a child is seeking help from them.

## Situations most associated with child sexual exploitation

Unweighted base = 1007

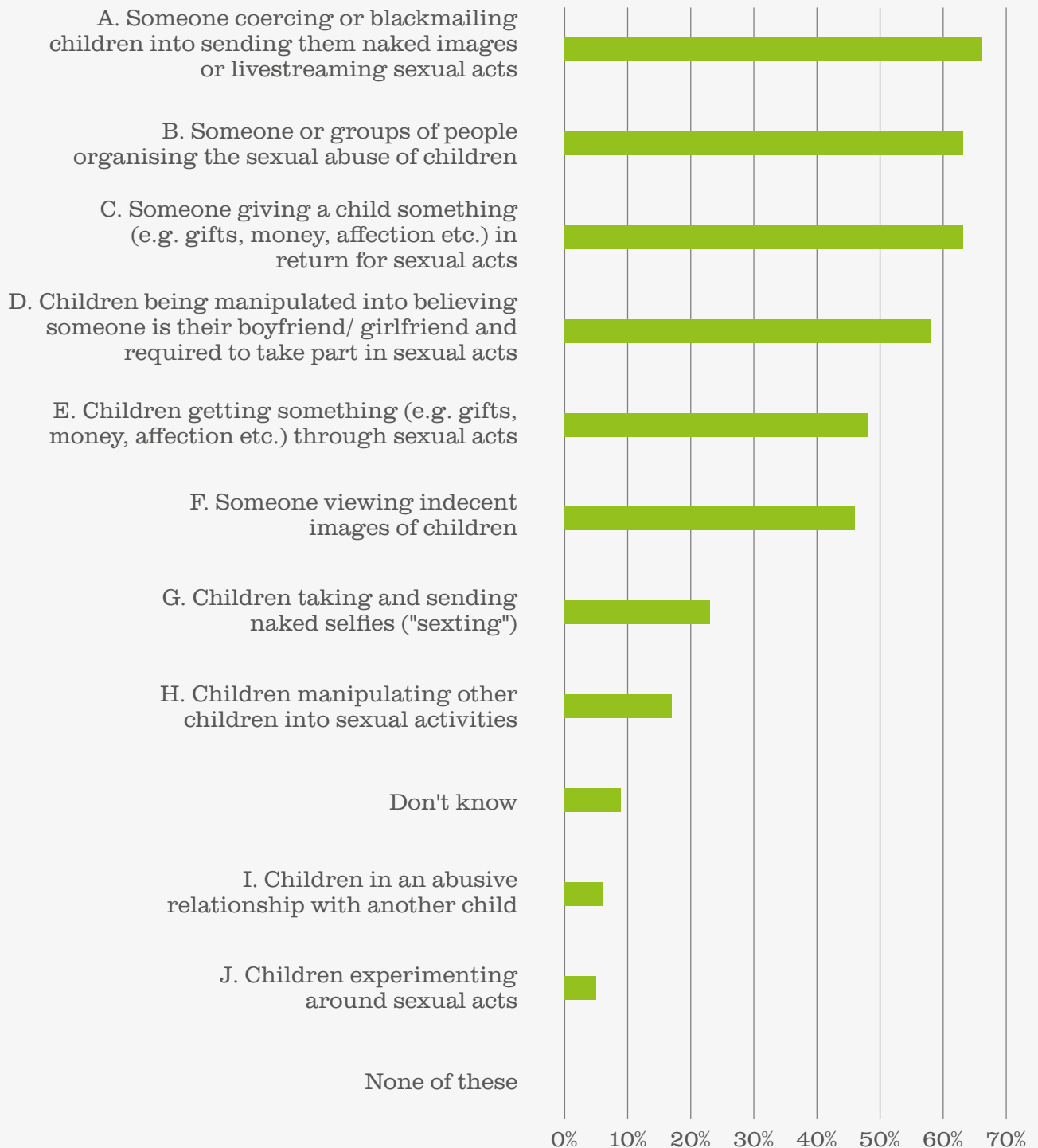


Figure 2: Situations most associated with child sexual exploitation.

Unweighted base = 1007.



Statements relating to activities where a child was perpetrating abuse or activities between children were rarely chosen by respondents. No statement which explicitly referenced all those involved as children was chosen by more than 25% of respondents; the four situations involving all young people were the four least popular statements (G, H, I, J). Similarly, we shall see below that when survey respondents were asked what was the most likely age of those carrying out exploitation, very few suggested people under the age of 18. Pearce (2018, p.25) states that there is a traditional concept of child sexual abuse as “a form of violence perpetrated against children by adults” without recognition that children can also carry out abuse. While there could be other reasons why respondents did not select these statements (e.g. the reference to manipulation in Statement H did not activate people’s concept of exchange), these survey results may suggest, in alignment with other work, that the potential for exploitation to be carried out by peers is not always well understood.

