



Preventing Harmful Sexual Behaviour and Child Sexual Exploitation for children & young people living in residential care: A scoping review in the Australian context



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ABSTRACT

Harmful Sexual Behavior and Child Sexual Exploitation are problems of significant proportion for children & young people living in out-of-home care. The aim of this review was to conduct a scoping exercise of the evidence about preventing these problems with the intent of summarising and disseminating knowledge to policy-makers, practitioners and researchers. Five electronic databases were searched in November and December 2016, including: PsychINFO; Applied Social Science Index and Abstracts; SocINDEX; Web of Science; and Education Resource Information Centre. The search was guided by the research question: What is known about preventing Harmful Sexual Behavior and Child Sexual Exploitation for children & young people living in residential out-of-home care settings? Twenty papers were included in the review, including: seven peer-reviewed journal articles; three reports for government; two presentation transcripts; two literature reviews; one qualitative research report; one report for a government inquiry; one submission to a government inquiry; one consultation paper for a government inquiry; one guideline; and one educational resource. Three major thematic categories were identified in the evidence: (i) *constructing educative interventions for children & young people and workers*; (ii) *targeting grooming and problematic sexual behavior*; and (iii) *providing a holistic response and a way out*. The review revealed that the current prevention response to Harmful Sexual Behavior and Child Sexual Exploitation for children & young people living in residential care is under-developed. Promising program, service or practice elements relating to the prevention of Harmful Sexual Behavior and Child Sexual Exploitation were identified and three interventions suggested for future prevention efforts.

1. Introduction

Children & young people in out-of-home care are at significantly increased risk of being victimised through Harmful Sexual Behavior and Child Sexual Exploitation (Commission for Children and Young People, 2015; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2016). Harmful Sexual Behavior is sexual behavior carried out by children & young people that is developmentally inappropriate and abusive towards self or others, whereas Child Sexual Exploitation is adult-perpetrated sexual abuse that involves a child or young person receiving goods, money, power or attention in exchange for sexual activity (Hackett, Holmes, & Branigan, 2016). Both Harmful Sexual Behavior and Child Sexual Exploitation are forms of child sexual abuse (World Health Organisation, 2006).

The terminology around Child Sexual Exploitation is less contested than the terminology around Harmful Sexual Behavior. Children & young people who carry out Harmful Sexual Behavior are variously referred to across English-speaking jurisdictions as: juvenile

sex offenders; adolescent sex offenders; children with problem sexual behavior; and young people with sexually abusive behavior (O'Brien, 2010; Shlonsky et al., 2017). In this paper, the phrase "Harmful Sexual Behavior" has been adopted as it is the terminology accepted by the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Royal Commission, 2016).

There is little prevalence data about Harmful Sexual Behavior, however the available evidence suggests that a substantial proportion of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by other children & young people. For example, in the USA, Finkelhor, Ormrod, and Chaffin (2009) reported that in approximately 35% of cases of sexual abuse where victims were zero–18 years, perpetration was carried out by other children & young people and for cases with victims 0–12 years, this rose to 50%. In Australia, Boyd and Bromfield (2006) presented police data revealing that 9–16% of sexual abuse was committed by other children & young people. Research from the United Kingdom reveals a much larger proportion. A population study involving 2275 young people carried out by Radford, Corral, Bassett, Howat, and Collishaw

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(2011) found that two-thirds of young people reporting contact child sexual abuse identified the abuse as carried out by other children & young people. Although there is no reliable global data about the prevalence of Child Sexual Exploitation as a form of child sexual abuse, meta-analyses indicate that approximately 10–20% of girls and 5–10% of boys are victims of child sexual abuse broadly defined on a spectrum from unwanted touching to rape (Pereda, Guilera, Forns, & Gómez-Benito, 2009; Stoltenborgh, van IJzendoorn, Euser, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2011). It is clear, however, that online forms of Child Sexual Exploitation are proliferating in Australia, with the Australian Federal Police receiving 11,000 online child sexual exploitation reports in 2015 and 194 Australian children being identified in child sexual exploitation material in 2016 (Anti-slavery, 2017). Further, the United States CyberTipline received 3.3 million reports of Child Sexual exploitation between 1998 and 2015 (Cameron, Mendez Sayer, Thomson, & Wilson, 2015).

In Australia during the 2015–2016 period there were 55,614 children & young people living in out-of-home care. Approximately 5% of those children & young people were living in residential care settings (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2017). A disproportionate 33% of child sexual abuse reports to statutory child protection related to that cohort of children & young people (Royal Commission, 2016). Further, children & young people from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and children living with disability were over-represented in these data (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2017).

