

Deflection, denial and disbelief: social and political discourses about child sexual abuse and their influence on institutional responses

A rapid evidence assessment

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Disclaimer

This is a Rapid Evidence Assessment prepared at IICSA's request. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors alone.

Due to the nature of the research report, the authors have worked with the predominant ideas on child sexual abuse and use the language in which those ideas were commonly expressed over the period from the 1940s to 2017. The use of language that encapsulates these ideas and meanings should not be read as an endorsement of any of the identified discourses.

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Executive summary

Background

The aim of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA or ‘the Inquiry’) is to investigate whether public bodies and other non-state institutions have taken seriously their responsibility to protect children from sexual abuse in England and Wales, and to make meaningful recommendations for change, to help ensure that children now and in the future are better protected from sexual abuse. As defined in current government policy in England and Wales, child sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person under the age of 18 to take part in sexual activities. It includes contact and non-contact abuse, child sexual exploitation (CSE) and grooming a child in preparation for abuse (HM Government, 2015b).

However, definitions and understandings of what counts as child sexual abuse have been subject to substantial change over time. As part of its work, the Inquiry commissioned this rapid evidence assessment (REA) to understand what the social and political discourses have been about child sexual abuse, and the ways in which these discourses may have influenced responses to child sexual abuse by institutions. These questions have cross-cutting relevance for the work of the Inquiry.

The overarching aim of this REA was to summarise the existing evidence base about social and political discourses concerning child sexual abuse in England and Wales from the 1940s to 2017 and identify the ways in which those discourses may have influenced institutional responses to such abuse.

Defining discourses

The term ‘discourse’ has been interpreted and applied in a broad way in this research. Discourses can be defined as clusters of ideas that provide ways of talking about issues such as child sexual abuse (Hall, 1997). This includes the language, terminology and definitions used but also how child sexual abuse comes to be understood, through the key points of change, and the different lenses through which it has been viewed, for example, through a focus on gender, social class or sexuality. It is important to look at which discourses have dominated ways of speaking about child sexual abuse over time, and who is speaking, because the language used to describe it is significant in determining how the issue is addressed. Discourses also produce meanings that can become accepted ‘truths’ and sustain particular power relations in society.

The contexts in which discourses about child sexual abuse originate are wide ranging. They include academia, politics, the media, and social movements or civil society groups such as the feminist, children’s rights and victim and survivor movements. They can be amplified by the media and through government policy. Discourses may be linked to particular institutional contexts or ‘arenas’. They circulate both within and across these and can be key to how institutions respond to child sexual abuse. Competing and contradictory discourses can co-exist within the same time periods, and the views and approaches held by some may be contested by others, which can create shifts.

Defining institutional responses

‘Institutional responses’ are defined here as practices relating to child sexual abuse in institutions such as schools, churches and the media, including how they have responded to allegations made about sexual abuse within their own institutions or elsewhere; their treatment of victims and survivors and perpetrators; and their formulation of child protection and safeguarding policies. While the family as a social institution is outside the Inquiry’s scope, it does feature in relation to institutional failure and recurs as a core theme in a number of the discourses identified in the review, predominantly throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Method

An REA method was used to identify and synthesise existing literature relating to the overarching aim above. This report is not a discourse analysis. Rather, it provides a descriptive and thematic analysis of the literature reviewed, and an exploration of whether links can be made with the institutional responses documented in the literature.

Three types of literature were searched and reviewed:

- Published literature which generated and/or employed discourses and secondary research that discussed the use of discourses by others (237 texts)
- A sample of serious case reviews (68 texts)
- A sample of national/institutional inquiry reports and guidance (35 texts).

The searches took place in March and April 2017. Texts were included if they were written in English, published between 1940 and 2017, and focused on England or Wales. Some international texts were also included where there was evidence of influence or relevance. Texts were screened for relevance and quality assurance before inclusion. The findings are presented as an integrated analysis of all three literature types.

Limitations of the evidence base

There are a number of limitations that are important to note when considering the findings presented here. First, it was difficult to draw conclusions about causal relationships between discourses and institutional responses within the parameters of an REA as it was hard to ascertain what individual practitioners, specific groups of professionals or organisations understood about child sexual abuse and what their thinking would have been at particular points in time. Where it has been possible to trace and track influences, this is discussed with reference to specific discourses.

In addition, an REA can only capture what has been discussed in the (searchable) literature. Materials relating to child sexual abuse during the 1940s to the late 1980s were harder to identify compared to later periods. There was also more literature on certain sectors and institutions (for example, social work) than others (for example, education).

Exploring discourses about child sexual abuse over time

How child sexual abuse is constructed and defined is critical to how the perpetrator, victim and survivor, and context of abuse are presented and responded to. Discourses about, understandings of, and responses to child sexual abuse have shifted in a variety of ways over time. For example, legal definitions of offences have determined whether or not certain manifestations of child sexual abuse have been recognised as a criminal offence. Similarly, how perpetrators of child sexual abuse are labelled has implications for both the perpetrator and the victim and survivor. For example, 'sexual misconduct' in the education sector has been described as blurring the boundaries between immorality and criminality and between harm to others and reputational damage (Bingham et al., 2016). This has meant that child protection implications have not always been recognised because the term 'misconduct' can disguise sexual abuse. The shift in language from 'child prostitution' to child sexual exploitation also represented a significant change in understanding – although there is an ongoing debate about whether or not the separation of child sexual exploitation from child sexual abuse is a valid and useful distinction.

Discourses about child sexual abuse have been shown to be in a continuous state of change and evolution. In some interpretations, they have been described as moving from societal denial of the existence of abuse to recognition and acceptance that child sexual abuse manifests in various forms (Kempe, 1978). Others have defined this as ‘cycles of discovery and suppression’ in which new findings about child sexual abuse are met with significant resistance (Olafson, Corwin and Summit, 1993). Child sexual abuse has also been described as ‘strikingly unusual for being repeatedly “discovered”, discredited, re-established and discredited over time’ (Nelson, 2016, p.91).

Some discourses about child sexual abuse are cyclical in nature; others are more linear, while others still are tied to particular moments in time. Yet there are key points of change, often catalysed by specific events. A notable example is the Cleveland Inquiry of 1987. This Inquiry into the sexual abuse of 121 children – and the means by which they were medically diagnosed as having experienced sexual abuse – is widely described as a ‘watershed’ moment. It had a significant impact on legislation and policy about child sexual abuse and both created and amplified a number of discourses about it. Further shifts could be seen in response to other high-profile cases such as the child murders of Sarah Payne and Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman. These cases led to shifts that focused particularly on the characterisation and management of perpetrators.

The literature identified five key institutional arenas where debates have occurred in relation to child sexual abuse. These debates have had implications for the institutional responses to child sexual abuse. The five arenas are shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Five key institutional arenas

Legal Arena	Government Policy Arena	Clinical Arena	Social Work Arena	Media Arena
This is one of the most prominent fields in which discourses about child sexual abuse have circulated. Substantial changes in the law on sexual offences have seen the definition and redefinition of multiple offences relevant to child sexual abuse. Concepts of childhood and children’s rights are key to this.	There has been a raft of government policies relating to child sexual abuse from the 1940s to 2017. Inquiries and high-profile cases of abuse have often led to the development of government policy regarding child sexual abuse. The Cleveland case is a particularly pertinent example of this.	In the health disciplines, approaches to perpetrators have been influenced by medicalised models of deviancy and pathology. The Cleveland case had a significant impact on the role of paediatricians and medical evidence in sexual abuse cases.	The area of child protection has undergone extensive shifts. Events which have received high-profile media attention have been linked to changing policy and practice. Tensions between keeping families together and listening to children are evident, as are those between empowerment and protection.	The media has been a vehicle for conveying a number of key discourses about child sexual abuse, such as ‘stranger-danger’ and ‘paedophile’.

Framework for understanding the key discourses about child sexual abuse

During the identification and analysis of discourses in the literature, serious case reviews and institutional texts, two broad types of discourses emerged: dominant discourses and counter discourses.

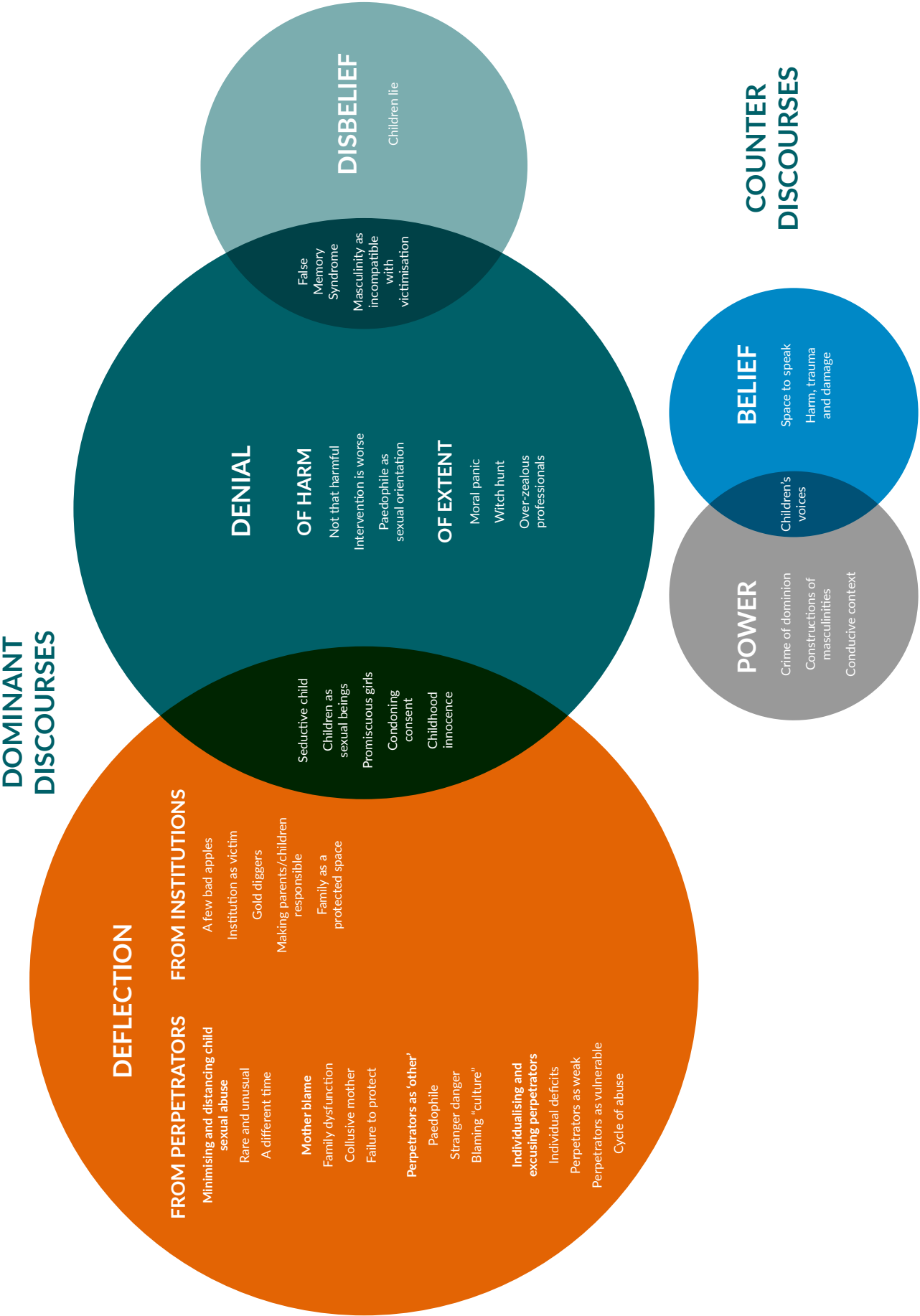
Dominant discourses appeared to take for granted as 'truths' certain ideas relating to child sexual abuse. They emerged in relation to the different institutional arenas described above and can be seen as having dominated thinking on the subject in these contexts. These could be split into three overarching categories:

- **Discourses of deflection:** These discourses serve to either deflect responsibility for child sexual abuse from perpetrators or deflect responsibility from institutions. Discourses which deflect responsibility from perpetrators are characterised by: minimising perpetrators' actions and distancing attitudes to abuse; blaming mothers; and 'othering' perpetrators in some way. Discourses that deflect responsibility from institutions are characterised by similar themes of minimising either an institution's space to intervene or the sexual abuse itself.
- **Discourses of denial:** These discourses serve to deny either the harm caused by child sexual abuse or the extent of the abuse. Denying that child sexual abuse is harmful positions it as consensual or minimises its harmful impacts. Denial of extent of harm shares a common thread that abuse has been exaggerated or fabricated.
- **Discourses of disbelief:** These are discourses that outright refuse to accept that child sexual abuse has occurred. There were fewer of these discourses compared to the other two but tendencies to disbelieve allegations of child sexual abuse remained a constant thread throughout the period under review.

Counter discourses were expressed by those at the margins of social and political power and challenge dominant views. These could be split into two overarching categories, drawn together by how they prioritise the voices of victims and survivors:

- **Discourses of power:** These discourses challenged dominant understandings and explanations of child sexual abuse by exploring the role of power and status in sexual abuse.
- **Discourses of belief:** These discourses started from the position of belief in the existence of child sexual abuse and the harm it could cause to victims and survivors. They attempted to create a climate of support and recognition for those who had experienced child sexual abuse by allowing space to speak for those who had been marginalised or silenced.

Figure 2: A conceptual model of discourses about child sexual abuse in England and Wales



The identification of these five broad, overlapping categories of discourse led to the development of a conceptual model in which a range of more specific discourses could be organised. Thirty-one dominant and six counter discourses were identified and structured using this model. This is illustrated in Figure 2 opposite.

As this report shows, discourses are rarely static and unchanging. Many shape shifted over time as they were influenced by and intersected with other discourses, and as they were used by institutions in defence of current or previous decision-making. Some were influential at certain points but went dormant only to re-emerge in an altered form, while others persisted, albeit that their salience rose and fell.

Counter discourses can gain more traction in so far as sets of ideas which were at one point marginal and only held by specific groups in society could become more widely accepted, acknowledged and even adopted. Examples of aspects counter discourses which have gained traction and dominance (albeit not universal acceptance) over time in England and Wales included:

- the view that child sexual abuse existed and was a crime, as a result of which victims and survivors of that crime existed (see for example, Alcoff and Gray, 1993); and (linked to this)
- that child sexual abuse caused harm to victims and survivors (see for example, O'Dell, 2003).

Dominant discourses

Discourses of deflection

Deflection from perpetrators

1940s – 1960s

The view that child sexual abuse was not widespread (here labelled as a discourse called 'rare and unusual') led to a limited recognition by professionals that abuse was taking place (see, Nelson, 2016; Scott, 2001a; Dominelli, 1989; Eisenberg, Owens and Dewey, 1987). There was also a perception that child sexual abuse happened within certain groups, such as lower social classes, and a failure to recognise how widespread it was across all social groups (here labelled as the 'blaming 'culture'' discourse). This was one of the discourses that positioned perpetrators of child sexual abuse as 'other'. This persisted until the 1970s (Nelson, 2016; Dominelli, 1989; Kelly, 1988; Lukianowicz, 1972). The idea that 'perpetrators are weak' and not in control of their actions was another prominent discourse at the time (see, Smart, 1999).

1970s – 1990s

The idea that child sexual abuse could be attributed to problems within individual families caused in some way by the mother (labelled here as 'mother blame' discourses) was salient during the 1970s to 1990s. Specific discourses of 'family dysfunction', 'collusive mother', and 'failure to protect' influenced the way professionals dealt with child sexual abuse (see for example, Hooper and Humphreys, 1998; Kelly, 1988; MacLeod and Saraga, 1988). It was also suggested in the literature that such views influenced government policy, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Views about gender roles within the family have also determined how child sexual abuse was perceived. Expectations around the mother's role in keeping her children safe have fed into the view that mothers of children who had been sexually abused were responsible for the abuse and somehow 'colluded' in it or 'failed to protect' their children (see for example, Nelson, 2016; Kelly, 1988). These expectations were also evident in the ways mothers were represented within the serious case review sample, implying they persist up to the present day.

As in earlier decades, the idea of perpetrators as ‘other’ and somehow different and separate from the rest of society, persisted. This was particularly evident with the use of the term ‘paedophile’. This term came from medical descriptions of people who displayed sexual attraction to prepubescent children, but was increasingly used in the media to describe all perpetrators of child sexual abuse, particularly those outside of the family. The term was used to emphasise the difference between perpetrators and ‘normal’ members of society (Salter, 2018; Cowburn and Dominelli, 2001; Wyre, 2000).

The ‘cycle of abuse’ theory – a discourse suggesting that experiencing sexual abuse in childhood led people to perpetrate abuse – was particularly popular amongst professionals and in policy in the 1980s and 1990s, despite a lack of clear evidence to support it. This was evident in professional and policy literature which cited past abuse as a risk factor for becoming a perpetrator and which used past abuse as an explanation for a perpetrator’s actions (see, Kelly et al., 2000; Brogi and Bagley, 1998).

2000s – 2010s

A range of discourses that deflected from perpetrators were prominent in the 2000s. ‘Blaming “culture”’, for example, attributed blame to specific communities through a focus on their race and cultural or ethnic group. This served as another way in which perpetrators were seen as not part of ‘normal’ society. This was evident, for example, in the recent focus on race in public debate on child sexual exploitation, and, specifically, the attention given to cases of child sexual exploitation involving South Asian male perpetrators and White victims, with no comparable coverage given to White perpetrators and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic victims and survivors (see, Gill and Harrison, 2015; Tufail, 2015; Cockbain, 2013).

More recently, perpetrators were constructed as vulnerable (here labelled as the ‘perpetrators as vulnerable’ discourse), particularly in relation to children and young people who sexually abused. However, it was applied inconsistently, with children who sexually offended described as vulnerable and in need of support but often treated in the same way as adult sex offenders (Smith et al., 2014).

Overlapping with representations of perpetrators as weak or vulnerable was the idea that perpetrators abused children because there was something ‘wrong’ with them which drove them to offend (for example Groth et al., 1982, cited in Taylor and Quayle, 2003). These types of ideas ranged from the popular clinical notion of ‘cognitive deficits’ (where perpetrators were seen to have distorted beliefs about children) to sexuality and problematic social behaviour. There were also publicly held attitudes that perpetrators had ‘perverted minds’ or moral deficits (Frameworks Institute, 2016).

The idea of ‘stranger danger’ – that perpetrators of child sexual abuse existed outside of the home and family environment – strongly influenced public attitudes and responses to child sexual abuse (Williams and Hudson, 2013; Jewkes, 2010; Kitlinger, 2004). An example of this was the public support for sex offender notification schemes and the emphasis on external controls and vetting of individuals who would have contact with children as a way of preventing child sexual abuse (for example McAlinden, 2006). This way of thinking again emphasised the idea of a difference between perpetrators and the rest of society and may have led to child sexual abuse within the family being overlooked. The current media focus on online ‘paedophiles’ could be seen as a variant of this (Jewkes and Wykes, 2012).

Some reviews and inquiries which looked at non-recent child sexual abuse have located abuse in a past social or historical context and made a clear distinction between this ‘different time’ and the present day (Furedi, 2013; Gray and Watt, 2013). The implication was that these attitudes and behaviours were confined to the past, and were not a problem in the present. Institutions have been criticised for using this narrative to justify actions taken in the past and to avoid accountability (Jay, 2014).

Deflection from institutions

2000s – 2010s

In addition to the discourses that deflected attention from perpetrators, there was also a range of discourses that deflected responsibility from institutions in the 2000s. These discourses are labelled here as ‘a few bad apples’, ‘institution as victim’, ‘gold diggers’, ‘making children and/or parents responsible’, and ‘family as a protected space.’

One approach to understanding child sexual abuse in relation to institutions was the idea that it was a problem of ‘a few bad apples’, or a small and distinct group of individuals who could be isolated and kept out of institutions through risk assessment and vetting processes (Hartill, 2013). This placed emphasis on the limitations and actions of individual perpetrators rather than the institutional context within which they offended (Stanley, 1999). It has been argued that this approach has been evident in the response of institutions like the Catholic Church to allegations and incidents of child sexual abuse and has also driven policies that focus on the treatment of individual offenders and the selection and recruitment of staff (Death, 2015; Sullivan and Beech, 2002).

Another discourse labelled here as ‘institutions as victims’ looked at a narrative in which the institutions positioned themselves as the victims of perpetrators who had abused children within that context (Gilligan, 2012), or victims of unjust accusations of abuse resulting from over-zealous investigations. Another discourse (labelled here as ‘gold diggers’) suggested that some victims would make allegations of abuse for (in the view of this discourse) financial gain (see for example, Webster, 2005).

Another way in which responsibility for child sexual abuse had been deflected from institutions was through a focus on the role of parents and children in keeping themselves safe (labelled here as ‘making parents/children responsible’). Awareness raising programmes for parents and children could (usually inadvertently) reinforce this (Frameworks Institute, 2016). Views on the relationship between the family and the state more generally also influenced how child sexual abuse had been understood and responded to, with the belief that families were a protected space that should be free from state interventions (labelled here as the ‘family as a protected space’ discourse) (Ward and Patel, 2006; Fox Harding, 1991).

Overlaps of deflection and denial

1940s – 1960s

The discourse of ‘the seductive child’ – the idea that children had an innate sexuality and might therefore seek out sexual activities – was evident during this period. This idea deflected responsibility from the actions of the perpetrator to the behaviour of the child and, at the same time, denied the harm done to children by sexual abuse by depicting them as the initiators of it (Olafson, Corwin and Summit, 1993; Kelly, 1988).

1970s – 1990s

This period saw a continuation of similar ideas to the ‘seductive child’ with discourses of ‘children as sexual beings’ and ‘promiscuous girls’.

The idea of children as sexual beings affected the way people thought about child sexual abuse (Green and Masson, 2002; Ward and Keenan, 1999; Campbell, 1988). In this discourse, it was not suggested that children sought out sexual activity but instead that they had an innate sexuality and might therefore respond to sexual advances from adults. This perceived sexuality of children has been characterised as threatening and helped to generate professional anxiety about being exposed to expressions of sexuality by children, sometimes leading to a lack of intervention (Green 2005; Farmer and Pollock, 2003). Girls

in particular were also seen as behaving 'promiscuously' and putting themselves at risk of abuse through their own behaviour, which detracted the focus from the perpetrators of abuse and denied the harm caused by it (Gohir, 2013; Ayre and Barrett, 2000). This was evident in the way sexual exploitation of girls was described as 'child prostitution' and girls described as 'risk taking' (for example, Berelowitz et al., 2012).

2000s – 2010s

In the 2000s, some explained the sexual exploitation of children by what was interpreted as children's own 'choices'. For example, the idea that children willingly engaged in sexual acts in exchange for payment or reward (Pearce, 2014, 2013). However, these children might have been making decisions in coercive contexts in which their agency and power to make decisions was limited (Pearce, 2014; Coy, 2009; Melrose, 2004). This affected professionals' identification and response to child sexual exploitation (Gillespie and Ost, 2016; Reisel, 2016) and serious case reviews highlighted how children were seen as consenting to sexual activity rather than victims of abuse in need of support or intervention – this discourse is therefore labelled here as 'condoning consent'.

1940s – 2010s

In contrast to this, throughout this period as a whole, children were also viewed as inherently innocent, and the ideal version of this required children to be asexual and unknowing and therefore unlikely to engage in sexual encounters (Green, 2005; Ennew, 1986). This way of thinking – here labelled as the 'childhood innocence' discourse – on the one hand, highlighted the fragility and vulnerability of children. On the other hand, some have argued that it compounded their powerlessness and dependency (Dominelli, 1989). The value attached to the innocence of children arguably also stigmatised those children whose innocence was perceived to be lost (Scott, 2001a), and prevented professionals from engaging with children as sexual beings and therefore addressing issues of sexual abuse and exploitation (Hackett et al., 2015; Green, 2005).

Discourses of denial

Denial of harm

1940s – 1960s

Discourses that child sexual abuse was 'not that harmful' (the idea that sex between adults and children did not lead to long-lasting harm) and that 'intervention is worse' (the idea that involving professionals and possibly removing a child from their family network was more negative than living with ongoing sexual abuse) appeared to be particularly dominant at this time. The harm done to children was also seen as lessened when abuse took place within 'a loving family environment' (Nava, 1988). Ideas about levels of harm were gendered. For example, the abuse of boys by male perpetrators was viewed as more harmful than the abuse of girls by males due to the former being perceived as homosexual activity and therefore categorised as less 'normal' (Green, 2005). This also linked to the idea that the harm caused in cases of child sexual abuse was a result of the response to the abuse rather than the abuse itself (see for example, Kinsey et al., 1953 cited in Kelly, 1988 and West, 1981).

1970s – 1990s

The idea of 'paedophile as a sexual orientation' gained traction at this time, particularly in the earlier decades. This was the idea that paedophilia, or more specifically, the attraction of some men to boys and adolescents, should be recognised as a legitimate sexual orientation. This was espoused by a number of individuals and groups, including the Paedophile Information Exchange (PIE) in the UK (Li, 1991; Thorstad, 1991). This idea had been linked to the sexual liberation movement, despite a distancing

between the two in the 1980s. Clinical literature saw homosexuality and paedophilia as associated forms of sexual deviance (Malón, 2012) and media and political discourses also associated, and even conflated, homosexuality and paedophilia at times (Robinson, 2011).

2000s – 2010s

The idea that child sexual abuse was ‘not that harmful’ resurfaced more recently in relation to Images Depicting Child Sexual Abuse (IDCSA) (Horsman, 2016). The use of the term ‘child pornography’ was recognised as problematic because of associations with consensual sexual activity (Edwards, 2000). The way cases of IDCSA were dealt with in law and the limited application of legal sanctions was also characterised as indicative of ambivalent views about the harm caused by them (McManus and Almond, 2014; Edwards, 2000).

Denial of extent

1970s – 1990s

Within the broader discourse of denial of the extent of child sexual abuse, discourses of ‘over-zealous professionals’, ‘moral panic’, and ‘witch hunt’ appeared to be salient during the 1970s to the 1990s. The extent of child sexual abuse was contested through the idea that ‘over-zealous’ professionals pressured or encouraged children to disclose sexual abuse, believed exaggerated claims of abuse, or intervened too readily (Taylor-Browne 1997a; Cream, 1993). Terms such as ‘moral panic’ and ‘witch hunt’ used in relation to child sexual abuse drew on a similar narrative. The former term described perceived disproportionate or irrational responses to social threats such as child sexual abuse, and thereby minimised the scale of the problem (Clapton, Cree and Smith, 2013; Critcher, 2002). The term ‘witch hunt’ also denied the scale of child sexual abuse by suggesting that allegations of child sexual abuse were false and driven by a desire to damage an individual or institution (see for example, Webster, 2005).

Overlaps of denial and disbelief

1970s – 1990s

In the 1990s the concept of ‘False Memory Syndrome’ emerged, where individual reports or disclosures of child sexual abuse were viewed as the result of false memories of abuse (Scott 1997). This could be seen as a discourse of denial (as the clinical explanation of the ‘false memory syndrome’ might have been used to minimise the scale of child sexual abuse) and of disbelief (as it might have been used to undermine the credibility of victims and survivors). It was seen as having an influence in the legal arena (Nelson 2016).

2000s – 2010s

The discourse of ‘masculinity as incompatible with victimisation’ emerged most notably in the 2000s. It was consistently identified in the literature by victims and survivors and professionals as a barrier to the recognition of exploitation of boys (for example, Beckett et al., 2013; Gohir, 2013) and was evident in some serious case reviews. The idea that masculinity was incompatible with victimisation could be traced from the association of masculinity with sexual prowess and stereotypes of men as strong (McNaughton Nicholls, Harvey and Paskell, 2014).

Discourses of disbelief

Whilst some sources in the literature described an overriding culture of believing children ‘at all costs’ (Beckett, 2002), there was also evidence that this was not always the case. The ‘children lie’ discourse showed that children have been represented as capable of, or even likely to, make false allegations of abuse (Nelson 2016). This belief was implied by professionals working with children who were reluctant to suspect a colleague of perpetrating child sexual abuse (Horwath, 2000, cited in Timmerman and Schreuder, 2014, p.719) and, historically could be seen in legal attitudes to children as witnesses (Temkin, 2002). The theory of ‘Parental Alienation’ which originated in the US in the 1980s and which exerted some influence amongst legal and child protection professionals, suggested that children were subject to ‘brainwashing’ by one parent who induced them to make false allegations of abuse against the other (Nelson 2016). The idea that children lied about sexual abuse featured in many of the serious case reviews in the sample, with this disbelief leading to a lack of professional action or intervention. In several of the serious case reviews, children also appeared to be caught in a ‘telling trap’ in that when they did not disclose abuse this was taken as evidence that abuse was not occurring, but when they did they were disbelieved.

Counter discourses

The counter discourses revolved around power relations and belief, recognition and support for victims and survivors. Both originated in feminist and survivor movements and operated to counteract dominant discourses around deflection, denial and disbelief.

Discourses of power

The discourses of power challenged dominant understandings and explanations of child sexual abuse by exploring the role of power and status in relation to who did what to whom.

1970s – 1990s

The discourse of ‘crime of dominion’ described abuse in which a person in a dominant, powerful or privileged position (for example, a father, a priest or a sports coach) took advantage of a victim who was less powerful and privileged in terms of their age, sex, race or class. There were a range of factors that could reinforce a sense of adult power over children. These factors included ideas about children’s natural vulnerability, which could facilitate the entrapment of children in abusive situations (Nelson, 2016; Campbell, 2015; Gallagher, 2000; Cream 1993).

The ‘constructions of masculinities’ discourse recognised the role of gender in structuring power relations. Feminists have critiqued dominant explanations of child sexual abuse that used stereotypical definitions of masculinity in which an innate ‘male sexual drive’ or an ‘uncontrollable sexuality’ was used to explain why men perpetrated sexual violence which rendered them less blameworthy (Barter, 2006; Green, 2005; Dominelli, 1989; MacLeod and Saraga, 1988). Related to this was the identification of a ‘macho’ leadership environment in many institutional regimes that created a culture in which sexualised bullying became normalised (Colton 2002; Waterhouse, 2000; Stanley, 1999).

2000s – 2010s

In the 2000s, the discourse of ‘conducive context’ challenged the view that children were sexually abused by ‘a few bad apples’. Instead it looked at the structures of and opportunities within institutions that created a conducive environment for sexual abuse to take place. This discourse rejected the idea that child sexual abuse could be stopped by excluding and warding against individual ‘sick’ or ‘wrong’ paedophiles. Instead it focused on the need for institutions including nurseries, schools, children’s homes and churches, to address that there were ‘closed worlds’ with ‘zones of impunity’ in which a ‘culture of

silence and authoritarianism' existed (Salter, 2018; Hartill, 2013; Dale and Alpert, 2007; Colton, 2002; Waterhouse, 2000; Herman and Hirschman, 1977).

Overlaps of power and belief

1970s – 1990s

Discourses of power and belief had in common the desire to champion 'children's voices', which was another counter discourse that was identified. This discourse emerged as particularly salient during the 1970s to 1990s and highlighted that children were often not heard because of the power differential between adults and children. It emphasised that children's structural dependency required a clear commitment from adults and institutions to listen to children and to treat them as subjects of their own lives, not as objects of concern. A number of more recent national and international policies and guidance better reflect the idea that children's voices must be heard on decisions that affect them (HM Government, 2015b; House of Bishops, 2011; Association of Chief Police Officers, 2005; Child Protection in Sport Unit, 2005; HM Government, 2004; Butler-Sloss, 1988).

Discourses of belief

The discourses of belief created a climate of support and recognition for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and positioned them as wise experts whose lived experiences were a source of knowledge.

1970s – 1990s

One of the counter discourses evident in the 1970s to 1990s was 'space to speak', which looked at the dynamics that created or limited spaces for victims and survivors to speak about child sexual abuse and to be heard and recognised by institutions (Exton and Kamaljit, 2013; Whittier, 2009; Naples, 2003; Alcoff and Gray, 1993). These spaces could open up when a 'time of telling' converged with a 'sphere of listening' (Carlsson, 2009) and often revolved around themes, such as silence, trauma and transformation. For boys, barriers to speaking were linked to fear of homophobia (Hunter, 2010).

Another counter discourse in this period was around 'harm, trauma, and damage' and looked at how victims and survivors of child sexual abuse could focus on individual recovery and healing. It looked critically at 'breaking the silence' as a way to address harm, trauma and damage caused by child sexual abuse because, while speaking out could be liberatory, it could also reinforce dominant discourses. For example when victims and survivors were invited to speak on television for 'shock value' instead of being positioned as subjects of their own lives with their own authority (Naples, 2003; Alcoff and Gray, 1993). The recognition of the impacts of harm, trauma and damage was challenged by the idea of 'victimhood' that sought to reposition victims of child sexual abuse as helpless, powerless and dependent by suggesting that they embraced, or revelled in, a 'victim identity' (Whittier, 2009). This is an example of what Nelson (2016) has described as 'backlash'.

Conclusions

The aim of this REA was to explore what the existing literature could tell us about the social and political discourses concerning child sexual abuse in England and Wales from the 1940s to 2017. A total of 31 dominant discourses and six counter discourses between the 1940s and 2017 were identified from the literature reviewed. The dominant discourses could be categorised as discourses of deflection (from perpetrators and institutions), denial (of harm and extent) and disbelief. The counter discourses comprised discourses of power and belief. This made for a complex picture of how child sexual abuse was recognised, made sense of and responded to over time. It also showed that there has not been an agreed, uniform definition, explanation or theory of child sexual abuse over these decades.

These discourses have not existed in isolation from each other, and they have been influenced by emerging knowledge and developing policy and practice. New insights in one area have often been (not always, and not systematically) picked up in other areas, leading to contradictions in how child sexual abuse has been recognised, made sense of and responded to. The discourse around ‘children’s voices’, for example, highlighted the need for children to be heard and for children to be treated as subjects on their own lives, not an object of concern. This is now embedded in a range of national and international policies and guidance, as well as in the work of many charities. However, a tension has remained between children as objects of protection and children as social actors with voices and rights.

The second aim of this REA was to explore in which ways these discourses have influenced institutional responses to child sexual abuse. This was a much more challenging question and one which could not be fully answered through the literature reviewed.

There have been some watershed moments and events which have radically changed how child sexual abuse is talked about and understood and have led to lasting legal, policy and social developments, most notably the Cleveland Inquiry of 1987. At times, rapid progress has been achieved in a relatively short time, but this has typically been in reaction to high-profile events (Parton, 2016; Davidson, 2008). This is often the case when a ‘time of telling’ (dynamics in society which create spaces in which it is possible to speak about child sexual abuse) converges with a ‘sphere of listening’ (when it is more likely to be heard by institutions and people in a position of power) (Carlsson, 2009).

Key findings regarding the influence of discourses about child sexual abuse on institutional responses in this period included:

- Institutions responding to claims of child sexual abuse within familial contexts have obscured the actions of perpetrators by focusing on the family as a whole, and using various versions of mother blame.
- The ‘crime of dominion’ discourse was clearest in relation to sport and the Catholic Church and, to an extent also residential care settings, where the role of authority within the institution – such as coach or priest – provided additional power and resources to perpetrators.
- The policy outcome of seeing perpetrators as ‘a few bad apples’, particularly in the late 1990s and 2000s, was focused on risk, recruitment and criminal records screening as the safeguarding response, rather than examining how internal cultures might have been implicated in making sexual abuse possible and in the failure to respond appropriately to complaints and concerns.
- ‘Children lie’ has been an enduring discourse in legal responses.
- A variety of discourses of belief have emerged since the 1980s which made it easier for victims and survivors to speak about their experiences, although some barriers remained.

The findings of this REA threw up a number of questions which could be further examined, including how different discourses have influenced the responses of specific institutions to child sexual abuse over time; how specific institutions or professions understood (or should have understood) child sexual abuse in particular moments in time, and how influential discourses were in this process.



SECTION A – Background

1 Introduction

There is an extensive and diverse body of literature on child sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation and child protection. This work was commissioned to assist the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA or 'the Inquiry') in understanding how evolving discourses, norms, and attitudes around childhood, child sexuality and child sexual abuse may have shaped responses to this abuse by institutions in different ways over time.

The overarching research question for this REA was:

'What can the existing evidence tell us about the social and political discourses concerning child sexual abuse in England and Wales from the 1940s to 2017, and the ways in which those discourses may have influenced institutional responses to such abuse?'

The review sought to address the following specific research questions, which focused particularly on shifts in discourses and language over time, what the catalysts or key points of change have been, and whether any variations by institution are evident:

1. What have been the dominant discourses around childhood sexuality, child sexual abuse and child protection since the 1940s, and how have they changed over time?
2. How have these discourses differed depending on the characteristics and circumstances of the children under discussion?
3. In what ways has the language used to talk about child sexual abuse changed over time? How has the changing language reflected changing understandings and definitions?
4. In what ways have the discourse and language around child sexual abuse varied by the type of institution or organisation producing it (e.g. the media, government and parliament, social campaigners, criminal justice officials, social and health services and other professionals)?
5. What have the key points of change been in the discourses and terminology used and who or what catalysed those changes (e.g. reports, investigations and highly publicised child protection failures)?
6. In what ways have the different discourses influenced the child protection practice of the various institutions of interest to the Inquiry, including their views on what constitutes good practice?

In addition, the Inquiry highlighted some key areas of interest to take account of when assessing the literature, including: discourses relating to children from different socio-demographic groups; young perpetrators of sexual abuse; the role of children's sense of 'agency' in child sexual abuse and exploitation; and the impact of the internet on ideas about child sexual abuse.

Defining discourses

Discourses can be defined as 'clusters' of ideas that provide ways of talking about issues (Hall, 1997). The literature reviewed here used the term 'discourse' in a variety of ways, with some sources reflecting different theoretical approaches and others attaching a wider meaning of ideas or ways of talking about child sexual abuse. In this REA, the term 'discourses' was therefore interpreted broadly, and synonyms like 'narrative', 'representation', 'construction' and 'understanding' were included in the searches.

Many theorists emphasise the relationship between knowledge, discourses and power, and describe how certain discourses become accepted 'truths'. These truths shape how we define and organise

ourselves and others and sustain particular power relations in society (Foucault, 1980, 1972). These are often taken for granted and are sometimes referred to as ‘dominant’ discourses (van Dijk, 2008). Other discourses are marginalised and stigmatised, and considered in some arenas to be wrong or extreme. These marginalised discourses are often called ‘counter’ discourses (Alcoff and Gray, 1993), as they seek to challenge dominant understandings, and can be seen as a form of resistance on the part of those with less power or voice. The analysis presented in this report chimes with this, as both dominant and counter discourses relating to child sexual abuse were identified in the literature.

According to Alcoff and Gray, discourses are: ‘[not] what is and what is not false, but what can have a truth-value’ (1993, p.265). Discussions of child sexual abuse have often centred on whether the accounts of victims and survivors or their advocates are true or false. Reavey and Warner (2003) highlight connections between discourses and power to argue that discourses, which they define as ‘ways of speaking’, produce particular versions of child sexual abuse that reproduce social hierarchies (Reavey and Warner, 2003, p.2). In their view, discourses are built on assumptions about sex, gender and childhood that are used to maintain dominant ideas about child sexual abuse (Reavey and Warner, 2003).

It is important to look at which discourses have dominated ways of speaking about child sexual abuse over time because the language used to describe this abuse and the way it is defined has practical impacts on who is believed or seen as a ‘legitimate’ victim and survivor, how victims and survivors are treated and whether sexual abuse is seen as harmful.

‘Child sexual abuse debates have been wars of words. The winners of these arguments have influenced both child protection policy, and wider attitudes to the credibility of children and adult survivors of [child sexual abuse]’ (Nelson, 2016, p.60).

Discourses are ‘associated with a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society’ (Hall, 1997, p.6), so the discourses about child sexual abuse within institutions can be seen as key to how they have responded. Smart (2000) describes these institutional contexts as ‘discursive fields’, in which ideas about different meanings of childhood and child sexual abuse are contested, for example medical, legal, and political, so one can speak of ‘medical discourse’, ‘legal discourse’ and so on.

What is said, known and understood about child sexual abuse has transformed over the period covered in this REA – from the 1940s to 2017. As Whittier argues, ‘Nearly everything about cultural and political responses to child sexual abuse has changed, sometimes more than once, since 1970’ (2009, p.4). This adds multiple layers to the analysis presented here, particularly with reference to how the reach of specific discourses has expanded and shrunk over time and in different institutional contexts.

