Empowerment of child victims and children at risk of sexual exploitation

Literature review
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Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is a pressing issue worldwide and one that needs to be addressed. In January 2016 the Down to Zero Alliance started implementing a 5-year programme to jointly address the issue of CSEC in 11 countries in Asia and Latin America; namely: Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Peru. The Alliance is a collaboration between Terre des Hommes Netherlands, Defence for Children-ECPAT, Free a Girl, ICCO and Plan Netherlands, with sponsorship from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹

The programme focuses on children’s rights and, in particular, the right to protection from sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. The programme aims to end CSEC by empowering child victims and children at risk in targeted communities by ensuring protective environments exist for these children.

To reach the goal of the programme, separate outcomes are defined for four types of actors:

1. Children: Child victims and children at risk are empowered and act as agents of change and are able to protect themselves from (re)victimisation of CSEC.

2. Communities: Targeted communities are safer, offer better protection to child victims and can prevent children from becoming (re)victimised.

3. Governments and law enforcement agencies: governments and judiciary systems apply policies, plans of actions, budgets and protocols to effectively combat CSEC.

4. Private sector: market leaders or branch associations of the tourist industry, ICT, transportation and extractives are actively engaged in the protection of children against CSEC.

Learning and improving interventions is of importance while working as an Alliance. In order to facilitate learning, the Down to Zero programme identified areas of learning, one being child empowerment, as this is an important component of the programme. Within the programme, questions arose regarding: (i) what are effective child empowerment strategies, taking into account age and gender, and (ii) how to measure effective child empowerment strategies. Furthermore, with a lack of understanding of the specific dynamics and needs of sexually exploited boys, a sub question on boy victims and boys at risk of CSE and their empowerment was additionally raised by the Alliance.

¹ Down to Zero Alliance, [http://downtozeroplatform.com/dtz/site/index](http://downtozeroplatform.com/dtz/site/index)
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to external experts who shared their knowledge and provided research guidance: Mark Capaldi, Junita Upadhyay, Mark Kavenagh (ECPAT International), and Claire Cody (University of Bedfordshire). I would also like to thank the members of the Down to Zero Working Group: Carrie van der Kroon (Defence for Children-ECPAT), Alastair Hilton (Terre des Hommes Netherlands), Froukje Gaasterland and Linn Thome (Free a Girl), Aude Diepenhorst (Plan Netherlands), for providing their expert opinions and constructive feedback.
Acronyms

**AIDS** Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

**CSA** Child Sexual Abuse

**CSE** Child Sexual Exploitation

**CSEC** Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children

**ECPAT** End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for sexual purposes

**GEMS** Girls Educational and Mentoring Services

**HIV** Human Immunodeficiency Virus

**LGBTQI** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transexual, Queer/Questioning and Intersex. This definition does not exclude in any way the existence of other types of identification.

**NGO** Non-Governmental Organisation

**PTSD** Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

**STI** Sexually Transmitted Infections

**UNICEF** United Nations Children’s Fund

**UNCRC** United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

**YPP** ECPAT’s Youth Partnership Programme
A. Aims and scope

In order to answer the questions raised in the Down to Zero programme, the Steering Committee requested a literature review to assess to what extent these questions can be answered by research current available. Secondly, it serves to identify the gaps in the academic literature and identify areas for further research.

This literature review concentrates on the literature available on the topic of empowerment of children and young people who are affected by sexual exploitation. It focuses predominantly on exploring the concept of children’s empowerment in the context of CSE. Secondly it examines how different groups of children and young people experience CSE. Finally, the review proposes empowerment strategies for child victims and children at risk, and —if available in the literature— this is adjusted to their experiences, as well as ways to measure the effectiveness of these empowerment strategies.

It is beyond the scope of this review to discuss the many different variations of child sexual exploitation in depth. Therefore, this review, when discussing CSE, will focus primarily on the commercial sexual exploitation of children. It is also beyond the scope of this review to discuss the many different areas in assisting child victims of CSE in their recovery and reintegration, such as the cover of basic needs, health, education, legal support, as well as family and community strengthening.

The review will focus especially on life skills, peer support and youth participation as the domain of support that promotes their empowerment.

The literature review primarily serves those working within the Down to Zero Alliance, including practitioners working in the 11 countries with/for children regarding the prevention of CSE and child protection and support in relation to this, in order to reflect on and learn from the literature.

The review does not assess the current CSE situation in the 11 programme countries or identify inadequacies of the national response to child support and protection or the level of child empowerment in these countries. Rather, it aims to provide answers to the learning questions, enabling these countries to efficiently implement the Down to Zero programme.

B. Methodology and limitations

The literature review took place between December 2017 and June 2018. It comprised of desk-based research and was conducted solely in English.

The review process has not followed a systematic process, but is better described as a ‘scoping review’. Using online search function, a combination of key words was used to search for relevant resources.
Key words included ‘child’, ‘children’, ‘young people’, ‘youth’, ‘victim’, ‘survivor’, ‘children at risk’, ‘gender’, ‘boys’, ‘girls’, ‘LGBTQI’, ‘children with disabilities’, ‘minorities’, in combination with the following terms ‘child sexual abuse’, ‘child sexual exploitation’, ‘empowerment’, ‘disclosure’, ‘resilience’, ‘agency’, ‘participation’, ‘recovery’, ‘reintegration’, ‘life skills’, ‘support’. Main sources of information included academic studies, guidelines, reports and publications from international organisations and NGOs, as well as journal articles and legal materials primarily of the last 15 years, aiming to give the current state of the art on the issue. In total, 80 pieces of literature were included and formed the basis of this review. In addition to the online search function, interviews with experts in the field provided enlightening data and guidance for further research.

C. Research challenges

This review concentrates on literature available on the topic of empowerment of children and young people who are affected by sexual exploitation, and specifically on empowerment strategies taking into account gender and age. In this context, diversity of the identities of CSE victims as well as diversity in the disclosure process are also explored, with a focus on boy victimisation.

Numerous research challenges had been encountered throughout the process:

- The online research identified a lack of literature on the specific topic of empowerment of child victims and children at risk of CSE. The vast majority of assessed literature examined empowerment under the general scope of recovery and (re)integration of children and young people affected by CSE, or as an empowering result of child-centred approaches applied during their care and support. Equally, there is a dearth of literature with regard to the definition of child empowerment in the context of CSE and empowerment strategies, as well as in relation to effectiveness.

  In order to contribute to this topic, it was necessary to first explore the concept of empowerment, its composition and its application in the context of CSE. Additionally, in order to examine whether empowerment strategies could take into account gender and age, the review analysed how different dynamics in children’s lives, such as: gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity, faith and disabilities, affect their experiences as victims or at risk of CSE. This is crucial, as understanding children’s realities is a precondition to building effective empowerment strategies.

- The study of the diversity of child victims of CSE and their disclosure experience was also challenging. While there is much literature that explores the diversity of child victims as well as the diversity in the disclosure process under the scope of CSA or both CSA and CSE, it was identified a lack of literature exploring the identities of victims and their disclosure experience solely in the context of CSE. This means that when literature compares girl and boy victimisation or examines the vulnerability of different groups of children (e.g. with disabilities, LGBTQI, faith or ethnic minorities), the focus is on the act of sexual abuse, often in the context of intrafamilial abuse, and not on the (commercial) exploitation that may or may not happen at the same time or occur afterwards. The same happens with regard to the disclosure process, where literature focuses on the disclosure of the trauma caused by the act of sexual abuse. Other pieces of
literature examine both CSA and CSE when it comes to understanding child victims’ experiences without differentiating.

Furthermore, while undertaking research on male and female victimisation of CSA/E, online research identified limited literature on the comparison between boys and girls. In addition, online research could easily lead to findings regarding boy victims of CSA/E, since literature on this topic is relatively recent and dedicated to the reasons why sexual abuse and exploitation of boys is hidden or underreported, opposed to that of girls. As a result, simply by using a combination of the key words ‘boys’, ‘sexual abuse’, ‘sexual exploitation’, ‘hidden’ and ‘disclosure’, online research provided sufficient results. On the other hand, studying girl victimisation of CSA/E proved to be complicated. In fact, while addressing child sexual abuse and exploitation over the years, the vast majority of literature and practice focused on girls, since the majority of identified victims are girls, but without making any explicit reference to girls. As a result, for the purposes of this review and within the limited timeframe and means, it proved to be impossible to adequately study girl victimisation of CSA/E, since all literature on CSA/E should be assessed. Consequently, a gap with regard to girl victimisation of CSE/A has been identified by the current literature review, and thus girls have been studied in comparison with boys.

D. Review outline

The findings of the literature review are set out in four chapters. Following this Introduction, Chapter I, applying a general-to-specific order in developing the empowerment of children in the context of CSE, first examines the general concept of empowerment, then explores related to children’s empowerment concepts found in the literature, and finally elaborates on the description and significance of the empowerment of child victims and children at risk of CSE. Chapter II examines how different groups of children and young people experience and disclose CSA/E with a focus on boys — a related sub question of the Down to Zero Alliance. Chapter III studies empowerment strategies for child victims and children at risk, and whether these could be adapted to their identities and experiences. Since empowerment strategies for children affected by CSE were barely defined in the literature, the review refers to practices, methods or ways of serving the definition and components of empowerment and introduces them as empowerment strategies. Chapter IV proposes ways to measure the effectiveness of these empowerment strategies. The last chapter, Conclusion and Recommendations, presents a brief summary of the main points of the review, whilst also addressing the main research questions. It also summarises the identified gaps and makes recommendations for further research.

E. Key definitions

For the purpose of this literature review, some terms and concepts that are used throughout the review are specifically defined here:
Children: In line with Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), in this review the term ‘children’ refers to those under the age of 18. The term ‘children and young people’ is also used throughout the review interchangeably. This is in recognition of the substantial developmental differences between a child and a young person — even though there is not a definitive age at which a child becomes a young person.²

Children at risk: In the context of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, the term ‘children at risk’ refers to children who have not necessarily been victims of abuse or exploitation but who are at greater risk than other children owing to their situation and/or circumstances and need to be reached for prevention purposes.³

Child Sexual Abuse: ‘Child Sexual Abuse’ (CSA) is a form of child abuse⁴ that includes, among other things, such acts as obscene text messages, exhibitionism, fondling, penetration, and exposing a child to other sexual activities.⁵ The sexual abuse of children requires no element of exchange, and can occur for the mere purpose of the sexual gratification of the person committing the act. CSA is a broad category that, at its core, defines the harm caused to children by forcing or coercing them to engage in sexual activity, whether they are aware of what is happening or not.⁶

Child Sexual Exploitation: ‘Child sexual exploitation’ (CSE) is a type of sexual abuse. A child may be considered to be a victim of sexual exploitation when she/he takes part in a sexual activity in exchange for something (e.g. gain or benefit, or even the promise of such) from a third party, the perpetrator, or by the child her/himself.⁷ Therefore, the notion of exchange is the key marker differentiating CSE from other forms of sexual violence and abuse.

It should be noted that, even if child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation are two different phenomena, there are cases where the distinction is not clear.⁸ For example, some cases of child sexual abuse may also involve some kind of benefit to the child or exchange — often to win trust or ensure silence (especially non-tangible benefits such as attention or affection). Similarly, the idea of exploitation is arguably applicable to all victims of abuse in the sense of exploiting the vulnerability of a child.⁹ Bearing also in mind that sexual abuse is always involved in CSE cases, both phenomena are merged in certain instances in the current paper, such as while studying the disclosure experiences of victims, differentiating when necessary.

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⁴ When a perpetrator intentionally harms a minor physically, psychologically, sexually, or by acts of neglect, the crime is known as child abuse, as cited at https://www.rainn.org/articles/child-sexual-abuse
⁷ Ibid, p. 24
Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: According to the Luxembourg Guidelines (2016), a distinction can be made between ‘sexual exploitation’ and ‘commercial sexual exploitation’, with the latter being a form of sexual exploitation where the focus is specifically on monetary benefit, often relating to organised criminality where the primary driver is economic gain. The commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) can entail the sexual exploitation of children in prostitution, child trafficking for sexual purposes, the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism, child sexual abuse materials and certain forms of child marriage. As such, the CSEC is a subset of CSE and for the purposes of this report, the terms CSE and CSEC are used interchangeably, differentiating when necessary.

Service providers/Practitioners/Caregivers: Organisations or/and individuals that provide one or more of the range of services and assistance offered to child victims and children at risk of CSE. These may include social workers, psychologists, shelter staff, medical personnel or legal professionals from the statutory sector (governmental organisations) and the voluntary sector (non-governmental organisations and international organisations). Service providers may be specialised in CSE assistance or may have a more general assistance background. In some situations the term may also include persons who provide informal assistance, such as family members and friends. In this review service providers are also referred to as practitioners and caregivers and all three terms are used interchangeably.

Victim/Survivor: The term ‘victim’ describes an individual who suffers, or has suffered, harm as a result of criminal conduct, while the term ‘survivor’ is additionally used by many in the service field to recognise the strength it takes to continue on a journey towards healing in the aftermath of a traumatic experience. The Luxembourg Guidelines caution against labelling children, noting that both labels ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ may be rejected by the children themselves. The term ‘children/girls/boys affected by CSE’ is used at other points in the review to recognise that children who experience CSE are affected in many different ways.

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10 Ibid., p. 27
11 While child marriage is not yet conceptualised as a category of CSEC, the sheer number of child brides estimated in today’s world regularly exposed to sexual abuse and exploitation may potentially make it an unprecedented CSEC challenge for the future, as cited in Riggio Chaudhuri, E. (2015). Thematic Report: Unrecognised Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children in Child, Early and Forced Marriage, ECPAT International and Plan International, http://www.ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/Child%20Marriage_ENG.pdf, p. 4; Child Marriage can be regarded as a form of CSEC, where a child is to be used for sexual purposes, through marriage, in exchange for cash, goods or kind. This is the case where parents or a family marry off a child in order to gain benefit or to support the family, as cited in Subgroup Against the Sexual Exploitation of Children NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (2005), Semantics or Substance? Towards a Shared Understanding of terminology referring to the sexual abuse and exploitation of children, http://www.ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/Semantics%20or%20Substance.pdf, p. 23; Hargitt, K. (2017), p. 12
Chapter I The concept of empowerment

A. Definition of empowerment

In accordance with major dictionaries, empowerment refers to the act or the process of giving a person or a group freedom and power to do what they want, or more control over their own life or the situation they live in.\(^{14}\)

Literature relates the concept of empowerment to terms such as agency, autonomy, self-direction, self-determination, liberation, participation, mobilisation and self-confidence.\(^{15}\) A number of authors cited by Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) frame empowerment as an increase in power, understood as control or a real ability to effect change.