Thus, the rationale for this scoping review is that in Australia and globally, child sexual abuse is a problem of significant proportions, particularly in residential out-of-home care settings. Yet there is a paucity of research identifying effective ways to prevent child sexual abuse specifically in these settings and an urgent need to develop, trial and evaluate new approaches anchored in the best available evidence (Royal Commission, 2016).

The objective of this paper is to provide a scoping review to identify prevention measures for preventing Harmful Sexual Behavior by children & young people and adult-perpetrated Child Sexual Exploitation in residential out-of-home care settings. The focus of the review is Harmful Sexual Behavior and Child Sexual Exploitation that is occurring after a child or young person has entered residential care.

2. Scoping review method

The scoping review method set out by Arskey and O'Malley (2005) was adopted for this review. The method involved five stages: (i) formulating a research question; (ii) identifying relevant studies through a systematic search of the evidence; (iii) screening the studies in accordance with inclusion and exclusion criteria; (iv) extracting data from the studies and displaying it in a table; and (v) synthesising findings from the studies. The method was chosen because it enables the relatively rapid mapping of the range of available evidence aligned with the research question. Further, the method does not require the quality appraisal of papers which allows for inclusion of empirical studies along with a broad range of policy and practice papers that may not be published in scholarly journals (e.g. presentations and reports to governments) (Arskey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac, Colquhoun, & O'Brien, 2010).

The research question that informed the scoping review was: **What is known about preventing Harmful Sexual Behavior and Child Sexual Exploitation for children & young people living in residential out-of-home care settings?**

2.1. Search strategy

A systematized search strategy was designed and involved the identification of four sets of search terms (indicated S1–S4 in Table 1). The first set of terms captured Harmful Sexual Behavior carried out by

children & young people, while the second set of terms was made up of terms that captured adult-perpetrated child sexual abuse. Phrases about prevention programs and interventions constituted the third set of terms, and the fourth set comprised residential out-of-home care signifiers as shown in Table 1.

Five electronic databases were searched in the months of November and December 2016, including: PsychINFO; Applied Social Science Index and Abstracts (ASSIA); SocINDEX; Web of Science; and Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC). These databases were selected based on the aim of collecting a broad range of evidence, conceptualised according to Puddy and Wilkins (2011) and to Humphreys and Kertesz (2012) as empirical evidence (from peer-reviewed academic journals), experiential evidence and contextual evidence (from grey literature, position papers and papers based on practice wisdom). These databases also enabled a higher likelihood of sourcing relevant papers from Australia, as some aspects of our federated system are qualitatively different to systems in other developed countries. Searches were limited to papers published in English between 2000 and 2016.

Each database was searched using the same strategy. The first set of terms was combined with the third and fourth sets, and the second set was combined with the third and fourth sets. For example, in PsychINFO the first set of search terms about Harmful Sexual Behavior by children & young people produced 5229 results, which were combined with the 920,431 results from the third set of search terms about prevention programs and interventions, along with the 13,207 results from the fourth set of search terms about residential care settings, yielding 134 results relating to categories of Harmful Sexual Behavior, prevention and residential out-of-home care. Searches were also conducted with Google and Google Scholar using the same sets of search terms, producing a further 675 results.

2.2. Paper selection

The systematized searches across all five databases generated a total of 2347 papers. A modified PRISMA flowchart is shown in Fig. 1. Titles and abstracts were screened, initially for relevance. Papers were assessed by one reviewer and classified as relevant if they addressed Harmful Sexual Behavior or Child Sexual Exploitation, in combination with either: prevention or intervention; or residential out-of-home care. This initial screening identified 82 relevant papers.

Next, the full text of the 82 relevant papers was screened and inclusion/exclusion criteria applied. Papers were included that: described or evaluated programs, services or practice elements aiming to prevent or intervene in Harmful Sexual Behavior or Child Sexual Exploitation in residential out-of-home care settings. Papers were excluded that focused on residential care in the context of inpatient mental health service provision. Papers were also excluded if the material covered was represented in a more recent publication. Further, exclusion occurred on the basis of duplication and the inability to access a paper without paying a fee (such as a training manual).

2.3. Papers included

Twenty papers were included in the corpus for this scoping review as shown in Table 2. The papers comprised: seven peer-reviewed journal articles; three reports for government; two presentation transcripts; two literature reviews; one qualitative research report; one report for a government inquiry; one submission to a government inquiry; one consultation paper for a government inquiry; one guideline; and one educational resource. The papers addressed the prevention of Harmful Sexual Behavior and Child Sexual Exploitation in residential out-of-home care settings between 2000 and 2016. Nine of the papers were from the United Kingdom; seven were from Australia; two were from the United States; one was from Canada; and one was from the Netherlands.

Data were then extracted from each paper using a spreadsheet with

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