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Grappling with smoke: investigating and managing organised child sexual abuse: a good practice guide

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**NSPCC**

# Grappling with Smoke

Investigating and Managing  
Organised Child Sexual Abuse:

A Good Practice Guide

by Bernard Gallagher

**NSPCC**

**Policy Practice Research Series**

# Grappling with Smoke

Investigating and Managing  
Organised Child Sexual Abuse:

A Good Practice Guide

by **Bernard Gallagher**

## The author

**Bernard Gallagher** is a Senior Research Fellow in the School of Human and Health Sciences at the University of Huddersfield. He has been involved in child protection and child care research since 1987. His work includes major studies of organised abuse, stranger abuse and the attrition of child abuse cases in the criminal justice system. Before this he worked as a residential social worker in a number of children's home in the London area.

### The title

The title for this publication was inspired by a police officer who had led an investigation into what initially appeared to be abuse by a single abuser, but then came to involve a group of abusers living at one particular address. As the investigation progressed the case became increasingly complex, with a series of additional aspects to the case being uncovered, including children being involved in prostitution in another part of London; links with a 'paedophile ring' which had been the subject of a wholly separate inquiry; and reports that associates of the original abusers were planning to abduct, abuse and murder a child. A pattern was established whereby agency workers were never sure as to the nature or parameters of this ever expanding case. Asked to describe the investigation, the officer said it was like "grappling with smoke."

# NSPCC

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) is the UK's leading charity specialising in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children.

The NSPCC exists to prevent children from suffering abuse and is working for a future for children free from cruelty.

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# Foreword

It is difficult, if not impossible, to overestimate the damage and pain caused to children by organised abusers. In these situations children are treated by adults as objects to be abused, passed around and thrown away. Those investigating organised abuse must have empathy with the children concerned and an ability to understand what has happened to them. At the same time calmness is needed, and a rational and methodical approach in pursuing the investigation. It can be a lonely and demanding job. Clearly this is a considerable challenge and those who respond to it deserve our wholehearted support. Organised abusers are committed and determined to go on pursuing and abusing children. We must become more committed and determined to stop them. It is hoped that this Good Practice Guide will make a contribution towards ensuring those undertaking investigations are as knowledgeable and skilled as possible. It is intended to be a good practice guide for managers and practitioners who may for the first time be undertaking a complex investigation. Whatever stage your investigation is at you have both the NSPCC's, and my own personal, support for the important work you are undertaking on behalf of children.

**Jim Harding**  
Director and Chief Executive

# Acknowledgements

Throughout the course of this work I have received advice and support from an expert and committed steering committee. Each member of the committee contributed to the research not only through this collective forum but also on a one-to-one basis. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all the members of the committee.

I would like to single out John Griffin, from the NSPCC, for special mention. Besides chairing, and putting a great deal of work into the steering committee, he has undertaken a significant amount of liaison work with other agencies to ensure the smooth passage of the fieldwork and the widest possible dissemination of research findings. He has been a driving force and inspiration behind this project, and his personal support over the past 18 months has been extremely important to me.

I would also like to express my thanks to the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), and in particular Commander David Kendrick; the numerous London Social Service Departments which agreed to take part in the research; the NSPCC; Centrepont; Respond; and Streetwise Youth. It was only through the generous co-operation of these organisations that this research was made possible.

As with any research, the piloting stage was crucial. I was fortunate to be able to conduct preliminary interviews with a number of people who allowed me to benefit from their considerable knowledge and experience in the area of investigating and managing cases of organised child sexual abuse. I would then like to thank Maureen Carson (NSPCC), WPC Alison Mellor and PC Phil Simpson (MPS), and Joan Semenonoff (Croydon SSD).

Bruce Clark and Phillip Noyes (NSPCC) have read drafts of this document with great care and attention. Their detailed comments have added considerably to the document and were very much valued.

I would also like to thank the Economic and Social Research Council for their support during the completion of this work; and Eileen Fairweather, and Associated Newspapers, for access to their library.

My most sincere thanks must go to all the agency workers who took part in the postal questionnaire survey, the in-depth interviews, and the general interviews. The time and trouble they took, invariably within extremely demanding schedules, was very much appreciated. I am particularly indebted to all the police officers and social workers who took part in, what were usually, quite lengthy interviews. In the interests of confidentiality, individuals, agencies and areas, cannot be named but I would like them to know that I feel a considerable sense of gratitude towards them.

# Members of the Steering Committee

<b>John Griffin (Chairperson)</b>	NSPCC
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(\* Members of the Steering Committee for only part of the research)

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## Disclaimer

While acknowledging the invaluable support of the above persons, the author would like to stress that the views and opinions expressed in this work are ultimately his own and do not necessarily reflect those of any organisation, including the NSPCC, or individual participating in the research.

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# 1 Introduction

One of the most significant issues to confront child protection practice in recent years has been the emergence of large-scale, or 'organised', cases of child sexual abuse (CSA) involving multiple victims and/or multiple abusers. These cases present agencies with formidable challenges in, for example, the interviewing of victims, inter-agency working, and the prosecution of offenders. Agency workers seeking guidance as to how they should investigate and manage organised cases can refer to official publications, in particular, *Working Together* (Home Office, et al 1991), and the *Memorandum of Good Practice* (Home Office, and Department of Health, 1992). However, discussion within these publications of problems specific to organised cases is limited. Practitioners may also refer to reports on individual cases of organised abuse, such as *Castle Hill* (Brannan, Jones and Murch, 1993), and the *Newcastle nursery schools* (Hunt, 1994). It is not known, though, the extent to which it is possible to generalise from these cases.

In the absence of any detailed knowledge or understanding of these cases, and the particular difficulties they raise for practice, the NSPCC commissioned the author to carry out a study into organised child sexual abuse. The research consisted primarily of interviews with agency workers who had been involved in the investigation or management of this type of case. The research had two main aims: to highlight the ways in which organised cases differed from other CSA cases, in terms of their characteristics; and to identify good practice.

Once the fieldwork was completed, the advisory committee and author began discussions concerning dissemination of the research findings. It was a unanimous view that given the immediate relevance of much of the research to practice, the first 'product' from the research should be good practice guidance. Working in conjunction with the committee, the author went on to produce this document.

The guidance is informed by the agencies which participated in the research. These were primarily the police, social service departments, the NSPCC, and a small number of other voluntary organisations. While the research was unable to fully address issues which were pertinent to other agencies, such as probation, health and those involved in the judicial system, it was possible to gather some observations from these perspectives. These have been incorporated within the guidance, and it is hoped leads to it being a quite comprehensive document.

In terms of its format, the guidance is laid out as follows: firstly it examines the lessons for the investigation and management of cases for agencies in general. This section is relevant to police, social services and a range of other agencies such as the NSPCC. Following this, the guidance is organised according to the individual agency to which it applies. In each of these sections an attempt has been made to lay out the guidance in a manner which broadly corresponds to the chronological order and priorities of a child protection investigation. It is hoped that this structure will enhance the clarity of the guidance, make the document more readable and facilitate its use as a quick reference source.

A considerable amount of additional information has been gathered in the course of this research. This information relates to the characteristics of organised cases and their implications for policy, and it expands further upon their significance in respect of practice. Many of these messages are supported by direct quotes from agency workers who were interviewed in the course of the fieldwork. The steering committee believed that this material would be best disseminated in the form a book, which would be particularly valuable to those who wished to deepen their understanding of organised abuse. Work on this book is currently underway.

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# The research

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## Terminology

In the interests of brevity, it was decided to use the term 'child' to refer to both children and young people i.e. all persons under the age of 18 years. The term 'entrapment' is used in place of 'grooming', as it was felt that this latter term did not describe adequately the powerlessness and distress of a victim's situation. Where reference is made to 'parent/carer', this should be taken to mean protective parent/carer, unless stated otherwise. Again, the prefix being left off in the interest of brevity.

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## Definitions

For the purposes of this research, two main types of organised abuse case - multiple victim and multiple abuser - were identified, and the following working definitions used:

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### Multiple victim

A case where it is known or suspected that a single adult has abused two or more children from two or more families. Typically this would be a situation where an adult has abused a number of children belonging to the same peer group, or where an adult has abused children within an institution. (6 such cases featured in the in-depth agency worker interviews.)

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### Multiple abuser

A case where it is known or suspected that two or more adults have conspired together to bring about the sexual abuse of one or more children, and where at least one of the adults does not live with at least one of the children when the abuse occurs. (14 such cases featured in the in-depth interviews with agency workers.)

Organised cases may of course involve both multiple victims and multiple abusers. In fact, the existence of multiple victims is a very common feature of multiple abusers cases. All the multiple abuser cases studied in this research involved more than one victim.

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## Methodology

All the fieldwork for this research was carried out by the author in London in 1995 and 1996. It consisted of three stages:

1. A postal questionnaire survey

A short postal questionnaire was sent to all police child protection team (CPT) Detective Inspectors; social service department (SSD) Child Protection Co-ordinators; and selected NSPCC Project Managers in London between March and April 1996. Respondents were asked to complete one questionnaire for each case of organised abuse referred to them in 1995. The survey was designed to measure the incidence of known cases of organised CSA, and provide information on their basic characteristics, for example, the number of victims and abusers; agency involvement; and the setting in which the abuse took place. Details were obtained for some 51 cases.

## 2. Interviews with agency workers concerning the investigation and management of specific cases of organised abuse

By far the largest amount of information in the research was obtained via comprehensive and in-depth interviews, carried out with agency workers who had been involved in the investigation or management of organised cases. The main focus of the interview was on the special challenges which these cases presented to practice and the ways in which agencies had sought to overcome them. Interviews were carried out with 12 police officers from the rank of Detective Inspector to Constable (uniformed); 14 social services staff from Assistant Director to basic grade social worker; and 4 workers from voluntary agencies, including the NSPCC, ranging from the equivalent of team manager to child protection officer.

Agency workers were interviewed in connection with a total of 20 cases. All these cases had some link to London, either through victims, abusers or agencies. 18 were based largely or exclusively in London. A small number of cases had, to varying degrees, connections with other parts of the country, or abroad. In terms of their main 'presentation', the cases broke down as follows: 13 community-based cases (10 multiple abuser, and 3 lone abuser); 5 institution-based cases (2 multiple abuser, 3 lone abuser), and 2 family-based cases (both multiple abuser). Many of these cases had secondary aspects. For example, in a number of the community-based cases, abusers set up institutions for children or infiltrated families as another means of entrapping children. Therefore, it needs to be understood that this breakdown of cases is a very simplified reflection of the way in which abusers operated.

## 3. Interviews with agency workers concerning broader aspects of organised abuse

Interviews were carried out with two other groups of workers. The first of these comprised individuals who, because of their experience, had acquired specialist knowledge of organised abuse. The other group was made up of practitioners who were not involved in statutory child protection work but whose work with other vulnerable children and young people meant they could bring a valuable, broader perspective to the research. These representatives were drawn from the police, SSDs and voluntary organisations working with the homeless, runaways, sex workers and people with learning disabilities. Some 13 workers from 10 agencies in London were interviewed.

### **Applicability of guidance**

Virtually all of the agency workers interviewed for this study, and the cases they discussed, were based in London. As practice, and the nature of cases, may vary in different parts of the country, there is an issue as to the extent to which the findings from this research can be applied to areas outside London. In an earlier, national study of organised CSA cases (Gallagher, Hughes and Parker, 1996), the author found that such differences were not very significant. Therefore, this guidance should be broadly applicable throughout the United Kingdom, although agency workers will still need to consider its relevance in the light of local circumstances.