Empowerment has been ascribed a wide variety of definitions and meanings in various socio-economic contexts, and has been given many forms, such as a framework, a process, a state,\(^{16}\) a feeling, a potential\(^{17}\) or an outcome. With regard to women’s empowerment for instance, Oxaal and Baden (1997) state that empowerment cannot be defined in terms of specific activities or end results because it involves a process whereby women can freely analyse, develop and voice their needs and interests, without them being pre-defined, or imposed from above, by planners or other social actors.\(^{18}\) In the context of CSE, empowerment has been defined as the process by which trafficked persons are equipped with the skills and ability to lead an autonomous life.\(^{19}\)

From the social workers’ point of view, empowerment process involves four stages:

1. Establishing a relationship between the service provider and the service user to meet immediate needs such as access to social services and benefits or to other sources of information;

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\(^{16}\) The process of empowerment is defined as “enhancing the capacity of an individual or group to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes”. The state of empowerment is defined as “an individual or group having the capacity both to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes”, as cited in The World Bank (2007), *Empowerment in Practice: Analysis and Implementation*, A World Bank Learning Module, [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/WBI/Resources/EmpowermentLearningModulebody.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/WBI/Resources/EmpowermentLearningModulebody.pdf), p. 6

\(^{17}\) One of the most prolific authors in the field of empowerment, J. Rappaport, offers a broad-based definition of the term: "(Empowerment) suggests a sense of control over one's life in personality, cognition, and motivation. It expresses itself at the level of feelings, at the level of ideas about self worth, at the level of being able to make a difference in the world around us... We all have it as a potential." as cited in Rappaport, J. (1985), *The power of empowerment language, Social Policy*, 15, pp. 15-21; Lord, J. and Hutchison, P. (1993), *The Process of Empowerment: Implications for Theory and Practice*, Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health 12:1, pp. 5–22, [http://www.johnlord.net/web_documents/process_of_empowerment.pdf](http://www.johnlord.net/web_documents/process_of_empowerment.pdf)


\(^{19}\) Hargitt, K. (2017), p. 14
2. Educating the service user to improve his or her skills and thereby increasing the ability for self-help;

3. Securing resources. This implies the development of skills to deal with other organisations and agencies, joining self-help-programmes and groups, or establishing and using social networks;

4. Enabling social and political action. Helping the service user to be able to articulate social and political needs at the appropriate time, enabling them to understand the basic principles of lobbying, negotiation, campaigning and so forth.20

B. Related concepts

1. Children’s participation as a form of empowerment

The United Nations Human Development Report 1995 stresses that empowerment is about participation in which actions and decisions “must be by people, not only for them; People must participate fully in the decisions and processes that shape their lives.”21

The same principle applies to children. According to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC),22 children have the right to an opinion and for it to be listened to and taken seriously,23 regardless of their experiences, background, age and ethnicity.24

Children’s participation is thus not only concerned with listening to children but goes further, promoting children’s ability to influence decisions made about them.25 Indeed, Boyden and Ennew (1997) suggested that there are two interpretations of the term participation. It can mean simply ‘taking part in’, or ‘being present’, or it can mean a form of empowerment: ‘having a real say in decisions’.26

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20 Labour-market Integration of Migrants and Refugees through Advice and Guidance, Chapter 4 Empowerment, http://www.agef-saar.de/4H01/4Lima/4StartLima.htm
22 Article 12(1): States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
24 Article 12 in combination with Article 2 which states that “1. States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his or her parent’s or legal guardian’s race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status”; ECPAT International (2012), Youth Journal. Youth Partnership Programme: Empowering Child Survivors and At-Risk Youth against Commercial Sexual Exploitation, http://www.ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Youth%20Journal_Final.pdf, p. 1
26 D’Arcy, K. with Brodie, I. (2017), p. 5; The definition of participation used by Action for Children is: “we believe participation is the active involvement of children and young people in experiences, opportunities and decisions that affect their lives and their ability to fulfil their potential”, as cited in Mieke Schuurman (2010), Valuing Children’s
Prior to the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, almost 30 years ago, children were virtually invisible as spokespersons, social activists, advocates, campaigners and policy analysts. Rarely, if ever, were children afforded an opportunity to influence the laws, policies, services and resources which impact on their lives. They were defined exclusively as recipients and not contributors. Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child made it clear for the first time that children are not merely ‘objects’ of protection but ‘subjects’ with human rights, and with legitimate rights to participate in the decisions concerning them.\(^{28}\)

The Council of Europe Convention on the protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (2007) notes that the development of policy in this area “must of necessity be informed by children’s own views and experiences in accordance with their evolving capacity”.\(^{29}\) The importance of participation as a foundation for protection against child sexual exploitation had also been stressed in both the European and South East Asian youth consultations for the Third World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.\(^{30}\)

Hence, children’s participation is a fundamental aspect in terms of protecting them. All children and young people should play an important role in shaping the services that are designed to support them. This includes children and young people who have been sexually abused and who have experienced sexual violence.\(^{31}\) At its most fundamental it supports and amplifies young people’s voices and challenges the cultures of silence in which abuse flourishes. Evidence also suggests that where young people affected by CSE are informed about, and engaged in, decision-making processes about their care, then they are less likely to resist or disengage from professional support.\(^{32,33}\)

An essential goal of therapeutic work with victims of CSA/E is to support the child or young person to acknowledge that the abuse was not their fault. This can be a long and complex process supported by the active participation of children and young people through youth participation activities. Once the young person begins to understand that they are not at fault for the abuse they have suffered and place the responsibility at the hands of the perpetrator(s), they can be encouraged to take an active

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\(^{27}\) Schuurman (2010), p. 45

\(^{28}\) ECPAT International (2012), p. 27


\(^{32}\) Warrington, C. (2017), p. 3

role in explaining their own experience, on their terms, using their own language, and suggest resources that might help and playing an active role in raising public awareness of the issues concerned.\textsuperscript{34}

The process of children’s participation is as important as the outcomes: alongside other interventions, it gives children and young people and particularly disadvantaged children, self-esteem and confidence, which will empower them to challenge abuses of their rights, express their opinions using clear arguments and listen to each other.\textsuperscript{35}

Specific examples of participatory approaches in CSE are provided in Chapter III/B/2, followed by an analysis of the benefits and risks of such approaches.

\section*{2. Empowerment as an expansion of children’s agency}

‘Agency’ has been defined as the ability of an individual to set his own goals and act upon them. As such, Kabeer (1999) defines \textit{empowerment as the expansion of this ability}.\textsuperscript{36,37} The expansion of agency is the first component of empowerment, according to Alsop (2006), with the second focusing on the institutional environment, which offers people the opportunity to exert agency fruitfully.\textsuperscript{38}

Children’s agency could refer to their independent capability, or ability, to act according to their will. It is important to recognise that individual agency is always situated within (and hence constrained to some degree by) biography, circumstances and/or social structures.\textsuperscript{39}

Brown (2006) notes that sexually exploited young people’s experiences of mainstream safeguarding services have too often been characterised by a focus on victimhood.\textsuperscript{40} Brodie (2016) agrees that historically, young people who have experienced child sexual exploitation have been viewed as ‘challenging’, ‘difficult’ or ‘troublesome’ and as lacking the competence or value to contribute in positive ways. This has been reflected in their experience of approaching statutory agencies for help, with many reporting that they have been ignored or blamed for what has happened to them. This tendency means their agency may be recognised but framed as a problem rather than a resource, excluding them from decision-making processes.\textsuperscript{41} Alternatively, according to Warrington (2017), when young people are recognised as victims there may be an understandable focus on their lack of agency, overlooking their potential competencies or viewing them as too vulnerable to exercise autonomy.\textsuperscript{42}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{34} Pearce, J. (2010), p. 76
\textsuperscript{35} Schuurman (2010), p. 70
\textsuperscript{37} More definitions of agency:
\begin{itemize}
\item Pettit defines agency as “the ability of individuals and groups to think and act in their own interests”, in Pettit, J. (2012), \textit{Empowerment and Participation: bridging the gap between understanding and practice}, For the UNDESA Expert Group Meeting on Promoting people’s empowerment in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and productive and decent work for all, \url{http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/egms/docs/2012/JethroPettit.pdf}, p. 2
\item Sen defines agency as “what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important”, in Ibrahim, S. and Alkire, S. (2007), p. 384
\end{itemize}
\textsuperscript{39} Warrington, C. (2017), p. 9
\textsuperscript{40} Brown as cited in Warrington, C. (2017), p. 9
\textsuperscript{41} Brodie, I et al. (2016), p. 5; Brown as cited in Warrington, C. (2017), p. 9
\textsuperscript{42} Warrington, C. (2017), p. 9
\end{footnotesize}
However, as Pearce (2010) notes, many victims of child sexual abuse are motivated to use their experience to improve service delivery for themselves and others. They welcome the opportunity to participate in the development of services and indeed see this participation as part of the therapeutic process facilitating their recovery, or, as Brodie (2016) expresses it, participation can be a part of a process of recovering their sense of self, and sense of agency.

In fact, according to Cody (2017), promoting agency is one of the nine cross-cutting elements or principles of professional practice identified as particularly pertinent when supporting children affected by CSE in their recovery and reintegration. Cody explains that, after the abusive experience, family or service providers may often attempt to determine the course of action and make plans for the individual’s recovery. However, evidence suggests that disregarding the wishes of the survivor may further act to disempower them. Allowing children to ‘take back’ some of this control following their abuse, is an important step, and a means to start re-building self-esteem and confidence. This does not mean that children always know what is in their best interests — according to literature, it is challenging for service providers to find the balance of allowing children to assert their agency yet being mindful of their vulnerability and the need to ensure their protection — but it does mean that decisions need to be discussed and agreed upon in partnership.

The analysis above illustrates that empowerment, participation and agency are deeply complementary concepts and can be all considered means and ends, processes and outcomes.

3. Empowerment as an element of recovery and reintegration of children affected by CSE

Cody (2017) describes ‘recovery’ as a process whereby those who have exited the exploitative situation attempt to: (i) overcome difficulties associated with their exploitation; (ii) address physical, emotional and psychological health concerns; (iii) develop a sense of safety; (iv) develop protective attributes for resiliency; and (v) (re)build relationships and skills to enable them to ‘move on’ with their lives. Furthermore, ‘reintegration’ refers to the process of moving from an environment or situation of exploitation to one where the child has the same opportunities as other children in the community, such as attending school and socialising with friends. Cody suggests that recovery and reintegration are long-term processes that do not fit into an established timeframe. They begin once children leave, or begin to leave, a situation of exploitation and continue through the process of accessing support and services, addressing various concerns and rebuilding their lives.

The concept of empowerment is evident here. In fact, as Hargitt (2017) states, in addition to addressing survivors’ basic needs and health, recovery and reintegration programmes provide opportunities to strengthen protective factors through promoting children’s resiliency, increasing their

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43 Pearce, J. (2010), p. 79
44 Brodie, I et al. (2016), p. 5
46 See definition of ‘recovery and reintegration’ in Chapter I/B/3.
48 Ibid., p. 22
self-confidence and self-efficacy, broadening their range of interests and capabilities, and, thus, empowering them towards greater freedom and choice.\(^{49}\) This is achieved mainly through life skills and peer education, support and leadership programmes, as described in detail in Chapter III/B.

**C. Describing the empowerment of child victims and children at risk of CSE**

Since there is a dearth of literature specifically on the concept of the empowerment of child victims and children at risk of CSE, we will now attempt to outline this issue, using relevant evidence.\(^{50}\)

For the purposes of this paper, ‘empowerment in the context of CSE’ may be defined as the process or/and outcome by which child victims and children at risk of CSE have gained control over their lives and power to exit the situation of sexual exploitation, make strategic life choices, effect change and carry on with their lives. Empowerment may be achieved through:

- raising children’s awareness regarding CSE and related risks;
- establishing trust and a sense of safety;
- facilitating access to support services and offering children the choice to engage with them on their terms\(^{51}\) and thus developing a sense of control over their recovery and reintegration;
- enabling children to develop confidence, boost their self-esteem and enhance their skills to render them proactively assertive and participatory in matters affecting their lives, as well as support others;
- providing choices, opportunities and resources to children to develop their own agency and become active agents of change.

**D. Why empowerment matters to CSE**

Above all actors in society, children are the ones primarily subjected to CSE, and as such, children are among those most able to define their problems and contribute to the development of appropriate solutions.\(^{52}\) Therefore, children need to be actively involved in addressing the issues arising from CSE. Instead of seeing children as passive and weak or as victims that only receive care, children are and should be recognised as experts and active agents with many strengths. This may be achieved by

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\(^{49}\) Hargitt, K. (2017), p. 224

\(^{50}\) The Down to Zero Alliance defines children’s empowerment as the expansion of children’s current and future ability to make and act on strategic life choices. Children are on a ‘journey’ of empowerment, one that can start in childhood or adolescence, and continue throughout their lifetimes. During adolescence, as children are making transitions to adult roles, they are expanding their resources and agency which will be fully exercised later, as cited in the Inception Report (August 2016)


\(^{52}\) Pearce, J. (2010), p. 77
empowering them and encouraging them to raise their voices, and by making informed choices and decisions for themselves.

