**Is identification of child victims of trafficking a possible undertaking? Why are evident signs of exploitation and trafficking often not followed-up?**

**13.45 – 14.45 on Tuesday 29 May 2018**

Mike Dottridge, independent expert (notes with PPoint presentation)

**IS IDENTIFICATION OF CHILD VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING POSSIBLE? WHY ARE EVIDENT SIGNS OF EXPLOITATION AND TRAFFICKING OFTEN NOT FOLLOWED-UP?**

WHERE’S WALDO/WALLY?

Summary of Challenges in identification

1. Perceptions & Prejudices
2. Use of indicators /tell-tale signs
3. Organisational issues
4. Some possible solutions
5. **PERCEPTIONS & PREJUDICES**
6. Mis-perceptions of trafficked children by those who should identify, protect and assist them, e.g., as

* Child delinquents
* Immoral girls (i.e. those trafficked for sexual exploitation) (Rotherham examples)
* Children accompanying their parents/family
* Children doing something slightly bizarre (e.g. begging or playing music on the metro and asking for money) without being perceived as exploited
* Foreign children with exotic customs, e.g., begging
* Gypsies/Roma, i.e. intrinsically delinquent

1. Inaccurate stereotypes about who is a child and what a ‘trafficked child’ should look like (i.e. failure to recognize adolescents who are 1.7 metres tall as children or to distinguish girl children soliciting for sex from young adult women)
2. Genuine lack of clarity about whether a child or group of children are earning money for themselves or for a controller/trafficker (e.g. Romanian children in Paris at start of the century, breaking into parking metres to get the cash)
3. Inclination to detain foreign children as delinquents, fuelled by xenophobia
4. False assumption that ‘identification’ is a one-off operation. In many cases, it involves building up a profile of a child at risk, i.e., recording ‘intelligence’ formally that a particular child displays some signs that they might be trafficked in a place and in such a way that other agencies that might encounter the child have access to this intelligence. In effect, this is a risk assessment for a child who is neither in custody, nor in care. However, it is particularly relevant if an unaccompanied or separated child is taken into care, for it has major implications for the measures that are appropriate to dissuade a child from walking out of care.

**UK example:**

(Rotherham inquiry by Alexis Jay concerning Child Sexual Exploitation in a Yorkshire town, Rotherham, over 16 years, 1997 – 2013)

“Over the first twelve years covered by this Inquiry, the collective failures of political and officer leadership were blatant. From the beginning, there was growing evidence that child sexual exploitation was a serious problem in Rotherham. This came from those working in residential care and from youth workers who knew the young people well”.

The inquiry estimated that approximately 1400 children were sexually exploited over the 16 years. In just over a third of cases, the children involved were previously known to services because of child protection and neglect.

“By far the majority of perpetrators were described as 'Asian' by victims, yet throughout the entire period, councillors did not engage directly with the Pakistani-heritage community to discuss how best they could jointly address the issue. Some councillors seemed to think it was a one-off problem, which they hoped would go away. Several staff described their nervousness about identifying the ethnic origins of perpetrators for fear of being thought racist; others remembered clear direction from their managers not to do so”.

The police’s Operation Stovewood says is has talked to approx. one in six of the victims. Among the 114 suspects, by March 2018, 4 had been convicted, 18 others had been charged.