In contrast, people regularly chose statements which referenced the internet. The situation most associated with child sexual exploitation, chosen by two thirds of respondents, was the idea of someone coercing a child into sending naked images. Statement F, someone viewing indecent images of children, was deliberately included as a statement that might be a situation of child sexual exploitation but there is no explicit reference to key concepts from the definition of child sexual exploitation (e.g. exchange, a child being forced/enticed). Statement F was chosen by 46% of respondents, a similar proportion to those choosing Statement E which contains explicit reference to the concept of exchange. Beckett and Walker (2018) suggest that the medium of abuse, specifically whether abuse happens online, is sometimes taken by practitioners as a proxy for defining cases of child sexual exploitation. These survey results suggest that there may also be a particular association in public understanding between abuse involving the internet and child sexual exploitation.

### Public understanding of how the child is accessed

Nearly a third (31%) of respondents stated that the most likely relationship between the child and the person carrying out the exploitation was a friend or acquaintance, known in person. A further quarter stated that it was likely to be a family member. Only a few people, 4%, said that it was a stranger, and similarly few, 6%, said it was someone known to the young person only online.

#### Perceived relationship between person carrying out and child affected by child sexual exploitation

Unweighted base = 1007

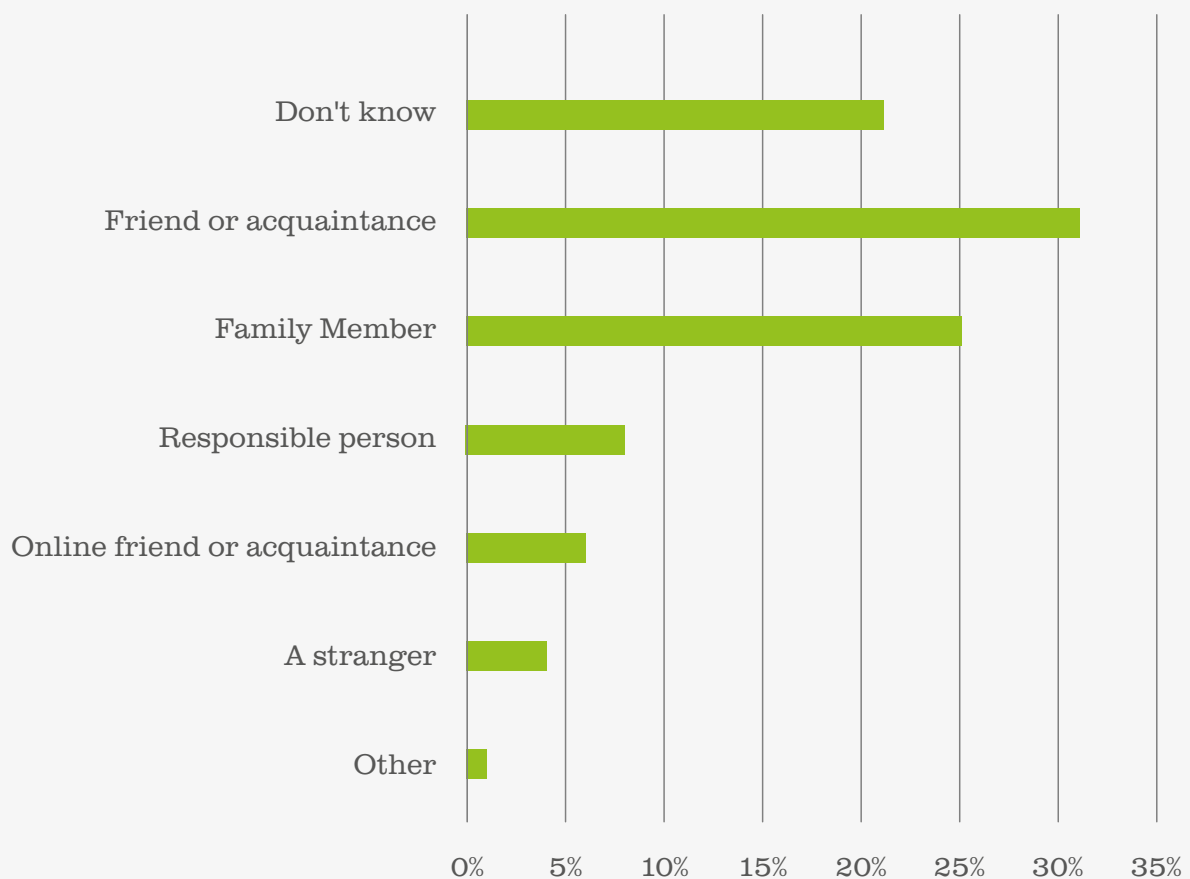


Figure 3: Perceived relationship of person carrying out child sexual exploitation to the child affected. Unweighted base = 1007.

On the one hand this may be viewed as an extremely positive finding. It has long been a goal of public awareness campaigns around child sexual abuse to change people's attitudes that perpetrators are strangers, and encourage recognition that perpetrators can be within your own community (Kemshall and Moulden, 2017). This relates to concerns that when we 'other' child sexual abuse, when we view it as happening away from us, this stops us taking ownership of the issue and action to prevent it (see e.g. Pearce, 2018). However, this also contradicts descriptions of how child sexual exploitation is understood by practitioners; Eaton and Holmes (2017) 'for example' suggest that practitioners primarily see risk in cases of child sexual exploitation as coming from outwith the family. This difference between public and practitioner understanding may reflect a lack of clarity in public understanding around the relationship between the terminology of child sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse, as seen above. A key issue for any further work may be around how to ensure that people have a clear understanding of child sexual exploitation as a form of child sexual abuse, without losing any gains that have been made around public understanding of child sexual abuse as a whole.

