



The use of out-of-home and secure care in response to child sexual abuse/exploitation and trafficking

An international scoping review

Delphine Peace

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Introduction

Extra-familial harm, Contextual Safeguarding, and out-of-home care: the UK context

There has been increasing political and practice developments over the last two decades in the UK flagging the need to better safeguard adolescents from significant harm that they might encounter beyond their families (hereafter referred to as ‘extra-familial harm’) – such as sexual violence, trafficking, or recruitment into organised crime. A growing body of research, prompted by a series of national enquiries and campaigns, has highlighted the limited scope within traditional child protection systems to address harm that takes place in young people’s relationships and in the spaces in which they spend their time outside of the home (such as schools and neighbourhoods) (Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2020; Firmin, 2017; Hill, 2019; Jay, 2024; Ofsted 2021; Wroe 2021).

‘Contextual Safeguarding’ has been developed as a theory and practice framework to improve understanding of, and responses to, young people’s experiences of extra-familial harm.¹ Since 2018, Contextual Safeguarding has featured in UK statutory child protection guidance, which now recognises professionals’ safeguarding duties to protect young people from extra-familial harm and outlines the need for child protection plans to address environmental issues associated with harm as well as support the individuals affected (HM Government).

While children social care and partners are increasingly adopting ‘contextual’ responses to assess and respond to harm in extra-familial contexts, these remain constrained by child protection systems that remain primarily focused on intra-familial harm (Firmin et al., 2021a; Lloyd and Firmin, 2020). In the absence of a safeguarding system equipped to create safety in extra-familial contexts, out-of-home care or secure placements are sometimes chosen as a safeguarding intervention by social care professionals to protect young people from risks in their neighbourhoods. Such relocations, which are highly disruptive and costly, seek to remove young people from the context, or disrupt relationships, in which they experienced harm. Relocations broadly can entail out-of-area placements, family relocations, secure accommodation, and any other forms of movement. Yet the rate at which these relocations are used, and the extent to which they achieve safety for young people, is unclear (Firmin, 2019).

¹ Find out more about the approach on www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk

The Securing Safety study

The Contextual Safeguarding team at the University of Bedfordshire explored these questions in the 'Securing Safety' study which examines the scale, cost, and impact of the use of relocation as a response to extra-familial harm in adolescence in the UK. Specifically, the study explored young people's experiences of safety using Shuker's 'multi-dimensional' model that considers physical, relational and psychological aspects of safety (Shuker, 2013).

The first stage of the study (Firmin et al., 2021b) began to build a national picture of how often, why, and in what circumstances, relocations are used to safeguard adolescents from harm in extra-familial settings. Findings of snapshot data for September 2019 showed significant variation in the rate of, and rationale for, using relocations in response to extra-familial harm across local authorities. There was little local or national oversight of the rate of out of area placements as a response to extra-familial harm. Relocations were driven by a range of factors, including: strategic decisions; lack of resources for alternative interventions; pressure from external agencies and local availability of placements. Moreover, relocations were often seen as a 'last resort' and primarily used to manage physical risk – with significant negative impacts on young people's relationships and mental wellbeing.

Building on these initial findings, the second stage of the Securing Safety study explored the views of young people, parents, and professionals who had experiences of the relocation process. Young people, parents, and professionals were interviewed about the extent to which they saw relocations as a helpful intervention in response to extra-familial harm and its impact on young people's physical, relational, and psychological safety.

Findings and resources from the Securing Safety project are available [here](#).

The current briefing

This briefing shares findings from an international scoping review exploring the extent to which the practice of moving children into out-of-home care placements or secure accommodations is present in other child protection systems as a safeguarding response to extra-familial harm. The purpose of this briefing is to situate the findings of the Securing Safety within wider international literature, as the Contextual Safeguarding Programme is beginning to map out responses to extra-familial harm internationally, with a view to considering the applicability of Contextual Safeguarding to the international child protection field.

Whilst acknowledging that extra-familial can cover a broad range of harm and vulnerabilities, this scoping focuses on child sexual abuse/exploitation and trafficking. The focus was narrowed to these specific types of extra-familial harm due to the large variation in the terminology used to describe extra-familial harm outside of the UK, and

because these types of harm have internationally recognised definitions (see Appendix for a list of definitions). Similarly, the term 'placement' in this scoping covers all types of placements under the umbrella term of 'out-of-home care' in which young people were moved to safeguard them from exploitation, including secure settings and distance placements. The briefing provides an overview of the contexts in which this practice happens and the agencies/organisations involved in delivering relocation interventions. The conclusion draws parallels from key findings with the Securing Safety study and provides initial considerations about how Contextual Safeguarding could contribute to further research in child protection settings beyond the UK.

Methodology

This review is a 'scoping review' aiming to provide a brief overview of the evidence gathered on a chosen topic in a limited time frame (Rutter et al., 2010). In light of the relative scarcity of the literature on this topic internationally, a broader search strategy was adopted drawing both from material published in peer-reviewed journals as well as grey literature across a number of different sectors, including international agencies, non-governmental organisations and international networks and communities of practices. In addition, a call for information was disseminated to complement academic and grey literature searches and was distributed widely through associated national, regional, and international networks (see Appendix A).

While this review is not systematic, nor claims to offer a complete summary of all the literature in this field, it follows a comprehensive search strategy (see Appendix A) which clearly defines the research questions, inclusion and exclusion criteria, search terms, and the database, peer-reviewed academic journals, and websites that were consulted.