# 1 Placing organised cases in context

## Current practice

1.1 The research found much good practice around the investigation and management of cases. For example, workers generally demonstrated thorough planning; agencies worked well with one another; and victims were often well-supported, at least in the initial stages of an investigation. However, the research also identified many areas in which the handling of cases could be improved. This guidance seeks to share the good practice among agency workers and help them learn from any mistakes which may have been made.

## Responsibility

1.2 In some organised investigations, policing aspects may be very much to the fore as, for example, in the carrying out of covert intelligence gathering operations and the co-ordinated arrest and interviewing of large numbers of suspects. As a result, agencies, including police and social services, may not pay sufficient attention to child welfare issues. In addition, a view might come to prevail among these agencies that organised cases are predominantly a police matter. Such an interpretation would be incorrect, and could lead to the neglect of major social work elements of a case, such as the vulnerability of victims and parents/carers, and their need for support. Thus, this guidance is about **how**, rather than **whether**, police and social services should work together on organised cases.

## Victim vulnerability

1.3 One of the most striking features of organised abuse, especially community-based cases, is the extent to which abusers target vulnerable children. This vulnerability may be manifest in a number of ways, such as material disadvantage; previous abuse (whether physical, sexual or emotional) and neglect; or parents/carers who have their own acute personal and social needs. Agency workers were certain that abusers had targeted such children in the belief that they were more susceptible to abuse compared to their peers; less likely to disclose; and prone to greater difficulty at all stages of the criminal justice system. In addition, some victims had a history of being in trouble with 'authority' figures, particularly teachers and the police, whether through truancy or delinquency. This then made it even more difficult for them to engage with agencies.

## Settings

1.4 Organised cases occur in three main settings:

- Families - Abusers in these cases come from extended or neighbouring families, and join together to abuse one another's children.
- Communities - In these cases, abusers often have no particular or pre-existing relationship with their intended victims, but target, entrap and then abuse children in the community. Victims may be drawn from a specific neighbourhood or estate, or from across a wider area.
- Institutions - Where an adult, employed in the public, private or voluntary sector, abuses the children s/he works with.

In some of the organised cases studied in this research, perpetrators 'specialised' in the setting in which they abused children, whether this was the family, the community, or an institution. In other cases, abusers were known to have moved between a number of different settings. For example, one group of abusers began by entrapping single parents, moving in with them, and abusing their children. This setting was then used as a 'base' for entrapping other parents/carers in the community, and abusing their children. The abusers then went on to form their own institution for children in the area, thereby giving them access to yet more children. Organised cases may, in fact, comprise of any permutation of victim, abuser and setting. Furthermore, in any given case, victims and abusers may move, or be moved, between a number of different settings. It is important then that agency workers, when faced with a report of an organised case, retain an open mind as to the context(s) in which abuse may have taken place.

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### Broadening the focus of child protection

1.5 Child protection has, for some time, been dominated by a focus upon children in the context of the family. If agencies are to respond adequately to the challenge of organised abuse then they have to broaden their focus in order that they can address the needs of children from the full array of contexts in which they may be at risk, including communities and institutions. As well as being prepared to respond to this wider range of cases, they have to be ready for the special demands which arise from such investigations, and which are detailed in this guidance. These cases are also different in that some agencies, such as housing, may be more heavily involved in an investigation, than might arise in intra-familial abuse cases. Investigations may also involve agencies, such as private security firms, which would not otherwise be involved in child protection.

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### The significance of scale

1.6 It was clear from the interviews with agency workers that the scale of a case - in terms of the number of children or abusers it involved - was one of the most important factors in determining the extent of the challenge it posed. As the scale of a case increased, so did, for example, the demand upon resources; the number of agencies, agency workers and areas involved; and the level of co-ordination that was required. Where small organised cases might differ little from other CSA cases, in respect of their investigation and management, larger scale cases could test the ability of agencies quite severely.

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### Quantitative and qualitative differences

1.7 Organised cases are marked out from other CSA cases chiefly on the basis of scale. The **quantitative** differences might therefore include: the number of children who have to be interviewed; the number of suspects who have to be kept under surveillance, or have to be arrested and interviewed; the volume of information which flows into an investigation; and the amount of time spent on inter-agency liaison. While these and other quantitative issues are critical in the investigation and management of a case, it should be understood that organised cases are as significant for the **qualitative** differences which exist between them and other CSA cases. These may either be unique to organised cases, as in the need to trace and identify potential victims, or they may occur more frequently in organised cases, as might apply to factors such as the involvement of victims from vulnerable backgrounds; the use of targeting and entrapment by abusers; and the interest of the media in these cases

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### The incidence of organised abuse

1.8 The postal questionnaire survey carried out among police, social service departments and the NSPCC in London, as part of this research, found that there was an average of one investigation per local authority area per annum. This finding concurs closely with that of an earlier large-scale national study by the author which found that the average incidence of known cases of organised abuse in England and Wales was approximately two cases per local authority per annum (Gallagher, Parker and Hughes, 1996). However, this low incidence should not be taken as a reflection of the significance of organised abuse. Individual cases may place huge demands on agency resources. A single case might, for example, involve scores of victims and several abusers. Thus, in terms of workload alone, a single organised case can be the equivalent to a large number of other CSA cases.

## 2 Area Child Protection Committees (ACPC's)

### Remit

2.1 In the course of the research interviews, a number of agency workers stated that while some Social Service Departments saw extra-familial organised abuse as falling within their remit, others did not. ACPC's need to address this issue, both to ensure that a clear policy exists in their own area, and in order to ensure a uniform, appropriate response across different local authorities, especially those within the same police service area. In responding to organised cases occurring outside the family, it is imperative that agencies, including the police, are guided by the **needs** of the victim(s), rather than the **setting** or circumstances in which the abuse takes place.

### Inter-agency working

2.2 The ability of agencies, especially police and social services, to work together, is critical to the successful investigation and management of all cases of abuse, but is particularly pertinent to organised cases which are more likely to create tension between agencies. Therefore, it is vital that different agencies have a common understanding of the issues involved in organised abuse, and reach clear agreement as to how such cases are to be dealt with. ACPCs have an important role in facilitating this discussion and planning.

### Reporting abuse

2.3 The research included a number of cases where workers in children's institutions did not respond appropriately to allegations or concerns of abuse. In two cases, managers actively sought to 'cover-up' abuse after children had made disclosures. (In one of these cases a number of staff were subsequently prosecuted for their actions.) In two further cases, agency workers failed to take any action in the face of clear evidence of sexual abuse. Thus, ACPCs should ensure that all owners, managers, staff, placing authorities and regulation and inspection bodies involved with children's institutions are aware of their responsibility to identify and respond to concerns of child sexual abuse. ACPCs should ensure that this issue is at the forefront of their discussions; features in training programmes; and is emphasised in policy documents.

### Unilateral action

2.4 In the course of some organised investigations, police or social services may, for operational reasons, have to withhold information from agencies, such as education and health, or postpone interventions. This may lead to tension with agencies, particularly if they believe police or social services are not acting in the best interest of children and are not following established procedures. These agencies will be able to have more confidence in police and social services actions, the better the **on-going** relationship which already exists between them. ACPCs are well placed to foster these on-going relationships, and more specifically, may be able to resolve difficulties which might arise should police or social services depart from normal practice.



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### Attendance at meetings

2.5 Organised cases may be of concern to many different agencies and workers. Sometimes cases will involve agencies from a number of areas. As a result, the number of people attending meetings called to plan or discuss an investigation may be very large. This could have adverse consequences for both the effectiveness and the confidentiality of meetings. ACPCs should, through their inter-agency procedures and training programmes, ensure that agencies understand their role and responsibilities in respect of these meetings.

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### Ethnic minorities

2.6 There was evidence from three cases in the research which suggested that some abusers had targeted children because of their ethnic minority status (see 3.16). In light of this, ACPCs should make sure that prevention programmes adequately address the needs of children from ethnic minorities through, for example, the distribution of material using appropriate languages; the involvement of ethnic minorities in these initiatives; and practice which is sensitive to cultural factors.

## 3 Investigation and management

### Detection

#### Characteristics of detection

3.1 Agency workers stated that there were a number of features associated with organised cases which indicated that their detection (and subsequent investigation) was very challenging. These features - one or more of which was present in virtually every case studied - were as follows:

- Many cases were detected quite inadvertently. These 'inadvertent' means included: disputes between abusers, or between an abuser and a victim, which led the 'aggrieved' party to report the abuse in an act of revenge; different pieces of agency information which, when viewed separately, had appeared quite innocuous, but when put together (by chance, rather than design) raised major concerns; and disclosures by victims after they had been apprehended in the course of carrying out criminal acts (not related to child abuse). Very few cases were detected via a 'straightforward' report by a victim or any other witness.

- In several cases, agencies had been unable to trace or identify all the victims or abusers who were reported (usually by other victims) to have been involved in the case. This meant that they could not be interviewed and appropriate child protection and criminal justice procedures could not be instituted.

- Many cases were typified by a series of allegations or concerns, sometimes over several years, surrounding a number of children who were believed to be involved in a case.

#### Obstacles to detection

3.2 Agency workers identified a number of factors which accounted for the difficulties encountered in detecting and investigating organised cases, foremost among which were the pressures upon victims not to disclose (see 3.12) and the actions of abusers (see 4.3-4.4). Whilst acknowledging that these issues could arise in any abuse case, agency workers believed that they were far more likely to occur in organised cases. In view of these findings, agencies should implement measures to improve the detection and investigation of organised abuse in their area. This should include the greater use of proactive measures, such as specialist intelligence gathering techniques; the investment of adequate resources for the tracing and identification of victims and abusers; and the development of effective information systems (see 3.6).

#### The challenge of tracing and identification

3.3 The large majority of CSA cases involve a small, finite and identifiable group of children. In organised cases, the situation may be very different. Often, agencies will be concerned about a large but indeterminate number of children, many of whom will not have been identified at the outset of an investigation. For example, it may be that a group of perpetrators has abused children across an entire neighbourhood. Thus, one of the most significant challenges agencies may face in an organised case is the tracing and identification of all the children who have had contact with an abuser.

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### Tracing

3.4 Some agencies have embarked upon major, proactive victim/survivor tracing operations. Such exercises have usually been necessary when contact is sought with survivors many years after their abuse (in children's institutions) is suspected of having taken place. Sometimes, agencies have appointed workers whose main or sole responsibility is to find the current address of potential victims/survivors. Once an individual is traced, they are then visited by a member of the interview team. Agencies have used a variety of methods to make contact with potential victims/survivors, including accessing official records, newspaper adverts and helplines. Each of these has its strengths and weaknesses, and the optimum method(s) can be determined only after taking into account all relevant factors, such as the number of victims/survivors to be contacted; their likely geographical dispersion; the time-scale of the concern and current investigation; the nature of the concern; and levels of intrusiveness. These exercises are very resource intensive but they can provide an effective and - especially with the facility of follow-up visits - sensitive means of contacting individuals.