While it should be acknowledged that children may not have expertise about how CSE services should run, their voices offer critical insights, which should form the basis on which services are designed and delivered. Young people’s own voices suggest that participation and empowerment are necessary conditions of a protective service, especially one hoping to challenge the exclusion of those considered the most marginalised, and concern itself with a longer-term recovery.53

As a result, empowerment of children echoes a child-centred approach and a strengths-based approach in supporting them. A programme against CSE, or a child protection system in general, adopts a child-centred approach if services are based on a clear understanding of the needs and views of children and act upon that understanding. Children are viewed from a strength-based perspective if their capacity and agency to influence change is recognised, if children are provided with the space and opportunity to develop concrete skills and abilities and are empowered to engage in authentic leadership roles.54 CSE research increasingly suggests that strengths-based approaches are desired by young people and are necessary to counter an undue focus on risk, deficit and past experiences.55

Children’s reality and children’s empowerment are thus interdependent. Each child’s reality is unique, and therefore the process of empowerment will be adjusted to this reality and to individual potential.

E. No single ‘model’ of empowerment for addressing CSE

The OAK Foundation’s Bamboo Project Study on Child Resilience,56 an international learning initiative intended to explore resilience in children exposed to sexual abuse and sexual exploitation in Bulgaria, Ethiopia and Nepal, demonstrated that children and young people can be insightful observers of, and articulate informants about, their own lives. Listening to children and drawing on their expertise about their circumstances is essential to achieving more relevant responses. The study also concludes that sexual abuse and exploitation typically do not occur in isolation, or in a context devoid of other challenging issues, such as poverty, violence and stigma, as well as that certain minorities of children are more vulnerable (for example, children from ethnic minorities, and children with disabilities), because of their low status, discrimination and sometimes limited access to relevant support.

Indeed, research highlights that there is no single ‘model’ of CSE or ‘typical victim’: they may be girls, boys, LGBTQI children, children from ethnic and faith minority communities, and children with disabilities. Equally there are groups of young people for whom services remain particularly inaccessible and therefore may be under-represented among current service users.57 They are also children of different ages with varying experiences drawn from different environments. Hence, their

57 Warrington, C. (2017), p. 4
needs and the approach taken to address such needs may vary significantly with diverse perceptions of what constitutes a ‘success’ story for different individuals.58

As a result, there is no single model of recovery process, empowerment being an important element of it. Literature shows that the recovery process is different for each person, typically takes years and is related to both the context of CSE that a child faces, and the degree of ease in removing themselves from it.59 However, while the relationship between the context of CSE and the recovery process is acknowledged, it is not yet identified by the literature in terms of how different aspects of identity, such as gender, sexuality, disability, religion and ethnicity, influence the recovery and reintegration experiences of those affected by CSE.60

Finally, to develop empowerment strategies for child victims and children at risk of CSE, assumptions and generalisations should be avoided. Instead, we need to turn, in each instance, to a careful investigation of the specific circumstances of the case, and to carefully listen to the child’s experience with an open mind,61 in order to adapt individual empowerment strategies to the specific circumstances.

59 Hart, R. et. al. (2016), p. 20
61 Gilligan R. et al. (2014), p. 28
A. Diversity of child victims of CSE

1. Gender similarities and differences in experiencing CSE

Although often labelled as ‘child victims’, the children affected by sexual abuse and exploitation are not a homogenous group: they are boys and girls of different ages with varying experiences drawn from different environments.\(^{62}\)

a. Vulnerability factors

With regard to vulnerability factors, a literature review on the topic of the CSA and CSE of adolescent boys, conducted by Promundo in 2014,\(^{63}\) showed that vulnerability factors vary by context but pertain to both boys’ and girls’ in terms of risks of sexual abuse and exploitation.\(^{64}\) These vulnerability factors relate to poverty and social exclusion such as homelessness,\(^{65}\) absence of legal identity or documentation, a need to earn money to survive (or cultural expectation to support the family), and history of drug or alcohol abuse. Living in or near risk environments — slums, streets, areas of concentrations of night entertainment (bars, discos, brothels), near highways, ports, borders, military camps, large public works, mining camps, in settings of armed conflict, and in environments with a tolerance for child labour, prostitution or sex tourism— also pose risks. Family-related risk factors include weakened family or community networks, absence of parental figures, history of sexual abuse within families, witnessing or being victim to domestic violence, HIV/AIDS infection in the family, and practices of prostitution among family members.

In the US, statistics show that as many as 90% of girls who have been charged with prostitution have been sexually or physically abused. Many have run away from home to escape abuse, only to encounter far worse on the streets. Instead of being identified as a victim and connected to services, they are prosecuted as a criminal.\(^{66}\) Evidence also confirms that male victims of commercial sexual


\(^{64}\) See also, ECPAT USA (2013), And boys too, An ECPAT-USA discussion paper about the lack of recognition of the commercial sexual exploitation of boys in the United States, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/594970e91b631b3571be12e2/t/5977b2dacc0f688b2b89e6f0/1501016795183/ECPAT-USA_AndBoysToo.pdf, p. 6-7

\(^{65}\) In a study of 620 self-identified homeless youth, 153 were involved in prostitution, of which 68% were girls and 32% boys, as cited in Coalition to End Sexual Exploitation (2017), Out of the Shadows, Addressing the Sexual Exploitation of Boys & Men, Research summary, https://endsexualexploitation.org/wp-content/uploads/Out-of-the-Shadows_Male-Sexual-Exploitation-Research-Summary_09-07-17-1.pdf, p. 16

exploitation have very comparable risk factors to female victims including: a history of sexual abuse, violence in the home, substance abuse, running away, and homelessness.\textsuperscript{67}

Consumerism has also been identified as a risk factor of sexual exploitation, as evidence from Brazil\textsuperscript{68} and Thailand\textsuperscript{69} shows that teenagers, coming from poor, indebted or large families, or having no citizenship, are attracted by the city, consumerism and perceived opportunities, and they are involved in sexual activities at a young age in exchange for money. Finally, large-scale sports or cultural events, such as the World Cup or Carnival in Brazil,\textsuperscript{70} attract international child sex tourists that purposely travel to tourism destinations, to engage in sex with boys and girls.

\textbf{b. Relationship to the perpetrator}

As to the relationship between the perpetrator and the child in the context of CSA, evidence from the US has shown that in three out of ten cases of sexual abuse the perpetrator is a relative of the victim. In six out of ten cases of sexual abuse the victim knows their perpetrator, but the abuser is not a family member.\textsuperscript{71} A comparative analysis of the child sexual abuse of boys and girls conducted by Sydney Law School in 2014\textsuperscript{72} states that, while girls are more likely to experience abuse involving their biological fathers, step-fathers and other male relatives within the family home, boys are more likely to experience extrafamilial abuse in the offender’s home, institution\textsuperscript{73} or in a public place.\textsuperscript{74} In both intrafamilial and extrafamilial abuse cases where the perpetrators are trusted members of the family or trusted members of the church or other institutions, the likelihood of disclosure is lessened and the severity of the impact heightened.

\textbf{c. Contexts of CSE}

Hence, literature and practice agree that CSE is not a gender-based crime, even if it affects mostly girls.\textsuperscript{75} However, there are some forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation that affect mostly boys

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{70} Pawlak, P. and Barker, G. (2014), p. 2
\bibitem{72} In Spain, boys are mostly abused between the ages of 11 and 12, and their abuser is someone in authority known to them: sports trainer, teacher, free-time monitor, etc., as cited in Save the Children Spain (2017), \textit{Eyes that fail to see: The sexual abuse of children in Spain and failures in the system}, \url{https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/eyes-fail-see-sexual-abuse-children-spain-and-failures-system}, p. 9
\bibitem{73} The prevalence of extrafamilial sexual abuse has been found to be higher among boys than among girls. This means that boys are more at risk of being sexually abused by someone outside the family than by a family member. In the case of abuse perpetrated in institutions or community organisations, the proportion of male victims is higher than that of female victims, as cited in Parent, S. and Bannon, J. (2012), \textit{Sexual abuse in sport: What about boys?}, Children and Youth Services Review 34 (2012), pp. 354–359, \url{https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254408234_Sexual_abuse_in_sport_What_about_boys}, p. 355
\end{thebibliography}
or girls, or contexts where boys or girls are commonly sexually exploited, as illustrated by the following examples:

- Sexual abuse against boys in church-based institutions and sporting and other recreational settings has been revealed in many countries. In clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse, for example, the victims are much more likely to be boys than girls.

- Heavily male-dominated environments such as prisons and juvenile detention centers are contexts where men and boys are commonly sexually exploited.

- In addition, sexual violence can be used against boys and men as a tool to emasculate them; to threaten their heterosexual status and to make them feel stigmatised by same-sex relations. In conflict settings in particular, sexual violence is often used as a tool of war to demoralise or threaten individuals and weaken social and familial cohesion. Even if sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations disproportionately affects girls and women, boys and men are also recognised as victims by the UN Security Council in its resolution 2106 (2013). Dolan (2017) notes that 90% of unaccompanied minors coming to Europe in flight from conflict in the Middle East are male, and sexual exploitation is "undoubtedly a feature of their flight".

- With respect to street children, the literature review conducted by OAK Foundation found that cases of sexual exploitation involved mostly boys. Girls’ and boys’ exposure to risk could also be related to a socialised tendency of parents to keep girls in or close to the household as being weak and passive, while encouraging boys to venture out or be more adventurous. The ECPAT regional report for South Asia points out that this practice increases vulnerability for boys, whose greater freedom of movement makes them more likely to encounter a travelling offender. In a study conducted in Seattle in 2004 pertaining to 372 homeless adolescents (54.5% male; 45.4% female) aged 13-21, a total of 11% of males reported being sexually victimised on at least one occasion since being on the street. Whilst on the street, 9% of males reported trading sex at least once. Researchers hypothesised that being on the street and recruiting potential sex buyers makes homeless males highly visible and easily accessible.

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77 Cashmore, J. and Shackel, R. (2014), p. 75


79 Pawlak, P. and Barker, G. (2014), p. 3: The forms that sexual victimisation of men can take are extensive including, but are not limited to, forced nudity, various forms of rape, genital mutilations, forced masturbation, and blunt trauma to the genitalia. Within the multiple forms of sexual violence perpetrated against men, one of the most striking features of some men’s experiences is the manner in which they are forced to “perpetrate” sexualized violence against others, including family members, friends, and fellow detainees, as cited in Dolan, C. (2017), Victims Who are Men, The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Conflict, http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199300983.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199300983-e-8?rskey=jJ3UBC&result=1, p. 10


82 Pawlak, P. and Barker, G. (2014), p. 6

to potential offenders. Sexual victimisation included being forced to do something sexual (e.g., kissing, touching, exhibiting private parts, performing sexual acts, etc.).

- In **gang situations** especially, boys can be sexually exploited by their peers. Research from the Office of the Children’s Commissioner in England (2013) found that the most common form of sexual exploitation and violence was in the form of pressure applied to males to take part in group-based sexual activities. Whether they wanted to participate or not, they did so out of fear or because of expectations. This research found that while most incidents of sexual exploitation and violence were perpetrated by young men in gangs against gang-associated young women, males can also be subjected to sexual exploitation, including ‘incidents of rape, forced stripping and non-consensual recording of sexual activity, used both as a means of initiation into a gang and as a means of humiliating a rival gang member’. Moreover, UNICEF’s research in South East Asia illustrates how rape and other forms of sexual abuse are used by street children and gangs to establish dominance and protect territory such as sleeping places.

- In **countries where there are strong policies regarding the separation of sexes**, men may more frequently engage in the commercial sexual exploitation of boys and other men, as buying sex from another man may be a question of convenience and access. As demonstrated in research carried out in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, in settings with rigid gender-based segregation of social spaces, many heterosexual men may have sex with boys or men because they do not have access to female sex partners. When these men’s behaviours are further conceptualised in a passive (those who are penetrated) and active (those who penetrate) framework, it appears that the concept of men who have sex with men also reflects the same gendered framework that is similar to the heterosexual model, in which there is an uneven power relationship. This specific gender construction perhaps better explains the high desirability of boys in commercial sex exploitation, since boys may be considered more ‘feminine’ — i.e. less powerful and easier to put into sexually passive roles. In these ways, gender segregation can increase vulnerability for boys (and girls) as there is often little public scrutiny of these spaces and children can be easily accessed and targeted by exploiters.

- **Child marriage** disproportionately affects girls. Evidence clearly shows that child marriage is a form of gender-based discrimination that predominantly impacts girls and women. According to UNICEF, over 700 million women alive today were married before they turned 18. More specifically, more than one in three (about 250 million) girls entered into a union before age 18. Child marriage refers to a marriage or an informal union in which one or both parties are younger than 18 years. The terms child marriage and early marriage are often used interchangeably in the international literature on the subject. In addition, any child/early marriage can be potentially regarded as a form of forced marriage, considering that the young age of one or both parties tends to hamper the full and free expression of consent. South Asia has the highest prevalence of child marriage (42 percent), with India accounting for one third of the global total. The ten highest prevalence countries are concentrated in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Niger has the highest overall prevalence of child marriage globally, while Bangladesh displays the highest rate of girls married below age 15, as cited in Riggio Chaudhuri, E. (2015), p. 27.

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84 Coalition to End Sexual Exploitation (2017), p. 17
85 Fox, C. (2016), p. 17
86 Pawlak, P. and Barker, G. (2014), p. 3
87 Ibid
88 Ricardo, C. and Barker, G. (2008), p. 18
89 Child marriage refers to a marriage or an informal union in which one or both parties are younger than 18 years. The terms child marriage and early marriage are often used interchangeably in the international literature on the subject. In addition, any child/early marriage can be potentially regarded as a form of forced marriage, considering that the young age of one or both parties tends to hamper the full and free expression of consent. South Asia has the highest prevalence of child marriage (42 percent), with India accounting for one third of the global total. The ten highest prevalence countries are concentrated in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Niger has the highest overall prevalence of child marriage globally, while Bangladesh displays the highest rate of girls married below age 15, as cited in Riggio Chaudhuri, E. (2015), p. 9 and 27.
15. In United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)’s figures, one in three girls in the developing world (excluding China) will probably be married before they are 18. And while girls are overwhelmingly more affected, boys may also be the victims of early marriage. Existing estimates reveal that 33 million men today were married before the age of 15 and 156 million before the age of 18. Within the context of child marriage, sexual abuse and exploitation of children takes place in both non-commercial and commercial/economic ways, with a potential number of victims that far outnumbers those affected by crimes so far codified in the CSEC rubric, such as prostitution, child sexual abuse material, or predatory practices in travel and tourism. Cultural norms and traditions that support child marriage or female genital mutilation, and religious practices that involve handing over a girl child to a temple or priest also create vulnerability. In South Africa, for example, the cultural tradition of ‘ukuthwala’ involves selling, trading and giving children to (often older) men for sex, marriage and money. Girls who resist such practices by running away from home or a forced marriage may have nowhere safe to go and no means of support, thus becoming easy prey for tourists, travellers and their intermediaries.