Searches were limited to English language publications, published since 2005, about practice outside of the UK, and related to the following three research questions:

1. To what extent are out-of-home and secure placements used as an intervention in child protection systems outside the UK to safeguard adolescents who are at risk of, or have experienced, sexual abuse/exploitation and/or trafficking in extra-familial settings?
2. Who are the key agencies/organisations involved in these interventions when they are used in an international context?
 - a) In which sectors are these agencies/organisations situated (child protection, justice, health, youth serving services, voluntary agencies, etc.)?
3. What do the findings tell us about the potential applicability of Contextual Safeguarding to international responses to extra-familial harm?

Combinations of search terms were trailed in three databases and seventeen journals. Snowballing and manual searches were used to identify further material. Title and abstracts of papers were screened according to inclusion/exclusion criteria (see Appendix A). This generated 94 items relevant to this study, consisting of a mix of peer reviewed academic papers and reports.

Limitations

As noted above, this scoping review is not a systematic literature review and is therefore not exhaustive. Only material available in the English language is included. The material generated is predominantly from Europe, Northern America, Canada, Australia, and New-Zealand. Due to both these linguistic and geographic limitations, this scoping does not claim to provide a holistic international picture but focuses rather on insights from high income anglophone countries that are comparable to the UK.

A brief overview of the landscape of out-of-home care for the countries identified in this scoping

A reduction in the use of residential care in favour of family foster care

In almost all European states, foster care with substitute families is preferred over residential care (Costa, 2012). Recent years have seen growing commitment to the transformation of child welfare and child protection services in Europe, namely deinstitutionalisation and the development of a range of prevention and alternative care options, combined with individualised family and community-based support (Opening Doors, 2018). In its Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2024), and through various other frameworks, the EU has reaffirmed its commitments to quality alternative care and the transition from institutional to quality family and community-based care (Lumos, 2020). Despite these developments, institutionalisation remains widespread in some countries, such as Greece (Papamichail, 2020). Similar developments can be observed in the US, where federal legislation has been introduced to reduce 'congregate care' – which includes group homes, residential treatment facilities, psychiatric institutions, and emergency shelters (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2020). In New Zealand and Canada, furthermore, community care systems have been referred to as a 'third service type' of care provision, often limited to indigenous children (Cameron and Freymond, 2006).

Several studies exploring the factors that influence placement decision highlight parenting and family problems, intra-familial abuse, and neglect, as the most significant drivers for placement (Font et al., 2015; Jedwab et al., 2020; Jud et al., 2012; Thoburn, 2007; Vanderfaeillie et al. 2014). Papers identified from various

European countries also highlight familial factors as the primary reason for placement (Cameron, 2014; Šašková and Mertova 2012; Sladović and Branica, 2013; Thoburn, 2007).

Importantly, this scoping review did not identify any papers related to extra-familial harm as a factor in the decision-making process. This speaks to a broader trend, highlighted in comparisons of child welfare systems across Northern America, Australia, and Europe, showing that in many legislative frameworks, like in the UK, abuse is defined and addressed in a familial setting – and that state intervention depends on the abuse being attributable to parenting (Gilbert et al., 2011; Merkel-Holguin, et al., 2019; Spratt et al., 2015).

Adolescents are more likely to be placed in residential care

Several studies across European countries and the US suggest that adolescents are more likely to be placed in residential care provisions than younger children (del Valle and Bravo, 2013; Dierkhising et al., 2020; Healy et al., 2011; Jedwab et al., 2020; Vanderfaeillie et al. 2014). Out-of-home care services in Germany, Norway, and Sweden in particular, and to a slightly lesser extent Ireland and New Zealand, are very much focused on adolescents. This can be explained to some degree by varying legal provisions across different child protection systems. In Sweden, for instance, youth offenders fall under the remit of social care (Healy et al., 2011), whereas in Germany, child protection services support young adults up to the age of 21 and even 27 in certain cases (del Valle and Bravo, 2013).

A number of studies featuring in this briefing further highlight the racial or ethnic disparities and the overrepresentation of young people from ethnic minorities, immigrant backgrounds or indigenous young people in the care system (Bhatti-Sinclair and Sutcliffe, 2012; del Valle and Bravo, 2013; Jud et al., 2012; Karlsson, 2021; Leloux-Opmeer et al., 2016; Rivaux et al., 2008; Thoburn, 2007). The overrepresentation of indigenous children in the care system has been noted particularly in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the USA, and Roma children in Romania (del Valle and Bravo, 2013; Thoburn, 2007). This trend was also surfaced by some respondents to our call for information with regards to Australia and Canada. A similar trend has been noted in the UK – where black children are three times more likely than white children to be placed in out-of-home care (Bywaters et al., 2016)

Findings

This scoping has identified a number of trends across the countries explored.

1. A shift in framing extra-familial harm from a youth justice to a child welfare issue

Over the last decades of the twentieth century, the prevalence and life-long effects of child abuse has been increasingly recognised, coupled with increased pressure internationally calling for adequate statutory responses (Spratt et al., 2015). The development of global and regional instruments to safeguard children from various forms of violence reflect a shift in international understandings and definitions of child abuse that is increasingly considering a wider range of harms in extra-familial settings². At the same time, a growing international body of literature draws attention to child sexual exploitation and trafficking (Know Violence in Childhood, 2017; Radford et al., 2017). While these forms of harm have been primarily framed in child protection systems internationally as a youth justice issue, international and national legal and policy frameworks in the last decade have shifted the responsibility of addressing child trafficking and sexual exploitation from the juvenile justice system to children social care (Cody, 2017; Farrell et al., 2019; Pullman et al., 2020; Radford et al., 2017). The majority of papers identified in the current scoping originate from high income countries and situate out-of-home placements within the social care sector, reflecting this trend.

