



Practitioner Briefing #6: Profiling peer-on-peer abuse

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Background

Since 2013 the MsUnderstood Partnership (MSU), led by the University of Bedfordshire, has been working with local areas across England to develop responses to peer-on-peer abuse which are:

- a) Contextual: Engage with the families, peer groups, schools and public, neighbourhood spaces associated to peer-on-peer abuse
- b) Holistic: Recognise the intersecting dynamics of peer-on-peer sexual exploitation, serious youth violence, harmful sexual behaviour and teenage relationship abuse which are often subject to siloed definitions and responses

Informed by a contextual audit, MSU delivered support plans with 11 participating local safeguarding children's boards, comprising six sites. Each site received a different package of support designed to build on the strengths identified during their audit process. One site was a cluster of six London boroughs – Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey, Hackney, and Islington – referred to as the North London (NL) Cluster. In the NL Cluster one area of activity focused upon building profiling capacity through the delivery of a support package to analysts. This briefing has been co-produced by the University of Bedfordshire with analysts who participated in the support programme. It aims to share lessons learnt from the process with other analysts who have been tasked with profiling the nature of peer-on-peer abuse.

Introduction and Structure

If we want to build comprehensive and effective responses to abuse between young people we need to know how the issue manifests in our local areas. Which young people are affected, in what ways and importantly where is this happening? Profiling the issue, and associated trends, is one route to answering these questions. Across the NL cluster, local authority children's services, as well as community safety teams, have invested in analytical capacity to profile the nature of, and inform local responses to, peer-on-peer abuse. Since 2014 this work has been supported by the MsUnderstood partnership, under the leadership of Dr Carlene Firmin, through a series of seminars which have explored the concept of contextual profiling and identified the datasets/data-holders that can be drawn upon when profiling peer-on-peer abuse.

This briefing shares what we, a group of CSE and gangs analysts along with Carlene, have learnt about profiling peer-on-peer abuse by:

- 1) Introducing the aspiration of contextual profiling and the goal we are trying to achieve
- 2) Sharing ideas about data sources for building contextual peer-on-peer abuse profiles
- 3) Sharing the ways in which we have contextually profiled to date
- 4) Identifying challenges to be addressed in order to advance profiling activity

- 5) Making recommendations for policymakers to alleviate the aforementioned challenges
- 6) Sharing next steps for us and our involvement in a contextual safeguarding network

Contextual Profiling: An Aspiration

Research tells us that the risk associated to peer-on-peer abuse is often located in the neighbourhoods, schools, peer groups and families associated to the young people who have been affected. Young people are abused by, and abuse their peers in parks, disused houses and garages, stairwells, high streets, schools and alternative education provisions, within friendship groups, and sometimes in their own homes. Vulnerabilities, exposure to victimisation/violence, and resilience in each of those contexts will inform young people's experiences of peer-on-peer abuse. In addition, different manifestations of peer-on-peer abuse (serious youth violence, peer-on-peer sexual exploitation, teenage relationship abuse and harmful sexual behaviour) may all affect some of the same young people and/or be occurring in the same peer groups, schools, parks etc.

As a result, in order to profile peer-on-peer abuse to best effect, our activity needs to identify:

- a) The individuals affected across the different definitional siloes of peer-on-peer abuse (identifying any overlap)
- b) The various social and public contexts to which those young people are associated and/or where they experience peer-on-peer abuse

Profiling in this way will enable managers, multi-agency operational/strategic groups, local safeguarding children's boards and community safety partnerships to know:

- a) Whether there are 30 young people, for example, who are vulnerable to CSE in their local area and a different 30 who are vulnerable to gang-association (totalling 60 young people), or if 15 young people feature on both lists (totalling 45 young people)
- b) Whether different manifestations of peer-on-peer abuse are emerging in shared, or distinct, contexts. For example, if in any given area there are two peer groups spread across five schools who are associated to peer-on-peer abuse or if young people who are affected by the issue are spread across all schools in the local area

Such knowledge should assist with risk assessments, commissioning decisions and the targeting of reactive and proactive interventions. If achieved, this aspirational model of profiling would generate knowledge in all the intersecting areas outlined in Figure 1:

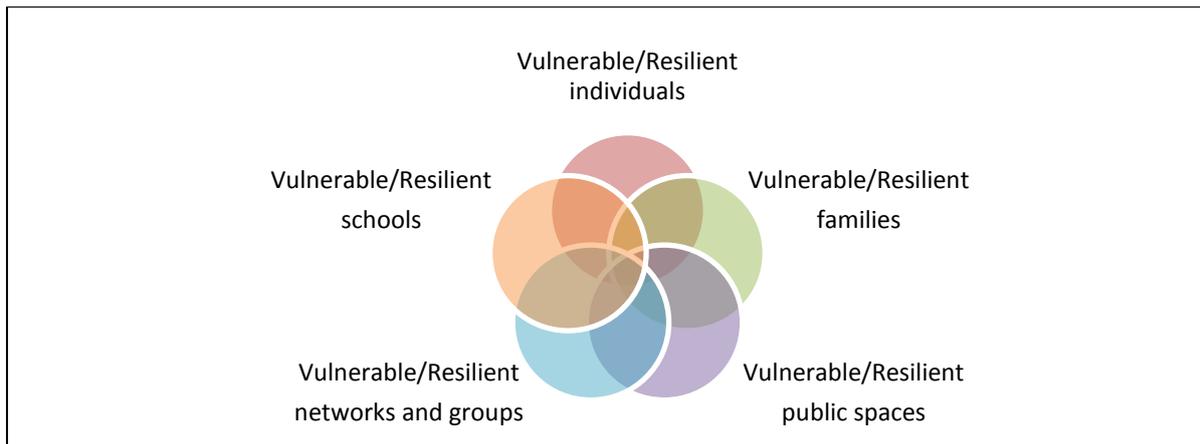


Figure 1: Contextual Profiling Categories

Potential sources of contextual data

To date, most analysts who are profiling peer-on-peer abuse draw their data from children’s social care and police referrals – in some areas this data is provided via a multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and in others analysts may have direct access to particular databases from which to access this information. However, these datasets, while helpful, only take us so far in profiling peer-on-peer abuse. In essence they help us profile what is already known by statutory services, and assist us in identifying trends amongst those referrals. But if we want to proactively profile vulnerability, thus providing opportunities for early intervention, as well as profile contextually, we need to consider other sources of data.

During the MSU Analysts Seminar Series we considered four broad sources of data that we could draw upon to further profiling activity:

- Education data: exclusions and children missing education
- Health data: collected in A&E, CAMHS and sexual health services
- Community safety data: anti-social behaviour, household disturbances and domestic abuse
- Transport data: driver incident reports, vulnerability and youth flags and journey data

Education data

Children go missing from school for a number of reasons, one of which can be experiences of peer-on-peer abuse (Barter, et al., 2009; Firmin, 2016, Forthcoming; Ringrose, et al., 2011). Children who are being abused by peers in school may stop attending to avoid being harmed. Others may be drawn out of school by abusive partners who are seeking to control their behaviour, or by peers whom they are offending alongside etc. As a result, identifying ways of monitoring and recording changes in young people’s attendance at school, and any unusual patterns (such as specific times of the day when absence occurs) can assist in building a vulnerability profile in a local area.

Each local authority should have an identified single point of contact to access data on children who are missing from education (either as a result of truancy or longer term missing concerns). An information sharing agreement between this single point of contact and an identified analyst should assist this data collection process. In some instances the MASH will provide the access point for this dataset. Children who have been missing from education may also be discussed at a range of multi-agency panels/groups in local areas and at the monthly Fair Access Panel meeting.

In terms of more thematic profiling, data on children missing from education is collected as part of the census data three times per year.

In addition to being missing from education, children can be excluded from mainstream education as a result of them abusing peers or due to behaviours which can arise as a consequence of being abused by peers (for example a deterioration in a young person's behaviour following a sexual assault). When a young person sexually abuses a peer they may be excluded for 'sexually inappropriate behaviour' – therefore drawing upon this dataset may give an initial indication of any peer-on-peer abuse incidents associated to particular schools. However, this exclusion code is not always applied in peer-on-peer abuse cases and on its own will not give sufficient indication of prevalence rates in schools.