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### Identification

3.5 During the course of an investigation, agencies may uncover photographs belonging to an abuser which depict unknown children. These photographs may be pornographic, 'erotic', or give the appearance of being quite innocuous. In addition to its criminal justice value - providing, as it may, clear evidence of child sexual abuse - this material can have a further, though less well recognised, role in assisting in the identification of victims. In two of the cases which featured in the research, police and social services put together 'photograph albums' which they then showed to other agencies in their own area and to their opposite numbers in other areas, in an attempt to identify unknown children. In a third case, the police compiled and disseminated (within the police service) an album of photographs of alleged abusers whom they wished to identify. In a fourth case, agencies compiled a list of the names of a large number of children who had been mentioned in notebooks and diaries seized at the home of an abuser. They then shared these names with local schools in an attempt to trace and identify the children. These are innovative practices, and ones which must be used with sensitivity and discretion. If this can be assured, then these techniques stand to make a significant contribution to an investigation.

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### Routine information collation

3.6 The detection of a number of organised cases in this research resulted from the chance coming together, within agencies, of seemingly disparate, sometimes historical, pieces of information. One such case was uncovered following a casual meeting between two agency workers. In the course of a general discussion concerning their work, they became aware that each had concerns (in this case, surrounding a particular address) which they had been harbouring for some time, but which they believed to be isolated. After further conversation, it became clear that their concerns were linked - a discovery which led eventually to the detection of a major multiple abuser, community-based case. In the light of detections such as this, agencies should ensure that they have mechanisms in place for the systematic and centralised recording of comprehensive details concerning all reported or referred CSA cases. Such a data system should include the names of all known and suspected victims and abusers, and other significant persons; their aliases, dates of birth, addresses, and relevant lifestyle details; the abusers' *modus operandi*; and the locations where abuse is known or suspected to have taken place. Such information systems would increase considerably the chances of identifying links between pieces of information or cases which might otherwise go undetected. Naturally, computers offer an ideal means of storing such information for both police and social services, although constraints arising from the Data Protection Act have to be taken into account.

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## Case assessment

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### Inter-agency differences

3.7 It is important that both police officers and social workers strive to reach an objective assessment of a case in terms of its extent (the number of victims and/or abusers involved) and the quality of evidence; and have due regard to the evaluation by the other agency. Among the cases studied in this research there was a tendency for police officers to judge cases as involving fewer victims/abusers and poorer evidence; and a tendency for social workers to assume the opposite. (It is not possible within the confines of this research to generalise as to the accuracy of assessments by police officers or social workers). Sometimes agency workers interpreted the resultant discrepancy as being due to shortcomings in the other agency's practice. As assessment of a case has a major bearing upon agency response, accuracy is, in this respect, of the utmost importance. Incorrect assessments could, for example, result in the continued abuse of children, or conversely, unwarranted intrusions into people's lives. Furthermore, if agencies do reach different assessments then this may lead to tension between them and affect the commitment of workers to any subsequent investigation.

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### Uncertainty

3.8 Agency workers have to be prepared for a considerable amount of uncertainty as to the parameters of a case. This ambiguity may relate to many different aspects of a case but especially the number and identity of victims and abusers; the relationship between them; the settings in which the abuse has taken place; the nature of abusive acts; and the abusers' *modus operandi*. This uncertainty may persist throughout a large part, if not the whole, of an investigation.

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### Change

3.9 Related to the previous point, agency workers should be prepared to encounter a significant degree of change over the course of an investigation, especially in the factors specified above. Indeed, given the intricacy and extent of many organised cases, it is essential that agency workers retain an open mind as to how an investigation might develop.

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### Institutional abuse

3.10 Agency workers investigating allegations of abuse concerning one child in a institution will be aware of the need to consider the possibility that an abuser has been responsible for other victims in the same institution. However, agency workers need to recognise, and anticipate, a number of other respects in which a case may be more extensive than first reports indicate. These include:

- Other perpetrators in the institution who are acting alone, or in conjunction with the initial perpetrator, whether they are abusing the same or different children.
- Children who were abused in an institution they attended previously.
- Children who were abused in a perpetrator's previous place of employment.
- Other, non-abusing, members of staff may have actively sought to cover-up abuse to protect their own interests or those of the institution.
- Children's involvement in abusive roles.

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## Victims

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### The needs of victims

3.11 Agency workers felt that organised cases were much more likely to involve particularly vulnerable victims and, in extra-familial cases, vulnerable protective parents/carers, than were other cases of child sexual abuse. If the needs of these victims are to be met, then considerable investment is needed through both the welfare and criminal justice systems. This should include a thorough assessment of victims' needs. Agency workers also believed that family support could protect children by reducing the material and emotional needs which abusers often preyed upon.

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### Interviewing victims

3.12 The reticence of victims in disclosing sexual abuse is well documented. In organised cases there may be additional obstacles to disclosure by victims. These are described below. By understanding these factors, agency workers should be able to facilitate the process of disclosure. (Having said this, it is important that interviewers keep in mind the lessons of the Cleveland inquiry report (Butler-Sloss, 1988); in particular, that it should not be assumed a child has been abused; children should not be put under pressure during an interview; and use of the term 'disclosure' can be problematic.)

■ In multiple victim cases a group dynamic or mentality may emerge whereby disclosure is seen as the equivalent of 'grassing'. This peer-group pressure may act as a powerful deterrent to disclosure.

■ Where abuse occurs outside the family, victims very often receive inducements, whether legal, illicit or emotional (see 3.19). This may make them feel responsible for the abuse, and more fearful of being blamed for it. It is essential that agency workers do not, either through their behaviour or attitude, blame the victim. Furthermore, they should assure victims that they are not responsible for the abuse, and should encourage protective parents/carers not to blame their child. Organised cases occurring within the family, in common with other intra-familial cases, tend to be characterised far more by coercion than inducement.

■ Cases may involve victims from vulnerable backgrounds. A key aspect of this vulnerability may be a lack of adequate parental/carer support. In the absence of a 'safe' home environment, victims may be very reluctant to disclose. Not only may they fear being blamed by their parents/carers (as indicated above), they may also be anxious as to the effects of a disclosure upon a parent/carer with his/her own acute personal or social needs. With such a home environment, they may in addition, worry about not being protected from abusers who are at liberty, and be concerned about not being supported in the period running up to a criminal trial.

■ Victims may have 'recruited' other children on behalf of an abuser; exerted control over them; and possibly even have abused them. Some victims may be involved in other criminal acts (though usually of a less serious kind) or may have fallen foul of 'officialdom' in other ways, such as getting into trouble at school, truanting or being excluded. Thus, some victims in organised cases may feel quite estranged from and wary of 'authority figures'. They may decide not to co-operate with an agency investigation, even to the point of denying their own abuse. As these victims enter early adulthood their involvement in illegal and illicit activities may increase, thus making the chances that they will disclose even more remote.

■ Some victims in organised cases will question the value or purpose in disclosing their abuse. While they may recognise that abuse is wrong, they may be entrapped by the inducements provided by the abuser (see 3.19). Abusers invariably seek to target children for whom these specially designed inducements act as a powerful lure. Victims may find it very difficult to forego these inducements. This alone could provide a powerful disincentive to disclosing, but when placed in the context of victim's profound vulnerability, it may be overwhelming.

■ Victims involved in multiple abuser cases may experience considerable fear of retribution should they disclose. This fear may be particularly pronounced if a child is aware, prior to being interviewed, that not all the abusers in the case are in custody.

■ Victims in organised cases are often entrapped by their abuser. This tends to be a lengthy, incremental and highly manipulative process which is very effective in drawing in, disempowering, and ultimately silencing children.

■ The reticence a victim feels in disclosing against one family member or relative will be magnified in a family-based, multiple abuser case. A disclosure in this type of case often carries with it added trauma, with the victim feeling responsibility and guilt for the arrest, charging, trial or imprisonment of numerous family members, who may include parents, siblings, aunts/uncles, grandparents and in-laws. Apart from the added practical difficulty of finding a trustworthy person to whom to disclose, the emotional consequences of a disclosure may act as a considerable deterrent.

■ Many organised cases involve the abuse of boys by men. Often these victims are approaching or have reached adolescence when sexuality is a particularly sensitive issue. The fear that they might, as a result of their abuse, be thought of as 'gay' may be a further deterrent to disclosure.

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#### Interviewer reaction

3.13 While much child sexual abuse is deeply disturbing, organised cases are especially likely to include harrowing acts of abuse against children. The cases in the research included, for example, the production of pornography; abuse by multiple abusers on the same child simultaneously; the ingestion of excrement; torture and bestiality. Faced with such disclosures, interviewers may find it difficult to contain feelings of shock and disgust. However, this is something they must do, as these reactions may make a victim more self-conscious as to what it is s/he is saying, thereby discouraging further disclosure. It must be remembered that a victim may already have had to overcome a great deal of inhibition before s/he begins to disclose.

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#### Memorandum of Good Practice

3.14 The abuse experienced by victims in organised cases may be prolonged and extensive. They may, for example, have been targeted and entrapped over a lengthy period; been made to feature in child pornography; been abused by a number of perpetrators; and have been pressurised to recruit other victims. Given this history, agency workers may feel it necessary to exceed the Memorandum of Good Practice (Home Office and Department of Health, 1992) guidance concerning the number (only one) and duration (not longer than one hour) of interviews. This response is a legitimate one and should be considered. At the same time, agency workers should not embark upon such an action without first seeking the advice and guidance of legal staff, whether these are attached to their agency or are independent of it.

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### The nature of family-based abuse

3.15 Family-based, multiple abuser cases tend to be marked out by the severity and frequency of abuse, even when compared to other organised cases. Victims may suffer particularly serious sexual abuse. Many also experience physical and emotional abuse and acute neglect. In three of the cases studied in this research, the abuse was accompanied by other acts including torture, bestiality and the production of child pornography. In short, the behaviour of these abusers, many of whom are parents/carers to the victims in question, could only be described as sadistic. In these circumstances, children often have considerable treatment and support needs. It is imperative that agencies meet these needs. Furthermore, in family-based, multiple abuser cases, victims may disclose what appear to be quite bizarre activities. In such situations, agencies should retain an open mind and assess cases as objectively as possible rather than relying upon any pre-conceived ideas.

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### Ethnicity

3.16 Abusers in organised cases have a marked ability and inclination to manipulate any facet of a child's life so that they become more vulnerable to abuse. While this is seen most often in terms of material disadvantage and previous abuse or neglect, it can take a variety of forms, including ethnic minority status - as illustrated by one of the cases which featured in the in-depth interviews:

■ In this case, the abuser targeted parents/carers from ethnic minority backgrounds who needed help with official matters, such as immigration, and had a poor knowledge of the English language. The problems these parents/carers faced were compounded by material disadvantage. By offering 'assistance', for example in the completion of forms, and with transport, the abuser was able to ingratiate himself with parents/carers and gain significant access to their children whom he subsequently went on to abuse.

■ The abuser also manipulated the fact that, in the culture from which the families were drawn, anyone in a 'professional' occupation (such as himself) was held in high esteem. The abuser knew and relied upon the fact that victims would be very reticent about making allegations against such an individual.

Also, within this particular ethnic group, issues relating to sex tended to be a taboo subject and were consequently difficult to discuss. It was not known to what extent the abuser played upon this, but it certainly made the victims' task in disclosing, both to parents/carers and to agency workers, more difficult. In a second case, the abuser targeted and abused children from an ethnic minority group which was quite isolated from the wider community. Throughout the investigation victims exhibited a profound sense of mistrust towards, and ignorance of, 'officialdom' - in this case, agency workers involved in child protection. They believed, for example, that as their video interviews were being recorded, agency workers would arrange for their simultaneous broadcast on national television. Given this type of targeting, it is essential that agencies understand, and take into account, any cultural factors which may be relevant to the investigation and management of a case involving children and families from ethnic minority backgrounds.