The survey results also suggest some complexities in public understanding. This pilot survey included some questions in fairly abstract terms but also the question about which situations people most associated with child sexual exploitation, to consider public understanding more in the context of situations people might see in front of them. When asked in the abstract, only 6% of people stated that

the person carrying out the exploitation knew the child as an online friend or acquaintance, but when asked to choose scenarios which were associated with child sexual exploitation, internet scenarios were frequently chosen. Notably, those who stated that family members or friends/acquaintances known in the real world were the most likely people to carry out child sexual exploitation were significantly more likely to choose the statement "Someone viewing indecent images of children" as a situation associated with child sexual exploitation than those who said that online friends/acquaintances were the most likely to carry out exploitation. These findings suggest that a valuable area for further exploration would be around how public understanding of information around child sexual exploitation would or would not be applied in situations people come across in everyday life. This ties in with the proposal from the Frameworks Institute (2013) that messaging around child maltreatment is most effective where it not only contains information but also helps people understand what they could or should do to take action about that information.

### **Men appear less engaged with the topic of child sexual exploitation**

As noted above, we are interested in public understanding around child sexual exploitation because of how this may affect our ability to prevent child sexual exploitation. Pearce (2018, pp.24, 26) for example suggests that our tendencies towards "distancing and denial" mean we do not take "universal ownership" of the problem of child sexual abuse and



our ability to prevent it; she argues that it is vital that public understanding and awareness improve. A key constituency for Pearce is men – she states that sexual violence against children is a problem that “all men need to own, in full partnership with women, for change to be effected.” (Pearce, 2018, p.28).

A concerning finding from this survey is that men appear to be particularly disengaged with the topic of child sexual exploitation. This can be seen in the significantly higher proportions of don't know responses from men as compared to women on almost all of the questions in the survey. There are many reasons why a person might respond 'don't know' in a survey. These include that they do not know or do not have an opinion. Don't know responses may also allow people to avoid giving what they view as an undesirable response or save themselves the cognitive effort required

to form a view. There may also be a lack of engagement due to the topic being child sexual exploitation - Stop it now! Scotland (2013) suggested that a particular barrier around awareness raising work was that that men did not see prevention of child sexual abuse as a relevant topic to them.

This finding that men are significantly more likely to respond with don't know is consistent with previous survey results from parents in England, where fathers were significantly more likely than mothers to say that they do not know very much about child sexual exploitation (YouGov, 2013). It would be valuable therefore to further explore what is driving this difference in don't know responses, as this may provide insight into how awareness raising or public understanding work around child sexual exploitation might most effectively support men to play an active role in the prevention of child sexual exploitation.

Question	% Don't Know			
	Overall	Men	Women	
Terminology	6	7	4	*
Situations most associated with CSE	9	12	6	*
Perceived most likely relationship of person carrying out exploitation to child affected	21	25	18	*
Perceived most likely age of person carrying out exploitation	19	22	17	
Perceived most likely age of child affected	11	15	7	*
Perceived most likely gender of person carrying out exploitation	4	6	3	*
Perceived most likely gender of child affected	3	4	2	*

Figure 4: % Don't Know responses by gender of respondent.

\* denotes a difference that is significant at the 95% confidence level

## Child sexual exploitation is happening in the world – but not in my local area

- Less than half of respondents thought that child sexual exploitation was a very or fairly significant issue in their local area;
- More than a quarter of people said they didn't know to what extent child sexual exploitation was an issue in their local area;
- These survey results are consistent with previous research suggesting an overarching public narrative of viewing child sexual abuse as being 'other' and happening elsewhere – this narrative may hinder people from playing a full role in the prevention of abuse;
- There are differences between particular groups of people and their views around child sexual exploitation in their local area.

