

Missing, Child Exploitation and Vulnerability Research & Development Round-up

April 2024

Jay Review of Criminally Exploited Children

**Shattered lives,
stolen futures**

Baroness Alexis Jay has authored a [review of child criminal exploitation](#), which found that the systems intended to respond to CCE are not fit for purpose. Recommendations include: a single, cohesive legal code designed to tackle the criminal exploitation of children; coordinated policy and practice at a local and national level; investment, research and whole-system learning, including funding for early intervention services. The BBC covers the report launch [here](#).

Action for Children blog coinciding with the Jay review launch [Criminally exploited children: who are they and how to keep them safe](#).

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)

CYP Now article in which former Children's Commissioner Anne Longfield warns that [drugs gangs are 'targeting younger children'](#) for County Lines exploitation.

Guardian [podcast](#) reporting on the story of Sosa Henkoma, who was exploited by drug gangs as a child and now mentors young people at risk of gang violence.

[Practice tips](#) about the signs and indicators of county lines taken from the longer Community Care Inform Children's guide: '[Responding to criminal exploitation and county lines](#)' .

Child Exploitation

New [research](#) into the effectiveness of Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Panels finds that repeat victims of exploitation are often not referred to MACE panels, and once re-victimised, are likely to suffer multiple revictimisations. It provides a predictive and evidence-based framework to identify exploited children at risk of further harm and victimisation.

The University of Bedfordshire has launched a [survey](#) to help them understand whether and how the Tackling Child Exploitation (TCE) [Practice Principles](#) for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm are being used by professionals.

NSPCC 'Words Matter' [blog](#) explores how referring to online 'friends' can mask safeguarding concerns.

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) and Exploitation (CSE)

Internet Watch Foundation [article](#) about a 'heartbreaking' eight-fold increase in 'sextortion' (sexual extortion) this year. Boys are most likely to be targeted (91%), with analysts frequently seeing evidence of boys being blackmailed by criminals looking to extort money. Three in five reports involved 16 and 17-year-olds. The IWF has [sextortion resources](#) which offer help and advice, and signpost children, parents and professionals to further support.

Children's Social Care

A Guardian [investigation](#) has found that hundreds of vulnerable school-age children in England are being sent to illegal, unregulated homes every year because of a chronic shortage of places in secure local authority units. Private accommodation providers made £105m from these placements last year, equating to almost £150,000 per child.

MPs on the Education Committee have launched a [survey](#) as they want to hear from people with lived experience of being looked-after, as part of their investigation into how the Government could improve children's social care. The survey closes on 23rd May.

In Care is a [new series of short documentaries](#) shining a light on children's homes, the young people who live in them and the staff who care for them.

NSPCC Learning has published a [report](#) exploring what children know, think, and would do about child abuse as part of the Together for Childhood place-based approach. Findings show that young people know more about physical, sexual and online abuse than other forms of child abuse and neglect; sometimes think they are to blame for child abuse; they face challenges when seeking help.

House of Lords [Briefing Paper](#) on children looked-after by local authorities in England.

[BBC News item](#) reports on analysis for the Child of the North All-Party Parliamentary Group, which claims there is a North-South divide in England in the rates of children entering care. The researchers found one in 52 children in Blackpool and one in 63 in Hartlepool were in care, compared to one in 256 in Buckinghamshire and one in 278 in Hertfordshire. This disparity is estimated to have cost the North at least £25bn more in the past 4 years.

Cost of Living

The Youth Select Committee has launched its [report](#) investigating the impact of the cost of living on young people's health and wellbeing. It finds the cost-of-living crisis has had a negative impact on young people across many aspects of their lives, and state benefits do not cover the cost of essentials. Young people from marginalised communities are more likely to be impacted by the crisis.

Disadvantage

A [report](#) published by the Child of the North initiative and the Centre for Young Lives is calling on the Government to put the country's education infrastructure at the forefront of a national plan to tackle poverty.

Education

['Lost in Translation' report](#) from the Children's Commissioner looks at the destinations, pupil characteristics and educational histories of children who left the state education system last year. The report found that over 10,000 children left the state education system to destinations unknown to their local authorities and around 13,000 left for home education.

[CYP Now article](#) covers Chance UK's findings about the sharp rise in children being excluded from primary schools, disproportionately affecting children with SEND. [BBC Newsnight](#) interviewed Anne Longfield from the Centre for Young Lives and Tom Bennett, Behaviour Tsar, about the issue. and this ITV News [report](#) summarises the findings.

LGBTQ+

BBC [item](#) featuring Dr. Hilary Cass, whose [report](#) found that children were being "let down" by a lack of research and "remarkably weak" evidence on medical interventions in gender care. It states there is no simple explanation for the increase in numbers of young people who have a trans or gender diverse identity. There have been many more birth-registered females being referred in adolescence, marking a

shift from the cohort that these services have traditionally seen. Clinicians also noted that young people were often facing other issues alongside their gender-related distress.

Missing

New [research](#) into what works in improving inter-agency responses to missing children suggests that mechanisms that may be effective in improving inter-team working include: information sharing techniques; cross-agency technology; designation of a SPOC; clarifying roles and responsibilities; and joint training.

