Life skills, leadership, limitless potential: Supporting children and young people affected by sexual violence in Europe by strengthening and facilitating participatory practice (LEAP)

LITERATURE REVIEW

PARTICIPATION IN POLICY AND PRACTICE – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE AFFECTED BY SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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Contents

Introduction

This review is part of the Life Skills, Leadership and Limitless Potential (LEAP) project. The LEAP project ran from November 2015 to November 2017 and was coordinated by the *International Centre: Researching child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking* at the University of Bedfordshire in the UK. It was implemented in partnership with Barnardo's Sexual Exploitation Children's Outreach Service (UK), Terre des Hommes (Romania), PULSE Foundation (Bulgaria), Stichting Alexander (Netherlands) and Terre des Hommes Regional Office for South East Europe, and in association with EuroChild.

A central aim of the project was to develop confidence amongst practitioners, and strengthen commitment to participatory practice when supporting children and young people who are affected by sexual violence. The project sought to build the evidence base on how to support and involve practitioners in advocacy through research and evaluation.

Aims and scope

This literature review concentrates on the nature and scope of participation of children and young people who are affected by sexual violence and receive services relating to this. The content draws heavily on a review conducted by Dr Isabelle Brodie et al (2016) which concentrated on the participation of young people in child sexual exploitation services and had started before the LEAP project. Rather than replicate a similar review of the literature, LEAP staff worked with the authors of the report to incorporate summary findings into this document, in order to inform the LEAP four-day training package developed for practitioners working in specialist services to support children and young people affected by sexual violence (more information about this training is available via ChildHub[1]).The review will be shared via ChildHub with the International Centre's International Knowledge Network, which is made up by specialist services across Europe. The review includes practice questions for practitioners working with young people in specialist services regarding the prevention of sexual violence and professional support in relation to this, in order to reflect on and learn from the literature.

Research questions

Brodie et al's review took place between September 2015 and February 2016 and focused on the following questions:

- How is the 'participation' of young people in child sexual exploitation (CSE) services conceptualised in the research, policy and the professional literature?
- What are the different theoretical strands that inform thinking about the participation of young people in CSE services?

[1] Webinar 6th June 2016 – available at http://childhub.org/en/child-protection-webinars/working-children-and-young-people-affected-sexual-violence-uk-childhub

- How explicit is the policy requirement for children and young people's participation in the processes associated with assessment, planning and review and what evidence exists regarding the effectiveness of these processes?
- What evidence exists regarding participation in the context of what represents 'good' practice and 'effective' working in relation to CSE services?
- What evidence exists regarding the conditions that need to be in place to make participatory working possible and effective for different groups of CSE-affected young people?
- What are the challenges for professionals, young people, parents and carers in relation to participatory working in CSE services?
- What evidence exists regarding the replicability of participatory models?

Methods

The review process has not followed a systematic process, but is better described as a scoping review. LEAP drew heavily on Brodie et al's (2016) review to bring together available and relevant evidence on participation in the UK. Additional searches were made to ascertain how participation is conceptualised in policy and practice in the wider European context, using mapping studies undertaken by LEAP partners for each country and additional searches using academic databases, journals and e-books and Google Scholar.

Terminology and models of participation

Terminology

The definition of sexual violence adopted by the LEAP project originated from the definition used by the International Centre at the time: "*any behaviour perceived to be of a sexual nature, which is unwanted or takes place without consent or understanding".* LEAP refers to 'children and young people affected by sexual violence' as we understand that children and young people are affected by sexual violence in a number of different ways:

- They may have experienced or be experiencing different forms of sexual violence.
- They may know friends or family members who have suffered from sexual violence.
- They may have witnessed sexual violence.
- They may know friends or family members who have perpetrated sexual violence.
- They may be living in communities with high rates of sexual violence.