It is important to be clear that this report sets out to identify and synthesise the existing evidence base on discourses about child sexual abuse within the parameters of a rapid evidence assessment, and provide a thematic analysis of the literature reviewed. The agreed search terms for identifying literature were such that much of the literature reviewed was about discourses. The report was not intended to be a discourse analysis in and of itself, but rather a description and analysis of the literature reviewed, and an exploration of whether links can be made with the institutional responses documented in certain types of official documents, such as inquiry reports, guidance and legislation. Discourse analysis is a field of inquiry that has been applied to multiple disciplines (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). There are defined methodological approaches used in each field, particularly applied linguistics. In this REA, we have drawn broadly on elements of discourse theory (Fairclough, 2010; van Dijk, 1997; Foucault, 1972), to highlight the role of power and social relations in the operation of the discourses identified in the period under examination.

Defining institutional responses

Institutions of relevance to this REA include a range of public, private and third sector organisations such as central government, Local Authorities, public and private educational establishments, the Police and other elements of the Criminal Justice System, as well as the media. ‘Institutional responses’ are defined here as responses to child sexual abuse committed by staff (and/or other residents) within institutions or by individuals in other contexts. This includes their treatment of victims and survivors, as well as perpetrators, and their formulation of child protection and safeguarding policies that relate to child sexual abuse. All of these elements are relevant to our analysis of how discourses have influenced institutional responses. This review did not set out to provide an in-depth account of the responses of each relevant institution to child sexual abuse from the 1940s to 2017, but it was deemed necessary to locate the discourses identified within their social and political context.

While the family as a social institution is outside the Inquiry’s scope, it does feature in this report in relation to institutional failure, for example, where experiences of child sexual abuse by a family member were known and not responded to appropriately by those in authority with a duty of care to protect. The family also recurs as a core theme in a number of the dominant discourses identified in the review, especially those from the 1970s and 1980s when the family or ‘family environment’ (Horvath et al., 2014) was the most recognised context for child sexual abuse. Moreover it is a reference point in the work on abuse in the Catholic Church (Pilgrim, 2011) and in sport (Hartill, 2013; Brackenridge, 2001), where these environments are sometimes likened to family structures. Children’s homes have also been described as akin to a family (Cowburn and Dominelli, 2001). Notions of family can carry underlying assumptions of a safe and protected space, which has relevance to a number of institutions the Inquiry is concerned with. This raises critical questions about forms of authority and power where relationships of trust can be exploited. The ways in which institutions view, respond to and have similar dynamics to families is therefore of particular relevance.

There is no simple connection, and certainly no clear causal relationship, between discourses and institutional and professional responses to child sexual abuse. Nevertheless, Freeman and Maybin argue that the study of documents is vital if we are to understand the policy and practice of government and public authorities as ‘the practices of government become formal or official to the extent that they are documented’ (2011, p.156). In their analysis, while policy researchers understand such documents as reflecting official proposals, commitments, ideology or ‘thinking’ on an issue, they are also ‘vehicles of discourse’, which ‘express and reproduce norms and patterns of thought set by relations of power between social, political and economic actors (Freeman and Maybin, 2011, p.160). This can be likened to what Bingham and colleagues describe as the ‘textual traces’ or ‘moments of visibility’ that documentary sources provide, which allow us to ‘construct an archaeology of the past’ (2016, p.412). In this REA, the documents used for this purpose include reports from inquiries into child sexual abuse, as well as other institutional texts such as policy and guidance documents, and serious case review reports. These different sources are discussed in Chapter 2.

The structure of the report

The report is structured in the following way:

- Chapter 2 outlines the method used to undertake this review.
- Chapter 3 explores how definitions, discourses and institutional and policy responses have evolved.
- Chapter 4 introduces the conceptual model that has been developed to frame and explain the discourses that have emerged.

- Chapters 5 and 6 explore the dominant and counter discourses respectively in more detail, referring to shifts over time as relevant.
- Chapter 7 draws the findings together into a brief summary and conclusion.

2 Methodology

A REA is an accepted approach to identifying and appraising the existing evidence on a topic, and is increasingly used in policy arenas where there is a large breadth of literature. It employs robust, systematic methods, but without some of the constraints of a full systematic review because of the reduced time or resources within which it is conducted.

In this REA, a 'question-led' approach was adopted (Government Social Research Unit, 2008). In this type of approach, there is an overarching research question to be investigated, which is key in driving all aspects of the REA process, such as setting search terms and parameters (Government Social Research Unit, 2008). However, the question this REA focused on was not as straightforward as one that looks at impact questions (what works on a given topic), which REA methods are most developed for (Government Social Research Unit, 2008), since it necessitated both isolating key discourses and the relationship between them and institutional responses. Understanding the influence of particular discourses on institutional responses to child sexual abuse is complex and as such involved multiple stages:

1. The identification and analysis of (primarily academic) secondary literature that explored discourses about child sexual abuse and institutional responses to child sexual abuse. The aim of these searches was to identify discourses at play within certain time periods and explore the ways in which they may have influenced institutional practice.
2. The analysis of a sample of additional original documents including serious case reviews and national or institutional inquiry reports and guidance to further assess the influence of key discourses on policy and practice.

The method adopted is summarised below. Further details are set out in Appendices A to C.

More of the literature reviewed here focuses on sexual abuse of girls than of boys. While the literature searches aimed to identify material relating to both sexes, and included the terms 'boy', 'girl' and 'child' (see Appendix A), this reflects the empirical evidence base; girls are disproportionately victims and survivors of sexual abuse (Kelly and Karsna, 2017; Office for National Statistics, 2016; Radford et al., 2011). Some of the literature reviewed does not analyse sex and gender, and some specifically explores the significance of social constructions of masculinities in relation to sexual abuse and exploitation. Given that girls are disproportionately more likely to be victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, and men and boys are disproportionately more likely to be perpetrators, it is important to investigate this asymmetry. Although there were a few papers that explored the complexities of gender and dominant discourses in relation to boys and men as victims and survivors, they were small in number overall and were primarily empirical. Research on female perpetrators was also less common and overwhelmingly empirical without reference to discourses, so not all were included in the final pool of texts.

Expert survey

At the start of the project, experts in the field from a range of disciplines were consulted through an online survey. The aim of this was to inform the search strategy under development, highlight key discourses and literature, and provide a form of triangulation with the results of the literature searches. Participants were asked to identify key discourses in each of the decades under study, which institutions and professions were particularly influenced by them, and state how these ways of thinking about child sexual abuse originated and spread. There were 13 responses from the 49 experts contacted. The responses were not used directly as data, but primarily as a reference point for identifying key literature and discourses.

Search strategy

The objective was to identify high-quality literature on social and political discourses about child sexual abuse. In light of the broad time period focused on and the scope of the REA, as well as the restricted time available for the review, a number of published overviews on the subject were accessed initially (e.g. Nelson, 2016; Whittier, 2009; Kitzinger, 2004; Scott, 2001a; Kelly, 1988). Search strings denoting child sexual abuse, discourses and relevant institutions were used on a range of academic, scientific and practice-oriented databases (see Appendix A for details of search strings and databases consulted).

A two-stage screening process was undertaken, leading to the inclusion of 237 texts in the REA. Full details are provided in Appendix A.

Quality assessment, data extraction and analysis

A member of the research team reviewed, quality assessed and graded each text included in the REA before extracting key data (details of this process can be found in Appendix B).

A template was developed for the extraction of data from the reviewed literature, which included information about the type of source, its focus, time period of focus, aims, findings and details of the main discourses and institutions discussed. Data extraction tools were adapted for the serious case reviews and institutional texts (see below) to reflect the different nature of these sources (see all data extraction templates in Appendix B).

Part of the data extraction focused on which discourses could be identified in the sources reviewed and how they were used in the texts. The full list of discourses was finalised when consensus about inclusion was reached between the review team members. Analytic work was then conducted to organise the discourses thematically and over time, which led to the development of a conceptual model about the function of the discourses identified and a map of when they were most evident (see further details in Chapter 4 and Appendix B).

There is no precise way to map how discourses have influenced institutional practices, especially given the long time period and the wide range of discourses identified. It is difficult to ascertain what individual practitioners, specific groups of professionals or organisations understood about child sexual abuse, what their thinking would have been at particular points in time and the range of influences on this. Much of the 'taken-for-granted' thinking inherent in discourses is not documented, and a literature review can only derive insights from published material, so we were limited to seeking examples in the literature that explored such attitudes and to analysing the documentary evidence of the institutional texts and serious case reviews for examples of their child protection practice and views of good practice.

Initially, sources were analysed to see if they identified relationships between discourses and institutional and professional practice. For some sections of the literature this was more straightforward than others. For example, much literature on child sexual exploitation and harmful sexual behaviour is written with reference to what shapes responses. For other aspects of child sexual abuse, connections between discourses and institutional and professional practice are in the shadows, precisely because of the way in which discourses gain status as common sense 'truths'. Where it has been possible to trace and track influences, this is discussed with reference to each discourse.

It was also difficult to categorise discourses to a discrete time period, such as a decade, as sources did not always report on discourses and institutional practices in this way, and approaches to this were inconsistent across the literature reviewed. In addition, some discourses persist over time, or reappear in a later period in slightly different forms. As a result, following initial analysis, where possible we sought to allocate discourses within three broad time periods: 1940s to 1960s, 1970s to 1990s, and 2000s to 2010s.

Serious case reviews

In 2006, the Local Safeguarding Children Board Regulations set out a requirement for reviews to be undertaken into 'serious cases': where abuse or neglect of a child was known or suspected: and the child was seriously harmed or died, or where there was cause for concern about safeguarding practices. A serious case review should be led by an independent, qualified reviewer, engage with organisations that were involved with the child, and agree action for improvement.

An analysis of serious case review reports was undertaken as another way of seeking to identify the influence of discourses, as they contain examples and discussion of institutional responses (see Appendix C for details of sampling and profile of the reports analysed). A number of the reports included here described the serious case review process as providing a 'window on to the system' (e.g. serious case review (SCR): Claire, Croydon, 2017; SCR: Julia, Thurrock, 2014) by highlighting features of child protection/safeguarding practice that were current at the time of writing. Reports contained combinations of authors' views and descriptions of practice, and it was not always possible to ascertain if discourses originated with authors or from the professionals whose practice they scrutinised. This is discussed with reference to specific discourses, where relevant.

In Reisel's (2016) research with practitioners, she notes that while professionals are often positioned as experts, the discourses they draw on and deploy are rarely analysed. In this report we aimed to draw on and analyse the discourse of professionals but found the level of detail and analysis in their case reviews varied widely. Authors usually covered what they thought was significant to the review process, only rarely explaining professional decision-making, limiting the possibility of being specific about which discourses might influence responses. In most reports, several discourses could be identified, but often only implicitly.

Additional work on national and institutional texts

This analysis was conducted in order to develop a picture of definitions and approaches to child sexual abuse within institutions over the review period and look further at whether examples of discourses on child sexual abuse and exploitation could be traced in institutional policy and practice. Additional analysis was conducted of a selection of institutional texts from England and Wales, consisting mainly of inquiry reports and guidance. It is important to note that the findings of inquiries may not be universally accepted nor their recommendations fully implemented. Similarly, the existence of guidance documents does not guarantee that they are put into practice. The rationale for including them here was that they contain examples of institutional thinking and discussions of practice relating to child sexual abuse at

particular points in time that may be underpinned by dominant discourses on the subject and may also, through their status as 'official' or policy documents, perpetuate such views. Again, in some of these texts, particularly the inquiry reports, it was not always possible to disentangle whether discourses originated with authors or the professionals whose practice they were reflecting upon.

Ethics

The project received ethical approval from the Inquiry's Research Ethics Committee and London Metropolitan University's Ethics Review Panel.

Limitations

This REA focused on a specific question about the social and political discourses about child sexual abuse in the period from the 1940s to 2017 that may have influenced institutional responses. Key developments in institutional policy and practice are highlighted in five key institutional arenas (legal, government policy, social work, clinical and the media) in order to explore changing definitions and understandings of child sexual abuse over the period. However, this REA is not intended to provide a comprehensive account of what was known about child sexual abuse or institutional responses to it, or wider responses to child abuse, throughout the period.

There are a number of key limitations that it is important to consider:

1. It is not possible to draw concrete conclusions about causal relationships between discourses and institutional responses. Systematically tracing the connections between each of the multiple discourses and institutional and professional practice over seven decades is beyond the scope of this review and is complicated by inconsistent approaches or a lack of coverage within the available literature. For some aspects of child sexual abuse, these connections are unclear, precisely because of how some discourses gain status as common sense 'truths'. Where it has been possible to trace and track influences, this is discussed with reference to specific discourses, institutions and time periods.
2. An REA can only capture what has been discussed in the (searchable) literature. There may have been discourses about child sexual abuse in existence, and equally responses in particular institutions, which have not been subject to detailed analysis in the secondary literature, and therefore will not be captured through this review. Literature suggested by the expert survey participants largely overlapped with the results of the systematic searches and snowballing¹. However, it is possible that a longer, more in-depth study may have generated additional relevant material and insights.
3. Some institutions have generated more literature on discourses and child sexual abuse than others. For example, there is far more literature on social work than on health or education, so the discourses raised about social work appear to be most prevalent, but this is partly because there were more items on this subject.
4. There are also challenges relating to language and accessibility. Definitions of child sexual abuse are explored in Chapter 3, and terminology from the 1940s to 2017 has changed considerably. This created methodological concerns when constructing searches and made it necessary to use a range of synonyms (see also Bingham et al., 2016). Our reading and existing subject knowledge informed the terms used, and these were adjusted further following the pilot.

1 This is the process of retrieving references from studies already screened into the review in order to find further literature on the subject.

5. Many materials predating the late 1980s are not publicly available online. Owing to the project time scales, material that was available online was prioritised, although some hard copy materials were included if they were accessible in time.
6. Although the REA sought to obtain high-quality literature on discourses about child sexual abuse, some older literature did not conform to contemporary standards. Some items were included because of their influence in generating key discourses on child sexual abuse rather than their methodological rigour. Strengths and weaknesses of each text reviewed were noted in the quality assessment tool (see Appendix B).



SECTION B – Findings

Section B sets out the findings from our review of the literature. Chapter 3 covers changing language and understandings of child sexual abuse in different institutional contexts. Chapter 4 outlines a model for conceptualising discourses about child sexual abuse over time and their functions. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the dominant and counter discourses relating to child sexual abuse that were identified in the review and assessment of the evidence base.

3 Exploring discourses about child sexual abuse over time

Key findings

- Child sexual abuse occurs in a range of contexts and involves differing relationships between victims and survivors and perpetrators. The way various elements of child sexual abuse are labelled is paramount in determining how the perpetrator, victim and survivor and context of the abuse are presented and responded to.
- Discourses about, understandings of, and responses to child sexual abuse have shifted in a variety of ways over time and are in a continuous state of change and evolution.
- Over the period reviewed here (1940s to 2017), there were key points of change, often catalysed by specific events. A notable example is the Cleveland Inquiry of 1987.
- There are five ‘institutional arenas’ – legal, government policy, clinical, social work and media – where key debates have occurred in relation to child sexual abuse. These debates have had implications for the institutional responses to child sexual abuse.

This REA has found that discourses about and understandings of child sexual abuse have shifted in a variety of ways over time. Several areas emerged from the literature that describe these shifts. Some sources have explored different levels of awareness of, or engagement with, child sexual abuse over time; others have highlighted changing language and definitions; some literature has addressed evolving legal and policy frameworks, or particular sectors like social work or the media at various points in time. Additionally, there is literature that explores particular discourses, some of which focuses on specific time periods. This chapter presents an overview of these developments from the 1940s to 2017.

To look at the role of discourses does not detract from the material reality of child sexual abuse for those who have experienced it or witnessed its impacts. Nor is it to suggest that child sexual abuse is unchanging or immutable. Rather, how child sexual abuse has been recognised, made sense of and responded to, by victims and survivors, perpetrators, institutions, professionals and the wider public, is bound up with these discourses, and their changing emphases over time. As Kelly and Karsna note, the shifts in language and framing for child sexual abuse over recent decades have meant that different forms and contexts of abuse have been recognised, making it possible for ‘survivors to speak and for agencies to listen and hear’ (2017, p.5). The challenge of changing definitions is noted in the Department of Health’s influential publication on the messages arising from research: ‘behaviour becomes abusive as soon as practitioners recognise it as such’ (1995, p.11). This also points to the importance of who is applying these definitions, which is often connected to the authority of their role as institutions or professionals. This REA has therefore sought to take account of the different ways in which child sexual abuse has been defined across the period from the 1940s to 2017 within different institutional arenas.

Naming child sexual abuse

Definitions of child sexual abuse are complicated by the fact that, as Hearn notes, 'child abuse is not a unity' and there is no single explanation or theory of it (1988, p.534; see also Nelson, 2016). Child sexual abuse occurs in a range of contexts and involves differing relationships between victims and survivors and perpetrators. The way various elements of child sexual abuse are labelled is paramount in determining how the perpetrator, victim and survivor and context of the abuse are presented and responded to. For example, the term 'incest' indicates both the identity of the perpetrator and the relationship between victim and perpetrator (Hearn, 1988). It has connotations of breaching moral and criminal codes, and refers only to sexual abuse within a familial context.

An example from the education sector is the way in which sexual abuse involving school teachers has been described as 'sexual misconduct'. Bingham and colleagues (2016) contend that this constitutes a blurring of boundaries between 'immorality' and 'criminality', and between harm to others and reputational damage. An article on the more recent period (Sikes and Piper, 2011) still uses this concept in relation to schools. The term 'misconduct' is also used in one of the serious case review reports where a teacher had a sexual relationship with a pupil (SCR: Child G, East Sussex, 2013). As a result of this framing, the child protection implications were not recognised because 'misconduct' disguises sexual abuse.

Labels may also change depending on the context and historical period in which they are used. The Punishment of Incest Act 1908 outlawed sexual contact between blood relatives, but was directed only at activity between male and female family members (regardless of age). Therefore, while anal rape of a son by his father might commonly have been described as incest, particularly in the earlier decades under review here, in a legal arena this would only have been prosecuted as an offence of indecency between males or as an offence of buggery, following the Sexual Offences Act 1956. This would now be seen as sexual activity with a family member within the framework of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Similarly, whether perpetrators are labelled as 'paedophiles', 'child sex offenders', 'child abusers' or 'child rapists', and how these terms are understood, affects how perpetrators are treated and what, if any, interventions are used. For example, with the term 'child sex offender' sexual activity with a child is conceived as a criminal offence warranting a sanction, and would most likely be used in a criminal justice context. The term 'child abuser' implies a wider range of potential forms of abuse, for example physical abuse. 'Paedophile' originates in a clinical context as a sexual disorder, although understanding of the term is far more elastic than this, as described below.

Shifting understandings of child sexual abuse

A core task for this REA was to trace how child sexual abuse has been understood, and how the concept has changed over time. Many commentators have characterised the period under review here as one of shifting understandings of, and responses to, child sexual abuse and exploitation. One widely cited framework for understanding society's recognition and response to sexual abuse is the American paediatrician, Kempe's (1978) 'stage' model from the 1970s. Following on from Kempe's earlier work on the battered child syndrome in the 1960s, this depicts a process which moves from societal denial through to recognition and acceptance of the existence of various forms of physical, emotional abuse and neglect, and latterly sexual abuse of children. Kelly, Regan and Burton (2000) dispute the reading that there has been a linear, progressive awareness of child abuse since the 1960s beginning with physical abuse and neglect, and with sexual abuse and sexual exploitation identified later. They point out examples of recognition of child sexual abuse and exploitation dating back to the 19th and 20th century. Smart's (2000, 1999) research provides detailed illustrations of this in relation to moral purity and child welfare movements in early 20th century England, while Bingham and colleagues (2016) have conducted

similar historical work (see also Jackson, 2000). Olafson, Corwin and Summit (1993) also report examples from the turn of the 19th century.

Another group of scholars (Bingham et al., 2016; Nelson, 2016; Cooper, 2014; Smart, 2000, 1999; Olafson, Corwin and Summit, 1993) argue that understandings of child sexual abuse as harmful have come about through clashes between different viewpoints about the meaning of adult-child sexual contact. Olafson and colleagues (1993) portray the modern history of awareness of child sexual abuse as 'cycles of discovery and suppression', in which new findings about child sexual abuse are met with significant resistance in different professions and the media.

'[T]he sexual abuse of children has repeatedly surfaced into public and professional awareness in the past century and a half, only to be resuppressed by the negative reaction it elicits' (Olafson, Corwin and Summit, 1993, p.8).

Nelson develops this view using the terms 're-discovery' and 'backlash', describing child sexual abuse as 'strikingly unusual for being repeatedly "discovered", discredited, re-established and discredited over time' (2016, p.91). In addition to a historical resistance against late Victorian feminists, she describes a modern reaction beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which has reappeared since 2012. The 're-discovery', she suggests, was a reaction to 'child-centred changes' in the early 1980s, the feminist movement and professionals from a range of sectors attempting to listen to child and adult victims and survivors, while the 'backlash' has sought to undermine the 'waves of revelations' about high-profile abusers, widespread child sexual exploitation and re-investigation of past allegations centring on politicians and institutions (Nelson, 2016).

Some commentators (Bingham et al., 2016; Smart, 1999) propose that child sexual abuse as the concept we understand today is relatively recent. For example, Bingham and colleagues (2016) locate the beginning of its usage in newspapers in the 1980s, peaking around the time of the Cleveland crisis (see 'UK government policy arena', below). As Smart (1999) argues, this does not mean that there was ignorance or a deliberate silencing of discussions about child sexual abuse, but that there has been an ongoing 'conflict' between different views regarding adult-child sexual contact and the extent to which it has been seen as harmful. These views are rooted in the wider evolving social and political context, as child sexual abuse has been 'discursively constructed across time in relation to shifting ideas about age, sexuality and gender' (Bingham et al., 2016, p.413).

The terms child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation are often used interchangeably in much media (Coy, 2016; Mooney and Ost, 2013). Kelly, Regan and Burton (2000) identified sexual exploitation of children as part of a continuum of child sexual abuse, and cautioned against losing sight of its specific dynamics. Early understandings took sexual exploitation to involve a third party (Ennew, 1986). In current policy, child sexual exploitation is defined as a form of sexual abuse with specific dynamics of some element of exchange and/or gain for perpetrators (Department for Education, 2017). However, as Kelly and Karsna (2017) suggest, there are significant methodological issues involved in identifying some practices as sexual exploitation and others as sexual abuse. For example, sexual abuse can also involve exchange (Kelly and Karsna, 2017); one UK study found that almost half (46 per cent) of the 91 perpetrators of sexual abuse reported using some form of bribe or gift (Elliott, Browne and Kilcoyne, 1995). Conversely some inquiries into sexual exploitation find little evidence of 'reward' and criticise the use of the term child prostitution for implying that payment and reward are always involved (Jay, 2014, p.21). At the heart of this debate is whether or not the separation of sexual exploitation from sexual abuse is a useful distinction.

The shift in language from 'child prostitution' to child sexual exploitation represents a significant change in understanding. Research conducted by and for children's charities began to advocate using the term 'sexual exploitation' in the early 2000s (e.g. Scott and Skidmore, 2006) and a wider spectrum of behaviours to be included within its definition than simply 'prostitution'. The term 'child prostitution' was also criticised for 'disguis[ing] child sexual abuse' (Goddard et al., 2005, p.288). Yet the 'dated language' of child prostitution persists (Jay, 2014; Local Government Association, 2014, p.13). Coffey's (2014) report into sexual exploitation in Greater Manchester was linked to a campaign to remove references to child prostitution from the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Changes in terminology from 'child prostitution' to sexual exploitation were enacted by the Serious Crime Act 2015.

However, Melrose (2013a) argues that the broadening out of sexual exploitation to an 'elastic' concept that can encompass almost any sexual activity of professional concern has created confusion rather than clarity for practitioners. Yet others suggest that naming sexual exploitation as a form of child sexual abuse integrates practice on both issues (Kwhali et al., 2016).

As for Kelly and Karsna (2017), the issue raised here is what is counted as child sexual abuse and exploitation. Goddard and colleagues (2005) ask a conceptual question about whether broadening the meaning of child sexual exploitation narrows understandings of child sexual abuse to intrafamilial incest, leaving sexual abuse in institutions and other contexts in definitional limbo. Perhaps this leads back to Melrose's (2013a) reflections on how practitioners simultaneously endorse and struggle with a broader definition of child sexual exploitation. This inconsistency in the definition and understanding of what constitutes child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation of children means that some discourses relate to both, while others emerge as more relevant to either sexual abuse or sexual exploitation.

Discourses about child sexual abuse within institutional arenas

Discourses may be linked to particular institutional contexts. Discourses circulate both within and across different institutions partly because of the breadth of engagement among different sectors with child sexual abuse. McCartan, Kemshall and Tabachnick (2015) argue that the range of professionals working on the issue of child sexual abuse gives rise to the number of discourses about it, with approaches ranging from therapeutic through to punitive. However, professional discourses can at times reflect personal beliefs and experiences (McCartan, Kemshall and Tabachnick, 2015). Eisenberg and colleagues (1987) also ask whether the attitudes of professionals are based on 'factual knowledge' or 'stereotyping', and argue that this question is important as professionals' attitudes are likely to influence their approach to interventions and decision-making. This is why it is important to explore understandings of child sexual abuse and how they have influenced institutional responses. As Kitzinger (2004) notes:

'Few lives or professions remain untouched by a debate which bridges the public and private, involves questions about sexuality, power and childhood, and touches on key institutions: the family, religion and the state' (Kitzinger, 2004, p.6).

McCartan, Kemshall and Tabachnick argue that the way child sexual abuse is contested has shifted over time:

'[W]ith different discourses, especially the feminist rights and the child protection movements, emerging over the last 50 years and which has reoriented discussions of sexual violence in the social landscape [...] towards 'the frontlines of social and political discourses' (2015, pp.100–101).

They also note that these shifts in discourses are affected by the involvement of wider sections of society in discussions about child sexual abuse, offering examples of the scrutiny of institutions in the aftermath of the revelations about Jimmy Savile.

The 1970s saw feminist responses to various forms of violence against women, including the publication of works on rape and incest and personal accounts of child sexual abuse (Bass and Davis, 1988; Rush, 1980; Armstrong, 1978; Herman and Hirschman, 1977). Feminist writers, scholars and activists played an instrumental role in attempting to raise awareness of the scale of child sexual abuse in the 1970s (Naples, 2003) and provided alternative analyses of power relations that facilitated abuse, but this discourse was always contested, initially by the conservative right who saw it as an attack on the nuclear family. Children's organisations and victims and survivors groups have also challenged the marginalisation of voice in public and policy debates and research. These ideas have been in conflict and, at times, in dialogue with institutional responses to child sexual abuse over the review period.

In her research on the history of child sexual abuse from the 1910s to the 1960s, Smart (2000) discusses four institutional arenas – medical, legal, political and psychoanalytic – that she describes as 'sites' or 'fields' of discourse, in which different meanings and understandings of adult sexual contact with children have been debated or contested. Building on Smart's approach, in this REA five institutional arenas of relevance were identified – legal, government policy, clinical, social work and media arenas.

The following sections explore key developments in relation to child sexual abuse within these arenas in England and Wales from the 1940s to 2017 and their implications for responses to it. Developments within these arenas are not mutually exclusive, and there are some overlaps between them.

1. Legal arena

The legal arena (and more specifically the criminal justice arena) is one of the most prominent fields in which discourses about child sexual abuse have circulated, as it involves the public definition of certain actions as criminal offences, and by implication, harmful.

It is important to note that the civil and family law fields have also given rise to and perpetuated certain discourses about child sexual abuse, although it is criminal justice that is focused on here.

Bingham and colleagues (2016) describe how prior to the 1960s child sexual abuse was addressed through a disparate range of archaic offences, such as indecent assault, unlawful sexual intercourse, gross indecency, buggery and incest. Where prosecuted, child sexual abuse offences, were approached through codes designed for sexual acts committed by adult men against females, or between men, and age was a 'secondary consideration that was superimposed on existing gender-specific prohibitions' (Bingham et al., 2016).

The Sexual Offences Act 1956 grouped a number of sexually motivated offences against adults and children together, but while it included some offences such as abduction that did not necessarily include a sexual act, others such as indecent exposure were excluded (Davidson, 2008). A number of the offences it contained were defined only in relation to girls, such as intercourse with a girl under 13 or 16. This period also saw debates surrounding the discussions by the Wolfenden Committee² about reforming the laws which criminalised sexual activity between men (Home Office and Scottish Home Department, 1957). While the Committee recommended the decriminalisation of homosexuality, this was not realised

² This was a government-appointed Departmental Committee led by Sir John Wolfenden set up in 1954 to consider law and practice relating to what were defined as 'homosexual offences' and prostitution (Home Office and Scottish Home Department, 1957).

for another decade, when the Sexual Offences Act 1967 decriminalised acts between men aged 21 and above. The age of consent for acts between homosexuals and heterosexuals was not equalised until the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000.

In 2000, the Sex Offences Review sought to dismantle the existing structure of sexual offences and replace it with a set of new offences. A crucial part of this overhaul related to sexual offences against children, which were seen as 'piecemeal' (Home Office, 2000), with differing provisions based on age and gender. The review sought to replace them with new offences that would provide greater protection against sexual abuse and exploitation. In relation to children, the resulting Sexual Offences Act 2003 included special protection for those under 13 who were defined as unable to consent to any sexual activity, and offences for those under 13 and 16, covering boys and girls equally regardless of sexual orientation. Additionally, new offences on 'child prostitution' were introduced, including facilitating child prostitution, grooming and paying for the sexual services of a child.

Key to debates in the legal arena about how to define sexual offences against children are definitions of children's rights and childhood. The period from the 1940s to 2017 has seen changes in the position of children in society. Until relatively recently children were seen as having few rights and were regularly exploited for labour (Davidson, 2008). Compulsory schooling to 14 was not introduced until 1918. Some have noted that by the 1930s a shift had occurred in the conceptualisation of children from economic resource to having a value in their own right (Furedi, 2013). At the level of international conventions, despite the existence of the earlier United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child 1959, it was not until the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 that an international framework for promoting children's rights was established that included protection from sexual abuse and exploitation.

Smart (2000, p.63) describes how historically children faced a 'totally unsympathetic' criminal justice system. She documents proposals to improve processes for children dating back to the Departmental Committee on Sexual Offences Against Young Persons in 1925, which were not adopted until the 1990s (Smart, 2000). Since the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, there has been greater recognition within the criminal justice system of the rights of child complainants in sexual offence cases, where children under 17 are seen as 'vulnerable' witnesses and have access to special measures and protections in the evidence gathering and court processes.

One lens through which childhood has been defined in the legal arena is the age of consent, with capacity to consent to sex an implied demarcator of the 'end of childhood' (Davidson, 2008). The age of consent was raised from 13 to 16 in 1885 amid concerns about 'child prostitution' raised by moral purity campaigners (Smart, 1999) and has remained so for girls since then. Under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, this was raised to 18 where the perpetrator was in a position of trust, such as in an institutional setting. There have also been disparities based on gender and sexual orientation for much of the period considered by this review. A higher age threshold of 21 for consensual sexual activity between males was included in the Sexual Offences Act 1967, which was only equalised with that for heterosexuals with the passing of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000. Age of consent is not a clear-cut indicator of the distinction between childhood and adulthood either as in England and Wales it is out of line with the age of majority (18), also defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, and that of criminal responsibility (ten). Offences relating to sexual exploitation introduced in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 also have a higher age of consent (Gillespie and Ost, 2016). This suggests that definitions of childhood shift in relation to different practices.

Some have pointed out the tension between a growing focus on risk since the 1980s that has led to diminishing children's freedom in order to protect them from the dangers of abduction and abuse, on the

one hand (Furedi, 2013), and the recognition of children as moral actors with the right to be heard, which has been written into legislation prescribing consideration of their views (Ferguson, 2004), such as the Children Act 1989.

2. Government policy arena

There has been a raft of government policy relating to child sexual abuse over the period from the 1940s to 2017. Links have been drawn between high-profile cases and inquiries and the development of government policy regarding child sexual abuse, with the Cleveland case a particularly pertinent example of this.

Davidson (2008) argues that over the past decades periodical child abuse inquiries, linked to key high-profile cases that generate media attention and public debate, have significantly shaped the development of government policy in relation to child abuse and child protection practice. This reactive process can be discerned at points over the past five decades beginning with the Maria Colwell case in 1970. According to Parton (2011), the issuing of the government circular on Non-Accidental Injury to Children (Department of Health and Social Security, 1974) marked the beginning of the child protection system in England and was a direct result of the public inquiry into the death of Maria Colwell, a seven-year-old girl killed in 1970 by her stepfather. Similarly, Parton (2011) notes that the first version of the government guidance document, *Working Together*³ (Department of Health and Social Security, 1988b), was published on the same day as the Cleveland report (Butler-Sloss, 1988), which looked at the handling of multiple cases of child sexual abuse diagnosed at Middlesbrough General Hospital in 1987. *Working Together* broadened the definition of child abuse that was contained in the earlier circular, to include sexual abuse. Stanley (1999) offers a similar characterisation to Davidson (2008), identifying a pattern from the late 1980s of media reporting of various forms of child abuse within particular institutions evoking public outcry being met with an inquiry and/or government review, and finally new policy initiatives. A clear example of this is the Cleveland case.

The significance of the Cleveland sexual abuse case is referred to throughout this report, the details of which are outlined below. The Cleveland crisis of 1987 is widely described as a 'watershed' moment. 'With Cleveland there really was a world before and a world after' (Clapton, Cree and Smith, 2013, p.275).

A pivotal moment: the Cleveland sexual abuse case and aftermath

In 1987, over a five-month period, paediatricians Marietta Higgs and Geoffrey Wyatt diagnosed 121 children in the Cleveland area in England as having experienced sexual abuse. Most of the children were removed from their homes under place of safety orders (Campbell, 1988). One of the primary means of diagnosis was a reflex anal dilatation test which indicated sexual abuse, although it is often overlooked that there was other evidence of abuse, including disclosure by children (Campbell, 1997). Parents of the children involved the local MP, Stuart Bell, questioning the reliability of the test and the power of social workers to remove children. A 'national outcry' followed, igniting debates about the sanctity of the family and state intervention (Kitzinger, 2004, p.56) (see also Soothill and Francis, 2002; Ashenden, 1996; Cream, 1993; MacLeod and Saraga, 1988). In 1988, the inquiry report into the case by Butler-Sloss was published, and the conclusions cast doubt on some of the practices of the professionals involved. The report stated that anal dilatation 'was abnormal and suspicious and requires further

³ *Working Together* is statutory guidance that emphasises the responsibility of multiple agencies to protect children from abuse that was first issued by the government in 1988. It was revised and republished in 1991 to coincide with the launch of the Children Act 1989, and has been revised several times subsequently.

investigation', although it was not enough 'in itself' to indicate anal abuse (Butler-Sloss, 1988, p.193). In fact, many of the 121 children were subsequently re-referred to social services, while an independent medical panel found many of the paediatricians' diagnoses to be correct (Nelson, 2016).

An important assertion made in the inquiry report was that, 'The child is a person and not an object of concern' (Butler-Sloss, 1988, p.245). Among the recommendations of the Cleveland inquiry was that there should be more parental involvement in decision-making, especially regarding medical examinations. The Cleveland case was influential in the implementation of the 1989 Children Act in 1991, which called for elements of more child-centred practice (Davidson, 2008; Cream, 1993), although it retained an emphasis on keeping families together (Nelson, 2016). It has also informed guidance on the investigation of sexual abuse at national and local levels, including *Working Together* (Ashenden, 1996). Kitzinger (2004) observes:

'The Cleveland scandal was the first, and remains the most famous, case in the UK involving contested allegations. It had a huge impact on public thinking about sexual abuse accusations and state intervention. It also had far reaching consequences for professional practice and child protection policy' (Kitzinger, 2004, p.56).

As an illustration of its enduring influence, the Cleveland case was mentioned in national UK news and television over 200 times as late as 1991, often as a means of telling the story of subsequent investigations into child sexual abuse (Kitzinger, 2004). Cleveland is often used as shorthand or a metaphor for child sexual abuse (Cream, 1993), although this masks competing meanings about exactly 'what "Cleveland" was' and to whom (Cream, 1993, p.3; see also Nava, 1988).

The public presentation of the Cleveland case has been subject to much critical analysis. One aspect that has been highlighted by several authors is how the case was polarised between the fathers accused of sexual abuse and their supporters (who were also men, including police and the local MP) and the lead paediatrician and social worker, both women (Cream, 1993; Campbell, 1988; Nava, 1988), creating a public 'war of the sexes' between the police and social services (Campbell, 1988, p.86). While media coverage was fairly nuanced about whether the abuse had occurred, with the authors of some journal and newspaper articles accepting the reality of child sexual abuse within the family and others recoiling from it, a focus on the family as a space into which doctors, social workers and the police had intervened was a core theme (Nava, 1988). Little distinction was made between the fathers who were accused of sexually abusing their children and the mothers (Nava, 1988), so the issue of masculinity was not addressed (Cream, 1993). The class dimensions of Cleveland have also been explored, particularly the demonisation of Marietta Higgs, the female paediatrician who was cast as a foreign, middle- class 'folk devil' (Nava, 1988), and the respectability of the families where it was unthinkable that child sexual abuse had been perpetrated (Campbell, 1988).

The significance of Cleveland therefore goes beyond its impact on policy about child sexual abuse and analysis of media coverage. Several discourses that are discussed later in this report were amplified by Cleveland, including: 'rare and unusual' (the extent of sexual abuse rendering this untenable); 'a different time'; 'failure to protect'; 'collusive mother'; 'family as a protected space'; 'children as sexual beings'; 'witch hunt'; and 'children's voices'. Some originate with the case, for example, the phrase 'over-zealous professionals' appears in the Cleveland report (Butler-Sloss, 1988, p.244) and was reinforced by media imagery of children being 'torn' from families (Cream, 1993). The Cleveland case was a landmark and site of both creation and dissemination of discourse about child sexual abuse.

The 1990s and 2000s saw similarly reactive responses to sexual and other forms of abuse of children in residential homes, such as those in Leicestershire and North Wales, leading to the Leicestershire (Kirkwood, 1993) and *Lost in Care* (Waterhouse, 2000) inquiries. These were closely followed by the Utting (1997) and Warner Committee (Department of Health, 1992) reports, which reviewed standards and practices in these settings and made recommendations that emphasised monitoring of standards and vetting and barring procedures for staff employed in them.

These cases were significant in contributing to several shifts in perceptions about child sexual abuse, firstly, bringing to greater attention the sexual abuse of boys, as they were historically represented in these closed institutions (Stanley, 1999). Secondly, they exposed abuses of authority by those tasked with children's care (Davidson, 2008). Parton (2016) describes the 1990s as a time when the policy focus broadened from familial to extra-familial abuse. However, Itzin (2000) highlights that the children who are subject of most government inquiries and institutional reviews represent an important, but comparatively small, proportion of all those who are sexually abused, noting that few major official inquiries of the past have focused on children sexually abused in the family. Chapter 5 explores how the resulting policies from this period tended to focus on seeking to address individual abusers rather than wider institutional settings (see section 'Deflection from institutions', Chapter 5).

In the early 2000s, high-profile sexually motivated child murders of Sarah Payne in Sussex and Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman in Soham led to further shifts that focused particularly on the characterisation of perpetrators and policy approaches to manage them. Depictions of the paedophile figure were prevalent in media reporting and also reviews. Ensuing legislation included Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, which established an Independent Safeguarding Authority to screen and regulate adults working with children.⁴

Other significant policy developments since the late 1990s have centred on definitions of child prostitution and sexual exploitation. A report by Barnardo's (1998), *Whose Daughter Next?*, named girls being paid for sex as 'abuse through prostitution' and set out stages of a grooming process whereby girls are entrapped and/or coerced by older boyfriends into having sex with other men for some form of payment. Here was the construction of a form of abuse that was 'not "child abuse" as it has been traditionally conceived' (Melrose, 2013a, p.159), and the beginning of policy engagement with competing views of child prostitution (Brown and Barrett, 2002, p.180). Yet as Ayre and Barrett (2000) point out, the numbers of children convicted of and/or cautioned for offences relating to prostitution – around 4,000 from 1989 to 1995 – suggest that agencies could not credibly claim to be unaware of sexual abuse through 'child prostitution' during the 1990s.

The issuing of central government guidance in 2000, *Safeguarding Children involved in Prostitution* (supplementary to *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, 1999) followed a policing pilot in Nottingham and Wolverhampton that stopped criminalising children for 'soliciting' and required local authorities to develop multi-agency responses that viewed young people involved in prostitution as victims of abuse (Department of Health and Home Office, 2000). This landmark document was the culmination of campaigning by children's charities throughout the 1990s for involvement of children in the prostitution system to be recognised as abuse. These campaigns drew attention to the situation of children as young as ten being cautioned for soliciting sex before they were legally able to consent to sex (Barnardo's, 1998).

4 Other widely publicised cases of child abuse and neglect, including Victoria Climbié and Peter Connolly, had far-reaching impacts on the wider child protection process, which are beyond the scope of this review.

