

No 'Magic Bullets': Children, Young People, Trafficking and Child Protection in the UK

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ABSTRACT

Trafficking of children and young people has become an increasingly debated issue in the UK, with official statistics often considered to reflect only the "tip of the iceberg" of cases. Identification of a child as "trafficked" relies upon referral to designated "first responders" and "competent authorities" within a National Referral Mechanism (NRM). This article explores the complex undertaking of identifying a child as "trafficked". It is suggested that, like any other form of child protection, in cases of "trafficking" there are unlikely to be "magic bullets" providing immediate answers to why children are not always seen as being exploited and/or abused and consequently identified as "trafficked". Drawing on findings from two qualitative studies into understandings of trafficking amongst agencies working with children, it is suggested that identifying "trafficking" of children could be enhanced if a broader range of agencies had roles in the process, particularly those working within community engagement frameworks in positions to form crucial relationships of trust with children.

INTRODUCTION

The "trafficking" of children and young people into, within, and out of the UK has become, over the past decade, an increasingly highlighted issue in government, NGO and academic circles (Anderson, 2012; Anderson and O'Connell Davidson, 2002; Bokhari, 2008; Bovarnick, 2010; Craig et al., 2007, 2010; Crawley, 2006; ECPAT UK, 2007; Finch, 2012; Hynes, 2010; Ishola, 2012; Kelly and Bokhari, 2012; O'Connell Davidson, 2013; Pearce et al., 2009, 2013).

The Palermo Protocol (2000), outlined in the introduction to this edition, provided a definition of trafficking. This has now been written into UK domestic laws including the Sexual Offences Act 2003, the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants etc.) Act 2004 and, at the time of writing, is due to be included in a Modern Slavery Bill passing through the UK Parliament. Crucially, the Modern Slavery Bill provides, subject to an evaluated trial, for independent advocates for children who have been trafficked. This is the first time that such steps have been taken in relation to trafficked children in the UK.

Currently there are no specific support services for children and young people who have been, or are suspected as having been, trafficked. Instead, support is provided under existing provisions of the Children Act 1989 and 2004 within the current multi-agency working framework which requires a range of statutory, voluntary and private agencies to have responsibilities for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children (Parton, 2007). Improving the understanding of trafficking within these agencies is an ongoing process. There have been pilot projects for the use of specialist foster care placements (Shuker, 2013) and specialist training on trafficking with agencies involved, but victim-centred approaches are still inadequate when children and young people are

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identified as trafficked. For example, the needs of children are often compromised rather than enhanced through their involvement in criminal justice processes (Kelly and Bokhari, 2012; Ishola, 2012). Also, as outlined in this article, asylum and immigration policies and legislation have often been prioritized over child protection legislation.

In the UK, anti-trafficking efforts run parallel to a broader immigration and asylum agenda that has seen an increasing tightening of policy and legislation since the mid-1990s (Bloch and Schuster, 2005; Bloch and Solomos, 2010; Hynes, 2009; Lewis, 2007). Consequently, an appreciation of the more structural "harms" of state asylum and immigration policy, whereby further exploitation can occur and vulnerabilities be exacerbated, is essential to an understanding of anti-trafficking efforts (Anderson, 2012; O'Connell Davidson, 2013). Garrett (2005) links asylum and immigration deterrence policies to attitudes of hostility and overarching mistrust towards asylum seekers, and the creation of an atmosphere of indifference towards migrant children.

Two recent UK government guidance and strategy documents – *Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked* (2011) and *Human Trafficking: The Government's Strategy* (2011) – focus on identification of trafficked children, building on the minimum standards of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking, which became operational in the UK on 1 April 2009. *Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked* (2011) highlights the potential role of "community groups, faith groups and voluntary organisations" in the identification process (Department of Education and Home Office, 2011:18). However, few minority ethnic organizations, migrant or refugee community organizations (MRCOs)¹ are involved in the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for trafficked persons in meaningful ways as discussed below. Such community-based voluntary organizations, set up to reflect and represent the concerns of their "communities", have long been considered to have under-utilized skills and assets (Carey-Wood et al., 1995; Duke, 1996). Nevertheless, and in part due to the increasingly restrictive and hostile environment towards asylum seekers, there is little recognition that outreach through MRCOs who work within community engagement frameworks around trafficking of children would benefit the NRM process.

