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**Policing Child Sexual Abuse**  
**The view from police practitioners**

*Beverley Hughes, Howard Parker & Bernard Gallagher*

Home Office  
Police Research Group  
February 1996

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## **Foreword**

**This report reflects the views of 32 child protection officers from ten forces who formed a working group in 1994 to consider models of good practice in child sexual abuse investigations and to recommend improvements in the policing of this difficult area. Although these are only views, they are the views of dedicated and experienced officers.**

**Whilst it is no doubt the case that both inter-agency working and standards of interviewing have both improved in recent years and are continuing to do so, the experiences of these officers indicate that further change is still required. This is to ensure that the welfare of the child is sufficiently protected, and that the number of successful prosecutions are increased.**

**Contained in the report are a number of recommendations which if adopted, would assist the police, other agencies involved in child protection and the criminal justice system in achieving these aims. Forces will wish to consider how appropriate they are to local circumstances.**

**Recommendations for the police include an increased need for strategic thinking in this area, improving the status of child protection work, developing a national database on paedophiles, providing more training and the need to adopt more sophisticated methods in the detection of perpetrators. The recommendations are based not only on the views of the officers which emerged in interview, but also the considerable experience of the research team who have recently conducted a major investigation (funded by the Department of Health) on Organised and Ritual Abuse which is shortly to be published.<sup>1</sup>**

**Dr Gloria Laycock  
Head of Police Research Group  
Home Office  
February 1996**

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<sup>1</sup> Gallagher, B., Hughes, B. & Parker, H. (1996) The nature and extent of known cases of organised child sexual abuse in England and Wales. In Bibby, P.(Ed.) Organised Abuse - The Current Debate. Arena/Ashgate: Aldershot. ISBN 1 85742 2848



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## **Executive Summary**

**During 1992 and 1993, the authors of this report conducted research on the nature and extent of organised and ritual child abuse in England and Wales. The fieldwork was based in police and social services child abuse teams in eight geographical areas and involved extensive detailed record searches and interviews with staff at different levels within each agency.**

**On completion of that research, the authors were commissioned in 1994 by the Police Research Group to bring together child protection police officers from the original eight areas and others to discuss further issues involved in the policing of child sexual abuse. The findings presented in this report are based on the views of 32 officers from ten forces, all experienced in child protection work and the management of child abuse units. These officers formed a working group to examine key issues and models of good practice in the investigation of child sexual abuse, and to set an improved agenda for the policing of child abuse.**

**In the light of serious misgivings about inter-agency cooperation in child abuse work during the 1980s new standards and systems were created around 1991 to ensure improved practice and better working together. Most police forces set up specialist Child Abuse Units (CAUs) at this time. These have been an undoubted success and have contributed greatly to improved inter-agency work and more effective official responses to child abuse referrals. However as our society learns to talk more openly and condemn child sexual abuse so the number of referrals rises and the complex and serious nature of sexual abuse surfaces. The police response must in turn continue to evolve. Present arrangements however are quite inadequate to allow this progress to take place.**

**There was great concern amongst the officers in this working group that, in their experience, very few investigations lead to a conviction in child abuse cases, and particularly in cases of sexual abuse. It was felt that some, and perhaps many, offenders remain unconvicted and unchecked, and therefore have the opportunity to re-abuse children and/or find new victims. The present inter-agency focus on the child victim must not be lost but at the same time the police role in detection must be developed into a more determined, highly professional approach. This is the missing link in the child protection chain. Focusing on suspects would**

lead to more crime being detected thus allowing CAUs to contribute to a core police activity. It would also, by providing information and intelligence about suspects and known abusers, offer the possibility of preventing abuse, deterring perpetrators and thus reducing what should be regarded in our society as a serious crime.

This report outlines a coherent programme of development involving 24 recommendations (see Part 8). However one of the conclusions of the report is that there is no obvious strategic thinking being undertaken at senior management level about the future of CAUs. Thus a pre-requisite to the implementation of these recommendations is that senior officers inform themselves more fully about the nature of child abuse work, its complexity and seriousness.

The recommendations of the Working Group fall into three categories: those which involve change within the police service; those which involve new goals for the multi-agency child protection and criminal justice systems in which the police play a part, and those which involve development via research and evaluation.

### **Changes within the Police Service**

- It was felt that current police organisation and culture was not conducive to the professional development of child protection work. Too many officers, and particularly some managers, had very little understanding of the complexity and seriousness of child sexual abuse and thus the range of skills required by specialist officers.
- The organization of CAUs needs reviewing with attention given to their physical and organisational location, management and staffing.
- Child protection officers are calling for appropriate training. They feel ill-equipped to undertake their duties. They need knowledge about child development; more about the techniques and strategies used by perpetrators and about the types of case they will encounter, particularly organised abuse cases. They need additional skills training both in interviewing children and, most of all, interviewing suspects and known perpetrators. The

officers in the working group called for a national conference structure to be established<sup>2</sup>.

- **Child sex abusers come in many guises. A significant minority are highly sophisticated in the way they target, groom and abuse children. They have a repertoire of techniques to avoid detection. Child Abuse Units need to develop a new strategy which includes creating intelligence systems which purposefully store and manipulate information much of which is in fact already available within the police officers' 'heads' and with their colleagues in Probation and Social Services. Knowing the whereabouts of convicted paedophiles would be a potent weapon. There are no legal reasons why such systems cannot be introduced and the Data Protection Registrar is keen to help in this development.**

- **Many police forces have already, or will encounter, a number of high profile, complex organised abuse cases involving large numbers of perpetrators and children. These cases can easily become 'professional disasters'. Each force should have a strategy for responding to such cases before they emerge. The present knowledge and experience about managing complex cases needs consolidating and disseminating to each force.**

#### **Changes in the child protection systems**

- **Whilst inter-agency work has improved considerably in recent years further cooperation and coordination at Area Child Protection Committee level is required to address continuing deficiencies notably over video interviews, medical examinations and, if perpetrator detection is to be taken more seriously, sharing intelligence.**

- **The criminal justice system continues to be simultaneously dysfunctional in respect of prosecuting perpetrators and unsympathetic to child victims and witnesses. Progress here will be slow but pressure must be brought on the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), barristers and judges to be more in tune with the special requirements for processing some abuse cases. A longer term goal should be the creation of a child centred judicial process**

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<sup>2</sup>Since these officers met, three national conferences have taken place, one in 1994 and two in 1995.

with all staff accredited in child sensitive procedure.

### **Implications for research and development**

- **The whole arena of child sexual abuse and professional intervention is under researched and under evaluated. Robust knowledge is in short supply.**
- **More research needs to be undertaken in respect of the types of abuse perpetrated; the profiles and patterns of behaviour of perpetrators; their strategies to avoid detection.**
- **'Good practice' in respect of investigation techniques and interviewing suspects needs to be developed through monitoring and evaluating police teams at work. The way cases are processed and/or discontinued merits further examination.**

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# **1. Introduction**

## **The policing of child sexual abuse**

Reports of various official enquiries into major incidents involving alleged child sexual abuse during the 1980's identified the need for a more coordinated multi-agency approach during investigations. Professionals from all relevant agencies were criticised, sometimes for intervening too aggressively, sometimes for not acting quickly enough. A persistent charge was the failure of professionals from different disciplines to work together to protect children effectively (Secretary of State for Social Services, 1988).

Change has resulted from these events since the late 1980's. For police child protection officers, this has meant joining newly-created specialist units, variously termed 'child protection units', 'family support units', or 'family protection teams', which deal with child protection and, in some areas, domestic violence and rape. (Throughout this report we will use the term 'child abuse unit' (CAU) or 'team'). At the same time, officers have had to implement the Memorandum of Good Practice, PACE and Code C revisions, the Criminal Justice Act (1991) as well as a number of new Home Office instructions and police service procedures. The 1989 Children Act has also had a significant impact on the work of police officers involved in child protection.

The framework for the improvement of multi-agency collaboration in child protection was published in 'Working Together' (Department of Health, 1991). Understandably, the primary goals were defined as the effective protection of children alleged to have been abused and safeguarding, as far as possible, the validity of evidence in order to enable prosecutions to proceed where appropriate. However, all agencies accepted the over-riding principle that the child's welfare was paramount and this principle is the key factor in the determination of strategy and actions in individual cases.

## **Background: 'The Manchester Research'**

Previous research by the authors on the nature and extent of organised and ritual sexual abuse included extended fieldwork visits during 1992/93 to police and social services child abuse teams in eight areas of England and Wales (Gallagher et al, 1994b). For that study, the site visits involved detailed searches of all child sexual abuse cases referred between 1988 and 1991 as well as interviews with individual child protection staff at different levels within each agency. A total of 33 confidential interviews were conducted with 20 male police officers mainly inspectors, sergeants and detective constables and 13 female officers mainly police constables and detective constables. The police forces included large county areas in different parts of the country, an inner London borough, a large northern city, a Welsh rural county and a small Midlands Metropolitan Borough. (A similar search and interviewing process was conducted in the eight co-terminus social services departments).

