

*SEXUAL MALTREATMENT OF
UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM
SEEKING MINORS*

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This paper is based on empirical research

- Earlier research indicated UASM from Ethiopia may be vulnerable to sexual maltreatment
- Suspicion was supported by anecdotal evidence from the ECCUK
- Funded by the BIG Lottery in 2003
- Project started 2004 – now writing report

Study aims

- Identify how sexual abuse and sexual assault (sexual maltreatment) can be prevented among UASM from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia in the UK
- Identify how services can be improved in terms of prevention of sexual maltreatment of this group and their after care

Study design

- Culturally competent research
 - Reflexive
 - Non-oppressive
 - Promotes inclusiveness
 - Empowering
 - Participatory approach – employed lay researchers
- Inductive /theory building
- Retrospective
- Used semi-structured interviews and questionnaires

Sampling methods

- Purposive sampling of lay participants
 - Young adults from Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia
 - Arrived in UK unaccompanied aged under 18 (UASM) and sought asylum
 - Were sexually abused or assaulted or had a 'near miss' as a UASM in the UK
 - This happened less than 10 years ago
- Purposive sampling of key professionals who are practitioners or policy makers

Data collection

- Questions regarding: nature of incidents; vulnerabilities; disclosure issues; help sought /wanted; how to prevent.
- Personal interviews with lay participants by trained lay researchers in own language using a semi-structured questionnaire
- Self-completion questionnaire for lay participants – demographics and specific details e.g. type of abuse
- Personal interviews with key professionals – semi-structured questionnaire

Characteristics of lay participants

- 53 young people participated
- Mostly females (51)
- Mostly Ethiopians (35), Eritrean (n=10) Somali (n=4), mixed (n=3)
- Mainly Christian (83%), Muslim (17%)
- Most arrived in UK aged 15-17 (range 9-17)

Key professionals

Total sample size = 8

- Dedicated teacher – school with many UASM
- Private counsellor
- Project manager from the NSPCC
- National Asylum Support Service (NASS)
- Former Ethiopian employee refugee support centre
- Detective Sergeant with project SAPPHIRE
(Met police specialising in sexual assault investigation)
- Social Services Manager child asylum service
- Academic / primary care nurse

Ethno-history of lay participants' homelands in Horn of Africa

- Ethnic conflicts
- Human rights abuses
- High mortality rates
- Poverty
- Gross gender inequalities
- High rates of female circumcision (FGM)
- Early marriage of girls – abduction and rape
- Rape highly stigmatised

Nature of incidents

Range of types of incidents from **feeling afraid for sexual safety to serious sexual assault:**

- Sexual harrassment (29/53: 55% - all female)
- Hand to genital fondling (15/53: 28% - including both males)
- 'Other fondling' (25/53: 47%)
- Rape (n=3) + 1 intercourse during abuse
- ¹Attempted rape (n=5)
- Felt at risk/ afraid for safety sexually (n=5)
- Other / near miss (10/51: 20%)

Location of incidents

- **Victim's home (n=20)** e.g. hostel, hotel, shared flat, B&B, foster home, residential care
- Perpetrator's home (n=6)
- Perpetrator's car (n=1)
- Outside (n=4)
- Workplace (n=2)
- Over the telephone (n=1)

Frequency of occurrence

- Once (n=27%)
- **2-3 times (42%)**
- 4-6 times (18%)
- 10+ times (13%)

Age and circumstances at time

- **39/53 aged 16 or 17**
- 14/53 aged <16
- Most not in contact with community organisations
- 31 had a social worker
- **Exceptional / 'temporary' leave to remain (n=20)**
- No decision re immigration (n=16)
- ILR /refugee (n=7)
- 8 in foster care, others in hostel, hotels, B&B, residential care

Perpetrators

- **More than 1 perpetrator at each event (n=23)**
- One perpetrator at each event (n=17)

Perpetrator's modus operandi:

- **²Treats or rewards for sexual favours (n=31)**
- Abuse of trust (n=8)
- Exploited weaknesses (n=7)
- Opportunistic (n=7)
- Abuse of position (n=4)
- Threatened with knife / to kill boyfriend (n=2)