In this article it is suggested that the identification of children or young people as trafficked could be enhanced by a multi-agency framework, in which non-statutory agencies have a stronger role in the NRM process. In particular, minority ethnic, and migrant and refugee community organizations who work within such populations in the UK are well-placed both to raise awareness about trafficking and to form crucial relationships of trust with children within communities. Thus, they could assist in the identification of trafficked children, and in collecting information about circumstances in which children are trafficked to the UK.

To enhance this argument, Kohli's distinction between "thick" and "thin" stories is adopted. Kohli suggests that separated children often provide accounts to professionals that are perceived to be merely instrumental or "thin stories", rather than substantial or "thick stories" which provide a more nuanced and contextual understanding of their trafficking experiences (2007:45). In this article, it is suggested that one of the unintended consequences of asylum and immigration legislation and policy is that "thin stories" are presented to receiving authorities (Kohli, 2007). This arises in part from mistrust and disbelief in disclosures, highlighting the difficulties of identifying children as exploited or trafficked. Secondly, the potential for "thick stories" (Kohli, 2007), or thicker stories, to emerge as a result of involving MRCOs is outlined, particularly in relation to the broader social context and the child's interaction with community. This article provides empirical evidence from two separate studies to support the argument that identification could be strengthened if community-based MRCOs had a stronger role in the NRM process.

Acknowledging the limitations of MRCOs is of course important, particularly the contested meaning of "community". The notion of "community" is complex and a full elaboration of its meaning is beyond the scope of this article. However, it is recognized that communities may simultaneously offer protective and risk factors to children. Griffiths et al. (2005:4-22) have examined

idealized and functional models of RCOs in the UK, challenging assumptions of unified communities, suggesting they represent the “complex, diverse and fragmentary social forms” (Griffiths et al., 2005:11) set up by and for refugees and migrants. Anderson’s notion of “imagined communities” (Anderson 1981) is helpful here – that all communities beyond face-to-face contact are imagined. However, it is also recognized that holistic understandings of the dominant norms, values, ethnic and religious backgrounds of children within such communities by agencies with an interest in child protection might also provide useful, perhaps unique, insights into the phenomena of trafficking and how children affected by trafficking might be made safe.

METHODOLOGY

This article draws on findings from two qualitative studies involving practitioners, professionals and representatives who work closely with children affected by trafficking. Study 1, conducted by the University of Bedfordshire and the NSPCC between 2008 and 2009, focused on statutory (or “official”) sector understandings of trafficking (Pearce et al., 2009). Study 2, conducted between 2012 and 2013, investigated the knowledge and understanding of the trafficking of children and young people within the non-statutory sector, particularly MRCOs who work closely with minority ethnic populations in the UK. In both studies, interviews and focus groups were tape-recorded, fully transcribed and analysed using social science software.

The aims of Study 1 were to explore the different ways in which trafficking was understood by a range of practitioners and highlight obstacles to identifying children and young people as trafficked. The study was ethically reviewed through both the University of Bedfordshire’s and the NSPCC’s Research Ethics Committees, with all child protection concerns supervised through the NSPCC. This vigorous ethical scrutiny was matched by comprehensive structures of governance throughout the duration of the study. A multi-agency Advisory Group, consisting of social workers and representatives from local authorities, government agencies and NGOs, met quarterly.

At an early stage it was decided that there were sound ethical reasons why children and young people should not be interviewed directly. For example, it was important to avoid replicating previous experiences that children may have had of being interviewed by police, border control and “official” agencies. Instead of conducting direct interviews with children about what were complex and potentially traumatic individual histories, existing and anonymized case files were examined. Avoiding harm in relation to ongoing work by key professionals with children was another key factor in this decision. The lack of trained interpreters was an additional reason for not conducting interviews with the children (see Pearce et al., 2013:42-45).

Following an extensive literature review, focus groups and in-depth interviews in three anonymized sites across the UK were conducted with a total of 72 practitioners. Data from anonymized case files of 37 trafficked children and young people were analysed (Pearce et al., 2009). Consultations with the Child Trafficking and Information Line (CTAIL) young people’s advisory group around the key findings and themes of the study were also included in the final report entitled *Breaking the Wall of Silence: Practitioners’ Responses to Trafficked Children and Young People*.