To access a broader dataset, and one that involves fixed term exclusions as well as those that are permanent, engagement with organisational partners and multi-agency panels are important. Youth offending team practitioners, for example, may know if some of the young people on their caseload have been subject to exclusion. Exclusions are also discussed at monthly fair access panel meetings. Being able to draw upon dynamic exclusions data is important for proactive profiling work. If professionals already have concerns about a young person and then they are excluded these concerns might escalate. Therefore on a case management level, as well as a thematic profiling level, exclusions data may prove useful.

Health data

Peer-on-peer abuse can compromise the physical, sexual and mental health of young people (Firmin & Beckett, 2014). As a result, health services may collect information of relevance to local profiling activity and should be considered partners in safeguarding young people from peer-on-peer abuse. At a case management level we recognise good relationships with health services that attend local multi-agency agency meetings and share information about specific children who are being abused by and/or who are abusing their peers.

However, in terms of broader profiling activity, different services within health hold a large number of datasets, much of which won't be of relevance (or use) for profiling activities, and as a result relationships are important. For example A&E, sexual health and CAMHS services will all capture demographic data on the young people accessing their services, and will also collect data on the nature of concerns the

young person presents, but sharing these broad datasets (in an anonymised format) will not necessarily assist with this specific profiling task.

However, if the local sexual health service is aware of the emerging peer-on-peer abuse profile being generated by an analyst they may know what warning signs to look out for and understand when sharing information may be of use. For example, there are concerns that young people are being sexually abused by peers in a local park. A group of young people then attend a sexual health service and a number of them disclose staying out in that same park overnight. If the nurse is aware of the potential concern around the park, they are in a better position to share information with an analyst and/or safeguarding partnership of which the analyst is part of. A number of local hospitals are also recruiting youth workers into A&E departments. These workers may also identify concerns related to some young people who attend with injuries that they have sustained following a physical assault from peers. The ability to share information about the nature of the assault, its location etc. with analysts, even when the young person doesn't feel able to give a statement to the police, can assist with proactive profiling activity. As a result, analysts should identify routes to proactively share redacted versions of their profiles to healthcare providers to enable the identification of trends and the sharing of that information.

Community safety data

Peer-on-peer abuse often occurs in public spaces – high streets, parks, disused garages, take-away shops etc. – and as a result is a community safety, as well as safeguarding, issue. Some analysts tasked with profiling peer-on-peer abuse are based within community safety departments. However, there are broader community safety issues which may also indicate a risk of peer-on-peer abuse and could be drawn upon to profile concerns.

Young people who are exposed to domestic abuse at home are vulnerable to being abused by, or to abusing, their peers (Barter, et al., 2009). Young people may run from home during domestic abuse incidents, placing them at risk of sexual exploitation and youth violence on the streets – as well as being exposed to harmful relationship norms within their household (Firmin, 2016, Forthcoming). As a result, domestic abuse data can assist in identifying the number of young people who may require additional support in this regard. Furthermore, when families affected by domestic abuse are discussed at the multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC), knowing which ones have young people in them who may be exposed to the abuse, and which ones have children who may already be of concern regarding youth violence and/or sexual exploitation, can ensure a more coordinated response. Profiling across multi-agency groups, as well as layering trends in domestic abuse over trends in sexual exploitation, youth violence, or harmful sexual behaviour, can therefore provide more holistic accounts of adolescent vulnerability within your local area.

Data on neighbour complaints or household disturbances can provide another route for accessing data on domestic abuse. However, work in local sites has told us that peer-on-peer abuse can occur in disused houses or in households where parents are working late and young people are left unsupervised after school. In these cases a group of young people can use one person's house or a disused house to engage in harmful behaviours. Complaints about noise, alcohol use or shouting/fights within such premises could indicate a safeguarding concern associated with peer-on-peer abuse.

Finally, data on anti-social behaviour is also helpful when profiling peer-on-peer abuse. Research into harmful sexual behaviour suggests that many young people who sexually abuse their peers, particularly those who do so in groups, may also be engaged in other forms of anti-social behaviour (of which sexually harmful behaviour is only a part) (Hackett, 2014). Anti-social behaviour can also escalate to serious youth violence and other forms of peer-on-peer abuse. Therefore, including trends related to anti-social behaviour when profiling peer-on-peer abuse could assist in identifying contexts or individuals to target through prevention and early intervention activity.