- **Sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism** affects both boys and girls. For instance, recent studies in Southeast Asia suggest that foreign male offenders are more likely than Asian nationals to directly approach young boys for the purpose of sexually exploiting them. Foreign sex offenders gain access to boys and girls via establishment-based prostitution in bars, karaoke venues, beer gardens, massage parlours and brothels, or by direct or facilitated solicitation of children living and working in public places such as on the streets or at the beach. However, the vast majority of child sex offenders in the region are Asian men. They are more likely to sexually abuse young girls, and to seek out young virgin girls, even though available research and anecdotal evidence does suggest that also considerable numbers of boys are abused by nationals.

2. **A closer look on boy victims of CSE**

It is now clear that boys, like girls, experience child sexual abuse and exploitation at significant rates. These rates differ due to different dynamics and in different situations. Yet research and responses have focused heavily on girls and young women, leaving fundamental knowledge gaps around the characteristics, vulnerabilities and needs of boys and young men affected by CSE. Additionally, when literature and services include men in their samples the numbers are often so small that their experiences become either overlooked or lumped in with those of female survivors.

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93 Ibid.


frequently views sexual abuse and exploitation as phenomena exclusively affecting females, male victims of sexual trauma go unidentified, their pain and suffering unattended, and their victimisation unrecognised by the world around them.\textsuperscript{97}

Promundo (2014) states: (i) a lack of recognition of the scope and pervasiveness of male victimisation due to sexual violence and exploitation; (ii) a failure to appropriately recognise and address the causes; and (iii) limited attention to the barriers of reporting and seeking help on the part of boys and men surviving (or young and adult male survivors of) sexual violence.\textsuperscript{98}

Boys and young men affected by sexual exploitation are often a hidden group due to cultural and gender stereotypes that do not acknowledge the possibility of boys as victims. For instance, roundtable discussions organised by Barnardo’s in the UK in 2015, together with experts from the field of CSE found that those working with, or researching, boys and young men in relation to CSE have seen a perception that boys were either the perpetrators of abuse, or were ‘lucky’ to be having sex, regardless of the person they were having sex with. Societal attitudes linking ‘being a man’ and being masculine to having sex were thought to be widespread, meaning that boys and young men having sex with an unsuitable ‘partner’ might not be seen as potential victims.\textsuperscript{99}

More specifically, the hidden sexual abuse and exploitation of boys and young men can be explained in stereotypes, as follows:

- **Social expectations of boys and men – ‘male strength’**: Men are often viewed by society as dominant, powerful, unemotional and even aggressive. They are frequently socialised to believe that they need to be protectors and providers or in other words, ‘real men’. Gender norms dictate that ‘appropriately masculine’ men do not acknowledge and certainly do not express their own pain, vulnerability, or feelings of helplessness.\textsuperscript{100} The pressure to embody these qualities often leaves boys and young men feeling that reporting sexual exploitation or asking for help when they have experienced sexual violence makes them weak or ‘non-masculine’.\textsuperscript{101}

- **Fear of being labelled as homosexual/homophobia**: The fact that boys are more often abused by males frequently raises associated fears of being labelled homosexual.\textsuperscript{102} However, it is a misconception to equate sexual exploitation of boys only with same-sex relationships or to assume that boys who are involved in commercial sexual exploitation are homosexual. Boys who have been sexually exploited vary in their sexual orientations, socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnicities. Homophobia perpetuates an atmosphere of judgment, which

\textsuperscript{97} Coalition to End Sexual Exploitation (2017), p. 1
\textsuperscript{98} Pawlak, P. and Barker, G. (2014), p. 1
\textsuperscript{99} Fox, C. (2016), p. 17
\textsuperscript{100} Gagnier, C. and Collin-Vézina, D. (2016), p. 222-223
\textsuperscript{101} Pawlak, P. and Barker, G. (2014), p. 1; “A ‘manly’ man would not have ‘allowed’ himself to be victimized”, as cited in Ricardo, C. and Barker, G. (2008), p. 33
only contributes to the shame and invisibility of male victims\textsuperscript{103} and leads to the underreporting and limited attention and services for male victims of sexual exploitation.\textsuperscript{104}

- **Feelings of being a willing participant**: A boy’s physiological reaction during acts of abuse (i.e. an erection and possible ejaculation), may lead them to view their abuse as something they invited or desired. Feelings of being a willing participant may be exacerbated by ‘grooming’ processes preceding and occurring throughout the abuse. Grooming is used to cultivate an emotional relationship between the perpetrator and make the victim compliant. This may make it difficult for the victim to recognise and/or acknowledge the abusive nature of the relationship.\textsuperscript{105}

- **Sexual abuse of boys by female offenders perceived as less damaging or non-existent**: For boys, it is argued that sexual experiences with an adult may be culturally defined as an early introduction to sexual prowess and ‘manhood’. When the perpetrator is female, male socialisation tends to encourage males to define sexual experiences as ‘desirable’ or as a ‘rite of passage’. Male victims of child sexual abuse perpetrated by a female tend not to report such experience unless coercion was involved.\textsuperscript{106} Victims often felt that they had failed as men, as they were abused by the ‘weaker’ gender.\textsuperscript{107} There is evidence also that practitioners tend to consider sexual abuse by female perpetrators as serious, but less damaging, and less likely to be considered worthy of intervention, and judicial action than cases involving male offenders.\textsuperscript{108} Even worse, with the general belief that abusers are solely males, male victims subjected to abuse by female offenders do not disclose their abusive experience out of fear of not being believed or of being ridiculed.\textsuperscript{109}

- **CSE as ‘duty’**: With the social belief that boys and men are responsible for protecting and providing for their families, boys with little choice participate in certain sexual activities, regardless of injury or emotional harm that they may face.\textsuperscript{110}

- **Fear of being labelled as future child abusers**: The social myth that boys who suffer sexual abuse will grow up to be abusers\textsuperscript{111} also reflects the stigmatisation of male victims of sexual abuse, thus discouraging them to report it.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{103} Gagnier, C. and Collin-Vézina, D. (2016), p. 223
\textsuperscript{104} Pawlak, P. and Barker, G. (2014), p. 3
\textsuperscript{105} Cashmore, J. and Shackel, R. (2014), p. 79
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} Cashmore, J. and Shackel, R. (2014), p. 79; In the UK, practitioners reported that the relationship between a female offender and male victim was still generally not viewed as being as problematic as those scenarios involving female victims and male perpetrators, or male victims and male perpetrators. However, it was felt that if the relationship was exploitative, it was, by definition, potentially harmful and should be seen as such, regardless of the gender of the perpetrator and victim. They also noted that femaleperpetrated CSE may still be a particularly hidden and unacknowledged issue, as cited in McNaughton Nicholls, C., Cockbain, E. et al. (2014), *Research on the sexual exploitation of boys and young men, A UK scoping study, Summary of findings*, Barnardo’s, https://www.barnardos.org.uk/cse-young-boys-summary-report.pdf, p. 10
\textsuperscript{110} Pawlak, P. and Barker, G. (2014), p. 7
Male sex workers seen as having more agency and choice.\textsuperscript{113} For example, a study in Rio de Janeiro found that 14% of men said they had paid for sex with a girl they believed was under the age of 14, and less than 1% reported ever having paid for sex with a boy under age 18. These findings suggest that sexual exploitation of boys is less prevalent or that men are much less likely to report having paid for sex with boys, believing that boys had more agency or freedom of choice to become involved in sex work.\textsuperscript{114}

3. Layering of victims’ identities

Going further, child sexual exploitation can affect all children, regardless of gender identity, sexuality, ethnicity, faith or economic background, including those with disabilities.\textsuperscript{115}

There is a very strong risk attached to stereotyping people affected by CSE, in that it can prevent the identification of victims. Practitioners must remember that boys and young men who are gay may not be identified because of assumptions about what is appropriate in gay relationships; girls who are lesbian may not be identified because their abuser is seen as their ‘girlfriend’ or friend; and young people living at home may not be identified because they have a supportive family.

The layering of victims’ identities — and therefore multiple forms of discrimination — can be illustrated by the following example: one person can fit into multiple ‘categories’ — being male, gay, having a developmental disability and coming from the traveller community. Each layer of their identity creates additional complexities in understanding how they came to be exploited and practitioners must identify each layer and respond to it effectively by understanding how each layer of the child’s characteristics interact with one another and what type of support is required to enable recovery and meet particular needs.\textsuperscript{116}

a. LGBTQI children

Being LGBTQI does not make someone inherently vulnerable to CSE. However, research highlights numerous factors that may result in LGBTQI children and young people becoming victims of sexual exploitation. Some LGBTQI young people may become vulnerable to being exploited because they feel isolated and believe that others will not accept their identity. In addition, young men may feel pressurised into having sex to ‘prove’ that they are gay. They may also seek advice or support by either going online or attending adult gay clubs, particularly in more rural areas or in communities where being LGBTQI is considered unacceptable. In situations where support systems are lacking, and young people, including LGBTQI young people, seek support from strangers, they are open to being exploited, have less control over the relationship and the type of sex they have, and can be influenced into believing that their abusive relationship is normal. LGBTQI young people can be particularly vulnerable to being influenced as there is less information that shows what a healthy gay relationship is, with most materials depicting heterosexual relationships.\textsuperscript{117}

Experiences from the USA show that for many boys there is a strong link between meeting basic needs and their sexual orientation or gender identity. Many boys are thrown out of their homes for being

\textsuperscript{113} ECPAT USA (2013), p. 5
\textsuperscript{114} Pawlak, P. and Barker, G. (2014), p. 3
\textsuperscript{115} Fox, C. (2016), p. 5
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., p. 12
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., p. 19
gay, bisexual or transgender. Finding themselves on the street can have the effect of leaving them at a higher risk of sexual exploitation in attempting to meet their basic needs, including money, shelter, food, clothing and transportation.\(^{118}\)

ECPAT International (2016)\(^{119}\) also highlights the vulnerability of homosexual or transgender boys to sexual exploitation, since, unable to comply with social norms that demand heterosexuality, they may attempt to keep their preference hidden by engaging in sex with tourists, travellers or other strangers.

b. Children from ethnic and faith communities

Victims of sexual exploitation come from all ethnic and faith backgrounds, regardless of how conservative or ‘protected’ children may appear.\(^{120}\) Victims from all ethnic origins are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, as they are to sexual abuse in general. By not fully understanding and raising awareness of the fact that victims can be found anywhere, children and young people are not being identified and/or communities made aware of sexual exploitation.\(^{121}\)

Both boys and girls can be victims of sexual exploitation due to customs or as members of ethnic or faith communities. Female children and adults can be vulnerable to being groomed and sexually exploited, and are vulnerable to perpetrators from their own communities. Cultural and religious views and practices, particularly those that prize a female’s virginity or a male’s heterosexuality, may prevent victims from speaking out due to a fear of retribution or rejection from families.\(^{122}\) There are also traditional practices in some communities that can pressurise victims of sexual exploitation to not speak out. One example is ‘juju’ (black magic) — particularly in respect of those who have been trafficked.\(^{123}\) The fear of black magic tends to keep the victim with their perpetrator. Another example of silencing sexual abuse in religious institutions is the sexual abuse of boys in Cambodia’s Buddhist ‘pagodas’.\(^{124}\)

c. Children with disabilities

Children and young people with disabilities are at risk of sexual exploitation, as any child without a disability: they are children first and live in ordinary families, attend mainstream schools, attend local churches or faith groups and engage in leisure pursuits in mainstream settings. However, they are placed at additional risk because of the increased likelihood that they will be separated from their families, accommodated in congregate settings where they encounter multiple caregivers, and/or are targeted on account of their visible ‘difference’ or ‘vulnerability’.\(^{125}\)

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\(^{119}\) Hawke, A. and Raphael, A. (2016), p. 52

\(^{120}\) ‘Ethnicity’ refers to a group of people whose members identify with each other through a common heritage, such as a common language, culture and ideology that stresses common ancestry. ‘Religion’ refers to a belief system that forms attitudes and behaviours and may also impact on one’s identity over a period of time, as cited in Fox, C. (2016), p. 22

\(^{121}\) Fox, C. (2016), p. 24

\(^{122}\) Ibid., p. 22

\(^{123}\) Ibid., p. 25-26


A literature review conducted by the Global Partnership on Children with Disabilities (GPcwd) in 2015 confirms that children with disabilities are 3 to 4.6 times more likely to suffer violence, abuse and neglect than their non-disabled peers. The USA-based National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN) has suggested that children with disabilities are four to ten times more likely to experience sexual abuse compared to children without a disability.\textsuperscript{126} In addition, evidence from the UK suggests that children and young people with a disability are three times more likely to be abused (including sexual, physical and emotional abuse) than non-disabled children.\textsuperscript{127} With regard to gender, disability rates are significantly higher among male service users than females, and males identified by services as being at risk of CSE are slightly younger than females.\textsuperscript{128} Disabled children at greatest risk of abuse are those with behaviour or conduct disorders, but research indicates that the needs of disabled children are often invisible, particularly in relation to those with learning disabilities that go undiagnosed.\textsuperscript{129} Statistics presented by Brown (2010) indicate that deaf children experience a particularly high level of sexual abuse.\textsuperscript{130}

The additional vulnerability of disabled children may entail the following characteristics:

- There is often a ‘perception that young people with learning disabilities do not have a sexual identity, don’t have sexual urges, and are not like their non-disabled peers who are exploring sexuality, often in a safe way’. Moreover, young people with disabilities can often be viewed as ‘unattractive’, with no one wanting to have sex with them.