According to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) children have 'the right to an opinion and for it to be listened to and taken seriously' (Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland. 2017). There are various academic and policy definitions of participation. Boyden and Ennew (1997), suggested that there are two interpretations of the term. It can mean simply 'taking part in', or 'being present', or it can mean a form of empowerment: 'having a real say in decisions'. Eekelaar (1992)

suggested that Article 12 of the UNCRC demands a shift from a paternalistic approach to one where children are seen as stakeholders in decisions, with a right to have some input, rather than merely being the object of concern or the subject of a decision. This corresponds with a wider shift in thinking about the agency of children and young people (James and Prout, 1997).

This is particularly important when working with children and young people affected by sexual violence, who have often been viewed as 'vulnerable' or 'troublesome' (Brodie et al, 2016). In addition, there is evidence from young people, presented in public inquiries and court cases, that demonstrates that they have often been ignored or blamed by professionals when seeking to report child sexual exploitation, which is reinforced by the research evidence (Brodie et al 2016). These issues have resulted in a lack of recognition of the scale and seriousness of sexual exploitation and violence. The legal principles of participation should ensure that all children and young people, including the most vulnerable and marginalised, are treated with respect, have a right to be listened to, and have their views and needs taken seriously.

Lansdown (1995) describes participation as:

> "A simple and self-evidently worthy principle which would, if taken seriously, have a revolutionary impact on the nature of adult-child relationships… without it children are denied the most basic of principles, to be accepted in their own right." (p.30)

LEAP observation and engagement with specialist services found that many recognise participation as a 'good thing' but remain confused about what it actually entails in practice. As Horwath et al (2012) stated "one of the challenges for adults is making sense of the notion of 'participation'" (p.56). It is a complex concept and there are many different words used to refer to 'participation', including: user-engagement, involvement, personalisation, empowerment, consultation, engagement, co-design, co-creation and co-production.

Moreover, there is little evidence about the different professional or geographic contexts in which these different terms are used, what they mean to practitioners and young people, and which particular participatory methods are being used to 'make' participation happen. Pearce's (2010) desktop review took stock of activities across Europe that involved young people as participants in efforts to prevent sexual violence against children. This review highlighted that the terms 'participatory methods' and 'sexual violence' are interpreted in a number of ways. Brodie et al (2016), identified a gap in the literature relating to the experiences of young people who have received CSE services but have not taken part in formalised 'participation' activities or processes. She also noted a lack of longitudinal studies that follow the experiences of young people and professionals and offer more detailed examples of the different ways in which 'participation' may take place and the effect these have on outcomes for young people.

Research into the effectiveness and outcomes of participation, especially around the subject of sexual violence, is also in its infancy. Larkins et al (2014) and Seim and Slettbø (2011) suggest that there is a growing trend towards children's participation in child welfare settings, where they might contribute to their own individual care plans or reviews, but there is less information on collective participation where children and young people are influencing policy and practice at service level. They suggest that collective participation

must include the ability for users to have the power to influence the shape and delivery of services. The importance of power and influence in participatory practice is evident in the different models of participation that are described in the next section of this report.

It is important to recognise that debate and theory regarding participation are not static but continue to evolve. In terms of participatory practice, Pearce (2010) recommends that further work needs to be undertaken to clarify and perhaps restructure current definitions. There is also a need to further explore methodologies used to support young people in helping prevent sexual violence. Brodie et al (2016), highlight the need to collate more literature relating to the experiences of specific groups of young people, for example, young people from different minority ethnic groups and young disabled people, in relation to their participation in CSE services. In order to do this, there is also a need for systems that can effectively monitor and evaluate children's participation in CSE work (Harris, 2014).

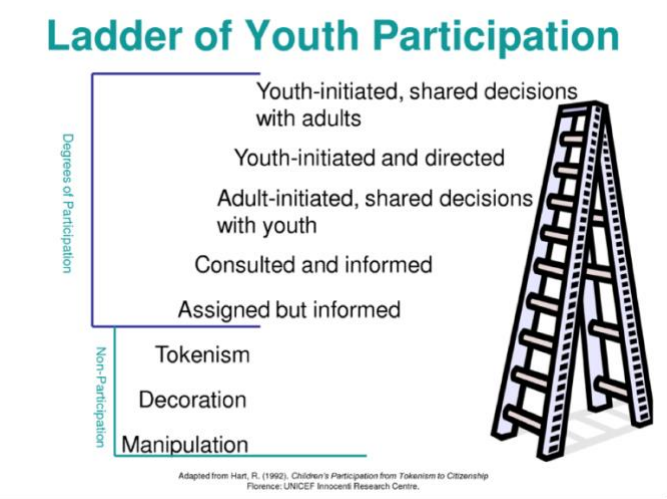
Models of participation

The next section will briefly discuss the main models of participation which have influenced theoretical thinking and practitioners' learning to date. These provide important messages about existing practice and knowledge in the field.