The national take-up of policy and practice developments in response to child sexual exploitation and trafficking, however, reveals a mixed picture. Numerous studies indicate that child protection systems across the world provide inadequate responses to extra-familial harm (Dubowitz, 2017; Hickle and Roe-Sepowitz, 2018; Palmer, 2019; Pullmann et al., 2020; Radford et al., 2017; The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020). The criminalisation of children victim of sexual exploitation and trafficking continues to be widespread within the youth justice sector or under the immigration and asylum system (Miller-Perrin and Wurtele, 2017; Palmer, 2019; Pullmann et al., 2020). Although UNICEF guidelines stipulate that under no circumstances should a child be placed in any type of detention facilities, this practice continues to happen in a number of countries (Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe, 2018). This is the case in the US, where some state jurisdictions continue to criminalise victims of CSE and trafficking (Miller-Perrin and Wurtele, 2017). In Europe, moreover, young people (often unaccompanied) who have been trafficked across borders tend to primarily fall

² See for instance the [European Report on Preventing Child Maltreatment](#) (2013) or the [World Health Organisation Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children](#) (2018).

under the immigration and asylum systems and considerations of their migration status often obscure their child protection needs (O’Connell Davidson, 2011), as is the case in the UK (Hynes, 2015).

Civil society organisations play an important role in providing protection and child welfare supports to victims of exploitation in the absence of state service provision. Although this trend has been highlighted particularly with regards to low- and middle-income countries (Radford et al., 2017), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) appear to fill a significant gap across all the countries included in this scoping, particularly for victims of trafficking in Europe (Palmer, 2019). It is revealing that significant research in this field is conducted by NGOs or private foundations. The third sector also plays an important role in establishing and monitoring care provision standards and children’s rights (see for instance the Better Care Alternative network).

2. Out-of-home/secure care is used as a response to child sexual abuse/exploitation and trafficking internationally (across child welfare and youth justice)

Types of care identified for victims of child sexual abuse/exploitation and trafficking featuring in material identified through this scoping

Long-term and short-term residential facilities

Residential care appears as the most common care provision for children and young people affected by child sexual abuse/exploitation and trafficking. The definition of ‘residential care’ employed in this scoping review is that included in the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children: “*care provided in any non-family-based group setting, such as places of safety for emergency care, transit centres in emergency situations, and all other short and long-term residential care facilities, including group homes*” (UN 2009, A/RES/64/142, p.6). Both long-term residential facilities (commonly termed as ‘congregate care’ in the US) and short-term residential facilities are used to accommodate young people who have experienced child sexual abuse/exploitation or trafficking.

The types of long-term residential placements featuring in this scoping include:

- residential treatment programmes/centres
- group home (large and small)
- secured/semi-secured and unsecured facilities
- shelters

“Shelters” often describe the place where survivors of trafficking are cared for. Shelters vary in size, purpose (emergency, transit or long term) and may encompass small group homes or secure accommodation (Cody, 2013).

In the US, some small group homes (typically 6-10 beds) have been developed specifically for sexually exploited and domestically or internationally trafficked children – and tend to be only available to girls or young women (Clawson et al, 2009).

Short-term residential facilities identified in this scoping include hotels, emergency shelters and temporary reception centres.

Family-based care

Family-based care is also used to accommodate young people who have experienced child sexual abuse/exploitation or trafficking, though there seems to be a dearth of evidence related to non-residential forms of alternative care – in particular, foster care, kinship care, and semi-supported independent living arrangements (Cody, 2013). Family-based care identified in the literature include foster care, relative care, pre-adoption, and CSEC-specific foster placement (Cody, 2013; Gibbs et al., 2018; Pullmann et al., 2020).

Specialist protective independent and semi-independent accommodations

Specialist protective independent and semi-independent accommodations are also used for victims of child sexual abuse/exploitation or trafficking. These appear to be primarily run by NGOs though there is little research on this model (Cody, 2013).

Detention facilities

Young people who have been victims of trafficking continue to be placed in detention facilities including police centres, detention centres, and juvenile justice institutions/correction facilities, both in Europe and the US (De Witte and Pehlivan, 2014; Degani et al., 2015; GATE, 2013).

Although the need for specialised care provisions has been recognised in international guidelines, there is a clear gap in the literature about specialised care provisions internationally. This scoping has only found evidence of this model of care in the US and the Netherlands, as outlined in the vignettes below.

Insight into the US

The majority of papers identified about out-of-care provisions for victims of exploitation came from the US, where shifts in policy and practice frameworks have led to increased identification of children victims of exploitation, alongside the recognition that they need specialised child welfare interventions (Pullmann et al., 2020). This shift however is recent, and funding and service provision for victims of CSEC, particularly shelter facilities, have hitherto remained limited (Miller-Perrin and Wurtele, 2017).

A study exploring the national landscape of existing residential programs across the US that offer specialised services for child victims of human trafficking identified 130 such programmes. It found that the majority of placements categorised their residential housing as ‘private congregate care’. These included a mix of locked, semi-secured and unsecured facilities (Farrell et al., 2019). The majority of these specialised residential programmes are privately operated and financed (93%) compared to publicly operated and funded (7%) (Farrell et al. 2019). Most existing residential programmes in the US appear to be focused exclusively on child sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. Only four were identified as explicitly accepting victims of labour trafficking (Farrell et al., 2019).

