

10 things everyone should know about adolescent harmful sexual behaviour

Welcome
#10thingsHSB

10 things everyone should know about adolescent harmful sexual behaviour

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Setting the scene

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p065dvr6>



Working with children who abuse – ethical issues

- In 1989, we assessed an adolescent male who had offended sexually, and we concluded that he was a high risk to reoffend—based on our unstructured clinical judgment. In 1989, there was virtually no guidance from published research regarding risk assessments for this population, and most professionals relied on unstructured clinical judgment. Ten years later—in 1999—this young man was a father of a young boy. A child protection worker came across the 10-year-old risk assessment and subsequently removed the young boy from his parents (Worling, 2017, online)

Key message 1: Children's Harmful Sexual Behaviour is Prevalent and Incidence is Rising

- **16.5% of 11-17 year olds** report experiences of contact sexual abuse in the UK (Radford et al., 2011)
- At least **1/3 of all sexual offences** against children in the UK involve other children as the perpetrators (Hackett et al., 2016)



- Cases reported to COPFS involving child sexual offences committed by a child rose by 34% between 2011-12 and 2015-16 (IPS, 2017)
- Children increasingly drawn into risk management and criminal justice systems designed for adults

Key message 2: Definitions of Harmful Sexual Behaviour are becoming more general and simplified

- Sexual behaviours expressed by children and young people under the age of 18 years old that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards self or others and / or be abusive towards another child, young person or adult (Hackett et al., 2016 p 12)
- Young people who engage in any form of sexual activity with another individual, that they have powers over by virtue of age, emotional maturity, gender, physical strength, intellect and where the victim in this relationship has suffered a sexual exploitation (Calder, 1999)

Key message 3: Harmful sexual behaviour is a social construct – but is also based in a reality. We need to ask: Problematic for whom?

- **Young children:** Information gathering, exploration of bodies, with known similar-age children balanced by curiosity for other things
- **Adolescents:** Behaviour more goal oriented towards intimacy and sexual arousal
- **Concerning:** Interferes with development, involves coercion, distress, divergent age/ability and power

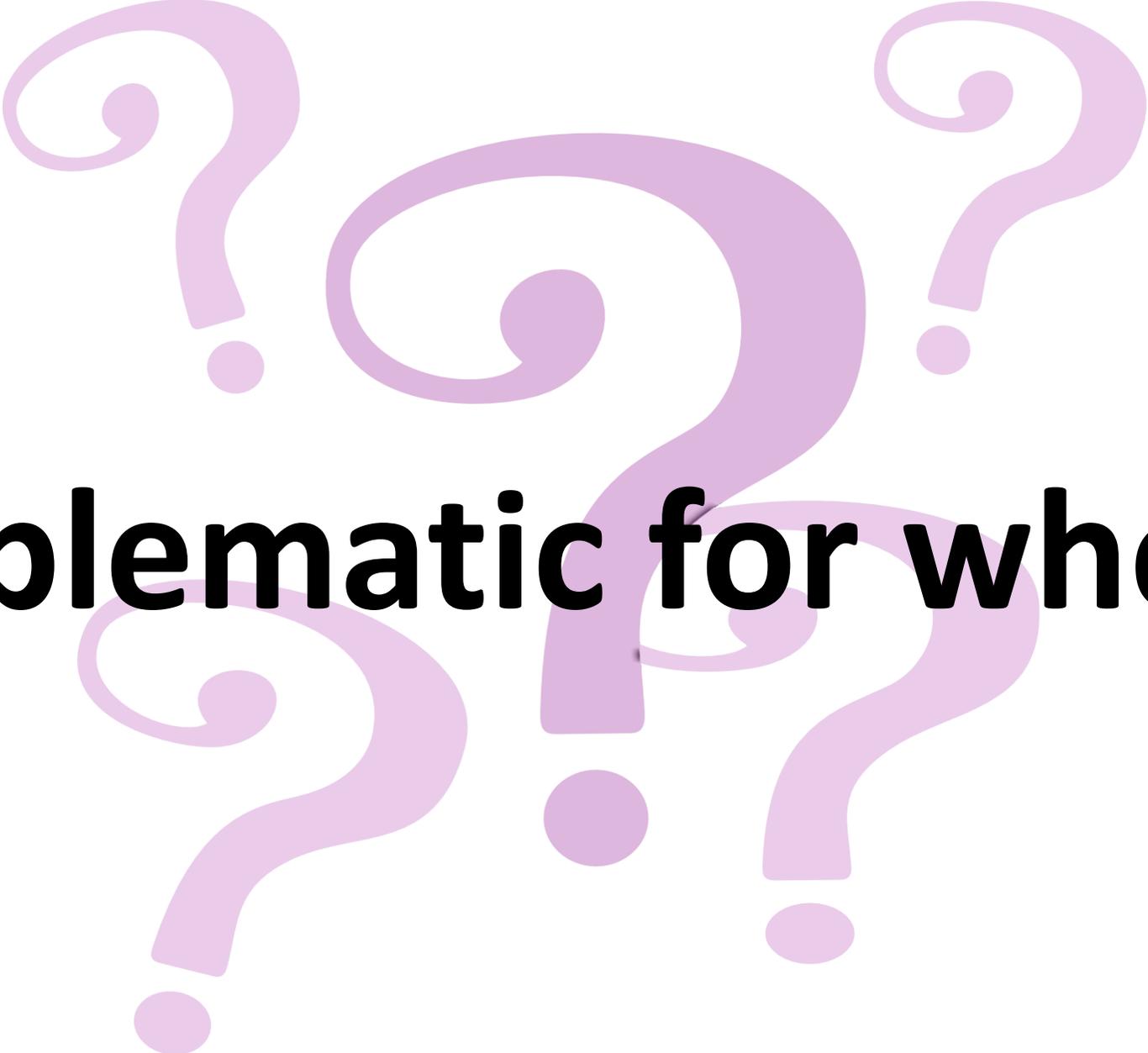
The continuum of sexual behaviour (Hackett, 2010)