It was quite clear from our analysis of case files, direct observation and interviews with key staff that a transformation in the quality of inter-agency working had taken place between 1989 and 1993. In all eight areas, we found front line police and social services staff who knew each other, had undertaken some joint training, exchanged information and by and large shared the goals embedded in both the Children Act (1989) and Working Together (1991). A majority of respondents spontaneously mentioned the improved inter-agency relationships, and whilst some problems remained, generally described a shared commitment to joint work with other professionals to protect children.

However, interviews with *police officers* also revealed some common dissatisfactions and concerns which clustered around three major related issues:

- ignorance and ambivalence about child protection work within the prevailing police service organisation and culture;
- a belief that whilst "working together" has become a new strength, child sexual abuse is not regarded as a serious *crime* across the force;
- the view that improvements in procedure to protect (or perhaps more accurately, to rescue) children have not been matched by improvements in the ability to investigate, detect and prosecute perpetrators.

## **The current project**

Drawing upon the findings of our earlier research (Gallagher and Parker, 1994a; Gallagher, Hughes and Parker, 1994b), the overall aim of this project was to identify in more detail key issues and models of good practice in the investigation and detection of child sexual abuse. Within this overall aim, the project was designed to:

- explore current practice and organisational arrangements for the policing of child sexual abuse;
- explore the perceptions and experience of police child protection officers of different ranks;
- provide a structured forum within which officers could work together with the researchers to recommend both good practice models and organisational arrangements;
- identify specific developments to improve the investigation and detection of perpetrators without undermining the quality of child protection and goals of 'Working Together' (1991);
- specifically to examine the feasibility of and the issues involved in the establishment of specialist intelligence systems for child protection work and the extent to which other agencies could be involved.

A background paper was prepared and circulated to ten police forces (including the eight which had participated in the Manchester research). A total of 32 delegates from these police forces then attended a residential working conference in Manchester on 23, 24 and 25 May 1994.

## **The working group**

The ten police forces participating at the conference represented parts of the country with different population profiles and urban/rural characteristics. They were:

Avon and Somerset

Bedfordshire

Cheshire

**Dyfed/Powys**  
**Greater Manchester**  
**London**  
**Merseyside**  
**Northumbria**  
**West Midlands**  
**West Yorkshire**

Participating police forces were asked to nominate between two and four delegates who, as a group, included both men and women as well as officers of different rank. The characteristics of the 32 officers on these criteria were as follows:

	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
<b>Senior officers (Superintendent and Inspector)</b>	0	10
<b>Supervising officers (Sergeant/Detective Sergeant)</b>	6	6
<b>Basic Grade officers (Constable/Detective Constable)</b>	9	1
	<b>15</b>	<b>17</b>

Of the 15 female delegates, 5 (33%) had detective status, although for most this status was temporary and contingent on their duty in the child protection unit. Of the 17 male delegates, 12 (70%) had detective status and most had become substantive detectives before joining the units. Throughout the report, these delegates are referred to as the Working Group.

The conference was designed to elicit the experience and views of the Working Group on the policing of child sexual abuse. In addition a small number of experts attended particular sessions: representatives from the Data Protection Registry and the Manchester Crown Prosecution Service; a senior police manager from Greater Manchester Constabulary with operational responsibilities for criminal investigations.

Detailed written records were taken throughout the proceedings and, in addition, delegates were required to summarise in writing the deliberations and conclusions which emerged from the various tasks set. These data were then analysed by the researchers and are presented

in this report to represent the views of the Working Group.

## **The report**

The data presented in this report has been structured to present the views of the Working Group about the current arrangements for and experience of policing child sexual abuse, as well as the areas in which change and development is needed. The first part of the report (Chapters 2 and 3) describes the range of organisational and professional practices across police forces, and summarises the *general* perceptions of specialist child protection police officers.

Each of the remaining sections explores in more detail the main themes which emerged from our analysis of officers' views and identifies the key changes necessary to develop police practice in child sex abuse work. These sections examine, in turn:

- **Police culture and organisation.**
- **Training.**
- **Criminal investigations.**
- **Dysfunction in the wider system.**

The final chapter sets out an agenda for change and development within the police service, within the wider multi-agency child protection system and for research.

## **2. The Organisation of Child Abuse Units**

There was wide diversity reported amongst the participating police forces in terms of:

- the history of child protection policing and the period of time over which it had developed;
- the position of CAUs within the overall organisation;
- the patterns with which CAUs are linked to senior management;
- the structure of CAUs;
- the policies and practices of staffing the units; and,
- the remit of the units.

### **Background**

A minority of the units had been established around the time of the Cleveland enquiry or following the publication of the Butler-Sloss report (Secretary of State for Social Services, 1988), and thus had some five years experience which often included at least one further reorganisation. However, most had been established for the first time between 1990 and 1992. One police force had no specialist units until April 1993 and another still had only one unit covering one division. The officers from the latter force reported considerable ambivalence, if not reluctance, by senior management to move towards specialist units: a single unit was established in 1991 and remained a pilot project until 1993 when it became established. This force has, in 1994, decided to establish a 'Family Support Unit' in each of its divisions but it will be some time before this is achieved.

### **Management**

Whilst most of the ten police forces have at least one officer at Inspector/Detective Inspector level with middle management responsibility for child protection usually based at headquarters, in many instances this was thought to be insufficient to provide effective operational management. Furthermore, in one or two instances the units are formally under

the control of divisional commanders who had little experience of child protection. Above the level of Inspector, the units are linked into the C.I.D management structures and it was reported that most forces had no officer above the level of Inspector with a dedicated remit for child protection.

### **Organisational Structure**

The most common structure is that of a number of units within a police force, organised to cover the geographical area of a police division or district, or a definable part of a local authority area. The unit typically consists of a sergeant or detective sergeant as manager, with a number of detective constables or constables as team members. However, the local context has a significant impact on the size of units and the extent to which they can be effectively linked together for developmental and strategic purposes. At one extreme, the Welsh rural area is very large but relatively sparsely populated. Thus, of the 8 'units' covering the whole of the police force area, 5 consist only of a single officer, usually a woman, working on her own from a divisional base and the remaining 3 teams each consist of 2 officers. A dedicated Detective Inspector has overall management of the 8 teams at force level but there is no specialist management above that level. This contrasts markedly with the urban areas, in which the basic unit usually consists of Sergeant/Detective Sergeant, with between two and five detectives and/or uniform officers. In some forces, there is also a headquarters unit with a policy development remit as well and some responsibility for operational activity. For example, one police force is reorganising to 9 divisions, each of which will have a 'Family Support Unit' linked managerially to C.I.D. structures. In addition, there is a central headquarters unit consisting of a Detective Superintendent, a Chief Inspector, eleven Detective Inspectors, a sergeant and three constables. This central team is represented at all case conferences as well as developing policy and overseeing intelligence operations.

### **Staffing**

Of the total staff working in CAUs, the majority are women, with reported figures in these ten forces ranging from 52% to 93%. The majority of unit managers and senior staff are

male. The gendered division of work is reflected not only in rank but also in the actual tasks allocated to male and female officers, with some units organised to allocate 'victim liaison' or support work to female officers and investigative work to males. However, in three forces there was less distinction, with women also undertaking investigative work and interviewing suspected perpetrators.

Different policies prevailed in relation to the detective or uniform rank of unit staff and managers. Five of the forces reported that the units are staffed mainly by uniform officers. If detectives are included in the unit, they had to have acquired that rank through selection procedures before joining the units. Most of these five forces reported difficulties in attracting detectives to child protection work. Three forces reported substantial proportions of detectives ranging from a third to 100%. In the remaining two forces, all staff are accorded temporary detective status whilst in the units.

The policies of staffing CAUs appeared to the officers in the Working Group to be a reflection of the ambivalence within police forces about the nature of child protection work and whether it requires the training and skills normally associated with other detective work.

### **Remit**

Most of the forces have established units whose remit was wider than child protection and included rape and domestic violence. However, most of the emphasis was reported to be on child protection and some concern was expressed about the relatively few resources the units are able to devote to other incidents, particularly domestic violence.

However, the units do not deal with, or even necessarily know about, all the cases involving child protection and allegations of sexual abuse in particular. In some police forces, the units receive only referrals which have a clear 'family' focus and in the case of sexual abuse this means in practice an allegation in which the suspected perpetrator is a father or other relative. If the allegation involves a stranger, the referral goes directly to C.I.D. or the Vice Squad and joint child protection procedures will not necessarily be mobilised. This rigid demarcation appeared to exist in only one large police force, but evidence of a more haphazard, if diluted, family abuse/stranger abuse split was reported in most of the other nine and, for reasons which will be discussed in a later section, was an issue of concern to specialist child protection officers.