This shift was not without critique: Phoenix (2002) argued that defining ‘youth prostitution’ as a form of sexual abuse obscured young people’s agency and decision-making. Nevertheless, abuse through prostitution stuck as a new way of responding, requiring more proactive intervention, ‘rallying existing resources and reconfiguring them in order to create new and different practices by professionals’ (Phoenix, 2002, p.358). Emphasising the abuse inherent in paying children for sex was an attempt to dissolve the idea that children consent to exploitative sex and to shift sexual exploitation into a child protection framework (Department of Health and Home Office, 2000).

3. Social work arena

Institutional responses to child sexual abuse in the social work arena can be seen as part of the wider, developing field of child protection, which has itself undergone extensive shifts over the period from the 1940s to 2017, many of which are beyond the scope of this report.

Some authors note how the policy and practice of child protection has shifted over time, seemingly influenced by political imperatives (Davies & Duckett, 2016, cited in Nelson, 2016; Parton, 2016). Key events, such as child deaths and murders that received high-profile attention, are also linked to changing policy directions (Parton, 2016) in this sector. Tensions between keeping families together and listening to children are evident, as are those between empowerment and protection.

Speaking primarily with regard to boys in the care of institutions, Coldrey (2001, p.96) has described how when first established in the 19th century the priority of orphanages, industrial schools and reformatories was to protect ‘respectable society’ from ‘certain classes of children’ perceived as ‘dangerous’ (see also Barter, 2006; Colton, 2002, p.37). Child protection organisations were among the first to suggest that children needed protecting from harm, and Smart (2000) documents the attempts of various feminist and child rights groups between 1910 and 1960 to define adult-child sexual contact as harmful. These can be seen as early examples of the counter discourses discussed below (Chapter 6). In the post-war period, the development of the child care service in Britain can be seen as an example of the social interventionism that led to the establishment of the welfare state (Parton, 1992). The Children Act 1948 developed the first moves towards specialist provision for children through the creation of Children’s Committees and Children’s Officers in local areas. The incremental development in England and Wales of a child protection system within social work can be seen during the 1970s and 1980s (Parton, 1992). This is enshrined in national legislation including the Children Act 1989 and national policies like *Working Together* (Home Office et al., 1991; see also updated versions), which also reflect international human rights standards such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989.

The Children Act 1989 was influenced by the Cleveland sexual abuse case (see section ‘UK government policy arena’, above). As Nelson (2016) argues, the Act made it harder to remove children from home, while ensuring more parents had power (see also ‘Family as a protected space’, Chapter 5). For example, section 17 of the Act outlines the duty of local authorities to ‘safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need; and so far as is consistent with that duty, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families’.

By the mid-1990s, the Department of Health’s guidance document *Messages from Research* (1995) suggested that too many children were being drawn into a child protection ‘net’ (see also Nelson, 2016 ; Bacon, 2008). Parton has characterised public depictions of state intervention following prominent child

deaths in the 1980s, such as Jasmine Beckford and Tyra Henry⁵, as 'too little, too late', while responses to Cleveland, Orkney and the Rochdale ritual abuse allegations were seen as 'too early and too much' (Parton, 1992, pp.100–101).

Despite this, the Children Act 1989 introduced a number of stipulations that increased the weight given to children's voices. By making the welfare of the child paramount and legislating that children's wishes should be heard, for example in the court process, it promoted elements of more child-centred practice. This was further elaborated in *Working Together* (Home Office et al., 1991), and subsequent versions of the guidance, and developed in *Quality Protects* (Department of Health, 1999), the government's framework for transforming children's social services, which aimed actively to involve children in the planning of services and care packages.

In the mid-1990s, there was a shift from the concept of children at risk to children in need. This period saw a transformation in the organisation of social work teams, and represented a change in practice away from joint working with police, where tackling perpetrators and supporting victims and survivors were priorities, towards a narrower assessment of children's needs (Davies & Duckett, 2016, cited in Nelson, 2016).

There is also a connection between developments in the child protection arena and scandals of undetected child sexual abuse (Gallagher, 2000). For example, writing of the Bryn Estyn children's homes case, Webster (2005) contends that the 'absolute' belief of children's voices that sits underneath this discourse originates in the US child protection movement, and this belief has created a modern witch hunt. In a similar argument about 'unfounded accusations and exaggerated claims' of child sexual abuse, Beckett (2002, p.627) suggests that the child protection system is a casualty of unsubstantiated allegations about abuse by residential care workers (see also 'Witch hunt', 'Moral panic' and 'Gold diggers', Chapter 5). What began as an attempt to highlight the harms of sexual abuse and the necessity of safeguarding children has also been deployed as both disbelief and denial. As Nelson (2016) points out, protection failures and poor practice occur with all vulnerable populations, yet none has invited the same level of outcry as for child sexual abuse. She cautions against the notion that the 'backlash' of disbelieving survivors can be explained solely through reference to poor child protection practice.

It is argued that child protection has become politicised, with extensive media (and in some cases policy) censure of social workers for failing to recognise or intervene in child sexual abuse appropriately (Parton, 2016). Kitzinger (2004), for example, notes that a defining feature of media portrayals of child sexual abuse following the Cleveland and Orkney cases was the magnitude of errors made by social workers. Multiple high-profile inquiries since have reinforced a dominant political narrative of 'blame and failure' of child protection services, which arguably has deflected attention away from the extent of abuse and its social origins (Parton, 1986 cited in Parton, 2016, p.14). The influential Munro (2011) report into child protection noted its increasing procedural basis where following guidance is prioritised over judgment.

The focus on dangerousness and 'significant harm' offers 'the promise of identifying, isolating and removing children permanently who are in high risk, but also ensures that the innocent and low risk are left alone', thus satisfying both the child protection and parental rights lobbies (Parton, 1992, p.5), two competing tendencies at the heart of child protection (Parton, 2016). This approach should be seen in the context of target-driven approaches to modernising public services and infrastructure (Parton, 2014). In the most recent period, it can also be seen as driven by the need to prioritise cases in a context where diminishing resources are available.

5 In 1984, four-year-old Jasmine Beckford was starved and beaten to death by her stepfather while in the care of Brent social services. Tyra Henry died aged 21 months after being beaten and bitten by her father while in local authority care. A lack of intervention by social services was highlighted in both cases.

Kelly et al (1995) have identified a focus on the family in discourses and practice in the child protection field. It is argued that child protection agencies' focus on the family when addressing the sexual exploitation of children explains why they failed to act. This is because they deemed sexual abuse outside the family to be a police issue rather than a social work concern (Firmin, Warrington and Pearce, 2016; Jago et al., 2011). However, in the mid-1990s Parton (2016) identifies a shift in child protection policy from preventing physical and sexual abuse in the family to recognising sexual abuse in extra-familial contexts such as institutions and community settings (see section 'UK Government policy arena' above). In the same period, concerns were expressed about 'ritual', 'organised' and 'institutional' forms of abuse (Parton, 2016, p.10).

Analysis of child protection responses to sexual exploitation also consistently highlights the way in which they position children as passive, vulnerable, and often young. In reality these children include teenagers who may perceive that they are making choices and may present as headstrong, wilful adolescents (Hallett, 2016; Pearce, 2014; Melrose, 2004; Phoenix, 2002; Ayre and Barrett, 2000). It has been argued that the attempt to strike a balance between protection and empowerment is an inherent tension in social work (Parton, 2014; Ashenden, 1996).

4. Clinical arena

This arena combines a range of fields from disciplines such as psychology and psychiatry to paediatric health, which have been connected to institutional responses to child sexual abuse. Legacies of Freudian conceptions of incest have coloured responses to children alleging sexual abuse, while dominant approaches to perpetrators of child sexual abuse have been influenced by medicalised models of deviancy and pathology. Developments in the field of paediatric medicine during the Cleveland case have had a significant impact on the role of paediatricians and medical evidence in sexual abuse cases.

Davidson (2008) argues that psychology, from Freudian psychoanalysis to cognitive behavioural therapy, has made a significant contribution to the study of child sexual abuse and has influenced theoretical explanations and views of treatment. The early focus on child sexual abuse was in the disciplines of psychiatry, particularly on incest explored through Freudian ideas, psychology on deviancy, as well as anthropology in relation to the 'incest taboo', and sexology through sexual variation. Dominelli (1989) contends that popular explanations of incest have drawn heavily on Freudian understandings, representing children as fantasising or lying about sexual abuse, and asking for it by 'seducing' the perpetrators.

It has also been argued that discourses about sexual violence dominated by medical and legal perspectives have strongly influenced both the definition of sex offenders as paedophiles and approaches to their treatment (Cowburn, 2005). From the 1940s and 50s adult preferences for sexual relations with children were explored as a form of sexual deviancy. Also at this time 'medicalised' discourses focusing on the pathology of individuals were developed through the classificatory systems such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) (Cowburn and Dominelli, 2001), which has been updated successively to the present day. In such classifications, child sex offenders, or 'paedophiles' have been categorised treatable and untreatable, which has had implications for interventions conducted with them, and has also fed into risk assessment systems (Cowburn and Dominelli, 2001). Critics of this approach have highlighted that it excludes gender and wider social understandings of masculinity and sexuality from its analyses (Cowburn and Dominelli, 2001; Itzin, 2000; Kelly, Regan and Burton, 2000).

Campbell (1988) describes how the application of forensic pathology to paediatrics by Hobbs and Wynne, two paediatricians based at Leeds University Hospital in the 1980s was a new departure which led to the detection of the sexual abuse in increasing numbers of children at hospitals in both Leeds and

later Middlesbrough (Cleveland). The reflex anal dilatation (RAD) test described in their controversial paper on buggery in childhood (Hobbs and Wynne, 1986), which was published in the *Lancet*, was key to these diagnoses of sexual abuse. This approach was endorsed in the Police Surgeons Association guidelines of 1987, which stated that an anal dilatation diagnosis should give rise to 'strong suspicions' of child sexual abuse (Campbell, 1988), although it was opposed by some prominent police surgeons at the time, including those of the Cleveland constabulary. Campbell (1988) describes how what was different about this 'medical diagnosis' compared to previous practice was how the police became involved, as it meant that some children were referred to the police following a paediatric exam, sometimes for a seemingly unrelated health condition, rather than as a result of a prior disclosure by the child or a witness. In the Cleveland case, instead of these diagnoses triggering automatic intervention, police refused to act on them, causing a clash with social workers, who opted to intervene.

A number of sources point out the impact of the Cleveland case on medical evidence in child sexual abuse cases. As Nelson (2016) explains, medical evidence can be highly significant in cases involving young or non-verbal children, but Itzin (2000) argues that its status was weakened following Cleveland, where the diagnoses of the paediatricians involved were discredited. According to Nelson (2016) hostile media and public reaction to Cleveland created a climate that was negative and suspicious towards paediatricians, and as a result Bacon (2008) suggests that since Cleveland it is less common for a child to be referred to the child protection system following a paediatric examination. Ashenden claims that the Cleveland public inquiry had a direct impact on what was written into the Children Act 1989 and *Working Together* (Home Office et al., 1991) guidance on the limits of medical evidence. Itzin (2000) describes other policies that were influenced by it, such as the Royal College of Physicians guidance on the physical signs of child sexual abuse of 1992, which stated that 'a clear statement by the child is the single most important factor in making a diagnosis of sexual abuse', implying the primacy of disclosure over medical evidence.

5. The media

The media is another example of a site in which discourses circulate, and has been a vehicle for conveying a number of key discourses about child sexual abuse, such as 'stranger danger' and 'paedophile'.

'The mass media can help to define what counts as a public issue, influence our understandings of individual cases, shape suspicions and beliefs, and be a resource for memories and conversations' (Kitzinger, 2004, p.180).

Bingham and colleagues (2016) argue that in the early decades covered by this review the press constituted a key source of knowledge for campaigners, civil servants and even police officers, who monitored cases going through the courts well into the 1950s.

Child sexual abuse is an ideal case study for investigation of media influence because it is such a high-profile issue and the focus of attention has shifted so dramatically over the last few decades. There has been a succession of public allegations and disclosures as new ways of identifying the problem have been opened up and the media have sought ever more sensational angles. Kitzinger (2004) identifies a chronology of media interest in child sexual abuse:

'Reporting that focused on incestuous abuse was followed by allegations about abuse in nurseries, schools, sports clubs and children's homes. Allegations against celebrities hit the headlines alongside claims about abuse perpetrated within (and covered up by) the Catholic Church. Fears about satanic networks were followed by concerns about predators in cyberspace stalking children via the internet' (Kitzinger, 2004, p.5).

The media acts as a channel for specific discourses such as ‘stranger danger’ and ‘blaming ‘culture’ (see Chapter 5) for perpetration of sexual abuse, either by generating them in the first place or by amplifying existing discourses. Kitzinger (2004) identifies child sexual abuse as first achieving prominence in the mass media at a national level in a 1986 popular television programme hosted by Esther Rantzen and the subsequent launch of Childline. Of the subsequent rich research literature on how the media construct child sexual abuse, most focuses on an analysis of the content of media articles rather than how these have shaped public perceptions (Weathered, 2015), although inferences are often drawn. Some studies have paid specific attention to language. In analysis of Australian and British newspaper coverage of child sexual abuse, Goddard and Saunders (2000) highlight examples of ‘affair’, ‘relationship’ and ‘the couple’ used to frame the abuse of girls. Through extensive empirical research on news coverage of child sexual abuse and public perceptions, Kitzinger (2004, p.81) developed the concept of ‘media template’ to explain how news stories influence audience understandings and policy change. She argues that the Cleveland case (see ‘A pivotal moment’, above) provides a media template through which subsequent stories of child sexual abuse were told. Media templates, then, affect reporting of similar stories, have powerful influences and involve ‘simplification and distortion’ (Kitzinger, 2004, p.73).

Despite an extensive literature documenting how the media reflects and reproduces myths and stereotypes, including those identified below as discourses of deflection and denial (see Chapter 5), there is also evidence of how the media has unmasked child sexual abuse and exploitation. For example, Kitzinger argues that this has brought the issue to wider public prominence:

‘The mass media’s discovery of sexual violence against children facilitated, and may have been a prerequisite for, its transition from a shameful, individual secret to becoming a more public issue’ (2004, p.46).

Brown and Barrett (2002) echo this, noting that media reporting in the 1970s on the sexual exploitation of boys in the ‘Playland’ case, involving an amusement arcade in central London, and the expose of young women’s involvement in prostitution while in local authority care thrust the practice and existence of under-aged commercial sex into the public eye. They also highlight the double-edged potential of the media: as an ally to bring issues into public, and therefore policy and practice arenas, but also to reinforce problematic ideas, including many identified in this report as discourses of deflection, denial and disbelief.

These themes all have relevance to discourses identified in the literature and institutional texts reviewed and are described in subsequent chapters.

Timelines

During the period covered by this REA there has been a proliferation of laws and policies relating to child sexual abuse and exploitation, particularly in recent decades. Appendix D contains a series of timelines showing key policies and events organised by decade from the 1940s to the present. It is not an exhaustive list, but includes the most relevant items. This information provides the contextual background for the findings on the individual discourses and their impact on institutional responses presented in the following chapters.

4 A framework for understanding the key discourses about child sexual abuse in the literature

Key findings

- Two broad types of discourses emerged – dominant discourses and counter discourses – while analysing discourses in the literature, serious case reviews and institutional texts.
- Dominant discourses appeared to take for granted as ‘truths’ certain ideas relating to child sexual abuse. These could be split into three overarching categories: discourses of deflection (from perpetrators and from institutions), discourses of denial (of harm and extent), and discourses of disbelief.
- Counter discourses were expressed by those at the margins of social and political power and challenged dominant views. These could be split into two overarching categories: discourses of power and discourses of belief.
- The identification of these five broad categories of discourse led to the development of a conceptual model in which a range of more specific discourses could be organised. 31 dominant and six counter discourses were identified and structured using this model.
- Dominant and counter discourses are not static and unchanging over time. Dominant discourses can shift in emphasis. Counter discourses can gain greater traction in so far as sets of ideas which are at one point marginal and only held by specific groups in society can become more widely accepted ‘truths’.

This chapter sets out a conceptual model of child sexual abuse discourses in England and Wales developed as part of this review, and maps those discourses on to specific time periods (from the 1940s to 2017).

A conceptual model: ‘dominant’ and ‘counter’ discourses

Two broad types of discourses emerged from the literature reviewed for this report: ‘dominant discourses’ and ‘counter discourses’. Dominant discourses is the term given to taken for granted ‘truths’ about child sexual abuse which appeared in the institutional arenas described in the previous chapter (legal, government policy, social work, clinical, and the media). Counter discourses were those originally expressed by people at the margins of social and political power and usually challenged these dominant views.

Three main categories of dominant discourse emerged from the analysis:

- deflection
- denial
- disbelief

Two main categories of counter discourse emerged:

- power
- belief

Dominant discourses

The three main categories of dominant discourse are summarised below.

Discourses of deflection serve to shift responsibility for sexual abuse from perpetrators and/or contexts that facilitate or do not prevent abuse. They are characterised by minimising and distancing attitudes to abuse, blaming mothers, treating perpetrators as 'other' and individualising perpetrators. Discourses specific to deflection from institutions serve to protect those institutions through similar individualising, minimising institutions' space to intervene and deflecting from the sexual abuse itself. Overlaps with discourses of denial (of harm) suggest that children invite, or are responsible for, abuse.

Discourses of denial are separated into those that deny harm, by positioning sexual abuse as consensual or minimising its harmful impacts, and those that deny the extent of sexual abuse. Those denying the extent of abuse share a common thread that abuse has been exaggerated or fabricated. There are overlaps with discourses of disbelief, although the two are not quite the same. As Nelson suggests, 'You need some knowledge of something before you can deny it, and some forms of CSA (child sexual abuse) have been genuinely difficult to believe' (Nelson, 2016, p.85).

Discourses of disbelief are smaller in number. They outright refuse to accept that sexual abuse has occurred compared with those of deflection and denial. Tendencies to disbelieve allegations of child sexual abuse remain a constant thread throughout the period under review.

Counter discourses

These discourses are positioned as 'counter' to those dominant discourses of deflection, denial and disbelief since their starting point is a belief in the existence of and harm caused by child sexual abuse. Whilst these discourses primarily grew out of the feminist and survivor social movements, they have since been drawn on more widely in media and policy arenas and practice. The two main categories of counter discourse are summarised below.

Discourses of power focus on the role of power, status and privilege in child sexual abuse, and the ways in which power relations can help to explain why child sexual has occurred and why it was not recognised or challenged sooner. These discourses explore power relations through the lens of gender (including ideas about masculinity) and the interests of institutions.

Discourses of belief centre around listening to and believing the accounts of victims and survivors, including children, and positioning child sexual abuse as a harmful crime.

Key shifts

As acknowledged above, dominant and counter discourses are not static and unchanging over time and their application can vary in different arenas. They emerge and further develop in response to each other, gain salience and increase in influence at certain points in time whilst receding in prominence at others, and they may also shift in emphasis and form. Crucially, counter discourses can gain more traction in so far as sets of ideas which are at one point marginal and only held by specific groups in society can become more widely accepted 'truths' acknowledged and even adopted by those in positions of power (albeit usually not universally accepted). In some cases such shifts are swift, catalysed by pivotal events such as the Cleveland or Rotherham child sexual exploitation cases (see Chapter 3). In other cases, there is a more gradual evolution linked to broader social changes, campaigning, activism and findings from research, amongst other things.

Three examples of child sexual abuse discourses which have shifted in dominance over time are summarised in the boxes below. The first (Box 4.1) concerns the shift from a dominant discourse characterised by the assertion that child sexual abuse is harmless, to one in which it is viewed as having the potential to cause significant harm to the children involved. The second, complementary example (Box 4.2) charts the evolution of dominant discourses which position people who allege childhood sexual abuse as either fantasists or instigators of those sexual encounters, to those which recognise them as victims and survivors and then a push back against this through the concept of victimhood. The third (Box 4.3) uses the concept of 'paedophile' as an example of the shape shifting nature of certain discourses, as it has been at the centre of a range of competing discourses in various institutional arenas about what is normative and what is harmful, which have altered over time.

The relationship between the discourses is simplified here, in order to demonstrate change over time, while in reality ideas fade in influence, but remain in circulation. The theory of 'cycles of discovery and suppression' (Olafson, Corwin and Summit, 1993, see Chapter 3) warns against concluding that any shifts are permanent.

Box 4.1: Shifting discourses: From harmless to harmful

- In the 1950s, Kinsey reported that most of the childhood experiences his team had documented in the large surveys they conducted on sexual behaviour had resulted in little or no harm (Gagnon, 1965). They conclude from this that intervention is probably more harmful than sexual abuse.
- A core element of the arguments of groups promoting inter-generational sex, such as the Paedophile Information Exchange in the 1970s centred around the harmless (and sometimes even beneficial) nature of sexual relations with children (Li, 1991; Thorstad, 1991; Brongersma, 1991).
- An influential criminologist, West (1981), argued that children could remove themselves from abusive situations if they wanted to, and that criminal justice system interventions were more damaging than the abuse itself.
- Woodiwiss (2014) notes that the 'harm story', i.e. that all victims of child sexual abuse are damaged and in need of healing, took hold in the 1990s and has become a dominant discourse over the last two decades (see also Harthill, 2014; O'Dell, 2003).
- Smith and Woodiwiss documented how the 'harm story' had become core to social work teaching (2016). Whilst bringing some positives, this can both limit the experiences that victims and survivors are able to tell, and the experiences that are recognised as abusive.

Box 4.2: Shifting discourses: From seductive child to victim and survivor to victimhood

- From the 1940s to the 1960s recognition of sexual victimisation in childhood was minimal. Child sexual abuse was generally considered either very rare, harmless, or a result of children seducing adults (Gagnon, 1965).
- Challenges to dominant discourses emerged in the 1970s, primarily from feminists who argued that this was a sexual violation, was not rare and was a crime in which children were the victims (Kelly, 1988).
- The concept of the 'survivor' of child sexual abuse developed as a way to challenge victim blame and emphasise resilience and strength rather than the weakness and powerlessness associated with being a victim (Alcoff and Gray, 1993).
- Survivor discourse, however, jostles with the harm story through which adult survivors become objects of concern within the media, especially talk shows, where they are expected to perform 'trauma talk' i.e. talk about the abuse in emotive ways that emphasise the emotional damage caused (Alcoff and Gray, 1993).
- This in turn leads to the concept of 'victimhood', used by media commentators to suggest that survivors choose, and even revel in, the position and status of victim (Warrington et al., 2017; Whittear, 2009).

Box 4.3: Shifting discourses: 'Paedophile'

- The concept of 'paedophile' sits within three distinct institutional arenas – clinical, legal and the media – which shift in their influence (De Block and Adriaens, 2013).
- Initially it was a clinical diagnostic category, defined as a sexual perversion alongside homosexuality (Malón, 2012) – this is one reason why gay men were linked with paedophilia, a connection that commonly has been deployed by opponents of same-sex relationships.
- Following homosexuality being normalised within psychiatry, a discourse gains traction that positions paedophilia as a sexual orientation (Seto, 2012; Feelgood and Hoyer, 2008).
- Liberation movements in the 1960s-70s included exploration of what children's liberation might look like, including debates about children's sexuality, which created space for discussions of inter-generational sex, most explicitly within gay liberation (Thorstad, 1991) but extending beyond there (Häberlen, 2016).
- Within the socio-legal arena, an unresolved debate lasting three decades has taken place about the diagnosis of 'paedophile' in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), resulting in a series of redefinitions which commentators suggest has created 'inconsistencies and contractions' (Ross, 2015), partly due to a failure to differentiate between sexual orientation and criminal behaviour (De Block and Adriaens, 2013).
- This confusion has led academics to use the more inclusive term 'child sex offender' (Feelgood and Hoyer, 2008).
- This created space for a more populist discourse to emerge, promoted by the media, which associates paedophile with all child sexual abuse – a monsterised perpetrator as 'other'.

- This public and populist discourse is increasingly dominant and more influential on practitioners than professional and official discourses (McCartan, 2010).
- Currently there is no clarity or cohesion about who or what a paedophile is (McCartan, 2010), nor where the boundary lies between paedophiles and all perpetrators of child sexual abuse.

A model of discourses about child sexual abuse in England and Wales

In the course of this research, a model of child sexual abuse discourses was developed (see Figure 4.1). The model uses the five main categories identified within the dominant and counter discourse labels to structure the more detailed discourses that emerged from the literature. It was tested for legitimacy through the triangulation of sources and with reference to the serious case review reports, although it could undoubtedly be developed further through empirical application. During this process, the list of discourses was honed; some discourses were folded into each other and moved around as their meanings and influence became clearer.

The model shows how the five categories of discourse intersect. The overlapping circles drew on two key insights: first, that for discourses to be necessary to deflect responsibility for abuse away from perpetrators and/or institutions they had to be based on a belief that abuse had occurred. Deflection and disbelief therefore do not co-exist. Second, that denial (of harm and/or that abuse had happened) could overlap with disbelief and deflection because some of the discourses identified serve multiple functions. The discourses identified from the material reviewed are primarily about failures of institutions to recognise, understand and respond to child sexual abuse.

The names of the detailed discourses in the model are designed to effectively convey the sets of ideas they represent. Some of them use terms or phrases drawn directly from the literature, such as 'a few bad apples', 'moral panic' or 'family dysfunction'. Others, such as 'gold diggers' and 'crime of dominion', were assigned by the authors of this study based on the information reviewed. Their inclusion should not be seen as an endorsement of the discourses themselves, rather as a reflection of the ideas and language used in the material that was surveyed.

Figure 4.1: A conceptual model of discourses about child sexual abuse in England and Wales

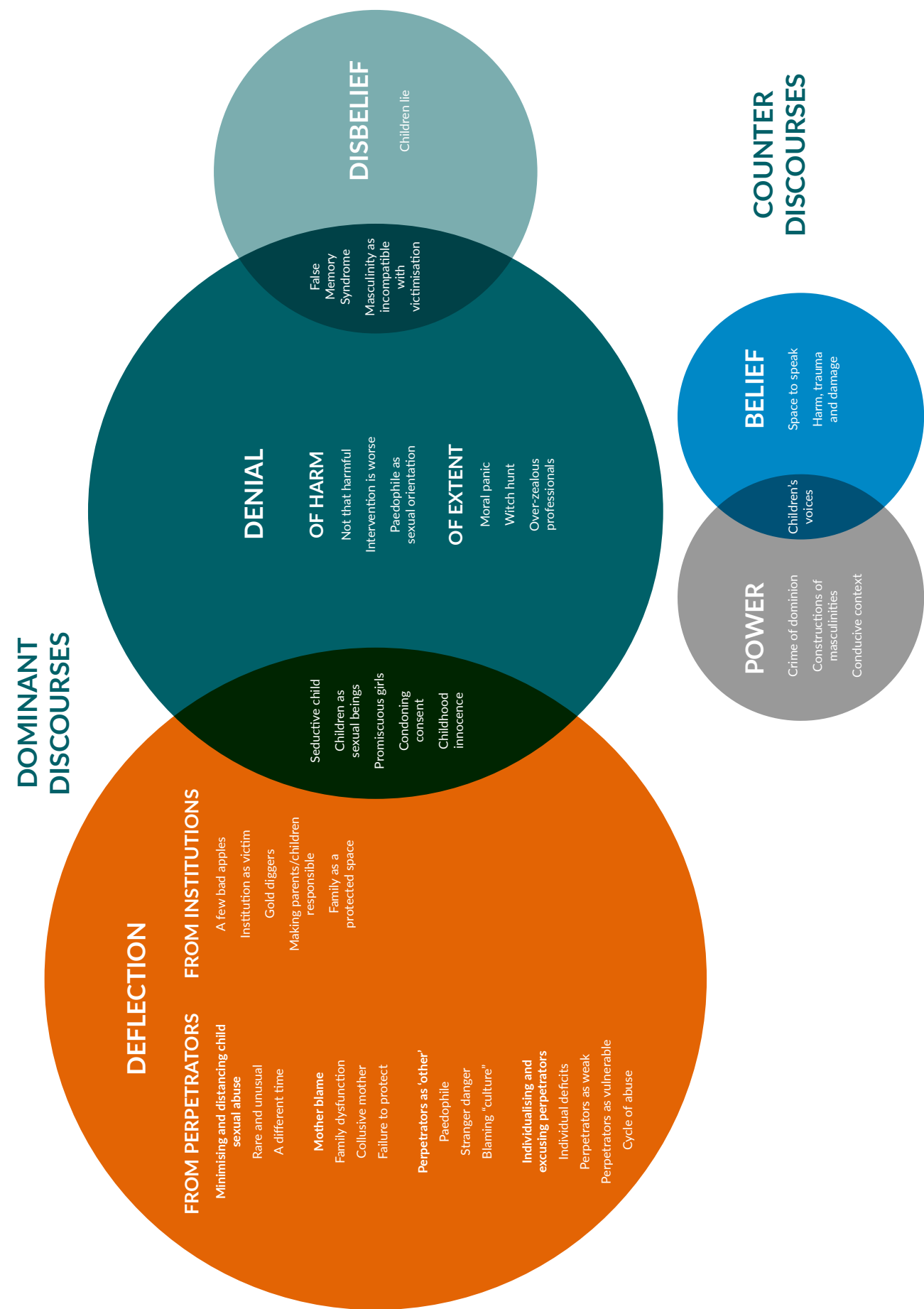


Table 4.1 below provides a short summary of each of the discourses included in the conceptual model above. Further detail on each discourse can be found in chapters 5 and 6.

Table 4.1: Summary of detailed dominant and counter discourses

Dominant discourses – deflection	
Deflection from perpetrators	
Minimising and distancing child sexual abuse	
‘Rare and unusual’	The view that child sexual abuse is not widespread.
‘A different time’	Placing emphasis on the social or historical context in which non-recent abuse took place; using this context as an explanation for why abuse happened and contrasting this with the present day, where there is no longer seen to be a problem.
Mother blame	
‘Family dysfunction’	The idea that child sexual abuse originates in problems with how individual families function.
‘Collusive mother’	The view that mothers have been seen as aware of and colluding in the sexual abuse of their children.
‘Failure to protect’	Emphasising gendered expectations around mothers being responsible for keeping children safe from sexual abuse and therefore blamed for failing in this when abuse occurs.
Perpetrators as ‘other’	
‘Paedophile’	The way that the term ‘paedophile’ has been used to emphasise the difference, or ‘otherness’, of perpetrators of child sexual abuse compared with other members of society.
‘Stranger danger’	The idea that child sexual abuse perpetrators are individuals outside of the home and family environment and not known to children who are victimised.
‘Blaming “culture”’	The way in which child sexual abuse has been seen as a problem of specific social, cultural or ethnic groups.
Individualising and excusing perpetrators	
‘Individual deficits’	Explanations for child sexual abuse that draw on the idea that perpetrators have ‘something wrong with them’.
‘Perpetrators as weak’	Thinking of perpetrators as vulnerable or in need of support or sympathy.
‘Cycle of abuse’	A view that sees experiencing sexual abuse in childhood as leading victims and survivors to themselves perpetrate sexual abuse against children.
Deflection from institutions	
‘A few bad apples’	The idea that child sexual abuse is a problem caused by ‘a few bad apples’, or a small and distinct group of individuals, who can be isolated and kept out of institutions through risk assessment and vetting processes.
‘Institution as victim’	The view that the institution in which abuse has occurred has become victim to the perpetrator(s) who have abused within it, or that the institution is a victim of unjust accusations of abuse resulting from over-zealous investigations.
‘Gold diggers’	The belief that people only report being victims of child sexual abuse in order to receive compensation payments.

Dominant discourses – deflection	
'Making parents/children responsible'	The idea that it is children and their parents who are responsible for keeping themselves safe from sexual abuse, deflecting attention from the actions of institutions (and perpetrators).
'Family as a protected space'	The view that families should be a protected space, free from state intervention.
Overlap of deflection and denial	
'Seductive child'	The belief that children have an innate sexuality and may therefore seek out, and initiate, sexual activities with adults and other children.
'Children as sexual beings'	Asserting that children have an innate sexuality and may therefore respond to sexual advances from adults and other children.
'Promiscuous girls'	The view that girls are choosing to put themselves at risk by being sexually 'promiscuous', especially by engaging in 'prostitution'.
'Condoning consent'	The idea that some young people willingly choose a lifestyle that involves violence and abuse and are willing participants in sexual abuse and exploitation.
'Childhood innocence'	The notion that children are sexually innocent and are therefore unlikely to engage in sexual encounters (and are tainted or spoiled if they do).
Dominant discourses – denial	
Of harm	
'Not that harmful'	The view that sex between adults and children does not lead to long-lasting harm, and in fact is sometimes beneficial for the child.
'Intervention is worse'	Builds on 'not that harmful' to imply that intervention, involving professional intrusion and possible removal of the child from the family network, has a more negative impact on children than living with ongoing sexual abuse.
'Paedophile as sexual orientation'	Argues that sexual contact with children is a legitimate, if socially stigmatised, sexual preference.
Of extent	
'Moral panic'	The view that claims of abuse are exaggerated, and the response to those claims disproportionate.
'Witch hunt'	The belief that claims of child sexual abuse against alleged perpetrators (individuals and institutions) constitute a campaign against them that is not justified by the evidence.
'Over-zealous professionals'	The characterisation of professionals as too ready to believe claims of abuse and to intervene unnecessarily.
Overlap of denial and disbelief	
'False Memory Syndrome'	The view that memories of abuse are fantasies about incidents which did not actually occur.
'Masculinity as incompatible with victimisation'	How ideas about what it means to be a boy or young man are in opposition to ideas about what it means to be a victim.
Dominant discourses – disbelief	
'Children lie'	The view that children are not credible and should not be believed if they claim they have experienced sexual abuse.

Counter discourses – discourses of power	
'Crime of dominion'	Describes abuse in which a person in a dominant, powerful or privileged position (for example a father, priest or sports coach) takes advantage of a victim who is less powerful and privileged in terms of their age, sex, race or class.
'Constructions of masculinities'	The theory that male power is a factor in child sexual abuse.
'Conducive context'	Focuses on structures and features within institutions that create a conducive environment for child sexual abuse to happen, rather than seeing it as a problem of isolated individuals.
Overlap of power and belief	
'Children's voices'	Emphasises the need for children's voices to be heard and for children to be treated as active subjects in their own lives, not as objects of concern.
Counter discourses – discourses of belief	
'Space to speak'	Looks at the dynamics that create or limit spaces for victims and survivors to speak about child sexual abuse and be heard and recognised by institutions.
'Harm, trauma and damage'	Focuses on the ways in which victims and survivors of child sexual abuse can achieve healing and recovery.

Changes in child sexual abuse discourses over time

As noted earlier in this chapter, discourses shape shift in a variety of ways. Even if they persist, their salience rises and falls. They re-emerge in slightly altered form and they are changed through their deployment by institutions, including the media. There is a selection process in what successive governments, policy makers and other agencies take up and disregard. In the latter case, there is the crucial question of what ideas or interests certain discourses are being deployed to support. For example, many discourses reproduce the home and family as a safe haven when the accounts of victims and survivors tells us this is a context in which a variety of forms of child sexual abuse are perpetrated.

A key question for this REA was whether and how language and discourses about child sexual abuse have changed over time. The methodology and time frame for this project make it impossible to track changes over the period in any systematic way, as this would require following each discourse over time through a number of routes and mechanisms. There were also issues in the way discourses and timings were recorded across literature that impeded a more linear analysis of this element (see Chapter 2 and Appendix B for further details of the methodology and its limitations).

That said, some of our sources do link discourses and/or the discussion of institutional responses with particular time periods or events, offering the possibility to gain an overall sense of the discourses that were most salient across the decades under scrutiny (see Table 4.2). It is also possible to identify some shape shifting of discourses within the time frame of the review. For example, 'paedophiles as other' returns in slightly different forms in the later period. Other discourses, such as 'children lie', appear fairly consistently. Table 4.2 also contains the numbers of the pages in Chapters 5 and 6 where the discourses relating to each time period are discussed in more detail.

Hunter (2010) offers a similar chronological overview of salient discourses on child sexual abuse but in relation to Australia rather than England and Wales. There is overlap and relevance between Hunter's model and the one presented in this report in that they both identify similar discourses in the earlier decades around child sexual abuse as rare and confined to certain social groups, followed by the emergence of survivor and trauma discourses in the 1980s and 1990s.

Table 4.2: Key discourses by decade

1940s – 1960s			
Type of discourse	Overarching category	Specific discourses	Page numbers
Dominant	Deflection	'Rare and unusual' 'Blaming 'culture'' 'Perpetrators as weak'	56 56 57
	Deflection and denial	'Seductive child' 'Childhood innocence'	75 80
	Denial	'Not that harmful' 'Intervention is worse'	82 83
	Disbelief	'Children lie'	92
Counter	–	–	
1970s – 1990s			
Type of discourse	Overarching category	Specific discourses	Page numbers
Dominant	Deflection	'Family dysfunction' 'Collusive mother' 'Failure to protect' 'Paedophile' 'Cycle of abuse'	57 58 60 61 62
	Deflection and denial	'Children as sexual beings' 'Promiscuous girls' 'Childhood innocence'	76 77 80
	Denial	'Paedophile as sexual orientation' 'Moral panic' 'Witch hunt' 'Over-zealous professionals'	84 87 89 89
	Denial and disbelief	'False Memory Syndrome'	90
	Disbelief	'Children lie'	92
Counter	Power	'Crime of dominion' 'Constructions of masculinities'	97 98
	Power and belief	'Children's voices'	101
	Belief	'Space to speak' 'Harm, trauma and damage'	103 104

2000s – 2010s			
Type of discourse	Overarching category	Specific discourses	Page numbers
Dominant	Deflection	'A different time'	63
		'Stranger danger'	65
		'Blaming 'culture''	66
		'Individual deficits'	68
		'Perpetrators as vulnerable'	69
		'A few bad apples'	70
Dominant	Deflection	'Institution as victim'	71
		'Gold diggers'	72
		'Making parents/children responsible'	72
		'Family as a protected space'	73
	Deflection and denial	'Condoning consent'	78
		'Childhood innocence'	80
Dominant	Denial	'Not that harmful'	86
	Denial and disbelief	'Masculinity as incompatible with victimisation'	90
	Disbelief	'Children lie'	92
Counter	Power	'Conducive context'	99

5 Dominant discourses

Dominant discourses are ways of looking at or talking about issues that come to dominate thinking on the subject. They are often taken for granted and can become accepted truths (van Dijk, 2008).

As discussed in chapter 4, there are three overarching categories of dominant discourses:

- Discourses of deflection
- Discourses of denial
- Discourses of disbelief

These three clusters are explored in detail below, as are the discourses identified within each overarching category.

Discourses of deflection

Key findings

- These discourses serve to either deflect responsibility for child sexual abuse from perpetrators or deflect responsibility from institutions.
- Discourses which deflect responsibility from perpetrators are characterised by: minimising perpetrators' actions and distancing attitudes to abuse; blaming mothers; and 'othering' perpetrators in some way.
- Discourses that deflect responsibility from institutions are characterised by similar themes of minimising either an institution's space to intervene or sexual abuse itself.
- Discourses of deflection constituted the largest category of dominant discourse and were present across the full time period being studied 1940-2017.

Deflection from perpetrators

A number of discourses were identified that served to deflect attention or responsibility for child sexual abuse away from perpetrators. This operated in different ways, and four key themes can be identified:

- Discourses that minimise sexual abuse by suggesting it is rare or distance it from the present by locating it in the past.
- Those that blame mothers.
- Those that construct perpetrators as 'other' (intrinsically different from and alien to oneself).
- Those that excuse perpetrators or suggest that individual limitations lead some to perpetrate sexual violence.

These four themes are summarised below along with the specific discourses that sit under each, organised by the time period in which they were most evident.

Minimising and distancing child sexual abuse

Discourses identified here from the literature serve to redirect responsibility from perpetrators by minimising their actions or distancing them from the present. Two specific discourses sit under this theme:

- 'Rare and unusual'
- 'A different time'

Discourses identified here from the literature serve to redirect responsibility from perpetrators by minimising their actions or distancing them from the present. In the 'rare and unusual' discourse, child sexual abuse is cast as an exceptional occurrence. By minimising the extent of child sexual abuse in this way, 'rare and unusual' becomes an explanation for why it happens, while also deflecting attention from any need to explain it. Suggesting that child sexual abuse is an uncommon, isolated phenomenon implies that no patterns can be identified that could offer insights into perpetration and victimisation. The discourse of 'a different time' locates child sexual abuse within the social norms of a particular (now passed) time, and implies that this is why child sexual abuse occurs: because it was deemed acceptable according to these historical values which no longer exist. Both these discourses point towards child sexual abuse being the product of particular isolated contexts rather than actions of perpetrators or wider issues in social structures.