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### Victim-abuser relationship

3.17 From evidence gathered in the research, it is apparent that agencies have to be prepared to encounter a number of 'complications' in the relationship between victims/survivors and abusers in organised cases:

■ In one of the cases covered in the research, agencies learnt that, having closed their investigation (in which the abuser had not been charged) victims were returning to the abuser's home. This behaviour only served to underline the vulnerability of victims and the power of abusers over them.

■ The research included two cases where victims had remained in contact with their abuser up to, and through, their adult years. In one case, a survivor and abuser were in an emotional relationship with one another. In the other, a group of survivors were, seemingly, good 'friends' of the abuser. Not surprisingly, none of these survivors were prepared to give evidence against their abuser.

■ In two cases, former victims had, either in late adolescence or early adulthood, joined with their former abusers to abuse other children. In both cases, the abuse they perpetrated was serious, and on being convicted they received significant prison sentences. The formation or enlargement of 'paedophile rings' is therefore yet another risk associated with organised abuse.

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## Abusers

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### Abuser nature

3.18 It appears that most, if not all, abusers in organised cases have a extremely strong compulsion to sexually abuse children. This is manifest in a variety of ways: the number of children they abuse; the length of time over which they abuse individual children; the duration of their offending 'careers'; and the nature of the abusive acts they perpetrate. Therefore, agency workers have to be aware of the seriousness both of the individual cases in which these abusers are involved and the long term risk they pose to children in general.

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### Entrapment by abusers

3.19 It was evident from the cases studied in this research that, having identified potential victims, many abusers would then employ a very premeditated and effective 'entrapment' process. There were three distinct elements to this process:

■ The provision of one or more of the following types of inducements: 'legal' inducements (for example, money, toys, food, sweets); 'illicit' inducements (cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, pornography, opportunities for sex with peers); and emotional inducements ('care' and attention).

■ The entrapment process, in respect of both physical contact (preceding abuse) and the use of inducements, tended to be very incremental. For example, initially a child might be spoken to; this would be followed by seemingly innocuous touching; then the abuser might 'accidentally' expose his body; later still, the abuser might touch the child in a sexual manner over his/her clothing, before moving onto ever more serious sexual abuse.

■ The entrapment process, as well as drawing victims into an ever more abusive situation, and inhibiting disclosure, also enabled the abuser to identify and avoid children who might disclose, or who might not be sufficiently compliant as the abuse developed.

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### Patterns of offending

3.20 Many organised cases involve male perpetrators abusing boys. Many of these abusers have a marked preference for male victims. However, agency workers should be alert to the fact that occasionally these perpetrators will deviate from this pattern of offending and abuse girls, as happened in one of the cases discussed in the in-depth interviews.

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### Female abusers

3.21 In the course of the research it was found that multiple abuser cases, especially those which were family-based, involved a much higher proportion of female perpetrators than would have been expected. (Although this finding was based upon a small sample size, it



does concur with the results of a much larger study undertaken by the author which revealed that 19% of perpetrators in multiple abuser cases were female, Gallagher, Hughes and Parker, 1996.) In both of these studies, women were sometimes found to be the ringleaders in a case. Agency workers need to be aware of these possibilities and the difficulties they may create in terms of the criminal justice process (see 4.7).

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### **Influential abusers**

3.22 The current research included one case where some of the abusers could be said to be 'influential' at a national level. Agency workers felt that these abusers had not been adequately investigated because of their status. In light of this, agencies should draw up specific procedures for the handling of cases involving suspects who, because of their position, whether locally or nationally, could impede the detection or investigation of a case. In such cases, there should be a prompt sharing of information between agencies to reduce the risk of a 'cover-up'. Consideration should also be given to the use of an independent agency, to ensure that any investigation is carried out in a proper and thorough manner.

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### **Protective parents/carers**

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#### **The targeting and entrapment of parents**

3.23 Abusers in organised cases do not only target and entrap children. This research found that they often use the same technique against parent/carers, particularly those who have acute personal or social needs. There are two main reasons why they do this: firstly, to gain access to children, via the parent/carer; and secondly, to gain the parent's/carer's trust, admiration or dependence, thereby making it more difficult for victims to disclose.

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#### **Child-parent/carer estrangement**

3.24 Some abusers will manipulate children to bring about their estrangement from parents/carers. This may be done for a number of reasons: to facilitate the entrapment process; to enable the onset and continuance of abuse; and to inhibit disclosure. Two distinct scenarios can be identified:

■ In the first, the abuser, with the parent's/carer's consent, provides the child with a variety of inducements. These can include play/leisure items, meals from fast-food restaurants, and money. Much of this activity may be centred around the abuser's home but it may be extended into day trips, or even nights away. Often, parents/carers in these cases are unable to provide their children with these items or activities. They also tend, initially at least, to be less suspicious of the abuser's motives than other parents/carers might be. Additionally, the abuser may play the role of 'big brother' or 'kindly uncle', seeming to give the child - who may be having trouble at school or with the police - a guiding hand. In reality, this is just another part of the entrapment process.

■ In the second scenario, the abuser again attempts to draw the child away from his/her home but this time against the parent's/carer's will. He often uses the same 'legal' inducements as those listed above, but also a series of illicit ones, such as cigarettes, alcohol and drugs, which may be particularly powerful in alienating a child from his/her parents/carers. In two of the cases studied in the course of this research, some of the children were eventually expressing a very strong desire to live with the abuser.

Agency workers felt that intervening with such children, and reducing their future risk, was a considerable challenge. However, they did believe that family support and public education programmes (around child sexual abuse) could help reduce the risk of children being drawn into organised abuse.

### Inter-parental/carer harassment

3.25 Some abusers in community-based cases 'infiltrate' a community by targeting a vulnerable family - often one comprising of a single mother and her children. Once established within this family, abusers use this relationship as a basis for getting to know other parents/carers and their children, with the intention of abusing the latter. When a case is detected, other families may victimise the original family for 'introducing' the abuser into the community. This occurred in two of the cases covered in the research. In both cases, a group of perpetrators abused large numbers of children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, having first established themselves with one particular family. When parents/carers became aware of the allegations, they blamed the original family and became extremely hostile towards them. Agencies have to be ready for such a reaction and take steps to prevent it, or at least reduce its impact, by whatever means are considered most appropriate. This could include a combination of increased policing (especially by beat officers in the relevant neighbourhood), community education, and early intervention. Failing this, they must be prepared to offer all necessary support to any family which is being so harassed, in particular re-housing.

### Parent / carer - abuser violence

3.26 On learning of allegations, parents/carers in three of the twenty cases which featured in the in-depth interviews expressed what agency workers judged to be serious intentions to harm the abuser. In one case the police were so concerned that they brought forward the arrest of a suspect for his own protection. Thus, when dealing with an organised case agency workers need to be mindful of the risk to abusers from the parents/carers of victims. To reduce this risk, agencies have to allow for this factor in planning an investigation. Initially, the flow of information into the public domain, and possibly to other agencies, may need to be restricted. On occasions, agencies, particularly the police, may have to take pre-emptive action and arrest a suspect earlier than they would otherwise wish to do.

### Denial by parents

3.27 The research featured two cases of abuse in institutions where many of the parents/carers were very reluctant to even consider the possibility that their children had been sexually abused. They appeared eager both to refute the concerns put to them and to argue in defence of the abuser. In both cases, parents/carers formed themselves into an 'action group' which proved to be a formidable obstacle in the path of agencies seeking to investigate allegations. Some parents/carers, for example, refused to co-operate with agencies wishing to interview their children. In each of these cases, the children came from predominantly middle class backgrounds. Agency workers believed that the parental response was motivated, in part at least, by a misconception that child sexual abuse was a working class phenomenon; and by a fear of the stigma which they felt was attached to child sexual abuse and agency, particularly Social Service Department, intervention. It is possible that the abusers had engaged in what was ultimately a successful entrapment process involving these parents/carers. Whatever the reasons for this response, agencies need to be aware that they may encounter denial among middle class parents/carers in institutional abuse cases, and may have to invest considerably more effort if they are to work with them. The challenge may be even greater if the parents/carers begin to act as a group.

### The significance of community

3.28 One of the most marked differences between organised and other CSA cases lies in the significance of the community. Whereas the latter cases are dominated by 'the family', organised cases often involve large parts of a community. In addition to being the setting in

which abuse and investigations take place, communities may provide the first reports or suspicions of abuse; be the audience to which agencies address their concern; be anxious to be kept informed as to the progress of investigations; complain about what appears to be agency inaction; be the setting for recrimination and harassment between families; and be the realm in which valuable preventative work is undertaken. Along with many of the other points made in this section, these aspects of organised cases point to the need (see 1.5) for a broadening in the focus of child protection work.

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## Case management

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### Resources

3.29 If police and social services are to respond effectively to the challenge of organised abuse then they have to be prepared to commit the considerable resources which these cases often require. This applies both to reactive and proactive styles of working. Agencies reacting to allegations or concerns may have to interview large numbers of children; embark upon extensive liaison work with families; or work with agencies from a number of different areas. Front-line staff may need to have access to external consultancy or counselling services. Similarly, proactive responses to organised abuse, whether seeking to detect or to prevent cases, also require a major investment of resources, such as are required in covert surveillance operations and in campaigns with the public.

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### Planning

3.30 The planning or pre-investigative stage is particularly significant in the investigation of organised abuse. Before embarking upon the investigation proper, it may be necessary for agencies to gather intelligence and information through covert observation and surveillance operations or by extensive record searches; establish the addresses and identities of victims and abusers; or liaise with other agencies and areas to co-ordinate responses. Therefore, agencies need to invest significantly greater time and effort in this stage of a organised case than might be needed for other CSA cases.

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### Continuity of staff

3.31 Investigations into organised abuse tend to be extremely complex. For example, large numbers of children, parents/carers and suspects may need to be interviewed; information may be gathered from a host of other witnesses and agency workers; and a great deal of liaison may take place between agencies and areas. As a result, individual workers may encounter difficulty in acquiring sufficient knowledge of a case and agencies may experience problems integrating and co-ordinating their response. In view of this, agencies should strive to attain as much continuity of staff as possible during the course of an investigation. Thus, front-line staff will have the opportunity to become very familiar with the case which, in turn, should make their response more effective. Although continuity of staff may, for logistical reasons (primarily related to the duration of an investigation), be difficult to manage, efforts should be made to overcome them in light of these benefits.

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### Staff numbers

3.32 Following on from the above point, agencies may endeavour to have a small number of staff working on a organised investigation in order to ensure that each worker is more familiar with the case. However, this can also create problems, as smaller staff numbers mean that investigations - which may already tend to be quite prolonged - take longer still. This in turn carries with it a number of risks, such as sensitive information leaking out to abusers and delays in cases coming to trial. On the basis of the experience of agency workers interviewed for this research, it is preferable on balance to have a small and 'tight'

team, each member of which has a sound understanding of the case and is able to work in an effective manner. Should there be any sudden rushes of work or if particular aspects of an investigation need to be carried out promptly, such as making contact with large numbers of children and parents/carers, then agencies could bring in staff from outside the team on a temporary basis. These personnel might most usefully be assigned to tasks other than those involving contact with children, such as interviewing parents/carers or other witnesses.