Transport

Young people experience peer-on-peer abuse on transport networks – whether being sexually assaulted on their way out with friends, having their mobile phone stolen, or being physically assaulted on their way to school (Firmin, 2016, Forthcoming). Furthermore, fights and disputes can spill over from school onto journeys to-and-from school, and young people can be threatened on public transport, should they have to travel through 'rival' neighbourhoods to access education (Pitts, 2008). As a result, data collected on transport networks can provide information on incidents of peer-on-peer abuse which may not be held by the police or other services (if young people/professionals have not reported them).

Across the country different transport providers collect data in a range of formats, as do the British Transport Police. However, in London, Transport for London (TfL) also collects data which may be of use to analysts who are profiling peer-on-peer abuse in the capital. Drivers on London's bus network have a red button to press if an incident occurs on their bus or if they see an incident at a stop. As well as receiving assistance, pressing the red button connects the driver to the central communications system where a driver incident report is recorded (DIR). DIRs can also be recorded for lower-level incidents of concern that do not require immediate assistance (as they would do with a red button). The call handler can apply a flag to these incidents and cause codes, include a youth flag and a newly introduced vulnerability flag. DIRs and cause codes can be used to generate hotspot maps as well as providing information related to time of incident and some incident details.

When an incident occurs on a bus but the driver doesn't need to call it through to central communications at the time, they can also complete an anti-social behaviour incident form (ASIF) at the end of their journey. These can also be submitted by station controllers regarding incidents at bus stations. These reports are all uploaded onto a system called the Transport Policing Online Mapping Application (TPOMA) which can be accessed by community safety and policing analysts.

Beyond these two incident report features, TfL's Education and Training team maintain a list associated to schools where there have been a high number of reports from members of the public or bus controllers – this data informs the work of their schools programme. Data is also held on any Zip cards (discounted travel cards for young people under 16 or young people 16-18 who are in full-time education) that have been withdrawn due to persistent behaviour concerns on the transport network.

Given this wealth of data it is critical that local CSE and gangs analysts make contact with TfL and draw upon transport-related data as part of their work to profile peer-on-peer abuse. Identifying opportunities to incorporate this data into existing activity, as well as identifying new ways to profile (for example profiling concerns on transport routes between schools rather than just static concerns associated to schools) should advance contextual approaches to identifying peer-on-peer abuse.

Towards contextual profiling: examples of our activity to date

As a small cluster of analysts we have developed a range of approaches to contextually profile peer-on-peer abuse:

Example 1: *In my borough I have begun to meet with individual schools with the highest identified number of young people i vulnerable to CSE attend. This has given me a good starting point for peer mapping within one particular school and has led to cross borough strategy meetings using the intelligence that was gathered and linking it to the intelligence that we already had. There is also work underway for me to receive data around children who are missing throughout the school day. A template has been developed by one school which is currently being reviewed before it is disseminated amongst other local schools. Once this data is received we will be able to review this against missing from home/care data and should give us a near to complete picture of all reported missing episodes for young people.*

Example 2: *Peer group mapping has been conducted by my borough, in conjunction with a neighbouring borough, encompassing intelligence and data from a wide range of partnership agencies. This has included information from Police, Community Safety, Social Care, Youth Offending Service, Children and Young People's Service and many others. This information has been brought together into two products – 1) a geographical mapping product to highlight risk by location, 2) a network association (i2) chart of females and males believed to be linked to CSE, Gangs, County Lines etc. Bringing together cross-border information for these products has allowed for significantly more extensive research and analysis to be conducted than*

has traditionally been done when focussing on single boroughs, as the issues being uncovered are not limited by administrative boundaries.