Farrell et al. (2019)’s findings echo a previous report which outlined a national programme inventory of residential services for trafficking victims (for both adults and children) in which the most commonly identified type was long-term residential and group homes, followed by transitional living programmes and shelters (Reichert and Sylwestrzak, 2013). This same study found that the majority of residential programmes worked with both domestic and international trafficking victims and that California had the highest concentration of these programmes. In California, moreover, specialised foster homes can provide emergency accommodation to young people who are suspected of having been subject to CSEC (Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe, 2018).

Insight into the Netherlands

The Netherlands have introduced targeted programmes for young people affected by child sexual exploitation – including both ‘open’ and ‘secured’ facilities. In some cases, admittance to care facilities (often enforced through judicial authorisation) is preventive when it is strongly suspected that a minor is at immediate risk of sexual exploitation or when there are strong suspicions but no substantial evidence that the exploitation is taking place (Aussems et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the Netherlands have a specialised anti-trafficking support structure for UASCs in NIDOS, the Dutch national guardianship institution for unaccompanied and separated children in the Netherlands. NIDOS runs protected centres in cases of children who are suspected of having been trafficked or at risk of trafficking (De Witte and Pehlivan, 2014).

3. A lack of evidence on the use of out-of-home care/secure placements as a response to sexual abuse/exploitation or trafficking in adolescence

There is limited international evidence on safe accommodation and alternative care for adolescents affected by sexual abuse/exploitation or trafficking, and about what types of provisions are more effective for this cohort of young people. This is reflected in the limited sample of papers identified in this scoping that looked at care provision for adolescents affected by these types of harm. In an international scoping on the matter, Cody (2013) noted that:

“studies exploring the needs and experiences of sexually exploited children tend to focus on the whole spectrum of support and services. ‘Accommodation’ or ‘housing’ is often highlighted as a need in these studies but there is little discussion surrounding what that should involve or look like” (Cody, 2013, p.1).

Family-based care models have been argued by some as the most suitable care provision to meet the needs of long-stay children who have been trafficked from abroad. However, no papers exploring this practice were identified in the present scoping.

Some reasons for this lack of evidence

The lack of evidence on the use of out-of-home care to protect adolescents from sexual abuse/exploitation or trafficking can be partly explained by the covert nature of these forms of harm and the stigmatisation and vulnerability of victims (Gibbs et al., 2018). Inconsistencies around identification and screening mechanisms for victims of exploitation and trafficking further obscures the picture and limit the provision of child protection services. In Europe and in the US, the recognition of human trafficking and sexual exploitation is relatively recent within child protection systems and there remains many disparities, both at regional level within countries, and at national level, between states (Degani et al., 2015; Dimitrova et al., 2015; Gibbs et al., 2018). The application of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), a mechanism to support the identification of trafficking victims, and subsequent attempts to adapt this mechanism to enhance international collaboration in cross-borders trafficking cases (with the introduction of the Transnational Referral Mechanism) vary greatly across European child protection systems and the majority remain ill-adapted to responding to child exploitation cases. This is also the case for practices around the appointment of guardians for separated or unaccompanied children (Degani et al., 2015). In their report on child trafficking among vulnerable Roma communities, comparing child protection responses across seven countries in Europe, Dimitrova et al. (2015) identify seven main deficiencies related to how protection and assistance is provided to victims of trafficking across these child protection systems, including: lack of NRM; lack of formalised procedures for risk assessment; communication challenges between local

authorities; insufficient funding and capacity of facilities providing assistance; insufficient capacity of social workers; lack of facilities for long-term accommodation and lack of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Moreover, there is high degree of ambivalence about who should bear the responsibility for safeguarding children who have been trafficked, combined with a lack of multi-agency partnership (Degani et al., 2015; Palmer, 2019). Particularly, service provision for children victims or at risk of trafficking is further limited by varying thresholds across countries (Palmer, 2019). Cases of young people suspected of being at risk of trafficking that fall below thresholds of active child protection concerns may not receive any support. In Europe, this tends to be observed for Roma children, particularly in situations where it is unclear whether they are genuinely living with their parents, and in situations where local law does bar further investigation if the child is not resident at a permanent address (De Witte and Pehlivan, 2014 – cited in Palmer, 2019). In a similar vein, the identification of foreign unaccompanied minors as victims of trafficking presents an even greater challenge because they tend to be primarily labelled as offenders and/or foreign unaccompanied minor – and thus located within juvenile justice circuits or within protection systems for foreign unaccompanied minors, rather than anti-trafficking protection systems (Degani et al., 2015).

Additionally, there is a lack of identification and response across many child protection systems which are aimed at older children, namely young males, and particularly those involved in forced criminal activity, such as labour exploitation, forced begging of theft and drug dealing. In many countries in Europe, adolescents involved in these forced criminal activities are criminalised (Degani et al., 2015; Dimitirova et al., 2015). Similarly, in the UK, the absence of national strategies for safeguarding adolescents from extra-familial harm means that young people who are victims of child criminal exploitation fall between youth justice, child protection agencies and the voluntary sector (Lloyd and Firmin, 2020; Wroe, 2021).

Limited evidence and diverging views on the type of care provisions that is most effective for adolescents who have experienced sexual abuse/exploitation or trafficking

Unsurprisingly, given the general dearth of evidence on adequate service provision for adolescent victims of sexual exploitation or trafficking, this scoping review found very little evidence pertaining to what type of care provision is most effective for this cohort of adolescents. While it is increasingly recognised that adolescents affected by these types of harm tend to have additional and complex needs, requiring some form of specialised provisions, there is dispute among professionals and academics on what type of housing provision best meets these needs. These debates highlight an underlying tension within safeguarding work with vulnerable young people around

reconciling youth agency with protection (Bovarnick and Cody, 2021; Brodie et al., 2016; Hamilton et al., 2019).