## To what extent is child sexual exploitation a significant issue in...

Unweighted base = 1007

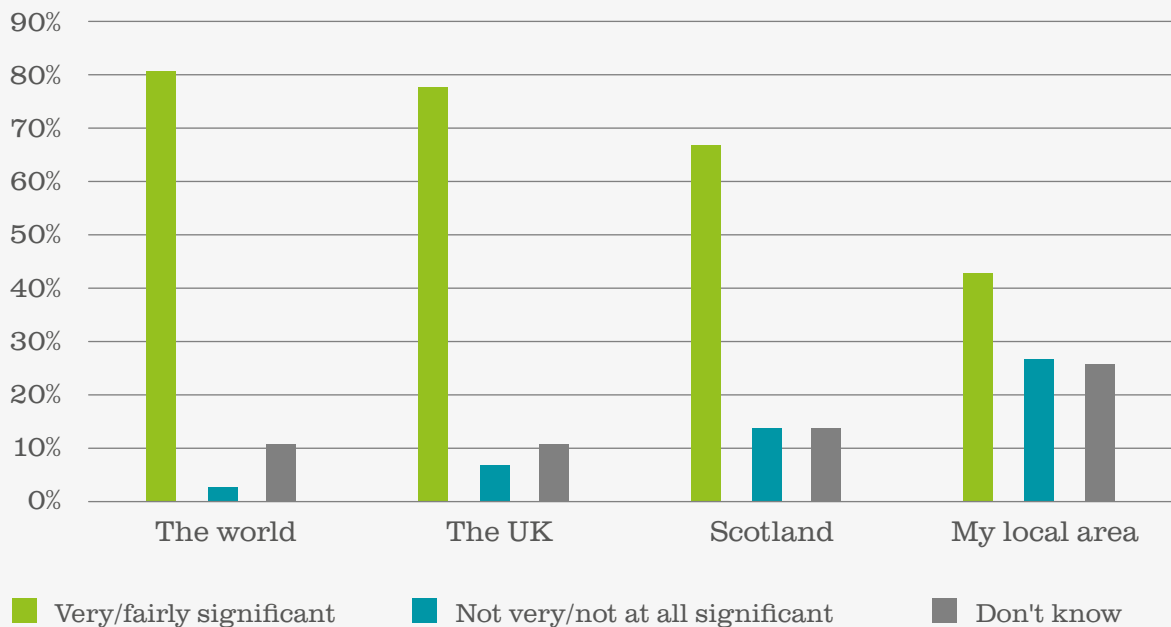


Figure 5: Perception of how significant child sexual exploitation is in different places. Unweighted base = 1007.

These results did not consistently differ in relation to where in Scotland the respondent was from (although people from the Highlands and Islands were significantly more likely than any other area to say that child sexual exploitation was not very significant in their local area). A person's view of how significant child sexual exploitation is in their local area does not appear therefore to be connected to particular aspects of their local area, but rather that there is a general trend across the population to view child sexual exploitation as happening elsewhere.

This is similar to findings around public understanding of trafficking in Scotland

(Kantar TNS, 2018), which reported that only 4% of respondents thought trafficking was a problem to a great extent in their local area, compared to 69% for the world (beyond Europe). As with child sexual exploitation, people seem less likely to view trafficking as a problem in their local area of Scotland.

There are a number of reasons why people may believe that child sexual exploitation is a problem in general, but not in their specific local area. They may for example have seen social media or news coverage of child sexual exploitation taking place somewhere, but not specifically in their own local area. Previous research however

suggests that it is a general pattern in how we think and talk about sexual abuse. Pearce (2018, p.24) states: “there remains a tendency within mainstream society to view SVBAC [sexual violence between and against children] as something that impacts on ‘others’ and not something that happens in ‘our’ homes, ‘our’ communities or ‘our’ neighbourhoods. Lovett et al (2018) similarly described a persistent discourse of perpetrators of abuse as ‘other’ and separate. This discourse is problematic – McAlinden (2014) notes that the purpose of such ‘othering’ of abusers is that it enables wider society, popular culture or institutions to deny responsibility – our failure to prevent or even our structural complicity is exculpated by landing the blame squarely on the separate and different perpetrator. The results of this survey, showing recognition from the Scottish public of child sexual exploitation in the world but not in ‘our’ local area, may reflect the presence of this ‘othering’ discourse, and the way it may hinder people from taking on their potential role in the prevention of child sexual exploitation.

### **Different groups of people have different views on the extent of child sexual exploitation in their local area**

The survey identified that some particular groups of people have different views on the extent to which child sexual exploitation is significant in their local area. As was noted above in relation to men’s responses in the survey as a whole, looking at particular groups may be valuable in considering how to target messaging or develop particular work to

ensure all individuals are playing their role in the prevention of abuse.

The youngest age-group (18-24 year olds) were significantly more likely to say they didn’t know if child sexual exploitation was an issue in their local area than other age groups (43% of 18-24 year olds, compared to 26% overall). We might have expected this age group to have had good knowledge of child sexual exploitation because some would have been through school recently enough to be taught about child sexual exploitation (although the National Child Sexual Exploitation Group’s 2017 report of Child Protection Committee’s self-evaluations did suggest inconsistency and gaps in provision at schools). It would be worth considering what mechanisms there might be to work with this age group in particular (for example the current Equally Safe in Higher Education work might provide opportunities) and how messages could be tailored to have most impact with this age group.

In contrast, respondents described as parents or guardians were significantly more likely to state that child sexual exploitation was a very significant issue in their local area than those who were not parents. This appears to be primarily driven by older people (35+), and those whose children are older (for example over 18). There is no difference in relation to whether or not there are currently children in the household. Another area of consideration therefore might be how to use what appears to be a greater recognition of child sexual exploitation in the local area among parents to ensure both their, or other groups’, full engagement in their potential to prevent abuse.

## Public understanding of who carries out and who is affected by child sexual exploitation

- Few people considered young people’s peers as likely to be carrying out child sexual exploitation;
- Few people considered the potential for older young people, 16/17 year olds, to be affected by child sexual exploitation;
- A notable minority of respondents did not recognise men as the most likely gender to carry out child sexual exploitation;
- The majority of respondents did not view child sexual exploitation as a gendered form of violence with a disproportionate impact on girls.

Respondents were asked who they thought was most likely to carry out and to be affected by child sexual exploitation, in terms of the person’s gender and age.