Mother blame

Three discourses sit under the overarching theme of blaming mothers, rather than perpetrators, for child sexual abuse:

- 'Family dysfunction'
- 'Collusive mother'
- 'Failure to protect'

'Collusive mother' is perhaps more explicit than 'family dysfunction' or 'failure to protect', but in both 'family dysfunction' and 'failure to protect' discourses, mothers are cast as in some way facilitating the sexual abuse by abdicating responsibility for meeting the needs of father abusers or of sexually abused children. The notion of collusive mother is a more active version of this where it is presumed that mothers know that children are being abused but choose not to act. Identifying these as dominant discourses is not to suggest that there are never cases where these discourses are also descriptions of what is happening. Instead it is necessary to pose a different question about the work that these discourses do in making mothers responsible for the abuse while actions of perpetrators go unscrutinised.

Perpetrators as 'other'

A discourse of perpetrator as other refers to all the ways in which perpetrators are constructed as 'other' – placed outside the everyday relationships and contexts of the lives of children, and other than an 'us' who do not sexually abuse children. Three specific discourses sit under this theme:

- 'Paedophile'
- 'Stranger danger'
- 'Blaming "culture"'

These discourses are in tension with the counter discourses of power and belief, which have emphasised that perpetrators are frequently known and familiar to children, part of their families and social circles. Perpetrators are thus deemed to be an external threat. Itzin (2001) notes that offender typologies frequently exclude what she terms ‘normal’ family men, with Cowburn and Dominelli (2001) adding that they rarely include either a breakdown of perpetrators by gender or an analysis of the meanings of gender. Cowburn and Dominelli (2001) also note that the perpetrator as other discourse feeds a protector–predator construct within notions of masculinity.

Individualising and excusing perpetrators

Four specific discourses sit under this cluster which offer an explanation for why perpetrators abuse, that is about their individual experiences and characteristics rather than any social, cultural or environmental factors:

- ‘Individual deficits’
- ‘Perpetrators as weak’
- ‘Perpetrators as vulnerable’
- ‘Cycle of abuse’

The specific discourses that sit under these four key themes are discussed in more detail below in a chronological order, based on what decade they are identified as having been most dominant during in the literature, though some may have originated in an earlier period. Most discourses can be seen as rippling beyond one decade, although sometimes how they appear changes over time.

1940s – 1960s

Minimising and distancing child sexual abuse: ‘Rare and unusual’

For a large period of the 20th century, child sexual abuse was seen narrowly as incest, and as being rare (Nelson, 2016; Scott, 2001a; Dominelli, 1989). This led to a lack of recognition among professionals of the range of contexts in which child sexual abuse takes place and its prevalence. The endurance of this discourse into later decades is evident. For example, in a study of 299 professionals conducted in the 1980s, many of those surveyed believed incest was rare, with over half estimating the frequency in the general population to be 1 in 500 or lower (Eisenberg, Owens and Dewey, 1987). The authors suggest that expectations about the low incidence of child sexual abuse may have led to insensitivity about the possibility of it taking place. With a growing research body on prevalence, and periodic inquiries showing there has been widespread abuse in a range of contexts, this view has weakened somewhat. Campbell (1988, p.125) describes the Cleveland sexual abuse case (see Chapter 3) as a ‘contest over [...] the very concept of widespread abuse’, suggesting that the Cleveland case was a pivotal moment in challenging the view of sexual abuse as uncommon.

Perpetrators as ‘other’: ‘Blaming “culture”’

In early clinical works child sexual abuse was located within particular socio-economic groups, in keeping with the view that it was relatively rare and that its victims and perpetrators were ‘others’. From the 1940s and into the 1970s, child sexual abuse, and specifically incest, was typically associated with the lower social classes and particularly the rural poor (Nelson, 2016; Dominelli, 1989; Kelly, 1988; Lukianowicz, 1972). Within this perspective, sometimes referred to as ‘cultural milieu’, the significance of cultural factors such as overcrowding, rural traditions and ‘low morals’ was emphasised (Kelly, 1988). MacLeod and Saraga note that these ideas tended to feed into myths of class and racial stereotypes about ‘pathological’, ‘chaotic’ or ‘disorganised’ families and ‘subcultures’ (Kelly, 1988, p.35). Acceptance of this perspective appears to have declined from the late 1970s onwards with research showing the wider

prevalence of child sexual abuse across all social groups (Nelson, 2016 ; Kelly, 1988), although notions of 'problem' families still persist. A focus group with trainee journalists during the early 1990s also found an ongoing perception that well-educated men are less likely to be perceived as abusers (Kitzinger, 2004).

Individualising and excusing perpetrators: 'perpetrators as weak'

A discourse of perpetrators as weak and vulnerable is linked to other discourses, including an individual deficit model and notions of promiscuous girls. Here the discourse suggests that sexual abusers are not in control of their actions. Smart argues that this is evident in the first half of the twentieth century:

'[T]hroughout most of the period leading up to the second world war it was widely assumed that anyone (any man) could be led astray (by his instincts or by a child). Men who engaged in these activities were not seen as mentally unsound, but simply as depraved or weak, or as having momentary aberrations' (Smart, 1999, p.93).

However, this discourse continues into later decades. Taylor-Browne cites a case where a judge told a 35-year-old man who had assaulted the 7-year-old daughter of a neighbour that 'it was the sort of accident that could happen to anybody' (1997b, p.123). A comment in the Utting report (1997) on safeguards for children living away from home (see Timeline 1990s, Appendix D) illustrates how this view is taken for granted. Describing members of staff who work with children, Utting contrasts those who seek to infiltrate institutions as they are 'determined abusers', with 'larger numbers of adults who fall into abusive behaviour in circumstances ranging from personal weakness to the influence of a malignant institutional culture' (Utting, 1997, p.5). This explanation is also echoed in a serious case review report about a young woman who was sexually exploited from 2009 to 2013. There are repeated references to a perpetrator's psychological difficulties instead of his known history of violence against women. This echoes the discourse of individual deficits, to suggest that perpetrators are not fully responsible for their actions because of personal weaknesses.

1970s – 1990s

Mother blame: 'Family dysfunction'

A key lens through which discourses about child sexual abuse have been articulated is the family. A prominent discourse in the literature, and one that appears to have been of significance for much of the period covered by this REA is that child sexual abuse is a response to issues within individual families. While it has origins in the much earlier clinical arena, its influence within multiple institutional arenas is particularly evident in the 1980s and 1990s.

The 'family dysfunction' discourse derives from family systems theory in psychiatry developed in the 1950s and 1960s, and has particularly informed versions of family therapy. An example of the pervasiveness of this discourse is its use by leading paediatricians in the field of child abuse, Ruth and C. Henry Kempe, who are still widely cited today:

'Incest [...] is not initiated by the child but by the adult male, with the mother's complicity [...] Often a very dependent mother is frantic to hold on to her man for her own needs and the financial support he provides, and sees the daughter as a way of providing a younger, more attractive sexual bond within the family than she can offer. This is especially true if she is frigid, rejected sexually, or herself promiscuous' (Kempe & Kempe, 1978, cited in MacLeod & Saraga, 1988, p.36).

Early examples of the family dysfunction discourse focus narrowly on father–daughter incest. Mothers are seen to play a pivotal role in the malfunctioning of the family by sexually rejecting their husbands, or failing to nurture their children, or through illness or even abandonment. Incest is viewed as occurring in response to this dysfunction (Kelly, 1988) as a form of parent-child role reversal. A small but influential study (Lustig et al., 1966), based on six case studies, typifies this view, theorising incest as a ‘family survival pattern’:

‘Despite the overt culpability of the fathers, we were impressed by their psychological passivity in the transactions leading to incest. The mother appeared the cornerstone of the pathological family’ (Lustig et al., 1966, p.39).

Critics of this perspective have pointed out that the family dysfunction approach individualises the problem of child sexual abuse (Hearn, 1988), locating it within ‘problem’ families, while failing to take account of other relevant structural factors (McCartan et al., 2015) such as gender and generation (Hooper and Humphreys, 1998) and the non-familial contexts in which sexual abuse also occurs (MacLeod and Saraga, 1988). Responsibility is shifted away from perpetrators of sexual abuse, and indeed from the abuse itself, and on to victims and other family members, particularly mothers (see section ‘Mother blame: Collusive mother’, below). These behaviours have been presented as opposed to, and lending support to, a traditionalist view of ‘normal’ family relationships (MacLeod and Saraga, 1988) based on ‘male authority and female dependence’ (Hooper and Humphreys, 1998, p.567). A number of feminist critics of the family dysfunction model (Hearn, 1988; Kelly, 1988; MacLeod and Saraga, 1988) have also highlighted the fact that these theories were derived largely from clinical experience, with studies citing small sample sizes, yet became a dominant framework with explanatory power.

Examples showing the reach of this discourse span multiple disciplines. In the literature reviewed here, it appeared to have an impact on responses in most institutional arenas – legal, government policy, clinical, social work – in the 1980s and 1990s. In the late 1980s, MacLeod and Saraga posited that this approach ‘dominated lay and professional discourse and achieved the status of common sense’, even ‘orthodoxy’, in social work, family psychiatry and children’s charities (1988, p.17).

It has been suggested that professionals working within this framework influenced the development of government policy during the 1980s. Documents such as *Diagnosis of Child Sexual Abuse: Guidance for Doctors* (DHSS 1988) (Department of Health and Social Security, 1988a) are said to have embodied the key principles of this approach (MacLeod and Saraga, 1988). For example, it is noted in the guidance that ‘mild suspicion’ should be aroused in family settings where there is ‘an unusually close physical relationship between father or step-father, against a background of marital disharmony’ (Department of Health and Social Security, 1988a, p.10). Children who were sexually abused in the family environment were therefore unprotected where institutional responses appeared to draw on discourses that associate sexual abuse with dynamics within the family. (Taylor-Browne, 1997b) cites an example from the legal arena from 1988 in which a judge said that a man who had indecently assaulted his learning disabled, 12-year-old stepdaughter had been ‘driven to it’ because his wife was pregnant and did not want sex. A decade later, Hooper and Humphreys (1998) confirmed that family systems continued to retain this level of prominence.

Mother blame: ‘Collusive mother’

The discourse of family dysfunction is closely allied with that of the collusive mother, which is evident in some of the work being conducted in psychiatry on incest in the 1970s, but reappears in later decades. In this discourse mothers were not only blamed for their husbands’ actions towards their daughters, but were also seen as having known about or colluded with the abuse, suggesting a level of agreement

with it. Kelly (1988) and Nelson (2016) cite widespread examples of statements about mothers colluding in incest in the professional clinical literature of the 1960s and 1970s. A piece by the psychiatrist Lukianowicz (1972) provides an example of the questionable basis on which these conclusions were founded. Her study was based on 26 clinical cases, in which at least one mother was aware, two were 'frigid' and 'agreed to be replaced', eight were promiscuous and one 'had died'. From these tenuous findings, she concluded that mothers accepted incest as normal, usually colluding with the husband's behaviour or choosing to deny its existence. The collusive mother discourse sets up an idealised version of motherhood, where mothers are associated with having caring, nurturing qualities and are solely responsible for children's welfare and protection. As with the family dysfunction model, attention is deflected away from the perpetrator, whose actions are ignored, and only the mother's behaviour is scrutinised.

Reflecting on her focus groups with the public about the Cleveland case in the 1980s and its aftermath, Kitzinger (2004) notes that some participants suggested 'mothers must have known'. Media coverage of the Cleveland sexual abuse case also conflated abusers with mothers (Nava, 1988), amplifying the reach of this discourse. It has been suggested that this was linked to the media tendency to focus on the 'de-gendered' unit of 'the parents' or 'the family', which 'edited gender out of the discourse' (Cream, 1993, p.243).

Farmer and Owen's (2000) study of cases on the child protection register in the 1990s found that mothers whose male partners sexually abused their children were treated as though they had known about or colluded with the abuse, and were subject to harsh moral judgement.

Bernard (2001) takes a slightly different perspective, addressing how black mothers have been positioned in discourses on child sexual abuse. She draws attention to the historic ways in which black motherhood has been constructed through racist discourses and explores how this and being part of 'marginalised' communities mean women face conflicting loyalties, between their community and state agencies that may influence their parenting decisions (Bernard, 2001, p.35). Bernard argues that the 'racially gendered dimensions of black mothers' experiences' (2001, p.17) need to be recognised and their 'ambivalences need to be understood in the context of powerlessness not the collusion paradigm' (2001, p.45).

More recently, McLaren (2013) conducted interviews with women in Australia who were in relationships with child sexual abusers and found evidence of discourses that reinforce guilt in women and strengthen the position of men. Men were found to have established positions for themselves in communities and in their dealings with institutions as 'trusted individuals' and drew on discourses that moved attention away from them and on to women and children. This suggests an active strategy of deflection by perpetrators. Gendered shame, blame, guilt and fear of societal repercussions led women not to see or speak, and placed responsibility on them for the abuse:

'shift[ing] the responsibility and blame away from perpetrators and towards the 'bad lover', 'bad woman' or 'bad mother' [...] which further blames these women and silences them' (McLaren, 2013, p.440).

Bell (2002) argues that women repair the challenge to their identities caused when their child has been sexually abused by their partner by reverting to dominant discourses about traditional gendered parenting. In these models, the mother-child bond is seen as biologically driven, and mothers are cast as inherently protective.

McLaren suggests that, while recognising that perpetrators are responsible for abuse, social workers continue to perpetuate blaming attitudes towards mothers:

'Unavoidably, child and family workers may participate in practices that blame the mothers, despite firm understanding that only perpetrators of child sexual abuse are responsible for the abuse... The paradox for child and family workers is how to intervene to ensure the protection of children without reinforcing the heteronormative discourses that position mothers/partners as 'failed' women – particularly when discourses that shame, blame and silence mothers have the potential to block lifelines to children at risk' (McLaren, 2013, p.445).

A discourse that mothers collude with sexual abuse is fairly prominent in the serious case review sample. Sometimes the phrasing is explicit. For example, in the serious case review into sexual exploitation of young women in Rochdale, the report highlights 'several examples of clearly collusive behaviour in particular by the mother of [redacted] for example in providing [redacted] with alcohol and in her approach to her daughters' contact with several men' (SCR: Young People 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, Rochdale, 2013, p.63).

Some reports refer to professionals unquestioningly accepting statements from mothers where evidence from children either implicated them in the abuse or clashed with her account. The tension between believing children or adults is apparent (see also section 'Children lie', below). Another example is worth exploring in more detail since both the tone and content of the report are strongly suggestive of collusive mother and failure to protect discourses. A foster father was eventually convicted of sexually abusing five children in his care, and there is a focus in the report on the actions of the foster mother as the primary contact with social workers (SCR: Sexual Abuse of Children in a Foster Home, Hackney, 2014). She is described as 'unprofessional and uncooperative' by social workers, obstructing their enquiries while being cast as an expert on sexualised behaviours in children (which does not appear to provoke professional curiosity about the possibility of sexual abuse). The actions of the abusive male foster carer are discussed less, ostensibly because he was in the background when there was contact with social workers.

Mother blame: 'Failure to protect'

Even where child sexual abuse in families is committed by fathers, a key aspect of the collusive mother discourse centres on the mother's perceived lack of protection of the child:

'Everybody assumes that the people who can and should protect children from sexual abuse are their mothers. Particularly when the alleged abusers are the fathers, we demand that the mothers save their children, and we blame them when they don't' (Campbell, 1988, p.9).

Hooper and Humphreys critique the 'failure to protect' discourse for being unsuccessful in representing the complexity of the situation women find themselves in, and of their responses to it, while 'unhelpfully position[ing] women in alliance with the offender rather than with professionals' (1998, p.572). Kelly (1988) also notes that this discourse is in conflict with evidence that the largest proportion of official reports of abuse is from mothers themselves.

Empirical studies conducted in the 1990s involving child protection cases (Farmer and Owen, 2000) and with social workers about the characteristics of cases registered at case conferences (Fisher, Miller and Sinclair, 1995) report that mothers' (in)ability 'to protect' was a common feature.

Failure to protect is a prominent discourse in the serious case review sample. It emerges mostly in relation to mothers, and it is difficult to determine if the discourse originates with professionals in their evidence to the serious case review process, or if it reflects authors' perspectives. What can be observed is that responsibility for protecting children was, in some cases, heaped onto mothers. There are multiple brief references to mothers' 'ability to protect', and to mothers not seeking help quickly enough, or resisting professional intervention. Their actions were then scrutinised when sexual abuse was identified, in ways that those of abusers were not. This includes the following example. A man was convicted of raping his stepdaughters, and making an indecent image of a child; the report refers to the girls' mother believing his explanation of why he had pled guilty to a previous sexual offence. The report implicitly criticises social workers for requiring her to supervise interactions between him and the girls, especially as this was compromised by her poor health. The author concludes:

'There are references to Mother having taken and continuing to take appropriate steps to ensure that the children are safe. Some of these steps are described and appear to rely heavily on agreements between Mother and Step Father following reported lengthy discussions between them. Mother also appeared reliant on Step Father's version of events, and yet her role as an on-going protective influence was given high profile' (SCR: CN10, Devon, 2014, p.13).

In an investigation into how agencies responded to a 16-year-old child who had sexually abused a child under 13, there are references to the mother knowing that the child was accessing pornography. This sits alongside criticism of institutions such as social work closing the case, and plants a seed that the child's mother turned a blind eye to a factor that may have been relevant to the sexually violent behaviour.

A further indication of the failure to protect discourse is related to the connections between domestic violence and child sexual abuse in the serious case review sample. It is frequently recorded that professionals had limited knowledge about domestic violence and child sexual abuse and that they made limited connections between different kinds of abuse, the gendered nature of these abuses, and controlling behaviour by the abuser. This was particularly evident where sexual abuse had been going on for decades. Connections between domestic violence and child sexual abuse are long-documented (e.g. Farmer and Owen, 2000). Perhaps most notably in one case, the children's mother is recorded to be feeling unsafe and unable to speak in child protection conferences. Several reports note that the power that perpetrators exercised over women and children, particularly where abuse lasted decades, limits the possibilities for all victims and survivors to seek help, including mothers.

Perpetrators as 'other': 'Paedophile'

This discourse has origins going back to the earlier period of the 1940s to 1960s, but sees further development in connection with debates in relation to sexual deviancy over several decades and around sexual liberation in the 1970s (see 'Key shifts' in Chapter 4). Salter (2018) argues that the construct of the paedophile has become a dominant discourse in relation to child sexual abuse and has a range of registers in which it is heard, the loudest being the media. It is also entwined with the moral panic discourse and sex offender literature. From the 1990s, the term 'paedophile' has come to stand for all sex offenders in public discourse, and this has intensified in the 2000s.

Wyre (2000) notes the varying definitions of 'paedophile'. He describes the origin of the term as meaning 'child love', and notes that it has been used over several decades in clinical discourse to describe men (and some women) who exhibit sexual arousal and attraction towards prepubescent children (Wyre, 2000, p.49). Cowburn and Dominelli (2001) argue that constructs of paedophile are embedded in clinical and journalistic discourse, a medical model which has been reframed in populist media. The earlier framings of 'dangerous beast' and harmless, misunderstood 'dirty old man' have been replaced

by 'paedophile', which they argue is connected to dominant discourses of masculinity, with 'paedophile' covering perpetrators from whom 'normal' men can protect women and children. This binary distinction conveniently limits the space for discourses which have sought to make connections between child sexual abuse and heterosexual masculinity. Within offender typologies, the term 'paedophile' fails to encompass the range of forms and contexts of child sexual abuse (Cowburn and Dominelli, 2001, p.403). Itzin (2001) concurs and notes particularly that constructions of 'paedophile' tend to exclude familial sexual abuse.

There is an ongoing debate as to whether clinical definitions of paedophilia are inappropriately applied to all perpetrators of child sexual abuse (Seto, 2012; McCartan, 2010 ; Feelgood and Hoyer, 2008). We explore above the deployment of paedophile as a discourse, the content of which has been transformed over time.

Individualising and excusing perpetrators: 'Cycle of abuse'

The 'cycle of abuse' is the notion that abuse in childhood leads individuals to go on to perpetrate abuse against other children (Herman, 1988; Kelly, 1988). The theory of a cycle of abuse was originally developed in the late 1970s in the field of psychology in relation to domestic violence, but is a part of policy and professional discourse, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, and continues to influence practice, as seen in the serious case reviews. Critics cite a lack of empirical evidence and point out that this discourse fails to account for evidence that the majority of victims and survivors are female and perpetrators male: if being abused were a determinant of becoming an abuser, this pattern would be reversed and the large proportion of male and female victims and survivors of child sexual abuse who do not go on to abuse others would do (Herman, 1988; MacLeod and Saraga, 1988; Kelly, Regan and Burton, 2000). As Armstrong notes:

'The 'cycle of violence' appears to fulfil a yearning to 'scientise' a social problem; to harness it so that it appears socially manageable, while not much disturbing the status quo' (Armstrong 2000, p.38).

The influence of this discourse is evident in the tacit acceptance of it as an explanatory model in academic, policy and professional literature. In their review of the detention of sexually abused children in residential centres and secure accommodation alongside those who have sexually offended, Brogi and Bagley (1998, p.316) describe the 'victim-to-abuser' cycle. While noting that 'long-term paedophile careers' can be halted in adolescence, they do not appear to question the implied determinism of young people (usually males) who are sexually abused going on to abuse others.

Kelly and colleagues (2000) note the influence of cycle of abuse discourse on policy documents such as Area Child Protection Committee guidelines in the late 1990s, which defined having a past experience of sexual abuse as a risk factor in relation to children. The issue here is that this might extend to mothers, and even support workers, who have experienced sexual abuse, who might then be perceived as having impaired capacity to care for children. A more qualified reference is made in the 1999 version of *Working Together*:

'A proportion of adults who sexually abuse children have themselves been sexually abused as children. They may also have been exposed as children to domestic violence and discontinuity of care. However, it would be quite wrong to suggest that most children who are abused will inevitably go on to become abusers themselves' (Department of Health, Home Office and Department for Education and Employment, 1999, p.15).

Kelly and colleagues (2000) also highlight the tendency to draw on the cycle of abuse discourse to justify work with children and young people, but with the aim of preventing them from becoming abusers rather than addressing their need or right to support (see section 'Individualising and excusing perpetrators: Perpetrators as vulnerable', below). The Frameworks Institute (2016) study with the general public noted that participants believed that those who are sexually abused go on to abuse others.

A discourse of 'cycle of abuse' can be seen to infiltrate inquiry reports, not so much as an overarching explanatory framework, but as a truism that needs no further explanation. This is precisely how a discourse becomes part of common sense public 'knowledge' about child sexual abuse (e.g. Frameworks Institute, 2016). An example is this statement in the Warner Committee report into the selection, development and management of staff in children's homes:

'The significant number of sexually abused children in children's homes poses problems not only for staff but for other children where the abused child seeks to become an abuser' (Department of Health, 1992, p.20).

In serious case review reports, the cycle of abuse discourse functioned to explain perpetrators' actions as an inevitable consequence of prior sexual abuse. One case involved the abuse of five girls by a foster father, and during the serious case review it emerged that both the foster father and the foster mother (who was cast as collusive) had been sexually abused in childhood. This is implied as a factor that would have prevented them being approved for fostering. In another case of abuse of two children within a foster family, there was an unquestioning assumption by the author that the perpetrator's sexualised behaviour was a result of (unconfirmed) earlier abuse, and that agencies should have recognised that he would, therefore, go on to sexually abuse. Here sexual abuse in childhood is taken uncritically as a determinant of future abuse of others.

2000s – 2010s

Minimising and distancing child sexual abuse: 'A different time'

The 2010s have seen a large rise in allegations of non-recent child sexual abuse, and sexual offences more broadly. When looking at non-recent allegations, one of the explanations that has been offered for cases of sexual abuse that often went unchecked is that those were 'different times'. Furedi (2013) suggests that standards of behaviour between adults and children were very different in the 1960s and 1970s and there was little discussion of 'paedophilia': 'it is easy to overlook the fact that in the 1960s and 1970s paedophiles were often treated simply as 'strange' people whom you kept your children away from' (Furedi, 2013, p.30). This links to notions of sex offending as rare and unusual and of perpetrators as weak or vulnerable (see 'Individualising and excusing perpetrators: Perpetrators as vulnerable', above). Furedi (2013) argues that this perspective suggests that contemporary sexual politics are very different to the past, and that focusing on the past is a diversion from addressing issues of the present.

Two research papers identified are based after the REA on the Savile case: Furedi (2013) uses it as the basis for a cultural commentary and Gray and Watt (2013) analyse 450 complaints to the police. Both sets of authors use the discourse of 'different times' somewhat differently. Gray and Watt (2016) draw on it as an explanation of why complaints were not dealt with respectfully and effectively at the time. Furedi (2013) explores the way the Savile case was used in a discourse that condemned the 1960s and 1970s as a permissive time, which created a context in which Savile was able to sexually abuse with impunity. More recently, Boyle's analysis of coverage about Jimmy Savile finds that the discourse of 'different times' throws the emphasis back onto whether the girls consented. This conveniently

disregards the fact that the time under scrutiny coincides with publication of key feminist texts on child sexual abuse (Boyle, 2017).

In some respects, the discourse of 'a different time' is registered at each review or inquiry that looks back in time. For example, the Cleveland report (Butler-Sloss, 1988) (see Timeline 1980s, Appendix D, and 'A pivotal moment' in Chapter 3) takes this discourse as a point of departure, noting a local context where child sexual abuse had not been attended to and the appointment of new staff in both paediatrics and social work who had a commitment to making it visible. *Lost in Care* (Waterhouse, 2000) (see Timeline 2000s, Appendix D) also has it as a motif, with the transition from approved schools to children's homes and increased awareness of child sexual abuse heralding the conjunction of new and old practices.

The question this raises is what work the discourse of 'a different time' does for institutions. That there was less public engagement does not mean that all child sexual abuse was hidden. Indeed, the literature reviewed for this REA gives examples of cases of incest, rape and indecent assault dating from well before the review period that were reported and prosecuted (see Bingham et al., 2016; Smart, 1999). There were various attempts in the 1920s by feminist groups like the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene and the National Vigilance Association to extend the criminal law to cover all forms of adult-child sexual contact (Smart, 1999) indicate awareness of the issue at least in some circles.

In some serious case review reports that investigated non-recent cases of sexual abuse or exploitation, or long periods of time during which policy and guidance evolved, some authors explicitly noted that agencies explained their practice through it being a 'different time'. Sometimes this referred to language of 'child prostitution' as an indication that agencies lacked understanding of child sexual exploitation (e.g. SCR: Young People 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, Rochdale, 2013). In others, institutional practices were held up against a mirror of contemporary expectations. The following excerpt from a review into the sexual abuse of three children by their father is an example. In this case, a friend of one of the children reported sexual abuse to a teacher in 1989, and no action was taken because the girls were deemed not to be good witnesses. Subsequent disclosures to different professionals did not provoke action or intervention. Commenting that 'agencies failed over two decades to recognise that [father] had seriously abused three children within the family' (SCR: Adults A, B, C, Rochdale, 2013, p.13), the review concludes:

'The Police investigation was not of a good quality by current standards. It is acknowledged, that the level of understanding of sexual abuse in the 1980s was still developing and a straightforward judgement against current expectations of good practice is therefore more difficult to make... During the more than 20-year time period covered by this review there have been developments in both societal and professional understanding of sexual abuse. This is not to suggest that good practice or skilled practitioners were not to be found during the early years or that gaps in practice or knowledge no longer exist. Nevertheless there is now a much more commonly accepted understanding of sexual abuse across professions, and considerably more research in relation to both victims and perpetrators. The challenge for agencies is to translate this greater knowledge and research base into routine practice' (SCR: Adults A, B, C, Rochdale, 2013, pp.9-11).

Some serious case review reports acknowledge how this discourse is used as a deflection, with one investigation into sexual abuse (referred to as sexual exploitation) in a school concluding that 'even taking account of the times in which these events occurred, it would appear that the school did not operate with sufficient accountability within local child protection procedures' (SCR: Mrs A, Surrey, 2014, p.55). This suggests that by the standards of the time – where awareness and policies about child sexual abuse might not have been so developed – professional practice was poor. Another serious case review report into sexual abuse of a young woman (also referred to as sexual exploitation) similarly refuted attempts by

agencies to historicise their failures. The Jay report (2014) (see Timeline 2010s, Appendix D) also engages with this discourse more critically. The inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham was asked to explore if practice to identify sexual exploitation of young women in the town would have met historical standards. Finding that principles for protecting sexually exploited young people first set out in 1998 were not followed in the 2000s, the report observes that institutional responses 'would have fallen short of any accepted definition of best practice as understood at the time' (Jay, 2014, p.64).

Perpetrators as other: 'Stranger danger'

The 'stranger danger' discourse is a variant on notions of perpetrators as 'other', which are evident in earlier periods. It is one of the discourses that the media plays a significant role in reproducing (Williams and Hudson, 2013; Jewkes, 2010; Kitzinger, 2004), and is particularly relevant in the 2010s in the discussion of online abuse and grooming. Weatherred's (2015) review of 16 texts about media reporting of child sexual abuse found that individualisation of blame and stranger danger were noted in all of them. Tracing the relationship between media content and audience reception is complex, because readers and consumers of the media interpret messages according to their existing views and experiences (Kitzinger, 2004). Empirical studies are mixed about the impact of media constructions of stranger danger on public perceptions.

Support for sex offender notification schemes is sometimes cited as evidence of belief in this discourse (Williams and Hudson, 2013). However, in a review of management of sex offender disclosure schemes, it is argued that the public does not always live up to the caricature of 'irrational, vigilantes, or media dupes' (Kemshall, 2008, cited in Lieb et al., 2011: 229) (Kemshall, 2008, cited in Lieb, Kemshall and Thomas, 2011, p.229). McCartan's (2013) conclusion based on focus groups with 35 members of the public in Northern Ireland and Wales is similarly nuanced:

'the popular notion in the literature [is] that the general public do not really understand sexual offending and that they seem to stereotype all sex offenders as being the same. This was further fleshed out by the realisation from the participants that stranger danger is not necessarily a useful idea when discussing sexual offending, especially child sexual abuse. Therefore, some of the participants suggested that the disclosure of sex offender information was irrelevant because most families would know who these offenders were anyway' (McCartan, 2013, p.224).

A recent project exploring public perceptions of child maltreatment, commissioned by the NSPCC, involved in-depth analysis of interviews with 20 members of the UK public (Frameworks Institute, 2016). This very small sample reflected findings from similar research by the authors conducted in Canada (Frameworks Institute, 2016), one of which was that 'men children know' were identified more commonly as perpetrators of sexual abuse than strangers. Yet a survey of 750 parents conducted by YouGov (Parents Against Child Sexual Exploitation, 2013) found a significant focus on the danger posed by strangers outside the family environment. Williams and Hudson (2013) in their survey of 557 members of the general public about media consumption and perceptions of different types of grooming found that the public were more concerned with 'stranger danger' (grooming by strangers on the internet or in public space) than sexual abuse within the family.

It has been argued that these findings are strongly connected. The stranger danger discourse positions parents and child sexual abusers as mutually exclusive (Jewkes and Wykes, 2012). Feminist analysis points out how this evades questions of masculinity, and power exercised within the family, and demonstrates how discourses deflect attention from 'men in paternal/familial settings and a socio-economic context that constructs children as sexually desirable' (Jewkes and Wykes, 2012, p.935). Kitzinger (2004) argues that victims and survivors recognise how these stereotypes protect abusers.

Jewkes and Wykes (2012) argue that the contemporary focus on online 'paedophiles' is a shift that reinforces stranger danger. While noting that there is an evident risk to children from child sexual abuse facilitated by the internet, they highlight:

'the current cultural tendency to represent child abuse as a problem of cyberspace rather than, and as if there was an absence of, occurrences in familial settings' (Jewkes and Wykes, 2012, p.946).

Similarly, McAlinden draws attention to how:

'the recent association of the term [grooming] with the Internet and on-line abuse in both the popular imagination and official discourses is based on the image of the sex offender as a sexual predator or so-called 'stranger danger' (McAlinden 2006, p.340).

A number of authors (Jewkes, 2010; McAlinden, 2006) contend that legislation on grooming intended to criminalise preparatory acts for sexual abuse reflects the enduring hold of stranger danger discourse. Some have also argued that wider responses are built around the idea of dangerous strangers: the external controls (e.g. pre-employment vetting) placed on institutions have been identified in the literature (e.g. McAlinden, 2006) as resting on the stranger danger discourse. Perpetrators within institutions are therefore protected by a focus on stranger danger, as the concept of infiltration attributes risk to strangers (McAlinden, 2006). Jewkes (2010) for this reason suggests that the power of stranger danger discourse shapes the allocation of resources.

A discourse about stranger danger was present in only very few serious case review reports, as most of them (where the relationship between abusers and victims was clear) were perpetrators known to the child. However, it is present in complex and contradictory ways. Two very different cases of sexual abuse, including one unexplained death, focused on strangers and safety advice in report recommendations. Stranger danger discourse was also present as a shadow where it was clear that professionals had not recognised the dangers posed by family members, for example cases where foster parents were the abusers. Stranger danger discourse constructs parents/carers and child sexual abusers as mutually exclusive. In a case where several girls were abused by a foster father during the 2000s it is noted that professionals were unable to view foster parents as abusers. It was particularly evident in reports that noted a lack of knowledge among professionals about the 'prevalence and nature' of sexual abuse. These examples draw on the discourse of stranger danger differently: in the cases involving foster carers, it seems to have prevented professionals from identifying abusers, whereas in cases involving sexual abuse by strangers, institutions are criticised for not recognising stranger danger.

Perpetrators as other: 'Blaming "culture"'

A more recent discourse of blaming 'culture' emerges in the 2010s in relation to media reporting of sexual exploitation cases. A number of authors have analysed media coverage and noted how sexual exploitation is cast as a problem of South Asian men, so this discourse becomes a version of perpetrators as other. Cockbain (2013) was perhaps the first to write about the centrality of discussions on race in media and public policy debate about sexual exploitation (specifically grooming), by analysing coverage of the Rotherham sexual exploitation case in the Times. White perpetrators of sexual exploitation and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) victims and survivors are rarely discussed in the media (Tufail, 2015). Subsequent analyses of newspaper articles by Gill and Harrison (2015) and Tufail (2015) identify the equivalence of South Asian masculinity as dangerous, particularly to young white women. For example, Gill and Harrison's (2015) analysis of 122 articles from five national UK newspapers notes that 'Pakistani Muslim' culture is repeatedly mentioned, presenting the problem of sexual exploitation as one

of race and faith, and 'Pakistani Muslim' culture is described as traditional, patriarchal and predatory (Gill and Harrison, 2015). There were few articles in their sample that were balanced about the lack of data on perpetrators' ethnicity, or discussed the silences about white perpetrators and victims and survivors from minority communities. Media coverage has also explored how professionals have responded to the relevance of race and ethnicity, suggesting that agencies feared being labelled racist (Gill and Harrison, 2015).

There is further evidence of the influence of blaming culture discourses in relation to familial abuse. In her inquiry into child sexual abuse in the family environment, the Children's Commissioner (Berelowitz, 2015) found the perception among BAME groups that the identification of sexual abuse within particular cultural groups served as an excuse not to act when abuse was known or suspected:

'This whole idea around "not destabilising communities" and disturbing community relationships – media/people did say this – it's an excuse by the establishment – narrative of racism which is intertwined with this agenda now' (Berelowitz, 2015, p.50).

Inquiry reports (e.g. Jay, 2014) and policy guidance documents (e.g. Local Government Association, 2014) also discuss how the media reports culture as a factor in child sexual abuse, and professional engagement with the race or ethnicity of perpetrators.

This discourse is most evident in the serious case review sample in similar ways to the literature, since it primarily refers to cases of sexual exploitation involving perpetrators from minority communities. For example, the Rochdale serious case review into sexual exploitation of young women from 1997-2012 (see also Timeline 2010s, Appendix D) observes that of the professional reports submitted:

'[I]nformation about the perpetrators' race, culture and ethnic background as understood by the Services involved at the time, is limited. Men are frequently referred to as 'Asian' without specifying what this meant, or indeed why it was considered significant to record it' (SCR: Young People 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, Rochdale, 2013, p.20).

One case involving sexual abuse of seven children by their father on a traveller site, however, explicitly acknowledges that professionals failed the children because they expected lower standards within the traveller community. The author concludes that 'the culture and ethnicity of this family became the defining influence in shaping the agencies' responses to the situation' (SCR: Family A, Southampton, 2014, p.45).

Class also emerges as a contour of culture, with some parents reporting to serious case review authors that their concerns were not taken seriously because they were working class, and/or that families lacked confidence to challenge decisions. In the serious case review into sexual exploitation in Rochdale, for example, parents perceived that agencies responded poorly because 'it's what they expected of our children'.

Blaming culture is also evident in a different way in literature on the sexual exploitation of young women from minority communities. Ward and Patel (2006) noted that professional concern continued to focus on young white women. Using case studies from a service supporting young Bangladeshi women, they concluded that professionals attributed poverty and overcrowding to cultural norms, and tension in families to generational 'culture' clashes. Young women who sought to escape these situations were not recognised as being vulnerable to sexual exploitation. In this way, the potential for young women to be sexually exploited was placed within a cultural framework. At the same time, there is evidence of how professionals have struggled to recognise the significance of culture in relation to how sexual

exploitation is perpetrated and experienced by victims and survivors. The Muslim Women's Network report (Gohir, 2013), based on case studies, highlighted how professionals were unable to recognise the way perpetrators used codes of honour and shame as a technique of control (e.g. blackmailing young women). An intersectional focus that addresses the contours of race or ethnicity and expectations that are attributed to culture is often lacking in responses to sexual exploitation (Sharp, 2013). Notions of culture are therefore present in contradictory ways, and only ever applied to minority rather than majority communities (Gill and Harrison, 2015).

Individualising and excusing perpetrators: 'Individual deficits'

The notion of individual deficits as an explanation for the actions of child sexual abusers has been argued to be one of a number of 'dominant psychological constructions of the male sexual offender' (Cowburn, 2005, p.215; see also Kelly, 1988). In this construction, child sexual abuse is committed because abusers have something wrong with them, such as distorted ideas about sexualising children, or because abusing fulfils their non-sexual 'needs' (e.g. Groth et al. 1982, cited in Taylor and Quayle, 2003). It is also linked to some versions of 'paedophile' equated with deviancy (Smart, 1999) and/or the figure of a pathetic 'dirty old man'. There is an extensive literature from the psychological disciplines – clinical, developmental and forensic – about sexual offending. We focus here on influential theoretical perspectives, identified through the literature searches undertaken, which support or critique the individual deficit model.

Ward and Keenan's (1999) review of implicit theories (or common sense understandings McCartan, Kemshall and Tabachnick, 2015) on child sexual abuse is based on the premise that sexual offending is driven by cognitive distortions – beliefs that enable offenders to overcome inhibitions and serve as a defence for their behaviour. This is a subtler version of the individual deficits discourse that has gained much traction in psychological frameworks on sexual violence. Cognition has been described as an 'important conceptual consideration in academic literature' on sex offending (Taylor and Quayle, 2003, p.11). Yet beliefs often cited as cognitive distortions reflect some socially constructed ideas, particularly that children are sexual beings. Ward and Keenan (1999) also acknowledge the influence of men's perceived entitlement to sex. A later model by Ward and Siegert (2002) based on knitting existing theories of sexual offending against children together includes elements such as 'intimacy deficits', and distorted thinking about sexual and social behaviours. In a study of men convicted of offences relating to abusive images of children, Taylor and Quayle (2003) critique the notions of perpetrators having individual deficits and cognitive distortions as this overlooks the social and interactional dimensions of their behaviour.

There are several areas where the individual deficits discourse has traction in understandings of child sexual abuse. The Frameworks Institute study of public attitudes about child abuse found that having a 'perverted mind' and moral deficits were offered as reasons why perpetrators sexually abuse children (Frameworks Institute, 2016, p.8). This discourse also applies in interventions with child sex offenders. It has been argued that medical and psychopathological models based on convicted offenders are not generalisable to the larger group of perpetrators that remains unidentified (Herman, 1988), nor should standards of deviancy be determined by the minority of perpetrators that are found in criminal populations (Cowburn, 2005). Yet an individual deficit discourse underpins many sex offender treatment programmes, despite the limitations of the evidence base. Cowburn notes that:

'sex offender classification systems may therefore be of limited value, particularly as these systems deflect attention from the behaviour of the wider group of unconvicted men. As such this 'scientific' attention constitutes a key part of the hegemonic discourse that shields the behaviours of wider populations of men from critical scrutiny' (Cowburn, 2005, p.225).

