



Briefing Paper No. 2

**The influence of  
paramilitarism in  
Northern Ireland  
on the recognition  
of child sexual  
exploitation in  
young males**

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## What is child sexual exploitation?

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity



**(a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants,**

**and/or**

**(b) the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator.**

The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

*(Co-operating to Safeguard Children, 2017, p.55).*

## What is Paramilitarism?

It was not possible to source a specific Northern Ireland definition of 'paramilitary'; therefore, two similar definitions are relied upon from the Collins and Cambridge dictionaries respectively:

***A paramilitary organisation is organised like an army and performs either civil or military functions in a country.<sup>1</sup>***

***A paramilitary group is organised like an army but is not official and often not legal.<sup>2</sup>***

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/paramilitary>  
<sup>2</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/paramilitary>



## Introduction

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) can affect both young males and females. However, the traditional discourse on CSE has primarily been female-centric despite some attempts to raise the plight of young males as victims of this phenomenon. Only in recent years has research on the sexual exploitation of young males begun to gain prominence, with an increasing appreciation of difficulties in relation to the recognition, and hence the low rate of known cases (Beckett, 2011; Berelowitz et al. 2013). While there has been a greater focus on this form of abuse, an absence of specific research into barriers to disclosure and the impediments to identification mean that fundamental gaps in knowledge and understanding have limited the degree to which boys and young men can be effectively protected.

In response, the author undertook research to achieve an understanding of factors inhibiting recognition of young males as victims of CSE (Montgomery-Devlin, 2019). The central focus of the study was to:

- Identify inhibitors to disclosure by young males and potential solutions;
- Identify impediments to identification by professionals and potential solutions; and
- Explore the existence of any relationship between inhibitors to disclosure and impediments to identification.

The issue of paramilitarism was not a pre-determined area for examination in the study; however, the significance of accounts by several participants in Northern Ireland warranted its inclusion and analysis. While limited and requiring further investigation, there was some evidence that there can be:

- a direct impact on young males from sexual exploitation perpetrated by individuals with paramilitary connections, and
- an indirect impact through the fear of living in communities under paramilitary influence, as a victim of CSE.

### About this paper

This paper is the second in a series of briefings on learning arising from the research on potential impediments to recognising the sexual exploitation of young males under 18 (Montgomery-Devlin, 2019).<sup>3</sup> It summarises a specific theme emerging from the study, that of the influence of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland on the recognition of CSE in young males. In doing so, the paper sets out the context of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland, explaining its significance to the study undertaken and highlighting factors impeding the recognition of CSE in males within these environments. The paper concludes with some specific recommendations to inform policy and practice in this area.



<sup>3</sup> Briefing paper No. 1: Potential impediments to the recognition of the sexual exploitation of young males under 18, June 2020.



# Prevalence of young males as victims of CSE in Northern Ireland



Almost **one-fifth** (17%) of children and young people (aged 12-17 years) known to Social Services in Northern Ireland, where CSE was identified as an issue of concern, **were male** (Beckett, 2011).



One in **23 males (4.3%)** of 786 16-year olds in Northern Ireland, reported being sexually groomed by an adult before the age of 16 as opposed to one in seven females (Beckett, 2011).

## Research methodology

The overall study utilised a mixed methods approach to achieve a valuable range of data from participants (young people and professionals) across the UK. These included a detailed policy and literature review; a professional survey with 91 respondents; one to one interviews with 30 professionals; one to one interviews with 10 young males; and 1,158 respondents to CSE questions in a Young Life and Times survey.

- The professional interviews included 18 participants from Northern Ireland, of which 28% (n=5) reported paramilitarism as a specific issue in relation to the sexual exploitation of young males.
- 1 of the 4 young males interviewed from Northern Ireland reported paramilitarism as being a relevant factor in the non-disclosure of his exploitation.
- The policy and literature review highlighted how paramilitarism is recognised across a number of key Northern Ireland government strategies as a risk factor in relation to effectively safeguarding children and young people.

### Data limitations:

- The study did not seek to distinguish young male victims of CSE who are members of paramilitary gangs and those who are not, but simply reside in paramilitary controlled communities.
- Statements by research participants, making links between the sexual exploitation of young males and paramilitaries, did not clarify whether the abuse was wielded by gangs or by individual members of these gangs. Nor were participants specific to which paramilitary gang they were referring.
- Neither the study nor this paper debate the nuances of paramilitary gangs against the definitions provided, suffice to note one distinct feature, that is, the predominance of adult male leaders within paramilitary gangs. The significance of this is the potential heightened dynamics of power and control exerted over others.