- Children and young people with disabilities are often over-protected and not informed about sex and relationships. Being over-protected due to a belief that the young person is incapable of understanding such a complex subject may result in a lack of provision for or information about sex and relationships. This lack of information may be particularly noticeable in communities where it is forbidden to talk about sex.

- A lack of diagnosis and assessment for learning disabilities can result in a child’s behaviour being misunderstood, and thus being excluded from school. This can lead to the child being vulnerable to CSE.\textsuperscript{131}

- The social isolation experienced by some young people with learning disabilities and a desire to cultivate friendships and to be seen as ‘normal’ make them potentially more vulnerable to grooming and sexual exploitation.\textsuperscript{132}

These risk and vulnerability factors pose challenges in identifying CSE of disabled children, as: (i) disabled children are often hidden from public view and encouraged by perpetrators to be secretive about their meetings and activities; (ii) disabled children may not identify themselves as sexually


\textsuperscript{127} Fox, C. (2016), p. 26

\textsuperscript{128} McNaughton Nicholls, C., Cockbain, E. et al. (2014), p. 6-7

\textsuperscript{129} Fox, C. (2016), p. 26

\textsuperscript{130} Brown, H. (2010), p. 108

\textsuperscript{131} Fox, C. (2016), p. 7

\textsuperscript{132} ‘Young people with learning disabilities are a perpetrator’s dream. If you were a perpetrator, why would you not target children and young people with learning disabilities? They’re often lonely and isolated. Many of them have not had a boyfriend or a girlfriend but would like one. Many spend a lot of time online. They are less likely to understand that sexual exploitation is wrong and are so easy to groom.’, as cited in Franklin, A., Raws, P. and Smeaton, E. (2015), Unprotected, overprotected: meeting the needs of young people with learning disabilities who experience, or are at risk of, sexual exploitation, Barnardo’s, \url{http://www.barnardos.org.uk/cse_learning_and_disability_report_2015.pdf}, p. 45-46
exploited and therefore they do not seek support; and (iii) practitioners often lack training and awareness of the indicators of CSE leading to lack of recognition and recording of sexual exploitation.133 Practice and research in the UK identified the need to empower young people with learning disabilities, so that they can recognise exploitation in general and disclose abuse, but also the need for more preventative work through education, raising awareness of CSE and safety skills development.134

B. Disclosure of CSA/E

From children’s perspectives, accepting help and identifying themselves as victims of child sexual exploitation, or children at risk, is neither comfortable nor straightforward. It may mean admitting the limitations of their own protective resources and requires trusting a new set of practitioners and services, often after multiple negative experiences of other services.135

In addition, a combination of social norms and labels associated with male and female CSE, as mentioned in Chapter II/A, the fear of perpetrator as well as personal and contextual factors, all may reduce the likelihood to disclose.

It is not rare that CSA/E remains hidden. According to UNICEF (2017), findings from 30 countries confirm that violence against children, including sexual violence,136 remains hidden due to the reluctance of many victims to disclose their abuse to authorities or other professionals, or to seek help to cope with the experience or to protect themselves from further victimisation. At this point it is worth noting that only 1% of girls who had experienced forced sex said that they had sought professional help. Sexual violence against boys remains under-researched.137

Understanding how girls and boys experience the disclosure of CSE will help practitioners to identify victims and provide support, facilitate victims through the process of disclosure, as well as through the process of empowerment. As we will see in Chapter III/A, creating an enabling and trustworthy environment is a key element to recovery and to empowerment.

This section briefly presents findings from the literature with regard to the diversity in the disclosure process of female and male survivors of CSA/E, the role of practitioners in the process of disclosure and the relation between disclosure and empowerment.

1. Understanding disclosure of CSA

In the context of CSA, disclosure is used to describe when a child is (i) telling someone about sexual abuse for the first time during an interview, (ii) describing an abuse experience to a family member,

133 Ibid., p. 30
134 Ibid., p. 39
135 Warrington, C. (2017), p. 6
136 Sexual violence against children encompasses both sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children and can be used as an umbrella term to refer jointly to these phenomena, both with regard to acts of commission and omission and associated to physical and psychological violence, as cited in Greijer, S. and Doek, J. (2016), p. 16
friend or peer; (iii) making a statement about the abuse to authorities; (iv) telling small pieces of an abuse story; or (v) a person recalling and recounting an experience of abuse from memory. Esposito (2014) defines disclosure of CSA as the way children, young people or adults let other people know they are being or have been sexually abused.  

The disclosure process is varied and unique to each child. Studies confirm that delays in disclosing child sexual abuse are common. Children may tell just once, making a full and detailed account of their abusive experience, or they may reveal their abuse to several people overtime. Some children disclose immediately, while many children wait until adulthood. Deciding whom to tell is an important part of the disclosure process and a child’s disclosure experience differs depending on the choice and reaction of the recipients.

Research suggests that disclosure can be conceived as an event or as a continuum or process. Various models of disclosure have been proposed by many authors, all agreeing that disclosure is an interactive and dynamic process that is influenced by the way children conceptualise and make decisions about whom to tell and the reactions they might receive. For instance, Summit proposed in 1983 the existence of an accommodation syndrome on the part of the victim, which could explain why they would keep the abuse a secret. When the victim’s disclosure is met with disbelief, they feel helpless, and with no alternative but to accommodate to the situation of sexual violence. Summit’s model included five components: (i) secrecy (keeping the abuse secret); (ii) helplessness (feeling like they have no power to stop or communicate the abuse); (iii) entrapment or accommodation (learning to accept and accommodate the sexual abuse into their reality); (iv) delayed, conflicted and unconvincing disclosure; and (v) retraction (disclosing abuse and subsequent retracting). Summit emphasised the fact that his theory was based on female victims of sexual violence, since they comprise the majority of victims available for study. Although the author did not restrict the syndrome to females, he did highlight the need to investigate the clinical applicability of the syndrome to male victims of sexual violence.

Children’s characteristics, such as age and gender, relationship to the perpetrator, family dynamics, severity of abuse, availability of support, community as well as cultural considerations are among factors that can influence victims’ disclosure decisions and experiences. For example, younger children are less likely to disclose than older children. In addition, younger children tend to disclose to parents, while adolescents usually turn to their peers. If the perpetrator is a family member of a known to the victim person, victims find it very hard to disclose because they worry about the consequence to themselves and family, or they feel a loyalty to the perpetrator. Cultural norms about

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139 See more on typologies of disclosure, e.g. purposeful, accidental, partial, prompted, assisted disclosure and signs of CSA (physical or bodily signs, emotional signs, behavioural signs), in Esposito, C. (2014), p. 9-10


141 Ibid., p. 12

142 Summit’s model has been endorsed by many clinicians, research suggests that there is little empirical evidence to support the tenets of the model beyond the silence/secrecy stage, as cited in Esposito, C. (2014), p. 11; See also, Von Hohendorff, J. et. al. (2017), *A boy, being a victim, nobody really buys that, you know?: Dynamics of sexual violence against boys*, Child Abuse & Neglect 70, pp. 53–64, [https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0145213417302041](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0145213417302041)


virginity, sexual taboos or a desire not to bring shame on the family can also deter a child from disclosing.145

2. Gender similarities and differences in disclosing CSA

Some similarities in the patterns of disclosure for male and female victims of CSA found in the literature include a tendency towards non-disclosure and delayed and indirect disclosure.146 As mentioned above, some children disclose immediately, while many children wait until adulthood. A main difference between genders is that males are less likely than females to disclose child sexual abuse at the time of abuse, and that when they do disclose, they take longer to do so, and make fewer and more selective disclosures. It can take more than 20 years for males to disclose their abuse or talk to anyone about it.147 In addition, literature confirms that girls disclose more often and sooner than boys, however boys can talk in depth if prompted.148

While non-disclosure or delayed disclosure are common features to both boys and girls, their motives may be different. According to Alaggia (2005),149 reasons for boys to delay, or not to disclose, are (i) the fear of being seen as a homosexual; (ii) feelings of stigmatisation or isolation because of the belief that boys are rarely victimised; and (iii) the fear of becoming an abuser. This last reason was also seen as a precipitant for disclosure. Literature also suggests that men may be further inhibited from disclosing due to concerns that they will not be able to access male-centered support services, in contrast to girls and women that generally receive more positive social support.150

Girls are more likely to be inhibited in disclosing due to their feelings of responsibility for possible family breakdown and the repercussions for others. As girls more often than boys fall victims to intrafamilial child sexual abuse,151 girls do not disclose their abuse due to fear of being blamed or disbelieved for being responsible of the abuse or for not stopping it.152 They also fear family disruption or negative consequences for others when they disclose.153 However, it should be noted that all these fears are commonly source of manipulation by the abuser to silence both male and female child victims.154 In addition, losing virginity as a result of sexual abuse and disgracing their own ‘honour’ and reputation, as well as that of the family, are cultural norms that make it hard for girls to disclose their victimisation.155

Consequently, a culture of sexism and patriarchal attitudes affect the disclosure experience of both male and female victims of CSA. Men are strongly affected by prevailing attitudes about masculinity

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149 Alaggia, R. (2005), p. 457 and 461
150 Cashmore, J. and Shackel, R. (2014), p. 81
151 de Jonge, R.L.J. (2013), Gender Differences in Disclosing Child Sexual Abuse, Tilburg University, http://arno.uvt.nl/show.cgi?fid=131792, p. 4
153 de Jonge, R.L.J. (2013), p. 4
and what it means to be a man in a patriarchal, heterosexist society, in which boys sexually abused by men are seen as homosexual, or, boys who are victims are seen to be weak or somehow lacking, since victimisation is associated with being feminine. Equally, affected by a culture of sexism and patriarchy, girls are considered as responsible for their abuse, as well as for the consequences of disclosing it.\textsuperscript{156}

3. Disclosure and empowerment

Children may not recognise or understand that they are sexually abused and/or exploited. Even when they do realise their victimisation, cultural biases cause difficulties in speaking about CSA/E. In addition, they may not be aware of available support services.

Empowerment of child victims of CSE is about raising children’s awareness on CSE and on available support services. Furthermore, empowerment may be achieved by making these services accessible to children. Empowerment also means challenging biases that inhibit child victims from disclosing abuse.

Practitioners play a key role in enabling disclosures. When developing interventions, it is important for practitioners to conduct a holistic assessment of the dynamics that put barriers to each child’s disclosure and eliminate them.\textsuperscript{157} Practitioners should pay attention to behavioural, non-verbal, and indirect ways of disclosure, usually common among younger children.\textsuperscript{158} In addition, literature suggests that a significant proportion of disclosures are prompted by direct inquiry by friends, family and caregivers. Being asked directly or indirectly about sexual abuse can provide children with the opportunity and purpose for disclosing their abuse. As abovementioned, research suggests that boys especially can talk in depth if prompted. Moreover, since disclosure is rarely a spontaneous event but is more likely to occur slowly over time, practitioners should remain open to a future disclosure.

Practitioners need to confront their own biases and avoid incorporating personal views about gender, sexuality and religion. Instead, cultural competency training and normalising the fear of judgment associated with disclosure should be incorporated into practice.\textsuperscript{159}

With regard to male disclosure in particular, Spiegel (2003)\textsuperscript{160} suggested using a thorough multistep treatment model — the Sexual Abuse of Males (SAM) model — that guides practitioners in their work with survivors by addressing elements such as the acknowledgement of their CSA, exploring the contextual meaning of the abuse, and formulating a goal-based plan. Practitioners may also invite clients to join support groups for male survivors of CSA as a tool to break the isolation they often feel.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that there is a tension in the literature on whether speaking about the experience of CSE is necessary for an individual’s process of recovery\textsuperscript{161} or part of effective therapeutic interventions.\textsuperscript{162} Indeed, disclosing may help children access safety interventions and provide them with emotional support to assist with their recovery, however for others disclosure may be a traumatic or humiliating experience that has a deleterious effect on their psychological and physical health.

\textsuperscript{156} Allagia, R. (2005), p. 465
\textsuperscript{157} Esposito, C. (2014), p. 3
\textsuperscript{158} Non-verbal signs and behavioural signs could include letter writing, role playing, sexualised playing with dolls, sexual experimentation, excessive masturbation, or drawing sexual acts, as cited in Esposito, C. (2014), p. 12
\textsuperscript{161} Hart, R. et. al. (2016), p. 20
\textsuperscript{162} Esposito, C. (2014), p. 2
functioning. Therefore, since the experience of disclosure of CSA is unique to each child, as the experience of CSA, practitioners should evaluate each case and prioritise treatment based on the presenting symptoms and weighing up the risks and benefits for each child.\textsuperscript{163}

Even if child victims are encouraged to voice what is happening to them, disclosure is not a necessary condition for recovery or a necessary condition for empowerment. Practitioners should not force children to disclose. Instead, as we will see in the following chapter in detail, acknowledging each child’s experience of CSA/E and letting them having control over the disclosure process is empowering.

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid.
Chapter III Empowerment strategies

A. Engagement with service providers as first step to empowerment

1. The role of service providers in supporting the empowerment of children

The role of practitioners is crucial throughout the process of empowerment of child victims and at-risk children of CSE, as in many instances it is the practitioners that will identify them and/or respond to their call for help. Children’s empowerment can be achieved through practitioners’ support and contributions, from being present and listening carefully to children, as well as through informing them about CSE, encouraging them to learn life skills, promoting their meaningful participation in matters affecting their lives and through developing their own agency.