Sociological perspectives, particularly those informed by feminist analyses, have long been critical of this individualising of sexual abuse. It has been suggested that focusing on individual deficits deflects from perpetrators because it places the abuser, rather than the victim and survivor, at the centre by turning abusive behaviours into issues of unmet human needs (Herman, 1988; Ennew, 1986).

Individualising and excusing perpetrators: ‘Perpetrators as vulnerable’

A discourse of perpetrators as weak has already been identified in earlier decades. There are overlaps between notions of weakness and vulnerability. An analysis of 420 articles about Jimmy Savile highlights this, as his predatory behaviour was in the public domain before his death but understood as part of his being ‘odd’ and ‘a curiously sympathetic figure who needed love’ (Boyle, 2017, p.6). She argues that allegations about abuse of children were explicitly denied in some reports by using quotes from Savile, or obscured by referring to the girls as underage ‘fans’. The ‘promiscuous girl’ discourse that is discussed later is also implied here.

A discourse of perpetrators as vulnerable is also evident in relation to young people who sexually abuse. This issue has attracted attention since the 1990s (Green and Masson, 2002). The 1991 version of *Working Together* contained brief guidance about young people who sexually abuse (Masson, 1998). In 1992, an inquiry report by the National Children’s Bureau argued that young people who perpetrated sexual violence should be channelled through child protection rather than criminal justice (Masson, 1998). Since then, competing theoretical approaches in child protection and youth justice have debated whether young people should be designated vulnerable and in need of support or identified as sexual offenders (Smith et al., 2014; Masson, 1998). The concept of ‘harmful sexual behaviour’ (HSB) has been adopted to varying degrees in policy and practice arenas, reflecting an inconsistent approach to young people who sexually abuse (Smith et al., 2014).

Whether young people who sexually abuse should be regarded as vulnerable was the core theme of the empirical and conceptual literature that was reviewed for this REA. In 1994, the Department of Health considered adding a fifth category to the child protection register for young people who sexually abuse, but decided in 1995 that this would only be appropriate if they had also been abused (a link indicating the power of cycle of abuse discourse). Research conducted around the same time with 50 practitioners concluded that juvenile sexual abusers were viewed as victims by social workers, and offenders by police (Sanders and Ladwa-Thomas, 1997). A later study by the same authors, involving seven child protection social workers in one local authority, also found that they rejected the notion that young perpetrators were ‘sex offenders’ (Ladwa-Thomas and Sanders, 1999). In short, during the 1990s there appear to be mixed professional views about the degree to which young people could be held responsible for sexually abusive behaviours (Green and Masson, 2002). Some practitioners also drew on the discourse of cycle of abuse as an explanation (Hawkes, 2011; Ladwa-Thomas & Sanders, 1999).

A study involving professionals and focusing on children under 10 found a high level of consensus that children should not be called sex offenders or abusers (Vosmer, Hackett and Callanan, 2009). There appears to be a similar consensus among researchers in this specialist area of sexual violence perpetration that labelling young people as sex offenders is problematic (see e.g. Hackett et al., 2015). Yet sexually abusive minors are managed through Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) processes designed for adults, and the 2013 version of *Working Together* (2013) did not mention harmful sexual behaviour committed by young people (Smith et al., 2014). There appears to be a gap, therefore, between the professional discourse of young perpetrators as vulnerable, and institutional responses that process them through paths designed for adult sex offenders.

Children who sexually abuse disrupt constructions of children's sexual innocence (Hackett et al., 2015). Lack of clarity over 'normal' sexual development among practitioners is also a common theme in literature on this topic (Green & Masson, 2002; Masson, 1998). Institutional and professional responses to young perpetrators are therefore potentially mired in multiple discourses: that children who sexually abuse are vulnerable; the cycle of abuse as an explanatory discourse for their behaviour; and children as sexually innocent.

This was evident in one serious case review report of a young man who was arrested twice for rape, where a new college was not informed about his history of abuse to girls, and professionals appear not to have challenged his 'confusion' about what constituted sexual consent (SCR: Child F and family, Unnamed location, 2017).

Deflection from institutions

Some discourses redirect attention from how institutions either enabled child sexual abuse or failed to intervene by offering ideas about victims and survivors and perpetrators. Five specific discourses can be identified within this category:

- 'A few bad apples'
- 'Institution as victim'
- 'Gold diggers'
- 'Making parents/children responsible'
- 'Family as a protected space'

The discourse of 'a few bad apples', for example, absolves institutions of responsibility for examining how they may constitute 'conducive contexts' for sexual abuse (Kelly, 2007; see section 'Conducive context', Chapter 6). In the discourses 'institution as victim' and 'gold diggers', harmful consequences of the abuse are shifted from victims and survivors to institutions. 'Making parents/children responsible' and 'family as a protected space' work slightly differently, as they offer explanations for why interventions by institutions are limited.

These five themes are summarised below. They are all relatively recent discourses, emerging in the 2000s and 2010s.

2000s-2010s

'A few bad apples'

This is a specific version of the 'perpetrator as other' discourse, deployed by some institutions when the issue of sexual abuse within is raised, albeit one source also uses it in relation to the limited knowledge base of police investigators (Davey and Hill, 1995). It is most well developed in the literature on organisational cultures in residential care homes, the Church and sport, and is most in evidence since the period of the 1990s and 2000s when these institutions have been under scrutiny. Brackenridge (2001) argued that sports bodies moved from denial through minimising to recognising that sexual exploitation (her overarching term for all sexual harassment and abuse) had taken place, but it was a problem of 'a few bad apples'. Brackenridge and Hartill (2013, p.243) concur that this discourse serves to protect the institution from deeper scrutiny, as they just have to 'keep the bad men out'. Hartill refers to this process as a 'narrative distancing' which, when accompanied by 'collective forgetting' (Hartill, 2013, p.242), allows each new case to be responded to as if previous revelations had not happened, creating a process of concealment.

The 'a few bad apples' discourse thus serves to exclude other more challenging discourses from consideration, especially those that critically engage with gender and power relations. As McAlinden (2006, p.353) argues, organisational cultures within institutions 'may be conducive to abuse of power', especially if perpetrators are in management positions where authority gives them 'the necessary control over the organisational culture'. Yet the policy outcome of seeing perpetrators as 'a few bad apples' is a focus on risk, recruitment and Criminal Records Bureau (now Disclosure and Barring Service) checks as the safeguarding response, rather than examining how internal cultures may be implicated in both making sexual abuse possible and failing to respond appropriately to complaints and concerns.

These risk-based approaches are evident in the Warner Committee report (Department of Health, 1992) on the selection of staff in children's homes and the Utting report (1997). As Stanley puts it, there is a shift 'away from abusive regimes to a focus on the detection and control of individual paedophiles' (1999, p.22). Sullivan and Beech (2002) also refer to this idea in their work on institutional abuse and perpetrators who are professionals, suggesting that abuse tends to be seen as the problem of the individual rather than the institution. This individualisation sets abusers apart from 'normal' men, with the implication that 'professionals who would seek to sexually abuse children should therefore be immediately identifiable to the outside world', (Sullivan and Beech, 2002, p.161). That this has not been the case, Sullivan argues, suggests the weakness of this approach.

Analogies to the Catholic Church are made (see Hartill, 2013), with the concept of 'paedophile priests' a possible alternate version of 'a few bad apples'. Dale and Alpert (2007) stress how the elite privilege of priests and the Catholic church enabled a deflection of responsibility for sexual abuse through the suggestion that abusers were individual 'bad apples', rather than from a 'bad barrel of institutional cultures and structures' (Death, 2015, p.9). Timmerman and Schreuder (2014, p.717) have drawn a similar analogy, in which behaviour facilitating abuse that is embedded in the institutional context is described as 'a rotten basket', in contrast with the pathology of individual perpetrators or 'rotten apples'.

The bad apple discourse is implicitly evident in three serious case review reports, and possibly in far more as many recommendations focus on recruitment and screening, which are linked to this discourse and that of stranger danger. One investigation into a case in a nursery in Plymouth highlighted an over focus in Ofsted inspections on recruitment, criminal records checks, policies and procedures (SCR: Nursery Z, Plymouth, 2010). That this constitutes safeguarding is an implicit endorsement of the 'few bad apples' approach, and the failure to examine the culture of the institution. This theme recurs in a second serious case review exploring sexual abuse in a nursery in 2013, where problematic practices were not understood within the knowledge base about sexual offending: both staff and Ofsted appeared to be overly reliant on Criminal Records Bureau (now Disclosure and Barring Service) checks alone as a safeguarding measure.

'Institution as victim'

This discourse is used in two ways: as a critical reflection on how institutions (especially the Catholic Church) deploy discourses as a protective strategy (Gilligan, 2012; Pilgrim, 2011), and as an actual description of the position of institutions where a 'witch hunt' is deemed to be taking place (Webster, 2005). Again, it emerges in the period when institutions have been under scrutiny. Gilligan (2012) compares the discourses used formally by the church and by victims and survivors in a single year. The church positioned itself as the victim in its appeal to several legitimacy communities – including the general public – in an effort to deflect its accountability. This strategy was seen and challenged by victims and survivors. Webster (2005) argues that the concern about sexual abuse in children's homes, especially in Wales, resulted in the police 'trawling' for complaints: a situation in which, he maintains, the staff and institutions themselves became victims of over-zealous investigation methods. Furedi (2013)

describes a further related scenario in which the integrity of the institution is doubly undermined. On the one hand, the allegation of sexual abuse or misconduct damages its reputation and credibility; on the other hand, the public inquiry, now a 'front-line instrument of governance', signals the loss of its legitimacy as a public institution (Furedi, 2013, p.89).

A variant of this discourse is also proposed by McAlinden (2006) with reference to 'institutional grooming': the process by which perpetrators gain the trust of institutions. Here the focus is, however, less on the institution as victim than the victimisation of the institution by perpetrators – a subtle but important shift of emphasis.

'Gold diggers'

'Gold diggers' sits underneath the 'institution as victim' discourse. It embodies the view that individuals, especially young people, only report sexual abuse in order to gain financial compensation, with an implicit suggestion that these are false accusations. This discourse is particularly apparent in the 2000s in connection with large-scale historical investigations into sexual abuse in residential institutions. Webster (2005) claims that, after 'trawling operations' in North Wales, Cheshire and Merseyside, 'several thousand former residents of care homes have made claims for compensation, and some have already received sums approaching £100,000' (Webster, 2005, p.4). This is addressed explicitly in the report, *Lost in Care*, which investigated child sexual abuse in children's homes in North Wales (see Timeline 2000s, Appendix D). The tribunal of inquiry (Waterhouse, 2000, pp.72, 74) declares itself to be impressed by the 'sincerity of the overwhelming majority of the complainants', noting, in fact, the difficulties for victims and survivors in coming forward.

'Making parents/children responsible'

A discourse that frames parents as responsible for keeping their children safe from sexual abuse makes fleeting appearances throughout the literature, thus deflecting responsibility from both institutions and abusers. It is linked to notions of failure to protect by mothers, but different in that it most often locates responsibility for preventing child sexual abuse with parents or children. There are earlier examples, but this discourse is closely linked to online safety and awareness raising, so it is most evident in the 2000s. In the Frameworks Institute study involving a small sample of the general public, some participants thought that 'open talk' about child sexual abuse would give children 'information about how they can protect themselves from sexual abuse' (2016, p.13). If delivered without wider social conversations, this implies that 'the primary burden of prevention [is] on individual children rather than on society as a whole' (Frameworks Institute, 2016, p.14). Elliott and colleagues' (1995) interviews with sex offenders include comments about how parents and children could prevent sexual abuse, and that institutions did not give parents enough information to keep their children safe. Two decades later, guidance for local authorities includes the suggestion that 'parents should know and be able to stop it' as one of the top ten myths about child sexual exploitation (Local Government Association, 2014).

What appears to be a clear shift over time in this discourse is perhaps something of a mirage, however. This discourse appears in initiatives aimed to prevent sexual abuse and exploitation. Attempts to equip parents and children with skills and confidence to be clear about boundaries and identify signs of abusive behaviour can quickly slide into making them responsible for stopping perpetrators from offending (Craven, Brown and Gilchrist, 2007). Guidance documents and inquiry reports that make recommendations about targeting children and parents in awareness-raising materials might be inadvertently indicating that they are responsible for preventing sexual abuse (HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2015). In a 2013 survey for Parents Against Sexual Exploitation, 44 per cent of professionals and 41 per cent of parents reported that 'in most cases' parents are in part responsible for not preventing the sexual exploitation of their children. The Utting report (1997) also makes clear that

parents are ultimately responsible for ensuring that placements away from the family home are effective and safe:

'The decision about placement is ultimately their responsibility. In making it parents should possess all the information they need about the arrangements for keeping their children safe' (Utting, 1997, p.72).

Attempts to make children responsible for preventing sexual abuse also make an appearance in serious case review reports, where it is noted that professional responses to concerns about sexual exploitation centre on giving young women advice about risk and vulnerability. In one case of a young woman who had reported being raped and sexually assaulted, and was repeatedly going missing, there are references to the risk of her 'lifestyle' and a commentary that she had 'difficulties in accepting guidance' (SCR: Child R, Lancashire, 2014, p.2). This emphasis on the behaviours of children and their parents, and their failings to prevent sexual abuse from occurring, makes the perpetrators invisible. Warrington and colleagues (2017) further note that when professionals miss signs of sexual abuse – termed here as denial – children are made responsible for seeking help.

'Family as a protected space'

It has been suggested that narratives about the family and child sexual abuse are linked to underlying conceptions of the rights and roles of the family and state, and relations between them. Ashenden (1996) argues that the public inquiry into Cleveland had a direct influence on how approaches to intervention in the family were written into the Children Act 1989 and subsequent Department of Health guidelines, *Working Together* (Home Office et al., 1991).

Several commentators point to contradictions evident in law and government policy between the promotion of minimal intervention in family life, on the one hand, and the rights and welfare of children, on the other in the immediate aftermath of Cleveland. Fox Harding (1991) notes that while section 1 of the Children Act 1989 describes children's welfare as paramount, it also includes a 'non-intervention principle'⁶, which reinforces rather than undermines the position of parents. Ashenden (1996), similarly, describes the family as a site of 'governance' or regulation by the state and argues that contemporary state-family relations contain competing expectations about the need to protect the welfare of the child and the rights of the family, which lead to a 'tension in the relationship between privacy and intervention' (Ashenden, 1996, p.65; see also Parton, 2016). This sets up a tension between interventionist and non-interventionist approaches. Bacon (2008) goes further, arguing that the over-riding message of the Children Act 1989 was to keep families together by working with the parents. These characterisations echo Campbell's (1988) analysis of how media coverage of Cleveland was articulated as a struggle between the protection of family and parental rights, on the one hand, and the power of the state (personified by the paediatricians and social workers) to remove children from families, on the other. In the 1990s, the privacy of the family continues to be evident in assertions such as the following from the Utting report: 'Public policy is founded on the conviction that family relationships and family values are essentially private' (1997, p.72).

⁶ This states that 'a court may not make an order regarding the child unless it is better for the child than making no order at all' (section 1(5)).

The family is not necessarily a unified concept either. Cream has described narratives of the family in Cleveland in the 1980s as conservative and reactionary 'profamily rhetoric' (1993, p.7). Yet for MacLeod and Saraga (1988), Cleveland demonstrated the extent of collective anxiety about the family in this period, speaking both to concerns on the political right about the preservation of the traditional family, and those on the left about state intervention in the private sphere. This challenge to conceptions of the family on both sides of the political spectrum is reiterated by Olafson and colleagues (1993). Some have identified a particular class dimension in the treatment of families where sexual abuse is suspected. Trevor Buckroyd, a police officer in the Cleveland case, captures the sense of the family as a protected space, but also the differential approach towards families from particular socio-economic groups.

'The family is behind four walls so the relationship is an enclosed world and it follows that the majority of known abused children will come from lower-class families, because for many other reasons they are monitored [...] The family is a protected ethic and this is what the MP Stuart Bell is on about. The normal residence is out of public view' (cited in Campbell, 1988, p.108).

The fact that in Cleveland middle class families were also implicated produced different dynamics than earlier discourses where child sexual abuse was located exclusively among the lower classes (see section 'Perpetrators as other: Blaming 'culture'', above). Campbell argues that this constituted one of the strengths of accused parents' protests in the face of the allegations: 'Apparently their respectability rendered the suspicions unthinkable' (1988, p.6). Salter (2018) concurs that social class can create a degree of protection from intervention or sanction.

In a more recent context, Ward and Patel (2006) suggest that this discourse can also become linked to notions of culture. In their case studies, professionals were reluctant to intervene in sexual exploitation of young women of Bangladeshi origin because of perceptions about the sanctity of family life.

It has been argued that these cultural norms about privacy and family enabled sexual abuse within the family to remain hidden and unchallenged for a long time. Feminist thinkers have critiqued the discourse of the family as a protected space by analysing how a traditional heterosexual family, and sexual abuse, are structured by the different social and economic power that women and men have (Dominelli, 1989; Campbell, 1988; Kelly, 1988; Ennew, 1986). Intervening in the family space, therefore, challenges patriarchal, private boundaries. Nava (1988), writing about media coverage of the Cleveland case, noted how notions of the traditional family and patriarch were defended and cast against Marietta Higgs, one of the paediatricians involved in the multiple diagnoses of child sexual abuse in the case, as representative of the 'spectre' of feminism. The 'family secret' of child sexual abuse is thus expected to stay secret, despite some reports that acknowledged the abuse and that families were not safe places for children. Indeed, the definition of the family as a private space under male control exacerbates children's powerlessness (Dominelli, 1989). At an international level, Van Bueren (1994) contends that child sexual abuse within the family was not seen as a human rights issue, because of the privacy afforded the family unit, and for this reason was not even prohibited in international human rights standards until the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Taylor-Browne has noted that the effect of this heightened emphasis on the parents in Cleveland was to shift attention away from the perpetrators and victims and 'refocus it on the family as victim' (1997a, p.6). Cream concurs with this view, suggesting that this also removes the question of gender from the frame:

'It is particularly interesting to note that 'families' included both the mother and the father, and 'parents' acted as an ungendered, unified unit. It was, however, fathers who were accused of perpetrating sexual abuse on children, and the media appeared to neglect this issue virtually uniformly. The issue was instead refocused on the wronged parents rather than on their powerless, abused children' (Cream, 1993, p.4).

Jewkes and Wykes (2012) update this argument with reference to the figure of the ‘cyber-paed’ (see also ‘paedophile’ discourse), who is represented as violating not just children but also the sanctity of the family home and, therefore, parental authority.

Overlaps of deflection and denial

Five discourses can be located in an overlap between deflection and denial:

- ‘Seductive child’
- ‘Children as sexual beings’
- ‘Promiscuous girls’
- ‘Condoning consent’
- ‘Childhood innocence’

The first three can be understood as deflection from perpetrators, since they suggest that children have invited or initiated sexual abuse and are therefore willing participants. In this way they also deny the harm of child sexual abuse, by framing it as consensual and/or actively wanted by the child. ‘Condoning consent’ is a more recent discourse that is most evident with respect to child sexual exploitation and offers a way of suggesting that young women are choosing to be abused, even if there is some acknowledgment of negative consequences. The final discourse, ‘Childhood innocence’, sits in opposition since it constructs a sexually unknowing child. Children who have been sexually abused are therefore often excluded from notions of innocence where it is equated with sexual purity (Scott, 2001a). While this discourse is less obviously one of deflection or denial, it is positioned here because it is a necessary counterpoint to discourses about children as actively sexual and therefore transgressing ideals about childhood. These five discourses are explained in more detail below, set out in chronological order, based on the period when they are identified as having been most dominant in the literature.

The subsequent section turns to discourses of denial and details how these have manifested over time.

1940s – 1960s

‘Seductive child’

Although the discourse of the ‘seductive child’ has its origins in psychiatry and sexology, specifically early Freudian seduction theory dating back to the late 19th century, it appears to have enduring power and continues to be influential. Olafson, Corwin and Summit suggest that, following Freud, ‘sexual modernists’ tended to argue that sexual expression was benign, with some suggesting that ‘sex between adults and children was relatively harmless and even sought by children’ (1993, p.14). Here also, then, are overlaps with a denial of harm discourse. In an influential paper from the 1930s, based on 16 children who had sexual relations with men, Bender and Blau remarked that they ‘frequently considered the possibility that the child might be the actual seducer [rather] than the one innocently seduced’ (cited in Olafson, Corwin and Summit, 1993, p.14).

Kelly (1988) argues that the participation of children in abuse was a central theme in clinical accounts published in the 1950s and 1960s, including the Kinsey reports, particularly on female sexuality (Kinsey et al., 1953). Gagnon (1965), writing in the 1960s, contends that there is provocation by the child where sexual abuse is repeated, and later West (1981) states events ‘could have been avoided if children had wanted to. This is linked to notions that child sexual abuse is not harmful because children are seen as initiating sexual contact, even if implicitly. It also informs discourses of paedophilia as a sexual orientation, sexual liberation and man/boy love (see section ‘Paedophile as sexual orientation’ below).

Various examples of the discourse of the seductive child in the professional and institutional literature can be cited in more recent decades. In a study on professionals' attitudes, Eisenberg and colleagues (1987, p.12) found that, although 42 per cent of respondents felt that few if any of the victims would enjoy the abuse, almost 10 per cent felt that the majority of the children would obtain some enjoyment. Taylor-Browne (1997b) cites comments made by judges that attribute sexual agency to children and equate this with responsibility for sexual abuse. One commented that a 12-year-old rape victim had been 'asking for trouble' when she went to the room of a 19-year-old man. An 8-year-old has been described as 'not entirely an angel herself' and the man who raped her was not sent to prison on the grounds that as he was only 18 at the time he was not 'a grown man' (Taylor-Browne, 1997b, p.123). Green cites a well-known social work textbook, *Sex and the Social Worker* (Davis, 1993, 1983, cited in Green, 2005), in which the author claims that 14-year-old boys seduce powerless residential workers. These discourses tie in with long-standing victim-blaming attitudes and concepts of 'ideal' victims that have been observed in relation to women and girls reporting sexual violence (Temkin, 2002; Taylor-Browne, 1997a).

1970s – 1990s

'Children as sexual beings'

A number of sources referred to conceptions of children as sexual beings (Firmin, Warrington and Pearce, 2016; Green and Masson, 2002; Ward and Keenan, 1999; Campbell, 1988). This discourse is clearly linked to the 'seductive child' and has the same origins, linking it to this earlier period, but it is also subtly different: it suggests that children have an innate sexuality and may even respond to adult sexual advances, while the 'seductive child' is seen actively to seek out and initiate sexual activity.

The secondary literature reviewed here that observed the influence of this discourse in institutional responses, and the institutional texts that echoed this, related to the 1990s. Research in institutional settings has found accounts of adolescent sexuality, which are often gendered. For example, Barter's (2006) research in 14 children's homes found that girls were described as 'provocative' and responsible for provoking sexual violence by male residents, who could not control themselves. In research and inquiries regarding sexual abuse in residential settings, there are various overtones of childhood or adolescent sexuality as dangerous. In her discussion of the photographs of children used as forensic evidence in the Cleveland case, Campbell captures the ambivalent reactions this provokes:

'They are glimpses of a sexual relationship which are disturbing both because they suggest the sexuality of children, and because they reveal how children take responsibility for relationships thrust upon them. They challenge the notion of childhood as asexual, precisely because they reveal children's participation, albeit under duress' (Campbell, 1988, p.79).

Farmer and Pollock's research with 40 sexually abused and abusing young people in care in the 1990s found that residential staff did not actively address sexual health and behaviour with them for fear they might be seen as condoning sexual activity by young people under the age of consent, although, somewhat contradictorily, they sometimes 'erroneously judged very sexualised and risky behaviour as normal' (2003, p.108). Stanley (1999) suggests that expressions of sexuality by young people in residential care are seen as potentially threatening for staff. These findings are echoed in Green's research in the 1990s on residential children's homes, which found that staff avoided talking to the children about sexuality and sexual abuse 'for fear that they would be seen as corrupting the children and unleashing a rampant, untameable sexuality' (2005, p.466). This can also be discerned in the Warner Committee report where staff are advised to take guidance on 'how to avoid placing themselves in a position of danger 'especially at night' (Department of Health, 1992, 155). The discussion of preliminary interviews with potential staff also highlighted the importance of probing the 'extent to which they

have characters strong enough to resist sexual temptation from children' (Department of Health, 1992: 52). In some cases, this sense of danger appears to derive from beliefs about an innate and assertive child sexuality and in others anxiety about the effects of sexual abuse on their sexual behaviour. There are a number of references in the secondary literature to ideas about the moral corruption and dangerousness of victims following sexual abuse (Brown and Barrett, 2002; Scott, 2001a; Smart, 1999; Taylor-Browne, 1997a).

'Promiscuous girls'

The construction of 'Promiscuous girls' is a gendered discourse that is implicit in much of the literature, and explicit in institutional and professional responses to sexual exploitation. It emerges in the literature on 'child prostitution' as a way of explaining the abuse of girls in the prostitution system from the 1950s onwards (Brown and Barrett, 2002).

In this way it reflects how ideas about why prostitution exists. It is well documented that the prostitution system is gendered, as most of those who sell sex are women and girls and the vast majority of those who pay for sex are men (Coy, 2016). From the Victorian era onwards, the commercial sexual exploitation of girls was understood as prostitution (and therefore consensual or chosen) rather than abuse (Brown and Barrett, 2002). Crimes related to prostitution in the Sexual Offences Act 1959 applied over the age of criminal responsibility of 10 years old; an attempt to have children exempted from these measures was unsuccessful. However, the sympathetic proposer of the clause even referred to the 'sort of bad girl of 15 who has got into trouble at home' (Leslie Hale MP, cited in Brown and Barrett, 2002, p.131).

Explanations for the abuse of girls in the prostitution system therefore drew on similar explanatory frameworks of immorality as those that are applied to adult women (see Melrose, 2013a). Economic circumstances were rejected as a motivation during the 1950s (Brown and Barrett, 2002). Later, studies about delinquency among girls during the 1960s and 1970s acknowledged the impact of 'economic and emotional deprivation' while also linking girls' involvement in prostitution to 'general loosening of moral standards and the increase of homosexuality' (Brown and Barrett, 2002, pp.157–158). Being paid for sex was attributed to personal moral deficits because of the 'historical linkages made between the delinquency and criminality of girls and women and their sexuality and sexual activities' (Brown and Barrett, 2002, p.156). The dictionary definition of 'promiscuity' as 'sexually indiscriminate' therefore has gendered meanings.

Melrose (2004) also noted that where abuse of young women through prostitution was acknowledged by professionals in the 1990s, it was attributed to 'bad girls'. Research with sexually exploited young women about their experiences of local authority care found evidence of professionals failing to respond to sexual exploitation and abuse because they viewed the girls as sexually experienced and therefore willing (Coy, 2008). These perceptions persist in inquiry reports two decades later. The Office of the Children's Commissioner for England's investigation into child sexual exploitation in the context of gangs and groups (Berelowitz et al., 2013, 2012) documented examples of case records describing young women 'asking for it' and 'liking the glamour'. In a review of barriers to understanding sexual exploitation, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection command report (2013) states that victims who participated in their consultation had been discouraged from approaching police, fearing being judged as promiscuous. The report by the Muslim Women's Network on the sexual exploitation of young Muslim women also highlights perceptions of girls as 'temptresses', which deflects attention from the actions of the men and boys who abuse and exploit (Gohir, 2013). It has been suggested in earlier commentary that the discourse of promiscuous girls has made it possible to deny there being harm in exploitation by constructing young women as a 'challenge to the victim concept' (Ayre and Barrett, 2000, p.55).

It is perhaps unsurprising that this discourse continues to influence professional responses when the landmark 2009 guidance on Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation – the first update since 1999 – included ‘promiscuity’ on the list of indicators of sexual exploitation (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009: 43) (see Timeline 2000s, Appendix D). Links between sexual exploitation and promiscuity became encoded in public policy.

In serious case review reports, the language of promiscuity with respect to sexually exploited young women is explicit and implicit. The well-documented references in agency records to girls ‘prostituting themselves’ and ‘putting themselves at risk’ (e.g. Berelowitz et al., 2012) were also evident. A review into the sexual exploitation of five young women in Coventry observed:

‘The language used about the children, for example references to promiscuity, was highly judgemental and demonstrated a lack of understanding of the degree to which they were in control of what was really happening to them’ (SCR: Child G-K, Coventry, 2016, p.17).

When considered against the ‘disbelief’ and ‘scepticism’ of young women’s reports of rape by police also noted in this serious case review, the judgement of promiscuity referred to in the report can be seen as more than condoned consent: it is a subtly coded framing of young women as always sexually willing, and therefore not violable. Similar implicit references to a discourse of promiscuity are present in the serious case review involving Operation Bullfinch in Oxfordshire (SCR: Children A, B, C, D, E, and F, Oxfordshire, 2015). Police records include notes such as ‘she is a streetwise girl who is wilful’ (SCR: Children A, B, C, D, E, and F, 2015, Oxfordshire, p.34) and, speaking of a 14-year-old girl who appeared 18 or 19, ‘by her own [she] admission initiated the sexual intercourse with both named males’ (SCR: Children A, B, C, D, E, and F, Oxfordshire, 2015, p.35).

Shortcomings in institutional responses to sexual exploitation of young women are long noted (Melrose, 2004; Barrett, 1998; Jesson, 1993). This failure of child protection practices has been framed as a ‘problem of fit with norms and expectations’ based on victim-blame that would not apply to other forms of child sexual abuse (Ayre and Barrett, 2000, p.58). Victim blame is evident in relation to all forms of child sexual abuse, but it is telling that the discourse of promiscuous girls is only found where there is some form of exchange, and an equation with prostitution.

2000s – 2010s

‘Condoning consent’

The term ‘condoning consent’ is borrowed from Pearce’s (2013) notion of ‘condoned consent’, to capture the way the sexual exploitation of children is explained through their ‘choices’ and sense of agency. There are different ways of viewing this discourse: it operates both to deflect responsibility from perpetrators by suggesting that young people are willingly engaging in sexual activity (and therefore deflects from institutions’ responsibility to intervene), and also serves to deny the harm of sexual exploitation and abuse. It is linked to the discourse of promiscuous girls.

Pearce describes condoned consent as ‘an overarching culture in professional discourse that some young people will choose a lifestyle that includes violence and abuse’ (2014, p.134). There are two elements to Pearce’s (2013) formulation: condoned consent as unconscious framing of young people’s actions, because of poor training; and a negligent application where older young people’s welfare is compromised by an assumption that they are freely choosing to be exploited.

In the literature reviewed for this REA, condoned consent becomes both a philosophical and professional discourse of 'condoning consent', a way of speaking about sexual exploitation which normalises the idea that children actively and willingly decide to exchange sexual acts for some form of payment or reward. There is a tension here with balancing how some young people talk about feeling that they are making decisions, and recognising the limited and coercive contexts in which these decisions are made (Pearce, 2014; Coy, 2009; Melrose, 2004).

Brown and Barrett (2002) noted that the combination of young women's emotional attachment to abusers, and the equation of victimhood as vulnerable or passive, lead to professionals misreading sexual exploitation as something consented to by victims and survivors. Writing about 'child prostitution' in the 1980s and 1990s, they suggested:

'[I]n the eyes of care and control agencies [children] may therefore be held to blame for the circumstances in which they find themselves...despite the weight of evidence which suggests that some young people are pushed into prostitution as a result of past negative experiences and reduced circumstances and that other, equally desperate and vulnerable young people, are pulled by the perceived positive outcomes their involvement may bring (financial gain, a sense of power over the punters, a sense of belonging) social care and control agencies appear previously to have adopted the view that young people 'freely' choose to be involved in the prostitution' (Brown and Barrett, 2002, p.181).

Despite the attempt in Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution (2000) to redefine the buying of children for sex as abuse, this was undermined by a 'persistent and voluntary return' clause which allowed children to be prosecuted where they were seen to be continuing to be involved in exploitation. Media reporting of recent sexual exploitation cases (e.g. Rochdale) has also implied that, even where girls were being paid for sex, they were making informed choices (Mooney and Ost, 2013). One confounding factor here is the age of sexual consent (16), since extending age thresholds around sexual exploitation to 18 – in line with international obligations – breaks links with the criminal act of unlawful sex (Gillespie and Ost, 2016). In other words, the higher age of consent may not be recognised by professionals who perceive young people over the age of 16 as capable of making choices to have sex (Gillespie and Ost, 2016).

Research with practitioners illustrates the enduring hold of condoning consent as a professional discourse. Reisel (2016) used vignettes with ten social work professionals to explore their assumptions about child sexual exploitation and consent. She found that notions of choice are more readily applied to sexual exploitation than other situations of risk, especially for older children. By analysing the professionals' discourse she identified concepts of choice, agency and consent recurring in their 'linguistic field'. While overall professionals seemed unable to hold both ideas of manipulation and choice as explanations, active language of consent appeared to be applied to young men more than young women. Echoing the competing notions of care and control within social work responses to sexual exploitation (Brown and Barrett, 2002; Phoenix, 2002), Reisel (2016) further noted that condoning consent can have two outcomes on professional responses: either intensifying concerns to restrict young people's choices, or reducing the need for intervention because young people are seen as willing participants.

This discourse is one of the most prominent in the serious case review sample, primarily in relation to child sexual exploitation, but spanning cases of sexual abuse too. As Reisel (2016) notes, high-profile serious case review and inquiry reports have documented professional perceptions about consent as consistently problematic. The triennial reviews of serious case review reports also note findings where agencies described children as 'prostitutes' to parents, possibly underpinned by a 'promiscuous girl' discourse (Sidebotham, Peter et al., 2016; Brandon et al., 2008). Examples of this are evident in

our sample, often framed as the view that young women were making choices, taking risks or placing themselves at risk:

'By 2004 the police recorded that [redacted] was believed to be having sex with 'Asian' men. There was reference to her 'prostituting' herself by both family and the police and this information was referred to the Public Protection Unit, but there is no record of any further response' (SCR: Young People 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, Rochdale, 2013, p.27).

One serious case review involving sexual abuse of girls within a school by their male peers appeared to rest on assumptions that the young women were consenting to the abuse. In another, where the eldest child of a family had been subjected to 'prolonged' sexual abuse and was also being sexually exploited by older men, agencies were described as 'inappropriately tolerant' of her being sexually active from a young age (SCR: KK, Lewisham, 2009). Sexual health agencies (and to a lesser extent, GPs) are often singled out in the serious case reviews for condoning consent, responding to visits from young people with contraception and infection treatment rather than asking searching questions about the nature of the sexual activity. In the sample, this includes a 13-year-old girl being offered contraception by a school nurse under the Fraser guidelines⁷. This report concludes:

'There were numerous occasions on which Julia made allegations and sought sexual health advice, and on each occasion there was a stronger professional focus on advice-giving rather than exploring issues of consent and abuse [...] the language used by Julia herself such as "she had consented to sex" was recorded across professional records without any clear critique or analysis about what it meant for Julia and her well-being' (SCR: Julia, Thurrock, 2014, p.35, 26).

However, social workers and police are also recorded as framing sexual exploitation and abuse as consensual. Condoning consent was present in one case of a 14-year-old boy, abused by older men, where multiple agencies framed his behaviour as sexual experimentation or promiscuity. This collided with a seeming professional view that he was not vulnerable, which can be linked to perceptions that masculinity is not compatible with victimisation (see 'Masculinity as incompatible with victimisation' below). It was rarely possible to ascertain which element of Pearce's (2013) formulation of condoned consent (based on poor knowledge and training or negligence) was evident, as there was little detail about professionals' thinking.

1940s – 2010s

'Childhood innocence'

The discourses of child and adolescent sexuality outlined above – variants on the sexually knowing child – are frequently constructed in opposition to a version of childhood innocence (Ennew, 1986). Green (2005, p.463) points out that child sexuality tends to be portrayed negatively or pathologised, while the ideal innocence is both 'asexual' and 'unknowing' (see also Ennew, 1986).

This discourse is present to some degree throughout the period under review, with some differing emphases. Furedi (2013) argues that since the 1980s there has been a new definition of childhood as vulnerable, epitomised by the phrase 'children at risk'. He connects this with the shift from children's economic value to their emotional value beginning in the late Victorian era, as well as declining birth

⁷ This term refers to the principle that children under 16 can be deemed able to consent to medical treatment without parental permission. The Fraser guidelines set out in 1985 as a consequence of the Gillick case refer specifically to contraceptive advice.

rates in more recent decades (see also Ennew, 1986). With this greater emotional investment in children, he argues, comes a heightened sense of preciousness, but also fragility and risk. During this period:

'The sacred child has emerged as one of the main foci of moral concerns. Those who assert that they are speaking on behalf of the child can assume that they will gain recognition of their moral authority. The paedophile symbolises the antithesis of the sacred child and is therefore the principal target of moral crusades' (Furedi, 2013, p.40).

The protected state of childhood is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, which was implemented in the UK in 1991 (see Timeline 1980s, Appendix D).

Traditional concepts of childhood innocence have been critiqued for compounding children's powerlessness and dependency (Dominelli, 1989). Being innocent or unaware of sexual matters can also leave children unable to recognise or name sexual abuse and exploitation (Green, 2005). Scott argues that innocence operates as a 'double-edged sword' because it stigmatises the 'knowing' child as spoiled (2001a, p.354). MacLeod and Saraga point out that, while arguments about the repression of childhood sexuality or the image of the child as 'innocent' may be problematised, '[w]hat does not follow is that adult-child sexual relations are "unproblematic"' (1988, p.26).

These notions of childhood sexuality and innocence are not just theoretical, but have a tangible impact. Indeed, Green (2005) suggests that this idealised version of childhood prevents adults working within institutions from engaging with children as sexual beings, and thus from addressing sexual abuse and exploitation in environments such as residential care. A similar argument has been made about professional difficulty in addressing sexually abusive behaviours by young people (Hackett et al., 2015; see also Smith & Woodiwiss, 2016; Woodiwiss, 2014).

Summary of shifts over time and institutional relevance

In dominant discourses of deflection, some temporal shifts can be traced in how discourses about child sexual abuse evolve. For instance, the most significant shift over time relating to 'stranger danger' is who is constituted as the stranger: from 'deviant' men in parks to online predators. While there was a short period in the 1980s and early 1990s when perpetrators were recognised as primarily known, and in many ways ordinary, men, the discourse of perpetrators as other has held sway. The precise ways in which they are other has had different contours over time, but for almost two decades 'paedophile' has held this meaning, with a more recent racialised version entering public discourse. Institutional versions of this include the 'Few bad apples' and 'Perpetrators as weak and/or vulnerable' discourses, which enable organisations to blame the behaviour on isolated individuals and focus on technical aspects of recruitment as a safeguarding response rather than looking in more depth at internal cultures.

The lens of the family has been a constant prism through which a number of key discourses of deflection have been articulated, as has mother blame in some form. There are elements of collusive mother in early theories of family dysfunction, and more recently this is framed as failure to protect in the practice literature. Discourses linked to mother blame surface in institutional responses through serious case review reports into sexual exploitation and intrafamilial sexual abuse, evidenced in scrutiny of mothers' actions and an accompanying silence about those of perpetrators. There was evidence of children who were sexually abused in the family environment being unprotected where institutional responses appeared to draw on discourses that associate sexual abuse with dynamics within the family.

In the overlaps between discourses of deflection and denial, the discourse of the seductive child evolves over time into the idea of children as sexually knowing. Although its origins are earlier, seductive child

is located in the 1940s-60s, where it was influential in the clinical arena. Children as sexual beings has similar origins but is more pertinent in the literature reviewed here in relation to the 1990s, while condoning consent is more visible in the 2000s, particularly in relation to responses to child sexual exploitation. In this set of discourses it is possible to see a degree of progression over time, although one does not give way entirely to the other, as there are traces in other decades. Childhood innocence is more tangible across the review period, perhaps as it acts as a polar opposite through which to construct the other framings of seductive child, children and sexual beings and promiscuous girls, and condoning consent.

Discourses of denial

This section explores discourses of denial around child sexual abuse.

Key findings

- Discourses of denial serve to either deny that sexual abuse is harmful or deny the extent to which it is happening. Discourses that deny the extent to which child sexual abuse is happening can overlap with discourses of disbelief.

Denial of harm

This cluster of discourses functions to suggest that child sexual abuse is, as one discourse explicitly suggests, 'Not that harmful'. Overall, three specific discourses were identified under this cluster:

- 'Not that harmful'
- 'Intervention is worse'
- 'Paedophile as sexual orientation'

In the 'Not that harmful' discourse, identified in the early decades covered in this REA, adult-child sex is perceived as not creating long-lasting hurt or impacts. There is a later, relatively prominent discussion of this notion in literature on images depicting child sexual abuse (Horsman, 2016). 'Intervention is worse' builds on this to imply that, since child sexual abuse itself is not that harmful, the disruption of professional intrusion and possible or likely removal from family relationships would be more negative for children than living with ongoing sexual abuse. 'Paedophile as sexual orientation' emerges in the 1970s and echoes other discourses by minimising the abuse of power in adult-child sex since it seeks to argue that sexual contact with children is a legitimate, if socially stigmatised, sexual preference.