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### Repeated investigations

3.33 One of the striking features of the organised cases covered in this research was the high proportion which involved a series of investigations, most of which proved 'inconclusive' - in the sense that it was not possible to bring charges against any abuser. Often there had been a series of allegations or concerns, over many months, if not years, concerning different children, sometimes in a number of settings. Each of these had led to a separate though 'unsuccessful' inquiry. This phenomenon suggests there may be a need for agencies to increase their efforts regarding the investigation of organised abuse, and it underlines the importance of all the other points which have been made so far under 'Case Management'. One further point which needs to be made in connection with repeated investigations is the failure by agencies to adequately cross-reference different allegations which had common features, whether in terms of children, suspects or addresses. It was not uncommon for related information/intelligence to be kept by a number of workers in different files, sections and offices within the same agency. This prevented agencies from acquiring as good a knowledge of a case as was possible, and it certainly undermined their investigative efforts. This reinforces the need (see 3.6) for agencies to record comprehensive details of all reports/referrals in a systematic and centralised manner.

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### Pressure on confidentiality

3.34 There are a number of features associated with investigations into organised abuse which are generally not present in other CSA cases but which increase the chances of confidentiality being breached. These are as follows:

- The planning stage of an investigation tends to be longer in duration and larger in scale, thereby creating more opportunity for information to 'leak out' and undermine subsequent work.
- The volume of information generated in an investigation may be huge. Managing such large quantities of information may be problematic. Under such circumstances it has to be assumed that there is an increased risk of information 'leaking out'.
- As the scale of a organised case increases, so too will the number of agencies and agency workers involved in its investigation and management. Again, this creates more opportunity for 'leaks'.
- If an abuser works for an agency which is involved in the child protection system this may create an opportunity for him/her to obtain information concerning the course of an investigation which s/he should not have.
- An organised case may involve numerous children and parents/carers. Some of these families may not appreciate the need for confidentiality and may be responsible for knowledge of the case spreading through the community.

- The media tend to be more interested in organised cases, in comparison with other CSA cases, and they may make considerable efforts to obtain information from agency workers and the parents/carers of abused children.
- Given these pressures, agency workers should ensure that rules governing confidentiality are explicit, understood and actively managed.

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### Breaches of confidentiality

3.35 The breaching of confidentiality can have serious consequences in any CSA case. However, in investigations into organised abuse the failure to maintain confidentiality can cause additional problems. The reasons for this are as follows:

- Some investigations will involve the police in covert operations. Should abusers learn of an investigation, this could very easily jeopardise the viability of undercover work and thereby the longer term protection of children.
- Criminal trials involving organised abuse are often very challenging for those involved with the prosecution. For example, there may be large numbers of witnesses, many of whom are very vulnerable and in need of considerable support. Similarly, the charges put before the court and the supporting evidence may be extremely detailed. In such circumstances, any issue over the communication of information, particularly between witnesses - as might result from a breach of confidentiality - could lead to a trial being stopped, with all the implications this has both for child protection and criminal justice.
- Organised cases often involve a number of families. Should details of a case become public, there is a risk that certain children, and their parents/carers, may be viewed as being responsible in some way for the abuse, even though they may be just as much a victim of it. This sometimes occurs if one family is seen as having 'introduced' an abuser into the community, no matter how inadvertently. The resultant scapegoating and harassment can be quite serious, as was evident in cases which featured in the research.

In light of these factors, it is even more important that agency workers are aware of the increased onus upon them to maintain confidentiality.

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### Information volume

3.36 Investigations into organised abuse may generate huge amounts of information. The ability to record, store, analyse and retrieve this information may be critical to the success of an investigation. Agencies should have systems in place for handling such large volumes of information prior to the detection of an organised case. While computers offer an ideal means of handling such information, questions remain over the appropriateness and availability of software suitable to this task. However, the issue of information volume does not raise technical challenges only. Demands are also placed upon management. Firstly, managers need to ensure that they have an adequate understanding of organised abuse. In this way they will be better placed to decide what information needs to be collated to provide the most valuable support to an investigation. Secondly, they need to determine how information is to be inputted and analysed, and who may access it. These are important considerations if information is to be used in an effective manner and if proper attention is to be given to concerns around confidentiality, civil liberties and legal - especially data protection - issues.

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### Communicating with parents/carers and children

3.37 Multiple victim cases may require agencies to make contact with large numbers of parents/carers, children and victims/survivors. For example, it may be that agencies wish to publicise a concern (suitably generalised so as not be open to the criticism of being 'leading') and offer families an opportunity to report any relevant information they might have. Alternatively, agencies may wish to inform a community about the general progress of an investigation. Sometimes contact with members of the public has to be carried out according to tight schedules. Faced with such situations, agencies might wish to consider using one or more of the following methods of communication, all of which, while innovatory, have been used with some success in cases studied in the course of the research:

- Letters to parents/carers - once an allegation or concern has been raised, agencies have - especially in cases based in large institutions - sent letters to parents/carers informing them, in a general manner, of the concerns they have. Such letters usually invite parents/carers to contact the agency should they have any concerns they wish to discuss. In this way, agencies are able to reach large numbers of parents/carers and through them children, providing one means of identifying victims within a short time span.

- Notices in newspapers - when agencies have been investigating a case which has occurred over many years, and where at least some of the victims would now be adults whose whereabouts are not known, they may decide to place advertisements in local or national newspapers. These advertisements indicate the relevant audience; describe a generalised concern; and request that any person with pertinent information come forward.

- Helplines - these have been used, often in conjunction with the two methods above, to provide parents/carers and children with an opportunity to discuss any concerns they have, in what is intended to be efficient manner, but also one which enables support and counselling to be provided simultaneously. Callers are thus enabled to make informal judgements about coming forward with relevant information.

- Questionnaires completed by children - this is perhaps one the most innovative techniques. It is sometimes used where the number of potential victims is not so large, nor indefinable, but where there is still a pressure to interview all the children within the time and resources available. Situations such as this may arise, for example, with a single class of schoolchildren or in a children's club. As with some of the above methods, questionnaires are used not only to identify victims, but also to highlight children about whom there may be sufficient concern to warrant an interview.

- Public meetings - organised cases may generate a considerable amount of anxiety within a community. Communities may also question the progress of an investigation or simply wish to be kept informed of it. Public meetings offer an opportunity to address all of these issues in a speedy and effective manner, and enable agencies to show communities that they are committed to engaging with them.

It must be emphasised that these methods have to be used with due regard to confidentiality, public anxiety and the requirements of the criminal justice system.

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### Withholding information from parents/carers

3.38 In some investigations of organised abuse, police and social services will have to delay sharing their concerns with parents/carers. This action may deny parents/carers an opportunity to protect their child which they might otherwise wish to have taken. There are two main reasons why agencies may adopt this practice: firstly, they may be unclear as to whether the parents/carers in question are involved in the abuse, and they may need to suspend communication with them until this is clarified. Secondly, agencies may be at a

very sensitive point in their work, where sharing concerns with parents/carers could jeopardise the viability of an investigation and any subsequent criminal prosecution, and in turn undermine more substantive efforts to protect children. While there may then be powerful reasons for withholding information agencies should always be mindful that their primary objective is the protection of children.

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#### Frequency of meetings

3.39 Police and social services have to be prepared to invest time and effort in inter- and intra-agency liaison in the course of investigating and managing an organised case. This may be for the purpose of information sharing; assessing the nature and extent of a case; planning and co-ordinating responses; or monitoring on-going work. At the same time, agencies have to be aware that if liaison, in the form of formal meetings, takes place too frequently then this may impede the progress of an investigation. Agency workers have to be aware of this tension and strive to reach the best balance on a case-by-case basis.

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#### Inter-area cases

3.40 Compared to other CSA cases, investigations into organised abuse are more likely to involve a number of different local authorities and/or police services. This cross-boundary aspect arises as a result of victims or perpetrators living in different areas or the abuse being committed in more than one locality. Therefore, one of the needs which agencies have to address in respect of organised abuse is that of inter-area co-ordination. Discussions should take place between agencies in different areas to reach a common understanding of these cases, and a preliminary agreement at least as to how they should be handled. One of the key issues to resolve is the agency which is to assume overall responsibility for a case.

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#### Adjacent and non-adjacent areas

3.41 The large majority of inter-area cases in the current research involved local authorities which were adjacent to one another. Thus, it seems particularly important that neighbouring areas engage in discussions concerning the response to cross-boundary cases. This does not mean that agencies working in areas which do not adjoin one another should be complacent. The fact that they are likely to be less familiar with each other's general policy and practice will tend to disadvantage them when it comes to initiating a joint response to an organised case. The issue of cross-boundary cases is then also a challenge to areas which do not adjoin one another.

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#### International cases

3.42 Police and social services should bear in mind the possibility that an organised case, particularly if it involves multiple abusers, has an international dimension. International dimensions arise in a number of different ways: abusers exchanging child pornography (either physically or via the Internet); abusers going abroad to abuse children; children being taken abroad to be abused; children being brought into this country to be abused; and foreigners coming into this country to abuse children living here.

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#### Media

3.43 Agencies need to be aware that the media are likely to take a strong interest in the investigation and management of an organised case. While the media has a legitimate interest in these cases, and may even contribute to their detection and investigation through, for example, exposing abuse, publicising concerns and appealing to victims to contact agencies, they can also have negative effects. In particular, they may make inordinate demands upon the time of agency workers; have inappropriate dealings with witnesses; and assume a hostile line in reporting agency handling of a case. It is important for police and social services to have a media strategy in place prior to the start of an

investigation. The areas which such a strategy needs to address include: the designation of individuals to deal with the media; the means by which enquiries are to be channelled; the training of front-line staff in responding to the media; the management of media relations; the timing of communications with the media; and the resolution of differences between agencies.

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## **Joint working**

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### **Closer working together**

3.44 The investigation and management of an organised case will often require police and social services to work together more closely than is usual. For example, they may have to spend more time together in planning specific operations, interviewing children, meeting parents/carers and in liaising with other agencies. In addition, there may be greater overlap in the specific tasks they undertake (see 3.50). The ability and willingness of these two groups to work together more closely is vital to the successful investigation and management of an organised case.

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### **Unified teams**

3.45 Following on from the above point, it may in some circumstances – such as very large scale and difficult inquiries – be preferable for police and social services to form what is, in effect, a single team working from one office. While this development should enable increased effectiveness in the investigation and management of a case, it should be brought about only if the two agencies are able and willing to make such a commitment. Furthermore, agencies should be aware of the problems which may be inherent in closer working together (see 3.46).

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### **Tension in closer working together**

3.46 While closer working together is generally beneficial to the investigation and management of an organised case, it may not be without its problems. Besides the differences which exist in the roles of the police and social services, there may be significant differences in professional culture and personal value systems. As police officers and social workers collaborate more closely, these differences may become more overt, and lead to conflict between them. These problems may be even more pronounced if part, or all, of a case is dealt with by police officers from outside the (police) child protection team (see 4.2). Therefore, once engaged on an investigation into organised abuse, agency workers (particularly front-line staff), need to recognise any professional or personal differences which exist between them, and ensure that they do not lead to conflict, which can only be detrimental to an investigation. Managers must also be aware of these potential problems and take whatever action is necessary to deal with them should they arise.

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### **On-going working relationships**

3.47 Organised cases tend to create more pressure upon agencies than other CSA cases. This pressure arises from a number of different aspects of a case, such as the number of children who have to be traced, identified and interviewed; managing the large amounts of information which flow into an investigation; listening to series of harrowing accounts of abuse; and working together more closely with other agencies. If tensions already exist between police and social services, then the pressure of a organised case will only serve to magnify them. Thus, if police and social services are to work together successfully on an organised case it is essential that they already have a good, on-going working relationship. This can be most effectively achieved through the monitoring and development of working relationships by senior management and the ACPC.