Hickle and Roe-Sepowitz (2018)'s study was one of the first to compare at the different care experiences of adolescent girls aged 11-18 residing in residential care homes in the US who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation, and those who have not. The study highlights the lack of evidence in this area, noting that a rapid review of evidence on providing support for sexually exploited children in residential settings commissioned by the UK Department for Education in 2016 had only identified nine studies internationally that referenced support provided in residential care – several of which were about other services (La Valle and Graham, 2016, cited in Hickle and Roe-Sepowitz, 2018). Hickle and Roe-Sepowitz's findings indicate that young people with experiences of commercial sexual exploitation face additional complex and challenging needs and suggest that group home environments are less adapted to these needs. The authors recognise that such findings can have different implications for service provision and outline current debates on the matter. They point to some authors calling for more intensive level of treatment, including locked/secured facilities (O'Brien, White, and Rizo, 2017), while others emphasise the need to develop more flexible, holistic programmes that are adapted to the specific needs of survivors of commercial sexual exploitation, recognising that recovery from these experiences is far from being a linear process (Sapiro et al., 2016; Schwartz and Britton, 2015). As Brodie et al. (2011) and Sapiro et al. (2016) have shown in the UK and the US respectively, professionals often struggle to strike a balance in service provision, including the provision of safe housing, between supporting youth agency and their rights to participate in decision-making, and the need to protect them from harm. This tension can sometimes blur the boundaries between the notions of "care" and "control". Some professionals believe that placing youth at risk of trafficking in secured facilities, accompanied with monitoring and surveillance by law enforcement, could help to locate them should they go missing (Sapiro et al., 2016).

Thomson et al. (2011)'s study of a treatment programme for sexually exploited adolescent girls at a residential treatment centre in New England, US, provides an example of flexible, holistic support to adolescents who have experienced sexual exploitation. The programme had a designated separate group home program especially for sexually exploited youth, located adjacent to a larger residential treatment campus. According to the authors, this allowed residents to "transition slowly to group home life, and to go back and forth to a more restrictive setting as needed", which was "more successful than treating youth with a variety of problems in the same setting, or moving them immediately from more restrictive external placements, such as a correctional institution or the hospital, to the designated group home" (p. 2295). Compared with an earlier treatment program at the same facility, during its first year of operation this group home had a 78% decrease in the number of young women who failed to complete treatment goals as a result of them running away, becoming hospitalised or incarcerated. Residents were provided with specialised educational

groups and survivor mentor programmes. This more informal, “real-life” support, combined with a “warm, home-like environment that allows more freedom than typical residential treatment settings” within the boundaries of “clear rules and consequences”, were, the authors argue, key to the programme’s success. The authors point to the dearth of evidence on the outcomes of residential treatment programmes for sexually exploited adolescents and the need for more studies to provide insight into how residential treatment programmes might be adapted to the needs of young people who have experienced exploitation, and well as to consider the impact of ethnic and family backgrounds, legal status, pregnancy and ‘problematic behaviour’.

There appears to be even less evidence internationally about specialised service provisions for indigenous young people (despite trends suggesting their over-representation in the care system, as previously noted). Only two papers were identified in this area – one about the gap of service provision and specialised centers for sexually trafficked indigenous girl in Canada (Sethi, 2007); and another flagging that the introduction of The Equity Care Plan 2010 in Ireland aligned responses to foreign national separated children with service provision for indigenous Irish children (Horgan and Ní Raghallaigh; 2017)

4. There are notable limitations of out-of-home care/ secure placements as a response to sexual abuse/exploitation and trafficking

Temporary accommodations

The limited evidence gleaned as part of this scoping review on the use of out-of-home care or secure placements as a response to sexual abuse/exploitation or trafficking points to a general lack of specialised care provisions. In the absence of alternative care such as small group homes and foster care, young people affected by sexual abuse/exploitation or trafficking are often placed in unsuitable emergency or temporary accommodations, such as shelters, with limited or no access to support. The use of temporary, shelter-based models is often viewed as a long-term solution to protect victims of trafficking internationally (Cody (2017). This practice is concerning, not only due to the absence of specialised and comprehensive, rights-based trauma-informed care support for young people in these settings, but in some cases, it further increases the risks of young people’s exposure to harm.

A review of twenty multi-national projects to support child victims of human trafficking in Europe (Palmer, 2019), furthermore, highlights a series of structural shortcomings in child protection services for children residing in temporary accommodations. These include unsuitable and unsafe accommodation, lack of wider support from child welfare services, and a lack of coordinated response, including around ensuring the safe return of minors to their home country. These gaps are evident for both national

EU children and children who have been trafficked from abroad into the EU. Another study comparing child protection responses to child trafficking across European countries flags that staff in shelters run by child welfare services or by the judicial youth protection services are not trained and upskilled to support children victims of exploitation (Degani et al., 2015). In some countries, like Hungary, in the absence altogether of specialised shelters, children victims of trafficking are placed in children foster homes or 'transitions homes' but with limited or no specialised support (Degani et al., 2015).