As in previous sections, discourses are discussed below in a chronological order, based on the decade in which they are identified as being most dominant in the literature. Most discourses can be seen as rippling beyond one decade, although sometimes how they are apparent changes over time.

1940s – 1960s

'Not that harmful'

In the early literature on child sexual abuse there is often reference to its minimal impacts on children. Kelly (1988) claims that very few research articles were cited in support of this at the time. In the 1920s, a disciple of Freud, Abraham, suggested that sex between adults and children might not be that harmful and might, in fact, be sought by children (cited in Olafson, Corwin and Summit, 1993). Kinsey and colleagues' work originally published in the 1950s was another key example of this approach, in which they contended:

'It is difficult to understand why a child, except for its cultural conditioning, should be disturbed at having its genitalia touched, or disturbed at seeing the genitalia of other persons, or disturbed at even more specific contacts' (Kinsey et al., 1953, p.121).

There is also a portrayal of incest as not harmful because it occurs in a loving family environment (Nava, 1988). For example Soothill and Francis quote Lord Justice James speaking in the 1960s:

'[I]t can vary in gravity between the most vicious and revolting abuse of a position of trust and the manifestation of true and deep affection' (cited in Soothill and Francis, 2002, p.4).

In the 1970s and 1980s, this view of adult-child sexual contact overlaps with the libertarian perspective (see section 'Paedophile as sexual orientation', below).

In her research with staff and adolescents in residential care, Green (2005) found that notions of harm were typically infused with norms relating to gender and sexuality with the result that levels of harm for boys were viewed differently from those for girls. For example, while abused boys were seen by staff as being latently homosexual and therefore complicit in their own abuse, the perceived homosexual nature of the sexual activity was seen as less 'normal' and therefore more harmful. Meanwhile, abuse of girls involving vaginal rape was seen as less abusive because it was seen as heterosexual abuse and therefore more normative and less harmful.

'Intervention is worse'

This discourse is more evident in the earlier literature. It is linked to the view that adult-child sexual contact is not that harmful (see section 'Not that harmful' above), and the two are often presented in conjunction with each other. Kinsey's report on female sexuality, published in the 1950s and based on data gathered from the late 1930s onwards, contained the claim that the reactions of others in relation to sexual abuse were more damaging to the child than the abuse:

'Some of the more experienced students of juvenile problems have come to believe that the emotional reactions of the parents, police officers, and other adults who discover that the child has had such contact, may disturb the child more seriously than the sexual contacts themselves' (Kinsey et al., 1953, p.121).

A similar narrative is found more recently in West's assertion:

'The minimal damage attributable to most sexual encounters does not justify extreme reactions [...] In particular, police questioning, appearances in court, family dissension and eventually perhaps the imprisonment of a parent, friend or relative to whom the child is extremely attached are likely to be far more traumatic than the sexual incidents themselves' (West, 1981, cited in Kelly, 1988: 56).

This view has been challenged by the large body of research and victim and survivor testimony on the impacts of sexual violence (see Kelly, 1988). Although the issue of secondary victimisation within the criminal justice process was taken up by feminist academics in the late 1990s and 2000s, they looked primarily at parallel processes of victimisation in intervention and sexual abuse rather than seeking to minimise the harms of abuse.

1970s – 1990s

'Paedophile as sexual orientation'

This discourse emerges in the 1970s through the assertion that 'man/boy love' should be recognised as a legitimate sexual orientation (Li, 1991; Thorstad, 1991). It is also linked to the sexual liberation movement, which in some versions did call for an exploration and freeing of childhood sexuality with a number of heterosexual permutations (e.g. Constantine, 1977), but the two movements diverged over the question of paedophilia. Capra, Forresi and Caffo (2014) raise a further question about the focus on pre-pubescent children and raise the question of whether this is a moral, scientific or legal discourse. The North American Man/Boy Love Association and the Paedophile Information Exchange (PIE) in the UK were exponents of such views during the mid-late 1970s.

This discourse is most clearly articulated in the influential paper by Brongersma (1991), a Dutch politician and academic who visited and spoke in the UK in the 1970s, including at events attended by PIE members (Plummer, 1981). He makes the distinction between sexual acts and sexual attraction, and with what he terms 'pseudo-paedophiles' who have sex with children because they cannot 'perform' with adults. This is contrasted to man/boy love which, he maintains, was considered normal at some historical moments. Reference is made to surveys in the 1970s of 'boy love' organisations in at least six European countries including the UK, and in an aside he cites the 'evidence' for the paper as having met 500 'boy-lovers' and 45 boys or adolescents. A distinction is made between acts with boys and with girls; boys are said to be consenting with force seldom used, which is not the case for girls. This is part of an argument to distinguish 'man/boy love' and paedophilia from 'real sexual abuse' (Brongersma, 1991, p.154); 'man/boy love' being characterised by 'tender and gentle' interactions, and a means through which boys get a good sex education. There are a number of statements, not backed up by evidence, which suggest that in the 1970s there were spaces in which such contacts between men and boys were accepted. For example, Brongersma (1991) describes some social workers who 'worked miracles with delinquent boys [...] not by preaching but by sleeping with them' (Brongersma, 1991, p.160), and states that in Berlin there was a practice of having 'boy-lovers' as supervisors of boys who were deemed delinquent. There is some support from a historical paper (Häberlen, 2016) of practices which today would be considered abusive in the context of wider sexual liberation politics. Brongersma (1991) concludes that the danger for boys is less the sexual element and more being entirely indulged through love.

Thorstad (1991) explores what he terms a distancing of the 'man/boy love' movement from the gay movement in the US, which he dates to the 1980s. He argues that this was caused by a shift in the politics of the sexual liberation movement, which had previously linked both, to a focus on the mainstream acceptance of gay men. One of the challenges the gay movement had to address was the association of homosexuality with child pornography and child sexual abuse, which was used strongly in Christian right-wing opposition to same-sex relationships. A robust message that homosexuality was entirely different from paedophilia became part of the campaign, which involved a distancing from those who argued for inter-generational sex. Thorstad (1991) also documents longstanding tensions between lesbians and gay men, with lesbians raising issues about sexual abuse in the 1970s and gay men, in the main, failing to see the relevance of this to gay politics for at least another decade.

This discourse has another strand rooted in the clinical literature on sex offending. The link is the discursive connection to homosexuality, with both homosexuality and paedophilia considered by many clinicians to be associated forms of sexual deviance (Malón, 2012). As Green (2005) argues, such statements run the risk of suggesting that all gay men are a risk to teenage boys, or that gay men are the sole perpetrators of sexual abuse. The contradictions in the linking of homosexuality and sexual abuse

are highlighted by Green's (2005) study of residential care, in which young male residents assumed to be gay by peers were perceived simultaneously as predatory or dangerous and weak or feminised. She found that such views were 'deeply entrenched' in the attitudes of many adults in these settings (Green, 2005, p.472). Others point out that constructing gay men as abusers is not borne out by research findings that the main perpetrators of sexual abuse are heterosexual men towards girls (Green, 2005; Wyre, 2000; Hearn, 1988). Kitzinger (2004) makes a similar argument about media coverage of sexual abuse, noting that perpetrators are never described as heterosexual:

'When a man attacks a girl, this is never identified as heterosexual, but when a man attacks a boy this is often identified as homosexual' (Kitzinger, 2004, p.127).

Bingham and colleagues (2016) suggest that in the 1950s arguments against the Wolfenden Committee (Home Office and Scottish Home Department, 1957) recommendation to decriminalise homosexual acts over the age of 21 (see Timeline 1950s, Appendix D) were made through media coverage of the sexual abuse of boys by male professionals (Bingham et al., 2016). Later periods of law reform around the age of consent for homosexual acts have represented these concerns. For example, in 1998 Baroness Young proposed an amendment to the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill when proposals to lower the age of consent for homosexual men to 16 in England, Scotland and Wales were debated in the Lords, stating that lowering the age of consent between males to 16 was not what 'good parents want for their children', stating 'we are family people' (Hansard, HL Deb, 22 July 1998, vol, 592, col 939-940). These arguments surface implicitly in the Warner Committee report (Department of Health, 1992), which suggests that those applying for posts in residential care homes should be questioned about their sexual orientation, in the Leicestershire report on Frank Beck (Kirkwood, 1993), who was convicted of child sex offences after running several children's homes in the 1970s and 1980s, and explicitly in the Utting report, which refers to 'homosexually abusive men' (1997, p.120).

Davies argues that PIE 'networked widely and internationally' (cited in Nelson, 2016, p.201). Robinson (2011) discusses how PIE's submission in 1975 to the Home Office Criminal Law Revision Committee on the age of consent drew explicit parallels between PIE's case and the Wolfenden Committee (Home Office and Scottish Home Department, 1957) report (see Timeline 1950s, Appendix D), thus cementing a connection between homosexuality and paedophilia that has proved 'unshakeable' (Robinson, 2011, p.136).

An extensive debate on how paedophilia should be understood ensued after the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality. Seto (2012) explores whether paedophilia should be conceptualised as a male sexual orientation rather than a sexual disorder. Such a move would require new categories: a sexual gender orientation (homosexual or heterosexual) and a sexual age orientation (sexual orientation toward a specific group). Seto (2012) concludes with the contentious question of whether a sexual age orientation could be tolerated and included in anti-discrimination legislation, if not accompanied by criminal acts. This is an implicit location of paedophilia as a sexual orientation to be afforded similar protections to homosexuality. However, the proviso that the application of such a policy be limited to cases involving no sexual acts with a child is something of a legal and social conundrum.

Malón explores tensions in the diagnostic category through changes in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM) arguing that paedophilia is 'a necessary diagnosis in search of an uncertain disorder' (2012, p.1083). The tension centres on the definition of mental disorder, with the requirement that it causes distress and/or impairment; this creates contradictions as neither may apply despite someone having committed illegal acts, while one or both may apply to a person who has never committed a criminal offence.

This discursive contention raises critical questions about the clinical definition of paedophilia and its usefulness in the context of treatment, research and policy, which the most recent DSM 5 fails to resolve, since it distinguishes between sexual orientation and a clinical disorder:

'However, if they report an absence of feelings of guilt, shame, or anxiety about these impulses and are not functionally limited by their paraphilic impulses (according to self-report, objective assessment, or both), and their self-reported and legally recorded histories indicate that they have never acted on their impulses, then these individuals have a paedophilic sexual orientation but not paedophilic disorder' (Malón, 2012, p.698).

There is limited reference to this discourse in the serious case review reports. One investigation, into sexual abuse of at least 12 boys and one girl in a diocese school (covering a 30-year period), highlights a conflation with homosexuality and child sexual abuse.

2000s – 2010s

'Not that harmful'

One form of child sexual abuse where the discourse 'Not that harmful' has been discussed in the literature in later decades covered by the REA is with reference to abusive images. This is another example of how discourses shape shift over time, taking on slightly different forms in relation to changing contexts – in this case Ennew (1986) and Tate (1990) argued that what was then referred to as 'child pornography' was a record of child sexual abuse. Subsequent debates have centred around notions of harm, fantasy, censorship and freedom of expression. It has also been argued that this form of abuse and exploitation has not been afforded 'equal attention' with other practices (Taylor and Quayle, 2003).

There are two levels where the severity of harm caused by abusive images is contested: harm to the child(ren) involved, and harm to society where images of child sexual abuse are available (Gillespie, 2011). Concerns about social harm have grown in prominence since technological developments have made it possible to create virtual images or morph, splice and edit non-sexual images, or images of adults, to resemble sexual abuse of children (Horsman, 2016; Gillespie, 2011). Where children have not been directly abused in the production of images, the question of harm becomes about normalisation of child sexual abuse and fuelling demand (Gillespie, 2011; Ost, 2002).

This is why Horsman (2016) advocates 'Images Depicting Child Sexual Abuse' as an overarching term for all visual records and representations of child sexual abuse. 'Child pornography' is widely acknowledged to be problematic, because of equations with pornography and connections with consensual sexual pleasure (Edwards, 2000), reflecting the meanings of perpetrators (Itzin, 2001). It is, however, a difficult term to avoid given its prominence in international law and human rights instruments (Gillespie, 2011). The legal framing in the UK of 'indecent images of children' is also criticised, not least because the concept of indecency is not defined, and is separate from harm and abuse. Alternative terms such as 'abusive images of children' and 'images of sexual abuse' have been proposed (e.g. Taylor and Quayle, 2003). Horsman's (2016) formulation of Images Depicting Child Sexual Abuse (IDCSA) encompasses virtual images and notions of harm.

Several authors note how criminal justice responses have struggled to keep pace with how technology has changed the production and dissemination of abusive images (e.g. Horsman, 2016; Gillespie, 2011). The Protection of Children Act 1978 (see Timeline 1970s, Appendix D) criminalised the taking, making, distributing, publishing or possession with intent to distribute of indecent images, but not simply possessing them. This law was catalysed by media reporting of children being abused in the production of pornography, public anxiety and developments in the US, yet doubt persisted over the volume of

images in circulation and whether or not legal intervention was necessary (Horsman, 2016). Subsequent legislation has introduced offences of possession (Criminal Justice Act 1988), and extended cover to pseudo-photographs (Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994) and virtual images (Coroners and Justice Act 2009) (see Timelines 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, Appendix D). Case law in between has to some extent clarified the reach of legislation on technological developments (Horsman, 2016). Nevertheless, a pattern of timid legal interventions suggests that there is an underlying ambivalence about whether or not IDCSA are indeed harmful.

Examination of convictions for offences in 1995 and 1997 under the Protection of Children Act 1978 and Criminal Justice Act 1988 related to images of child sexual abuse found that defendants' disavowal of harm was reflected in light sentences (Edwards, 2000). Edwards (2000) concluded that ambiguous views on the relationship between child sexual abuse and 'child pornography' underpinned 'judicial reluctance' to pass maximum sentences. One widely cited example of this is Professor Oliver Brooke, a paediatrician who was convicted in 1986 of possessing thousands of indecent images, whose sentence was reduced by a judge who compared his actions to schoolboys collecting cigarette cards (Tate, 1990). Almost two decades later, a 2015 HMIC inspection into policing of online child sexual exploitation uncovered cases where no action was taken for possessing indecent images, and expressed concern about the use of cautions for such offences. McManus and Almond (2014) note that ambiguity over the harm of Indecent Images of Children is encoded in legislation, since possession of these images is not included under the umbrella of sexual offences. Yet conviction under these offences can lead to registration as a sex offender and other civil order sanctions e.g. a Sexual Offences Prevention Order (McManus and Almond, 2014). This contradiction suggests there might be ambiguity over the harm of IDCSA, as Edwards (2000) has claimed.

Denial of extent

This cluster of discourses functions to suggest that child sexual abuse is not happening to the extent claimed. They are deployed to suggest exaggeration and even fabrication in some cases. Three specific discourses were identified under this cluster:

- 'Moral panic'
- 'Witch hunt'
- 'Over-zealous professionals'

These discourses were identified as having been dominant between the 1970s and 1990s. They are discussed in more detail below in chronological order within this time period.

1970s – 1990s

'Moral panic'

The concept of moral panic originates in criminology and sociology (Cohen, 1972; Young, 1971) and has been the framing preferred by criminologists and social scientists in relation to child sexual abuse. A moral panic involves exaggerated claims, or a disproportionate reaction to an issue. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) see one of the key characteristics of a moral panic to be disproportionality compared with the objective threat. In this sense, it does not amount to total disbelief, but rather the denial of something happening on the scale being suggested. The designation of something as a moral panic can also be seen as a form of social critique, where panics are seen as social reactions that are 'irrational' and misdirected (Rohloff and Wright, 2010). It has been argued that moral panic discourses are a symptom of wider social tensions, and 'risk society' (Soothill and Francis, 2002). For example, Critcher (2002) links their use with the sense that there is a disintegration of old cultural identities or the advent of new ones. Typically,

there is a focus on an external threat, which shifts focus away from home (Jewkes and Wykes, 2012), ensuring the defence of traditional family (Nava, 1988) and institutional regimes (Stanley, 1999).

In the literature about child sexual abuse, discourses of moral panic have two main versions: one takes ritual abuse as its key moment (Scott, 2001b) in the 1990s, while the other relates to media campaigns about paedophilia. Scott (2001b) makes an analogy with HIV/AIDS about which there was a moral panic, but alongside this there was still public recognition that HIV/AIDS was a serious issue. In contrast, moral panic became the story in relation to ritual child sexual abuse, endlessly repeated in the media, and implicitly relying on a discourse of false accusations. Scott (2001b) terms both examples 'discourses of denial' and points out that this ignores the fact that there have been successful prosecutions for child sexual abuse in which judges have noted the ritual elements. Salter (2018) argues that the tendency to invoke moral panic discourses has in large part excluded examination of the power relations and discursive struggles associated with child sexual abuse.

There is also literature disputing the relevance of moral panic to child sexual abuse. Critcher (2002) argues that paedophiles are not proper 'folk devils' as they are neither vulnerable nor unfairly maligned. He also takes issue with the version of moral panic theory which positions the state as a monolith concerned with 'control culture', arguing that the state has layers with shifting alignments, and that policy processes are complex. Angelides (2004, p.82) argues that the term 'moral panic' is descriptive rather than explanatory, and that it fails to unravel why a particular issue has resonance.

Critcher (2002) argues that moral panic may be too rigid a concept to apply, but accepts that a number of the features of the moral panic framework, such as the emergence and naming of a new problem, its sensationalised and stereotyped treatment by the media, and the construction of an unequivocal folk devil of the 'paedophile', were evident in the public debate over paedophilia in 2000 and 2001. He notes that previous folk devils in relation to child sexual abuse have been social workers, care assistants, paediatricians and feminists (Critcher, 2002):

'This is the power of discourses... Their function is to "delimit what it is possible and not possible" to say and do about an issue... Evidence of the nature and ubiquity of the discourse about paedophilia is not hard to find' (Critcher, 2002, p.531).

Critcher (2002) focuses on the campaign in the News of the World in 2000; there were multiple players at the policy level, the media set an agenda mediating between policy and publics. The intensity of discourse at this time, suggesting that paedophiles were incurable, recidivist, devious and organised, resulted in a number of policy changes including the introduction of sex offender registers (see section 'Perpetrator as other' 'Stranger danger', above). It has also been argued that the exaggeration of the extent of child sexual abuse led to a 'child protection industry' (Clapton, Cree and Smith, 2013).

Another perspective questions why child sexual abuse would not be a moral panic, given its prevalence and impacts. Jenkins (2009), for example, asks why internet 'child pornography' has not given rise to more social anxiety than it has. Gill and Harrison (2015), analysing media coverage of sexual exploitation in which they identify South Asian men as the folk devils, suggest that exploitation of children could be viewed as a 'good moral panic'. In this framing, moral panic is less an exaggeration of the issues at stake and more a recognition that more action and support for victims is necessary.

'Witch hunt'

The discourse of the Witch hunt is commonly used in conjunction with moral panic and is particularly apparent in relation to cases that have been the subject of large-scale child sexual abuse investigations, such as Cleveland, Orkney and later in North Wales, 'when they are perceived to be unjustified' (Beckett, 2002, p.621). The book *When Salem Came to the Boro: The True Story of the Cleveland Child Abuse Crisis* (Bell, 1988), by the local MP for Cleveland during the crisis, who publicly defended the accused parents, draws a direct analogy with the Salem witch hunt.

This discourse re-emerges in the late 1990s and 2000s in connection with a series of cases involving abuse in residential institutions. According to Beckett, use of the witch hunt metaphor is often part of a 'backlash' and is a result of 'a widespread desire to discredit the evidence that sexual abuse is widespread' (Beckett, 2002, p.621). However, Beckett, himself a former field social worker, sees it as apt in relation to the operations in North Wales, Cheshire and Merseyside affecting numerous residential workers.

A key exponent of the witch hunt discourse in relation to child sexual abuse is Webster (2005), who articulates it with particular reference to the Bryn Estyn children's home in North Wales. This perspective does not deny that some allegations of sexual abuse are founded, but disputes the scale of abuse suspected, and from this concludes that false allegations are made. Indeed, 'cases' were being manufactured on the basis of evangelical conviction, not evidence' (Scott, 2001a, p.353). For Webster, this is connected to the approach used in this investigation, described as 'trawling', whereby instead of waiting for allegations to be made spontaneously, the police began actively to look for them. The result is that all residential workers face a 'climate of suspicion' (Webster,; Beckett, 2002), since, 'in the minds of some observers, almost all care workers became paedophiles, or silent abettors of evil crimes' (Webster, 2005, p.3).

'Over-zealous professionals'

Following the Cleveland case, a discourse about 'Over-zealous professionals' circulated in relation to the paediatricians and social workers involved in removing the children, and this was referred to widely in the literature. The phrase appears to originate in the inquiry report into Cleveland, in which Butler-Sloss herself referred to the 'over-enthusiasm and zeal' of the professionals involved (1988, p.244). There was what Clapton and colleagues have described as 'a readiness to believe exaggerated claims of sexual abuse' and a 'readiness to intervene' (2013, p.205). Heather Bacon, a clinical psychologist involved in the case at the time, has stated:

'We can be accused of losing objectivity, of grooming children to make false allegations, of pressurising them by facilitating communication' (Bacon, 2008, p.225).

Similarly, in the inquiry report into the Orkney case it was argued that social workers and police acted precipitously without considering other options. Cream notes the powerful imagery used in the media about Cleveland, suggesting that councils were 'kidnapping' or 'tearing' children from their families on a whim (1993, p.4).

The implication of this discourse that certain professionals are encouraging disclosures all too readily is that child sexual abuse is rare and unusual. Taylor-Browne (1997a) also notes that it resulted in calls to address social workers' 'misuse' of their powers, rather than doing anything about what the perpetrators had done. This discourse is closely linked to the discourse of family as a protected space, since it suggests that professionals are intervening inappropriately in the sanctity of the family sphere.

Overlaps of denial and disbelief

Two discourses are identified here as sitting in the overlap between the denial of extent that child sexual abuse is happening, and disbelief:

- 'False Memory Syndrome'
- 'Masculinity as incompatible with victimisation'

These are explained below in chronological order.

1970s – 1990s

'False Memory Syndrome'

False Memory Syndrome is not, and has never been, a recognised diagnostic category, but for much of the 1990s it was a dominant discourse. It emerged in response to the increasing reports of sexual abuse within the family by adult daughters, and was promoted by the advocacy group VOCAL, which sought to counter critiques of the family as a conducive context for child sexual abuse. Scott (1997) argues that part of the success of this discourse was that it enabled daughters to remain victims, but of therapists rather than abusive fathers. The challenge was to what was termed 'recovered memory therapy' – a concept that appealed to a form of common sense by asking how it was possible to forget traumatic events. Scott argues that over time False Memory Syndrome became a 'discourse of disbelief' (Scott, 1997, p.36). Nelson (2016) refers to the memory debates as 'wars of words', which had impacts on policy and practice, especially in so far as they undermined the short-lived credibility that had been afforded to victims' and survivors' voices.

Whittier (2009) sees False Memory Syndrome as a discursive contest about knowledge. The recently established credibility of experiential knowledge of survivors (see section 'Space to speak', Chapter 6) was challenged by experimental work on memory, which was bolstered by claims to science. Part of the appeal of False Memory Syndrome is that its use can endorse family values, as the explosion of accounts of sexual abuse in the family was seen as an attack on the family. While there is limited indication of an explicit influence of False Memory Syndrome on policy, it had more impact in the courts. Nelson (2016) argued that the linked discourse of Parental Alienation Syndrome has been used by defence lawyers in family court cases involving children, whereas False Memory Syndrome is used if the case involves adult victims and survivors.

Interestingly, both the Cleveland and Orkney inquiries – the two cases in which agency action rather than inaction was scrutinised, with young children removed from families because of suspicions of child sexual abuse – raised concerns about 'disclosure'. It is worth noting that Ralph Underwager, a member of VOCAL, and an early proponent of False Memory Syndrome, gave expert evidence to the Cleveland enquiry. This discourse was not evident in the sample of serious case review reports.

2000s – 2010s

'Masculinity as incompatible with victimisation'

In the literature on child sexual exploitation, many authors claim that boys and young men are 'hidden' victims and survivors (e.g. Lillywhite and Skidmore, 2006; Palmer, 2001). For some, this is because the extent of exploitation of boys is unknown (e.g. McNaughton Nicholls, Harvey and Paskell, 2014; Lillywhite and Skidmore, 2006), although there is also limited evidence of the extent of sexual exploitation of girls. Masculinity is consistently identified in the literature by victims and survivors and professionals as a barrier to the recognition of exploitation of boys (e.g. Beckett et al., 2013; Gohir, 2013) (Beckett et al.; Gohir, 2013). The Children's Commissioner (Berelowitz, 2015) found that where there

were concerns about sexual abuse within a family environment, boys were more likely to be seen as potential perpetrators rather than victims, and referred to a harmful sexual behaviour service, whereas girls were more likely to be referred to a sexual exploitation support service. Within the literature reviewed here, reflection on the influence of this discourse on responses to boys is relatively recent. This is likely to be connected to campaigning and awareness raising by male victims and survivors' groups and children's organisations during the 2000s to raise the profile of sexual violence against men and boys and challenge stigma around male survivors.

The discourse of masculinity as incompatible with victimisation operates to prevent young men and professionals from recognising and naming sexual exploitation. This can include an equation of masculinity with sexual prowess (McNaughton Nicholls, Harvey and Paskell, 2014), and endorsement of stereotypes that men are tough and strong, rather than associations of victimhood as weak and passive (Fox, 2016; McNaughton Nicholls, Harvey and Paskell, 2014).

This discourse is also evident in the serious case review sample. In one example an adolescent boy was found dead in 2009 from a suspected overdose. He had disclosed having been sexually abused, but no child protection action was invoked and he was not interviewed. There were subsequent concerns about his relationships with older men and possible sexual exploitation. However, after months of non-intervention this was explained away as 'promiscuity' and 'sexual experimentation', his own choices, and a police perception that he was 'mature'. Professionals were criticised in the report for failing to address the risk of harm he faced, with the author expressing alarm at the unwillingness of agencies to view him as vulnerable (SCR: Daniel, Kent, 2013, p.23).

Summary of shifts over time and institutional relevance

Discourses of denial function at multiple levels, and the particular ways in which they are articulated shift over time. In the earlier decades, denial of harm was the most clearly identifiable, together with the idea that intervention was comparatively more harmful. As the scale and nature of child sexual abuse became more evident, and there was discussion within research, policy and the media of sexual abuse occurring in a wider range of contexts, specific 'campaigns' of denial were discussed in the literature. Moral panic is an enduring trope through which some of these counter-claims are made.

The influence of these discourses spans both denial of harm and denial of extent about child sexual abuse. 'Witch hunt' is discussed with reference to sexual abuse in children's homes while 'Over-zealous professionals' appears to originate in the Cleveland inquiry report, linked to discourses about the family as a protected space into which professionals inaccurately and inappropriately intervene. This is perhaps a variant on the earlier discourse that 'Intervention is worse'. Paedophilia as a sexual orientation is prominent in the literature, emerging in the 1970s and discussed extensively across disciplines. There was evidence of its influence in some of the institutional texts in the 1990s, such as the Utting and Warner Committee reports and in debates around sexual offences law reform. The only trace of it identified in the serious case review sample was a conflation of paedophilia with homosexuality in a report about sexual abuse in a church diocese (SCR: Case CO1, West Sussex, 2014).

The paramount discourse within this cluster – that sexual abuse is 'Not that harmful' – has considerable longevity from its earliest appearances with reference to incest not being harmful because it occurs in a family environment. Later institutional relevance can be seen in inaction about peer sexual abuse in children's homes and in criminal justice responses to sexual abuse, most acutely with reference to what Horsman, 2016 terms 'images depicting child sexual abuse'.

Discourses that are identified as overlapping with disbelief, False Memory Syndrome and masculinity being 'incompatible with victimisation' have very different origins, but both serve to deny the extent of sexual abuse and disbelieve children's words. False Memory Syndrome emerges in response to sexual abuse of girls in the family, and was not evident in the serious case review reports. The discourse of masculinity as incompatible with victimisation was more prominent in literature and serious case review reports about sexual exploitation of boys, although it is referenced in a recent publication on sexual abuse in the family environment (Berelowitz, 2015). In these texts the discourse was drawn on to deny that boys were being abused.

Discourses of disbelief

This section presents a discourse of 'children lie' that was identified in this review as an explicit way of disbelieving children's experiences of sexual abuse. It includes a discussion of what can be termed 'the telling trap': a way of capturing the paradox that without children's statements about sexual abuse, there is no evidence, yet their words are doubted and disbelieved. This discourse of disbelief endures across decades covered in the review, so is not assigned to a specific time period.

Key findings

- Discourses of disbelief outright refuse to accept that child sexual abuse has occurred. Tendencies to disbelieve allegations of child sexual abuse remained a constant thread throughout the period under review.

1940s – 2010s

'Children lie'

There were several references in the literature describing an overriding culture of believing children, almost at all costs. Beckett (2002, p.625) proposes that the view that 'children never lie about sexual abuse' was an 'article of orthodox faith' in the child protection field in the 1980s, and that to question it was tantamount to 'heresy'. Sikes and Piper link this to a 'master narrative' of childhood innocence, giving rise to what 'seems to have become almost a professional truism, namely that children are unlikely to lie about abuse' (2011, p.296).

However, there is also evidence of a strong history of disbelieving children. Early examples of this can be seen in the depiction of children as liars and fantasists in Freudian seduction theory. In some of his works, Freud referred to patients' accounts of child sexual abuse as fictitious and imaginary (see Olafson, Corwin and Summit, 1993). Smart argues that Freud's psychoanalysis did not silence children, but that psychoanalysis provided a new language of disbelief' (2000, p.66). Nelson highlights how deep-seated prejudice against children, and historical views of them as liars and fantasists concerning sexual abuse, have led to a readiness to accept backlash theories that have denied or minimised abuse (2016).

Often the discourse 'Children lie' was phrased in terms of false allegations. This had particular resonance in the literature dealing with institutions such as education, care homes and the courts. For example, it was noted in the Warner Committee report that 'many staff consider themselves excessively vulnerable to unjustified complaints about their actions' (Department of Health, 1992, p.102). The report also implied that this was more common among care home residents who had previously been sexually abused, stating that; 'These children may be more likely than others to make unjustified accusations against staff' (Department of Health, 1992, p.20). The Leicestershire report (Kirkwood, 1993, p.312) (see Timeline 1990s, Appendix D) observed a 'general predisposition not to believe children, and this was

echoed in the Lost in Care report (Waterhouse, 2000). Speaking of the education sector more recently, in their research on allegations of 'sexual misconduct' in schools, Sikes and Piper note:

'[A] sexually aware 14-year-old is entirely capable of making a detailed false sexual allegation against any adult s/he does not, for whatever reason, like. Such a lie seems far less likely to be perpetrated by a 3-year-old – although the highly sexualised environment which we now inhabit does not totally rule that possibility out either' (Sikes and Piper 2011, p.297).

In their review of literature on sexual abuse in residential care, Timmerman and Schreuder (2014) describe research with care workers by Horwath, who found that staff do not 'readily suspect a colleague of sexual abuse, let alone confront that colleague on the strength of a suspicion' (Horwath, 2000, cited in Timmerman and Schreuder, 2014, p.719). Horwath attributed this to an institutional culture of mutual respect, in which staff would not entertain the idea that colleagues would perpetrate abuse, with the implication that allegations must be false. This view was evident in the Warner Committee report:

'There is a tendency to disbelieve that abuse can happen in residential institutions that are assumed to provide higher standards of care than those families from which children have been removed' (Department of Health, 1992: 7).

Historically, there has been a legal assumption that children are unreliable witnesses and that their testimony is untrustworthy. Temkin argues children are commonly considered to be natural liars, and there is a tendency to disbelieve their word over that of an adult (Temkin, 2002). Evidence of this view can be seen in deep-rooted biases against both women and child witnesses. For example, Sir Matthew Hale's comment in the 17th century that; 'Rape is an accusation easily to be made and hard to be proved, and harder still to be defended by the party accused, tho' never so innocent' (Temkin, 1995, p.384) has had enduring power, and was commonly cited in relation to the experiences of rape complainants in court in the period covered by this study. At a rape trial at the Old Bailey in London in 1976, Judge Edward Sutcliffe, QC, said to the jury: 'It is well-known that women in particular and small boys are liable to be untruthful and invent stories' (Smart, 2002, p.35).

Another way in which a discourse that children lie was phrased was through 'parental alienation'. The theory of parental alienation originated in the work of the American psychiatrist, Richard Gardner, in the mid-1980s. Its premise is that allegations of child sexual abuse are common in disputed custody cases, and that out of revenge mothers brainwash children about their ex-partners, causing them to make false allegations of sexual abuse (Gardner, 1987).

Nelson (2016) argues that despite a lack of medical, scientific or legal validation, this narrative has been highly influential in legal cases and among child protection professionals. In support of this view, the Children's Commissioner for England, in her report on child sexual abuse in the family, found evidence indicating that allegations of child sexual abuse in these contexts were more likely to be disregarded or disbelieved by statutory services:

'They may instead consider that the allegations have been fabricated by a parent/carers in order to undermine or frustrate contact arrangements and/or damage the reputation of former partners' (Berelowitz, 2015, p.53).

Contemporary literature thus demonstrates the enduring power of a discourse that children lie. A recent inspection into police practices regarding child protection found evidence of oppressive questioning, hostility towards children and failure to act on a child's account, with officers too ready to accept a parent or suspect's version of events. 'Sometimes, children were accused of lying or perverting the course of justice when their accounts of offences against them were disbelieved' (HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2015, p.11). Allegations of unreliability have been made about children with disabilities (Nelson, 2016). Yet the supposed unreliability of children's accounts has been challenged by research findings on children's recall, and greater recognition of the barriers children face that may influence how and whether they are able to say they have been experiencing sexual abuse (Nelson, 2016; Allnock and Miller, 2013; Cossar et al., 2013).

That children lie about sexual abuse is another prominent discourse in serious case reviews. One explicit example is of a girl aged approximately seven who was placed in foster care after a family acquaintance sexually abused her. She was removed from the placement over a year later after contracting sexually transmitted infections through sexual abuse by the male foster carer. During this time, she showed signs of injuries to her genitals and told teachers her vagina hurt; her social worker decided that no police referral was possible without a disclosure naming an abuser. There are overlaps with denial here, but one of the most revealing elements of the case is that the male foster carer was required not to be alone with the girl, in case she made a 'false allegation':

'The established norm of seeking a commitment from [a] male foster carer that they will not have unsupervised contact with a female child in their care to avoid allegations being made provides a veneer of assurances that the child and carer are safeguarded... This expectation is set up in this way, not on the basis that the male carer would pose a risk, but in order to protect foster carers from potential allegations of sexual abuse being made by a child' (SCR: Claire, Croydon, 2017, pp.35-36).

The foster carer sexually abused the child on her first night in his care. It seems, however, that her previous experience of sexual abuse may have marked her as an accuser from whom he needed to be protected. It is also possible, since the requirement not to be alone with her was 'supported by management guidance', that there was a blanket rule about male foster carers not having unsupervised contact with children. Either way, there is an assumption that children lie about sexual abuse.

In another serious case review, three children who were sexually abused by their father from the late 1990s through early 2000s made repeated disclosures to teachers, police, voluntary sector workers and social workers. Their father claimed the children were lying; a social worker is said to have decided that they were 'fabricating' the abuse, and child protection notes use the word 'unsubstantiated'. This is identified in the serious case review as poor practice, reflecting a lack of knowledge about the dynamics of child sexual abuse. The children were disbelieved and perceived as difficult, rather than as having experienced significant harm; there was no intervention or protective action.

In a case involving the suicide of a 16-year-old girl, disclosures of sexual exploitation were viewed as 'incredible' and a consequence of her mental health issues instead of her mental health issues being understood as a legacy of abuse (SCR: Child O, Haringey, 2015). Another child, who repeatedly told professionals about being sexually and physically assaulted by her father, described not understanding why no action was taken: 'why the police did nothing' (SCR: Q family, Isle of Wight, 2015, p.23).

What appears to have been in play in these cases was a perception that the children ‘lacked credibility’. This is another manifestation of a discourse of disbelief. It may be more nuanced where professionals do believe the children but do not think that they will be ‘credible witnesses’, perhaps justifiably given the inadequacy of criminal justice responses to sexual violence. In some cases, this is related to victims and survivors who had learning difficulties.

The ‘telling trap’

There was a clear paradox in several of the serious case review reports: where children did not tell professionals that they were being sexually abused this was taken as evidence that no abuse was occurring, yet when they did tell they were disbelieved. This paradox can be termed the ‘telling trap’. Without children’s words, other indicators and signs of sexual abuse are not recognised or named, yet the words of children are also framed as lies. In the sexual abuse of children in the Q family, the serious case review concludes that:

‘[M]any individuals and agencies waited for the women to disclose what was happening even though between 1988 and 2002 there had been seven disclosures by family members and professionals none of which were effectively investigated’ (SCR: Q family, Isle of Wight, 2009, p.12).

Some professionals across several cases also reported feeling afraid of men who were described as domineering, and did not link this to children being unable or reluctant to speak out. In one case, three children:

‘described extremely controlling behaviour by their father who ensured that the children did not speak to the professionals on their own, and even prevented the siblings spending time with each other alone. Adult B described it as a ‘house of secrets’ and it was apparent that the children lived in a highly abusive household’ (SCR: Adults A, B, C, Rochdale, 2013, p.6).

This appears to have created what Carlsson (2009) identifies as a ‘time of silence’, which involves a sense of powerlessness in relation to fathers. Another report refers to ‘worrying signs’ of sexual abuse being displayed by a child, but no action by social workers because the child had not made a disclosure.

Writing about the Cleveland case, Campbell has commented on this ‘crusade’ or imperative for children to tell.

‘Caring adults who believe that children are being, and should not be, abused and who want to do the right thing, demand that children should tell all. They must talk about their experiences, and talk about sex in a way and in the kind of detail that many adults would never do, least of all among strangers. The 1980s is the decade in which we urge children to ‘disclose, share your secret, we will protect you’: that’s supposed to be their salvation. But what happens when children do tell? What happens to all those who told somebody, who then told the police, only to be told in turn that it would never stand up in court. Are we promising them something we can’t deliver? Often children are blamed, accused, or evacuated from their homes, separated from a loved one who might also have been their abuser, when all the child wants is for the abuse to stop. And what happens when they don’t tell? How do we interpret their silences? Do we ever wonder whether what we offer them in return produces impossible conflicts?’ (Campbell, 1988, pp.8–9).

This collides with examples documented here under disbelief, such as a child's reports of rape being described as 'allegations'. Yet when children retract their accounts of sexual abuse, this is immediately believed. Their 'impossible conflicts' include reasons to withdraw their words, once spoken.

'Experts in sexual abuse work are familiar with the burden that telling places on children – they are often reluctant to tell and, having told, often retract. It is part of the process of protecting the abuser, and of taking responsibility for the inevitably painful consequences of disclosure' (Campbell, 1988, p.76).

This point is made clearly in a serious case review report:

'The retraction of allegations was initially accepted without much question and no consideration was given to the reasons for these retractions, particularly around whether pressure was placed on the children to withdraw what they had said' (SCR: Child 1,2,3, 2014, Nottinghamshire, p.13).

Professionals in this case appear to have focused on corroborating the children's accounts as a prerequisite for intervention:

'Without this evidence, the word of the children was judged either to be discredited, or to be insufficient to support protective action' (SCR: Child 1,2,3, Nottinghamshire, 2014, p.28).

The telling trap, then, is that children are compelled to tell when their non-verbal messages are denied, ignored and minimised. When they do tell, their words are scrutinised and questioned, and, in many cases, dismissed as untruths. Attempts to unspeak these words appear to be taken as evidence that the sexual abuse has not happened.

Summary of shifts over time and institutional relevance

The doubting of children's and adults' accounts of sexual violence is one of the oldest and most entrenched of the discourses identified. 'Children lie' is expressed in institutional responses that frame accounts from victims and survivors as false allegations and depict children as unreliable witnesses. It is persistent as a framing used by professionals when accusations or accounts emerge. Ideas of parental alienation and the view that 'it doesn't happen here' have also both influenced institutional responses to sexual abuse, despite a lack of evidence about their foundations.

The concept of the 'telling trap', introduced here, captures how children are required to disclose as evidence that they are being abused, yet their words are often disbelieved. This concept was developed from analysis of the serious case review reports about sexual abuse within the family, where inaction by professionals was justified by the absence of disclosure by children and non-verbal messages denied, minimised and ignored, yet withdrawals of accounts of abuse were unquestioningly believed.