Example 3: *Our borough has seen a big increase in online exploitation in the last year, this in part due to peer exploitation online. This has led to a profile specifically around peer exploitation and online exploitation and what it looks like in our borough. Specific schools have been identified where a high volume of ‘sexting’ reports have been received and additional training/awareness-raising has been rolled out. We have also been able to look at the most common social media sites/apps that are being used for online exploitation and have started a dialogue with one of these pages around what steps we can take to address these issues.*

Example 4 *After going through CRIS reports I noticed that three young women had sustained a minor stab wound to the thigh. In at least 2 of those reports the suspects were young men known to the females. All three young women were part of the same of peer group. This profiling work would have benefitted from having access to data off all females u18 who had similar wounds. I could have identified more young women who belonged to this peer group, or if the young women weren’t known to each another, this could have highlighted something that young men were doing as a way of punishing or branding young women across different peer networks. The data was requested, but the way the information was recorded firstly made it difficult to see whether the injuries were to the thigh and the information at that time could only be shared in an anonymised fashion.*

We will continue to share these approaches, and develop responses to these challenges, via the contextual safeguarding practitioner’s network detailed below.

Challenges

As outlined earlier, this is a briefing on aspirational profiling. We have outlined opportunities for broadening profiling activity and demonstrate how we have drawn upon some of these datasets to undertake our work to date. However, we recognise that there are a number of challenges to address to ensure consistent inclusion of the aforementioned datasets in the profiles that we generate. Key challenges identified during the seminar series included:

- Inconsistent use of flags and codes. From the codes used when young people are excluded from school, through to the codes set by public health and the application of ‘youth’ flags within TfL, flags are inconsistently applied. As a result, it is not possible to rely on any of the above datasets to tell us a complete picture, and we continue to rely on relationships and young people themselves to fill in the gaps
- Agreement regarding information sharing: different areas apply different restrictions for sharing information. Some of us are able to access some datasets that our colleagues in neighbouring boroughs cannot. Further investigation is still required about the legality surrounding information sharing

in some contexts – for example sharing journey data from transport providers or sharing trend data from health services. Despite guidance from central government regarding information sharing further support is still required

- Agreeing the purpose of profiling: Over the past two years a number of areas have invested in analysts as a means of strengthening their local response to peer-on-peer abuse. In general people recognise the value of profiling an issue and the potential it holds for targeting interventions and the allocation of resources. However, at the moment some colleagues report that they are asked to share information for the purposes of profiling but are not clear how that information will assist with building a problem profile. It is important that multi-agency partnerships are clear on what they want from a problem profile, how it will be used, and how this objective will be shared with partners to ensure proportionate and valuable information sharing.

Recommendations

As a result of the challenges outlined we make the following recommendations to national and Pan-London policymakers to facilitate improvements in profiling activity in the future:

1. Learning from work on domestic abuse, identify means through which to consistently apply 'safeguarding', 'vulnerability' and/or 'youth' flags to key datasets concerned with peer-on-peer abuse
2. Provide more detailed guidance on the legal framework for information sharing – and the differences between sharing information for case management or profiling purposes and sharing information on families, peer groups, schools and public spaces, compared to information on individuals
3. Produce a 'why profile' information sheet or template that can be circulated to key agencies who hold data of use to particular profiling activities. This can be shared, with redacted examples of problem profiles, prior to data requests within a given local area

Next Steps

This briefing, and the seminar series that accompanied it, provided a foundation for building a contextual profile of peer-on-peer abuse. Broadening the pool from which we source data increases our opportunities for collecting data on the families, peer groups, schools and public spaces that are most associated with, or affected by, peer-on-peer abuse. This in turn provides means of targeting contexts, as well as individuals, with support and intervention. In order to continue to apply the learning from the seminars, address some of the challenges and pursue the recommendations outlined above the University of Bedfordshire will:

1. Continue to promote and support profiling activities through our Contextual Safeguarding Practitioners' Network: Launching during 2016 this network will showcase contextual profiling tools/activities undertaken by analysts across the country and provide peer-learning routes between analysts to sustain and embed learning
2. Pursue recommendations through our policy and influencing plans: We will work with Pan-London policymakers to explore the challenges and recommendations outlined above and publish updates on the MsUnderstood webpage, twitter feed and the Contextual Safeguarding Practitioners' Network hub
3. Work beyond peer-on-peer abuse: We will provide support and advice, through the practitioners' network to local areas who are seeking to apply the approaches outlined in this briefing to broader issues related to adolescent safeguarding as a means of promoting holistic responses to vulnerability and exploitation

If you have any queries on this briefing please contact carlene.firmin@beds.ac.uk

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