Study 2 explored the gap in knowledge about trafficking within voluntary, non-statutory organizations working within minority ethnic populations. This inductive scoping study involved in-depth qualitative interviews with ten anonymized representatives of the voluntary sector across London, plus an examination of existing literature from three further organizations involved in raising awareness of trafficking and child protection within communities. It aimed to explore knowledge and understanding of trafficking within the voluntary sector, particularly within MRCOs. Another goal of this study was to generate knowledge relating to particular constellations of “vulnerabilities” experienced by children and young people trafficked into, within, and out of the UK.

THE NATIONAL REFERRAL MECHANISM

Following ratification of the Council of Europe's Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, the NRM was established in 2009, to help identify "victims" of trafficking. The establishment of a NRM is a critical step in ensuring the rights of trafficked persons are protected (OSCE, 2004). The OSCE recommend that states establish NRMs by building partnerships between civil society, law enforcement agencies and multi-disciplinary agencies to involve all relevant actors and be as "inclusive as possible in its membership and participation" (OSCE, 2004:16). This recommendation is supported by Italian research that found more than 40 per cent of all trafficked persons were identified through outreach work by NGOs, local authorities and hotlines (Martinsicuro, 2002, as cited in OSCE, 2004:59). The OSCE propose that civil society agencies need to have confidence and trust in the NRM's identification procedures. (OSCE, 2004:60).

The UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) was established in 2006 to act as a central conduit for information and statistics. There are two "competent authorities" that deal with referrals of trafficking cases – the UKHTC and the UK Border Agency (UKBA). The UKBA receives referrals of trafficked persons identified through the immigration and asylum systems, including those identified as part of a child or young person's claim for asylum.ⁱⁱ On the other hand, potential cases are referred to the UKHTC by "first responders" for a decision as to whether the case involves a "victim" of trafficking. These "first responders" include social services providers within local authorities, police forces, and some longstanding voluntary organizations such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and Barnardo's. These statutory agencies and selected voluntary, or non-statutory, agencies are consequently the conduits for children and young people to be identified as "trafficked". At time of writing, a review of the UK's NRM is underway which may ultimately change these arrangements.ⁱⁱⁱ

Under this framework in 2014, 671 "minors" under the age of 18 were referred to the NRM, constituting 29 per cent of the 2,340 potential "victims" of trafficking (NCA, 2015). Forms of exploitation for "minors" were reported as "labour exploitation" (206 cases), "sexual exploitation" (91 non-UK nationals; 66 UK nationals), "domestic servitude" (71 cases), "organ harvesting" (1 case) and "unknown exploitation" (236 cases). In 2013, there were 450 referrals of "minors" with the highest changes from the previous year being "labour exploitation" (67 per cent change) and "domestic servitude" (58 per cent change). In 2012 "sexual exploitation" had the highest referral numbers overall. Knowledge of the forms of exploitation involved in trafficking of children has therefore broadened over this period.

The Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group (ATMG), a coalition of UK based voluntary agencies, argue that the identification of children as trafficked by NRM decision-makers bypasses the UK's "strong and mature" existing multi-agency working framework, with its considerable "expertise in child protection" (ATMG, 2010:10). They argue that the NRM has "insufficient expertise in relation to children", and therefore this strategy misses an opportunity to protect children and young people affected by trafficking (ATMG, 2010:10). Also, as ATMG suggests, it is highly problematic that police and immigration-led agencies currently make identification decisions. There is still a gap between the prevalence of child maltreatment in the UK and cases that are identified, reported and referred to child protection services, as only a small proportion of child maltreatment and abuse is reported (Radford et al., 2011). A gap between identifying a child as 'trafficked' and referral to the NRM is therefore also likely. The findings presented in this article may aid identification in the long term - learning from this cumulative experience of child protection, understanding the risk and protective factors surrounding "trafficking", identifying good practice, working together within multi-agency frameworks and shifting away from mono-causal explanations to more multi-faceted, nuanced and integrated understandings required to identify a child as trafficked.