### **3. Officers' Experiences of Policing Child Sexual Abuse**

During both the confidential interviews conducted by the Manchester research (Gallagher, Hughes and Parker, 1994b) and from the delegates in the Working Group attending the conference, a number of common themes emerged about the current experience of policing child sexual abuse cases. The particular emphasis varied according to the local context but, to a greater or lesser extent, these thematic issues were generally shared across all ten police forces and these general themes are reported in the first part of this section.

However, at the same time, police officers at different ranks also viewed the issues through the prism of their own particular experiences. Thus, the perceptions of middle-managers, unit managers, unit members and male and female officers, contribute complementary perspectives on the themes and are explored in the second part of this section.

#### **General themes**

Generally, police officers in child protection are a self-selected group and, perhaps as a consequence, demonstrate a very high level of commitment to the work in general and to the policing of child sexual abuse. This is true of officers of all ranks. At the level of the unit, officers felt supported by their own immediate colleagues and line managers, feelings which were heightened by a perceived sense of distance and isolation from the rest of the police force.

Many officers also expressed a high degree of job satisfaction, notwithstanding the many frustrations they also identified. In part, the satisfaction arises from the considerable amount of autonomy for case management and decision-making which managers and unit members reported. But this was a double-edged sword, with many delegates reporting a fine line between autonomy and neglect. As some of the Working Group reported:

*"We're allowed to use our own judgement and that's very fulfilling."*

*"We take decisions far above our rank. It's a back-handed compliment that we do it and are allowed to do it."*

However, such autonomy was also seen by some officers as indicative of the lack of interest in the force generally about child protection work. This was a view held particularly by unit managers:

*"Senior management leave us alone to take decisions and actions until there's a high profile case, then it goes elsewhere."*

Generally, units felt that working within the multi-agency child protection system had improved considerably and relationships with social services departments were good, although not without residual problems:

*"...it is not thought possible to create a better working relationship with Social Service Departments except that they themselves reorganise".*

This was the comment of an officer whose police force has to work with ten local authorities. Overall, the management and coordination of systems to protect victims were felt to be much more effective and the formation of specialist dedicated police child abuse units was identified as a significant benefit. However, all the officers at every level expressed frustration at the lack of development of investigative work and at the relatively small proportion of perpetrators who are prosecuted. These are issues which will be developed in later sections.

### **The views of middle managers**

Ten members of the Working Group, all of inspector level and above, met together with the researchers to discuss issues relevant to their role as middle managers with responsibility for child protection. The group, all male, consisted of a superintendent; a detective superintendent; three inspectors and five detective inspectors.

A majority had chosen to become managers of child abuse units and wanted to work in this

area. They applauded the creation of CAUs as an important advance in the policing of child sexual abuse but most felt that more senior management now believed that "child protection is sorted" and the CAUs, therefore, receive little attention "as long as a wheel doesn't come off".

Genuine recognition of the work of the units was felt to go only as high as Inspector/Detective Inspector level, however. Awareness and recognition by more senior management was reported to be haphazard and dependent upon the interest or previous experience of a particular individual or the recency of a high profile abuse case, rather than a result of policy or supervision.

Overall, it was reported that allocation of resources to units has not kept pace with the rising referrals and workload after the initial, often substantial, investment involved in setting-up. Consequently, these middle managers were now considering various strategies to rationalise work, including some which will inevitably involve greater risk assessment and risk management. For example, case screening and not attending all review conferences, were being discussed in some forces as possible means of targeting scarce police resources, although in other forces it was regarded as a police duty to attend all case conferences including reviews.

All but one of the middle managers reported difficulties in recruiting detectives into the units and this was felt to be due to a complex network of factors: the nature of the work and its emotional impact; gender issues; the lack of status as 'real' detective work; the impact of police culture generally.

Finally, on the question of managing the significant proportions of women officers, these male middle managers did not report any problems, nor did they identify any particular issues which needed to be taken into account. Some officers were actively encouraging women to apply for detective rank and felt that the women officers in their units were as able, if not more able in many cases, than the male officers. However, one or two expressed their views in ways which whilst undoubtedly intended to be benign, arguably reflected some of the paternalistic and dated attitudes of which the female officers complained:

*"These women are cracking workers, tremendous girls. They are tough nuts".*

*"We tend to apply the implied strength of the gender, ie males interview suspects, females interview children".*

### **The views of unit managers**

Seven male officers below the rank of inspector met as a group with the researchers to discuss issues from their perspective. All but one were sergeants or detective sergeants and responsible for managing a team. The seventh officer was a detective constable.

These unit managers were much more explicitly critical of senior management than middle managers had been. They described their experience as that of managing very committed, able and often articulate officers, policing an area which is highly stressful and emotional, in a wider police context which fails to recognise the nature of the work, its significance and its relevance to police work in general. Thus, they experience their position as one of interface between frustrated unit staff and indifferent managers.

Day-to-day management was left to unit managers, some of whom felt unattached to either divisional or child protection command structures. Not only did this contribute to a feeling of "isolation" within the police force: unit managers were also unclear as to whether anyone is taking a longer view about the future strategic developments of child protection work. However, in those few police forces in which the line management is directly through operational child protection inspectors rather than through divisional command, managers reported a stronger sense of managerial support and had a clearer view of the developmental issues which were being pursued. On the other hand, some of these units felt less integrated into the mainstream activity of the divisional bases in which they were physically located.

Lack of clarity about the work of the units frequently resulted in inappropriate referrals from colleagues:

*"We're getting dumped on with victims, relatives of murdered people, children going missing."*

*"I get all the mental health problems. Anything that can be classed as a 'vulnerable person' case".*

Unit managers generally felt the specialist nature of the work was "better understood by outsiders than insiders", and that the team was used as a depository for any vaguely "family" or "community" work that could not be located elsewhere.

*"We got adults with learning difficulties dumped on us recently, with the comment 'well, they've got a mental age of six'. That was the justification for this referral to the team."*

### **The views of women officers**

The fifteen female officers met with a female researcher. The group consisted of two detective sergeants and four sergeants, all of whom were unit managers. Of the remainder, three were detective constables and six were police constables. Thus, the majority in this group were unit members (60%) but a substantial minority (40%) were managers.

These women identified a complex mutually-reinforcing web of factors which impinged upon their experience in the units. Firstly, they felt that the work is seen as "a cushy number", partly because staff generally work a "days and lates" system and partly because of a more insidious attitude that this is not 'real' policing. Secondly, these views were reinforced by the fact that the units are staffed predominantly by women. Thirdly, however, the experience of women officers of this wider negative context is compounded by a common arrangement within units of a gendered division of labour: women deal with victims and families; male colleagues deal with suspects. Finally, work with children has fairly low status and the skills demanded are not acknowledged: "anyone can talk to children, can't they?" These women officers did not want to relinquish this role. Rather they wanted:

- work with children to have status, recognition and training;
- opportunities for investigative work with suspects; and
- a less stringent division of labour.

*"Insufficient importance is placed on the skill needed to interview a child. It's not recognised and if it was, there wouldn't be this hierarchy and division between work with children and work with offenders".*

However, most female officers did not feel, at the level of the team, that their work was constructed in this way as a result of explicit and rigid policies by team managers. Most described very cordial relationships within their teams and, indeed, some were able to report a considerable diminution of the demarcations in work allocation between female and male officers. Nonetheless, it was an issue to a greater or lesser extent for all but two of the women, although the main problem of attitude was identified amongst middle and senior level managers, not at team level.

*"Most of our immediate colleagues are fine. They're younger men; and attitudes have changed there. But some of the older, male officers at inspector level and above - even those experienced in child abuse - they're still very male-oriented, but they don't even know it".*

Furthermore, the women felt that some senior managers, usually male and often without direct experience in child protection and child sexual abuse, are unable to acknowledge the personal dilemmas which the subject raised for them as men and that this emotional distancing contributes to professional indifference:

*"Also, some bosses get really embarrassed about it (sexual abuse). It's a taboo subject".*

Most of the women officers were concerned about the perceived deficiencies in supervision and training and the complex issue of detective status. In one police force, the operational Child Protection detective inspector felt strongly that all unit members, including women, should have detective status and was actively pursuing this issue with senior management. However, whilst the dearth of female *detectives* was a potent symbolic issue for most women in the context of their child protection work, they did not rate it as their single most important issue:

***"Detective status is not the most important thing to us personally. To us, denial of training is the key thing but lack of opportunities for detective status symbolises the lack of importance given to this work."***

## **4. Police Culture and Organisation**

### **Culture**

The unanimous view of the Working Group was that, at best, police forces demonstrate an ambivalent attitude towards child protection work and one police service was reported to be openly obstructive to the further development of its very low level of current provision. All the officers differentiated between the 'official' public statements about the importance of child protection work and the 'unofficial' views of specialist staff, based on their day to day experience of the attitudes, and practices demonstrated by their force colleagues.