Academic [research](#) based on serious case reviews looks at the intersecting characteristics, vulnerabilities, harm indicators and guardianship issues associated with seriously harmed missing children. The research shows that 83% of these children had been missing repeatedly, 75% had been excluded from school and 50% had ADHD/Autism.

[‘Building Safety’ report](#) from the Contextual Safeguarding Network shares learning from the Building Safety project about co-designing safety and fairness into the missing response for children in care who are at risk beyond their families and makes a number of practice recommendations.

The Safeguarding Network has updated its [advice pages](#) for schools on safeguarding children who go missing. The page includes a free poster download.

Online Safety & Online Harms

The BBC reports that [Nine-year-olds are being added to malicious WhatsApp groups](#) and exposed to harmful content. This news story comes as [WhatsApp cuts its minimum age](#) from 16 to 13.

New figures released to [ITV News](#) by the Revenge Porn Helpline show an alarming rise in victims of sextortion. Reports have risen by 54% in just one year, often leaving victims in extreme distress and fear.

Free Child Rescue Coalition [e-book](#) developed to help parents navigate the fast-changing world of social media, gaming and the Internet.

Ofcom has published its annual study [A window into young children’s online worlds](#), which suggests a disconnect between older children’s exposure to potentially harmful content online, and what they share with their parents about their online experiences. A third of 8-17s have seen something disturbing online in the last 12 months, but only 20% of parents of this age group report their child telling them about these experiences. Girls aged 8-17 are more likely than boys of the same age to experience nasty or hurtful interactions online.

It has also published a [list of research](#) from a range of sources exploring children's experiences of harm online, including the pathways to harm, its impact and the use of and perceptions towards online protections.

The Information Commissioner's Office has published its [priorities](#) for protecting children's privacy online. Areas where improvements need to be made include: default privacy and geolocation settings; profiling children for targeted advertisements; and using information of children under 13 years old.

Internet Matters has done some follow-up research on findings from their 3rd annual report, [Children's Wellbeing in a Digital World](#). This [Digital Wellbeing Index report](#) shows that teen girls experience significantly more negative outcomes online than other children. Teen girls experience more social pressure, more online bullying and more inappropriate content from strangers. The report is accompanied by guidance for parents and carers.

Safeguarding

The Government has updated its [Information Sharing Advice](#) for safeguarding practitioners. The document contains guidance on information sharing for people who provide safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers, and sits alongside Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023.

The Contextual Safeguarding Network has produced a [new report](#) as part of the Next Chapter research. The report looks at practitioner experiences of Contextual Safeguarding and finds the framework provides new possibilities for practice, via a new lens to see the world, but there are considerable barriers to realising these possibilities, with practitioners 'engaged in daily system battles.'

The NSPCC has published a [summary](#) of key issues and learning for improved practice around multi-agency working and information sharing based on serious case reviews 2017- 2023. It highlights perennial issues in both these areas which have been identified in case reviews and inquiries, including in the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's 2022/23 annual report.

Substance Misuse

Blog from Catch22 on its '[Distribution of Time](#)' intervention, designed to get young people thinking about their substance misuse and whether it is having an impact on other areas of their life.

New [Guide to Vaping](#) for young people and parents from Catch22.

BBC News reports from Bristol on the phenomenon of [Ketamine bladder](#) as youth addiction 'explodes' . The BBC has also produced a documentary on the topic: [Young and Addicted: Generation Ketamine](#)

[Report](#) from the Incident Response Group convened by Public Health Wales convened to investigate the rise of vaping amongst children and young people. The Group agreed the evidence showed vaping has and continues to rise amongst the youth population and that without action these rises are likely to continue, and produced a series of recommendations for action.

Updated UK version of the [Drugs Wheel](#).

Youth Justice

Young Advocates for Youth Justice has published a [youth-led report](#) about keeping children and young people out of the justice system. The aim was to explore the routes into the justice system for young people, as compared to pathways out and away from it. Young Advocates also developed a series of recommendations to address these challenges.

[In conversation: An inside perspective of youth justice practice and experience](#) is a reflective dialogue between two youth justice professionals who have lived experience of being incarcerated children.

HM Inspectorate of Probation has created a [poster](#) setting out an A-Z of key good practice research messages and concepts, with accompanying links to further reading.

Youth Violence

[Blog](#) from Catch22's Head of Policy on the essential role that youth workers play in preventing crime.

OTHER

[Findings](#) from the Children's Commissioner's 'Big Ambition' survey launched in September 2023, which heard directly from children, young people, and parents across the country. The paper analyses the responses from children on different topics, and the ideas they had for change, and makes a series of proposals to deliver structural change.

The Children's Commissioner has produced a [report](#) about children who have experienced domestic or sexual abuse being forced to navigate complicated and often traumatic criminal justice processes alone, without being offered specialist support. The report claims 92% of cases involving child victims of sexual violence or domestic abuse are receiving no direct advocacy support.

Fearless has updated its [resources for professionals](#) to include sections on Knife Crime; County Lines; Drugs & Alcohol; and Child sexual abuse and harmful sexual behaviour.

The government has published its [annual report](#) on the Supporting Families Programme 2023-2024.

BBC [Panorama programme](#) reports on how spiralling care costs for children, the elderly and homeless people are threatening to push the councils across the UK into the red.