As a result, children’s engagement with practitioners plays a key role in their empowerment. The effectiveness of services also depends on children and young people’s own decisions about if and how to engage with service providers.\(^\text{164}\)

Service providers working directly with children affected by CSE should create appropriate foundations for children’s empowerment by: (i) establishing trust;\(^\text{165}\) (ii) committing to the child and building a solid relationship;\(^\text{166}\) (iii) prioritising safety;\(^\text{167}\) (iv) promoting agency; (v) taking a non-judgemental approach;\(^\text{168}\) (vi) promoting acceptance and belonging; (vii) encouraging hope; (viii) providing access to information; and (ix) ensuring and maintaining confidentiality and privacy. These nine elements have been identified as pertinent when supporting children affected by broader forms of adversity, CSE included. These elements are strategies for maximising the empowerment of child victims.\(^\text{169}\)

Service providers should take all necessary steps to avoid replicating the disempowerment that characterises exploitative relationships.\(^\text{170}\) Instead, being friendly, warm and welcoming, devoting time,\(^\text{171}\) facilitating communication and avoiding stigma and discrimination are qualities that show children that practitioners genuinely care about them,\(^\text{172}\) and therefore create the conditions and environment to enable empowerment to take place. These qualities should be allied with a strong

\(^{\text{164}}\) Warrington, C. (2017), p. 6

\(^{\text{165}}\) Children affected by CSE, probably already betrayed or tricked by people they once trusted or feeling abandoned by their family or the society, may have difficulties in trusting again. Therefore it may be challenging for service providers to engage with child victims and win their trust. Literature shows that denying help may be viewed by some practitioners as a symptom of a psychiatric disorder, when instead, such behaviour may be a coping strategy developed by the child for self-protection, as cited in Cody, C. (2017), p. 43

\(^{\text{166}}\) When children feel that caregivers or other professionals genuinely care for them, they are more likely to listen to them and confide in them, as cited in Cody, C. (2017), p. 44

\(^{\text{167}}\) Physical safety (making it as difficult as possible for perpetrators to access children), relational safety (making it easier for children to develop positive, stable relationships to ‘counteract’ the abuse) and psychological safety (helping children to develop self-esteem and an identity outside of the exploitative relationship or situation), as cited in Cody, C. (2017), p. 45

\(^{\text{168}}\) As stated in the literature, service providers often do not recognise that children may have faced traumatic experiences. Instead they blame them for any harm or abuse suffered, believing that these children were ‘choosing’ to be involved in exploitative situations, as cites in Cody, C. (2017), p. 47 and Pawlak, P. and Barker, G. (2014), p. 5

\(^{\text{169}}\) Strategic Empowerment in Social Work Practice: An Analysis of., p. 6-7

\(^{\text{170}}\) Warrington, C. (2017), p. 3

\(^{\text{171}}\) Brodie, I. with D’Arcy, K., Harris, J. et al. (2016), p. 7

knowledge base relating to CSE and the needs of vulnerable children, but training should also go beyond CSE specific topics and include counselling and communication skills, legal matters, cooperation with other relevant support services or training on care of the caregiver. These are only some of the training needs identified by a child-centred study carried out by ECPAT International between 2014 and 2016 in Nepal, Thailand and the Philippines, which gathered insights and recommendations from service providers working in the field of CSE.

As a result, practitioners’ empowerment is a precondition for children’s empowerment. A strong child-practitioner relationship, based on mutual trust, respect, non-judgementalism, self-determination and confidentiality is an efficient, effective and appropriate strategy for child empowerment.

2. Formal and informal assistance

Although states are primarily responsible for children’s recovery and reintegration, in reality, in many countries NGOs provide the majority of specialised support for those affected by CSE. Field research in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region identified that there was no statutory service in place to offer comprehensive support to trafficked children, while at the same time voluntary services provided by NGOs and international organisations had more plentiful resources. Furthermore, while exploring whether children and young people affected by CSE can successfully be engaged in support services in England, the Alexi Project made the implicit assumption that there is a distinct quality in the way in which the voluntary sector engages children and young people that sets it apart from the statutory sector and which confers a ‘specialist’ status upon it.

In the framework of the Alexi Project, empowering methods applied by the voluntary services, in accordance with the principle of children and young people’s right to self-determination, included providing the opportunity to determine locations of meeting where they felt most comfortable, with the aim of creating soft access points to the service (for example, schools and fast food outlets instead of a police building or children’s social services bureau), and the best method of day to day communication (for example through text message).

However, formal assistance, whether statutory or voluntary, is not always available or not available for all ‘types’ of victims. Formal assistance is often declined by victims due to lack of trust and shame. These are some instances where children affected by CSE, according to the abovementioned study in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region, turned to informal assistance from family and friends. Finally, the significance of informal connections and supports is highlighted by the Bamboo Project where children in Bulgaria, Ethiopia and Nepal, due to limited availability of formal assistance but also closer proximity

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174 See tables of training topics for service providers in Hargitt, K. (2017), p. 103-105
175 Strategic Empowerment in Social Work Practice: An Analysis of., p. 6
177 The Alexi Project was a 3-year evaluation to test the effectiveness of the ‘Hub and Spoke’ model, a programme of service development through 16 services, which were established by voluntary sector organisations and designed to extend the coverage and reach of child sexual exploitation (CSE) services in England. The Alexi Project was undertaken by The International Centre: Researching child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking’ at the University of Bedfordshire between September 2013 and January 2017. For more information, https://www.alexiproject.org.uk/
178 Knowing that children and young people would avoid engaging with support services if contact was awkward or uncomfortable, by speaking directly on the phone for example, texting enabled children to manage their own communications and gave them the choice over whether and when to make contact. It also provided a vehicle for more spontaneous communication when young people felt the need to talk or ask for help, as cited in Harris J. and Roker D. with Shuker, L. et al. (2017), p. 36
and familiarity of informal helpers, placed great value on any help they received from family members, friends, employers and others in their social networks. Children also drew on support from less conventional (to some adult eyes) sources such as gang leaders or other young people experiencing exploitation in the sex trade, the latter confirming the value of peer support, which will further be explained in the next section.

B. Life skills and youth participation

Many kinds of activities have a positive role in children’s recovery from CSE. Recreational and spiritual activities may provide children with the opportunity to experience fun and gain a sense of hope for the future, or a sense of ‘normality’ and belonging. Indeed, having opportunities to play, ‘hang out’ with friends and take part in other age appropriate activities are an important part of the overall recovery and reintegration process. Furthermore, being in school or learning new vocational skills can also establish a sense of ‘normality’ for children and help them to connect and establish a sense of belonging in the community. Income-generation activities may help children exit or avoid a return to commercial sexual activities. For some, avoiding engaging with support services and trying to forget what they have experienced may be another coping strategy for child victims of CSE.

However, while a variety of activities or coping strategies may be empowering in general and contribute to children’s recovery and reintegration, literature connects the empowerment of child victims and children at risk of CSE with strategies that allow discussions and actions specifically against CSE and which help children to develop agency and a sense of control over their lives, namely life skills and youth participation.

1. Life skills training

Literature defines ‘life skills’ as empowering skills that enable individuals to cope with life and its challenges and changes. Life skills support psychosocial well-being, by promoting good communication, positive thinking, analytical skills, problem solving and goal setting, cooperation and coping. Strengthening life skills helps individuals and communities to manage challenges and risks, maximize opportunities and solve problems in positive, co-operative and constructive ways.

Life skills are grouped into three categories of empowering skills: (i) cognitive skills, for analysing and using information; (ii) personal skills, for developing personal agency and managing oneself; and (iii) inter-personal skills, for communicating and interacting effectively with others.

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180 Field research in Nepal, Thailand and the Philippines showed that survivors enjoyed doing a variety of activities, such as dancing, playing sports, engaging in the arts, celebrating birthdays and festivals, listening to music, watching movies, baking, visiting places of worship, museums, hiking, swimming and picnicking, as cited in Cody, C. (2017), p. 97
182 Ibid, p. 79
All children need to develop life skills. However, children affected by CSE may encounter particular difficulties in developing, or re-building such skills. A lack of life skills may be a risk factor in being exposed to CSE, as well as a consequence of CSE itself.

**Life skills training topics for CSE survivors** may include emotional management, financial management, information technology skills, personal safety, health, reproductive health, STIs/HIV, hygiene, nutrition, traffic awareness and street safety, community (re)integration, relationships skills, communication, problem-solving, decision-making, teamwork, advocacy, life planning, children’s rights, specific forms of CSE and how and where to seek help and report abuse.

**Life skills training methods** may vary in order to be tailored to children’s real life situations, taking into account factors such as age, gender, health, ethnic profile, and in relation to needs and capabilities.

In Nepal and Thailand, animation tool kits (videos) and creative arts, like drama, were methods used in shelters and drop-in centres to teach children about CSE, while deep breathing, muscle relaxation and meditation were some of the ways to manage negative emotions and tension. Finally, outdoor therapy camps combine therapeutic activities, such as group counselling sessions, and recreational activities with life skills training. Experiencing nature and engaging in camping activities give survivors the opportunity to be in a different environment where they “spend time together informally” and share stories about their lives, “the good part and not so good part.” Outdoor activities, like ropes courses and zip lines increase self-esteem, hopefulness, trust and a sense of one’s competence, and river rafting increases positive feelings and decreases symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These activities contribute to team-building and leadership skills. Life skill themes developed in outdoor therapy camps in Thailand included: ‘Self-Awareness, Self-Worth and Relationship with Oneself’, ‘The Teen World’ (e.g., Puberty; Emotion Management; Empathy)’, ‘Sexual and Reproductive Health’ (e.g., High-Risk Behaviour Reduction through Analysis and Choice)’ and ‘Life and Variety’ (e.g., Gender Identity; Sexual Orientation; and Tolerance and Acceptance through Understanding), through which survivors learned how to act as peer supporters and challenge biases.

Budget limitations, as well as limited access for survivors could be some barriers in the delivery of life skills training programmes. In addition, in order to be effective, life skills training should be provided on a regular and consistent basis, by an adequate number of trained trainers.

Adapted to children’s identities and needs, life skills may overlap with topics and strategies of other domains in the recovery and reintegration process, such as counselling and therapeutic work, vocational training, recreational activities and academic education, making the separation between those categories unclear. With the specific focus on empowerment, life skills equip children with the

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187 Hargitt, K. (2017), p. 29
188 Ibid., p. 226
189 Red Cross (2013), p. 32; ‘A girl in Nepal highlighted the need for life skills trainers to be sensitive to children’s learning needs. She explained that, children, who find it difficult to learn during training, should be given space afterwards to express themselves and ask questions about topics they do not understand. The trainers “have to be willing to talk to them privately because not everyone is courageous enough to ask questions during the training. Although they have questions and they are curious to know more, they do not express it during the training so if they have questions, we have to give them enough space so that they can explore, even later”; as cited in Hargitt, K. (2017), p. 227
190 Hargitt, K. (2017), p. 227
191 Disclosure of a boy survivor, participant in outdoor therapy camp in Thailand, as cited in Hargitt, K. (2017), p. 188
192 Ibid., p. 228-229
193 Ibid., p. 278
knowledge and confidence to protect themselves, as well as to help their peers and teach them the various skills they learned,\textsuperscript{194} through youth participation programmes.

2. Youth participation programmes

As mentioned in Chapter I/B/1, sexually exploited children and young people can play an important role in shaping the services that are designed to support them, by being involved in their care and supporting their peers. Child victims could be instrumental in developing effective empowerment strategies. Participation programmes documented in the literature involve peer support as well as influencing policy and service development with leadership development and peer research.

a. Peer education and support: Survivors as role models

Literature describes ‘peer support’ as the process by which a young person trained in listening, communication and support skills helps another child or youth of similar age, background and experiences to feel safe and supported. Young people’s attitudes are highly influenced by their perception of what their peers do and think. Peer support makes use of peer influence in a positive way. Peer supporters are less likely to be seen as authority figures ‘preaching’ about how others should behave from a judgmental position. Rather, the process of peer support is perceived more like receiving advice from a friend ‘in the know’, who has similar concerns and an understanding of what it is like to be a young person,\textsuperscript{195} and thus, peer support helps children and young people to normalise their lives, and realise they are not alone.\textsuperscript{196} Survivors who make positive changes in their lives can become important role models to their peers.\textsuperscript{197}

Peer educators and supporters may be the people presenting certain life skills topics or more effectively reaching children still involved in CSEC, as well as facilitating disclosures and informing child victims and children at risk about services and programmes.\textsuperscript{198} For example, in Fortaleza (Brazil), and in the framework of a project to enable transexual victims of CSEC to transform their lives, that begun in September 2009 by ECPAT Brazil, young people called ‘social educators’ led a methodological approach which included four steps: (i) the identification process (identification of the vulnerable youth, study of the context and identification of strategies to approach the adolescent transsexual); (ii) contact (offering health aids, creating links with the young person to facilitate a trusting respectful and non-judgmental relationship), (iii) referring youth to support services, trying to re-establish the violated rights of the young transsexuals in their families and communities, and providing ‘peer counselling’, life skills training and opportunities for recreational activities; and (iv) strengthening the youth’s autonomy (encouraging them to build a life project, as well as helping them regain financial independence by providing scholarships for educational, vocational and professional courses). In 2010, almost 40% of those involved in the project ended up leaving sexual exploitation within the year.\textsuperscript{199}

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., p. 225
\textsuperscript{196} Hart, R. et. al. (2016), p. 21
\textsuperscript{198} Hargitt, K. (2017), p. 233
\textsuperscript{199} ECPAT International (2012), p. 2-5
Peer educators and supporters may also be involved in prevention activities such as campaigning and developing materials for other children.\(^{200}\) Out of the box is a booklet with child friendly descriptions of what sexual exploitation and sexual abuse is, the harm that sexual violence can cause and the positive ways that young people can remove themselves from danger, written by young people for young people.\(^{201}\) The Youth Partnership Programme (YPP) and the young Peer Educators at the Educational Programme for Working Children (PENNAT) in Guatemala implemented a micro-project which seeks to prevent sexual exploitation and child trafficking through information sharing and awareness-raising among young people, teachers and the community. Peer supporters created murals using newspaper articles, drawings and articles to creatively convey their key messages around CSEC, trafficking of children and HIV/AIDS, based on their own personal experiences and those of their peers. This helped the young people to internalise the gravity of the problem and strengthen their sense of responsibility towards protecting children from CSEC and other harmful cultural practices.\(^{202}\)

Peer support does not only benefit and empower those receiving help but also those peers providing it, who have an opportunity to further develop their understanding of these issues, receive training to lead activities, learn new skills and gain experience. Therefore, peer support activities give survivors a purpose, as through helping others their negative experiences can be turned into something positive,\(^{203}\) survivors build self-confidence and such activities also aid them in their own longer-term recovery.\(^{204}\)

b. \textbf{Leadership development}

While contributing to the elimination of CSE, young people can be empowered and also empower others, not only by becoming peer supporters and educators, but also by being active advocates for change.\(^{205}\)

\textbf{Peer advocacy} is one method of achieving goals to make change in a way that helps peers. It involves influencing, persuading, or arguing for a young person to use his or her power to change society over the long-term.\(^{206}\) Young people can bring fresh and innovative ideas to legislation analyses, research, drafting laws, programmes and petitions. Children and young people can also actively campaign against CSE, as they are the ones who are most affected. With peer advocacy activities, especially when combined with youth-led awareness raising activities and lobbying, young people have a meaningful role in and a real influence on matters and decisions that concern them.

