

Prevention, Intervention and Inclusion: Harmful Sexual Behaviour and Young People with Communication and Learning Needs Event Report

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1. Introduction

In partnership between Supporting Offenders with Learning Disabilities (SOLD), the Centre for Youth & Criminal Justice (CYCJ), and the Scottish Transitions Forum, this one day conference took place on April 3, 2019. The event recognised that while there is a lot of good work being done to develop new and effective ways to intervene with young people who exhibit signs of HSB, and to protect people from harm, this work is largely focused on young people in the general population. In order to ensure that young people with learning disabilities; autism; speech, language and communication needs; and/or other additional support needs are not unfairly disadvantaged or excluded, and that they have equal opportunities, the event sought to explore how preventative and early intervention can support young people with additional support needs who present with Harmful Sexual Behaviour.

Attendees heard from several experts in the field:

- Steve Robertson ([SOLD](#) User Group) and Tony Bowman (Policy and Development Worker, the SOLD Network) discussed insights from lived experience
- Stuart Allardyce (National Manager, [Stop It Now!](#)) looked at what evidence can tell us about best practice
- Beth Hannah (Senior Lecturer in Educational Psychology, University of Dundee) discussed the importance of understanding and supporting young people with additional support needs.
- Dr Clare Alley (Reader in Forensic Psychology, University of Salford) introduced sexual offending behaviour in young people with intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorder.
- Dr Jana de Villiers (Consultant Psychiatrist, The State Hospital Carstairs) discussed the submission from the Intellectual Disability Subgroup and preventing harmful sexual behaviour between children and young people.
- Dr Colin Morrison (Partner, [TASC Scotland](#)) showcased accessible Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood education resources in development

This was combined with participants' attendance at a morning and afternoon workshop, from a choice of seven:

- Working with children and young people with learning disabilities who have harmed sexually and their parents/carers and support network (Steven Barry, [Keep Safe](#))
- A mother's story: what agencies need to know about internet porn's effect on the brain of an adolescent with ASN (Mary Sharpe, Chief Executive Officer, [The Reward Foundation](#))
- 'Our rights and what works for us' (Steve Robertson, Paul Roberts and Allan Speirs, SOLD User Group and [People First Scotland](#))
- The Halt Service: our work with children and young people with additional support needs who display harmful sexual behavior (Stewart Evers and Shona Robertson, Social Workers, The HALT service)

- Community services for young people with a forensic label - a provider's perspective (Frank Slokan, National Autism Advisor and Alex Paterson, Service Manager, [Richmond Fellowship Community Forensic Team](#))
- 'Sex and relationship education and support that keeps everyone safe' (Michelle Steel, Geraldine McCormack and Margaret Wilson, People First Women's Group)
- Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood education (Dr Colin Morrison, Partner, TASC Scotland)

The presentations and materials utilised at the event can be accessed [here](#).

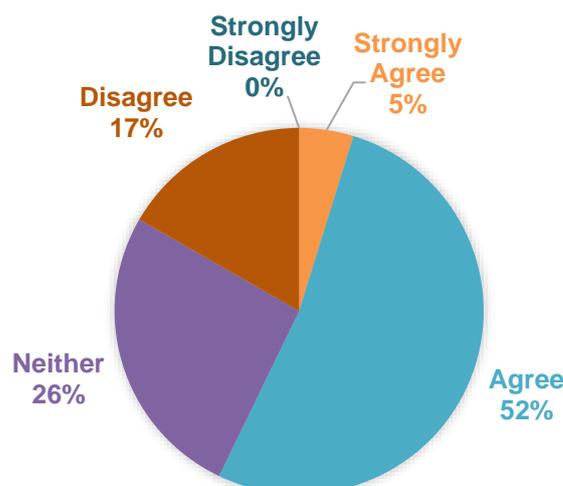
There were approximately 80 delegates who attended from a diverse range of agencies in the field, including local authorities, social work, NHS and third sector organisations. The following report represents an accurate account of the 42 responses received from delegates who completed returned evaluation forms.

2. Evaluation Feedback

2.1 Prior Knowledge

Attendees were asked to describe their knowledge and understanding of this topic prior to the conference. The chart below shows that the majority had prior knowledge before the event. Over half had existing good knowledge on harmful sexual behavior and young people with communication and learning needs, with 57% either agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement. A small proportion of attendees felt they had little knowledge prior to the conference (17%), and around a quarter (26%) stated they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

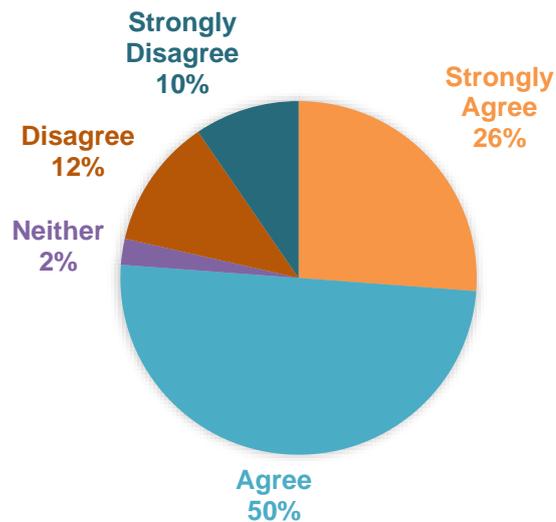
Chart 1 - Prior Knowledge



2.2 Previous Experience

Attendees were asked to describe their previous experience of working with young people involved in harmful sexual behavior. The chart below shows that the vast majority (76%) either agreed or strongly agreed that they had previous experience. Some 22% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, and 2% answered neither.