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### Unilateral action

3.48 Owing to the special challenges to which some organised cases give rise, it may be necessary for police and social services, or the police alone, to carry out their work - especially during the intelligence/information gathering stage - under conditions of added secrecy, so as not to jeopardise the viability of an operation. While the resultant decrease in liaison with other agencies may be wholly understandable, and indeed quite essential, police and social services (or the police alone) have to guard against their behaviour being interpreted as inaction or worse still, malpractice, either by other agencies, members of the public or media organisations. The research included a number of cases where either agency workers or communities became very concerned at what they thought was police and/or social service inaction. In reality, the agencies in question were actively engaged in sensitive investigations 'behind the scenes'. This problem also underlines the need for agencies to develop good, **on-going** working relationships with one another. As suggested above, the best way of achieving this is through the work of senior management and the ACPC.

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### Agencies outside the ACPC

3.49 A significant proportion of organised cases are community-based. In some of these cases, community-based agencies from outside the ACPC structure may be able to assist in the detection and investigation of abuse. These agencies include housing departments, caretaking services and security firms. They may act as a source of initial referrals; facilitate the intelligence/information gathering operations of the police and social services; perform a specific intelligence/information gathering role themselves; or provide information which is of more general use in an investigation. Having said this, it must be stressed that such 'inter-agency working' does raise issues relating to civil liberties, confidentiality and community relations. This is due to the fact that the agencies in question are primarily concerned with providing services to residents, rather than assuming the quasi-policing role this type of work demands. In addition, there are issues over the background of workers from these community-based agencies, and in particular whether there is any aspect of an individual's character, such as a previous criminal record, which may render him/her unsuitable to be involved in an investigation. However, if these matters can be adequately addressed, the involvement of community-based agencies may make a significant contribution to the investigation of organised abuse.

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## Individual worker issues

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### Role flexibility

3.50 In child protection cases, the police are primarily concerned with the investigation of crime, and social services with the provision of support to children and their parents/carers. Given many of the challenges posed by organised abuse, such as the need to trace and identify children, and the acute vulnerability of victims, it is often necessary for police and social services to be more flexible in terms of their professional role. For example, an investigation and possible subsequent criminal trial may place victims and their parents/carers under a great deal of pressure. In such circumstances, families may turn to the police for support. Similarly in cases involving large numbers of children, some of the tracing and identification tasks may be undertaken by social workers. This flexibility is important if the effectiveness of an investigation is to be maximised. At the same time, it is essential that workers from each agency retain a clear view as to their main responsibility, whether this is in the investigation of crime or in the welfare of children and families.

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### Levels of involvement

3.51 The level of involvement, both physical and emotional, by agency workers tends to be greater in organised cases compared to other CSA cases. The greater physical involvement may arise, for example, through agency workers carrying out large numbers of interviews, working longer hours or from the investigation being more protracted. Increased emotional involvement is frequently linked to specific features of a case, such as the vulnerability of victims or the abuse they have experienced. This greater involvement may be very beneficial to the investigation and management of a case, and is often unavoidable. However, police officers and social workers have to be careful that they do not become over-involved in a case. This carries with it a number of risks: staff may become 'burnt out'; they may lose their objectivity; their credibility may be weakened in judicial terms; and they may create expectations in the minds of victims and parents/carers, particularly regarding levels of support, which cannot be met.

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### Stress

3.52 The investigation and management of organised abuse may impose considerable physical and emotional demands upon front-line staff. Being involved in the investigation of a single organised case over a given length of time can be considerably more stressful for an agency worker than a series of other CSA cases dealt with over the equivalent period. It is essential that managers (and to some extent front-line staff themselves) realise this, and take whatever action is appropriate to avoid stress becoming excessive. Foremost among this must be the monitoring of workload and the provision of adequate support and supervision.

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### Counselling

3.53 During or following an investigation, it may be appropriate to offer counselling to front-line staff. It may be that staff have had to deal with particularly disturbing accounts of abuse or have had to deal with a large number of victims. The needs of individual staff can be determined only on a case-by-case basis, and some agency workers will not always need a specialised service. They may wish only to 'talk through' their experiences with someone who may not necessarily counsel them but who can offer a knowledgeable and independent perspective (see 3.58 and 3.59).

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### Professional satisfaction

3.54 While recognising the stress of dealing with an organised case, many agency workers during the course of the research interviews, commented upon the professional satisfaction they had derived from being involved in this type of investigation. This was particularly so if this work had been 'successful' in the face of considerable challenges, such as meeting the needs of severely abused and vulnerable children, and overcoming the efforts of devious and highly manipulative abusers. It is important to acknowledge this positive aspect of practice given the despondency which often surrounds work in this area.

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### Intra-agency tension

3.55 Agency workers need to be aware that the investigation and management of an organised case may create tensions **within** an agency. This tension arises from a number of sources: the additional workload which other staff have to take on as a result of their colleagues being involved with an organised case; a reluctance on the part of some staff to work on this type of case or to commit resources from their section/district/division; a perception that staff involved in such an investigation are working too closely with, or are allowing some of their role or responsibility to be subsumed by, other agencies; and a belief that colleagues involved in these investigations are becoming elitist, or are having 'an easy time of it'. In order to avoid or minimise these tensions managers should ensure that

all appropriate personnel and sections are aware of, and understand, the need for the investigation; that there is adequate communication between sections; that some sense of corporate responsibility for the investigation exists; and that there is a proper overview and monitoring of cases.

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## Closing investigations

### Decision-making

3.56 Organised cases sometimes throw up a dilemma in that decisions are taken to close an investigation before all victims and abusers are identified. There are a number of reasons why cases may be 'prematurely' terminated. There may be a need to consolidate investigative work ahead of a criminal trial. It might be felt that there is insufficient evidence to pursue further lines of enquiry. Investigations may also be closed because agencies are unable or unwilling to commit additional resources to what may already have been a demanding piece of work. If the decision to terminate an investigation raises the possibility that children will not be protected and abusers not brought to justice, then it is clearly very significant. Furthermore, if agencies differ in their view of the validity of such a decision, this may cause conflict between them. In view of these factors, agencies should ensure that they discuss and reach some understanding about the criteria and procedures by which investigations into organised abuse are to be closed. Such discussions should assist agencies in arriving at a consensus when considering terminating an investigation, or at least minimise the tension that can surround these judgements, thus avoiding suspicions that agencies are acting from ulterior motives.

### 'Flagging' systems

3.57 On closing an investigation into organised abuse, there may be a number of issues which are left unresolved. For example, only some of the victims may have been traced or only some of the abusers charged. In such instances, agencies should set up systems whereby if any pertinent information becomes available in the future, the original case is automatically reviewed. Such a 'flagging system' currently exists within the Metropolitan Police Service, although the precise extent to which it is used in child protection cases is not clear. It works on the following basis: should a child or suspect from an earlier investigation come to the attention of the police, for any reason, then this information is directed to the original file and an appropriate officer is alerted to determine whether there are grounds for re-opening the investigation. This has several benefits: it results in the prioritisation of particular information; it ensures concerns are responded to rapidly; and it increases the chances of bringing charges against a suspect. In one such case, incorporated in the current study, an abuser was reported to be driving around the streets of a particular estate befriending children, giving them rides in his car and taking them to fast food restaurants. This, agencies believed, was part of a quite elaborate entrapment process. Although, even after two separate inquiries, the abuser was not charged, agencies were certain he had abused children, and would re-offend. In response, the police implemented a flagging system. Such a system seems ideally suited to organised cases, many of which have been found in this research to be characterised by a series of allegations or concerns extending over many months, and sometimes years.

### De-briefing

3.58 Police and social services should hold a formal de-briefing session at the end of any investigation into organised abuse. A de-briefing session would fulfil two roles: firstly, it would enable an agency to evaluate the work it had carried out, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and thereby improving future practice; secondly, it would serve to meet the professional and personal needs of front-line staff who may have faced enormous physical

and emotional demands over a considerable length of time, but who have not had an opportunity to 'off-load' their feelings.

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#### Disseminating good practice

3.59 Agencies should ensure that the investigation and management of organised cases is written up and published, with appropriate degrees of anonymity and confidentiality. Given the dearth of knowledge in this area, such publications would greatly assist in the dissemination of good practice. Furthermore, if this exercise was attached in some way to a de-briefing exercise, it would contribute to the value of this latter process, and in particular would enable front-line staff to see some positives in what might otherwise be viewed as an unmitigated series of disturbing and depressing events. It is also possible that such a procedure might have some therapeutic value for agency workers.

## 4 Police

### Role of child protection teams (CPTs)

4.1 Police services have Terms of Reference to describe the investigative remit of child protection teams. As this research was carried out in London, reference is made to the Terms of Reference of the Metropolitan Police Service. (In the absence of a comprehensive knowledge of the remit of CPTs in police services in other parts of the country, the extent to which the following points can be applied around the country is not clear.)

The Terms of Reference produced by the Metropolitan Police Service describe the investigative remit of child protection teams as follows:

*'To investigate, in co-operation with local authorities and other appropriate agencies, allegations of child abuse:*

- a) occurring within the family or extended family;*
- b) occurring in respect of children in care where the abuser is alleged to be the carer or an employee of the care organisation (for example, foster parents or any children's home employee);*
- c) where the victim is an adult but the abuse occurred while they were a child and under circumstances*
  - (a) or (b); or*
  - d) which are connected matters coming to notice during the enquiries by the CPT into (a) - (c) (for example, where an abuser within a family has also committed similar offences against another unrelated child).'*

While the Terms of Reference state that *'Within the family and extended family should be given a wide interpretation'*, which includes *'regular visitors to the household (such as neighbours or family friends)'* it is made clear that *'This definition should not be extended to persons whose identities are known to the child but where there is no substantial relationship nor to stranger attacks'*.

Whichever section of the police does investigate these latter cases, for example the CID (Criminal Investigation Department), it is expected that the officers concerned would liaise with the CPT:

*'Officers investigating allegations of physical or sexual attacks on children outside the family environment, **must** (the 'Terms' emphasis) inform the CPT as soon as possible. In suitable cases, the CPT may be able to conduct the interview with the child, help with arrangements for medical examinations, and also help to liaise with the social services.'*

Community-based organised cases involve varying degrees of familiarity in terms of victim-abuser relationship. Thus, while some cases are dealt with by CPTs, others are handled by other sections within the police. In light of this, the instruction, within the Terms of Reference, that officers in these latter cases liaise with CPTs is especially welcome as it helps ensure that all organised investigations are able to benefit from the knowledge and expertise contained within these teams.

Having said this, officers interviewed in the course of the research felt that the remit of the CPT should be broadened to incorporate a wider range of cases, in particular community-based organised cases where there is no substantial relationship between victim and abuser. They argued that children in these cases are often extremely vulnerable and their families are frequently known to social services. In the light of these factors, and despite the fact

that abusers may be relative strangers, they felt that it would be preferable for these investigations to be led by CPTs.

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#### Non-CPT officers

4.2 Owing to the demands of large-scale organised cases, it is sometimes necessary for CPTs (where they are responsible for an investigation) to draft in officers from outside the team. It is probable that some of these officers will not be familiar with the particular challenges of child protection work, such as inter-agency working and dealing with young victims. Managers should ensure that 'incoming' officers have at least a basic understanding of the requirements of this type of work. One means of minimising potential problems is by assigning such officers to more general tasks, such as initial visits to families, instead of the interviewing of children.