6 Counter discourses

Counter discourses are ways of talking about issues that oppose or challenge dominant views (Alcoff and Gray, 1993) and often come from socially marginalised groups (Cowburn and Dominelli, 2001). This section examines discourses that oppose those of deflection, denial and disbelief.

As discussed in Chapter 4, there are two overarching clusters of counter discourses:

- Discourses of power
- Discourses of belief

These two clusters are explored in detail below, as are the discourses identified within each overarching category.

Discourses of power

Key findings

- Discourses of power challenge dominant understandings and explanations of child sexual abuse by exploring the role of power and status in relation to who does what to whom.

Under this heading, three discourses were identified that challenged dominant understandings and explanations of child sexual abuse by exploring the role of power and status:

- 'Crime of dominion'
- 'Constructions of masculinities'
- 'Conductive context'

As in previous sections, discourses are discussed below in a chronological order, based on what decade they are identified as having been most dominant in the literature. Most discourses can be seen as rippling beyond one decade, although sometimes how they are apparent changes over time.

1970s – 1990s

'Crime of dominion'

The framing of sexual abuse as a crime of dominion was conceptually developed by Campbell (2015). Crimes of dominion are those in which power, status and privilege are seen to play a role in how, why and against whom the crime is committed. More specifically, inequalities between those committing the crime and those who are the victims of it in terms of age, gender, race, class and (dis)ability are often seen as explanatory. In the literature reviewed here about child sexual abuse, the inequalities of gender and age/generation are usually seen as most relevant. Although this discourse could also be used to explore the way in which other intersecting inequalities can be addressed, only one text in the sample used the concept of intersectionality to explore how:

'race and class inequalities limit the opportunities for some women to come to voice about their experiences of childhood sexual abuse and to be heard when they do speak out' (Naples, 2003, p.1156).

Cream echoes the layers of differential power in child sexual abuse:

'CSA (child sexual abuse) is about the abuse of power and it requires an analysis that is capable of contextualising interrelated notions of power in social and political arenas. Two sets of power relations, those between men and women (those of gender), as well as those operating between adults and children (those of generation), must be recognised, together with 'race' and class' (1993, p.9).

The 'crime of dominion' discourse is most clearly articulated in feminist texts from the 1970s onwards (e.g. Nelson, 2016; Herman & Hirschman, 1977), but it is also evident more recently in relation to sport (Hartill, 2013) and the Catholic Church (Pilgrim, 2011), where further layers of institutional power – those of the coach and the priest – have been shown to provide resources to perpetrators.

In addition to the gender and generational disparities between adults and children in contexts such as the family, there are further complexities in institutional contexts. As Green (2005) notes, in an institutional setting there are 'organizational and generational power inequalities' between adults and children in the institution's care. In his research on abuse in a range of institutions in the 1980s and 1990s, Gallagher (2000) has described the range of factors reinforcing a sense of adult power over children, which has facilitated the entrapment of children in abusive situations. Referring to the case files he analysed, Gallagher describes how perpetrators appeared to be:

'...bolstered [...] by a number of factors, such as the power they had over children by virtue of being adults; children's fear of not being believed or being blamed for the abuse; and children's anxiety as to the consequences of making a disclosure. Abusers were exploiting what could be described as children's 'natural vulnerability' (2000, p.809).

Some have referred to the relevance of the theory of 'power and powerlessness' (e.g. Stanley, 1999; Colton and Vanstone, 1998) in institutional settings: staff who may feel powerless within an organisation can nevertheless feel powerful in relation to children in their care, which can lead to a 'corruption of care'.

'Constructions of masculinities'

A discourse focusing on the construction of masculinity is evident in early models of sexual offending, as noted earlier. From the 1970s, feminist approaches have advanced thinking in relation to the social structure of gender and masculinities, and its role in sexual violence.

Scott (2001a) argues that feminist research has provided evidence that has challenged dominant discourses on the nature and prevalence of child sexual abuse, such as that it was rare and unusual and limited to particular isolated groups. In the 1970s feminists challenged the gender-neutral nature of earlier work on child sexual abuse, showing that the majority of perpetrators were male, including when victims and survivors were boys, and the majority of victims and survivors were girls (Dominelli, 1989).

In feminist theory, power relations and conceptions of masculinity are intimately connected. Several of the texts reviewed described and discussed masculinities as a way of talking about the power dynamics of child sexual abuse. MacLeod and Saraga (1988, p.52) argue that; 'Child sexual abuse is a gender issue, and a product of the social construction of masculinity'. Similarly, Dominelli (1989) describes how stereotypical definitions of masculinity (as a dominant, aggressive force) and femininity (as a passive, submissive force) are commonplace in descriptions of sexual abuse in familial environments. According to Dominelli (1989, p.298), feminist work has shown that sexual abuse involves 'sexualised power relationships' and the imposition of male gratification on women and children, which undermines their sense of self-determination and sexuality.

Masculinity is also discussed in the literature on men who work with children (Colton and Vanstone, 1998; Pringle, 1993; Hearn, 1988). For example, Pringle (1993) describes the sexual abuse by welfare staff as 'the problem of men'. Colton and Vanstone develop this, by suggesting that it is important to:

'[P]lace the stories of these men within an understanding of the heterosexual, white, male hegemony which can dominate the social and professional settings within which their offending occurred' (1998, p.514).

Stanley identifies a 'macho' leadership in a number of institutional regimes that have been subject to inquiry and notes the role of gender in structuring power relations within them (1999, p.28). Colton traces this back to residential institutions for young men that have typically displayed masculinist cultures characterised by bullying, and argues that this creates conditions in which sexual abuse can flourish: 'The abuse of power by the bully facilitates a corresponding abuse of power by the child sex abuser. Bullies may be sex offenders themselves' (Colton, 2002, p.36). In *Lost in Care*, Waterhouse (2000, pp.95-96) highlights 'a pervasive culture' of 'damaging attitudes to sexuality' in the Bryn Estyn children's home, including the regular use of inappropriate language with sexual overtones, exposure to pornography and sexualised bullying, which had a negative impact on the developing sexuality of the teenage boys who lived there.

Some texts address gendered norms surrounding sexual behaviour in residential settings for children and how masculinity is implicated in them. The core thread from these studies is how notions of an innate 'male sexual drive' are drawn on to explain differences in gendered sexual norms. Barter's (2006) research into children's homes found that girls were viewed as being in control of their sexuality while boys were believed to have an uncontrollable sexuality. Green (2005) found that young men were seen as unable to control their actions rendering them less blameworthy when they perpetrated sexual violence. This in turn influenced how professionals responded to sexual coercion and abuse, by excusing the behaviour of boys because of ideas about masculinity and sexuality.

2000s – 2010s

'Conducive context'

This discourse is the counterpoint to 'a few bad apples' as it encompasses an analysis which seeks to uncover the contexts within institutions that enable abuse. It was articulated most explicitly in the literature on sport and the Catholic Church, but some of the early feminist work on the family can be seen as connected (Herman and Hirschman, 1977).

In Brackenridge's seminal text *Spoilsports*, she argues that in the UK in the 1990s, 'as the panic [about child abuse in sport] spread, so did the tendency to blame "others" outside sport' (2001, p.237). Similarly, Hartill suggests that:

'As in other contexts, the instinctive reaction has been to blame deviant individuals and focus on the development of protection policies to keep the "bad men" out, rather than to reflect critically on the sociocultural, masculinist environments that may support sexual violence' (2013, p.248).

As a result of this narrowed focus the exploration of a culture of hierarchy was sidelined. Obedience to coaches, the treatment of the body as a resource to be trained – all elements that Hartill (2013, p.248) describes as part of an 'athleticist' discourse, which served to justify practices that objectify children and fetishise their bodies – were not addressed. Hartill (2013) suggests that these aspects of the culture of sport create conditions in which child sexual abuse can easily occur.

Some authors (e.g. Pilgrim, 2011; Dale and Alpert, 2007) explore structural and cultural aspects of the Catholic Church that both enable sexual abuse and facilitate denial. Dale and Alpert (2007) note that the definition of paedophile in DSM 5 would not extend to cases involving priests and adolescents – the majority of known cases. They argue that diagnostic categories are unhelpful in explaining priests as perpetrators of child sexual abuse, and that examining the opportunity structures within the church has more explanatory promise. The areas they identify include: the authority and trust which the position of priest affords; the lack of transparent governance and discretion at all levels within the Church; the capacity to isolate children from support; lack of professional supervision; and a subculture which protects the church at all costs.

The Catholic Church combined the concept of treating paedophiles as 'sick' with the discourse of forgiveness to develop an internal policy of sending perpetrator priests for treatment and then on to new parishes: 'Psychology and psychiatry were used to treat the offending cleric, contain scandal and placate the legal system if the cleric ran afoul of the law' (Sipe cited in Dale and Alpert, 2007, p.66).

Many inquiries in multiple countries have concluded that the church used secrecy, power and isolation to protect itself (Pilgrim, 2011; Dale and Alpert, 2007). They argue for a focus on the environment – what is termed here as 'Conducive context' – rather than on individuals within it.

Writing on sexual abuse in institutions, Salter points out that class and social status create 'zones of impunity', where privileged status acts to increase the power differential between victim and survivor and perpetrator, as perpetrators enjoy 'multiple points of influence, compliance and even complicity within institutions and authorities' (2018, p.11).

A number of serious case reviews and inquiry reports refer to institutions, including nurseries, schools and children's homes as 'closed worlds', spaces in which local cultures become embedded, which fail to place the needs and safety of children and young people at the centre (see SCR: Sexual Abuse of Pupils in a First School, North Somerset, 2012; see also Waterhouse, 2000). In such contexts, complaints are disbelieved or deflected, with the priority shifting to protect colleagues and the institution itself. In one serious case review report, the author identified the nursery context as facilitating the perpetrator, through poor controls and governance (SRC: Nursery Z, Plymouth, 2014). Another example (SCR: Mrs A, Surrey, 2014) involved a residential school where the serious case review author criticised a culture of sexualised behaviour and sexual activity between staff and students. This, combined with a 'hothousing' environment with pressure on students to succeed, in the absence of parents, placed teachers in positions of considerable power. Structural features of these contexts as 'closed worlds' are also recognised in the serious case review sample, particularly for abuse within residential schools where there is minimal contact with the wider community.

Lost in Care (Waterhouse, 2000) refers to cultures of silence and authoritarianism in many of the children's homes under scrutiny, which became entrenched because of limited oversight. The inquiry into Frank Beck and sexual abuse perpetrated by staff in children's homes in Leicestershire makes similar observations (Kirkwood, 1993). Here, the local discourse that there was 'a thin line' between acceptable and unacceptable conduct served to minimise young people's complaints, and at times those of staff. The lack of oversight by the local authority and its use of the homes Beck was in charge of to place 'difficult' children in, enabled him to establish an authoritarian culture. This facilitated his regime of abuse.

A similar analysis can be found in the analysis of the culture identified in Broadmoor secure hospital as part of the inquiry into Jimmy Savile (Kirkup and Marshall, 2014). The report concludes that a masculinist culture predominated in which sexual harassment of young female staff and sexual relationships between staff and patients were tolerated. Savile took advantage of this conducive context; revealingly, he rarely visited wards where there was a culture of greater respect for residents and female staff.

Colton (2002) suggests that this situation has been further exacerbated by the fact that boys in children's institutions were seen as 'less than fully human'. Both Colton (2002) and Coldrey (2001) chart the early development of these residential environments and how they have shaped views of children in care. They note the impact of class divisions between staff and residents and the perceived social control function of such institutions, which aimed to restore the 'threat to social order posed by "dangerous" children' (Colton, 2002, p.37). Coldrey (2001) describes traditional residential settings of the 1950s and 1960s, such as children's homes, orphanages and reformatories, as sites of a confrontation between the values and behaviour of working-class boys and young men with the middle-class values of their managers and staff. He describes this process as a 'cultural assault' in which behaviour modification was the objective, and there was strict discipline which often became 'abusive' and an overriding 'culture of violence'. In his analysis, peer sexual experimentation was a form of resistance to the authoritarian 'hegemony' of staff, though he also acknowledges that rape by both peers and adults was not uncommon.

Overlaps between discourses of power and belief

Many connections between the discourses of power and belief can be identified as originating in feminist and survivor movements. Both began with listening to survivors (in discourses of belief) and theorising from their experiences about why child sexual abuse happened (in discourses of power) and the needs of survivors. In many ways, the distinctions drawn here between them are less clear-cut than they seem. This overlap section looks at the way feminists and survivors championed children's voices and rights and how these ideas have been taken up in institutional policy and guidance.

The key discourse here is:

- 'Children's voices'

This is most evident in the period 1970s-1990s, following the Cleveland report in the late 1980s, with continued relevance up to the present.

1970s – 1990s

'Children's voices'

Listening to children and ensuring that their right to live free from violence is realised is integral to discourses of power and belief, in contrast to the discourses of deflection, denial and disbelief. Much of the work on gender and generation referred to earlier also addresses the need for children's voices to be heard explicitly, highlighting how children's structural dependency requires a clear commitment from those who have power to facilitate space for children to speak.

However, there is a tension here between children as objects of protection and children as social actors with voices and rights (Ferguson, 2004). This echoes similar more recent debates in the 2000s about young people's agency and consent in sexual exploitation (Pearce, 2014). In a qualitative study of children aged 6-19 who had experienced sexual abuse in the family, Warrington and colleagues note:

'Recognising the relationship between listening to children, involving them in decision making (both at a personal and collective level) and protecting them is critical. Without this, efforts to address children's physical, psychological and relational safety will fall short. This highlights the importance of talking about children's rights in broader debates about CSA (child sexual abuse) – demonstrating that addressing these issues must start with recognition of children's mutually reinforcing rights to protection, provision and participation' (2017, p.167).

The need to listen to children was noted in the Cleveland and Orkney inquiry reports (see 'A pivotal moment', Chapter 3 and Timeline 1980s and 1990s, Appendix D). The voice of child victims was not heard because of the power differential between adults and children. Disagreements between adults obscured the needs of children (Butler-Sloss, 1988, p.44) and the perpetrators in turn could not be recognised or addressed. As Butler-Sloss stated in the Cleveland report: 'The child is a person and not an object of concern' (1988, p.245). The Orkney report also referred explicitly to children's rights and the need to treat each child as an individual rather than part of a case.

'The discourse concerning children's rights remained unacknowledged throughout the Cleveland affair, both in mainstream and in feminist reports. The demand for children's rights requires a radically different concept of childhood and fundamentally new ways of relating to children' (Cream, 1993, p.12).

Various institutional texts dating from after the Cleveland report incorporate the need to listen to children's voices and consider their wishes, and these can be seen in recent and current guidance in the 2000s (e.g. HM Government, 2015; House of Bishops, 2011; Association of Chief Police Officers, 2005; Child Protection in Sport Unit, 2005; HM Government, 2004). However, research with victims and survivors (see 'Space to speak' below) suggests that this is not all necessarily experienced in practice.

Discourses of belief

Key findings

- Discourses of belief create a climate of support and recognition for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and positions them as wise experts whose lived experiences are a source of knowledge.

Discourses of belief start from the position of those who have been victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and attempt to create a climate of support and recognition by allowing space to speak for those who have historically been marginalised or silenced. Two discourses were identified within this category:

- 'Space to speak'
- 'Harm, trauma and damage'

Discourses of belief originate in both the feminist and survivor movements and challenge discourses categorised in the conceptual model as denying the extent or harm of child sexual abuse. The common feature of these discourses is how they prioritise the voices of victims and survivors.

Whittier (2009) argues that 'survivor discourse' was enabled by the feminist challenge to the denial of child sexual abuse and the practice common within the women's movement at the time of giving testimony and speaking out about all forms of violence against women and girls. Feminists positioned survivors as wise experts, strong in having survived, and set themselves the task of challenging

traditional dominant discourses. Scott describes how feminist scholars and activists have often sought to convey the experiences of women who are 'rendered mute in patriarchal discourse' (2001a, p.358).

The feminist valuing of lived experience as a basis for knowledge was drawn on to question who was seen as an expert, with speaking out about experiences of sexual abuse understood to be a form of social change (Whittier, 2009). Survivor discourse picks up this challenge as a deliberate attempt to wrest control of self away from institutions.

1970s – 1990s

'Space to speak'

The 'Space to speak' counter discourse was perhaps strongest in the 1980s. A number of commentators and researchers note that what they term the 'damage discourse' created a renewed suspicion of the accounts of survivors (Whittier, 2009; Alcoff and Gray, 1993), thus reigniting concerns about being disbelieved (see also 'Harm, trauma, damage' below). Policy shifts since the 1990s stressing criminal justice and mental health interventions are seen by some as muting discourses which centred on power and the need for fundamental social change. Alcoff and Gray assert:

'Before we speak we need to look at where the incitement to speak originates, what relations of power and domination exist between those who incite and those who are asked to speak, as well as to whom the disclosure is directed' (1993, p.284).

Naples (2003) uses the concept of 'relations of ruling' from Smith (1987) to explore how the dynamics of gender, race, ethnicity, culture and sexuality are embedded in the institutional settings in which the survivor discourse is produced. These dynamics create contexts that do not just shape who speaks and how they are heard, but also determine whether experiential knowledge is devalued or certain stories are excluded. Naples (2003) notes that it is common to find more complex stories in fiction, where survivors are multi- rather than mono-dimensional.

This discourse is evident in empirical research findings through two studies that explore space to speak with groups of victims and survivors with a wide age span. In the first study, Hunter (2010) spoke with women and men aged 25-70, noting that what could be said and heard changes over time. In this way, discourses create or limit spaces for victims and survivors. Hunter (2010) identifies four narratives:

- silence (more common for men), which was often accompanied by an account that they had coped
- ongoing suffering/victimhood articulated through the trauma discourse (see section 'Harm, trauma, damage', below)
- transformation through an account of survivorship (only used by women abused by fathers)
- transcendence, which was a defiant rejection of the positions of both victim and survivor.

Half of the sample Hunter spoke to rejected the concepts of victim and survivor. They also suggested that while there is now more space to speak about child sexual abuse, the positions from which victims and survivors could do so were limited. Men's fear of speaking out was linked to the stigma of homosexuality.

In a more theoretical piece, Hartill (2014) talks in depth about what stories by men are heard, and which ones have what he calls 'tellability'. In attempting to create more space for survivors who do not tell trauma stories (see section 'Harm, trauma, damage', below) he introduces the concept of 'sexual

subjection', which he argues might have more reach than 'abuse'. The stories that 'take off' are those that fit the dominant narrative, and in the case of sport this is a 'script' that normalises heterosexuality and homophobia. This has served to exclude some of the stories that male survivors tell, for example of early sexual experiences with adult men opening up the possibility of identifying as a gay man. That the event did not have traumatic consequences, or was not defined as abusive at the time, should not preclude understanding of the misuse of power and authority.

In the second study, Exton and Kamaljit (2013) held focus groups with adults who had been sexually abused by Jimmy Savile, including some who had been abused in the 1960s. The older survivors stressed that there was very little space to speak in the 1960s and 70s. There was a consensus that the recent publicity had created space not only to speak, but also to report. There is a link here to the 'A different time' discourse in that there are periods when public discourse creates contexts that limit or increase the spaces in which it is possible to speak about child sexual abuse, and in which it is more likely to be recognised and addressed by institutions. Carlsson (2009), who has worked on child sexual abuse in Sweden, conceptualises this as a 'time of telling', where public debates about sexual abuse converge with a 'sphere of listening', making conversations about sexual abuse possible.

Enabling individual survivors to speak and be listened to and heard is core to many of the serious case review reports, through creating the conditions that make telling possible, for example references to interviewing children and hearing their experiences. There is also a more discursive recognition cutting across many of the reports that children's voices have not been listened to and institutions have not facilitated the space or invitation to tell. Recognition of the need for institutions and professionals to listen to children and past failures to do so is also reflected in a number of institutional texts following the Cleveland report and Children Act 1989 (e.g. HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2015; Kirkup and Marshall, 2014; Jay, 2014; Munro, 2011), and it is embedded in a range of national and institutional guidance (e.g. HM Government, 2015; House of Bishops, 2011; Association of Chief Police Officers, 2005; Child Protection in Sport Unit, 2005; HM Government, 2004).

'Harm, trauma and damage'

There is a specific literature that explores how discourses of belief have become corralled into narratives about harm, trauma and damage (Smith & Woodiwiss, 2016; Hartill, 2014; Woodiwiss, 2014; Whittier, 2009; Naples, 2003; Alcoff & Gray, 1993). The 'Harm, trauma, damage' discourse originates in survivor movements in the 1990s, with foundations in the clinical arena, particularly psychology, and has been amplified in medical, psychological and psychotherapeutic arenas. Naples (2003) argues that there is a contemporary focus on individual healing rather than patriarchal power:

'[The] transformation from "breaking the silence" as a political act to the more consumer-oriented and inward-turning recovery industry dominated by the media, psychiatry, and social work professions that now characterizes much of the discourse on incest and childhood sexual assault [...] The recovery approach [...] also reduces the act of breaking the silence and going public to useful steps in the individual healing process' (Naples, 2003, p.1167).

Alcoff and Gray (1993) explore the complexity of survivor discourse: speaking out can be liberatory, but also reinforce dominant discourses. They discuss the power element of discourses and note that there is not a level playing field, as some discourses have more power and credibility – meaning authority – than others; for example, they assert that women and children are not accorded authoritative voices in discourse. Indeed, speaking about sexual abuse has been prohibited, denied and deflected by more dominant discourses. This links to what is defined above as the 'telling trap', when survivors' words are discredited and disbelieved (see section 'The 'telling trap', Chapter 5). The survivor discourse is often

sidelined by diminishing survivors' experiences as 'anecdote'. Alcoff and Gray devote considerable attention to what they call the 'confessional mode' of discourse, which in discourse theory is considered a source of domination, since it always requires an expert mediator to determine its legitimacy:

'... although confessional modes of discourse may appear to grant survivors an empowering permission to [speak], they give the expert mediator the power to determine the legitimacy of survivor discourse. It is the expert rather than the survivor who determines under what conditions the survivor speaks and whether the survivor's speech is true or acceptable within the dominant discourse's codes of normality' (1993, p.271).

The classic example that comes up in several of the sources reviewed here is speaking on television. Naples (2003) asks whether, when survivors appear on talk shows or in documentaries, they are positioned as knowers or as a spectacle; whether they are invited to speak for 'shock value', or to perform as the distressed survivor who can be explained by the cool expert. Too often they are not positioned as subjects in their own lives, invited to speak with authority.

For instance, there are ways in which survivors are repositioned as victims, with a series of negative connotations. This also appears in anti-feminist texts and has been picked up in some parts of the media, coming into evidence from the late 1990s onwards. Whittier (2009) locates it in the 'knowledge battles' that have been part of discussions of child sexual abuse by various publics in which survivors are positioned not as knowers but as invested in an identity focused on their victimisation. This is an example of the 'backlash' described by Nelson (2016).

The claim to harm and suffering has been reinterpreted as seeking someone else to blame for current situations. Underpinning this is a narrow concept of victim, as someone who is helpless, powerless and dependent, to the exclusion of other meanings, such as someone showing resilience and perseverance in a search for justice. In its most critical form, this is linked to the idea of 'victim identity', implying that the victim makes an investment, and in some senses a choice, in continuing to suffer. Sometimes it is connected to the 'Gold digger' discourse, with the implication that victims make illegitimate claims.

Nonetheless, it is the experiences of victims and survivors that are at the heart of serious case reviews and many inquiries. A renewed interest in the experiential as a source of learning can be seen in recent publications by the NSPCC (Warrington et al., 2017). It is also notable that the approach adopted in the policy document from the Church of England (House of Bishops, 2011) threads the voices of survivors throughout and acknowledges their contribution to the shape and content of the document.

Summary of changes over time and institutional relevance

Discourses of power and belief, which are located here as challenges to those dominant discourses (and aspects of dominant discourses) that have had an unhelpful influence on institutional and professional responses to child sexual abuse, have had varying degrees of traction. They share common characteristics of belief, recognition and support for victims and survivors. They emerge since the 1970s as counters to earlier, more individualised perspectives and ways of talking about sexual abuse.

Borrowing from Campbell's (2015) notion of 'crimes of dominion', the inequalities of sex, age, class and disability can be explored with reference to power in ways that challenge psychopathological models which individualise those who are victims and survivors and those who are perpetrators of child sexual abuse. There is very limited discussion of the intersections of race and ethnicity in the literature on child sexual abuse in England and Wales. The 'Crimes of dominion' discourse is most evident in the literature

reviewed here on the institutions of sport and the Catholic Church. Kelly's (2007) concept of 'conductive context' deepens the exploration of how discourses of power provide a challenge, or counter argument, to those that individualise the actions of perpetrators (e.g. 'a few bad apples'). Here, the focus is on the organisational and/or institutional contexts that facilitate sexual abuse, including how power is exercised to ensure silence and perpetuate masculinist and macho cultures of leadership.

The 'Crimes of dominion' discourse is evident in serious case review reports that refer to 'closed worlds' and poor governance as creating enabling environments for perpetrators of sexual abuse. Linked to this, a discourse of masculinities appeared in several texts that explored why there is a prominent asymmetry between victims and survivors as mainly girls, and perpetrators as mostly men and boys. The institutional relevance of this discourse lies in the way it has been drawn on to discuss men who work with children and responses to sexual abuse in residential childcare settings. These discourses about power originate with feminist analyses of child sexual abuse, although the use and deployment of this discourse has been wider.

The discourses of belief provide a direct challenge to those identified in the conceptual model for this report that serve to deflect, deny, and disbelieve. Originating in the accounts of victims and survivors, these discourses initially overlap with discourses of power – children's voices – and continue with 'space to speak' where voices can be heard and acted on. There are specific dimensions of this discourse that refer to the space to speak for boys and men who have been abused and that identify how barriers to speaking have been linked to fear of homophobia. Harm, trauma, damage and victimhood discourses are complex, as they offer an alternative to the notion that child sexual abuse is 'not that harmful' and that 'intervention is worse', but some argue that they have also been used to discredit and diminish victims' and survivors' accounts. Limited reference to some of these discourses was found in the institutional texts and serious case review reports, perhaps because they are strongest in earlier decades and the serious case review reports are focussed on later decades. However, there are critiques of how victims and survivors have not been heard alongside commitments to their voices and acknowledgments of the harm sexual abuse inflicts. Following the findings from the Cleveland report (Butler-Sloss, 1988) and the approach to children outlined in the Children Act 1989, the influence of a number of these ideas can be seen in national and institutional policy and guidance.

7 Summary and conclusions

The first aim of this REA was to explore what the existing literature can tell us about social and political discourses concerning child sexual abuse in England and Wales from the 1940s to 2017. Three sets of material were sampled and reviewed: 237 items of secondary literature derived from systematic literature searches; 68 serious case review reports; and 35 institutional texts. A total of 31 dominant discourses and six counter discourses were identified between the 1940s and 2017 from the literature reviewed. The rise and fall of some discourses and the way in which they interact with each other makes for a complex picture of how child sexual abuse has been recognised, made sense of and responded to over time. This picture also shows that there has not been an agreed, uniform definition, explanation or theory of child sexual abuse over these decades.

The dominant discourses identified can be categorised as discourses of deflection, denial and disbelief.

- Discourses of deflection shift responsibility for sexual abuse from perpetrators and/or contexts that facilitate or do not prevent abuse. They are characterised by minimising and distancing abuse, blaming mothers, treating perpetrators as ‘other’ and individualising perpetrators. Discourses specific to deflection from institutions serve to protect those institutions through similar individualising, minimising either institutions’ space to intervene or the sexual abuse itself. Overlaps with discourses of denial (of harm) suggest that children invite, or are responsible for, abuse.
- Discourses of denial have been organised here into those that deny harm, by positioning sexual abuse as consensual or minimising its harmful impacts, and those that deny the extent of sexual abuse. Those denying the extent of abuse share a common thread that abuse has been exaggerated or fabricated. There are overlaps with discourses of disbelief, although the two are not quite the same.
- Discourses of disbelief outright refuse to accept that sexual abuse has occurred compared with those of deflection and denial. The main discourse here was that ‘Children lie’.

Starting in the 1970s, a set of counter narratives originated in feminist and survivor movements and operated to counter dominant discourses around deflection, denial and disbelief. These counter discourses look at power relations and revolve around belief, recognition and support for victims and survivors.

- Discourses of power challenge dominant understandings and explanations of child sexual abuse by exploring the role of power and status. The discourse labelled as ‘Crime of dominion’, for example, describes abuse in which a person in a dominant, powerful or privileged position (for example a father, priest or a sports coach) takes advantage of a victim who is less powerful or privileged in terms of their age, sex, race or class. The discourse labelled as ‘Conducive context’ challenges the view that children are sexually abused by ‘a few bad apples’ and demands for society to look at the opportunity structures within institutions that created a conducive environment for abuse to happen.
- Discourses of belief create a climate of support and recognition for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. The discourse labelled as ‘Space to speak’, for example, looks at the dynamics that create or limit spaces for victims and survivors to speak about abuse and to be heard and recognised by institutions.

These discourses do not exist in isolation from each other, and they are influenced by emerging knowledge and developing policy and practice. New insights in one area are often (not always, and not systematically) picked up in other areas, leading to contradictions in how child sexual abuse is recognised, made sense of and responded to. The discourse around 'Children's voices', for example, highlights the need for children to be heard and for children to be treated as subjects in their own lives, not as objects of concern. This is now embedded in a range of national and international policies and guidance, as well as in the work of many charities. However, there remains a tension here between children as objects of protection and children as social actors with voices and rights.

The REA findings also show that child sexual abuse has been discussed in many different professions and institutional arenas, often with different starting points, motivations and desired outcomes:

- Legal arena: The legal arena is one of the most prominent fields in which discourses about child sexual abuse have circulated, and concepts of childhood and children's rights are key to this arena. There have been substantial changes in the law on sexual offences involving the definition and redefinition of multiple offences relevant to child sexual abuse.
- Government policy arena: There has been a raft of government policies relating to child sexual abuse from the 1940s to 2017. Links have been drawn between high-profile cases and inquiries and the development of government policy. The Cleveland case is a particularly clear example of this.
- Clinical arena: Various health disciplines have been connected to and influenced institutional responses to child sexual abuse. Approaches to perpetrators have been informed by medicalised models of deviancy and pathology. The Cleveland case had a significant impact on the role of paediatricians and medical evidence in sexual abuse cases.
- Social work arena: Institutional responses to child sexual abuse are part of the wider field of child protection within social work, which has itself undergone extensive shifts over this period. Events that have received high-profile media attention have been linked to changing policy and practice. Tensions between keeping families together and listening to children are evident, as are those between empowerment and protection of children.
- Media arena: Discourses are amplified within the media, including key discourses about child sexual abuse, such as 'stranger danger' and 'paedophile'.

The second aim of this REA was to explore in which ways these discourses have influenced institutional responses to child sexual abuse. This is a much more challenging question and one which cannot be fully answered through an REA.

Key findings regarding the influence of discourses about child sexual abuse on institutional responses in this period include:

- Institutions responding to Claims of child sexual abuse within familial contexts have obscured the actions of perpetrators by focusing on the family as a whole, and using various versions of mother blame.
- The discourse of 'crime of dominion' is clearest in relation to sport and the Catholic Church and, to an extent, residential care settings, where the role of authority within the institution – such as coach or priest – provides additional power and resources to perpetrators.

- The policy outcome of seeing perpetrators as ‘a few bad apples’, particularly in the late 1990s and 2000s, has been a focus on risk, recruitment and criminal records screening as the safeguarding response, rather than examining how internal cultures may be implicated in making sexual abuse possible and in the failure to respond appropriately to complaints and concerns.
- ‘Children lie’ has been an enduring discourse in legal responses.
- A variety of discourses of belief have emerged since the 1980s which have made it easier for victims and survivors to speak about their experiences, although some barriers remain.

There were some watershed moments and events which radically changed how child sexual abuse was talked about and understood and led to lasting legal, policy and social changes, most notably the Cleveland Inquiry of 1987.

- The Cleveland Inquiry of 1987 into the sexual abuse of 121 children – and the means by which they were medically diagnosed as having experienced sexual abuse – is widely described as a ‘watershed’ moment. It had a significant impact on legislation and policy about child sexual abuse and both created and amplified a number of discourses about it.
- The abuse of children in residential homes, such as those in Leicestershire and North Wales in the 1990s and 2000s led to the Leicestershire and Lost in Care inquiries. These were closely followed by government recommendations that emphasised monitoring of standards and vetting and barring procedures for staff employed in them.
- The high-profile sexually motivated child murders of Sarah Payne in Sussex and Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman in Soham in the early 2000s led to shifts that focused on the characterisation of perpetrators and policy approaches to manage them. Ensuing legislation included the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 that established an Independent Safeguarding Authority to screen and regulate adults working with children.

These examples show that at times rapid progress was achieved in a relatively short time, but this was typically in reaction to key high-profile events (Davidson, 2008; Parton, 2016). This was often the case when a ‘time of telling’ (dynamics in society which created spaces in which it was possible to speak about child sexual abuse) converged with a ‘sphere of listening’ (when it was more likely to be heard by institutions and people in positions of power) (Carlsson, 2009).

After having reviewed the three samples of literature for this REA, there are still a number of questions this report is unable to answer, which are partly due to the nature of what is achievable within this type of study.

- Firstly, it is not possible to say in any systematic way how these different discourses have influenced institutional responses to child sexual abuse, and how these responses have impacted on the practice on the ground. There is a gap between the ideas, words, language and terminology that we see reflected in the discourses and the real actions and lived experiences of those affected in their personal and professional lives.
- Secondly, from the literature reviewed it is not possible to conclude how specific institutions or professions understood (or should have understood) child sexual abuse in specific moments in time. For example, it is not possible to say what cluster of ideas a doctor or prison governor in the 1960s would have had (or should have had) in relation to child sexual abuse.

- Thirdly, it was not the aim of this REA to systematically attempt to embed the identified discourses in the social, legal and policy context of the time. To achieve this, the research project would have required much more time and a different methodological approach (that is, not an REA), which was felt to be unfeasible and disproportionate.

The findings of this REA also throw up a number of questions for further investigation, including how different discourses have influenced the responses of specific institutions to child sexual abuse over time; how specific institutions or professions understood (or should have understood) child sexual abuse in specific moments in time; and how influential discourses were in this process. To fully explore these specificities requires a range of additional methodological approaches.



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2014	Serious Case Review Overview Report: the sexual abuse of children in a foster home. City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Board (Author: Keith Ibbetson). Serious Case Review CN10. Devon Safeguarding Children Board (Author: John Kirby) The death of Mrs A: Serious Case Review. Surrey Safeguarding Adults Board (Author: Professor Hilary Brown). A Serious Case Review 'Child R' The Overview Report. Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board (Author: Peter Maddocks). Serious Case Review Family A. Southampton Local Safeguarding Children Board (Author: Kevin Harrington). Case: CO1 Case Review. West Sussex Safeguarding Children Board (Author: Edi Carmi). Serious case review in respect of Child 1, Child 2 and Child 3. Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board (Author: Ruby Parry). Serious Case Review 'Julia'. Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Board (Authors: Jane Wiffin and David Peplow).
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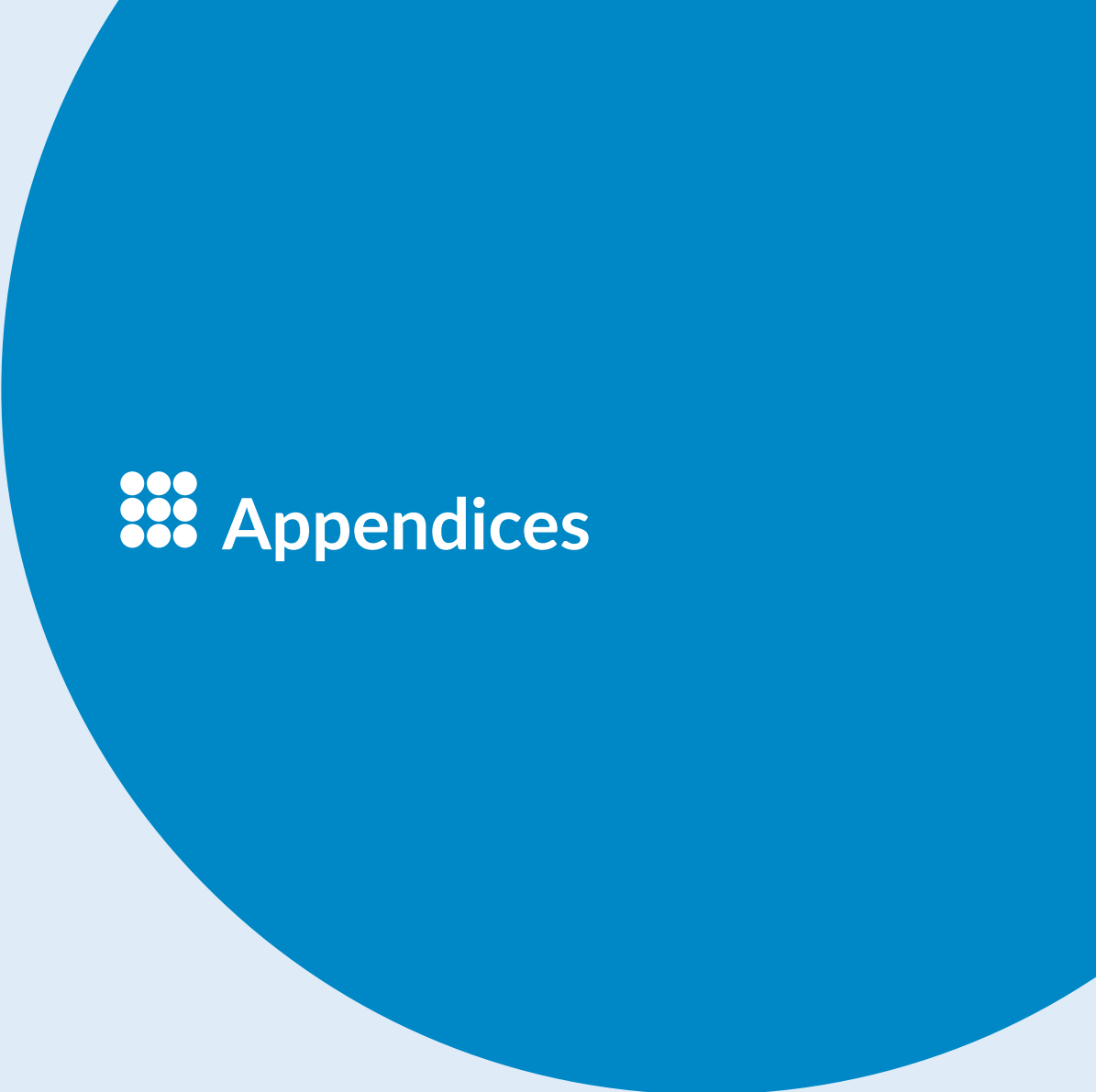
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Appendices

● Appendix A: Search strategy – technical details

Search terms

The search terms – denoting child sexual abuse, discourses and the range of institutions being investigated by the Inquiry – sought to cover a range of words and phrases used in different settings and time periods, which were developed and refined in discussion with the Inquiry. Search terms and parameters were further adjusted after being piloted in one major database. From these primary search terms, a series of search strings were constructed and adapted for use within the different databases according to their search functionalities. A record of all searches conducted and the results obtained was maintained in an Excel spreadsheet. Table A.1 shows the primary search terms used in this REA.

Table A.1: Primary search terms used in the REA

Population terms	Sexual abuse terms	Discourse terms	Institutions and professions
"Adolescen*" "Boy*" "Child*" "Girl*" "Juvenile*" "Kid*" "Minor*" "Teenage*" "Young" "Youth"	"Buggery" "Molestation" "Porn*" "Prostitut*" "Rape" "Sex* abuse" "Sex* assault" "Sex* exploitation" "Groom*" "Incest" "Indecent image*" "Paedophil*" "Pedophil*" "Rent boy*" "Sex* offend*" "Sex* solicitation" "Sext*" "Violat*"	"Attitud*" "Depiction*" "Discourse*" "Discursiv*" "Language*" "Linguistic*" "Narrativ*" "Norm*" "Representation*" "Slang" "Social* construct*" "Stereotyp*" "Terminolog*" "Term*" "Understanding*" "Fram*" "Paradigm*"	"Children's home*" "Care home*" "Residential*" "Secure accommodation" "Secure training centre*" "Secure estate*" "Borstal*" "Detention" "Prison" "Remand centre*" "Probation officer*" "Church*" "Social Service*" "Local authorit*" "Social work*" "School*" "Teacher*" "Media" "Safeguarding" "Child protection" "Looked after" "Foster care*" "In care" "Care system" "Social media" "Internet" "Faith* organisation*" "Religious organisation*" "Clergy" "Hospital*" "General Practitioner*" "Doctor*" "Nurs*" "Healthcare"

Population terms	Sexual abuse terms	Discourse terms	Institutions and professions
			"Medical centre" "Young Offender* Institute*" "Custod*" "Residential School*" "Criminal Justice" "Civil Justice" "Youth justice" "Justice system*" "Judge*" "Lawyer*" "Barrister*" "Police*" "Online" "Internet" "Westminster" "Member of Parliament*" "Inquir*" "Investigat*" "Sport*" "Military" "Army" "Armed force*"

Databases searched

Searches were conducted within 12 databases – academic, scientific and practice-oriented. Grey literature (e.g. reports, conference papers) was accessed through ResearchGate and the Open Grey database to identify non-governmental organisation and other reports.