While temporary houses or shelter facilities for minors at risk of or victims of trafficking often prove unsuitable, the lack of shelters (and of any alternative care provisions) can also result in young people being placed outside of child protection facilities, such as hotels or detention facilities. To illustrate this issue, in their report on child trafficking among vulnerable Roma communities comparing child protection responses across seven countries in Europe, Dimitrova et al. (2015) share an example of two Roma siblings found on the street in Greece who were detained for 40 days in a police cell while authorities were looking for suitable alternative accommodation. It appears that young people who have been trafficked from abroad (including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children) are more susceptible to slip through child protection nets. In Hungary for instance, there are no protected houses or shelter facilities for 'third-country' national minors – despite the country being a popular transit stop for smuggler nets transporting migrants to Europe and beyond. Instead, trafficked third country nationals identified as victims of trafficking – including children – are accommodated in reception centres for the duration of the procedure, without any access to psychosocial assistance or support, neither from the state nor from civil organisations (Degani et al., 2015).

Similarly, a respondent to the call for information that was issued to inform this scoping review highlighted that in the US, the child protection department in their state has been placing 'challenging youths' in remote areas placements in very temporary hotel accommodation due to extreme shortage of intensive service settings – a practice that essentially rendered young people homeless. Although this person did not define what they meant by the term "challenging youths", it is possible that some of the young people impacted by this practice were vulnerable to or at risk of extra-familial harm.

In some cases, unsuitability and/or instability of placements can increase young people's exposure to harm

In many European countries, children who are suspected/victims of trafficking often go missing from shelters and child protection facilities. This has been attributed to poor living conditions in shelters and/or continued links with their exploiters (Degani et al., 2015; Dimitrova et al., 2015). For example, in a number of European countries, unaccompanied minors who were trafficked from abroad have left their

accommodation because they feel obliged to pay money back to their traffickers (Degani et al., 2015).

The absence of suitable alternative care is also deemed problematic in the countries of origins of young people who have been trafficked across borders. The lack of long-term accommodation in these countries for children whose best interest it is not to return to their families has been flagged as further placing young people at risk (Dimitrova et al., 2015). They might be placed in state institutions with low quality of childcare or, in the absence of suitable accommodation facilities, returned to families and guardians without sufficient assessment of the environment and of the potential risk of re-trafficking when parents and guardians were complicit in the crime (Dimitrova et al., 2015).

Several papers were further identified through this scoping review about young people's exposure to exploitation/trafficking whilst in residential or foster care (Latzman et al., 2019; Lumos, 2020; McKibbin and Humphreys, 2019; Moore et al., 2017; Pullmann et al., 2020; Werkmeister Rozas et al., 2018). A report by the foundation Lumos (2020) reveals that children across Europe are placed in unspecialised or unsuitable institutions (including unaccompanied children and child victims of trafficking), often as part of a misguided protective response. In some cases, victims can be placed in the same institutions as youth offenders. The report shows that being placed in these institutions can make young people more vulnerable to (re)trafficking – and refers to this pattern as “institution-related trafficking”.

One study featuring in this scoping indicates that placement settings where young people are more closely monitored, such as secured or semi-secured accommodation or group homes with staff supervision, are less conducive to building trusting relationships between young people and staff. The authors argue that this may lead young people to seek support in other ways, notably by going missing from the placement and through relationships that may make them more vulnerable to exploitation (Werkmeister Rozas et al., 2018). Having trusting relationships with placement staff has been articulated by young people as key to helping them feel safe in residential placements in a number of studies (Aussems et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2018; Moore et al., 2017). This theme also surfaced in the Securing Safety study, where young people, parents and professionals spoke about need for professionals involved in the relocation process, including those running placements, to have experience of supporting adolescents and responding to extra-familial harm.

5. A lack of attention to the geographical location of placements

While this scoping uncovered limited evidence on out-of-home placements in response to extra-familial harm, even less material was found specifically about the use of distant placements as a response to child abuse/exploitation or trafficking. Only

three studies included in the scoping give some consideration to the location of placements as a response to extra-familial harm. The first, from the US, found that young people with experience of commercial sexual exploitation preferred unlocked placements and that they were more likely to rank out-of-state placement higher in preference compared to youth without experiences of commercial sexual exploitation, who were more likely to prefer local homes. The reasons for these preferences, however, are not explored in depth. The authors do nonetheless report that *“for both remote and out-of-state options, youth stated as a positive that it was harder to leave or run away, and they provided new opportunities for activities and a greater ability to focus on programming”* (Dierkhising et al., 2020 p.5). Yet young people in this study also found it difficult to be away from family and friends and some found it harder to adjust to their new community. One young person interviewed in the study felt that it was *“still easy for a trafficker to go pick you up”* in a distant placement. Another youth person reported that it was *“too easy”* to go missing from placements in local housing and *“for the trafficker to expect you to return to him”* (Dierkhising et al., 2020 p.5).

The second study, also from the US, outlines diverging views among professionals on placement types for young people with experiences of commercial sexual exploitation (Sapiro et al., 2016). Some professionals felt that placing these young people in remote environments, including rural settings, would increase their safety because it would render it more difficult for them to return to trafficking situations. Other professionals advocated for services that are accessible to community providers, prioritising the environment around the care provision, over its geographical location – while noting that the location should nonetheless be removed from traffickers. The authors conclude that

“the disagreement over the ideal location for a program [for sexually trafficked youth] reflected the tension between a program’s need to protect the safety and security of its clients and staff and the desire to support healthy community engagement among the youth it served” (Sapiro et al., 2016; p.106)