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#### Attempts to thwart investigations

4.3 In common with other multiple offender crimes, perpetrators in multiple abuser cases may assist one another in thwarting an investigation, for example, by intimidating witnesses or by removing or destroying corroborative evidence, especially child pornography (see 4.4). One example of this in the current research involved associates of an abuser, against whom a family had made allegations, going to the home of the family in question and threatening to burn it down. They would add to the family's fear by loitering near their home. In view of this risk, the police should seek to identify and implement any measures which would prevent abusers impeding the investigation of a case. This might include witness protection or the provision of a higher level of more general support during the course of an inquiry; minimising public, and in some instances agency, awareness of an investigation prior to arrests; the simultaneous arrest of the maximum number of suspects in a case; and - in conjunction with the prison service - greater supervision, or curtailment, of an remanded suspect's communication with the outside world.

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#### Seizing child pornography

4.4 One of the most acute problems, in terms of investigating organised abuse, arises from the ability and propensity of perpetrators to conceal, remove or destroy child pornography once they learn of police inquiries. The research covered three cases where abusers were known, or were suspected, of having removed child pornography from the place where victims informed agency workers it had been stored. In each of these cases it appeared that the individuals in question took this action after becoming aware of the arrest of co-abusers. (In one of these cases an abuser who removed child pornography was subsequently convicted for perverting the course of justice.) In view of the potential value of this material in protecting children and convicting abusers, it is essential that the police take whatever steps they can to increase the chances of seizing any child pornography they have reason to believe exists. In addition to the measures listed in 4.3, they should deploy the most effective search personnel and procedures when seeking to uncover child pornography. Furthermore, when they have been unable to find child pornographic material that has been referred to by a witness, the police should evaluate the possible reasons for this in order to inform the conduct of future cases.

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#### Information on an abuser's associates

4.5 Perpetrators in organised cases appear to have a strong compulsion to sexually abuse children. Consequently, they are likely to pursue any means that will facilitate this end. This includes linking up with other abusers. Such associations need not involve conspiracy to abuse the same children. They may exist for the exchange of child pornography or to 'cover-up' abuse. Thus, the police should, when undertaking searches, seize and evaluate any available information on an abuser's associates (including relatives), in

case this should prove relevant to the investigation. Address books, diaries, correspondence and computer files are the types of material which should be assessed.

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#### The sensitive treatment of victims

4.6 Some victims in community-based cases will have returned to their abuser on repeated occasions. Often they will have received 'inducements' (see 3.19). Some may have perpetrated crimes themselves, whether of a child abuse or non-child abuse nature. Under these circumstances there may be ambiguity in the minds of police officers as to whether the children concerned really are 'victims'. On occasions such children may not be treated with appropriate sensitivity. This is more likely if officers do not come from a child protection background. It is essential that all police officers realise that, irrespective of a victim's history or the context of the abuse, s/he has been the subject of a serious crime and must be treated with appropriate sensitivity. If a child has to be interviewed over criminal acts which s/he has committed, such as the 'recruitment' or actual abuse of other victims, then this may create further tension. However, even in this situation police officers should not lose sight of the child's status as a victim or the vulnerability which may have preceded it.

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#### Selective provision of evidence by victims

4.7 The police need to be aware that in family-based, multiple abuser cases, victims may refuse to give evidence against certain perpetrators. Where this does occur it usually relates to a victim's mother. Two such cases were covered in the research. In both cases, the women in question had - along with other male and female perpetrators - taken a very active role in serious sexual, and other abuse, and neglect. While the victims were willing to give evidence against a variety of relatives, including fathers, aunts and uncles and grandparents, they were adamant that they would not assist in the investigation if their mothers stood to be charged. These situations raise major issues in terms of the criminal justice process. While they have to be tackled on a case-by-case basis, it is important that officers appreciate the dilemma in which they may find themselves; having to take on board three distinct considerations: the victims (who are refusing to give evidence); the need to charge a particular abuser; and the need to secure convictions against the remaining abusers. This dilemma may be made yet more acute both by the strength of a victim's feelings, and by the seriousness of the offences committed by the abuser against whom the victim does not want to give evidence.

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#### Interviewing abusers

4.8 While interviews with many child sex abusers will produce strong feelings in the minds of interviewing officers, they may be particularly intense in respect of perpetrators in organised cases. The reason for this is that these cases tend to involve more extreme abuse than do other cases of CSA. Examples include the production of child pornography, sexual abuse by more than one perpetrator simultaneously, torture, bestiality and murder - all of which featured in cases covered by this research. Interviewing officers should be prepared for such admissions in the course of an interview. While feelings of disgust, even loathing, towards an abuser, are understandable, it is vital that officers do not show these, as this may discourage the abuser from initiating or continuing with admissions.

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### Improving detection

4.9 Many of the cases studied in this research were detected as a result of information which came to the attention of agencies quite inadvertently (see 3.1). This issue is of particular relevance to the police given the role of 'intelligence' in their work. The police should, therefore, maximise the sharing of intelligence **within** and **between** police services, and raise the profile of CSA within existing police-community channels in order to increase the chances of detecting organised abuse.

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### Intelligence gathering

4.10 The police have at their disposal a number of specialised intelligence gathering techniques. Many of these are highly pertinent to the investigation of organised abuse given the *modus operandi* of many perpetrators. Several of these techniques were used with considerable success in some of cases covered in the current research. Although these techniques are very resource intensive, serious consideration should be given to their use in organised cases as they can make an invaluable contribution to an investigation.

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### Paedophilia units

4.11 Anecdotal evidence suggests that an increasing number of police services are setting-up paedophilia/paedophile units in order to tackle cases of child sexual abuse involving 'paedophile rings' and child pornography, which fall outside the usual remit of child protection teams. Comments made by agency workers involved in this research indicate that the existence of these units may lead to problems and that their development should be carefully monitored. These problems concern the relationship of these units to CPTs and also to other agencies, particularly in terms of the sharing of information and the ability to work together.



## 5 Social services

### Family support

5.1 Social services should recognise that victims in organised cases, particularly community-based ones are, with few exceptions, extremely vulnerable children. Many of their parents/carers (especially single parents) are similarly vulnerable and have their own acute personal or social needs. Like their children, they may be targeted and *entrapped* by abusers. Often these families are already known to social services. If organised abuse is to be prevented, it is essential that vulnerable families are protected and supported. If families are already known for abuse or neglect, then social services should be alert to the fact that their children face increased risk of involvement in organised abuse.

### Support and treatment of victims

5.2 The vulnerability and need of many victims in organised cases does not apply only to their background. They will often have been severely abused by the perpetrators in the organised case. This may come about as a result of the frequency and duration of the abuse; the perpetration of penetrative acts; abuse by multiple perpetrators, sometimes in group situations; the carrying out of other acts, such as torture, bestiality and the production of child pornography; and the inflicting of other forms of maltreatment (whether physical and emotional abuse, or neglect). When abuse is detected and investigated victims will often not receive the support of their parents/carers. Even if the case is not family-based - where parental/carer support would not be expected - parents/carers may be openly hostile to their children on learning of the abuse. Thus, social services have to be prepared to invest additional resources in meeting the needs of victims of organised abuse in terms of their support and treatment.

### Victim rejection of intervention

5.3 Social services should not assume that victims in organised cases will concur with their view of sexual abuse as being wrong. Similarly, they should not expect victims to readily welcome their intervention. As stated above, children involved in organised cases, particularly community-based ones, often come from extremely vulnerable backgrounds. Entrapment by an abuser, especially if it involves the use of inducements (see 3.19), may have had a powerful effect upon a child. Victims may reject social services intervention; attempt to return to their original abuser; and be at increased risk of abuse by other perpetrators. This type of 'outcome' was exemplified by one of the cases which featured in the research. In this case, agencies had major concerns regarding the activities of a lone perpetrator who would drive around a neighbouring estate, pick up vulnerable children, provide them with gifts and then take them to his home. In response, agencies launched a major investigation. At the close of the investigation, agencies were certain children had been abused but were unable to bring charges. Shortly after this, it was reported that children were once again visiting the home of the abuser. Clearly, social services face considerable challenges when trying to help such children.

### The separation of roles

5.4 It is important that investigative and family support aspects are kept separate from one another in a organised inquiry. Individual agency workers, whether they are from social services or voluntary organisations, should be involved in only one of these spheres.

Failure to do this may reduce their effectiveness in both areas of work and undermine the criminal case against an abuser.

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#### Composition of meetings

5.5 In meetings where decisions have to be taken concerning the commitment of resources to an investigation, social services should ensure that they have an officer in attendance with the authority to give such an undertaking. If this permission has to be sought from a more senior officer after a meeting this may delay the investigation.

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#### Locally elected members

5.6 Elected members (councillors) may express considerable concern over the occurrence of an organised case in their local authority, and the subsequent handling of it by social services. This concern can stem from a variety of sources: elected members may be under pressure from a community to resolve a case; they may have committed substantial extra resources to an investigation; allegations may have been made against a council employee or member; or the case may be high profile for other reasons, such as the involvement of a large number of abusers. Locally elected members proved to be very anxious in relation to two of the cases which featured in the research. In both cases there was a risk that the case would not be responded to in an appropriate manner because of their influence. In the first, senior managers had to intervene to ensure that additional, and undue, pressure was not placed upon front-line staff to 'get a result'. In the second, managers had to resist calls for 'the problem' (i.e. the abusers) to be shifted into a neighbouring authority. Senior managers must resist pressures from elected members for inappropriate responses to a case. This phenomenon underlines the importance of having a media strategy in place at the outset of a organised investigation (see 3.43).

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#### Legal advice

5.7 Given the nature of some of the challenges posed by organised abuse, such as uncertainty regarding the culpability of different individuals (including parents/carers) in multiple abuser cases and the pressure to secure convictions, social services should ensure that they have adequate and appropriate legal advice over the course of an investigation. Although the police are primarily responsible for the passage of a case through the initial stages of the criminal justice process, social services may make a significant contribution to this work. This being the case, social services should consider utilising legal advice earlier and more frequently than they would do normally. This legal advice may also assist social services in their work in respect of civil matters.

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#### Voluntary agencies

5.8 Notwithstanding issues of resources, ownership and current relationship, social services should consider using a voluntary agency to assist them in the investigation and management of organised abuse. Voluntary agencies may be able to offer both general and specialist services, including: basic logistical support, for example, interviewing children or visiting families where numbers are large; interviewing victims who have learning disabilities; witness preparation; and leading investigations. It is worth noting that police CPTs do, in effect, sometimes 'contract out' their work on organised cases. As the scale and diversity of the police is so considerable, invariably this work is undertaken by other departments within the service, such as the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and the uniformed section. However, external consultants and specialists have been brought in to provide assistance on particular aspects of investigations, such as the analysis of interview evidence.

## 6 NSPCC

### Special investigative teams

6.1 Since 1995 the NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) has had a special team of child protection officers in London undertaking investigations into organised abuse on behalf of commissioning social service departments (SSDs). By the end of 1996 the London Investigation Team had investigated 10 cases on behalf of 7 local authorities. Research participants from social services and the police commented positively on the work carried out by the team. The contracting-out by social service departments of organised cases to a specialist team carries with it a number of significant benefits, including:

- Ready access to the additional qualified personnel which a case may require.
- The provision of investigative and managerial expertise in the area of organised abuse.
- The ability to work across local authority boundaries.
- The introduction of an independent element into investigations, which is particularly valuable where allegations involve local authority personnel.
- A lessening of the disruption which these investigations can cause to other SSD work.

