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Safeguarding Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities: Missed by a One Size Fits All Approach

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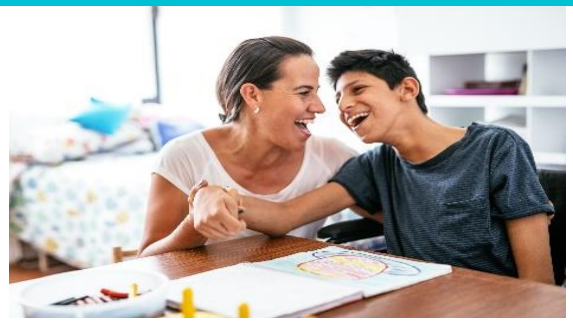

Croeso!! Welcome!

Namaste नमस्ते Tere tulemast Estonian

환영(hwan-yeong) Korean

maligayang pagdating Filipino

أهلا بكArabic

As-Salaam-Alaikum

soo dhaweyn Somali

خوش آمدیدUrdu

Bienvenu!! BSL

સ્વાગત Gujurati

Bine ati venit Romanian

באַגריסן Yiddish Benvenido Spanish

Fáilte irish

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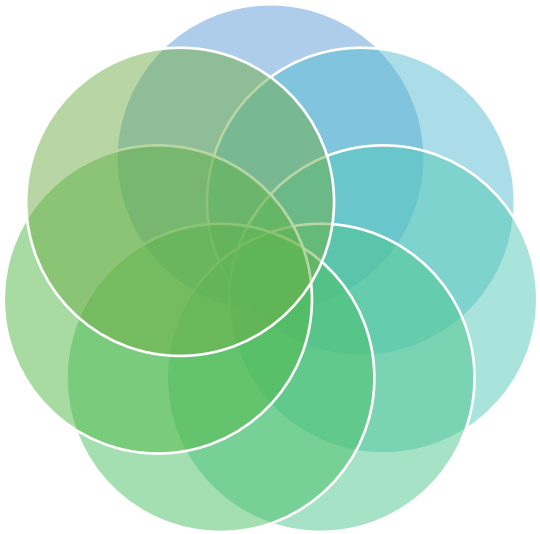
Every child and young person is an individual and each is different; identity is not one dimensional; many have multiple strengths but may also face multiple social inequalities

Ethnicity

Location and community

Culture

Trauma and history; misogyny, bullying



Poverty

LGBTQ+

Disability

Context – Increased risk factors

- Unmet needs associated with communication, learning and neurodivergence can increase vulnerability
- Needs not often recognised or understood by multi-agency services
- Little multi-agency training on SEND
- Lack of, and long waiting times for, diagnosis
- Severe lack of training on intersection of SEND and abuse

Coupled with

- Higher rates of poverty, social and school exclusion, isolation, bullying and discrimination
- Over-represented in care system (although often not recorded)
- Lack of empowerment and agency

Context

- Unmet early support and early help needs (CBF 2022; Sapiets et al 2021; 2022)
- Patchy and inconsistent specialist services such as speech and language support (OCC2019)
- Delays in recognition and diagnosis (BMA2019)
- Access to key services worsened since COVID (Disabled children's Partnership 2022)
- Greater risks of breakdown at school (Lamrhari et al 2022; Timpson Review 2019)

IICSA

- Disability featured prominently in more than one-third of the children's cases examined by the Inquiry. **The impact of disability in raising the risk of sexual exploitation was not well understood within the main agencies and children with learning disabilities or neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism were not appropriately protected** in some of the case study areas. Some councils gave evidence that, as a result of the Inquiry's questions on this matter, the issue was receiving the attention it deserved.
  - Child Sexual Exploitation by Organised networks: Investigation Report IICSA 2022 page 5.