It is not the intention of this paper to detail the entire complexities surrounding the sexual exploitation of young males within the realms of paramilitarism, but to begin to address those believed to impede recognition of it within this context.



## Policy context

### Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland

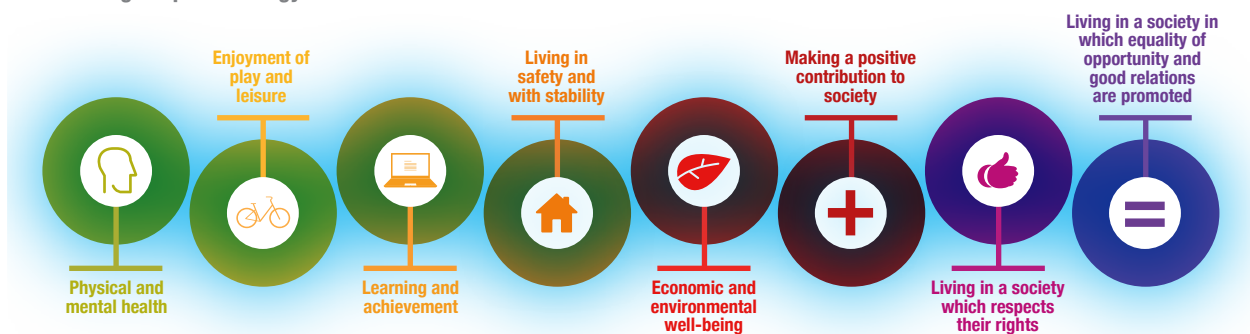
This safeguarding policy framework addresses the sexual exploitation of children and young people.<sup>4</sup> As well as defining the issue and how it presents, it outlines how organisations and people must work in partnership to ensure children and young people are nurtured and safeguarded as effectively as possible from domestic, physical, sexual or emotional abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Notably the guidance also acknowledges the additional vulnerabilities faced by children and young people *‘living in a post-conflict society which is still experiencing legacy issues associated with paramilitarism’* (p.51). It recognises that, within some communities, *‘there can be an acceptance of the use of violence as a response to perceived anti-social behaviour, crime committed by individuals or as a method of control over children and young people’* (p.51). The guidance highlights *‘children may also be abused or exploited by adults who hold power within their communities, where fear is used to coerce the child or young person into compliance’* (p.52).<sup>5</sup>

### Children and Young People’s strategy

The Strategy for Children and Young People 2019-2029 is the overarching strategy in Northern Ireland from which flows a variety of cross-departmental, multi-agency plans, topic-specific strategies and programmes.<sup>6</sup> It states the well-being of children and young people includes:

#### Children and Young People’s strategy



4 Section 7.2.7

5 Section 7.2.2

6 The Strategy sits within the context of the United Nations international human rights conventions including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); the Northern Ireland Executive’s Programme for Government; the Children’s Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015; and the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.



The 2015 **Fresh Start** agreement sets out the Northern Ireland Executive's commitment to tackling paramilitary activity and associated criminality. This includes:

- the prevention of vulnerable young people being drawn into paramilitary activity
- a focus on young males
- addressing underlying issues that increase the risk of young males becoming involved.

The subsequent **Action Plan on Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime** (Northern Ireland Executive, 2016) included the development of initiatives to ensure that those schools and youth groups dealing with the effects of paramilitary activity on young people are appropriately trained to identify risk factors and to adopt a whole school/group approach to help deal with those challenges.

It also included Youth Intervention Programmes specifically targeted at vulnerable young people, including those most at risk of becoming involved in, or affected by paramilitary activity, so that they can make a positive contribution to their communities. A range of initiatives are underway to deliver on these commitments. For example, the Education Authority Youth Service is delivering a Capacity Building Programme (for Teachers and Youth Workers) and a Youth Outreach Programme (Steer Teenagers Away from Recurrent Trouble – START) which supports young people highly vulnerable to paramilitary threat and coercion. Other activities are underway to support young men who have offended and are at risk of being drawn into crime and paramilitarism.

The overall intended outcomes of the Action Plan are a society where:

- citizens and communities feel safe and confident
- paramilitarism has no place
- the public support and have even more confidence in the justice system; and
- those who wish to move away from paramilitary activity and structures are supported to do it.