1. **USE OF ‘INDICATORS’ OR TELL-TALE SIGNS that a child is being exploited or is destined to be exploited**
2. Confusing or ambiguous tell-tale signs and indicators – due to inadequacy of ‘indicators’ but also to poor understanding of how and when to use them
3. Front-line law enforcement and immigration officials fail to react to tell-tale signs that should make them suspicious, in part because of prejudice and in part because the tell-tale signs are not conclusive enough (e.g., a young adult man driving a car through a border post or police check-point with a teenage girl sitting beside him).
4. Children are identified as adults because of *de facto* training/brain-washing NOT to believe claims by asylum-seekers that they are under-18, but also officials failing to challenge the validity of identity documents portraying a young person as an adult (numerous Nigerian cases e.g. in the UK). UNICEF (2006) said “Age assessment includes physical, developmental, psychological and cultural factors. If an age assessment is thought to be necessary, independent professionals with appropriate expertise and familiarity with the child’s ethnic/cultural background should carry it out. Examinations should never be forced or culturally inappropriate”.
5. ‘Changing playing field’ about which children should be categorised as ‘trafficked’, i.e., situations that were already brought to the attention of law enforcement officials but not labelled as trafficked (e.g. child sexual exploitation, UK & Albania) or children acting as drug runners (UK?). For example, successive patterns have been identified in the United Kingdom of adolescent girls being subjected to sexual exploitation, but the authorities only regard some of the victims as trafficked (when the girls concerned are taken away from home to be exploited elsewhere).[[1]](#footnote-1)
6. In 2006 UNICEF published a ‘Check list for immigration officers (border officials) to assess whether a child is ‘at risk’ of being trafficked’ (p 115) . It didn’t assume identification was definitive, suggesting what immigration officer should do so child’s welfare could be monitored, e.g.

**Record data on the child**

1. Record biological data, including information on family and individual name, names of father and mother (or guardian if relevant), normal place of residence of the child, date and place of birth of the child, etc...;
2. Record data on the child’s travel route and destination;
3. If the child is unaccompanied, record data on the person who is to meet the child;
4. Assign a reference number to the child that will enable the authorities to track migrant
5. children once they leave the border point;
6. Take a photo of the child so the child can be identified in future even if their name is changed.
7. Experience shows that trafficked children are more likely to talk openly to officials if they are not in the presence of a parent or adult who might be exploiting or trafficking them. UNICEF (2006) said “Ensure that a child suspected of being a victim of trafficking is questioned in private and is questioned in a language that she or he understands”
8. **ORGANISATIONAL AND STRUCTURAL ISSUES**
9. Lack of clarity on which statutory organisation has responsibility for identifying possibly trafficked children (other than at a border), e.g. in a street situation (begging, stealing or offering sex in exchange for money) and taking action to protect and assist such children.

ILO trains labour inspectors, but they habitually have zero expertise as far as children outside a formal workplace are concerned. Experience shows that ‘mobile social work’ teams are ‘good practice’ as they can make discreet contact with children working on the street, including those soliciting for sex in Paris or Rome, preferably social workers with same language/ethnicity/identity as the children (NB experience with Albanians & Bulgarians in Greece).

1. Lack of team work / multi-agency team / coordination – between separate agencies in the same area or country and particularly between different countries. Any multi-agency team needs a single manager. Biggest problem appears to arise when a social inquiry is required in another country as part of a risk assessment.
2. Police reticence to take children into (protective) custody for various reasons (bureaucracy / Fear of accusations of (anti-Roma) racism (e.g. Brussels?) + fear of accusation of racism in UK cases of Pakistani-descent men exploiting adolescent girls.
3. Reluctance by UNICEF in SEE/child rights organisations to identify children as ‘trafficked’ for fear this will result in child being taken away from their parents & families
4. Prospects for child once identified must be better: Unless care & accommodation are attractive, child may prefer to remain with trafficker
5. Unless child who has been under tight control feels freer, why should they remain?
6. Don’t assume that young people are uninformed about the prospects awaiting them in care – read the damning comments made by many unaccompanied children arriving since 2015!

**SOLUTIONS – WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?**

* I hope my comments point the way to solutions
* Listen (to children) and learn! Get the right (trained) people to talk to children. You may need to decode what they say.
* Research (yes, including further interviews with children about their experiences – but not just their exploitation/abuse)
* Training (that relates to the children present in your country – nationals and non-nationals), i.e. not about a “theoretical trafficked child”, but about children in your country/region
* Tackle prejudice and preconceptions among relevant officials systematically and repeatedly
* More training – to work together in multi-agency teams

1. The United Kingdom’s Sexual Offences Act 2003 defines a series of sexual offences against children. Section 58 focuses on “Trafficking within the UK for sexual exploitation”, stating that “A person commits an offence if he intentionally arranges or facilitates travel within the United Kingdom by another person” and intends something to be done to the child or adult “during or after the journey and in any part of the world”, which would involve one of the offences specified in the Act. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)