### Age

Survey respondents did not appear to have strong views of particular age groups as either carrying out or being affected by child sexual exploitation. In both questions around half of respondents said that all age groups were equally likely. One in five (for age of person carrying out child sexual exploitation) and one in ten (for age of person affected by child sexual exploitation) stated that they did not know.

### Perceived most likely age of person carrying out child sexual exploitation

Unweighted base = 1007

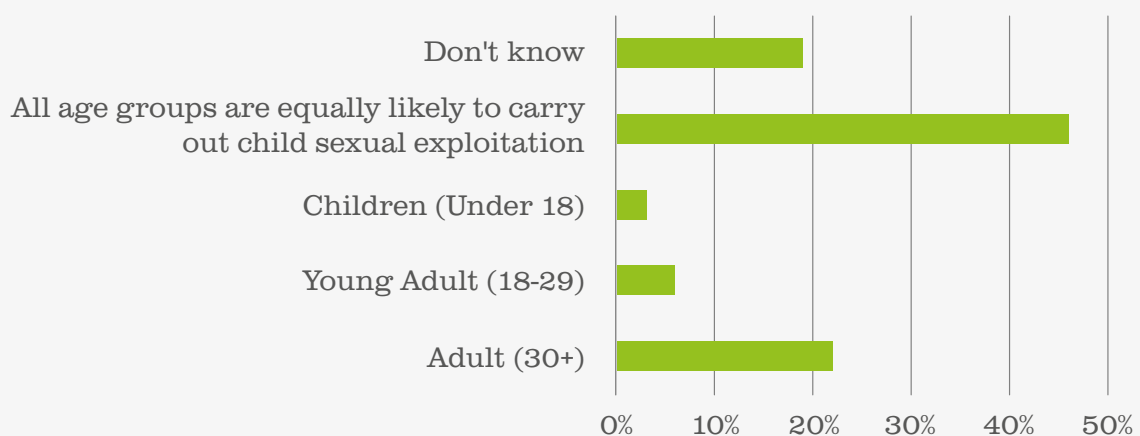


Figure 6: Perceived most likely age of person carrying out child sexual exploitation. Unweighted base = 1007.

Where respondents did choose an age bracket for those most likely to be carrying out child sexual exploitation, they rarely (less than 3%) chose ages under 18. This is consistent with the responses where respondents were asked to select the descriptions most relevant to their understanding of child sexual exploitation, where statements involving other young people as those carrying out the exploitation were rarely selected.

The Children's Commissioner in England (Berelowitz et al, 2013) suggested that children were particularly likely to be 'hidden' when exploited by peers. This survey suggests that few members of the public are thinking about young people as potentially carrying out exploitation of other young people, which may be a reason why those exploited by peers would be unseen.

### Perceived age most likely to be affected by child sexual exploitation

Unweighted base = 1007

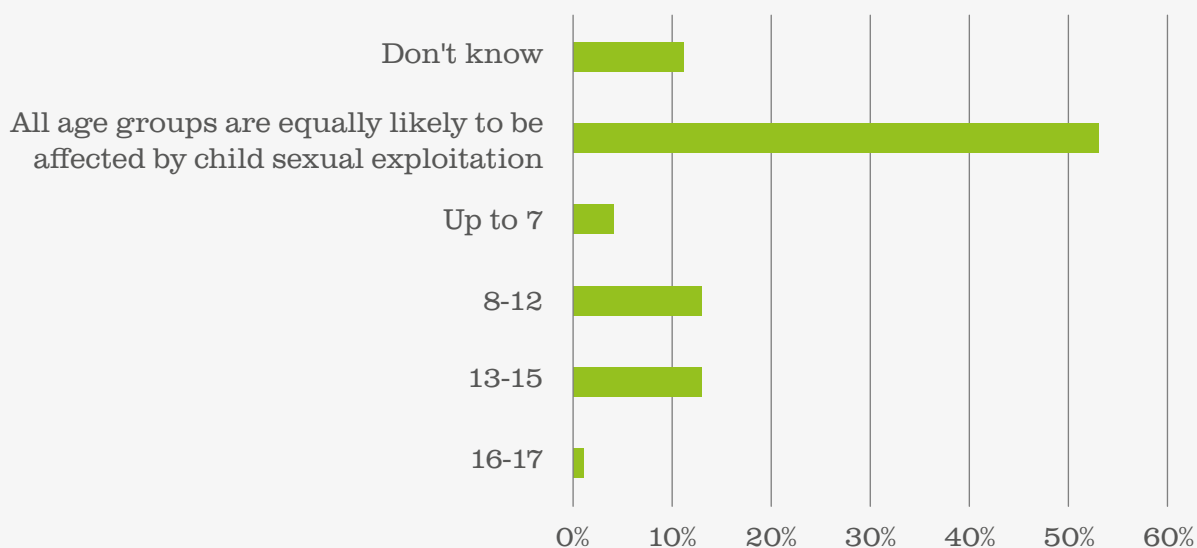


Figure 7: Perceived age most likely to be affected by child sexual exploitation. Unweighted base = 1007.

Where respondents chose an age bracket for those affected by child sexual exploitation, most chose ages 8-12 or 13-15. Only 1% said that 16/17 year olds would be the age group most affected; this is less than the proportion who viewed under 7s (4%) as the most likely age group to be affected.