The following online databases were searched:

- Academic Search Complete
- CareKnowledge
- Child Development & Academic Studies
- Cochrane Library
- COPAC
- IngentaConnect
- JSTOR
- Open Grey
- PsycINFO
- ResearchGate
- Social Care Online
- Web of Science

Screening and selection of studies

The main searches were conducted over a two-week period in March and April 2017. The following screening process was adopted. A member of the research team reviewed titles and abstracts for relevance to the topic. Where search results exceeded 1,000 hits, only the first 1,000 records were screened. When processing the initial search results, a series of inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied (see Table A.2). Texts were excluded if they contained no substantive reference to child sexual abuse and exploitation, discourses or institutional responses. Empirical pieces that were purely descriptive in their presentation of study findings were also excluded, as they contained insufficient discourses or discussion of them for analysis.

A random selection of records was blind screened by a second member of the research team to provide a quality check. The full range of selected items was then double-checked for relevance by another member of the team. Disagreements or queries over inclusion and exclusion of any items were discussed until consensus was reached.

The selected items were coded according to broad theme and allocated to different members of the research team for further screening based on abstract and full-text content. Additional material was identified via the expert survey and snowballing (following up references within the texts already identified in the searches).

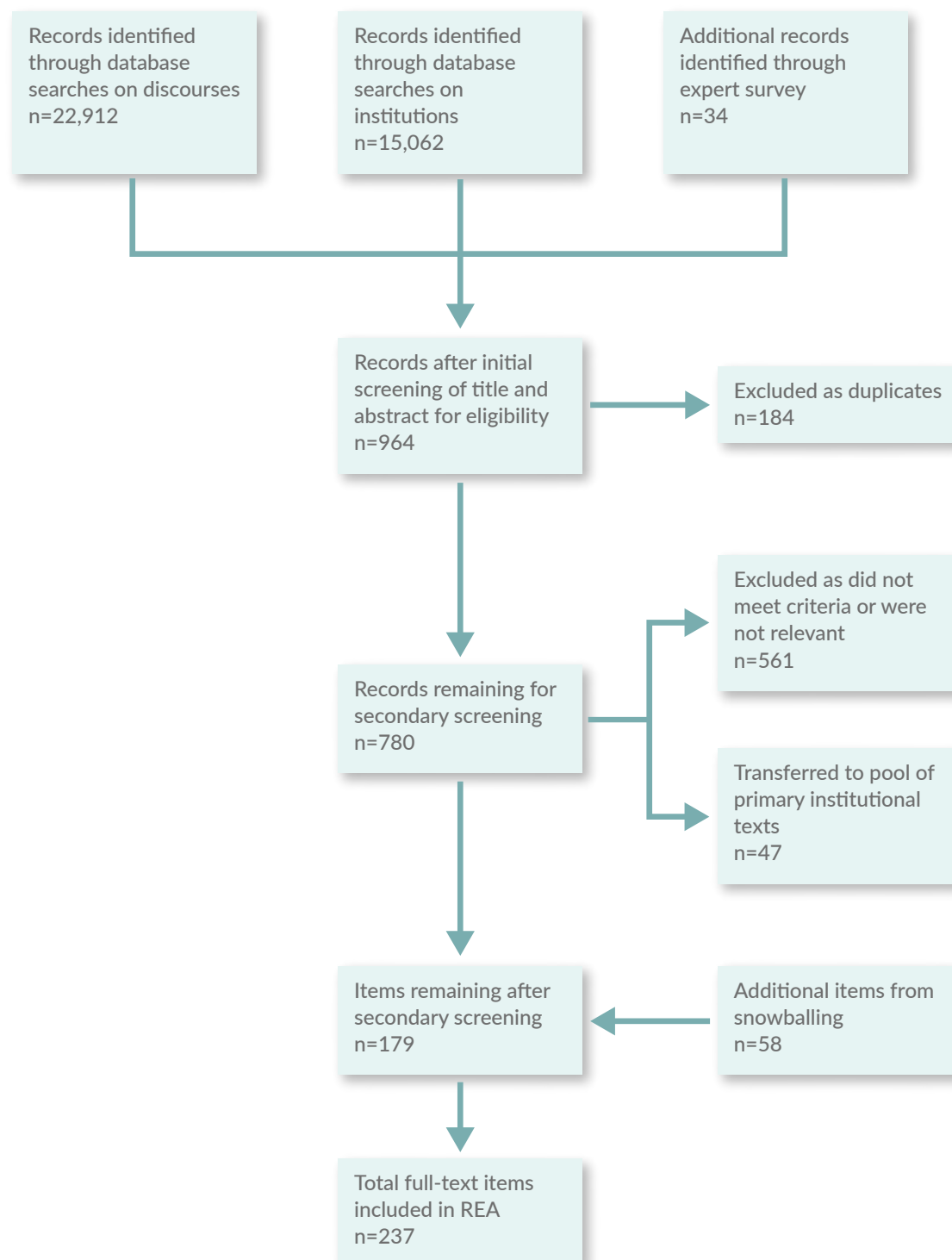
Texts were included if they were written in English, published between 1940 and 2017, and focused on England or Wales; some international texts were also included where there was evidence of influence or relevance. Table A.2 details the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied during first- and second-stage screening, and Figure A.1 shows how studies were selected.

Table A.2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria and parameters during first- and second-stage screening

Criteria and parameters	Include	Exclude
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journals Books or edited collections Textbooks Grey literature from academic, public and third-sector organisations	Media articles Non-peer-reviewed and practitioner journals
Country of origin	Is from or about England or Wales	Is from or about any other location, unless has broader relevance to English or Welsh context
Publication date/ time period	Publication date and time period covered is 1940s to 2017	Earlier publication date and time period
Relevance	Main focus is child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation	Main focus is other forms of child abuse or maltreatment more generally
	Population focused on is primarily children	Population focused on is adults
	Engagement with discourses, ideas or narratives about child sexual abuse	No engagement with discourses, ideas or narratives about child sexual abuse
	Discussion of institutional responses to child sexual abuse	No discussion of institutional responses to child sexual abuse

All references for possible inclusion were downloaded to Zotero reference management software to capture bibliographical information and facilitate removal of duplicates.

Figure A1: PRISMA flow chart showing how studies were selected



● Appendix B: Quality assessment and data extraction tools

A member of the research team reviewed and quality assessed each text included in the REA. Publication details, research aims and findings, and other key data relating to the REA research questions were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet. For quality assurance purposes, a proportion of items was reviewed by a second member of the team; internal reliability was high. Each item was also quality assessed using a bespoke adaptation of a tool originally designed by the Inquiry’s research team (Fisher et al., 2017). This used a combination of standard and specific measures to assess individual texts for multiple types of literature.

Using a weight of evidence approach, each item was graded as high, medium or low according to relevance and confidence. An additional grading of influence on institutional responses was also applied.

The reviewed literature was categorised according to six study types: critical review, primary mixed, primary qualitative, primary quantitative, textbook and theoretical. Table B.1 shows the criteria applied to assess the quality of reviewed items, which were adapted according to study type.

Table B.1: Criteria applied to assess the quality of reviewed items, by study type

Criterion	Study type					
	Critical review	Primary qualitative	Primary mixed	Primary quantitative	Textbook	Theoretical
Clearly defined research question or objective	X	X	X	X		
Appropriate research design that addresses the research question or objective	X	X	X	X		
Appropriate purposive approach to sampling	X	X	X	X		
Evidence of attention to ethical considerations	X	X	X	X		
Rigour of approach	X	X	X	X		
Appropriate analytic methods	X	X	X	X		
Places issue in historical context					X	
Reviews different perspectives					X	
Engages in critical debates					X	
Discusses structural inequalities					X	
Clarity of argument	X	X	X	X		X
Conclusion supported by results	X	X	X	X		X
Reference is made to existing literature	X	X	X	X		X

Criterion	Study type					
	Critical review	Primary qualitative	Primary mixed	Primary quantitative	Textbook	Theoretical
Where findings and conclusions diverge from existing literature, this is logically defended	X	X	X	X		X
Engages with the implications for policy and practice	X	X	X	X	X	X
(Where present) recommendations for policy and practice are supported by the results	X	X	X	X		X
Limitations of research are discussed	X	X	X	X		X
Discussion of perspectives and values that have shaped the form and output of the research		X	X	X		X
Any obvious conflicts of interest?		X	X	X		X
Are they addressed?		X	X	X		X
Which discourses are evident	X	X	X	X	X	X
How discourses used	X	X	X	X	X	X
Weight of Evidence – Relevance	X	X	X	X	X	X
Weight of Evidence – Confidence	X	X	X	X	X	X
Weight of influence on institutional responses	X	X	X	X	X	X

A series of templates was developed for extracting relevant data from the sources reviewed. Different tools were used for the secondary literature and the primary sources (serious case reviews and institutional texts).

The data extraction template for the secondary literature included details about the nature of the study or source, including the study setting, design, aims and key findings, the main discourses identified in the text, institutions focused on and whether the issues of gender, race and ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation and disability were examined.

A number of issues linked to variations in the type and approach of literature reviewed made the recording of data particularly complex. These issues centred principally on separating out key discourses and institutions and discussing them historically. The treatment of discourses on child sexual abuse was not always linked to specific institutions, while in other instances multiple discourses and/or institutions were considered, and some sources referred to professionals generically, for example as 'practitioners'. In order to locate the source temporally the year of data collection or period under study was recorded. However, it was difficult to categorise some sources in this way, as they either focused on a range of time periods or did not explicitly link their findings to a particular historical period. Publication year was not a reliable indicator either, as some sources were later editions or re-publications of earlier works, and not all related to contemporary issues. The absence of consistent data across these three key areas within

the sources reviewed made it impossible to track them systematically within the pool of literature as a whole. Figure B.1 shows the data extraction template for secondary literature.

Figure B.1: Data extraction template for secondary literature

Data to be extracted
Type of source
Author(s)
Publication details
Publication year
Country/ies of scope
Study setting
Data collection year/period under study
Main aims (as specified in paper)
Definition of child sexual abuse
Study design
Sampling strategy
Dataset (who/what)
Number in study sample
Analysis technique
Main findings/conclusions
Discussion of gender?
Discussion of race/ethnicity?
Discussion of disability?
Discussion of sexual orientation?
Discussion of social class?
Summary of discourses identified in paper
Summary of how discourses emerge
Summary of critical engagement with discourses
Summary of links with institutional responses
Which institutions discussed?
Strengths of paper
Limitations of paper

Separate data extraction tools were developed for the serious case reviews and institutional texts as a number of the items about the secondary literature like study and sampling details were not relevant. These are shown in Figures B.2, B.3 and B.4.

Figure B.2: Data extraction template for serious case reviews

Author(s)			
Title			
Pub year			
Location			
Full/summary	Full report	Exec summary	
Years covered by review			
Author's position			
CSA/E	CSA	CSE	Both
Child details			
Details of case			
How CSA/E present in case			
Parents/carers/guardians involved?	Yes	No	Reason?
Main findings/conclusions			
Summary of discourses evident in findings			
DISCOURSES		WHICH PROFESSIONALS	
How discourses influenced institutional/professional responses			
Any other comments			

Figure B.3: Data extraction template for national and institutional inquiries and reviews

Title			
Pub year			
Location			
CSA/E	CSA	CSE	Both
Details of case			
Details of children			
Main institutions/professionals focused on			
Main findings/conclusions			
Summary of discourses evident in findings			
DISCOURSES		WHICH PROFESSIONALS	
How discourses influenced institutional/professional responses			
Any other comments			

Figure B.4: Data extraction template for national and institutional policies and guidance

Institution (e.g. church, government)	
Title	
Pub year	
CSA/E	CSA Both
Details of guidance	
Main changes from previous guidance, if documented	
Reasons for change in approach	
Summary of discourses evident in document	
DISCOURSES	
How discourses are evident in recommendations for practice	
Any other comments	

● Appendix C: Profile of the reviewed literature

Below is a description of the profile of our three samples of texts: secondary literature on discourses about and institutional responses to child sexual abuse, Serious Case Reviews and institutional texts.

Profile of secondary literature

Breakdowns of the secondary literature covered by publication type (Figure C.1), by publication year (Figure C.2), by study type (Figure C.3), by topic (Figure C.4) and by coverage of key groups (Figure C.5) are presented below.

Figure C.1: Breakdown of literature by publication type

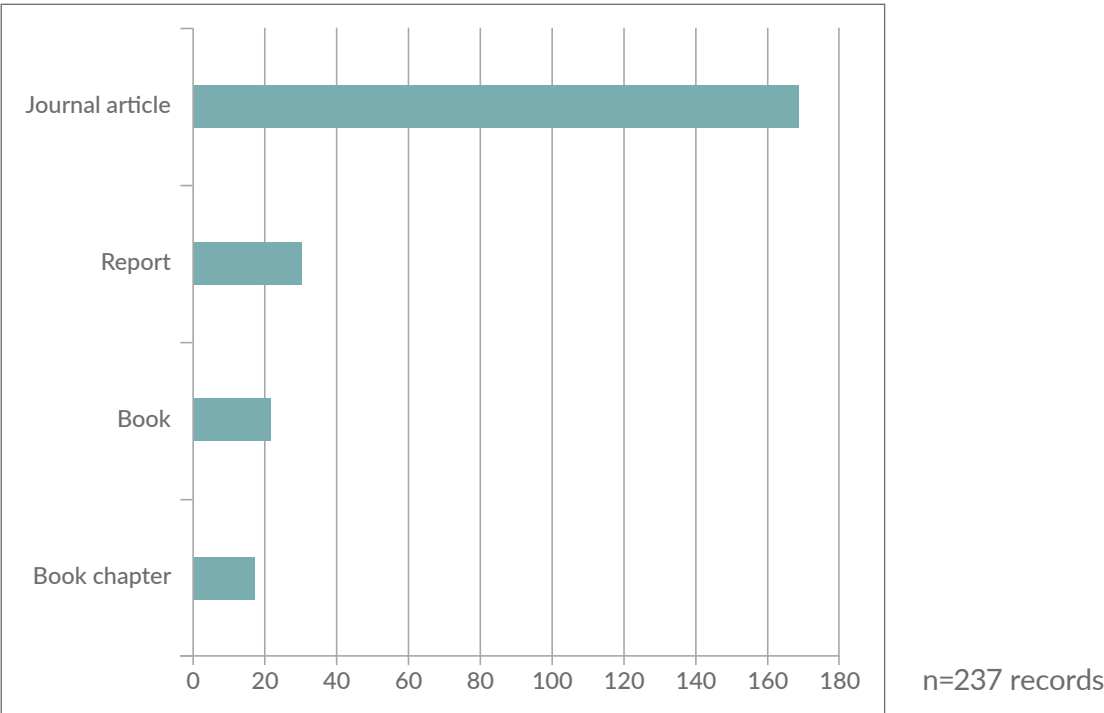


Figure C.2: Breakdown of literature by publication decade

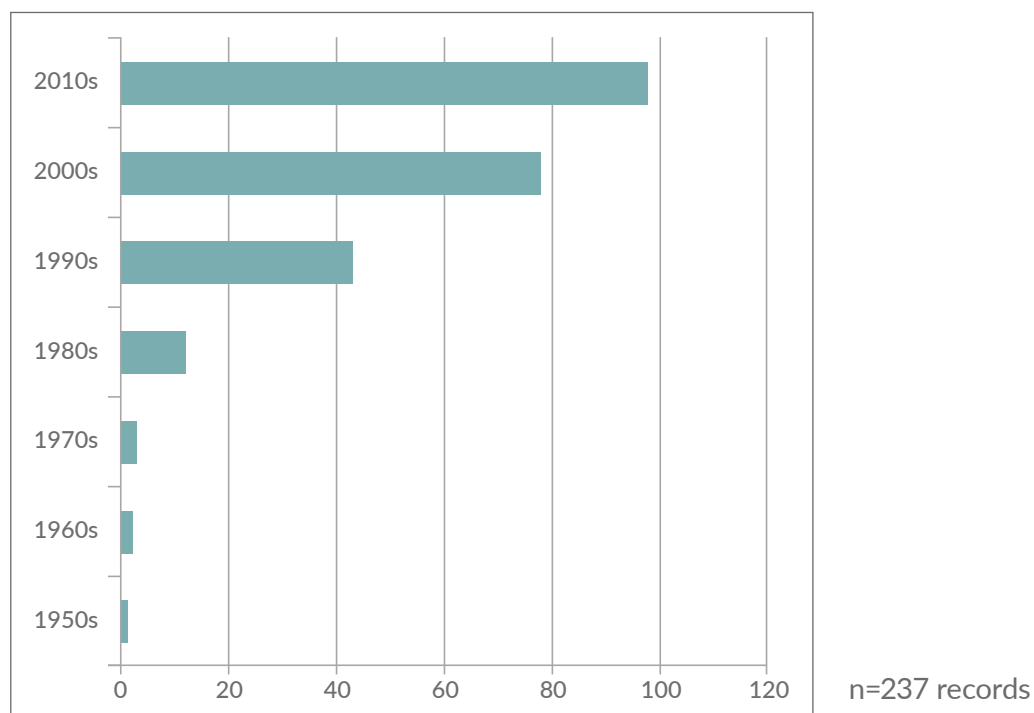


Figure C.3: Breakdown of literature by study type

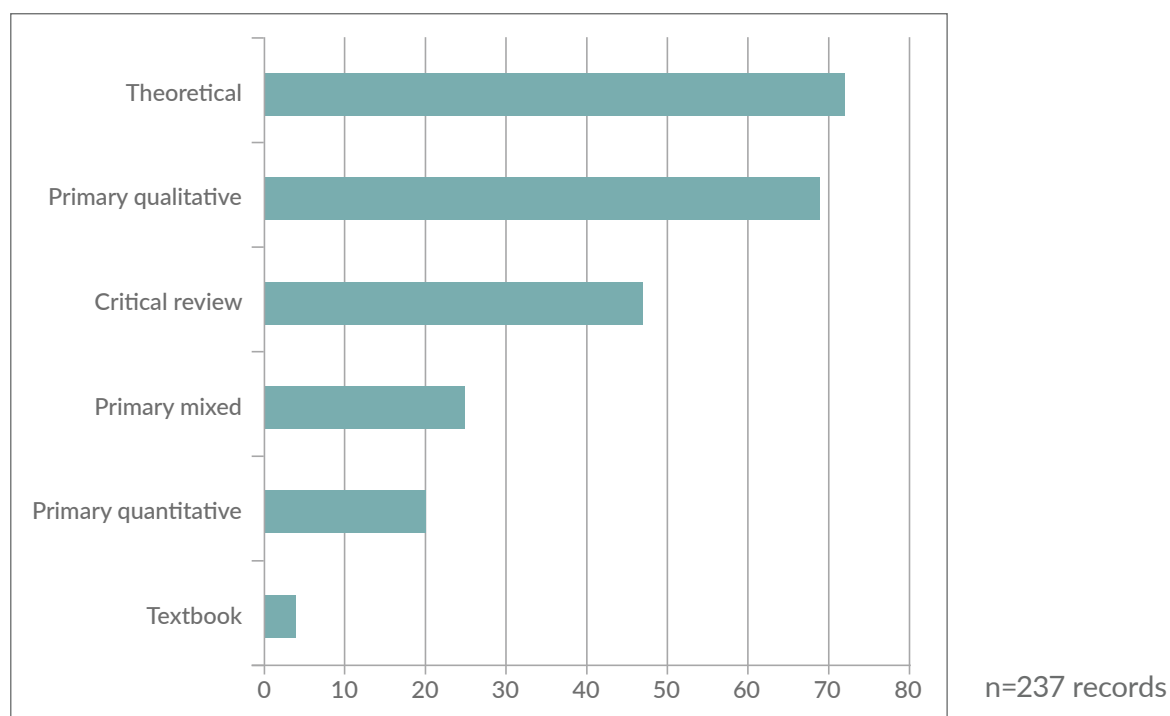


Figure C.4: Breakdown of literature by topic

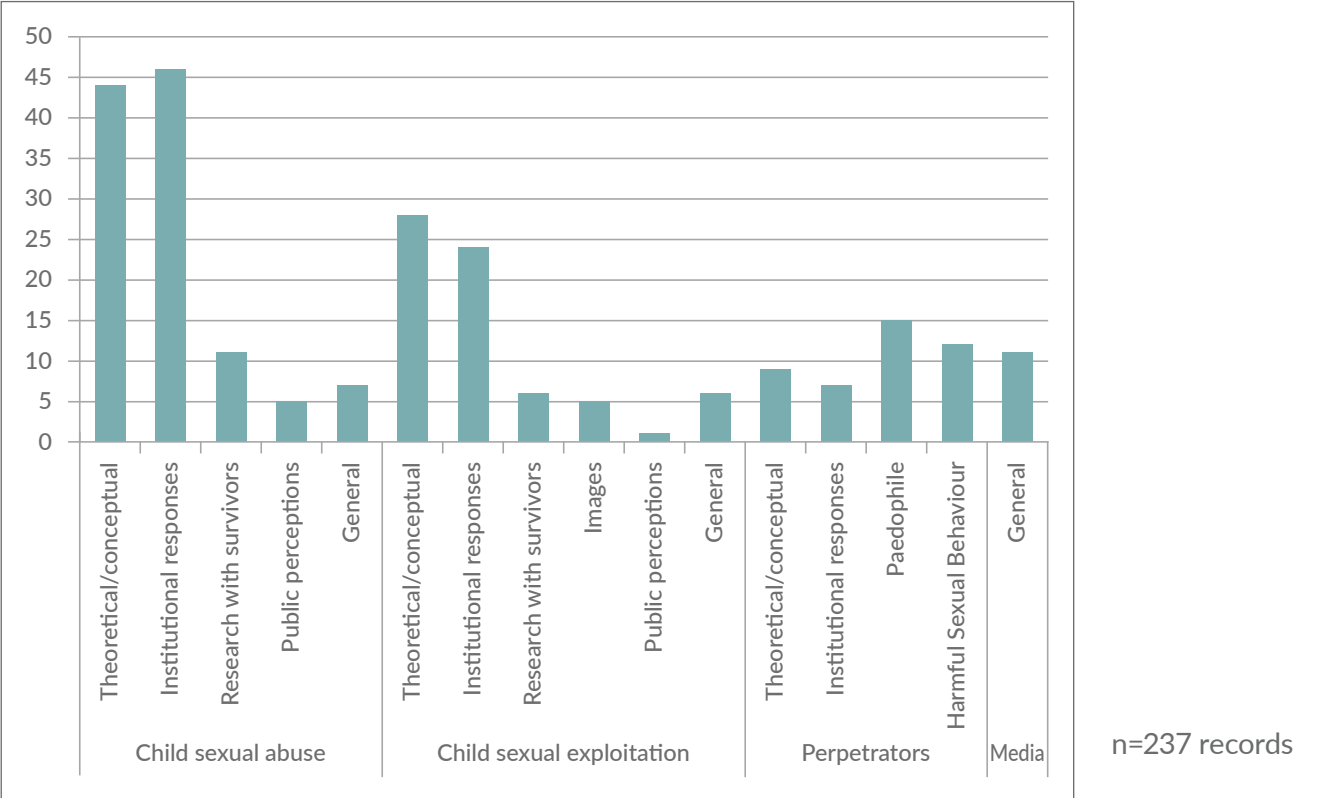
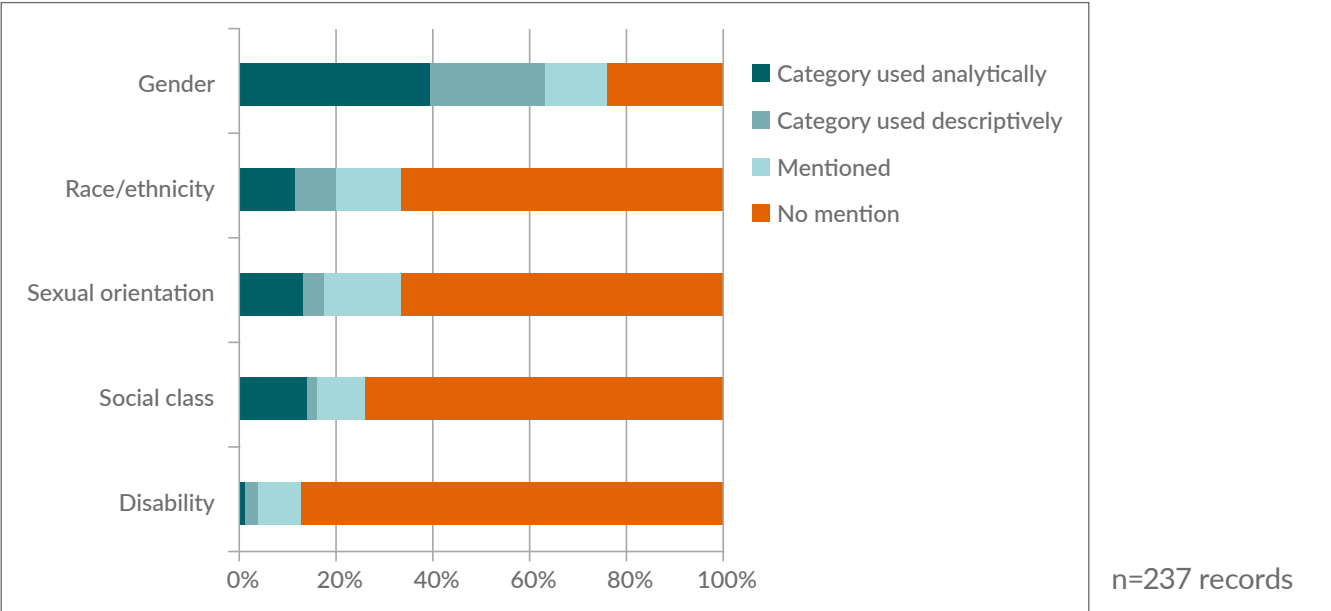


Figure C.5: Breakdown of the literature by coverage of key groups



Sampling and profile of the serious case reviews

Relevant serious case reviews were identified by searching the NSPCC repository using the keywords 'sexual abuse' and 'sexual exploitation'. No time parameters were applied to the searches, as the repository holds inquiry and review documents dating back to 1945, although the serious case review process was initiated in 2006. The inclusion criteria were that the sexual abuse or exploitation must have occurred in childhood and there was sufficient detail in the report to be useful for analysis. Thus very short reports were excluded. In addition, only cases where full reports or executive summaries were available online were included. From a total of 176 serious case review reports, these screening processes led to a final sample of 68, comprising 24 executive summaries and 44 reports. The report publication dates range from 2007 to 2016, although the periods under scrutiny span the 1970s to the 2010s, with the majority from 2000 onwards. The non-recent reports involve victims and survivors of child sexual abuse who are now adults, where it was established that there had been inadequate professional intervention during their childhood. These reports offer windows into professional practices during the 1970s and 1980s; while they are written through the lens of contemporary practice, the authors attempt to establish why children were not protected at the time of the abuse.

It was evident in some cases that there was conflation and confusion about the parameters of child sexual abuse and exploitation, as we have already discussed. Two cases referred to as child sexual exploitation appeared to involve child sexual abuse without any form of exchange that would be the distinguishing feature of child sexual exploitation. While it is notable that the gender of victims and survivors and perpetrators was not always specified, in some cases this was an attempt to preserve anonymity. Since 2010, the requirement for serious case review reports to be published has made it particularly important to ensure that individual children cannot be identified. However, one panel concluded that submitting a 'gender-neutral report' was not appropriate. Clearly, given the gendered dimensions of sexual abuse and exploitation, it is important to explore gender as a relevant factor in victimisation and perpetration, including for boys and young men who are abused.

Two review reports were included in the sample that varied slightly from others. One was the 2014 Case CO1 report from West Sussex into sexual abuse within a church diocese. This report was completed in 2004 and published in 2014 and is included in the sample as it came up through the searches of the NSPCC repository and because it focuses on child sexual abuse in the church, which is an institution of interest to the Inquiry. The second report (SCR: Mrs A, Surrey, 2014) focused on sexual abuse in a boarding school and was published by Surrey Adult Safeguarding Board. It is included here because of its reflection on the legacies of sexual abuse in institutional contexts.

These are the key characteristics of the sample of the 68 serious case review reports that were analysed.

- 59 (87%) were from England, 5 from Wales and 4 from unnamed locations.
- Three-quarters (n=49; 72%) focused on child sexual abuse. Of these, at least 6 cases involved perpetrator(s) who were minors.
- Almost a fifth (n=11; 17%) addressed child sexual exploitation.
- Seven cases involved both sexual abuse and sexual exploitation.
- There was clear gender asymmetry in perpetration and victimisation. In 54 cases the perpetrator was male, in 3 female, and in 11 cases this was unknown. Three-fifths (60%; n=41) of cases involved girls as victims, 7 where boys were abused, 8 involved boys and girls (and 12 where the gender was unknown).

Sampling and profile of the institutional texts

An initial sample of institutional texts was generated through the second set of systematic searches on institutional responses performed for the REA. This was supplemented by references flagged in the literature and expert survey, making a total of 150 items. The texts were categorised as either nation, institution or sector specific, and divided into inquiry reports and reviews and guidance documents. Sampling matrices (see Tables C.1 and C.2) covering institutions, sectors and themes were then developed for the four sub-groups of texts and the cells populated with relevant items. To ensure the final sample was broadly representative across time period and institution or sector, one or two key texts were selected from each cell, depending on their perceived level of influence in the field. A total of 35 items were analysed, 21 of national relevance and 14 from individual institutions and sectors.

Tables C.1 and C.2 show the sampling frames used for the institutional texts.

Table C.1: Sampling frame for institutional texts with national relevance

Document theme	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
Child sexual abuse								
Child sexual exploitation								
Specific setting (e.g. residential care)								
Cross-cutting								

Table C.2: Sampling frame for institutional texts with sector-specific relevance

Document theme	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
Criminal justice								
Medical/psychological								
Local Authority/social work								
Church								
Sport								

Appendix D: Timelines

Timeline: 1940s-1960s

INQUIRIES AND REVIEWS



1957

Wolfenden Report
Recommends homosexuality between consenting adults (over 21) not be treated as a criminal offence

NATIONAL LEGISLATION



1948

Children Act 1948
Creates mandatory Children's Committees and Children's Officers in local government, specifies duty of local authorities and standards of treatment for children in care, includes exposure to 'moral danger' as grounds for removal of child

1956

Sexual Offences Act
Section 38 gives power of court to divest person of authority over girl or boy in cases of incest

1960

Sexual Offences Act
Makes it a crime to commit an act of gross indecency with someone under 14 and increases length of imprisonment for certain offences against girls; refers to children as gender-neutral category

1963

Children Act
Allows local authorities to put resources into preventing children coming into care

1963

Children and Young Persons Act
Section 1 allows statements taken by trained women officers to be admissible in committal proceedings in place of child's oral evidence

1967

Sexual Offences Act
Fixes age of consent for male same-sex activity at 21

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS



1959

United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child
States children to enjoy special protection and be protected against all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation

Timeline: 1970s



Timeline: 1980s

INQUIRIES AND REVIEWS

- 1988**
Cleveland Report
Publication of inquiry into child abuse in Cleveland in 1987
- 1989**
Clyde Report
report on removal of children from families in Orkney published

NATIONAL LEGISLATION

- 1980**
Child Care Act
Introduces duty of local authorities to promote welfare of children; measures to regulate voluntary homes
- 1981**
Foster Care Act
Introduces various local authority controls regarding fostering
- 1988**
Criminal Justice Act
Introduces offence of possessing indecent photographs of children
- 1989**
Children Act
States child's welfare 'paramount'; 'significant harm' and 'ill-treatment' replace language of 'moral danger'; 'looked after' and 'disability' replace 'in care' and 'handicap'; introduces concepts of 'children in need' and 'children in need of protection' Introduces Emergency Protection Orders

POLICY AND GUIDANCE

- 1988**
Working Together
Guidance launched; includes system of case reviews (which became serious case reviews)

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS

- 1989**
United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child
Affirms best interests of the child are primary consideration, States Parties, duty to protect the child from all forms of violence, including sexual exploitation, and promote recovery and reintegration (especially Articles 3, 19, 34, 39)

EVENTS

- 1984**
Jasmine Beckford
Killed by father
- 1984**
Tyra Henry
Killed by stepfather while in local authority care
- 1987**
Cleveland crisis
Paediatricians at Middlesbrough Hospital make 121 diagnoses of child sexual abuse

Timeline: 1990s

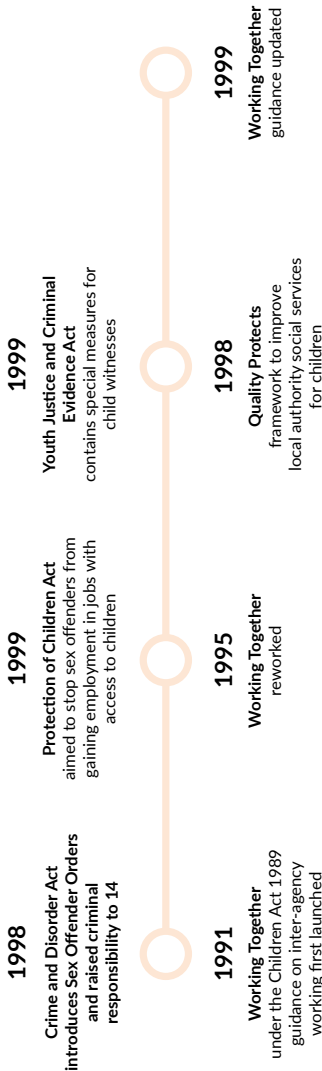
INQUIRIES
AND
REVIEWS



NATIONAL
LEGISLATION



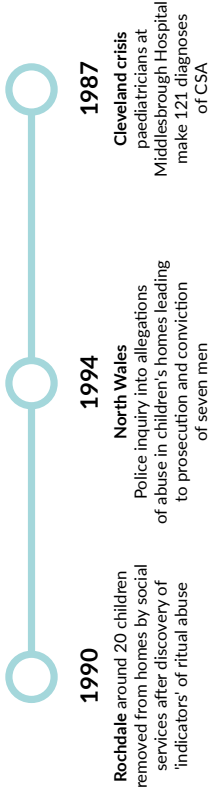
POLICY AND
GUIDANCE



INTERNATIONAL
CONVENTIONS



EVENTS



Timeline: 2000s

INQUIRIES AND REVIEWS

- 2000** Lost in Care Inquiry report into abuse of children in care in Gwynedd and Clwyd since 1974 (Waterhouse Report)
- 2002** Home Affairs Committee report into The Conduct of Investigations into Past Cases of Abuse in Children's Homes
- 2004** Richard Inquiry into Soham murders recommends registration scheme for those working with children and vulnerable adults

NATIONAL LEGISLATION

- 2000** Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000 lowers age of consent for male same-sex activity to 16, abuse of trust offence
- 2003** Sexual Offences Act 2003 definition of consent, strict liability offences for under-13s, abuse of trust offence, also causing, arranging, facilitating child prostitution, grooming and paying for the sexual services of a child
- 2003** Criminal Justice Act 2003 Part 13 arrangements for assessing risks from sexual or violent offenders leads to the establishment of Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements and stricter monitoring and enforcement for sex offenders
- 2004** Children Act 2004 creates post of Children's Commissioner, local authorities to install Director of Children's Services, Local Safeguarding Children Boards replace non-statutory Area Child Protection Committees
- 2006** Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 establishes Independent Safeguarding Authority to prevent unsuitable adults working with children and make barring decisions



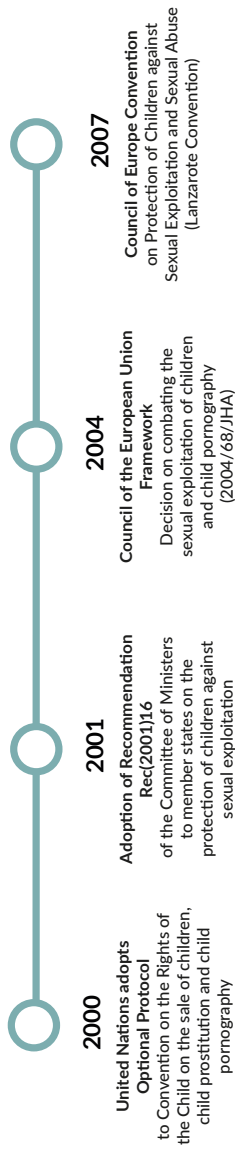
- 2009** Coroners and Justice Act 2009 creates new offence of possession of prohibited images of children, also includes provisions for young witnesses

POLICY AND GUIDANCE

- 2000** Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution guidance published
- 2001** National Plan for Safeguarding Children from Commercial Sexual Exploitation issued by the Department of Health and Home Office
- 2004** Every Child Matters: Change for Children outlines national framework for change in children's services linked to Children Act 2004
- 2006** Working Together to Safeguard Children states that child's needs are paramount and safeguarding is everyone's responsibility
- 2006** Department for Education and Skills non-statutory guidance on what to do if you're worried a child is being abused
- 2007** Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework developed in Wales
- 2009** Together We Can End Violence Against Women and Girls strategy published by HM Government
- 2009** Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation supplementary guidance to Working Together to Safeguard Children, includes new definition of sexual exploitation
- 2009** Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation guidance issued by Department for Children Schools and Families
- 2009** Handling Allegations of Abuse made against Adults who Work with Children and Young People practice guidance published by Department for Children Schools and Families

Timeline: 2000s

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS

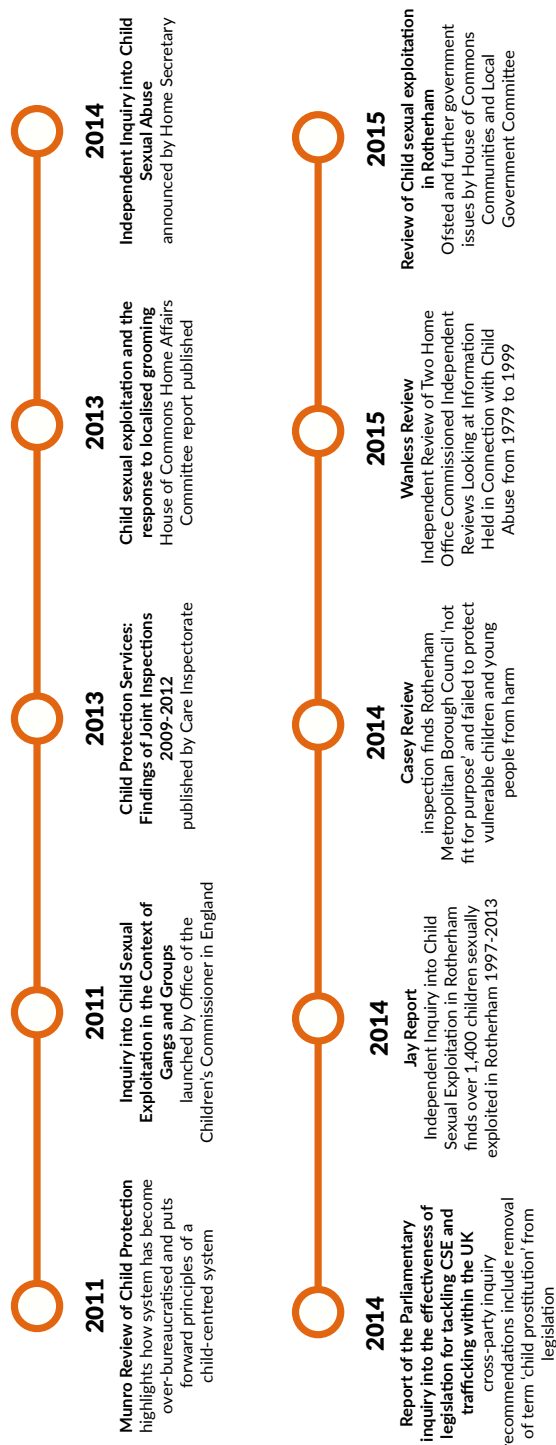


EVENTS



Timeline: 2010s

INQUIRIES AND REVIEWS



NATIONAL LEGISLATION



Timeline: 2010s

POLICY AND
GUIDANCE



Timeline: 2010s

EVENTS