# Key findings

## 1. Literature review

In recent years, the links between gangs and CSE have been well documented (Berelowitz *et al.* 2012; Firmin, 2013, Beckett *et al.* 2013; Pitts, 2013; Brayley *et al.* 2014). However, with the exception of Beckett (2011)<sup>7</sup> and Marshall (2014),<sup>8</sup> the focus has primarily related to gangs in England. Furthermore, as with many other aspects of CSE research, these studies have revealed females to be the primary victims, with less known about the victimisation of young males in this context. Knowledge of the dynamics and complexities within this culture provide significant learning about the factors that act to impede recognition of the exploitation.

### **Northern Ireland and paramilitaries**

From the late 1960s Northern Ireland experienced a sustained period of violent conflict which remained part of the political landscape until the mid-1990s. This conflict was focused on national identity, namely Republicanism versus Unionism. The evolution of paramilitary organisations originated at the start of this, with young males being actively recruited by them (Harland, 2009). During this era there were over 3,000 'punishment shootings' and over 2,500 'punishment beatings' by paramilitary organisations. Of significance to this study is the degree of fear generated, and power exerted, by these gangs, together with the fact that 25% of victims of punishment attacks were perpetrated against those under the age of 19 (Muldoon *et al.* 2005).

In the conflict's transformational change period since the late-1990s, paramilitary gangs did not relinquish their grip on the communities in which they originated. While there was de-militarisation in a political sense, the structures remained,

turning their focus to criminal activity for personal benefit (Marshall, 2014). This was conducted at a local level, with the dealing of drugs becoming a significant element of this. Furthermore, despite this changing political context in Northern Ireland, vigilante style 'punishment beatings' and shootings continued, with paramilitaries acting as the 'informal police' enforcing their own form of violent justice (Knox, 2001; Feenan, 2002; Kennedy, 2004).

*"Two paramilitary-style shootings or beatings are taking place on the streets of Northern Ireland every week, the Belfast Telegraph can reveal."* (Kilpatrick, 2014).

*"Acts of intimidation and PPA<sup>9</sup> are not a new phenomenon; rather they have been a consistent feature of Northern Irish society throughout the 30 years of the troubles."* (Knox, 2001).

This raises issues regarding the extent to which the State is meeting its obligation as signatories of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)<sup>10</sup> (McAlister *et al.*, 2018). In 2016 the Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern that, in Northern Ireland, children face violence, including shootings, carried out by non-State actors involved in paramilitary-style attacks, as well as recruitment by such non-State actors. The Committee recommended that the State party:

*"Take immediate and effective measures to protect children from violence by non-State actors involved in paramilitary-style attacks as well as from recruitment by such actors into violent activities, including through measures relating to transitional and criminal justice."<sup>11</sup>*

<sup>7</sup> Beckett, 2011, p.60

<sup>8</sup> Report of the Independent Enquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland, 2014, pp. 11-12; 32; 35; 39; 47-49; 62; 124; 147.

<sup>9</sup> Paramilitary Punishment Attacks.

<sup>10</sup> Articles 3, 6, 15, 19, 36, 37, 38.

<sup>11</sup> UNCRC - Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding Observations on the fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 2016.