Despite suggestions that child sexual exploitation as a concept can be particularly associated with adolescents/teenagers (e.g. Beckett and Walker, 2018; Eaton and Holmes, 2017), these survey results suggest that public understanding is focused toward younger children. Concerns have been raised about lack of recognition of abuse of older young people and how this may limit their access to support (e.g. Stop it now! Scotland, 2013); these results suggest particular concerns around 16/17 year olds being unlikely to be recognised by the public as potentially affected by exploitation.

## Gender

60% of respondents stated that they thought it was most likely to be men carrying out child sexual exploitation, with 30% saying that all genders were equally likely to carry out child sexual exploitation. In terms of the children affected by child sexual exploitation, 62% said they thought all genders are equally likely to be affected by child sexual exploitation while 30% said that girls were more likely to be affected. Women were significantly more likely than men to say that all genders are equally likely to be affected by child sexual exploitation. Survey respondents were relatively confident in their knowledge about gender – these two question had the lowest proportion of ‘don’t knows’, less than one in twenty for either.

### Perception of gender most likely to carry out child sexual exploitation

Unweighted base = 1007

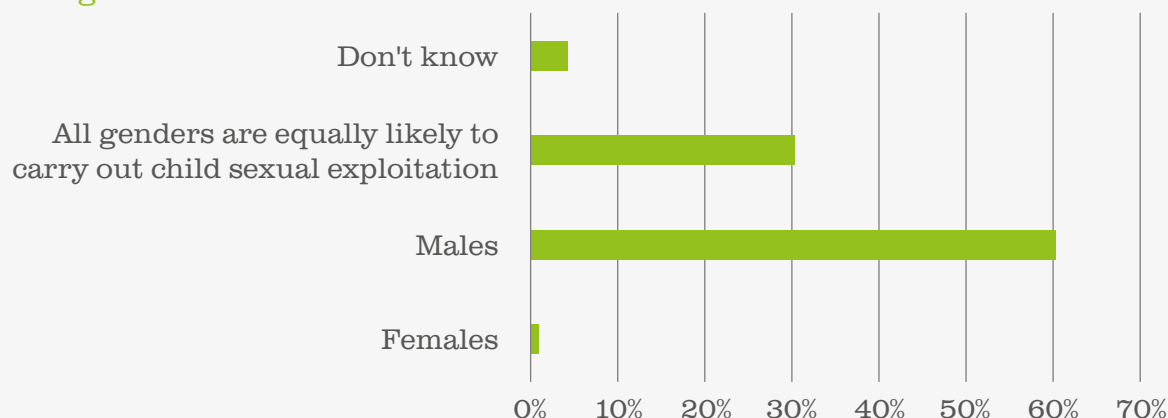


Figure 8: Perception of gender most likely to carry out child sexual exploitation. Unweighted base = 1007.

The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse reports that a consistent finding about perpetrators of child sexual exploitation is that the majority are male – with studies finding between 90% and 99% of perpetrators are male (Walker et al, 2018). However, Pearce (2018, p.28)

describes the overarching evidence that the majority of perpetrators are male as “often under or never reported”. This may be one reason why a notable minority of Scottish adults did not say that they thought men were most likely to carry out child sexual exploitation.