Normal	Inappropriate	Problematic	Abusive	Violent
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developmentally expected• Socially acceptable• Consensual, mutual, reciprocal• Shared decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Single instances of inappropriate sexual behaviour• Socially acceptable behaviour within peer group• Context for behaviour may be inappropriate• Generally consensual and reciprocal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Problematic and concerning behaviours• Developmentally unusual and socially unexpected• No overt elements of victimisation• Consent issues may be unclear• May lack reciprocity or equal power• May include levels of compulsivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Victimising intent or outcome• Includes misuse of power• Coercion and force to ensure victim compliance• Intrusive• Informed consent lacking, or not able to be freely given by victim• May include elements of expressive violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physically violent sexual abuse• Highly intrusive• Instrumental violence which is physiologically and/or sexually arousing to the perpetrator• Sadism

Problematic

- Problematic and concerning behaviours
- Developmentally unusual and socially unexpected

- What is considered 'normal' behaviour will vary across time and place
- It will be different for boys, girls, children of different intellectual abilities
- Non-normal \neq Inappropriate or harmful: Normal \neq Harmless



Problematic for whom?

Key message 4: Adolescents who display harmful sexual behaviour are not mini-adult sex offenders

- Mostly perpetrated by boys (93% Finkelhor et al. 2009)
- Mean age of onset is 14 (Hackett et al. 2013)
- Learning disability (and ASD) over-represented (1/3 of cases Hackett et al. 2013)
- Maltreatment common. Those who sexually abuse 6 x more likely to have been sexually abused than those known to law enforcement for non-sexual crime (Seto and Lalumiere, 2010)
- Most victims are female (75%). Male victims tended to be younger than female victims.
- Mostly in domestic settings (69% in comparison to 12% in schools, Finkelhor et al. , 2009)
- 24% of cases involved rape, 13% sodomy, and 49% sexual touch (Finkelhor et al. 2009), but 1/3 of cases may be at less serious end of spectrum (Bateman, 2017)
- Sexual recidivism rates are low (Caldwell, 2016)

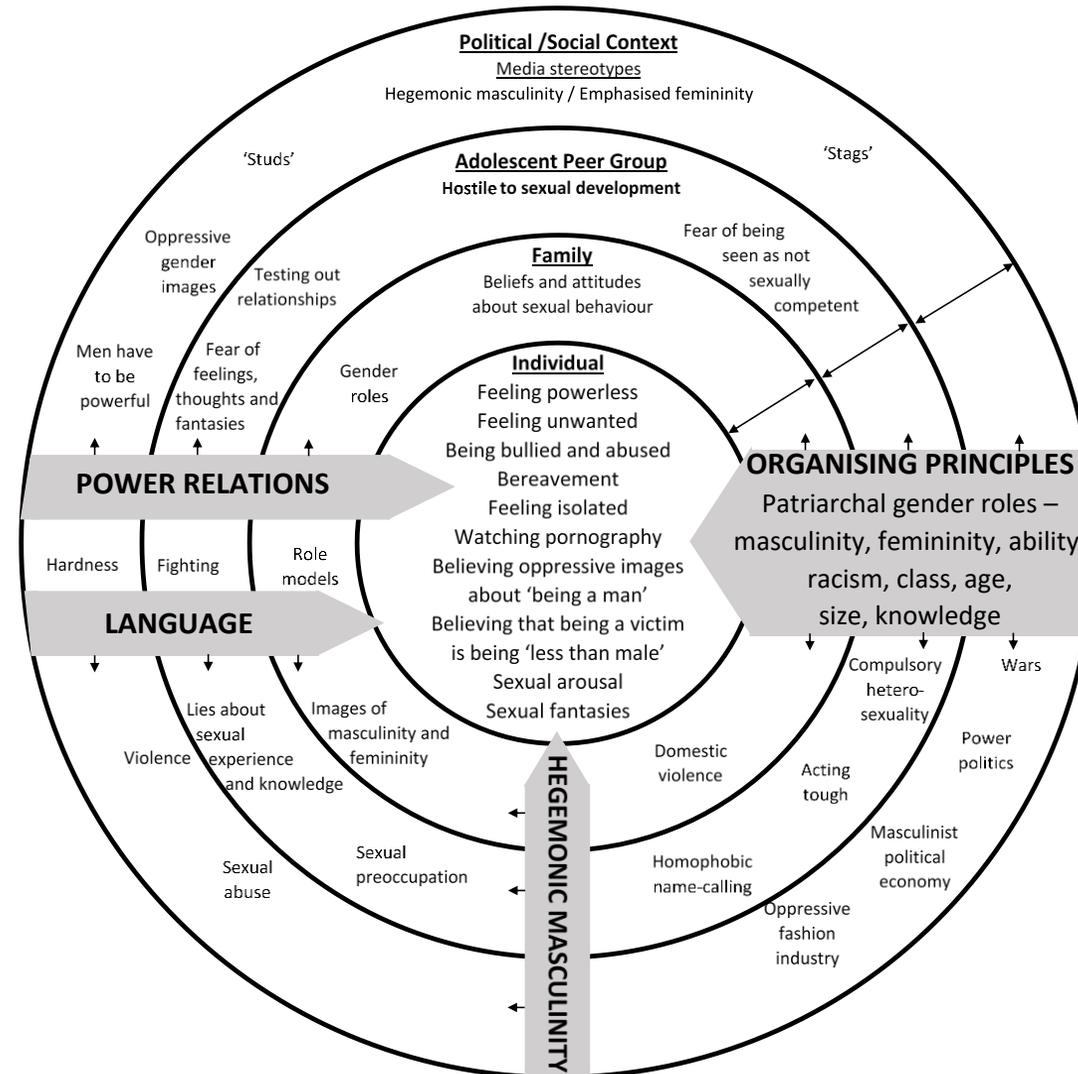
Key message 5: There is no one theory to explain all harmful sexual behaviour