**Senior Management** Overall, there was generally perceived to be a lack of interest and knowledge amongst senior management, and consequently this area of policing was felt to have a low profile at the strategic level.

*"It shows in who visits you. We've never had a commander at the unit, ever. But he visits other places".*

*"In practice, we have low priority and we're marginalised - we're only seen as important when there is a multi-abuse situation which may attract media attention and put 'the job' in the spotlight."*

Whilst some officers could identify a key individual in senior management who had taken an interest or had first-hand experience of child protection, and could point to the benefits in morale and resources this would bring, the Working Group felt that child protection work is neglected by senior management who, furthermore, have little understanding of its inherent complexities.

**Performance Culture** The introduction of a performance culture into policing, with the emphasis upon detection rates, was seen as a further impediment to improving the status of child protection work:

*"The lack of interest in the service is fundamentally due to the lack of results, that is convictions. We don't produce good statistics."*

This dislocation of child protection work from the mainstream drive to improve detection rates was recognised to be potentially a significant problem, not only for the seriousness with which these crimes are perceived, but also in the longer term for resource allocations. If performance measurement of this kind continues to be the model for resource allocation, it was feared that child sexual abuse may not fare well in the competition for resources.

*Peers* Whilst relationships with individual detectives and uniform officers were described as good, and improving all the time, lack of clarity and, again, ambivalence were described as the main characteristic of the attitudes of peers to child protection units. On the one hand, for example,

*"CID are thankful that someone will take this on board"*

but at the same time, other colleagues expressed the view that

*"I don't know how you can do this work".*

The Working Group felt that investigations of child sexual abuse are frequently not regarded as 'real' detective work, and as a consequence, units in most of the areas have difficulty in recruitment, although in two areas, applications have increased recently and the units were increasingly being seen "as the place to be", particularly for detective constables seeking a career pathway to promotion. However, this situation was not the norm.

*"We're seen as a kind of knitting circle."*

*"Unofficially, we're the Mickey Mouse Squad."*

*A "force" culture or a "service" culture?* Different areas were reported to be moving at

different speeds towards the abandonment of the title "police force" and the adoption of a police *service* title and orientation. Whilst this transition is by no means complete even in those areas whose mission this has become, it was felt such a change is potentially supportive of child protection work. Not only is a service culture closer to the orientation of child protection officers on the ground, but also, in the development of child abuse work, the units have had to grapple with many of the issues (eg. outreach work, multi-agency liaison, partnership approaches) which a service culture emphasises. Child protection units, therefore, have considerable experience and learning to offer other kinds of police work as they move toward this different model.

***Implications*** Culture and attitudes were seen as fundamental to the lack of progress within police forces in accepting child sexual abuse as a serious crime and in recognising skills and knowledge required to deal with demanding and often complex cases of sexual abuse and work on a daily basis with other agencies. The Working Group felt that police forces need to:

- ensure more attention is given by senior managers to child protection work in general and child sexual abuse investigation in particular;
- ensure that senior managers have not only management training but also child sexual abuse training and, where possible, experience;
- ensure that child protection is considered in strategic planning and represented at the strategic level;
- raise awareness of child sexual abuse as a serious crime, and the demands it makes in terms of policing, amongst all levels of police personnel including senior management;

In addition, units themselves, and their operational inspectors if they have them, should consider formulating a strategic plan for future development and promoting discussion with senior officers.

## **Organisation**

A central problem for child abuse units is how to manage the dilemma of working very closely for operational purposes with outside agencies whilst at the same time remaining visible in the mainstream of police investigative work. Day-to-day child protection work tends to pull the units *away* from their police base. However, many of the issues which need to be addressed in the *development* of their work, require them to move closer to their colleagues and be embraced by their police forces. Indeed, this is also where police officers want to be and they are clear and determined that their role is that of police officer not surrogate social worker.

This problem is exacerbated by the lack of common boundaries between police districts and social services department divisional areas. Furthermore, some police forces were working with a multiplicity of social services departments. Whilst the problem of the Metropolitan Police in relating to over thirty Area Child Protection Committees was extreme, most police child abuse units had to work with at least two and up to ten local authority areas.

**Location** Organisation issues are also related to questions about the location of child abuse units. One police force has provided a converted sub police station for sole use by the CAU, with dedicated clerical support and fully equipped video interviewing and examination suite. The location is a pleasant, prosperous area, although the building is still clearly an ex-police station. Thus, although the facilities are good, the unit is effectively detached from the rest of the police force at the operational level. Some units are housed in buildings separate from other sections of the police, although sometimes on the same site. Video suites are often located in NSPCC or other non-police premises and accessible to all agencies. Other units are located in divisional bases or other shared buildings although most frequently on the top floor or at one end of a long corridor so that informal contact with colleagues is difficult. The complex issues involved in deciding upon location of units cannot be reduced to a single prescription which will be universally applicable. However, the issue of location must be given careful consideration and the conflicting imperatives of separation from or integration within existing police premises must be weighed in the light of the local context and available resources. The need to enable child protection officers to retain and develop contacts,

informal and formal, with other colleagues must be part of the equation.

**Tenure** Different forces have different policies regarding periods of tenure in the units, and sometimes different policies for different levels of staff. Unit managers are usually in post for 3 years, and in most, but not all, instances complete only one period of tenure. Thus, from the perspective of one relatively long-serving police constable:

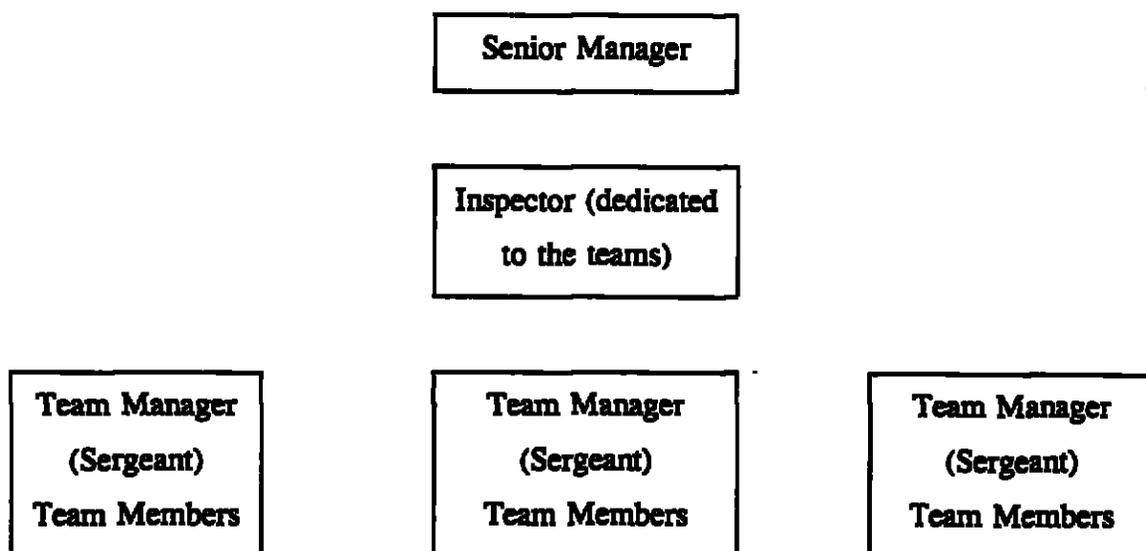
*"It's the revolving door. A new Sergeant comes, knows little about child abuse, reorganises the team, invents new systems, then goes somewhere else. The next one comes in, and we go through it all again. They're all trying to make a mark, I think, but whether it results in improving things, I don't know."*

Clearly, the period of tenure and the principle that managers move between different areas of work is potentially beneficial in disseminating experience and knowledge about child sexual abuse amongst managerial grades. However, in terms of the need to develop links with outside agencies, to gather sufficient knowledge and expertise to act as an ambassador for child abuse work *within* the police service, such short periods of tenure were regarded as counter-productive.

Similarly, for constable rank, whether detective or uniform, short periods of fixed tenure were not seen as conducive to the acquisition and development of the necessary knowledge, skills and multidisciplinary relationships upon which effective child protection policing depends. It is also counter-productive to the sharing and development of intelligence required in complex organised abuse. Most officers favoured a flexible period of tenure for both constables and team managers, with a 3 to 5 years initial period, followed by annual review.