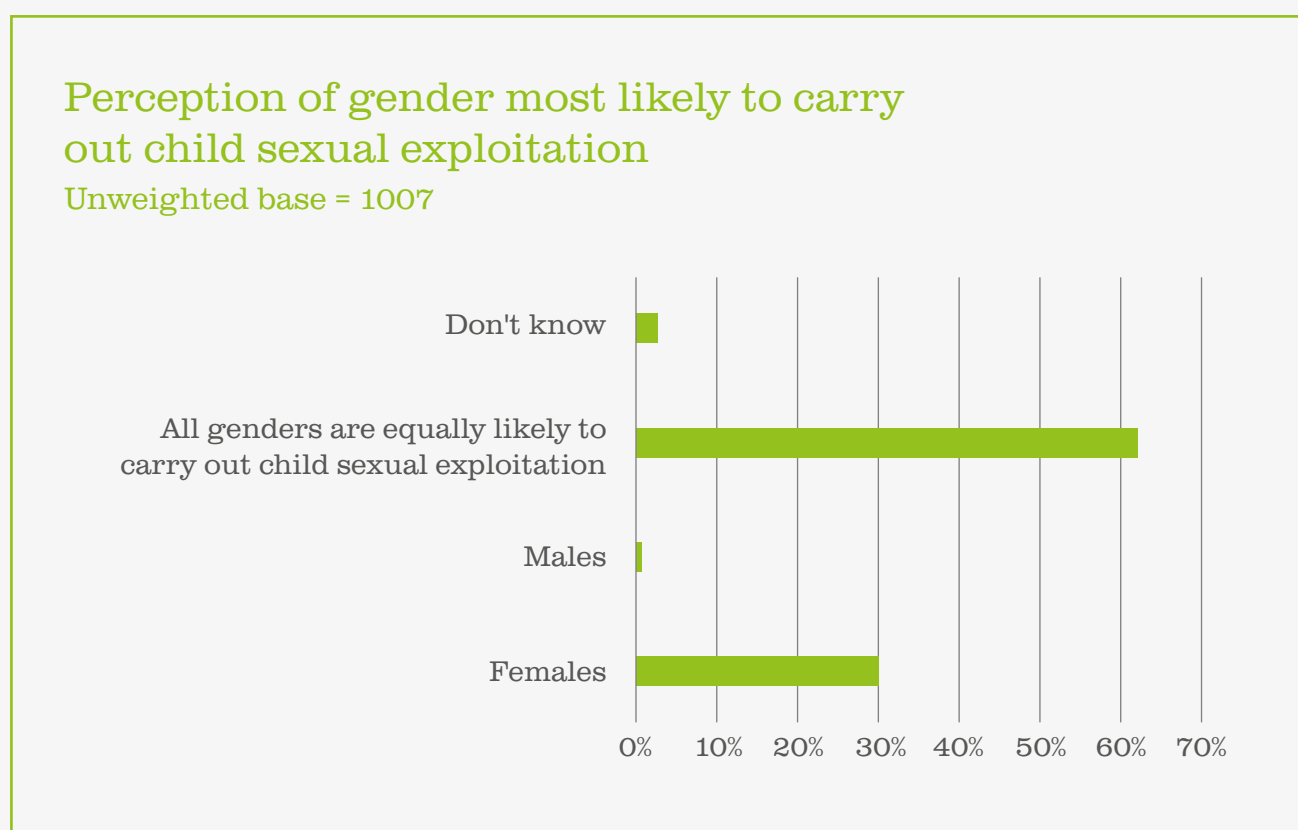


Figure 9: Perception of gender most likely to be affected by child sexual exploitation. Unweighted base = 1007.



The Centre of Expertise for Child Sexual Abuse suggests, on the basis of reviewing international studies of child sexual abuse, that 15–20% of girls and 7–8% of boys experience sexual abuse before the age of 18 (Kelly and Karsna, 2018). Cockbain et al (2017, p.660) state “It is well established that boys constitute a minority of child sexual abuse victims.” Scotland recognises child sexual exploitation as a form of gender based violence in its Equally Safe strategy, noting that “women and girls are disproportionately affected by particular forms of violence” (Scottish Government, 2018, p.20). Nevertheless, only a minority of the public viewed girls as disproportionately affected by child sexual exploitation, with the majority stating they thought all genders were equally likely to be affected.

Recent work has sought to consider the different experiences of girls and boys affected by child sexual exploitation, for example different pathways into services (Cockbain et al, 2017). This is perhaps motivated by what has previously been described as the “persistent invisibility of boys” in professional and research literatures (Lillywhite and Skidmore, 2006, p.352). This survey suggests that the majority of the public believe boys to be equally visible as girls as potentially affected by child sexual exploitation, at least in principle. This does not negate the importance of considering gender in relation to professionals’ responses and children’s experiences of child protection systems and support services.



## 6. Conclusion

The findings of this pilot survey allow us to explore public understanding of child sexual exploitation in Scotland, to consider how work that has been done to date may have been taken on board by different segments of the population and to start to think about which messages about child sexual exploitation have come across more or less strongly. Whilst very much an initial look at these issues, these results highlight areas that may be particularly valuable for further research. They may also be useful to policy makers considering the role of public understanding in the prevention of child sexual exploitation.



The key findings of this survey include:

- Public understanding of child sexual exploitation is complex – different concepts appear salient in different contexts, sometimes in contradictory ways;
- Men appear less engaged with the topic of child sexual exploitation;
- While people acknowledge in general that child sexual exploitation is an issue, people are less likely to think that it is an issue in their local area – most likely reflecting a public narrative of child sexual exploitation as ‘other’ rather than something we can all play a role in preventing;
- There are particular messages about child sexual exploitation that do not appear well embedded in public understanding, including that older children (16/17 year olds) can be affected and that children may carry out exploitation.

Barnardo’s Scotland believes that child sexual exploitation is preventable and hopes the findings of this pilot survey will contribute to better understanding of how communities can be activated in achieving this goal.

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All links correct at time of publication

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## Survey questions and results

**1: How good, or bad, would you say your level of understanding of the term “child sexual exploitation” is? (Please select the option that best applies)**

Very good	201
Fairly good	607
Fairly bad	91
Very bad	14
Don't know	56
Chose not to take part	38

**2: Which ONE, if any, of the following statements best describes what you understand the relationship between the terms “child sexual exploitation” and “child sexual abuse” to be? (Please select the option that best applies)**

They mean the same thing	223
Child sexual exploitation is a type of child sexual abuse	380
Child sexual abuse is a type of child sexual exploitation	209
They mean different, unrelated things	94
None of these	5
Don't know	59
Chose not to take part	38

For questions 3-8, respondents were supplied with a modified version of the Scottish Government definition of child sexual exploitation (Scottish Government, 2016a):

For the following questions, by ‘child sexual exploitation’, we mean a form of sexual abuse in which a person(s) of any age takes advantage of a power imbalance to force or entice a child (i.e. someone aged under 18) into engaging in sexual activity in return for something received by the child and/or those perpetrating or facilitating the abuse. As with other forms of child sexual abuse, the presence of perceived consent does not undermine the abusive nature of the act.