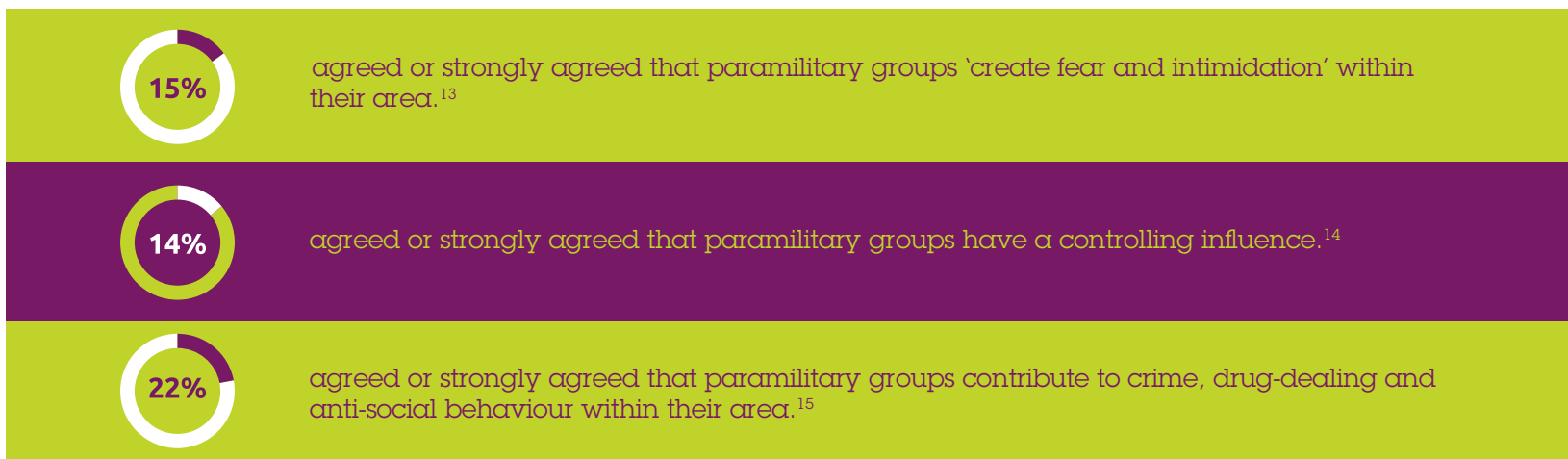


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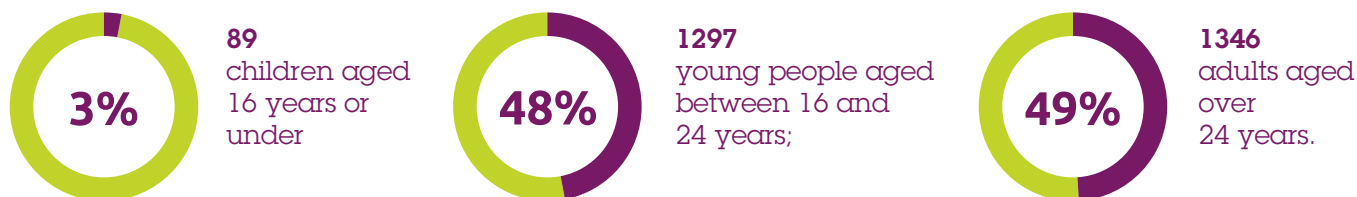
### Recent evidence

A 2017 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILTS)<sup>12</sup> with 1,203 respondents provided data on the public's perceptions of and attitudes towards paramilitary influence and activity in Northern Ireland:



### Paramilitary attacks in Northern Ireland April 1998 to June 2015<sup>16</sup>

**2732** casualties of paramilitary style attacks:



12 Perceptions of Paramilitarism in Northern Ireland: Findings from the 2017 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey: <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/8-2019-nilts-perceptions-paramilitarism.pdf>  
 13 1,087 respondents (n=163)  
 14 1,105 respondents (n=155)  
 15 1,058 respondents (n=233)  
 16 Northern Ireland Policing Board: Human Rights Annual Report 2016/17



#### Significance of paramilitarism to the study

The significance of paramilitarism to the study, both during and post-conflict, was three-fold:

**(i) It created an environment which reinforced masculine ideology** - one of power, strength, aggression, and protection, giving young males a place as defender and protector of their community; with this came status amongst peers and community members (Harland, 2011; Ashe and Harland, 2014; McAlister et al, 2018).

**(ii) It established a climate of fear and control which silenced victims of CSE.** This could have been as a result of:

- paramilitary figures being the perpetrators of the exploitation;
- general fear of disclosing within such a threatening environment;
- a culture which did not permit the involvement of statutory services; and/or a distrust of statutory bodies tasked with protecting them, especially the police:

*'We were told very clearly that paramilitary influence, where it is apparent, may cause and facilitate CSE and this undoubtedly makes it difficult for people to report it to the statutory authorities' (Marshall, 2014, p.49).*

This established culture may be the cause of the process Pitts refers to as *'involuntary affiliation'* in relation to gangs (2008, p.108). This is evident in the following sections regarding control, constrained choice, and the impact of fear.

**(iii) The longevity of the conflict has helped embed and normalise a culture of violence** which ranged from an acceptance of it to actively seeking out conflict and violence within other communities. As a result, paramilitary violence was accepted as *"just the way it is in our area."* (Harland, 2011 p.11).