**Management** There was a unanimous belief that team managers, middle managers and senior managers all need not only expertise and training in management but also a knowledge about child sex abuse.

The preferred structure for a child abuse unit was as follows:



This arrangement ensures that the separate teams are able to work together as a unit for policy and strategic purposes; supports unit managers more effectively; provides a visible and clear link with senior managers. At senior level, a designated superintendent with relevant experience and training was identified as another essential component of a more effective management structure.

**Work Rationalisation** The lack of clarity within police forces about the remit of CAUs, and the consequent inappropriate referrals of any incident with a 'family' or 'community' dimension, has already been noted. However, there are other kinds of cases which arguably ought to be part of the work of CAUs but which are frequently diverted into other parts of police forces by traditional organisational structures. In particular, sexual abuse by strangers and organised paedophiles was undertaken by the Vice Squad or generic CID officers in nine of the ten forces. Furthermore, whilst specialist officers from the units might become involved in such cases, their involvement was not routine.

This is not only a concern because child protection procedures were not mobilised in such cases; it also prevents child abuse officers from gathering as complete a picture as possible about the level, nature and complexity of child sexual abuse activity in their localities. As we shall discuss more fully in section six, the modus operandi of persistent abusers cannot be neatly categorised: a particular individual may appear in cases involving paedophile rings,

as an apparently 'lone' perpetrator targeting vulnerable families, in a neighbourhood with offers of babysitting, or moving-in as cohabitee in a series of families. Thus, the organisational distinction between 'family' abuse on the one hand and 'stranger or organised' abuse on the other hand is not compatible with the *reality* of child sexual abuse and the behaviour of committed abusers. Therefore, consideration should be given to (i) the formal inclusion in the remit of CAUs all cases involving sexual abuse of children, and (ii) the means by which non-specialist officers can assist with the investigation of those large-scale cases in which more staff are needed than can be provided from the units. Child protection procedures should be mobilised in all cases of child sexual abuse.

***Detective or uniform?*** The range of practices of the different police forces in according detective status to the officers in the units has already been referred to. There are a number of complex organisational questions inherent in this issue which is further complicated by the fact that the broader context is also fluid: one of the ten police forces had recently abandoned the status of detective and removed the use of the title throughout all ranks and divisions.

However, in the other nine police forces, procedures for selection for detective training continue to exist. There was reported to be widespread ambivalence about the relevance of child abuse investigative work to other forms of detection and this had two consequences.

First, officers afforded temporary detective status whilst in the CAUs have to revert to uniform status at the end of their period of tenure. It was felt that this undermines their position whilst in the unit. A woman officer reported:

*"You ring up a colleague, say, in CID about a case and, you know, you say 'hello, this is WDC Smith' and they say 'Oh really? but you're not a real DC, are you'".*

Second, many officers have found that their experience in child abuse was not regarded as valid in the selection for detective training. Another officer, who had substantial experience as a uniform officer in both a division and a CAU, said:

*"I applied for aide-ship as a precursor to detective training. I scored highly, but I was refused on the grounds that I needed more relevant experience and should go*

*back on the beat before applying again. "*

**The Working Group recommended that, all police forces should consider whether anomalies and inequalities exist in relation to child protection officers, and rationalise their policies, criteria for selection and systems for training; senior officers involved in selection procedures should be given training in organisational policy, criteria and process of selection, and CAUs should more frequently be used as bases for aides and attachments for non-specialist officers.**

## 5. Training

There was an unanimous view that training at all levels for officers policing child sexual abuse is inadequate both in terms of quality and quantity.

*"We don't get the training that a police constable would get, say for dealing with robbery. And yet more responsibility is passed down to us".*

*"The training is poor quality and not specific enough. For example, there is nothing on interviewing children."*

Furthermore, child protection police officers believed that generally throughout all the agencies involved in child protection, insufficient priority is given to both profession-specific and multi-disciplinary training, and that the lack of specialist training for some agents within the system, notably barristers and judges, is having a significant impact on the process and outcome of cases of child sexual abuse within the criminal justice system.

### Training for police officers

Overall, police officers felt ill-equipped to deal effectively with some aspects of child protection work and in particular cases of sexual abuse. They identified priority training needs in three areas: knowledge; skills; current, policing developments.

**Knowledge** There were three main gaps in what was regarded as essential knowledge for specialist child abuse officers and these related to victims and perpetrators: knowledge about child development; perpetrators and their behaviour; types of complex or organised cases and how to manage them.

Officers felt that they needed training in all aspects of child development: developmental milestones; the 'normal' range of competencies of children at different ages; physical, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, moral and sexual development in non-traumatised children;

the impact of trauma on children at different ages; the impact of deprivations of different kinds, separation and loss on children of different ages; knowledge about disability and special needs including educational needs; knowledge about child-rearing and family practices in minority ethnic cultures.

Police officers also felt they had little systematic or reliable knowledge about perpetrators other than 'practice wisdom' developed through experience and which, they conceded, would be, at best, partial and impressionistic and, at worst, may be inaccurate. Information about the social and other characteristics of convicted perpetrators was identified as necessary but not sufficient baseline data, given the very small proportion of perpetrators who are convicted. Indeed, police officers themselves recognised that perpetrators come from all social classes and backgrounds, although there may be a tendency for, say, middle class professional abusers to have different routes of access to children and therefore associated with different types of sexual abuse cases. Exploration of the knowledge available about different personality types, different social classes or employment/professional background and the association of these characteristics with different types of cases was identified as important.

The techniques used by individual perpetrators to target, access, groom and silence children for sexual abuse was also regarded as essential knowledge, which should be acquired in a more systematic way through training. Officers need a better understanding of the strategies used by perpetrators to avoid accepting responsibility for their behaviour, for example, denial, fantasy or attributing adult status to the child.

Finally, there is a need for more training on the types of complex or organised sexual abuse cases which have come to light, and how they have been managed in large-scale multidisciplinary operations. The Obscene Publication Squad, for example, has a wealth of knowledge and experience about how paedophiles network together, the diverse activities in which they are involved, the coded names they use to communicate with each other, and how these systems can be policed effectively. Furthermore, many police forces have mounted investigations into complex sexual abuse cases which are either large scale or have a high profile for some other reason. However, the knowledge and experience gained through these

operations is not generally disseminated throughout police forces, largely because no coordinated training or national conference mechanism, which could be the vehicle for sharing such knowledge, exists for child protection police officers.

**Skills** Interviewing and investigative skills were the two priorities identified by the Working Group. Skills in interviewing children of different ages, with different levels of ability or disability was regarded as paramount, especially in view of perceptions within most police forces that this work does not demand very high degrees of skill and that officers, particularly women, can be assumed to be able to conduct such interviews without training. It was also felt that the skills training ought to be firmly rooted in a knowledge base about child development, and therefore, that training should help them to apply communication and interview skills appropriate to the age and stage of development of different children. As with their comments about knowledge of child-development, officers wanted this skill training to be child-focused and felt that it should help them to balance more effectively the competing demands of meeting the child's needs whilst not compromising the evidential validity of the investigative interview.

The single most challenging aspect of investigations and that for which most officers felt least equipped was the interviewing of suspected perpetrators. There was general agreement that interviewing people suspected of child sexual abuse presented special difficulties which general interviewing techniques did not address. A sexual crime against a child is probably *one of the most difficult actions to admit in view of the stigma attached and likely sentence outcome*. Therefore, the suspected perpetrator has, at the outset, two very powerful reasons for continuing to deny guilt. Moreover, it is likely that some perpetrators actually attribute blame to the child and have other similar psychological defences which protect them from feeling, acknowledging and thus admitting guilt.

Whilst there is little published material available for this kind of interview training, and certainly very little which has been professionally validated, there is an urgent and growing demand amongst child protection police officers that training in the interviewing of suspected perpetrators of sexual abuse is an immediate priority. Those officers who had attended workshops given by people experienced in working therapeutically with abusers

reported a dramatic improvement when the techniques advocated were applied in their own cases. However, whilst it is clear that some training of this kind must be developed, it is important that its underlying principles and theoretical basis are made explicit and that its outcomes are evaluated systematically. It is also imperative that the skills and techniques developed are consistent with PACE/Codes of Practice.

In addition to interviewing, officers felt that many had insufficient training in investigation skills. Not only did they feel that their own professional standards would be improved by investigative training, but also that an understanding of the established principles, procedures and good practices of investigative work would also enhance the quality and thoroughness of child sexual abuse investigations generally. Officers complained that CAUs are usually by-passed for training in skills, techniques or the use of resources designed to improve investigation. For example, the use of information technology in the policing of child sexual abuse is rudimentary and restricted largely to the collation of statistics, rather than to intelligence. Most officers felt that basic investigative training should be given to all child protection officers and the importance of standard procedures, such as house searches, may then be more readily appreciated and routinely applied.