The authors of the third study, a comparison of child protection responses to child trafficking in Europe, explore the use of temporary shelters to accommodate young people at risk or victim of trafficking (Degani et al., 2015). In their opinion, shelters need to guarantee a geographic relocation and a rupture with the exploiters in order to ensure the protection of victims. At the same time, they also point to the need of considering the suitability of placements in relation to identity and belonging, pointing to the frequent desertion of shelters by minors that are victims of trafficking, due to the fact that they do not perceive themselves as victims of trafficking:

“in order to prevent the desertion of the shelters by the children, it is essential to think of a model of residential assistance that overcomes the current practices and tries to place the person and the culture he/she belongs to at the centre, rather than his/her victim status because of which it is thought he/she needs primarily security and protection. This means offering a non-judgmental

setting with an operational approach able to involve the child and to entice the child to return even after his/her possible desertion of the shelter”(Degani et al., 2015: p.109)

Some insights from the call for information

The call for information generated some but limited insight into decisions that might lead to distance placements. One respondent observed that in the US there was generally a preference to keep or return a young person to their home/community but that the idea of relocation as a fresh start was sometimes considered in juvenile justice settings. Another respondent from the call for information shared that in the US, states can move children to another state if there is a lack of availability of ‘Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres’, the clinical needs exceed what in-state providers can meet, or there is a specialised need such as eating disorders. However, no evidence could be found on the extent to which this was practiced for young people with experiences of exploitation. A third respondent shared information about a programme in Italy which removed young people involved with the Mafia from their community into a different region and offered them wraparound support. This programme has supported young men involved in “gang-related violence” and criminal exploitation and young women with experiences of sexual violence.

Several respondents further suggested wilderness/adventure programmes as examples of out-of-home placements that involved relocating young people – but did not know whether these targeted young people with experiences of exploitation. Wilderness therapy programmes primarily feature in the US. They mainly target reducing adolescent substance use, improving social and psychological well-being, and increasing family cohesion and functioning (Harper et al., 2017). Although it has been argued that these types of programmes, due to their physical, psychological, and social dimensions, are well suited to young people who have experienced adversities such as abuse and neglect (Pryor et al., 2018), no evidence could be found on the use of such programmes as part of an intervention for young people who have experienced sexual abuse/exploitation or trafficking.

Conclusion

This scoping review identified limited international evidence on the use and efficacy of out-of-home care and secure placements as a response to child sexual abuse/exploitation and trafficking. The material identified in this scoping review surfaces two main reasons that could explain this lack of evidence.

Firstly, child protection systems in the countries that feature in this scoping are ill-equipped to identify, and respond to, child sexual abuse/exploitation and trafficking –

and to forms of exploitation and harm within extra-familial settings more broadly. In many cases, there is simply an absence of child protection response to extra-familial harm.

Secondly, when child sexual abuse/ exploitation or trafficking is identified, care provisions are generally inconsistent – and tend to sit between the child welfare, the youth justice, the voluntary sector, or private care providers. Although states are encouraged to provide a child protection response to these forms of harm, in practice, these responses greatly vary – and are marked overall by a lack of specialised services. This gap can be partly explained by resource shortage combined with a lack of evidence and expertise about the types of care provisions and interventions that work best for young people who have experienced child sexual abuse/exploitation or trafficking. The current scoping found even less evidence about the use of distant (or ‘out-of-area’) placements to remove young people from the context of harm, though the limited evidence on this topic points to diverging views among professionals about tensions between the use of distance placement to reduce risk against the need to build safety in the community.

Despite these shortcomings, out-of-home care and secure placement are clearly used as a response to child sexual abuse/exploitation or trafficking. This scoping surfaces some notable trends and limitations associated with this practice, which mirror some of the trends highlighted in the UK literature and in the Securing Safety study:

- Intra-familial harm as the main driver of out-of-home care
- Challenges in identifying and responding to extra-familial harm
- Similar types of placement as those seen in the UK (notably with more adolescents in residential care and short-term provisions for victims of trafficking)
- A lack of alternative care and specialised service provisions – leading in many cases to unsuitable and unsafe placements, including placements situated outside of social care settings
- Limited oversight of the rates at which distant placements are used to safeguard adolescents from extra-familial harm
- Lack of evidence on the conditions that would best support out-of-home care to play a role in ensuring a young person’s safety

While Contextual Safeguarding has been developed and primarily implemented in England and Wales, the picture painted in this scoping suggests that the issues it confronts are clearly present other in child protection systems. A Contextual Safeguarding approach could speak to some of the limitations identified in relation to the use of out-of-home placements as a safeguarding response to adolescent extra-familial harm internationally, namely through:

- Providing a contextualised lens to better understand the contextual dynamics of adolescent extra-familial. Assessing and targeting the contexts in which adolescents experience harm could help shift the focus of social care interventions from disrupting or managing risks – by removing the young person from a context – to considering alternative interventions focused on creating safety in these contexts
- Encouraging child welfare responses that are collaborative, centred on children’s rights, building on current efforts to move away from responses that criminalise adolescent victims of extra-familial harm
- Encouraging multi-agency partnerships

Moreover, the Securing Safety study highlighted the lack of evidence on the impact of distant or ‘out-of-area’ placements on young people’s experiences of safety, or on the conditions that contribute to their effectiveness. This lack of evidence is also apparent in the international literature. The Securing Safety study highlights the importance of asking about, and planning for, young people’s safety – particularly in considering the impact of relocations on young people’s relationships and wellbeing, alongside their physical safety. Only a small number of papers in this scoping draw attention to the importance of relationships in promoting wellbeing and creating a sense of safety for young people in care – both between young people and staff in care-provisions, and within young people’s informal support networks. Shuker (2013)’s model of multidimensional safety, which underpins the Securing Safety study, could provide a valuable framework to explore young people’s experiences of safety in other child protection settings.