Characteristics of perpetrators

- **Large majority were male** (2 female)
- Teenagers= 24%; **20s=42%**; 30s= 24%
40s=10%
- **Most perpetrators were African or 'Black'**; others were Arabs, white and black British, Afghans, Pakistanis and East Europeans
- **Some believed to be refugees/asylum seekers**
- Many lived nearby or shared their accommodation including toilet & kitchen

Profiles of perpetrators and their behaviour

1. Paedophiles who targeted pre-pubescent children (including both the females) – abused trust /position
2. Young men often African or ‘black’, asylum seekers, who acted in groups or alone to sexually harass and assault UASM
3. Older men, often Africans settled in the UK who targeted UASM (females) by befriending / grooming and later abusing them

Relationship to victim

- **Neighbours/ cohabitees n=17**
- Strangers n=14
- Friend of friend n=8
- Acquaintance n=4
- Home/hostel staff n=3
- Foster parent n=2
- Manager/ employer n= 2
- Classmates n=2
- Others n= 6

Main risk factors: young people's views

- **Ignorance (n=22)**
- Loneliness /isolation (n=19)
- Being without family (n=19)
- Housing situation (n=19) shared/ mixed sex
- Proximity of potential perpetrators (n=17)
- Being female (n=15) – rights not respected
- Being a foreigner (n=9)
- Language problems (n=9)
- ³Cultural factors (n=5): trusting, secretive, shy

Main risk factors: professional's views

- UASM being needy emotionally and financially – reduces resistance of child
- ⁴In alien culture – language, ignorance
- Previous traumatic experiences – accepts adversity
- Females seen as sex objects
- Poor inter-agency communication
- Inadequate funding / low priority / lack of supervision and monitoring/ lack of professional expertise
- Housing – inadequate supervision; large groups of UASM easily targeted
- Racism and discrimination – visibly different

Who they told

- **29 told a friend or peer**
- 16 reported to social worker
- 7 sought help from GP but did not disclose
- 4 reported incident to police – no prosecutions
- 17 told nobody

Main reasons for non-disclosure

Often numerous reasons given:

- **Didn't know anyone to tell**
- ⁵Cultural – taboo subject - do not talk about it – stigmatising – ashamed
- Fear e.g. fear of reprisals, unable to tell male worker
- Did not know they should report or how
- Lack English language

Framework for prevention

Finkelhor's four preconditions to child sexual abuse model –

For abuse to occur the perpetrator needs to:

- 1) Be motivated to act on urges
- 2) Overcome internal barriers to do so
- 3) Overcome external barriers
- 4) Overcome the child's resistance

Reduce motivation to commit sex acts with inappropriate/ unwilling partners

- Remove the temptation – young asylum seeking males not to be housed with or near young female asylum seekers
- Reduce time asylum seekers spend awaiting a decision
- Provide asylum seekers (males especially) with opportunities to build self-esteem and to gain emotional fulfilment

Strengthen perpetrator's internal barriers to commit

- Educate that sex offences are crimes (L/P)
- Punish offenders (LP/ KP)-deterrent
- Reform offenders whilst in prison (KP)
- Educate about harm to victims (LP) – increase empathy
- Males to respect females and not abuse power over them (L/P)

Strengthen external barriers to sexual maltreatment

- Provide UASM with appropriate, secure accommodation (LP/KP) – single sex, males not allowed in, or foster care for 16+
- Re-house victims to prevent re-victimisation (LP)
- More monitoring of UASM (LP); tracking (KP)
- Engender a culture of openness about sexual maltreatment & encourage disclosure (LP)
- Prompt professional action on disclosure (LP)
- Strengthen skills/ knowledge of professionals especially cultural competence and where to refer to (KP)
- Improve interagency working (LP/ KP)
- Improve relations of police & minority ethnic groups (KP)

Strengthen resistance of potential victims

- ⁶Teach UASM about sexual abuse, their rights and the support available soon after arrival e.g. community organisations (LP/ KP)
- Opportunities to discuss wellbeing in private
- Information, advice and support to report incidents (LP/ KP) – need to see that action will be taken
- Improve access to services – information on them; language, user friendly, non-authoritarian (KP)

THANK YOU

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