In 2010, gaps in Ukrainian legislation in the field of protecting children from trafficking, prostitution, sexual abuse and child sexual abuse material encouraged advocacy activities of the YPP towards legislative change. Those activities included the participation of a youth panel in a group of experts, with responsibilities such as research, drafting amendments and participation in expert meetings. Additionally, children and young people from 14 regions of Ukraine collected more than 55,736 petition signatures — half of those coming directly from children — in order to push the Ukrainian government to improve legislation. Young activists conducted a flash mob to mobilise public support

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\textsuperscript{200} Cody, C. (2017), p. 93
\textsuperscript{201} Pearce, J. (2010), p. 79-81
\textsuperscript{202} ECPAT International (2012), p. 9-11
\textsuperscript{203} Cody, C. (2017), p. 94
\textsuperscript{204} Hart, R. et. al. (2016), p. 21
\textsuperscript{205} ECPAT International (2012), p. 19
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for their advocacy agenda. The advocacy efforts of the YPP, culminating in the flash mob, received wide media coverage. One year later, the petition had been accepted and resulted in legislative change. The AYPH Be Healthy project in the UK trained young people with experience of CSE services as ‘health advocates’ and developed a range of resources (films, booklets and leaflets) to support young people and professionals to work together more effectively. In the Philippines, a mobile community theatre advocacy group raised awareness on CSEC related issues in various communities. The CSEC Labyrinth in Mexico, the Avispate Por Tus Derechos [Wake Up To Your Rights] Facebook page for communication of peer support activities, awareness-raising and advocacy activities in Chile, and the youth participation in the petition campaign against CSEC in Kyrgyzstan are only a few examples of youth leadership development cited in the literature that strengthen confidence and interpersonal skills and empower children to influence the process of protecting their rights.

Children also take part in decision-making processes by their participation in governance. Child and youth governance may be developed on two levels. At a community level, children and young people participate in the design, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes against CSE. Children are represented in forums (e.g. schools councils, child/youth councils, children/youth parliaments or children/youth forums), where they can identify issues of concern to them and bring these issues to relevant authorities, including government, at school, local, regional and national levels. Most importantly, children should be integrated into the everyday decision-making processes of the organisations that serve them. Thus, at an organisational level, young people’s participation in governance occurs when children and youth provide their input regarding an organisation’s direction, policies, hiring and other major functions. For instance, the regulations at a shelter in Thailand come from the children who initiate and agree on them together. When a child breaks a rule, they discuss among themselves how to best address the situation and find a joint solution. They then consult with the staff and seek their advice.

c. Participatory research

If one truly wishes to involve children in decision making, rather than simply having them carry out the manual phase of projects, they must be involved in their design, which requires research, conducted by or with the people concerned. Participatory research or youth-led research strengthens children and young people’s capacity to identify, explore and find solutions to key issues affecting their lives. In addition, young researchers can be better equipped to gain access to those young people who are most-at-risk of CSEC, conduct youth-appropriate training and build a rapport with those who are at risk to engage them in a sensitive and non-judgmental way. They are also in a position to make

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207 ECPAT International (2012), p. 17-19
208 The AYPH Be Healthy project, www.ayph-behealthy.org.uk, as cited in Warrington, C. (2017), p. 12; See also The young people’s advisory group for the National Child Trafficking Advice and Information Line (CTAIL) project run by the National Association for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Project (NSPCC) in the UK, as cited in Pearce, J. (2010), p. 81-82
210 ECPAT International (2012), p. 12-16
211 Ibid., p. 23-26;
212 See also leadership development programme for girls in Lloyd, R. (2010)
213 For more on Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation, see Chapter IV/B/3/d.
appropriate referrals to help their peers. Youth-led research not only benefits those who are conducting the research, but also the young respondents.218

Youth-led research had been used by the ECPAT’s YPP in Nepal as a mechanism to strengthen children and young people’s participation in the fight against CSEC. One of the outcomes of this programme was that the wider NGO community became aware of situations that required urgent attention, such as limited access to school for at-risk children. For example, youth researchers tried to identify the reasons why children did not go to school, such reasons including poverty, discrimination against girls and having to work to support the family. However, the main reason that was cited by the girls that were not attending school was that there was no separate toilet for use by the girls — an issue that was easy to resolve, but which had not been addressed by the school administration. This illustrates clearly the importance of youth-led initiatives. Not only does this kind of research prompt targeted and specific actions required, it broadens the knowledge and understanding of CSEC and child-centered research and helps raise awareness.219 In the UK, in the framework of the participatory research project Making Justice Work, focused on improving responses to young people involved in CSE investigations and prosecutions, nine young ‘experts by experience’ worked with researchers to collect and analyse data, disseminate findings and identify opportunities for change in the system.220 The research was based on recognition that young service users hold unique expertise relating to experiential aspects of utilising services, involving young people as ‘experts’ rather than ‘victims’. It aimed to facilitate learning from these perspectives while attending to the ethical issues involved in discussing traumatic investigative and prosecution processes directly with young people.221

d. Considerations for participatory approaches

Literature raises the question of meaningful participation.222 Pearce (2010) asks whether participation is an exclusive and tokenistic gesture or a genuine attempt to give real control to all young people, including those who may be vulnerable and abused.223 Hart’s (1992) ‘ladder of participation’ identifies different levels of young people’s involvement: from manipulation and tokenism (levels 1 to 3) to genuine children participation (levels 4 to 8).224 Hart acknowledged that generalised recommendations of the ladder do not reflect situational diversity, cultural differences and other complexities such as gender, sexual orientation, age and disability. He also acknowledged that everyday informal participatory activity is not captured in the ladder model. However, despite Hart’s own criticism, as well as critiques in terms of the hierarchical nature of the model, the ladder presents the development of relationships between children and adults as they negotiate their different positions of power and need,225 and clarifies what ‘good’ participation consists of.226

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218 ECPAT International (2012), p. 31
219 Ibid., p. 31-33
223 Pearce, J. (2010), p. 77
225 Pearce, J. (2010), p. 77
Literature presents instances where children are exploited by organisations for media attention on so-called ‘human interest aspects’ or for help with fundraising,\textsuperscript{227} and urges the need for ethical standards to be developed for use in participatory work undertaken by children and young people who have experienced CSE. Therefore, assessments of meaningful youth participation need to carefully consider the quality and parameters of that involvement,\textsuperscript{228} and programmes must be carefully planned and supported\textsuperscript{229} and provide all children and youth with different options and types of participation that can be accessed at different times.\textsuperscript{230} Children genuinely participate, if they are given opportunities to exercise autonomy and choice, exert influence and inform change, experience a sense of control, as well as access information, resources and support that enable meaningful involvement.\textsuperscript{231}

Furthermore, alongside benefits, literature acknowledges the challenges and limitations associated with peer support and peer leadership, as participation may not be relevant for all young people or may place an additional burden on an abused individual who needs therapeutic support rather than involvement in policy and practice decision-making procedures.\textsuperscript{232} In the field research in Nepal, the Philippines and Thailand, concerns were raised over the risk of re-traumatisation of peer leaders through such work. Survivors need to have the skills, emotional readiness and the maturity or confidence to address any situation. Therefore, a child’s readiness must be assessed thoroughly, and continued guidance and support must be reliably available. There were also concerns raised over the risk that peer educators may groom, encourage or pimp children into CSEC, and thus over the safety of young people who peer educators would be working with. Finally, it was noted that there may be a risk of relapse among some CSEC survivors engaging in participatory work.\textsuperscript{233} Therefore, prudent selection, training and supervision is required to ensure that peer supporters and peer leaders are the ‘right people’.\textsuperscript{234}

Remembering that the empowerment process is different for every survivor, research stresses the fact that engagement through peer support and leadership programmes may not be valuable for all children. Practitioners mentioned that children who can participate in advocacy and governance activities against CSE are either those that have been hurt the least or older survivors, perhaps even in their late twenties, leading to the question of whether including young survivors in organisational decision-making is appropriate.\textsuperscript{235} For example, the Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS) in the US states that there must be multiple avenues and opportunities for girls and young women be involved in youth leadership, since for some girls it may have the form of public speaking, for others it may be the opportunity to serve as a ‘big sister’ to other girls in the programme, while others may simply want to make an impact through sharing their talents.\textsuperscript{236} It is thus highlighted in the literature that survivors of CSE must be provided with opportunities to become involved in participatory

\textsuperscript{228} Warrington, C. (2017), p. 8
\textsuperscript{229} Pearce, J. (2010), p. 82-83
\textsuperscript{230} Brodie, I. with D’Arcy, K., Harris, J. et al. (2016), p. 5
\textsuperscript{231} Warrington, C. (2017), p. 8
\textsuperscript{232} Pearce, J. (2010), p. 78
\textsuperscript{233} Hargitt, K. (2017), p. 233
\textsuperscript{234} Cody, C. (2017), p. 93
\textsuperscript{235} Hart, R. et al. (2016), p. 20
\textsuperscript{236} Lloyd, R. (2010), p. 17
projects, according to their evolving capacities and interests, and that these need to be potential opportunities rather than expectations.⁴³⁷

As not all survivors may feel comfortable providing peer support, equally not all survivors may feel comfortable receiving support from peers.⁴³⁸ In fact, research shows that some children trust adult practitioners more than peer supporters, while some children prefer to talk to their peers, other children have no preference either way.⁴³⁹ It has also been noted by a practitioner that discussing experiences with CSE among peers may be a supportive setting for some survivors, but can be a ‘competitive’ setting for others.⁴⁴⁰

**Financial compensation for participatory work** is also another issue discussed in literature, acknowledging its benefits as well as raising concerns. For children and young people whose motivation was to leave home and earn money to support their families before they experienced CSEC, getting paid for their time and work in assisting organisations can help them in their struggle with economic stress and in resisting participation in CSE activities.⁴⁴¹ Indeed, most beneficiaries from the abovementioned project implemented in Fortaleza Brazil cited the opportunity to generate an income as the most important factor that would permit them to leave the cycle of sexual exploitation.⁴⁴² In addition, girls and young women at GEMS, offered paid positions to practice leadership activities and felt that their time and skills were valued.⁴⁴³ On the other hand, since participatory work during recovery and (re)integration is the implementation of the children’s right to be heard, literature raises the question of whether it is ethical to pay children to implement this right. Finally, research argues that compensation may be considered as an option at the local level and with maximum transparency of the reasoning behind it.⁴⁴⁴

### C. Empowerment strategies taking into account gender and age?

There is little research on empowerment strategies that take into account gender and age.

With regard to the factor of ‘gender’, ECPAT proposes empowering ways for girls to develop resilience to harmful practices in the context of child marriage, while GEMS presents a leadership development programme for girls and young women victims of CSE. Both resources include awareness-raising activities in relation to children’s rights, as well as challenging social constructions and biases of sexuality, life skills training, peer support and leadership skills.⁴⁴⁵ As a result, these two examples do not introduce any new strategy specifically targeting girls, rather they repeat or confirm the empowering value of the strategies existing in literature and included in this review. Finally, no literature on empowerment strategies for boy victims of CSE was found.

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⁴³⁷ Hart, R. et al. (2016), p. 22
⁴⁴⁰ Hart, R. et al. (2016), p. 20
⁴⁴¹ Ibid., p. 21
⁴⁴² ECPAT International (2012), p. 5
⁴⁴³ Lloyd, R. (2010), p. 18
⁴⁴⁴ Hart, R. et al. (2016), p. 22
With regard to the factor of ‘age’, it was documented in the literature that ECPAT’s YPP in Thailand developed a peer support programme which divided children into two groups, (i) children between 7 and 11 years of age; and (ii) children between 12 and 18 years of age, and applied empowering strategies in an age-appropriate way. For example, the methodology used to educate the first group included storytelling and the use of illustrative pictures and pop-up books, while methods used for the second group included discussions, competitions, situational analysis, mapping and problem trees. Furthermore, practitioners observed that advocacy and governance activities against CSE may be addressed to older survivors, which echoes Article 12 UNCRC according to which full consideration of child’s views must be given, taking into account the child’s age and maturity.

As a result, literature generally does not separate empowerment strategies into age groups or genders. Moreover, in the broader context of recovery and (re)integration of those affected by CSE, literature has not yet identified how different aspects of identity, such as gender and age, influence this process. Should it be interpreted only as a gap in literature in terms of gender-appropriate and age-appropriate empowerment strategies or a lack of such empowerment strategies also in practice?

At this point, it is important to repeat that there is no single model of recovery and (re)integration process, nor a single model of empowerment. The empowerment process is applied on an individual basis. In addition, in a child’s empowerment process, applied strategies may change over time. All above mentioned empowerment strategies, namely engagement with practitioners, life skills, participation programmes, are not standardised procedures. Instead, they have the possibility but also the purpose of being tailored to children’s realities, capacities, needs and perspectives. Therefore, in that sense, empowerment strategies do take into account age and gender.

While designing support programmes for child victims and children at risk of CSE, practitioners should evaluate each case and develop empowerment strategies for and with each child individually.