#### 2. Fieldwork

##### **The impact of fear, control and constrained choice**

Participants referencing paramilitarism in the context of CSE and young males, collectively described environments of fear, created to generally engender compliance and silence:

*"...you didn't cross them, and that's nearly 20 years ago, and I don't think there is anything different." (PI 8, Voluntary non-CSE specialist).<sup>17</sup>*

*"There was one young man one night when I was on nightshift, and he came down in tears, floods of tears...and then he disclosed he was in huge drug debts and a paramilitary group were making him perform oral sex as a way to pay off this favour. His social worker at the time was involved and reported it to the police but he didn't want to proceed with the investigation. He withdrew his statement and retracted what he had said." (PI 16, Social Services).*

This young man was conscious of the consequences for him if he did not retract his statement, stating to his worker:

*"...that touts get a hard time or get beat up, especially by this known group of paramilitaries." (PI 16, Social Services).*

One element of the overall study examined how offending and anti-social behaviour can be manifestations of trauma for male victims of CSE. In the context of Northern Ireland and paramilitary controlled communities, such behaviours can result in a young male being subject to 'punishment attacks' within their communities:

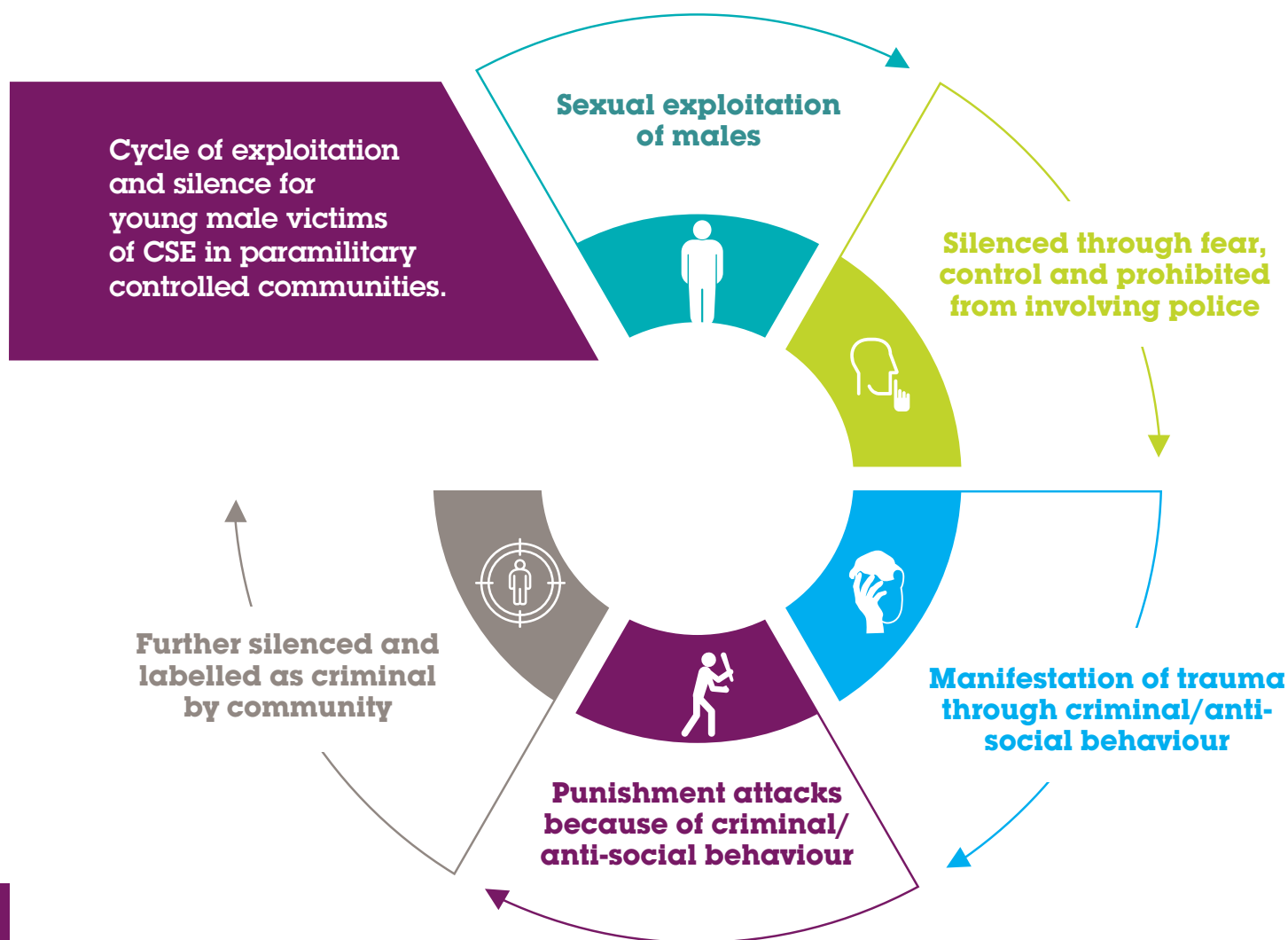
<sup>17</sup> Quotations from professional interviewees will be referred to as 'PI', followed by the number of their interview and sector.