Participation is central to the idea of citizenship. In the UK, citizenship education emerged during the early 2000s as a way in which young people could be taught to be active citizens and this concept of citizenship included entitlements and responsibilities. Citizenship education was part of Personal, Social and Health Education in schools and there were local initiatives and funding opportunities enabling young people to create and take part in active citizen projects. In the political arena, participation is still expressed as the 'action' of citizenship (Seim and Slettebø, 2011).

The ladder of participation

Following Arnstein (1969), Hart (1992) equated levels of participation with movement up a 'ladder of participation' and also as movement towards citizenship. This model has been particularly influential in the youth and community sector, which uses it as a model and measure for effective practice. Use of the model has changed and been critiqued over time, specifically in terms of the hierarchical nature of the model.



The benefit of the ladder is that it clarifies what 'good' participation consists of, and supports services to recognise that some forms of participation may well be tokenistic or manipulative. One critique of the ladder structure is that it can be viewed as sequential and that it therefore suggests young people have to progress up the ladder in stages. Hart (1992), acknowledged that situational diversity and cultural difference can make generalised recommendations about stages difficult and that everyday informal participatory activity is not captured in the ladder model. For example, young people who participate are often more confident than most, which draws attention to the need to reach out to wider groups of children and young people. This is challenging because the most vulnerable and marginalised in society experience intersectional inequalities related to gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, ethnicity, and religion. These factors may make it very difficult for them to participate equally. These complexities are not reflected in such a simple model.

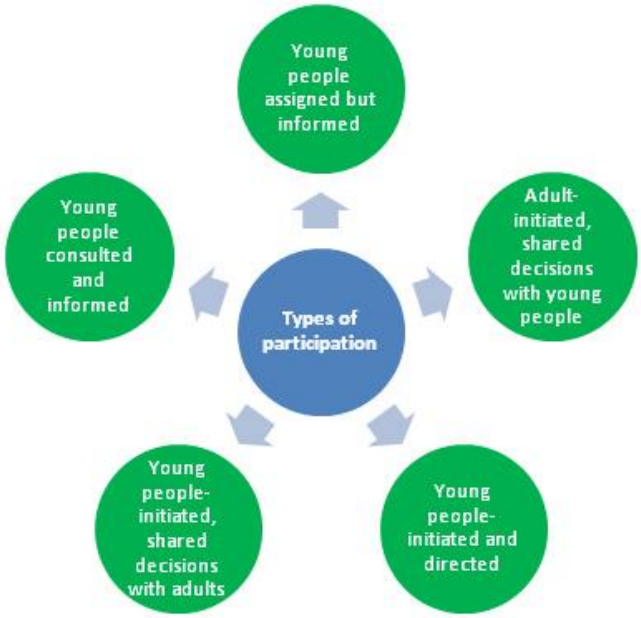
Shier (2001), developed Hart's ladder model and suggested that various levels of involvement can be understood in terms of openings, opportunities and obligations. Each level requires awareness of the importance and need for young people's involvement, resources, staff and young people's skills and organisational procedures that support, encourage and embed participation. He explains that an example of 'opening' is a worker committed to participation, 'opportunity' may be resources available, while 'obligation' is represented by organisational policies reinforcing expectations of participation.

This model makes no suggestion that children should be pressed to take responsibility they do not want or that is inappropriate for their level of development and understanding. However, in practice, adults are more likely to deny children developmentally appropriate degrees of responsibility than to force too much responsibility on them. Shier (2001), suggests that a sound participation policy involves a balance and weighing up of all the potential risks and benefits for children of sharing power and the responsibility for decision making. Any participation should happen in a supportive environment (Shier, 2001). Participation is inherently political and the recognition of power relations is central, as these will have a direct influence on the opportunities available to children and young people and their abilities to access them. Brodie et al (2016), pointed out that it is impossible to review the literature without recognising the significance of power dynamics in shaping participation and the participatory experience.