*Current developments* Whilst arguing the need for specialist training, officers also felt that training in new developments is too frequently assumed to be irrelevant to child abuse and that therefore they are excluded from initiatives designed to disseminate new practices, research information or improve policing. For example, crime prevention strategies, intelligence work, and evaluation of general interviewing techniques are all topics which have received attention in police forces and the Home Office. Training has been developed but not offered to child protection officers or managers. The acceptance of the role of training in developing new practice in some areas of policing such as drugs or fraud, is in sharp contrast with the experience of child protection officers, who feel that the potential of new developments to be applied to child abuse policing through training is not being realised to the extent it might be.

## **Multidisciplinary training**

Whilst the Working Group identified the current deficiencies in training which affect their role in child protection, they also identified the need to develop multidisciplinary training in order to:

- ensure that everyone working in child protection has a minimal standard of knowledge and skill, and
- enable practitioners in different agencies at local level to develop and sustain links, and establish a forum for continuing discussions about policy and practice.

There was considerable support for a national standard of accredited training to be developed and for this training to be a prerequisite for any person employed in the investigation and prosecution of child sexual abuse cases.

*"There should be a national standard of training to accreditation level for all those involved in child protection, from social workers, police constables through to solicitors, barristers and judges."*

Accreditation through training defined at a national level should, however, be delivered locally and could consist of a package including both profession-specific and multidisciplinary modules. The content of the core multi-disciplinary modules should include child development; the forms and types of sexual abuse; the impact of trauma on children; information about the different agencies involved in child protection; the policies and procedures of 'Working Together'; the Memorandum of Good Practice and the local Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC). Professionals who had received such training would then be 'approved' to work in child protection cases and only approved professionals would be allowed to do so.

Over and above a nationally-defined minimum standard of accredited training, police officers called for multidisciplinary training at local level. Whilst some of the ten police forces

engaged in such training, it is not frequent and generally does not include CPS, barristers, judges or medical professionals. In one area, an informal gathering incorporating all these groups has been held and it was hoped this will lead to the organisation of a multi-agency forum to discuss cases, policy and practice issues. However, a major obstacle to the establishment of such a forum in some areas is the lack of common boundaries between police, social service and petty sessional divisions. Nonetheless, it was considered that ACPC should consider the means by which a regular multi-disciplinary forum can be established and how the membership of such a forum can be extended to include legal and judicial representatives.

## **6. Criminal Investigations**

It has been stressed earlier in this report that CAUs are still in their infancy and that in dealing with the massive changes expected of them, today's police forces are still struggling both in terms of an appropriate professional culture and in prioritising goals and crime targets.

The Working Group identified a number of key issues which must be addressed. However, it was with the investigation and prosecution of perpetrators that front line officers and their immediate managers were most frustrated and it is here that radical improvements must come if further real progress in child protection is to be achieved. The low rate of conviction was identified as the key priority to be addressed.

An effective child protection system should consist not only of child rescue but also perpetrator detection and prosecution. The rescue and protection of children at the centre of allegations of sexual abuse has improved considerably with joint working arrangements. However, prevention of further abuse of the child population also depends in part upon the successful investigation, detection and prosecution of offenders. The frustration reported by the Working Group was generated by the feeling that it is the bigger, complex and often very serious cases which, despite sustained police work, never reach court. Major weaknesses in the current systems were reported and a number of specific issues relevant to criminal investigations were identified:

- use of intelligence
- tracking methods
- methods of investigation
- complex operations

### **Intelligence**

There was agreement in the Working Group that an effective intelligence system is urgently needed at local and national levels. Each of the ten forces had developed its own card index system, cross-referencing victims and suspected or convicted perpetrators. However, these

systems are incomplete, haphazard, inaccessible and not amenable to the manipulation of data. In most of the police forces, the data protection officer does not allow details of unconvicted suspects to be stored on computer on the grounds that this practice would contravene the Data Protection Act. It is also common policy for all information to be deleted after a set period, usually a year, if no further entries on a particular individual had been made. Thus, the way information technology is applied in most police forces is of little use to the development of an intelligence system in child sex abuse, because a system based only on convicted individuals would include a very small proportion of actual offenders and because some perpetrators continue to offend for very long periods of time.

Existing national systems were deemed ineffectual:<sup>3</sup>

*"NCIS is a waste of time. We need a proper national intelligence system to assist in tracking paedophiles".*

*"The Paedophile Index? Where is it? Can someone give me the phone number?"*

*"You can sometimes get through to PI, but you can never get anything out."*

Previous research has demonstrated not only that organised abuse is much more widespread than hitherto assumed, but also that the organised nature of many cases can be obscured by the fact that agencies are structured to respond on a 'case by case' basis (Gallagher, Hughes and Parker, 1994b). This means that the connections *between* cases, perhaps appearing in different localities or at different times, pass unrecognised in the absence of any efficient means of noting that, for example, the same perpetrator(s) or the same victim(s) are involved. The noting of connections depends currently on vigilant and long-serving officers keeping the information in the ubiquitous 'miscellaneous file' or in their heads.

Advice from the Data Protection Registrar given at the Conference suggested that the

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<sup>3</sup> Information made available to the authors during the drafting of the report suggests that NCIS is aware of some of these criticisms and of the fact that police officers are unaware of the services it offers. NCIS was also said to be in the process of developing explicit Service Level Agreements with ACPO as well as introducing a new computer system - ALERT - specifically designed for criminal intelligence systems.

requirements of the Data Protection Act need not be an impediment to the development of intelligence systems in child abuse (Data Protection Act, 1984). The key principles state that:-

- i. The information to be contained in personal data shall be obtained, and personal data shall be processed, fairly and lawfully.
- ii. Personal data shall be held only for one or more specified and lawful purposes.
- iii. Personal data held for any purpose or purposes shall not be used or disclosed in any manner incompatible with that purpose or those purposes.
- iv. Personal data held for any purpose or purposes shall be adequate, relevant and not excessive in relation to that purpose or those purposes.
- v. Personal data shall be accurate, and where necessary, kept to date.
- vi. Personal data held for any purpose or purposes shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose or those purposes.
- vii. An individual shall be entitled -
  - (a) at reasonable intervals and without undue delay or expense-
    - (i) to be informed by any Data User whether he holds personal data of which that individual is the subject;
    - (ii) to have access to any such data held by a Data User; and
  - (b) where appropriate to have such data corrected or erased.
- viii. Appropriate security measures shall be taken against unauthorised access to, or alteration, disclosure or destruction of, personal data and against accidental loss or destruction of personal data.

Thus, the code of practice developed by police forces need not have a fixed period of time for deletion. The key issue is that information stored is reviewed and a decision made as to its continued necessity. The problem identified by the Registrar is that, in resource and

professional terms, it is easier to institute a fixed period for deletion rather than trawl all data and make a qualitative and justifiable decision in each case.

Child abuse officers identified criteria which an intelligence system must fulfil if it is to be an effective aid to policing child sex abuse:

- a locally and nationally linked network
- *interaction between intelligence and other computer systems: crime recording, custody and arrests*
- accessible to all police officers and other specified child protection users
- inputs by all agencies via the police
- part of a wider intelligence system, preferably, so that links between sex offences and drugs, alcohol, violent offences can be seen
- should include
  - victim/complainant
  - family members
  - associates
  - offenders
  - suspects
- should include dates of birth, addresses, occupations
- for suspects/offenders, should include status, description, modus operandi, areas frequented, links with other known suspects/offenders
- suspects/offenders should be "starred" on other databases so that whenever their name is retrieved on any matter, they are identified as a child sex abuse suspect.

The storage of information about unconvicted child abuse suspects clearly raises serious issues. On the one hand, the civil liberty rights for people suspected of and/or investigated but not convicted of sexual offences against children cannot be lightly dismissed. On the other hand, the extremely low rate of convictions of suspects and the issues which arise from the dependence on children's evidence in these cases raise special and particular questions which must be considered. The use of intelligence on suspects is an accepted part of police practice for other crimes, especially when people operate in networks or with a degree of organisation, and the application of such methods to identify and investigate organised sexual

abuse is essential.

The Data Protection Registrar reported that they are working with a police force to address some of these problems and establish a comprehensive data system specifically for child abuse cases. It is imperative that the results of this project are widely disseminated and discussed. The Working Group recognised that setting up such a system would be a challenging task, although it was felt that there were no intrinsically unsurmountable problems. Several police forces were already creating such systems, in some cases in conjunction with social services, probation and health. As these local initiatives evolve much will be learnt about how to proceed nationally.