*"...their punishment is meted out by paramilitaries acting on the communities' behalf." (Knox, 2001, p.181).*

This role as facilitator of 'criminal justice' within their own community was reported as ensuring compliance to their 'laws'; to ensure alienation of police and other statutory authorities. Criminal behaviour by others is seen to undermine paramilitary authority and their status within communities, as well as some criminal activities, ironically, being viewed as detrimental to the community (Silke, 1998). This has the potential to reinforce fear and compound silence within

paramilitary controlled communities, reinforced by the research findings of McAlister *et al* (2018). Furthermore, punishment by paramilitaries results in the labelling of these young males as criminals, potentially reducing their own credibility as victims, in their own view and that of others. The male victim of CSE who is then guilty of offending and subject to paramilitary punishment attacks, is then prohibited from disclosing his victimhood on two levels - either as a victim of CSE or that of paramilitary punishment. The cyclical nature of this proposition is illustrated below.





#### **Fear for others**

The study highlighted the efforts of male victims of CSE to disguise their experiences from others, often fearful of the repercussions of disclosure. Sammy described his struggle to maintain the secrecy of his exploitation, having learnt, from a young age, what was safe and acceptable to disclose in his close-knit paramilitary controlled community:

*"Northern Ireland has this real sense of community where... 'we can work it out,' but because of the way it is with the paramilitaries and no equal rights here, ... everyone in the estate knows everyone... You walk outside your door and everyone knows what time you left at... but because of those other things (sexual exploitation) it's just surface level. It's 'I will tell you about this and this and this, but I won't tell you ever about this.'" (Sammy, aged 21).*

Sammy illustrated the young males' attempt to protect his own perpetrator within a paramilitary controlled community. Living within a paramilitary culture of violence, he understood the potential lethal consequences for his abuser should he disclose his identity. Sammy felt he could not be responsible for this:

*"Especially in [named paramilitary area] – that's all I've known... these are all manly men and I know, if I went and told my dad, him and his manly paramilitary friends would go up and kill him, I mean literally kill him there and then on the spot. So, for a young male feeling that sense of responsibility, knowing you've caused someone's death because you've told about something happening." (Sammy, aged 21).*

As well as recognising the potentially fatal consequences for his perpetrator, Sammy contemplated that he would not receive an appropriate safeguarding response from within his community; at best it would be unsympathetic and, at worst, victim-blaming:

*"...if its paramilitary involved 'you can't say that – you're going to get put out.'<sup>18</sup> So, it's 'okay thank you for telling me but that's it, keep quiet'... because of that community and sense of 'how did you let this happen; you know how close we all are?'" (Sammy, aged 21).*

This context exemplifies the potential pressure on young males to prioritise the welfare of others above that of themselves, reducing the likelihood of disclosure of CSE, and highlights the influence of cultural complexities compounding this.

#### **Control (including through the use of drugs)**

Drug issues amongst young males and females, in the context of paramilitary gangs, featured as a common theme in the study. However, there was a perception as to the different forms drug use took for young males and young females which should assist our understanding of the constrained choice of young males:

*"With females it's more about control; in that they would be given a bit of the substance and 'here's a party' and 'you take a wee bit of this love;' it's less of that party atmosphere and more of this big man, hard man atmosphere, you know 'you're part of our group now and you're part of moving this [drugs] from here to here' and it's very much tied in...like a job rather than a party situation." (PI 8 Voluntary, non-specialist).*

As an illegal activity, one professional interviewee spoke of how young males felt complicit in their role with drugs. This, combined with the fear and control wielded by paramilitaries, rendered them unable to speak about the connections between drugs and their experiences of CSE:

*"... that whole aspect of having total control over a community, one that closes down and that sense of the young person...they are involved with ourselves because of*

<sup>17</sup> This usually means to be told to leave your home, your community, and in some cases, the country.