The Circular model

Treseder (1997) describes different types of participation using a visual, circular model, which provides more flexibility than a ladder format, in which there is no suggestion of a system or which level should take place first.

Figure 1. Circular model of participation



Save the Children (2010), produced a practical guide to participation called *Putting children at the centre* in which they refer to both the Hart and Treseder models. They point out that "regardless of the degree to which children are involved in any activity, it is always important that their involvement is as meaningful as possible"(p.15), and provide some helpful notes on what 'meaningful participation' involves:

- Children and their ideas are treated with respect.
- The aims and outcomes of their involvement are explained to children.
- Children volunteer to participate – or decide not to!
- The process and experience builds confidence and self-esteem and is empowering.
- Child-friendly methods are used – making it fun, interesting and engaging and in line with children's evolving capacities to take part.
- An opportunity is provided that suits the development needs of the child, and is in line with what children choose.
- Time is factored into project-planning – it takes time to do participation well! It shouldn't be a one-off event.

Save the Children (2010) p.15

The extent to which individuals can contribute and participate is recognised and discussed by Barker (1999) who refers to 'zones of penetration'.

Barker (1999) identifies different participation roles within a group:

- Onlooker – who takes no active role in the setting
- Audience – who has a recognised role but very little power
- Member – who has potential rather than immediate power, such as an organisation member who is eligible to vote for officers

- Active functionary – who holds power over one specific part of the work
- Joint leader – with an immediate but shared power over the entire setting
- Single leader – with immediate and sole authority over the operation setting.

He claims that the presence of a single leader can disrupt the spirit of participatory decision making and proposed that for this reason, planning for participation is essential. This planning should involve as many roles for young people as possible, allowing opportunities for engagement and influence or, equally, enabling young people to stand back. Barker's findings are very similar to Warrington's research (Warrington, 2015) regarding the different stances young people take towards participation in CSE services.

Levels of participation

Like Hart and Shier, Lansdown (2011) recognises that there are different *levels* of participation and that these are appropriate and/or possible at different times. Four levels of participation are described:

1. Children are not involved.
2. Children are consulted.
3. Children collaborate.
4. Child initiate, lead and/or manage.

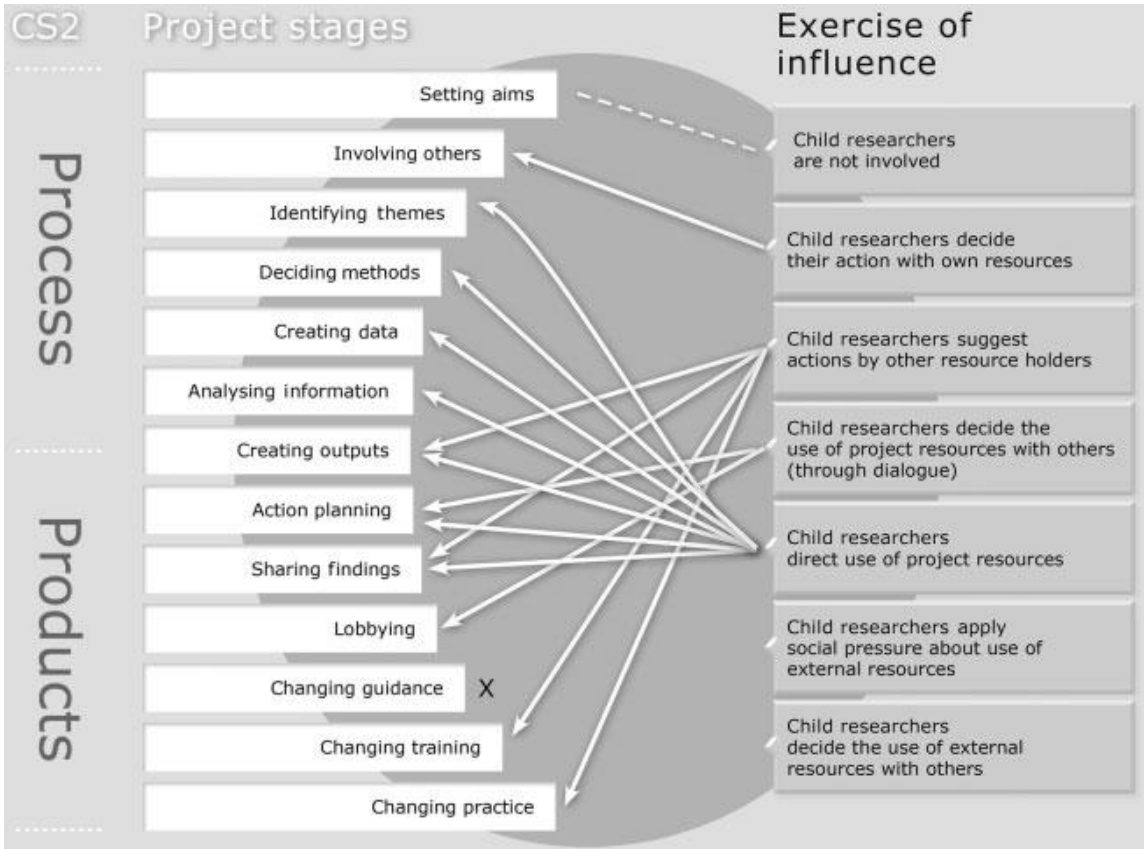
This model recognises that individual young people will be involved in various ways, at various stages, and in diverse aspects of decision making, depending on their capacities, interests and resources. For example, their participation could include completing a consultation or questionnaire on a specific issue, working with professionals to develop a training session, or being supported to apply for funding to set up their own initiative.

The lattice of participation

Larkins et al (2014) completed a useful study exploring the situated, intergenerational and dynamic nature of collective participation in child welfare settings in Wales, France and Finland and found that there were dynamic and relational ways in which participation takes place.

This model reveals the opportunities for participation at different stages of projects. It can be used to enhance and encourage participation and provides a tool for reflecting on how the influence of any actor and institution, at any stage, is enhanced or limited in terms of their relationship to resources.

Figure 2. Lattice of Participation



Change-scape theory

Johnson's (2014) 'change-scape' theory builds on Larkins' lattice concept and explores the significance of power relations and having spaces for participation.

> "Local power dynamics are key to understanding how different children may participate and what their interest in a process may be. It is an ethical issue whether children take up their right to participate and they need to be given the space to opt out of participatory processes with dignity." (p.97)

The main mechanisms within a change-scape are as follows:

- Communication and collaboration between adults and children involved in participatory processes is key to long-lasting change. In different cultural and political contexts there may be different mechanisms to encourage communication that in turn shift adult attitudes towards children's roles and power dynamics.
- In order to include different children who may have different perceptions of their identity and varying interest in participating, spaces for their participation will need to be considered.
- Continuity and sustainability may be achieved through capacity building of staff and adults in the community as well as children who want to be involved. Champions for children can help to energise and sustain more meaningful participation and action (Johnson, 2014).

Johnson (2014) used a change-scape framework to analyse the relationship between the local context and processes. She promotes the creation of participatory spaces for inclusion i.e. going to where young people are, rather than expecting them to enter adult-orientated spaces. This is reminiscent of the detached youth work approach which has always employed 'outreach' to engage young people on the streets. Here the basis of the relationship is about voluntary participation and more equal power dynamics between the worker and young person than is perhaps possible in a club or organisational setting.[2]

The 'change-scape' concept is beneficial as it can show the mechanisms through which participation can change the context in which children and young people live (Johnson, 2014). This is important as practitioner capacity and commitment to participation need to be developed. Head (2011,) confirmed that adults are often poor judges of how best to involve young people, and adult practitioners often need to be convinced that participation is right and important. The Council of Europe Recommendation on participation of children and young people under the age of 18 (CM/Rec (2012) 2 of the Committee of Ministers) and Lansdown's (2011) framework for monitoring and evaluating children's participation may be helpful in relation to this.