PROBLEMS WITH IDENTIFICATION OF TRAFFICKED CHILDREN

The legacy of asylum and immigration policy

Since the mid-1990s, the portrayal of asylum seekers as “bogus” or “genuine” claimants has entered public consciousness leading to narratives of “undeserving” and “deserving” refugees which arise from policies of deterrence (Sales, 2005). The mistrust of asylum seekers undermines UK government policies that require engagement with MRCOs to address issues around trafficking, forced marriage and “honour” crimes, as well as broader debates around social cohesion and social exclusion (Hynes, 2009). Trust is a key need for effecting such policies, something which non-statutory organizations working within communities to challenge harmful practices have addressed historically.

Understanding the vulnerabilities of a child’s history are thus tied up in these broader political agendas of control and deterrence. As such, responses to children and young people occur within complex policy and legislative environments. The responses of practitioners in Study 1 resonated with the effects of these asylum and immigration policies. They commented on the discrimination of children and young people from abroad as well as the preconceived notions that these children had less rights than children born within the UK (see also Crawley, 2006):

I believe that migrant children get a second rate service in this country, and I don’t think they’re afforded the same levels of protection. (Study 1)

I mean it really was a lot of work trying to get these young people the same rights as British children. (Study 1)

“Thin stories”

Due to UK policy in relation to asylum seekers, cases of child trafficking were handled either within local authority child protection teams, with the child’s “best interests” guiding decision-making, or as an immigration response within the asylum and immigration teams. Bovarnick (2009) argues that such definitional pluralism existing in practice around these two discourses – an “immigration-centred discourse” and a “child-centred discourse” – needs to be realigned towards child-centred practices focused on the “best interests” of children. Analysis of Study 1 data showed that practitioners viewed children who were suspected of being trafficked as needing either a child protection or an immigration response. This pluralism within child protection frameworks was frequently commented upon by practitioners within Study 1, as were inadequate refugee status determination processes for children:

The way the screening unit at the Home Office interviews children means they do not disclose the information professionals need to identify a child as trafficked. (Study 1)

In this context, practitioners commonly reported hearing accounts akin to what Kohli refers to as “thin stories” (2007:45) in that similar “stories” were recalled with the children they worked with:

We often hear the same story again and again and it is only if something is different about the case that trafficking is suspected. (Study 1)

Only acting on cases with some type of different account suggested a danger of non-identification of trafficking. Now, under the London Safeguarding Trafficked Children Toolkit, this lack of

distinction would be an indicator in itself, as one of the indicators of a child being at risk of harm is if there is a suspicion of coaching by adults, that is, the child is telling the same story as others. This risk assessment matrix recognizes trafficking as a complex form of child abuse and outlines exploitation, movement into or within the UK and other risk factors (Ishola, 2012).

Disaggregating such “thin” stories in the UK is linked to what has been described as a “culture of suspicion” (JCWI, 1998) or “culture of disbelief” (Pearce et al., 2009, 2013) which has been documented since the mid-1990s in asylum and immigration cases. This was apparent in practitioners’ descriptions of disclosures from children and young people:

They come in, they claim to be children . . . they know if they claim to be children they will be put in a children’s home rather than a detention centre. (Study 1)

This child has a very vivid imagination. I’m not even going to record a lot of our conversation because it’s clearly not true. (Study 1)

A key finding of Study 1 was that children and young people found it hard to speak about their experiences of being trafficked and, simultaneously, practitioners often found these accounts hard to hear. The reasons for this varied, but included the different understandings of trafficking held by practitioners, as well as hearing accounts that appeared incredible or cast the child in a negative way. For example, as one legal professional recounted:

A cynic might say she was trying to get money out of social services. She was pregnant at the time. (Study 1)

Additionally, as one interviewee (from Study 2) suggested, the child protection framework itself also posed barriers for trafficked children:

There are no magic bullets in child protection. The child protection framework does not work for trafficked children because the framework talks about familial abuse, imminent risk of harm. With trafficked children you don’t see that but the risks are as great if not greater than child abuse, physical violence, etc. (Study 2)

In addition to improvement of interviewing environments and techniques, a comprehensive understanding of coercive contexts that generate and exacerbate “vulnerability” during the process is essential. Vulnerability and the ability, or inability, to trust others is at the heart of child protection for children who have been trafficked.