### **Tracking**

A more specific problem involves the difficulty in tracking Schedule 1 offenders who have committed child sex abuse. Currently, the system is haphazard and it is very easy for offenders to become invisible. Probation services operate in different areas information systems with varying degrees of rigour and cooperation: effectiveness often depends not upon clear policy and procedure but on the good will of individual police and probation officers.

Even if local systems are effective in sharing information about the arrival of a Schedule 1 offender in the locality, there are no clear systems for tracking the individual and monitoring his movements. The information as to whereabouts is rarely updated and, if it exists at all, often consists of a box file of outdated letters at the back of a filing cabinet. And yet tracking Schedule 1 child sex abusers would be an effective means of trying to prevent further abuse, given the frequency with which they appear in subsequent allegations. It is not uncommon for such an offender to appear as a cohabitee in a series of families over a period of time, targeting a vulnerable single parent, moving in and allegedly abusing the children, before leaving and repeating the process elsewhere. In many such cases there is judged insufficient evidence to prosecute or the children are very young and deemed as unreliable witnesses. If convicted offenders know that an effective tracking system was in operation they may be deterred.

## **Methods of investigation**

Some officers believed that routine investigation methods are often not employed in child sex abuse cases and that, as a result, other sources of evidence or information are lost. For example, some of the units routinely search a suspect's residence whilst others do not. It was reported that, in many instances, house searches yield important evidence either for the case in question or of other related offences such as the finding of child pornography. Indeed, paedophiles are known to have elaborate methods of hiding such material and the Obscene Publication Squad has developed specially-trained search teams whose experience enables them to retrieve material which non-specialist searchers may not find. Surveillance of suspects was also identified as important although often staff resources are insufficient to allow the deployment of surveillance operations in most cases where it would be applicable.

## **Complex Operations**

Organised child sexual abuse encompasses a wide range of types of cases. They may focus upon a school or residential establishment; involve a teacher, church worker, peripatetic music teacher, scoutmaster or youth leader; be concentrated on a neighbourhood and involve many children; feature a paedophile network; demonstrate characteristics of ritual; involve allegations against high-status or influential people.

These cases are characterised by a level of complexity which demands systematic, rigorous investigative procedures and techniques. Even family-based organised abuse presents particular challenges, may involve significant numbers of children and be compounded by the close relationship between the perpetrators and victims. Thus, at the start of an investigation, police officers do not know the boundaries of the case with which they are dealing and cannot predict how far those boundaries may extend as the investigation proceeds. Many officers felt that the lack of investigative resources resulted in their inability to pursue all possible leads and that, therefore, the boundary of complex cases was often not reached before the investigation was closed down.

## **7. Dysfunctions in the Multi-agency System**

Child protection police officers also reflected upon the ways in which other elements in the child protection and criminal justice systems impacted upon their investigative work and identified a number of key deficiencies in current policy and practice. Once again, the overall concern was to improve the way in which the systems responded to both victims and perpetrators and, in particular, to increase the extent to which perpetrators are successfully prosecuted. The key issues arose in relation to social services departments; medical services, and the criminal justice system. Before identifying the agency-specific changes required, it is worth restating two points upon which there was unanimous agreement:

- overall, inter-agency work has improved considerably and most officers reported good local relationships between agencies and between individual practitioners;
- there remains an urgent need for multi-disciplinary training and for multi-disciplinary opportunities to discuss practice, policy, procedure and to address local problems. ACPCs are not fulfilling this role adequately and, indeed, there is a need for a more informal layer of inter-professional discussion.

### **Social services**

Almost all ten police forces reported problems with joint video interviewing and claimed that there appears to be a noticeable reluctance on the part of social workers to do video work. In a number of areas social workers were reported to engage in some video interviews but generally the police considered they did significantly more recordings than social workers.

*"Social services need to engage in more video interviews."*

*"Social workers seem reluctant to do the videos, They avoid it if they can, and yet they're the ones who've had training for this".*

The lack of co-terminosity between social services and police areas together with the lack of

consistency between the guidelines and procedures of different ACPCs created major organisational problems for most of the police forces. The magnitude of the problems increased with the number of ACPCs and social service departments with which any one force had to relate, but all ten reported significant organisational difficulties. The suggestion by some officers that child protection services should be based on police geographical areas did not appear to be feasible and would probably do little more than relocate the problems within social services departments. A proposal that local ACPC guidelines should be replaced by national guidelines may have more potential for addressing these cross-boundary problems.

Most of the police forces argued that the internal arrangements for child protection work within social services teams were not conducive to the development and maintenance of good practice and the inter-professional relationships upon which this depends. The use of generic 'child and family workers' in area teams rather than specialist child protection teams results in many different individual social workers being involved in different cases. Police officers would prefer links with a smaller number of dedicated child protection specialists and argued that this arrangement would also lead to better and more consistent practice.

### **Medical services**

Police officers identified significant problems resulting from either the poor working relationship between paediatricians and police surgeons and/or lack of specialist paediatric training amongst police surgeons. In one area, two paediatricians experienced in investigating child sexual abuse have initiated regular meetings with police surgeons as a means of forming better relationships and practice. Whilst most of the others felt that such developments are to be welcomed, they did not consider this alone would improve the quality of medical examinations or the provision of expert evidence. They recommended for every ACPC a system of 24 hour cover by forensically trained paediatricians.

## **The criminal justice system**

There was unanimous criticism amongst the ten forces of the criminal justice system for the way it has responded to and processed child sex abuse cases. The entire system was regarded as unsympathetic to the needs and abilities of child victims generally, and traumatised children in particular, and as a result was regarded as heavily weighted in favour of perpetrators. The adversarial nature of proceedings was heavily criticised and many officers believed that the time had come for a radical reappraisal of the suitability of the courts and current legal and judicial systems for these cases. They argued instead for a family court system, inquisitional rather than adversarial, and in which the burden of proof was based upon the 'balance of probabilities' not 'beyond all reasonable doubt'. The workings of the present system present a number of obstacles to the prosecution of child sex abuse cases:

- the setting is hostile to a child's evidence, particularly when the evidence concerns an emotionally disturbing experience;
- subjecting a child's evidence to cross-examination by a barrister is not a fair way to test the child;
- the difficulties created by the system are not restricted to the procedures or the court room, but are found in the attitudes and practices of some of the major stakeholders in the system;
- the difficulties influence not only the outcome of cases which go to court, but in particular the decisions about which cases will be prosecuted. This is the major reason why so few cases are allowed to go to court;
- the long delays in the system undermine the evidence of children, especially young children.

**Judges** A significant problem within the criminal justice system and its handling of child sex abuse was seen to rest with judges and their attitudes, practices and lack of knowledge about children and the issues inherent in sex abuse cases.

*"The problem is the judges. Not the CPS, not the kids, not the police, but judges."*

*"The big bugbear is the judicial response."*

Examples were cited of the insensitive behaviour of individual judges and the lack of understanding they displayed. There was a general agreement that very few judges are sufficiently knowledgeable to preside over child sex abuse cases at the moment, and it was felt that only specially trained judges should hear such cases. The lack of knowledge revealed itself in many practices which officers felt to be disadvantageous to children. For example, in one area judges are now demanding a competency test, consisting of a full psychological profile, be submitted on all children under six years of age. Police officers are attempting to challenge this practice through the CPS. In other areas, the demands of judges for editing of video interviews, and the reasons which lay behind these demands, are also causing problems.

In all areas, judges were seen as a principal source of delay which characterised so many of the cases which were prosecuted. Despite attempts in some areas to experiment with 'fast tracking' of selected cases via pre-trial reviews, this has not always resulted in cases being heard more quickly:

*"It sometimes worked out slower than the ordinary systems".*

The apparent lack of understanding by judges of the impact of long delays and successive demands on children and their ability to give evidence was a common complaint.

***Barristers and solicitors*** Similar complaints were made about barristers as were made about judges: their lack of knowledge and awareness about children and child sex abuse.

Crown prosecution solicitors who have developed a specific interest in sex abuse cases were reported to be helpful and effective. However, as an agency, CPS was perceived not to "understand child protection issues". The main complaint concerned the small number of cases which CPS selected for prosecution and disagreements with decisions not to prosecute. There was a call for greater openness and clarity from CPS about the criteria upon which decisions to prosecute are made.

Overall, it was recommended that, if further progress is to be made in protecting children, attention must now be paid to the specialist training in child protection needed by judges, barristers and solicitors.

Furthermore, it was argued that judges, barristers and solicitors should specialise in child protection cases, and child sex abuse in particular, and that a minimum standard of nationally accredited training should be a prerequisite to practice in such cases. Preferably, dedicated judges, barristers and CPS solicitors should be appointed as part of child protection arrangements.

