

Short Guide for Practitioners: Child Trafficking

This guide is primarily for education practitioners although may be useful for practitioners across the children's services workforce in Aberdeen City.

What is Child Trafficking?

Child trafficking is a crime that is a Child Protection concern involving the illegal trade and exploitation of children. It is defined by the Scottish Government as 'a global business that targets and victimises the most vulnerable children for transportation, abuse and exploitation across the world.' It is a real and escalating problem with a threefold rise in cases of child trafficking in Scotland since 2011. Child trafficking does not essentially mean that a child has to cross international boundaries but merely be moved from one location to another within towns and cities across Scotland for the purposes of exploitation.

Trafficking of children is a process, not a single event. It combines three constituent parts, listed below:

1. **The Act** (what is done)
This involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring and receipt of children for the purposes of exploitation.
2. **The Means** (how this is done)
This may be achieved through use of threat, force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, or the giving of payments or benefits to a person in control of the child.
3. **The Purpose** for which a child may be trafficked is far ranging and may be one or a combination of categories below:
 - child labour
 - debt bondage
 - domestic servitude
 - begging
 - benefit fraud
 - ritualistic violence
 - drug trafficking / decoys
 - illegal adoptions
 - forced / illegal marriage
 - sexual abuse
 - sexual exploitation
 - organ donations
 - radicalisation
 - sport and military conscription

Effects of Child Trafficking

The effects of child trafficking are far reaching and difficult to define due to the varying nature of the purposes for which children are trafficked. For example, a child being trafficked for the purpose of sexual abuse will experience different effects from those of a child trafficked for organ donation. The most important factor to acknowledge is that child trafficking causes real and significant harm to children.

Legislation

The UK is a participant in the UN Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime, part of this convention deals with the trafficking of children. In Scotland the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015 was passed by the Scottish Parliament. The first provisions of this Act came into power in 2016 and the enactment of other

provisions are ongoing. The Act reinforces existing law by creating a single offence for all types of trafficking and people convicted now face a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. All trafficked children are entitled to the same level of care, safeguarding and protection as children resident in the Scotland, regardless of immigration status.

Who are the victims of Child Trafficking?

For the purposes of this guidance, a 'child' is a person under the age of 18. It is important to note that trafficked children may not be aware of nor understand they are being abused and may even think they play a role in this. There are a number of factors which make children vulnerable to trafficking. The factors listed below are not exhaustive and may be present in both the country of origin and here in Scotland.

Children who:

- are from impoverished backgrounds.
- do not attend school.
- are from an ethnic minority who are victims of social discrimination.
- originate from a country with cultural values which endorse child labour.
- have a dysfunctional, chaotic home life and may already be subject to child abuse/neglect.
- originate from a country with political conflict.
- originate from a country with inadequate legislation and enforcement of law to protect them.
- inappropriately use the internet and form online relationships, particularly with adults.

Identifying cases of Child Trafficking?

Due to the variation of purposes of exploitation which children are trafficked for, it is difficult establish a particular set of signs which may indicate child trafficking. This is further complicated as children may move in and out of trafficking situations. So, it is more helpful to consider an array of potential signs which may present in isolation or combination.

- Physical appearance
Children may show signs of physical abuse for example, they may appear undernourished or unkempt. They may always wear the same clothes daily. The clothes they do wear may not be suitable for the setting.
- Lack of or false identification
The child or adults in control of the child, may have no, or false identification documents. They may also be unable or unwilling to give accommodation and personal details, equally multiple addresses may be given. Multiple unrelated children may be registered at the same address. The child may also claim that the details on the documentation are incorrect such as their name or date of birth.
- Lack of clarity regarding parental responsibility
The child may be cared for by adult/s that are not their parent/s. The child may be unable to confirm the name and contact details of the adult who travelled with them or met them on arrival and the adult who is responsible for their care. Their travel arrangements may have been organised by someone out with their family.
- Constantly accompanied
The child is constantly accompanied by an adult who insists on remaining with them always.
- Withdrawn
The child may be excessively introverted. This may be shown through avoiding eye contact, appearing frightened and hesitant to talk to authority figures, particularly those from the Police service. They may rarely interact with their peers in school or in the community.
- Rehearsed story
The child appears to have a rehearsed story about their circumstances and will not disclose information beyond this.
- Sporadic Attendance
Due to the varying purposes of exploitation the child may have sporadic and frequent absences from school. There may be patterns to absences and lateness's. Contact with the child may be lost and recommenced days, weeks, months or even years later.
- The child may show maturity and self-confidence not expected in a child of their age.
- Lack of Universal Service Engagement
The child may not be registered with a GP or enrolled in school/nursery.

What to do next?

If you're concerned that a child may have been trafficked or is at risk of entering into a child trafficking situation, follow your school or organisations child protection policy:

Your response to a disclosure;

- Be calm
- Tell the child they have done the right thing by talking to you
- Do not make any promises to keep a secret
- Tell them that help is available
- Record what you have seen, what your concerns are and/or what the child has disclosed to you.

Report your concerns in line with your organisations child protection policy.

These people know what to do next;

- Your child protection co-ordinator or line manager
- The child's Named Person (Head teacher, Guidance teacher or Health Visitor)
- Joint Child Protection Team (01224 306877)
- Emergency Out of Hours Social Work (01224 693936)
- Police (101)

What to be mindful of if you suspect a child is a victim of trafficking?

- Do not use unofficial interpreters or assume all documents are legitimate.
- Try to dispel any fear of support from services.
- Be vigilant in looking for signs of non-verbal communication between potential victims of child trafficking and perpetrators.
- Consider cultural and religious issues relevant to any potential victim.

References

Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015; www.gov.scot/Topics/Justice

Human Trafficking; Reading the signs; www.aberdeencity.gov.uk

NSPCC Child Trafficking, signs symptoms and effects; www.nspcc.org.uk

Action to combat child trafficking, Scottish Government; www.gov.scot/Topics/Justice

Interagency Guidance for Child Trafficking – Child Trafficking Assessment National Referral Mechanism; www.gov.scot/Publications



Information on all aspects of child protection in Aberdeen City can be found with the following link - <http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/childprotection/>