*drugs or alcohol issues...It's very scary... they get the drugs to deal with the issues that are going on at home. ...they go to the paramilitaries, get involved in getting drugs when they don't have the money to get them, so eventually they get to the stage of 'well how are you going to pay the debt off?' So, they may do a couple of runs but maybe they get into the habit and create a dependency and the aspect of that is that it becomes a greater dependency...and then I suppose thinking who would they tell, who would believe them?" (PI 12, Social Services).*

### **Coercion to perpetrate**

The coercion of young males, by paramilitary figures, to perpetrate sexual exploitation on young females illustrates a further dimension of constrained choice for the male, also highlighting the influence on professionals to recognise the young male's perpetrator status rather than his victim status:

*"...so there would be powerful individuals in the community who would organise line-ups and then there would be fear attached if young men don't turn up and do as they are asked; then there would be repercussions – could be very, very sinister; they could be beaten up... Young males would be expected to perform sexual acts on girls as well so then they look like they are the predators but essentially, they are being controlled by the paramilitaries. So, there is a very fine line between victim and perpetrator." (PI 21, Voluntary CSE specialist).*

This example concurs with other research findings, such as that by Beckett *et al.* (2013), where, within a gang culture, they describe young males being pressurised into performing sexual acts with females, against their will. This warrants recognition of a broader picture of the role young males may be forced play in the facilitation of those seeking to abuse young females. It also has relevance to the debate surrounding the inclination to view young males as perpetrators without cognisance of underlying determinants, a theme throughout the study.

### **Gains versus disclosure**

McAlister *et al* (2018) identified social exclusion, marginality and searching for a sense of belonging as particular vulnerability factors pertinent to the recruitment of young males to paramilitarism. Morrow and Byrne also stated:

*"direct participation in violent conflict has been dominated by males from districts with evidence of persistent multiple deprivation in the age group the United Nations identifies as 'young people' (15-29)." (2020, p.5).*

This study also found young males within socio-economically deprived areas, as being highlighted where these paramilitary gangs primarily existed:

*"You tend to find that young people who have a paramilitary connection tend to come from more working-class areas..." (PI 16, Social Services).*

*"You've got a lot of these young males coming from very deprived areas and I suppose a lot of the deprived areas, if they are run by paramilitaries, they are the men that are held in high esteem." (PI 12, Social Services).*

This is corroborated by Harland (2011), stating how paramilitary membership appeared to be of mutual gain for the gang and the young male:

*"Young men from disadvantaged communities throughout Northern Ireland have always been a prime target for paramilitary membership. Conversely, paramilitary membership has been a potentially attractive option for marginalized young men living in areas of deprivation." (Harland, 2011, pp.427-428).*

This aligns with some of the most recent research identifying the existence of gangs within areas of acute social deprivation (Beckett *et al.* 2013). A desire for a life of purpose, with a sense of status or acquired possessions, otherwise unavailable to some young males, was described as the means



by which the perpetrator gained their compliance and silence:

*"The paramilitaries have access to guns, they have access to drugs and a lot of things that would be used to lure young men into involvement in certain things." (PI 21, Voluntary, specialist).*

Social exclusion referred to by Pitts (2008), compounded not by race as he suggests, but by religious and political divide in the Northern Ireland context, has the potential to create what he refers to as an "alternative cognitive landscape" which "isolates young people from mainstream social and cultural values" (2008, p.65).

The element of fear was illustrated as having the potential to produce a degree of complexity for young males:

*"I think a bit of both status and fear. I've met someone and he's really powerful'... In a way you are living the dream because you are with him, but no-one knows and he's buying you a drink. I think in their heads it's not a bad thing because there's this powerful person...It's almost like this mobster's wife, you know. With the paramilitaries I don't think it's so much 'oh I'm so scared;' it's more 'I've more status now.' Especially if you grow up in [named paramilitary area]." (Sammy, aged 21).*

Considering this in the context of identification, it is possible status gain for the male victim of CSE has the potential to render him culpable in the eyes of others, perceived to be choosing involvement in gang culture, and thus not viewed as a victim. In some cases, gravitation towards gang status was seen by participants to provide a sense of protection to the young male who believed this would guard him from further exploitation, or some other harm. In this way, the fear exerted by paramilitaries, towards others, can be viewed by the young male in a positive light and preferable to seeking protection from the authorities for his own victimisation:

*"...it's nearly glorifying paramilitary groups what you see young men doing. I know*

*such and such who will look after me when I'm out in the community' or I'll be fine down there because such and such is the head of that group.' There's that protection, the status, so 'if I'm in with them I'm safe.'" (PI 16, Social Services).*

Similarly, previous gang research has also evidenced the desire for status and protection to be a strong motivator in young people (male and female) where they are seen to exchange sex in return for what they perceived to be these gains (Beckett *et al.* 2013).

This paradoxical position of some male victims of CSE who may claim, or appear to be claiming, a degree of agency regarding their involvement with paramilitaries needs to be recognised. The inducement of power, status and protection are by-products of their affiliation to such gangs; however, coercion and fear simultaneously impact them, resulting in powerlessness, being objects of control, silenced, and unable to conceptualise a viable escape from this life of exploitation. The implications of this constrained choice for young males who become victims of sexual exploitation within such environments potentially reduces the likelihood of recognition of their victimhood.