**Video interviews** The implementation of new procedures for the use of video-recorded evidential interviews in the Criminal Justice Act (1991) has, according to the Working Group, produced a crisis. There now appears to be considerable reluctance on the part of judges to allow video interviews to be used:

*"Crown courts are just not accepting videos".*

Videos were reportedly used in court to different degrees in different areas although most reported that the onus is on the police and CPS to prove the necessity of the video, rather than the courts accepting video interviews routinely. In one area, the police could not recall a video interview ever having been used. Clearly, this is a situation of considerable conflict and confusion. Video interviews were introduced to alleviate pressures on children. Police and social services officers go to considerable efforts to produce videos in line with guidelines and the Memorandum of Good Practice, but the videos are not being used in court. The role of judges and some barristers in limiting the use of video interviews in court needs urgent examination.

Several factors appear to be at work in producing this dysfunction. Firstly, the quality of the playback is impaired and this was said by these officers to be due to the lack of compatibility between recording equipment in video suites and playback facilities in the Courts. However, subsequent research has suggested that technical training to police and social services interviewers would overcome some of the problems which result in poor quality recordings (Davies et al, 1995)

A second reason for the failure to use videos is the perception amongst prosecution barristers that the jury will realise more fully the seriousness of the crime if they see a young child before them, preferably one who is tearful and vulnerable. The subjection of children to this ordeal in the courtroom, when video interviews were introduced primarily to spare children, appears to be wholly questionable and this practice also needs to be examined.

Thirdly, in many areas judges demanded transcripts of the interviews and this was leading, it was feared, to further reduction of the use of the video itself in court. Furthermore, the resource implications for the police in producing transcripts were considerable. However, one police force routinely makes transcripts of all video interviews and felt it was in their own interests to do so.

Finally even when videos were allowed judges were increasingly insisting that they are edited on the grounds that the interviews were too long to expect a jury to sit through them. This raises the question, once again, as to how far judges really understand the way in which children communicate and the conditions necessary to facilitate interviews with sexually abused children.

*Memorandum of Good Practice.* The Working Group argued that the conditions imposed by the Memorandum on the interviewing of children are restrictive and do not relate to the way in which children tend to reveal what has happened to them particularly when those experiences have been abusive and involve sexual activity.

*"The memorandum needs rewriting".*

Whilst officers fully appreciated the need to preserve the evidential quality of interviews as far as possible, in practice they find that emphasis on standardised procedures and limited length and numbers of interviews is, in fact, protecting offenders by making it more difficult for children to disclose.

*"The memorandum has become a paedophile's charter and that's something on which everyone in the police and social services agree".*

In addition to the prescriptions within the memorandum, the Working Group also reported contradictory messages from other agents within the system about how interviews, particularly video interviews, should be conducted. Crown prosecution solicitors in some areas are pressing for close-ups of the child's face, in the hope that the jury might see some emotion or perceive the child as inherently believable. However, prosecution barristers and judges prefer the whole room shown to ensure that no-one was out-of-camera, coaxing the child.

## **8. The Future Agenda**

The development of an effective multidisciplinary child protection system has arguably reached its first milestone: the more effective working together of agencies to protect children once abuse has been alleged. Whilst not all children are adequately protected on all occasions, the framework for joint work is now firmly in place, liaison and multidisciplinary practice has improved and there is genuine commitment amongst the police and social services staff to continue to improve the system together.

The second phase of development crucially involves the police service if some of the next generation of challenges are to be addressed. These are:

- protecting children by detecting and prosecuting sex abusers;
- targeting offenders, as well as responding to victims;
- investigating organised or complex cases of child sex abuse, and
- integrating the criminal justice system more effectively with the child protection system.

The Working Group concluded that perpetrator detection and focusing on offenders is essential if child protection is to be improved. This is justified for several reasons: as an important crime reduction measure; as a form of deterrence; because children's evidence will always be vulnerable and therefore other sources of evidence are required. However, the Working Group posed three questions:

1. Who is thinking about the *next* five years?
2. Who is thinking *strategically* about where child protection needs to go?
3. Who is thinking about the *future development* of CAUs and police child abuse work?

In short, *"We need to do more than simply keeping the wheel from coming off"*.

*"We have to move from being a reactive service to a proactive policing service in relation to child sex abuse, or we're not even beginning to find the scale of problem"*.

Officers participating in this project have identified a number of key priorities which the report has discussed. This section summarises the issues under three headings:

- *The Agenda for the police.*
- *The Agenda for the multi-agency system.*
- *The Agenda for research.*

#### **The Agenda for the police**

- i. **Strategic planning and development at police force, regional and national levels has to embrace child protection. Senior managers with training and experience in child protection have to be included on all the main crime committees. ACPO should establish a working group to review the policing of child abuse.**
- ii. **A 5-year strategic plan, with annual reviews, incorporating nationally agreed objectives focusing on the development of the criminal investigation of child sex abuse, should be agreed and implemented. At local level, the strategic plan for the police must integrate with overall multi-agency planning undertaken under the auspices of the Area Child Protection Committee,**
- iii. **Within police forces, consideration needs to be given to improving the status of child protection work. In particular, strategies to modify police culture, integrate units organisationally into the service, enhance the ability of units to recruit able detectives and to address gender issues need to be developed, taking account of the**

local context.

- iv. **Regional and national police conferences on child protection should be established.** It was noted earlier that three national conferences have taken place during 1994 and 1995. Regional meetings have since developed and could be used particularly to identify and share good practices. However, the extent to which child protection officers know about and have access to regional and national conferences should be examined.
- v. **Management structures should be reviewed, with the aim of providing organisational line management by child protection inspectors, with a direct line to a dedicated senior manager with responsibility for policy, strategic development and resourcing.**
- vi. **In service police training and local multidisciplinary training needs to be improved and should be delivered to senior managers as well as operational officers. The potential for developing national training at a Police College should be explored.**
- vii. **The sophistication of investigative methods deployed in child sex abuse work needs to be enhanced. In particular, a coordinated intelligence system, methods of tracking, methods of investigating complex cases must be developed and applied. Criminal investigation training should be given to all operational officers.**
- viii. **A national, accessible and effective database on paedophiles should be developed. Local intelligence systems should be established, compatible with each other and with a national database. Procedures for input, storage and retrieval of data should be clarified. The information technology requirements for such systems should be routinely considered by regional computer committees and at national level.**

#### **The Agenda for the multi-agency system**

- ix. **Consideration should be given to whether more standardised ACPC guidelines are feasible, to improve consistency across different areas.**

- x. **The Memorandum of Good Practice should be rewritten in the light of evaluation and review.**
- xi. **Appropriate training should be given to judges, barristers and solicitors.**
- xii. **Consideration should be given to the establishment of a nationally-accredited minimum standard of training to be defined as a prerequisite to practice for all professionals in child protection.**
- xiii. **Consideration should also be given to the appointment of dedicated judges, barristers and solicitors, including CPS solicitors, for child sex abuse cases. Social Services departments, which have not done so, should consider the establishment of dedicated child protection teams.**
- xiv. **In relation to the use of video interviews, consideration should be given to the introduction of the Pigot recommendations in full (Pigot, 1989).**
- xv. **The quality of video recordings must be more consistent. Whilst child protection officers felt the poor quality of a significant minority of recordings was due to the technical incompatibility of equipment in the recording suite and the court rooms, a subsequent study has suggested that problems are more often due to lack of technical expertise when recordings are made (eg sound levels set to the adult interviewer's voice rather than the child's) (Davies et al, 1995). Technical information and training to interviewers should be considered.**
- xvi. **The efficacy of pre-trial reviews and fast-tracking mechanisms should be evaluated and, where implemented, the outcomes monitored to ensure that the time taken for cases to come to trial is reduced.**
- xvii. **There should be improved opportunities for joint training - involving all professionals including legal and judicial personnel - and far more informal multidisciplinary discussion of local issues.**

**xviii. Consideration should be given to the establishment of family courts with an inquisitional rather than adversarial basis.**

### **The Agenda for research**

**xix. A number of the recommendations above require a research input to enhance development and revision:**

- **The memorandum of good practice.**
- **The use of video interviews.**
- **Pre-trial reviews and fast-tracking systems.**

**In addition, the Working Group identified some key areas for research, essential if the strategic development of child abuse police work is to proceed:**

**xx. Further development of knowledge about the types of sexual abuse, their characteristics and patterns.**

**xxi. Knowledge about perpetrators: their profiles, patterns of behaviour, patterns of offending over time.**

**xxii. Development and evaluation of techniques for interviewing suspects and perpetrators.**

**xxiii. Evaluation of the criteria used by CPS as they pertain to child abuse cases.**

**xxiv. Evaluation of techniques of criminal investigation employed by the police in child sex abuse cases.**

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