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247 Hart, R. et al. (2016), p. 20
The measurement of the empowerment of child victims and children at risk of CSE is minimally covered in this chapter since literature on this topic is extremely limited. In fact, Cody (2017) notes that there is a limited evidence base when it comes to understanding the impact of life skills programmes on children, including how, for whom, and in what conditions youth participation is effective, and stresses the need for further research on the value of these different models of support. For example, in many cases life skills training may be delivered but there may be no standardised approach, no clear documentation surrounding the process and no evaluation of outcomes. There is also no commonly agreed or adopted standard of what constitutes ‘good practice’. Furthermore, since empowerment may be a long process that takes years, the empowerment of children that participated in empowerment programmes may be achieved many years after children left the programme, which is very difficult to be measured.

However, anecdotal evidence suggests that with the right selection, training and support, empowerment strategies may be beneficial both to survivors themselves as well as to their peers. As a result, this chapter will draw upon literature that is specific to: (i) monitoring and evaluation of recovery and reintegration programmes for children affected by CSE, where monitoring and evaluation of programmes enabling the empowerment of these children is found; (ii) wider literature that relates to measuring youth participation more generally; and (iii) monitoring and evaluation of life skills programmes.

A. Why measurement of empowerment is needed

Measuring the effectiveness of empowerment strategies for children at risk and affected by CSE may allow us to understand how helpful these strategies can be at building skills and protective factors for children. Measurement of empowerment is needed in order to see what works, what to avoid in the future and how to improve support services to children. The goal of empowerment is that children effect change and carry on with their lives. It must therefore be measured whether empowerment strategies produced real change in children’s lives. Such measurement may also contribute to effective change in service delivery.

In the general framework of recovery and reintegration of children affected by CSE, literature states that rigorous evaluations of such interventions are rare. However, when they do take place, the focus is on whether the programme objectives were achieved, rather than on whether the activities benefitted the child or on how and why they made a positive impact. In other words, evaluation shows whether a programme did what it said it would do and reunified a number of children with their

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families, but it does not consider how reunification and reintegration was supported, what it was that made a real difference, and how this affected the overall well-being of the child and family.250

As a result, measuring the effectiveness of empowerment strategies is as complex as implementing them, since it is important to learn not only what works, but also how and for whom. As there is no universal and unique empowerment process, it follows that there can be no universal approach for measuring empowerment. Any processes undertaken must be tailored and appropriate to the local context and must be carried out in an ethical and safe manner.251 For example, the evaluation of the above cited Alexi project, having adopted a realistic approach, did not focus only on whether programmes or interventions work, but on how and why they might do so. The evaluation started from the principle that interventions in and of themselves do not either ‘work’ or ‘not work’; rather it is the people involved in them and the skills, attitudes, knowledge and approaches that they bring, together with the influence of context and resources, that determine the outcomes generated.252

Empowerment programmes may be measured through monitoring and evaluation, as well as with the participation of children in measuring the effectiveness of these programmes, hence measuring their own empowerment.

B. How to measure empowerment

1. Defining the goal of the empowerment programme

In order to measure empowerment, it is important to have a clear definition of the concept253 and set the goal of the programme, what is to be achieved.254 Drawing upon the definition of empowerment, the goal may be that ‘all children and young people affected by CSE have gained control over their lives and power to exit the situation of sexual exploitation, make strategic life choices, effect change and carry on with their lives.’ Or programmes applying specific empowerment strategies may have the specific goals of such strategies; for example, the development of certain life skills or the improvement of service delivery setting as goal that ‘all children in the region can identify CSE risks and have access to support services’.

Monitoring and evaluation document progress and development of a programme and ensure that the programme achieves its goal.


251 Ibid., p. 6


2. Monitoring and Evaluation process

Aiming to promote and facilitate learning on recovery and reintegration approaches that improve outcomes for children and adolescents affected by CSE, the RISE Learning Network developed a toolkit that provides ideas, examples and suggestions of how organisations could collect monitoring and evaluation data with, from and about the children and young people they work with.\footnote{Cody, C. and Wakia, J. (2016)}

‘Monitoring’ is the on-going, routine assessment of a project or programme. To monitor progress, information is collected on a regular basis throughout the life of the project. The information collected through the monitoring process often captures output (the immediate results of activities) and outcome (short to medium-term changes in people’s lives) data and can be a useful source of information in the overall evaluation of a project. Monitoring tends to answer three basic questions: (i) ‘Who are we reaching?'; (ii) ‘What are we doing?'; and (iii) ‘What immediate difference is it making?'\footnote{Ibid. p. 17}

‘Evaluation’ is a systematic and objective assessment of a project or programme. It generally occurs at one point in time, such as mid-way through or at the end of a project, and asks the question ‘is our project making a difference?’

An evaluation may wish to assess:

- The process of the project (process evaluation) – how it was implemented. This may be done by asking those involved at regular intervals what they think of the activities, what they like or do not like or what changes they would like to see. It may also be carried out after a specific training programme has finished to garner feedback.

- The effects or changes that occurred as a result of the project or programme (outcome evaluation). This is probably the most common form of evaluation.

- The sustained or long-lasting changes that have occurred beyond the lifetime of the project, both positive and negative, that the project has made a contribution to (impact evaluation).\footnote{Ibid. p. 17-18}

3. Monitoring and Evaluation methods

a. Quantitative and qualitative methods

Different methods may be employed when it comes to collecting monitoring and evaluation data, including: (i) quantitative methods (e.g. project records; survey; questionnaires; statistical reports; existing standardised psychosocial measures); and (ii) qualitative methods (e.g. interviews; focus-group discussions; observations; case studies; participatory, learning and action tools; photovoice/participatory photography).

Applying the monitoring and evaluation process especially to empowerment programmes, change may be demonstrated through numbers (quantitative method), for example X number of children completed the life skills training programme; or, change may be shared through descriptions (qualitative method), for example, X number of children and young people reported that they had
learnt new skills during the life skills programme and were now more confident or were no longer scared to speak up in class.

Mixed methods is a set of methodologies that collects both qualitative and quantitative data. This approach generates a good overall picture providing numbers, stories and descriptions.258

b. The evaluation chain

Monitoring and evaluation of life skills programmes may also be employed with the use of the Red Cross’ evaluation chain that follows the process of change. For instance, in a youth empowerment programme, aiming to enable young people to speak up for themselves, the process of change starts with the young people being aware that speaking up is difficult for them. Then they need to learn what to say and how to deal with the stress of speaking up and have the courage to do so in spite of the difficulty. When they have learned to do this in a safe environment, the next step is to practise what they have learnt in a real situation. The process then continues, as the young people build up their confidence in speaking up in their daily lives. The evaluation chain shows the importance of monitoring and evaluating each link of the chain (inputs → activities → outcomes → immediate impact → long-term impact). One weak link would cause difficulties in meeting programme objectives and supporting change in participants’ lives.259

c. Developing indicators

While planning the monitoring and evaluation process, indicators help to measure specific aspects of changes in the child’s behaviours, skills, attitudes and relationships, and thus indicators may be developed as a useful tool in monitoring life skill and youth participation programmes. For instance, if the objectives of a programme are the development of decision-making and leadership skills or improvements in confidence and self-esteem, then an output indicator is the number of children engaged in life skills building work, while the outcome indicator may be that children demonstrate increased knowledge of these skills or an increase in confidence and self-esteem.260 Indicators may also consist of children’s views on how they experience change. For a child in Uganda, being confident means that “I can do all I want; I am able to do what other people cannot expect me to do, and achieve my goals, do anything without fear, can enable you reach your dreams, helps you endure even the toughest times when in the community, and I am happy doing something that I confident in.”, while a survivor in Ethiopia expressed hope as follows: “A bright future makes the child to aspire to become a better and successful person. This helps the child to settle in his home and grow.”261

In addition, the Council of Europe has developed an assessment tool that provides indicators for measuring progress in promoting children’s participation in decision making in matters affecting them.262 Grouped in three categories, ten indicators measure the level of: (i) protecting the right to participate; (ii) promoting awareness of the right to participate; and (iii) creating spaces for participation. Regarding this last category, one indicator is that children are represented in forums, including through their own organisations whether at school or on local, regional and national

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259 Red Cross (2013), p. 94-95
260 The Down to Zero Alliance has developed a number of indicators to measure the effectiveness of trainings and programmes on e.g. advocacy skills and awareness raising techniques, counting the number of children that have participated in programmes (NL 2017 05 15 List of Down to Zero Indicators)
261 Indicators suggested by children and by children and young people and reported by Partner Organisations to RISE Learning Network project during the 2013 consultations.
262 Council of Europe (2016)
governance levels. States can measure progress towards children’s representation in forums using criteria that assess the level of such representation (from 0 if no forums exist to 3 if it is legally mandated that child/youth councils or parliaments exist). Children’s participation in decision making applies to child and youth participation, which is one of the empowerment strategies for survivors of CSE identified in the literature. This assessment tool can be used in the context of CSE and allow states to measure and ensure children’s participation in addressing it.

d. Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

The RISE Learning Network project acknowledged the fact that children are ‘experts in their own lives’ and should therefore be consulted and involved when it comes to monitoring and evaluating the programmes that impact on them. Therefore, participatory methods may be used for measuring the effectiveness of empowerment programmes. Data and views may be collected through drawing, games, photography, drama or film. Participatory monitoring and evaluation allows, among other things, the development of appropriate, socially and culturally grounded indicators and measures that take into account age and gender, as well as an understanding of the process of change and how and why change happens. Participatory approaches as a monitoring and evaluation tool have similar benefits and risks to children as participatory approaches have as empowerment strategies, since on the one hand children are heard and recognised as experts and active agents while on the other hand this process may not be appropriate for all children, or lead to re-traumatisation or be deemed tokenistic.

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263 See Chapter III/B/2/b
In order to respond to the research questions, the literature review has drawn upon research literature that is specific to empowerment of child victims and children at risk of CSE and wider literature that relates to the concept of empowerment as well as the recovery and reintegration of survivors of CSE more generally, specifically in the context of child participation and life skills.

A. Answering the main research questions of the Down to Zero Alliance

1. What are effective empowerment strategies to CSE taking into account gender and age?

Empowerment of child victims and children at risk of CSE has been defined by this review as the process or/and outcome by which child victims and children at risk of CSE have gained control over their lives and power to exit the situation of sexual exploitation, make strategic life choices, effect change and carry on with their lives. Empowerment strategies allow children to feel safe, be aware of CSE related matters, develop confidence, strengthen their competences, support their peers and become active agents of change; therefore, be empowered.

Children and young people are the most important resource in the fight against CSE, as they are the ones who are most affected. They have imagination, knowledge, experience and motivation to move out of exploitative situations. Hence, empowerment is their ally against this fight and effective empowerment strategies their weapons.

The review found in the literature methods that allow victim identification and disclosure of CSE, as well as discussions and actions specifically against CSE, and help children develop agency and a sense of control over their lives. These methods have been presented as empowerment strategies and include successful engagement with practitioners, life skills training and youth participation. Youth participation programmes are particularly empowering, since, implementing the children’s right to be heard and influence decisions in matters of concern to them, such as CSE, grant children an important role in shaping the services that are designed to support them, by being involved in their care and supporting their peers.

The process of empowerment is unique for every child, as is the experience of CSE. Age, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, ethnicity, faith, family background, relationship to the perpetrator, context and severity of the abuse, as well as level of personal resilience and availability of support, are all factors that determine each case of CSE and what empowerment strategies should be applied. Empowerment strategies are not standardised procedures but adapted on an individual basis, they can thus take into account children’s identities, such as age and gender, as well as their needs, capacities and potential.
2. How to measure effective child empowerment strategies?

Empowerment strategies provide child victims and children at risk of CSE with the possibility to be empowered against CSE, however empowerment should not only stay a possibility but become reality. Measurement of empowerment allows us to see whether applied strategies are effective, whether they produce real change in children’s lives and turned children from victims to survivors to active agents of change, or prevent children at risk from being affected by CSE.

Monitoring and Evaluation is a process used to measure the effectiveness of empowerment programmes and supporting programmes in general, including empowerment strategies to CSE such as life skills training and youth participation programmes. Specific measuring tools are quantitative and qualitative methods, the evaluation chain, the use of indicators and the involvement of children in gathering data and views. The monitoring and evaluation process shows whether the goal of the empowerment programme has been achieved.

However, to date, there is a dearth of literature in the effectiveness of empowerment strategies to child victims and children at risk of CSE. The effectiveness of each strategy for empowering children is not universal and employed indicators and measures should take into consideration each child’s particularities and the context where change happens.

B. Identifying gaps

It was well established prior to the study that the amount of literature relating specifically to children and young people’s empowerment in the context of CSE would be relatively limited. Gaps in literature have been identified throughout the review, as follows:

1. Gaps with regard to the concept of empowerment in CSE (Chapter I):
   - Definition of empowerment of child victims and children at risk of CSE
   - The effect of different aspects of identity, such as gender, sexuality, disability and ethnicity, on the recovery and reintegration experiences, and thus the empowerment, of those affected by CSE.

2. Gaps with regard to the diversity of child victims of CSE (Chapter II):
   - Gender similarities and differences in experiencing CSE
   - Gender similarities and differences in disclosing CSE

3. Gaps with regard to empowerment strategies in CSE (Chapter III):
   - Empowerment strategies for child victims and children at risk of CSE, defined as such
Empowerment strategies for child victims and children at risk of CSE taking into account age and gender

4. Gaps with regard to measurement of empowerment in CSE (Chapter IV):
   - Measuring the effectiveness of empowerment strategies for child victims and children at risk of CSE

C. Recommendations for further research

Having this literature review as research base or starting point, the empowerment of child victims and children at risk may be better understood and employed with further research in the following areas:

- With practitioners playing a key role in the empowerment of children, it might be beneficial for the *Down to Zero Alliance* to undertake academic and field research on the training needs, training topics and possibilities for practitioners at the local level, in order practitioners to be able to identify CSE cases and provide support to victims, adapted to their identities, needs and potential.

- Field research on children’s views on what is empowering for them would be beneficial for re-defining and/or understanding better children’s empowerment, as well as for using their views in order to develop indicators for empowerment.

- Since there is a limited evidence base when it comes to understanding the impact of empowerment programmes on children, including how, for whom, and in what conditions they are effective, further research on the value of these programmes might be beneficial.
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