#### **Normalisation of paramilitarism and all that is inherent in that culture**

A theme emerging from the study showed how the lived experiences of some young males promoted tolerance of cultural norms such as violence, including sexual violence, resulting in the normalisation of the same. Such acceptance was seen as inevitable in reducing the likelihood of disclosure of CSE experiences. One such example highlights how one young male victim assumed his role in life as 'drug running' for a paramilitary group, acceding to sexual exploitation as part of that role:

*"...if you grow up in the wrong place...if you are born into the wrong house...He saw that he was never going to live anywhere else in his life; that was him for the rest of his days, he was never going to be employed or have proper education but...this was how he*



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*was going to make his money, this was his future; so everything was tied in to this and whatever was going on, on the side, you just had to soak it up, you just had to get on with it; that was life and just accept it. Young men get very stuck, 'this is my life, this is the way it is. This is the way it was for my brother, my da, my cousin.'*" (PI 8, Voluntary, non-CSE specialist).

The strength of such community structures, and pervasive control, which remained significant to young males, despite their experiences of exploitation was explained:

*"...that structure is really important to the young men...that's the be all and end all. Potentially a longevity thing in that the young men are maybe being primed to take over and to go into this because it's a man's world – there's no women really in charge of these housing estates. Young women are only needed for sexual exploitation to a certain age and then 'off you go' whereas these young men will be sexually exploited to a certain age but then 'you will be staying on to help us move our money, move our drugs – you are part of this now'...so, it's that potential lifelong kind of thing."* (PI 8, Voluntary, non-CSE specialist).

Each of the contextual influences present in paramilitary controlled environments, were shown to clearly impact the young male's perceived lack of freedom to, not only reject the exploitation, but to disclose their status as a victim of it. Whatever the reason for a young males' non-disclosure, the silence surrounding it was also perceived to have implications for professionals' response to it. There was an element of frustration expressed by professionals, aware of some extreme circumstances for young males:

*"...he was only 13 when he came through to ourselves, but huge history of drug use, being found in flats in [named area], being found in his own faeces so very much gone in his functioning on a day to day basis, known to be around a lot of older males... There was a huge influence with the paramilitaries, and he seemed to gravitate towards known figures in the community. Again, police were informed and investigated what they could, but there was nothing substantive for them to go on and this young man would never have talked about it."* (PI 16, Social Services).





## Conclusion

This paper has presented an examination of the concept of paramilitarism and the complex dynamics within paramilitary controlled communities in Northern Ireland to which young males are exposed, particularly those who are sexually exploited.<sup>19</sup> The ultimate impact of this cultural environment, which embodies masculine ideology, on the identification of CSE in males, and reasons for their silence, is highlighted. While limited, it is evident from the findings of this study that there can be a direct impact on young males from sexual exploitation perpetrated by individuals with a paramilitary connection and also an indirect impact through the fear of living within such communities, as a victim of CSE. A

genuine recognition of this, and the uniqueness of this for young males, is imperative if they are to be assured of safety in disclosure.

Analysis of this subject concluded more is known about the potential barriers to disclosure of CSE amongst young males within paramilitary controlled environments than there is in relation to impediments to identification by professionals, an area which has received little attention. This latter limitation, therefore, highlights a significant knowledge gap and the need for further attention and research specifically regarding professionals' identification.

## Recommendations

1. CSE policy, practice and training for professionals should specifically consider the influence of paramilitary gangs in relation to the sexual exploitation of young people, including young males. This should include a response that reflects an understanding of potential complex trauma experienced from living in a paramilitary controlled community.
2. The Northern Ireland Executive Strategy aimed at tackling paramilitary activity by supporting vulnerable young people/males, should include awareness raising and training for youth workers and other professionals about the links between paramilitarism and sexual exploitation.
3. Youth services should take a key role in creating forums where young males can address issues around cultural identity, masculinity and the need for power and protection.
4. Existing services addressing issues, such as drug and alcohol misuse and mental health, should be trained in CSE awareness, and in particular, all the nuances of this for young males.
5. Further research is required on:
  - ▶ the role of paramilitarism in relation to CSE, to include a specific focus on young males;
  - ▶ impediments to the identification of CSE, by professionals, amongst young males in specific cultural environments.

<sup>19</sup> Although the focus of this section relates to one nation within the UK, due consideration should be given to its application to similar cultural contexts in the other nations.





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