

Safeguarding Adult Review – Rachel

Practice Briefing



Rachel was a vibrant, intelligent young woman, with a sense of fun who wanted so much to love life and live life. She had been a victim of sexual abuse as a child, and had a history of mental health difficulties and self-harming behaviours. She was also a victim of sexual exploitation and trafficking from the age of 17 onwards. In October 2016 at the age of 20, she was found dead in her bedroom at the supported accommodation where she had been living. Following a coroner's inquest, the cause of death was recorded as drug related.

From July 2014 when it was first known that Rachel was the victim of sexual exploitation, she experienced a high level of agency involvement. Rachel felt overwhelmed at times by the number of professionals involved and experienced a loss of valued relationships established with some professionals because of unavoidable changes in worker or her several moves to different accommodation. She also experienced coercion and threats from her perpetrators; Rachel often indicated that the more professionals tried to contact her, the more she was placed at risk of violence.

Lessons

There should be a single joint strategy group, with responsibilities to develop strategic priorities, co-ordinate actions and oversee delivery of these, in respect of both children and adults who are victims, or at risk of exploitation.

Professionals need an understanding of the processes and possible benefits of the National Referral Mechanism for victims of human trafficking, including the importance of partnership working with the agency commissioned to provide independent support when a "positive reasonable grounds" decision has been made.

Professionals need to have access to updated legal guidance, including reference to current case-law, on the different legal options which are available to protect adult victims of sexual exploitation, including situations where mental capacity may be impaired because of coercion.

There needs to be a firming up of the multi-agency pathways and eligibility criteria for considering what support might be provided when child victims transition into adulthood. For some young people, their circumstances and needs do not readily fall into the existing transition arrangements and referral routes into adult services.

Consent

- The “social model of consent” being led by Professor Jenny Pearce and the University of Bedfordshire provides a framework for understanding why children and young people might appear to be consenting to sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Underpinning the model is the observation that all too often the focus and attention has been on the behaviour of victims who are often inappropriately blamed for apparently consenting to sexual exploitation, rather than assessing the impact of the environment surrounding them. While the research is focused on children the approach is equally applicable to adult victims. More information on this model can be found [here](#)

National Referral Mechanism

- The NRM is a framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery & ensuring they receive the appropriate support.
- Only staff at designated First Responders Organisations can refer cases to the NRM (Police and Local Authorities are amongst the First Responder organisations)
- Black Country Women’s Aid are contracted to provide support to victims in the West Midlands
- Individuals who are recognised as potential victims of modern slavery through the NRM have access to specialist tailored support for a period of at least 45 days while their case is considered, which may include access to relevant legal advice/asylum support, safe accommodation, pursuing criminal convictions and compensation, independent emotional and practical help, financial support and specialist services such as interpreting services and therapeutic support

Risk Assessment

- RIPFA Guidance from 2017 identified that whilst the use of suggested ‘risk indicators’ is helpful in risk assessment, these should not be used as a prescriptive and definitive list. What is more important is a critical analysis of the presenting picture which takes account of the history and the actions of a young person and the context in which they are functioning. Read more about this [here](#)
- This approach becomes particularly important in cases when there is insufficient evidence to support a prosecution, in order to avoid assessments being unduly influenced by the lack of disclosure. There is a risk of agencies ‘stepping down’ their response when victims do not want, or are unable to support a criminal investigation.
- Professionals must be careful not to adopt an over optimistic view of positive factors and should exercise caution before ruling out the possibility of exploitation taking place.



Information Sharing Without Consent

- It is good practice to try to gain the person’s consent to share information.
- A professional can reasonably override a person’s decision not to give consent where other people may be at risk, a serious crime has been committed, or might be prevented, or where coercion appears to be influencing the decision not to give consent. In these circumstances, sharing information would be considered legally proportionate, and avoids the risk of data protection concerns being used as an excuse to withhold information.
- As long as it does not increase risk, practitioners should inform the person if they need to share their information without consent.
- “Adult safeguarding: sharing information” - Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) January 2015 has more information on this and can be accessed [here](#)

Exploitation Reduction Board

- The Exploitation Reduction Board has replaced the CSE Steering Group with a cross age joint strategic group which can direct activity in respect of both adults and children.
- Its remit is wider than the CSE Steering Group encompassing all forms of exploitation, co-ordinating multi-agency initiatives and action.
- The Board is currently developing a shared vision of its purpose, clear terms of reference, the appropriate multi-agency membership, and its responsibilities.
- It will be supported by a Delivery Group which will be responsible for carrying out tasks and actions as identified by the board