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Context and key themes; harm, abuse, maltreatment and bullying for learning disabled children

- Greater risks all forms of harm and greater risks for those with learning disabilities (Sullivan and Knutson 2000; Jones et al 2012)
- Poorer responses, not heard, not believed, not taken seriously (Taylor et al 2015; Franklin et al 2015)
- Issues with terminology and definitions of what is meant by and included in learning disabilities (Wissink et al 2015; Helton et al 2018)
- Increased severity of sexual abuse (Akbas et al 2009; Helton et al 2018)
- Tailored support and responses are needed (Helton et al 2018)
- Increased risk for those who experience neglect, with disabilities, and looked after (Karna and Kelly 2021)

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Unprotected Overprotected

Professionals can find understanding learning disability hard

'unprotected' by lack of understanding or recognition of need

'overprotected' by how their lives can be 'managed' leaving them little voice, seen as almost asexual and relevant issues avoided or not addressed
False perception that young people with learning disabilities do not have needs, wishes or desires to have relationships

Time and attention and an individual approach to communicating and supporting the development of a young persons' understanding of relationships, online safety, grooming and exploitation.

Franklin, Raws and Smeaton (2015)

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A systematic review of all UK relevant studies

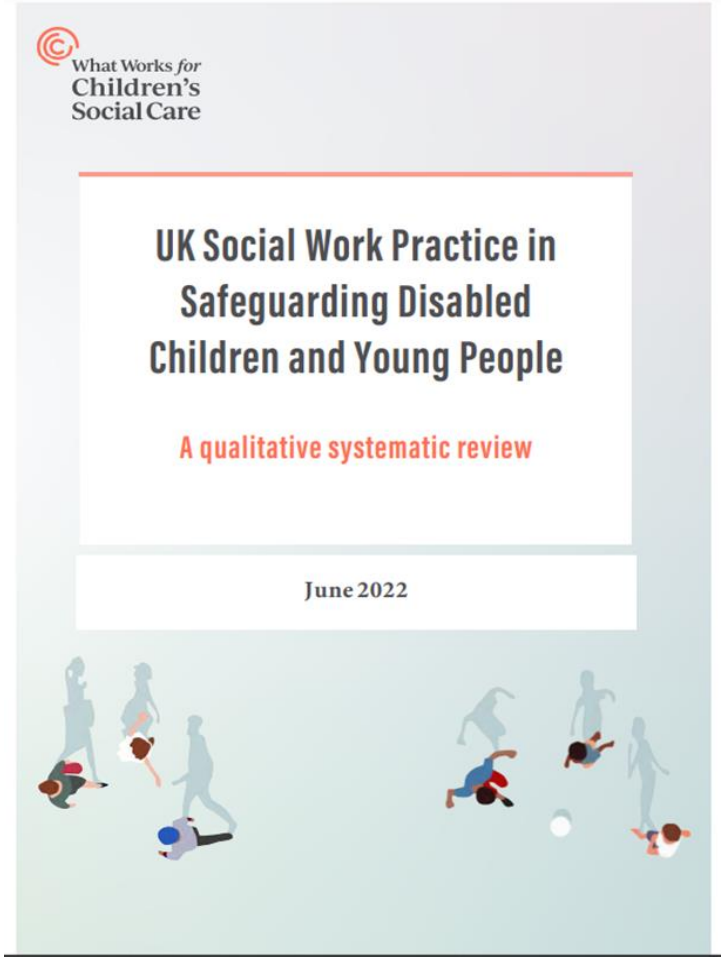
Led by Professor Anita Franklin, Dr Alex Toft, Jo Greenaway-Clarke, Dr Jane Hernon and Sarah Goff

Review identified 14 articles/reports from **10 unique UK studies**

13 out of 14 studies published since 2014

Most studies used multiple methods to capture participants' perspectives

157 disabled young people's voices, and 405 practitioners' voices included in review



Systematic Review key findings:

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Why do disabled children face greater risks of harm

Invisibility Finding 1: Disabled children and young people are often invisible in services, or can be hidden but in plain sight *within* services.

This increases risk as this reduces the chances of signs of abuse being identified, and/or limits opportunities for disabled children to tell.

Practitioners can lose sight of disabled children through assuming they are protected by others, or will disclose abuse.