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Appendix A: Search strategy

A. Research questions

1. To what extent are out-of-home placements used as an intervention in child protection systems outside the UK to safeguard adolescents who are at risk of, or have experienced, sexual abuse/exploitation and/or trafficking in extra-familial settings?
2. Who are the key agencies/organisations involved in these interventions when they are used in an international context?
 - b) In which sectors are these agencies/organisations situated (child protection, justice, health, youth serving services, voluntary agencies, etc.)?
3. What do the findings tell us about the potential applicability of Contextual Safeguarding to international responses to extra-familial harm?

B. Definitions

Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation: The Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, also known as "[the Lanzarote Convention](#)", is the first, and most comprehensive legally-binding instrument that criminalises various forms of sexual abuse of children, including acts committed abroad. The Lanzarote Convention defines sexual abuse as:

1. *engaging in sexual activities with a child who, according to the relevant provisions of national law, has not reached the legal age for sexual activities;*
2. *engaging in sexual activities with a child where:*
 - – *use is made of coercion, force or threats; or*
 - – *abuse is made of a recognised position of trust, authority or influence over the child, including within the family; or*
 - – *abuse is made of a particularly vulnerable situation of the child, notably because of a mental or physical disability or a situation of dependence.*

Child exploitation refers to '*using a child for sexual activities where money or any other form of remuneration or consideration is given or promised as payment, regardless if this payment, promise or consideration is made to the child or to a third person*'. The Lanzarote Convention criminalises sexual abuse and exploitation of children through 'prostitution', offences related to child abuse material and exploitation of a child in pornographic performances, corruption of children, as well as solicitation of children for sexual purposes (grooming).

Child trafficking: The [Palermo Protocol](#) to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons defines human trafficking as:

(a) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.

(b) Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

(c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purposes of exploitation shall be considered trafficking in persons even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a).

Under the terms of this Protocol, children under 18 cannot give valid consent and the ‘means’ of trafficking is therefore not relevant.

(Article 3, Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime)

Child protection system: Structures, functions, and capacities, among other components that have been assembled in relation to a set of child protection goals (Wulczyn et al. 2010).

Young People: Refers to young people aged between 10 and 24 inclusive, in line with the World Health Organisation’s use of the term.

C. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Include	Exclude
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definitions applied as above • Related to ‘delinquency’ or ‘poor behaviour’ of young people i.e. where young people are problematised in relation to EFH • Relevant to at least one of the research questions following screening of abstract or executive summary • Grey literature where relevant (policy documents, organisational reports, etc.) to provide broader context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not feature relocation • Intra-familial harm in adolescence without an extra-familial factor • Does not feature adolescence • Study is only based in the UK (NB: can include comparative studies between UK and other countries)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methodological approach provided • Date 2005 onwards • English language 	
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D. Search terms

Young person / adolescence chain	"adolescen*" OR "youth" OR "young" OR "teen*" OR "juvenile" OR "deliquen*" OR "young adult" OR "emerging adult" OR "emergent adulthood" OR "minor" OR "emerging adulthood" OR "emergent adult" OR "child*"
Relocation chain (in two parts)	"relocat*" OR "residential placement" OR "placement" OR "residential" OR "institution" OR "secured placement" OR "secured" OR "care" OR "foster care" OR "accommoda*" OR "looked after" OR "looked-after" OR "secure" AND "Social work*" OR "social care" OR "child protection" OR "safeguarding" OR "child welfare" OR "safety" OR "youth work" OR "intervention" OR "response" OR "practice" OR "family work" OR "care" OR "looked after" OR "looked-after"
EFH	AND "exploitation" OR "abuse" OR "harm" OR "trafficking" OR "child sexual exploitation"
Country	NOT "UK" or "United-Kingdom" or "England" or "Wales" or "Scotland" or "Northern-Ireland" or "Britain" or "British"

Note: Search terms were applied with some degree of flexibility, and in some cases modified and/or combined to better adapt to the different databases

E. Databases searched

- International bibliography of the social sciences
- DISCOVER
- ASSIA
- CROCHANE

F. Journals searched

- Adolescent Research Review
- Child Abuse Review
- Child and Adolescent Social Work

- Children and Society
- Children and Youth Service Review
- Childhood Vulnerability Journal
- Child and Youth Care Forum
- European Journal of Social Work
- International Journal of Adolescence and Youth
- International Journal on Child Maltreatment
- International Social Work
- Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma
- Journal of Human Rights and Social Work
- Journal of Youth and Adolescence
- Social Work and Social Policy
- Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies
- Youth Justice

G. Manual searches of International/European organisation and networks website (these were also contacted and invited to contribute to the call for information)

- [Better Care Network](#)
- [Care Leavers Network Europe](#)
- [CarePath Project](#)
- [Child to Child](#)
- [Child Hub](#)
- [ECPAT International](#)
- [European Social Work Research Association](#)
- [Eurochild](#)
- [European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community Based Care \(EEG\)](#)
- [Expert Group on Children at Risk](#)
- [Family for every child](#)
- [International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children](#)
- [NIDOS guardianship for refugees](#)
- [La Porte Ouverte](#)
- [Opening Doors for Europe's Children](#)
- [Promise](#)
- [Quality for Children](#)
- [Separated Children in Europe Programme](#)
- [SOS Children's Villages International](#)
- [Terre des Hommes](#)
- [The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children](#)
- [The International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse & Neglect](#)
- [UNICEF's Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia](#)