**3: To what extent, if at all, would you say that child sexual exploitation is a significant issue in each of the following places?  
(Please select one option on each row)**

	Very significant	Fairly Significant	Not very significant	Not at all significant	Don't know	Prefer not to say	Chose not to take part
The rest of the world (i.e. North/South American, Africa, Asia, Oceania, Europe excl. the UK)	567	248	25	15	109	6	38
The UK as a whole	382	399	68	4	110	7	38
Scotland as a whole	284	393	135	8	144	6	38
Your local area	193	239	225	47	261	5	38

**4: Thinking about children affected by child sexual exploitation...Which ONE, if any, of the following genders do you think are most likely to be affected?  
(Please select the option that best applies. If you are unsure, we are still interested in your opinion)**

Males	9
Females	302
All genders are equally likely to be affected by child sexual exploitation	626
Don't know	30
Prefer not to say	3
Chose not to take part	38

**5: Still thinking about children affected by child sexual exploitation...Which ONE, if any, of the following age groups do you think are most likely to be affected? (Please select the option that best applies. If you are unsure, we are still interested in your opinion)**

Up to 7 years old	36
8 to 12 years old	134
13 to 15 years old	134
16 to 17 years old	12
All age groups are equally likely to be affected by child sexual exploitation	536
Don't know	112
Prefer not to say	6
Chose not to take part	38

**6: Now thinking about the people who carry out child sexual exploitation...Which, if any, of the following genders do you think are most likely to carry out child sexual exploitation? (Please select the option that best applies. If you are unsure, we are still interested in your opinion)**

Males	602
Females	14
All genders are equally likely to carry out child sexual exploitation	306
Don't know	44
Prefer not to say	3
Chose not to take part	38

**7: Still thinking about the people who carry out child sexual exploitation...Which, if any, of the following age groups do you think are most likely to carry out child sexual exploitation? (Please select the option that best applies. If you are unsure, please give your best estimate)**

Up to 7 years old	2
8 to 12 years old	11
13 to 15 years old	6
16 to 17 years old	8
18 to 19 years old	12
20 to 24 years old	22
25 to 29 years old	32
30 to 39 years old	88
40+ years old and above	129
All age groups are equally likely to carry out child sexual exploitation	460
Don't know	196
Prefer not to say	4
Chose not to take part	38

**8: Still thinking about the people who carry out child sexual exploitation...Which ONE, if any, of the following relationships do you think the person carrying out child sexual exploitation is most likely to have with the child affected? (Please select the option that best applies. If you are unsure, please give your best estimate)**

A family member of the child	252
A friend or acquaintance of the child (someone they know in person)	308
A friend or acquaintance of the child (someone they know online only)	60
Another person responsible for the child (e.g. educators, childminder, etc. excluding family members)	80
A stranger	38
Other	11
Don't know	216
Prefer not to say	4
Chose not to take part	38



For the final question, respondents were no longer given the full definition of child sexual exploitation, but were provided with a reminder that ‘child’ meant anyone under the age of 18 years old.

<b>9: Which FIVE, if any, of the following situations do you MOST associate with child sexual exploitation? (Please select up to FIVE answer options)</b>	
Children experimenting around sexual acts	48
Children taking and sending naked selfies (“sexting”)	236
Children getting something (e.g. gifts, money, affection etc.) through sexual acts	483
Children being manipulated into believing someone is their boyfriend/girlfriend and required to take part in sexual acts	581
Children in an abusive relationship with another child	61
Children manipulating other children into sexual activities	169
Someone viewing indecent images of children	460
Someone coercing or blackmailing children into sending them naked images or livestreaming sexual acts	664
Someone giving a child something (e.g. gifts, money, affection etc.) in return for sexual acts	636
Someone or groups of people organising the sexual abuse of children	638
None of these	3
Don’t know	91
Prefer not to say	18
Chose not to take part	38

# Acknowledgements

With thanks to those people both within and outside Barnardo's who provided thoughts on findings and comments on the draft report.



## Sources of help and advice

There may be people reading this report who are worried about themselves, a family member, a friend or someone in their community being affected by child sexual exploitation, or who are worried about themselves, a family member, a friend or someone in their community in terms of their thoughts or behaviours towards others. There are sources of help and advice available.

**CSE the signs** is Scotland's information website for the prevention of CSE, with information about where to get help for young people and for parents who are worried about being affected by CSE.

[www.csethesigns.scot](http://www.csethesigns.scot)

**Childline** is free to call on **0800 1111** or support can be accessed in a variety of ways through the childline website

[www.childline.org.uk/get-support/](http://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/)

**Stop it now!** Scotland is a charity dedicated to the prevention, and therefore eradication, of child sexual abuse. Their services include support for individuals and their families with problematic sexual thoughts and those who may be at risk of sexual offending, including in relation to the internet. Support can be accessed through their helpline (**0808 1000 900**) or online

[www.get-help.stopitnow.org.uk/](http://www.get-help.stopitnow.org.uk/).

You can search the range of **Barnardo's Scotland services** here: [www.barnardos.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/scotland/scotland\\_service\\_search](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/scotland/scotland_service_search)





[www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)