In view of the success of this initiative and the benefits it entails, ACPCs might, when confronted with a organised case, want to consider utilising this NSPCC service.

### Inter-agency working

6.2 The NSPCC may be involved in the investigation and management of cases of organised abuse either through being 'contracted-in' by ACPCs or by other means, such as a direct referrals from children's institutions. In these situations, it is important that all agencies, including social services and the police, and the NSPCC itself, are fully committed to working together. This is irrespective of the route by which the NSPCC comes to be involved in an investigation and any unfamiliarity with this working relationship. More specifically, all agencies will wish to ensure that regardless of the special challenges which apply to organised abuse, ultimately these cases are about children who have needs, one of which is protection.

### Dissemination

6.3 One of the means by which the NSPCC can facilitate good working relationships is by formally sharing the lessons of its work with other agencies, such as social services and the police. This would have a number of distinct benefits: it would ensure a wider dissemination of knowledge in what is a poorly understood area; assist in the integration of organised cases within the wider child protection and child welfare systems; and show an on-going commitment to co-operative working.

## 7 Criminal Justice System

### Witness support

7.1 Many victims in organised cases come from very vulnerable backgrounds. Should they have to appear as witnesses in a criminal trial they will, in common with other CSA victims, need considerable support. If a victim's parents/carers are unable or unwilling to provide support - a not uncommon feature of organised abuse - then his/her need will be even greater.

### 'Severance'

7.2 The splitting of indictments, or 'severance', is more likely in organised than other CSA cases, and it can have a major impact upon the course of a criminal trial. It may make the prosecution argument more straightforward for a jury and thereby more plausible, while restricting the opportunity for defence counsel to confuse juries, thus leading them to question the validity of a case. Conversely, severance may weaken the overall evidence in a case, thereby reducing the chances of a conviction; or make the crime appear less serious, thus warranting a lesser sentence. Most importantly, severance can have very negative consequences for child witnesses. Appearance in more than one trial may add significantly to the trauma experienced by a witness. If a judge feels that child witnesses have experienced excessive stress in a preceding trial, they may abort pending trials to spare them further trauma (as occurred in one of the cases which featured in this research). In light of this, it is essential that agencies involved in the criminal justice process consider measures to mitigate the negative effects of severance, such as additional support to witnesses; the extra 'fast tracking' of organised cases; and greater control over the nature and duration of child witness cross-examination. The issues raised by severance form one aspect of the current campaign to reform the judicial process to make criminal trials less traumatic for all child witnesses.

### Police - Crown Prosecution Service liaison

7.3 Organised cases may raise special problems in terms of the criminal justice process, such as the use of evidence gathered through covert means and the greater risk of 'contamination' of evidence in multiple victim cases. In view of this, the police should - once they realise they are dealing with a case of organised abuse - liaise promptly and frequently with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). This will enable the CPS to offer the police the most effective advice in terms of their handling of a case. To this end, the CPS should ensure that it is fully acquainted with the particular investigative and managerial issues raised by these cases.

## 8 Prison service

### Formation of 'paedophile rings'

8.1 The concentration of child sex offenders in prison has allowed a number of 'paedophile rings' to form among people who were previously unknown to one another. One of the 'paedophile rings' studied in this research formed in this way. This group of abusers went on to commit a catalogue of abusive acts against a large number of children both in the UK and abroad. Whilst recognising the need to uphold the rights of prisoners to communicate and associate, the Prison Service should examine whether there are ways of deterring the formation of such dangerous groups of offenders in prison.

### Operation of 'paedophile rings'

8.2 The research included two cases where abusers in the community wrote to abusers in prison, and one case where an abuser (adopting a false persona) visited Schedule 1 offenders in prison. These contacts appeared to be designed to fulfil a number of functions: to facilitate the setting-up of 'paedophile rings'; to 'promote' existing ones; and to thwart investigations, for example, by planning the harassment of witnesses in impending trials. In one further case, abusers in the community brought children into prison to visit abusers who had, until their incarceration, been members of the same 'ring'. It was suspected that these children were to be abused by the imprisoned perpetrators on their release and that the prison visit was intended to serve as some form of 'preview'.

### Preventive measures

8.3 In light of the above, it is noteworthy that the Prison Service is considering a number of measures designed to reduce the risk of paedophiles pursuing their activities while in prison. These measures are likely to focus upon prisoners' communications (i.e. visits, letters and use of the telephone). The Prison Service will also be introducing new SMART phone technology across the prison estate which will restrict prisoners to telephone numbers which have been approved in advance. It is important that those undertaking investigations into organised abuse liaise with the Prison Service so that appropriate sharing of information can take place.

## 9 Customs and Excise

### Working with the Customs and Excise service

9.1 In the process of an investigation it may be helpful for agencies to make contact with the Customs and Excise service. The Customs service prioritises the detection of child pornography. It is useful to make contact with this agency to share any information/intelligence and to discuss whether it can take an active role in an investigation. This is important, as abusers in organised cases are known to travel abroad to abuse children. The Sex Offenders Act 1997 and the introduction of extra-territorial legislation mean that offences committed abroad should be seen as a vital part of investigative work in the UK.

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## 10 Other ACPC agencies

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### Health

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#### HIV/AIDS

10.1 In the course of some of the investigations covered by this research, agency workers became aware that the sexual lifestyle of some of the perpetrators (in terms of consenting sexual relationships with other adults) meant that they were at increased risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. This meant that the children they abused could also have been at increased risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. Given the potential medical and social consequences of the disease, this issue must be given adequate consideration in the investigation and management of organised cases.

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### Education

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#### Establishing children's identity

10.2 Teachers, particularly those in secondary schools, may be able to fulfil a valuable role in the investigation of organised abuse. Some abusers in organised cases may build up a large library of child photographs, both pornographic and non-pornographic. As police and social services will often not know the identity of all the victims in an organised case, especially community-based ones, they may turn to local schools for assistance. Naturally, this work is unusual for teachers and it can be distressing, but their assistance may make an important contribution to an investigation.

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#### Protection programmes

10.3 Teachers should ensure that the child protection component of Personal and Social Education (PSE) lessons, whether delivered by school staff or workers from outside organisations, makes reference to organised abuse, particularly the use of targeting and entrapment, and peer pressures not to disclose.

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### Probation

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#### Inter-agency liaison

10.4 The probation service has specific responsibilities in relation to convicted sex offenders. Therefore, it is important that agencies involved in the investigation of organised abuse liaise with the probation service to ensure that they are aware of all relevant information.

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#### Risk assessment

10.5 The probation service has experience in the risk assessment of sex offenders. This expertise could be of use to other agencies during the investigation and management of a case.

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#### Sex Offenders Act 1997

10.6 Since this research was undertaken, the Sex Offenders Act 1997 has been introduced. The Act establishes a register of sex offenders. It is too early to assess the impact of this legislation on probation but it is likely to result in an increased role for probation in investigations of organised abuse.

# 11 Voluntary agencies

## Supporting victims

11.1 Voluntary agencies working with child witnesses in the pre-trial or trial period must be aware of, and respond to, the specific needs which they may have. These needs may derive from a number of different sources: a victim's vulnerable background; the level of abuse experienced; the lack of parental/carer support following disclosure; fear of retribution (especially in multiple abuser cases); having to give evidence against several abusers (even more so in family-based cases); and abusers who occupy positions of authority.

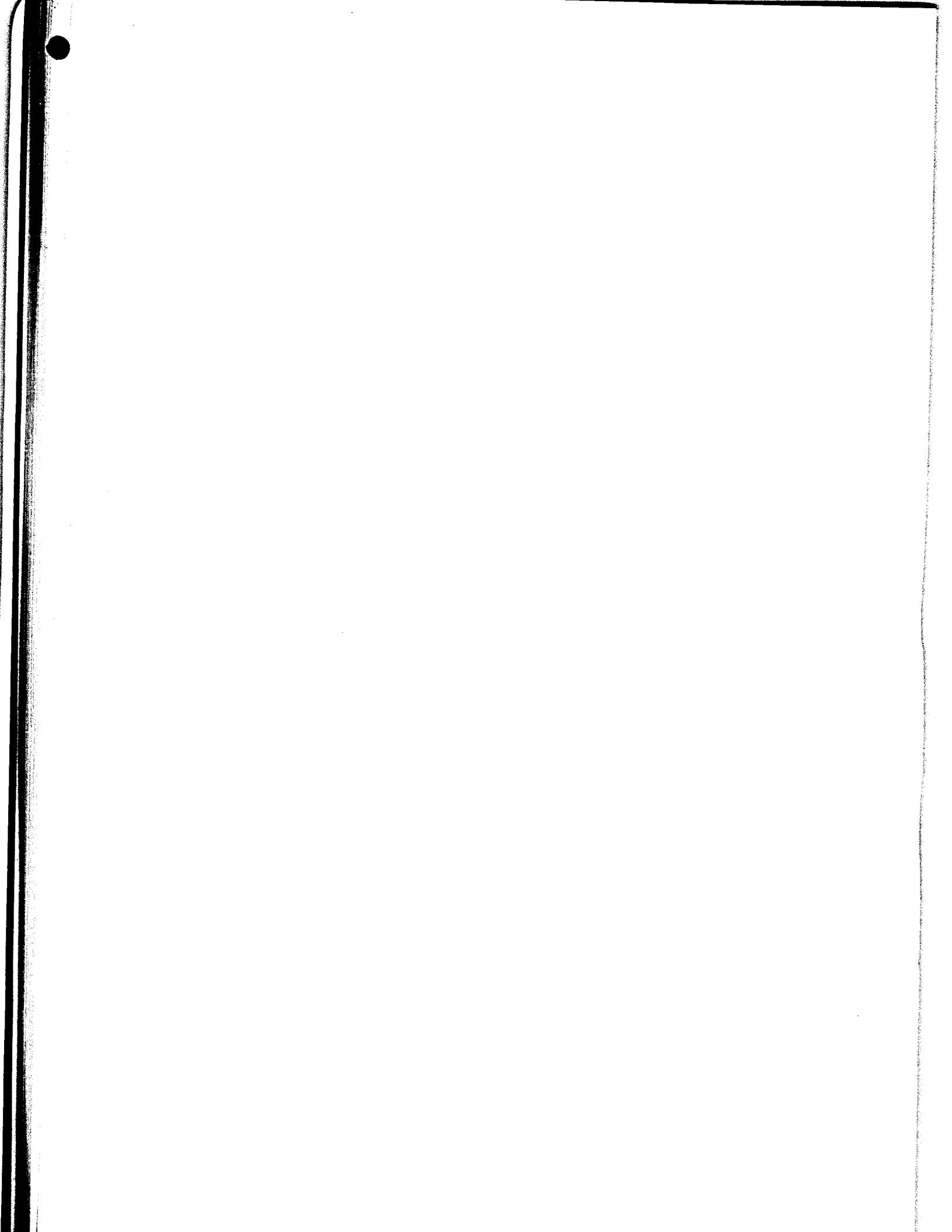
## Prevention programmes

11.2 Voluntary agencies, such as ChildLine, KIDSCAPE, and the NSPCC, should ensure that any preventive work they carry out with children adequately addresses the special challenges which are presented by organised abuse, such as the risk of abuse in community and institutional settings, and the use of targeting and entrapment techniques.



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