Trust in the context of disclosure

Trust is an ambiguous term. It is complex and multifaceted and, once lost, takes time to restore. Trust, or mistrust, has been a central consideration in studies around forced migration for the past two decades, with commentators suggesting that refugees are mistrusted and themselves mistrustful of authorities (Daniel and Knudsen, 1995; Robinson, 2002; Hynes, 2003, 2009). Relationships of trust and reciprocity are also paramount in some theories of social capital (Putnam, 1993; Granovetter, 1973; Coleman, 1988). Trust – or the lack of trust – which was a key theme emerging from Study 2, was also an implicit and important factor within the data obtained under Study 1. It was considered to be a key barrier in working with communities to improve the safeguarding of children who had been, or were vulnerable to, trafficking.

It is accepted that disclosure of child abuse or maltreatment is notoriously difficult to deal with (Allnock, 2010). In cases of child sexual abuse, guilt, shame and stigma may make disclosure “nearly impossible” (Hall and Canavan, 2007:489). It is increasingly recognized that sexual abuse

can take decades to disclose, something which recent media attention surrounding celebrities, such as Jimmy Savile and Rolf Harris,^{iv} has exposed and, more recently, the 1,400 cases of child sexual exploitation in Rotherham (UK). Reviews of research concerned with understanding the consequences of child sexual abuse have one important feature in common: none of them are able to name a “conspicuous syndrome” (Kendall-Tackett et al., 1993) in children who have been sexually abused or exploited. In other words, there is no dominant or single symptom, or indicator, of sexual abuse that is applicable across a majority of children.

A proportion of child trafficking cases referred to the NRM relate to sexual exploitation and/or abuse. These cases each involved psychological and emotional impact of abuse on children (Awbrey, 2013) plus other consequences for children in terms of their stages of development, resilience and coping strategies.

Children and young people at times remained completely silent, potentially as a coping mechanism, something which case workers often understood and other times misconstrued as obstructive:

The young person was very skilled at deflecting people from finding out more about her, her past or the people with whom she associates. She is closed off emotionally and will not discuss her own safety. (Study 1)

... he’s got really high emotional needs, not used to disclosing anything. (Study 1)

Even with the very best social workers this child was extremely reluctant to disclose ... (Study 1)

For children and young people to be mistrusted and disbelieved in the manner described above was alarming. For children moving through the human services, trust – or in this case mistrust – is a central component of their experience. As in cases of child abuse, a child who has been trafficked may have past experiences that require practitioners to adopt approaches that address mistrust, fear and past betrayals, reconstituting their sense of ontological security. Relationships between practitioners and children operate on a fulcrum of trust that influences the outcomes. As Ishola (2010) has suggested, children need to be asked what makes them “feel safe” and this should be incorporated into protection plans and “back into enhancing the risk profiles and identification tools”. Providing a child or young person with a secure relationship within this process is essential, particularly in terms of their ability to disclose. Being disbelieved and mistrusted prevents this relationship from forming.

Narrow understandings of trafficking

The initial focus of trafficking in the UK was on sexual exploitation, however this was subsequently expanded to include other forms, as one participant from Study 1 outlined:

We realized it wasn’t always about sex trafficking ... there were kids being used as domestics ... people were bringing kids in under the wire, so smuggling them in but going on to exploit them here. (Study 1)

In Study 2, participants also discussed nuances around trafficking, including how rural to urban internal migration, prior to crossing borders or arriving in the UK, was an overlooked aspect of trafficking in UK discourses. Participants also relayed how, at the level of the individual child, demographic factors around age, gender and culture were important factors in trafficking experiences:

The boys have one route and it seems the girls have another route altogether. ... but in both cases it’s a way of paying back quickly, about paying back that debt. (Study 2)

And in [Southeast Asian country], if you're 11, 12, 13 years old, you go out to work in the factory. It's normal. It's nothing wrong. . . . then they can support the family. (Study 2)

It's quite a common thing now that the [African country] girls will move to an Arab country for domestic work. . . . There's a lot of question marks around what happens to those girls during transit and when they get there, and whether or not it's a legitimate situation. (Study 2)