The premise is that participation for all children can lead to better protection. Lansdown (2011) states that:

> "Children who are silenced and passive can be abused by adults with relative impunity. Providing them with information, encouraging them to articulate their concerns and introducing safe and accessible mechanisms for challenging violence and abuse are key strategies for providing effective protection. Children who have access to information about health and sexuality are better able to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancy, sexually-transmitted diseases, and HIV. Child workers who form and join associations may be able to protect themselves better against exploitation and abuse. Opportunities to participate have been found to be of particular importance in situations of conflict and emergencies." (p.6)

Key learning from models

The models regarding participation have been helpful in highlighting different thinking about the ways in which participation can take place. However, this adds a layer of complexity for practitioners who might already be unclear about the concept and practice of participation. Important starter questions might be how far practitioners recognise these models, and the extent to which they feel more or less comfortable with the different models.

The models also draw attention to the challenges of enacting participation for children and young people. Unequal power relations can and do prevent and disrupt participatory practice, and many adults still need convincing that participation is an important element of prevention and service developments. Examining the barriers to participation that exist in any professional or organisational context is important in developing participatory practice.

[2] See http://infed.org/mobi/detached-street-based-and-project-work-with-young-people/ for more information about detached youth work in UK.

A commonly perceived barrier to participation voiced by LEAP professionals was the risk of re-traumatising young people when delivering participation work with vulnerable young people. Interestingly, the importance of care emerges strongly in literature relating to the care and child protection systems, where the lack of 'care' is often uppermost in young people's accounts. Participation work offers a way in which practitioners can ask questions and raise issues of concern in a sensitive way, care can be demonstrated and relationships achieved so that young people can open up conversations about their lives and their risks or experience of exploitation. Worker confidence is therefore needed to undertake participation, manage the risks and enable children and young people to participate.

Having provided an overview of participation more generally, the next section analyses the definitions and context of sexual violence in the four LEAP countries before exploring the opportunities and barriers for participation of children and young people affected by sexual violence.

Questions for practitioners:

1. Which terms do you use to describe participation?
2. Do any of these models reflect your view of participation? What might the advantage be of using such a model to promote participation?
3. Are there particular opportunities or challenges (regarding power and participation) within your own organisational context? How might these be shared in order that they can be addressed?

Opportunities and barriers regarding participation

Opportunities

Brodie et al (2016), notes that the literature on CSE in the UK has built on a decade of policy, research and practice thinking about participation in other service contexts, such as children in care, disabled children and young people. This suggests there has been a wider recognition that realising children's participation rights enhances their protection in different service contexts. Participation and protection rights are therefore interdependent. The benefits of participation identified by LEAP practitioners and young people themselves include:

- Participation supports children and young people's recognition of their own rights and supports their ability to assert these.
- Participation improves knowledge about children and young people's diverse lives, which supports the development of better, more appropriate services and responses to their needs.
- Participation enhances and strengthens young people's opportunities, self-esteem and confidence.
- Participation can re-balance power relationships between service users and providers.

There are therefore many opportunities for practitioners to champion participation in their own organisation, especially if they are aware of the above benefits and feel confident to promote participatory models and methods. However, workers do need to be supported to do this work and this requires their organisation's long-term accountability. Young people in Cody's (2015) research suggested several opportunities and roles as well as giving some advice on how participation should be supported:

1. *Ambassadors:* Young people should work as ambassadors to support and advise other young people and be involved in campaigns, events and distributing resources.

2. *Appropriate support:* Young people can be better than adults at supporting other young people because they talk the same language, are more accepting, and know more about what is happening.

3. *Training*: In order to help young people participate in this area of work, training should be offered and examples of work other young people have been involved in should be shared.

4. *Fun:* Making it fun is very important, using accessible language and making the space safe and comfortable to discuss this sensitive topic.