Children say that practitioners can lack curiosity and interest in their lives and not seek their views.

There is a lack of understanding among practitioners of the intersectionality of disability and child abuse, and of intersectional issues for disabled children.

In this context 'invisible' often also meant that they were either not spoken to directly or their everyday experiences not being the main focus of practitioners' thinking and actions (Franklin and Smeaton, 2017)

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Systematic Review key findings:

Attitudes and assumptions about disability can lead to disabled children being invisible, and/or seen as better protected than their non-disabled peers

Cooke and Standen (2002) reported on a tendency for practitioners to not see the abuse of disabled children. With **'disability is seen first'** impacting on whether abuse is recognized or not.

Parents and professionals **focussing on tasks and not the child** or young person as whole socially and emotionally

Practitioners in several studies reported that **treating all children the same created problems** and did not take account of individual needs and the barriers affecting disabled children could lead to a situation where;

Systematic Review key findings:

Lack of specialist services, poor access to communication and/or high thresholds for services creates risk

- Disabled young people facing domestic abuse lack services which understood the combined effects of the harm and their disability related needs, especially LGBTQ+ and ethnic minority disabled young people (Goff and Franklin, 2019)
- Wilson et al (2018) and Taylor et al (2017) highlight the barriers Deaf child face to disclosure in a hearing world, and where helplines and other forms of potential avenues for help-seeking are inaccessible.

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Systematic Review key findings:

Structures, processes and attitudes reinforce disabled children's vulnerability through isolation, a lack of voice and agency and overprotection

Social isolation of disabled children and young people was identified as contributing to risk across a number of studies (Franklin and Smeaton, 2017; Jones et al, 2017)

'Young people's experiences of the world can be confined to a door-to-door taxi or bus service to and from a special school' (Franklin and Smeaton, 2017, p 477)'

Overprotection combined with a lack of sex and relationship education tailored to individual need and understanding (Taylor et al 2016)

The normalization of violence through the use of inappropriate restraint and restrictive practices in residential and secure settings can lead to some young people internalising experiences of violence and control as something to expect in relationships (Goff and Franklin, 2019)

A lack of voice and agency e.g. not being kept at the forefront of planning and services, reviews and processes about them.

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What training and skills are needed to effectively support disabled children?

Variable skills and access to training across all agencies contributed to a lack of robust multi-agency and practitioner responses to suspected abuse of disabled children.

Social workers' lack of training, knowledge and skills to understand & respond to complexity relating to the abuse of disabled children was a source of concern and frustration; these included:

- Lack of specialist knowledge in both disability and child protection practice
- Lack of skills in communication
- Lack of skills to unravel complexity and recognize the effects of working in silos
- Lack of practitioners with combined specialist knowledge **in both** disability and child protection practice was a finding highlighted by several studies:
- Not having skills to communicate with disabled children about abuse

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Internal trafficking and exploitation of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) within England and Wales: Understanding identification and responses to inform effective policy and practice.

Research Team: Professor Anita Franklin, Dr Louise Bradley, Dr Jo Greenaway, Sarah Goff (Manchester Met University), Sarah Atkins (University of Portsmouth), Lucy Rylatt, Safeguarding Children Partnerships, Portsmouth City Council.

MODERN SLAVERY & HUMAN RIGHTS | POLICY & EVIDENCE CENTRE
Led by the Bingham Centre

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Our previous research on CSE indicated:

- Sign and indicators of harm can be misattributed to an impairment
- Children with SEND may present signs of harm in “atypical” ways
- Falling through the gaps (Franklin et al, 2015)

Aims and Objectives

1. Identify gaps in relevant law, policy, guidance and evidence to support the better protection of children with SEND (aged up to 25 years) in England and Wales to ***internal*** trafficking and exploitation.
2. Examine practice responses from the perspectives of practitioners and parents/carers to better identify the risks, indicators and responses in cases of suspected, or known, trafficked and exploited children with SEND.
3. Consult with strategic and frontline multi-agency practitioners to better understand barriers and facilitators to improved policy and practice.
4. Develop specific outputs and policy and practice recommendations that would support improved guidance and policy development for this group and their specific needs.