- Single-factor theories lack explanatory power
- It is complex, multi-determined behaviour



- General delinquency factors + sexual socialisation experiences?
- Harmful sexual behaviour requires a perpetrator, a victim and a place (Smallbone, 2016)

Durham (2006, p.32)



Key message 6: Assessment is the cornerstone of good practice

- A tiered approach to assessment is necessary
- Assessment tools do not have predictive validity
- We sometimes overemphasise risk in our assessments to the detriment of thinking about welfare outcomes
- We over-emphasise individual psychology and underplay social context

Key message 7: Adolescents need ecological and trauma-informed interventions

- Sexual recidivism rate: 19% (without intervention) vs 7% (with intervention)
(Reitzel and Carbonell, 2006)
- Whilst recidivism is low, long-term wider welfare outcomes may be very poor (e.g. family instability, poor housing, drug use, poor health)
(Hackett, Phillipps, Masson & Balfe, 2012)
- Still not clear what works, for whom, in what circumstances
- Relationship is a core condition of change, as important as intervention content

- CBT on its own unlikely to be effective (Ter Beek et al., 2017)
- Multi-modal, ecological approaches have shown some promise (e.g. MST)
- Trauma-informed, sequenced approach
 - Emotional regulation
 - Processing of traumatic experiences
 - Sex and relationships education, CBT, masculinity
 - Need to Practise! (Creeden, 2009)
- Proportionate risk management
- Adolescents need individualised, ecological and developmentally sensitive interventions which attend to their long-term welfare

Key message 8: Harmful Sexual Behaviour online is not always what it seems...

- Growing area in terms of referrals to law enforcement and statutory services
- The term relates to a heterogeneity of different issues
- Early evidence suggests that a great deal of online HSB has more affinities with harassment and bullying than with contact HSB
- Some evidence to suggest that we may be over-reacting in some situations – some agreement about definitions and proportionate approaches to good practice essential

Key message 9: Adolescent harmful sexual behaviour is preventable

- Young people who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour say that it may have been prevented by:
 - Providing sex education earlier, which also addresses harmful sexual behaviour
 - Interventions to reduce the impact of young people's trauma experiences
 - Helping young people to manage their pornography use through critical thinking skills
- (McKibbin et al., 2017)
- Integrate information and education about harmful and healthy sexual behaviour within parenting programmes

Key message 10: We need a rights-based perspective, to ensure that adolescents who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour:

- are protected from abuse, neglect or harm at home, at school and in the community;
- learn to make healthy, safe choices;
- are supported and guided in the development of skills, confidence and self-esteem;
- have a nurturing place to live;

- have opportunities to participate safely in activities such as play, recreation and sport, which contribute to healthy growth and development, at home, in school and in the community;
- have the opportunity to be heard and involved in decisions that affect them;
- have opportunities and encouragement to play active and responsible roles at home, in school and in the community, including help to overcome social, educational, physical and economic inequalities, and
- are accepted as part of the community in which they live (GIRFEC, 2017)

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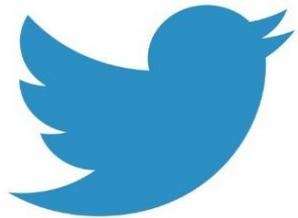
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Closing remarks

Claire Lightowler, CYCJ

Drinks reception

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