Barriers

Young people who have experienced violence are one of the most marginalised groups and are likely to be categorised as being at risk of significant harm. The balance between risk and opportunity is a barrier to participation. Cody (2015), consulted with 47 young people (42 female and 5 male) on the topic of sexual violence and participation. This sample suggested that fear of reliving experiences can prevent young people from participation. Other barriers voiced by young people in Cody's research included stigma and embarrassment, fear about the perpetrators finding out, and a lack of resources and support for young people. These issues have also been raised on the LEAP project. Having the time and resources to facilitate participation is a challenge and this is related to the ethos and support for participation within different organisations. Participation needs to be taken seriously so that young people feel their time is valued and there is evidence that adults are really listening and taking on board their suggestions. Spaces and processes for participation, particularly related to CSE and sexual violence, need to be flexible and friendly to young people. Involvement must be meaningful (Cody, 2015).

Practitioners might deem it too difficult, or not even consider including vulnerable young people in participation work, as the risk of causing further harm might seem too great. Yet Lansdown (cited in Horwarth et al, 2012) confirms that too much caution on the side of

protection denies children the right to be heard, inhibits opportunities to develop their capacities for participation, and, perversely, can serve to heighten risk (in Horwath et al, 2012, p18).

In order to address these opportunities and barriers there is a clear need to support, motivate and enthuse practitioners, managers and policy makers about participation. The research literature reviewed for Brodie et al's (2016) review suggests that participation in CSE services is distinctive and professionals in these services have a strong knowledge base regarding the routes into and experience of CSE. Young people value the way in which CSE services recognise them as individuals, listen and take their views seriously, and provide a flexible and friendly approach.

In addition, workers need to understand what participation means and be supported in their work by management. Participation for young people will take different forms depending on the individual, and may well change over time (Warrington, 2015). This is particularly important in relation to CSE services, where young people may not wish to be labelled as CSE service users.

There is a clear need for sensitive yet creative support and this requires training and awareness-raising activity. The role of the 'facilitator' of participatory work is important, whether this be as a trainer or someone in a workplace or youth club facilitating participation with adults or young people. Horwath et al (2012), note that important attributes include communication and inter-personal skills. Young people suggested that the facilitator should support decision making without being patronising, making assumptions or using stereotypes. They should be able to adapt their own style to the group, allow others to speak freely and ensure the safety and wellbeing of all those involved in the participatory process.

Conclusion

Participation is not a static idea and cannot be confined to the development of policy or practice guidelines. Services will need to work with children, young people and their families in an ongoing cycle of research, reflection and action to enact change. Individual practice needs to be matched by organisational commitment in order to develop services that are responsive. Participation is a long-term approach to the prevention of sexual violence and needs to be facilitated by the appropriate ethos and context. Some basic principles inherent across the literature include:

- Having a clear understanding of participation.
- Having clear aims, purpose, methods and processes to ensure that the benefits and limitations of participation in each case are explicit.
- Recording participation work in order that achievements can be disseminated and promoted.
- Participation models such as Hart's (1992) highlight that having young people as co-creators of work from the beginning, so that they can decide which aspects of

participatory processes they can get involved in and take control of (recognising as well that participatory roles and tasks are not feasible or necessary for every task or project) is recognised as meaningful participation.
- Developing opportunities for participation in local policy and practice that recognise the value of making a commitment to a participatory approach in the long term.
- Delivering relationship-based working, which includes flexibility, outreach and persistence, is essential to ensure the voluntary participation and inclusivity of children and young people.

There continue to be limitations to the research base and an absence of evaluative detail regarding the participation of children and young people at risk of or experiencing CSE and receiving different support within statutory and voluntary organisations. There is also a lack of literature that evaluates the practice undertaken by professionals working with young people at risk of or experiencing CSE that is perceived to be 'participatory'.

Where there is a strong commitment to the idea of participatory practice in CSE policy and practice, the next steps are to develop the evidence base of existing work.

Further evidence of the ways in which participation takes place in practice and with different groups needs to be captured. This is an opportunity to bring participation to the forefront. Longitudinal evaluation strategies could record the impact of participation for children and young people affected by sexual violence across Europe and further promote this way of working to empower young people and safeguard communities.

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