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Recognition of Modern Slavery in current policy and guidance to meet needs and protect children and young people with SEND

- lack of joined-up thinking across statutory guidance which would aid the better protection of children and young people with SEND..(filters down to practice)
- little recognition of:
  - increased vulnerability and risk for children and young people within SEND in policy and guidance,

  Lack of discussion of appropriate preventative measures and responses – lack of specific duties to meet additional needs.
- Practice guidance on safeguarding disabled children and young people (2009) not been updated.
- Falling through the gaps…

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Key findings and concerns

Gaps and Missed Opportunities:

Clear pathways into exploitation..

- Undiagnosed/unrecognised SEND by services (NB: often identified by parents)
- Lack of SEND provision
- Transition to secondary school
- Behaviour/communication misunderstood as ‘disruptive’, ‘naughty’
- Punishment often isolation leads to disaffection
- Self- medication via drugs (cannabis/vaping)
- School breakdowns *“he used to get put in isolation for not having a green pen”*
- Missing opportunity for schools to be a protective factor, missing opportunity for school breakdowns to be seen as an opportunity for intervention (safeguarding lens)….
- Need for a more nurturing educational environment

Key findings and concerns

Parents not listened to both when asking for help with disabilities or when asking regarding exploitation – dual trauma

Parents spent years asking for help with SEND, now exploitation…

Responding Early: Responding Well is dependent on three factors:

1) Parents being listened to concerning their child's (often undiagnosed/unrecognized) SEND needs
2) Parents being listened to regarding concerns they had around their child's safety and experiences of exploitation
3) Parents not being judged or becoming the focus of 'concern', but instead being supported and seen as protectors of their child when harm is committed outside of the family home.

Report offers insights into improved working with parents/children, early intervention, responding to missing episodes, transition at 18years.

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Thank you for listening

For further information about our work in safeguarding disabled children, regarding training and for our forthcoming report on Modern Slavery and children and young people with SEND, please do get in touch.

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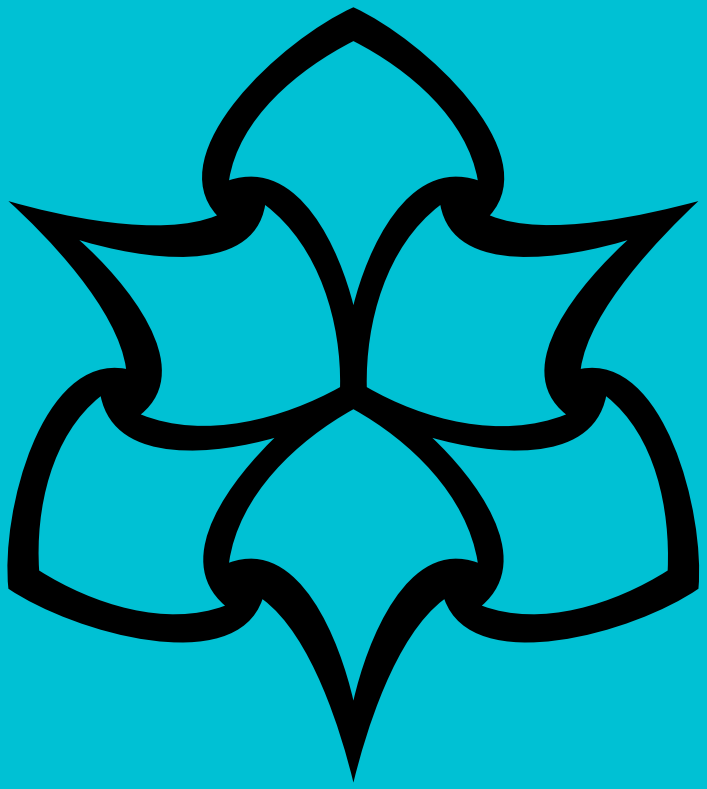
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