As Meetoo and Mirza (2007) argue, the precise extent to which cultural values influence rates of abuse is difficult to know. However, issues around trafficking, "honour" crimes and female genital mutilation for example do require understanding of violent practices within communities that affect children. Styles of parenting and different conceptualizations of "childhood" and child development also feature within these debates, as do important questions about the agency of children. Culture alone is not an explanation for abuse (Philips, 2007). Nor is it easily defined. Citing the Victoria Climbié case, Philips (2007) argues that it is the impact of "culture" or "race" that makes children vulnerable to abuse as a result of the impact these issues have on professional practice and, in particular, cultural explanations provided allowing behaviours to be "normalized". Thus, there are dangers when assessing particular nationalities or communities that need to be avoided:

'On the one hand, a *pathologizing* approach to black families may lead to unnecessarily coercive intervention and, on the other hand, a *cultural relativist* approach may lead to non-intervention when services are required.' (Bernard and Gupta, 2008:488)

Between these two extremes, Korbin (2007) has outlined how the "cultural competence" of professionals is key in that it provides a useful balance and mid-point between these two extremes during assessments. What is seen as exploitative by "community" representatives, who may have more access to children, and practitioners in statutory agencies may, of course, differ. What was clear in Study 1 and 2 was that there was a lack of focus on the circumstances and environments from which children are trafficked.

A key finding was also that practitioners often considered trafficking of children to be a one-off *event*, i.e. that children were "kidnapped" and then forced into some form of exploitation. It was also found that practitioners who understood trafficking as more of an ongoing *process* were more likely to identify and consequently support children as trafficked. This understanding of trafficking as an ongoing sociological *process*, rather than a nationally-bounded/bordered and one-off *event* in the life of a child or young person, was often characterized by the lack of a clear, easily identifiable beginning, middle or end of the process. In other words, there was no identifiable "event" where exploitation began and ended. It was often hidden in the day-to-day activities of the child or young person, sometimes within private or informal fostering arrangements. It was also a process that occurred over a long period of time, sometimes with a slow and gradual erosion of the human rights of the child or young person involved. These characteristics presented a particular challenge for practitioners when identifying a child as trafficked, regardless of the form of exploitation. The complex circumstances and aspects of a child's individual history may only be revealed over time and often demand longer term support and interventions. This is problematic for agencies required to demonstrate "outcomes" from six-month or one-year interventions, or evidence their "success" in a shorter timeframe.

PRODUCING "THICK STORIES" DURING THE IDENTIFICATION PROCESS

The potential for "thick stories" (Kohli, 2007), or thicker stories of trafficking to emerge, were highlighted during Study 2, particularly in relation to a child's interaction with community and the

broader social context. In this part, it is argued that the potential for such thicker stories of trafficking should be built into the NRM process.

Context and vulnerability to trafficking in the country of origin

As greater understanding about child protection, child maltreatment and abuse has developed over the past few decades, there has been a shift from looking for mono-causal explanations to more integrated understandings. Singular or simple explanations are now widely accepted as being inadequate. Rather, multiple causes and complexities are captured within theoretical frameworks and models to outline multi-level responses associated with maltreatment. Importantly, analysis of Study 2 data showed that there are risk and protective factors at the different levels of the trafficked child's interactions and relationships within their parents, family, community and the broader social context.

Parents and family

Children either being separated from parents or not having parents either in the UK or overseas, i.e. the full or partial absence of parents, appeared central to understanding those vulnerable to trafficking in both studies:

It does not seem to be uncommon. Quite young children can migrate to the cities to find work. They go for periods of time to raise money, sometimes for their education. Sometimes they go and they get trapped – they go thinking “I will make some money and I’ll come back”, so they are quite ill-informed about what it is really like once they get there. In the process of being there they end up getting trapped. “I’m away from home and they are not going to want me back”, or they get in with the wrong crowds. They get trapped into this very day-to-day existence and there are very few success stories. (Study 2)

Alternatively, accounts of child maltreatment and abuse as a consequence of alcohol, mental health or domestic violence were also a consideration at the parental level. At a broader family level, children “left behind” by parents migrating for work were considered to be at risk:

In some cases the most dangerous place is the family home, so you can't return them necessarily to the family home because it is too dangerous. ... It's one of those fine lines you're walking along, you need to protect them but you need to make sure you're not doing things that will be detrimental to them in that process. And they have to be heard in that process. (Study 2)

Broader social context - poverty and domestic violence

Broader debates surrounding societal attitudes around violence against women and girls (VAWG), sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and poverty prevention also require consideration. Study 2 highlighted the link between human trafficking, poverty and domestic violence against women and children, as seen from the selection of quotes below:

... it's the wider society context that is exploiting and making life unjust for the children as opposed to the individual parent. ... It's extreme poverty that's putting them in the situation they're in. Their parents love them but they can't do much about the economic situation so [the children] end up working. (Study 2)

In situations where domestic violence and violence against women is accepted, again violence against children can be heavier and more commonly accepted. (Study 2)

And then this culture where it's kind of normal for girls to be abused, for violence in the home to take place, for women to be very sexualized. ... so, women as objects, it's very normal in society. (Study 2)

You're working with an issue that's so engrained in society ... this exploitation conversation about changing societal norms around the roles of women and young girls ... or is it more about looking at child abuse that could be perpetrated from somebody within the family... (Study 2)

So we're talking about poverty but we're also talking about inequalities, we're also talking about violence being normalized. (Study 2)

... they have come from small surrounding villages and there's very few ... opportunities, educational opportunities, etc. There's also a lot of interfamilial violence. ... there's violence against mothers and then against children and that's very much mixed up with the poverty that exists in these areas. (Study 2)

As outlined earlier, such quotes should be considered in the light of notions of "childhood", "culture" and "race" (Meetoo and Mirza, 2007; Philips, 2007; Bernard and Gupta, 2008; Korbin, 2007). However, it is essential to have an understanding of these exploitative, dangerous and often gendered contexts where violence is normalized prior to arrival in the UK. Unfortunately, criminal justice processes in the UK tend not to consider such aspects of a child's circumstances or experience (ATMG, 2013).

The importance of involving community agencies in the NRM – a proactive and preventative approach

The fact that people bring "kids in under the wire" means that those children will not be identified through law enforcement but, rather, by members of communities *in situ* with, or without, an understanding of the forms of exploitation that constitute trafficking. In Study 2, these social networks and ties were very evident. Representatives of MRCOs ongoing transnational social networks and comprehensive knowledge of contexts for children in countries of origin creates potential for trafficking prevention and child protection efforts. As one community representative suggested:

This is the UK dimension. But it also stretches across, I'll use the word global, every country in the world. It stretches globally in that these community groups have connections back in their original countries of origin. Use [original emphasis] those connections to link up with organizations and people who can prevent trafficking. There would already be a prevention strategy embedded in that approach. (Study 2)

Community level interaction in the UK could become a stronger protective factor if resources were made available for community mobilization:

We feel the community groups are best placed to be at the forefront of this. Statutory agencies tend to be reactive as opposed to proactive around prevention. So this is part of our vision, strategy and approach in Europe, African and the UK. (Study 2)

Whilst mindful of the dangers of profiling or labelling communities, this community representative's suggestion resonated with others who provided, as Rehman et al. (2013) suggests, vital understandings of the coercive contexts or "situatedness" of different forms of violence perpetuated against women in minority ethnic populations. It is suggested that the same applies to children and young people. Disclosure is therefore contextual, situated and based around safety and trust.

Organizations working within communities often displayed a broad global reach in terms of understanding the context and constellations of risk and protective factors that lead to trafficking in the first instance:

I have seen a young girl that they brought her in. First she was an unaccompanied minor, but eventually she developed to be a beautiful girl. But, because she did not have contact here, parents, etc. we don't know the full truth. The representative of the agency that brought her in this time demanded sex from her. Selling her and etc. this is how she pay the money back - £6,000 she had to pay back. And how many sex you have to sell yourself to pay off £6,000? So that was an example that I have witnessed. (Study 2)

It is an agency, we call them "chetta", who are human transporters – they can exploit anything that they can. If you are a beautiful woman, they could exploit your body. If you are, maybe, a person that got land or money back home, they could exploit that. Or they might push you into drugs business. They might push you into extorting money because that is what we are experiencing in the community. (Study 2)

Interviews with the small sample of MRCOs revealed an extensive global reach in terms of anti-trafficking work carried out both overseas and in the UK. This proactive, and preventative, agenda is for example being carried out by organizations such as the Victoria Climbié Foundation (VCF) and Africans Unite Against Child Abuse (AFRUCA). Both organizations are actively working within communities to raise awareness of issues such as trafficking, female genital mutilation (FGM), child abuse linked to faith, belief systems, witchcraft and spirit possession as well as "honour-based" crimes. If agencies such as VCF and AFRUCA work across continents to understand the dynamics of abuse, exploitation and/or "trafficking", this could increase the number of "thicker" stories that are told. This in turn would help create a more comprehensive understanding of "trafficking", which would offer greater scope for identification of children:

Well, we have taken a proactive approach really... I think the headline is engaging communities in the process of identification and referral into statutory services. It is a difficult balance because we don't want to say this is a particular issue in your community, a bit like the FGM scenario. But, we take the view that communities, and people living in the community, are in a position to understand slightly better what is going on on the ground. They see individuals and ... have a sense of, like everybody does, children at risk. (Study 2)

As discussed above, contextual understandings formed the basis of participants' responses during Study 2, highlighting the vast global reach of prevention activities being undertaken by small and largely underfunded organizations across the EU, South America, Africa and Southeast Asia.

CONCLUSION

We keep simplifying trafficking when we should be focussing on the nuances. (Study 2)

Every child's experience of trafficking and exploitation is different. There is room for further understanding and a greater focus on the nuances, subtleties and complexity of this form of child abuse. The current detachment and disengagement in UK discourses between sending and receiving environments and the consequences for care of trafficked children is significant. There needs to be a greater understanding of the contexts from which children arrive into the UK and the circumstances that have led to their trafficking and exploitation.

Trafficking is a broad sociological *process* and not a nationally-bounded, one-off *event* and the identification of children and young people in the UK as "trafficked" is also a process that

requires time for trust to be restored for disclosure to occur. Given the resonance and importance of wider child maltreatment and child abuse knowledge and practice, it is unlikely that mono- or single-cause models of “trafficking” can provide adequate explanations. Likewise, simply focusing on “push” or “pull” factors to explain migration are unlikely to be conclusive.

UK legislation around immigration and asylum has made entry as an asylum-seeker difficult. Increasingly health, education and other professionals are involved in making decisions on access to services based around an individual’s immigration or asylum status. Mistrust and disbelief of accounts given can be a consequence of focusing on migration status. “Vulnerability” does not end once a child or young person arrives in the UK, as mistrust within the asylum and immigration systems create its own “vulnerabilities” and “harms”. Practitioners in the statutory and non- statutory sectors in the UK therefore operate in an environment whereby mistrust of the accounts of children and young people can hamper identification of trafficked children.

A holistic approach to understanding trafficking could allow for much “thicker” stories, narratives and discourses to emerge about the interacting factors that relate to the child’s parents, family, community and broader societal contexts. This may ultimately provide a useful framework for understanding the particular constellations of “vulnerabilities” and protective factors that relate to “trafficking” of children and young people. This approach could be enhanced by including community organizations in the NRM process, due to their connections in source countries and understanding of these layers of complexity.

It is clear that stories and accounts of trafficking remain untold in the UK child protection context. All agencies have roles to play in understanding and identifying children and young people as “trafficked” and community based organizations can contribute significantly to this, utilizing social networks and potentially reaching otherwise invisible children. Enabling non-statutory organizations that have access to communities – and who are trusted – to take a stronger role in identification of those children vulnerable to exploitation, to be identified and consequently offered protection as trafficked children.

NOTES

1. See Griffiths et al., 2005 for an exploration of RCOs in the UK.
2. At the time of writing further restructuring of the UK Border Agency was taking place emphasizing tough immigration law enforcement See: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsarticles/2013/may/11-transition> accessed 30 June 2013.
3. For details see: http://socialwelfare.bl.uk/subject-areas/services-client-groups/asylum-seekers-refugees/home-office/168761Review_of_the_National_Referral_Mechanism_for_victims_of_human_trafficking.pdf
4. Since his death, it has been discovered that the BBC presenter, DJ and charity fundraiser, Jimmy Savile, was responsible for child sexual abuse over several decades, including children in hospitals and those attending BBC live broadcasts. Hundreds of people have since made disclosures, many of whom have not spoken about their abuse previously. During the same police investigation, Operation Yewtree, Rolf Harris was found to have assaulted girls aged between the ages of 7 and 19 over three decades. The TV presenter has since been found guilty of charges of indecent assault for child sexual abuse.

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