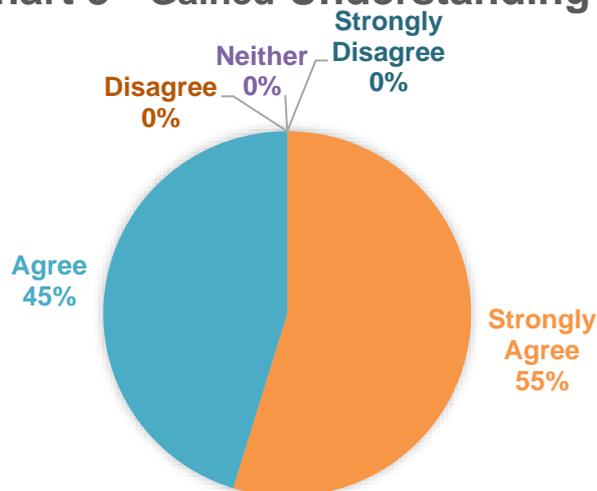
Chart 2 - Previous Experience



2.3 Gained Understanding

The chart below highlights that almost all attendees gained a greater understanding of the topic from the event - with 98% either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.

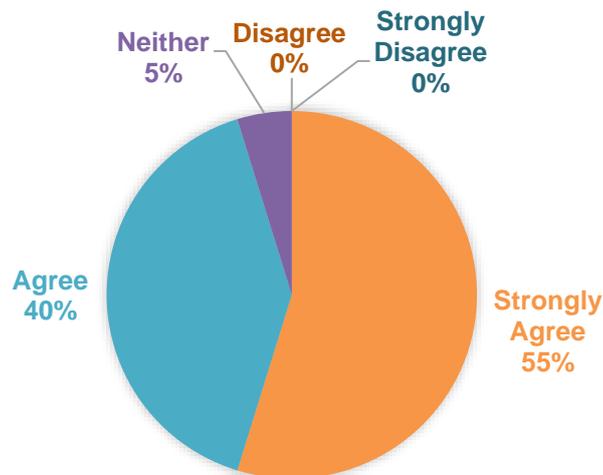
Chart 3 - Gained Understanding



2.4 Impact on Practice

The attendees were asked if they gained any knowledge from the event that would impact on their practice, as illustrated in the chart below. A vast majority of 93% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

Chart 4 - Gained Knowledge



3. Event Impact and Learning

Overall, the feedback from the event was exceedingly positive. Ninety eight percent of respondents identified something they felt they had learned as a result of the event. Many detailed that the current lack of understanding and support available for young people with communication and learning needs in relation to harmful sexual behaviour was the most important insight they had gained from the event:

“The lack of understanding and consideration given to learning disabilities and autism spectrum disorder within the criminal justice system”

“The persistence of improper diagnoses and lack of appropriate support/targeted intervention”

“That the rights of people with learning disabilities to access information and support around sex is largely lacking”

“The lack of support available for those with autism who have been involved in harmful sexual behaviour” #

For several respondents, the event highlighted the number of resources available when working with young people with communication and learning needs involved in harmful sexual behaviour and where these can be accessed:

“A better overview of sexual offending and what support and contacts are available”

“The range of different agencies and other supports available”

“The amount of information and resources available and ways to work with young people”

Others also identified that they increased their knowledge and understanding of harmful sexual behaviour within the population of young people with communication and learning needs, and particularly the complex relationship between this issue and internet usage:

“The link between child pornography use and people with autism spectrum disorder”

“Increased focus on internet enabled offending”

“New learning, including autism spectrum disorder and the internet”

Ninety five percent of respondents also provided feedback on what they felt went well from the event, with over half (57%) identifying the attendance at workshops as one of the best aspects of the conference:

“The workshops were good, in depth and informative”

“The workshops were very thought provoking, challenging and knowledgeable”

“I found the workshops were really interesting and particularly helpful”

Many respondents also identified the wide range of speakers and professions as a positive aspect of the conference, along with the benefit of hearing from those with lived experience:

“A good variety of speakers with different professions, qualifications and perspectives which gives a complete picture”

“The range of disciplines and shared knowledge helped strengthen positive attitudes toward diversion to prosecution in appropriate circumstances”

“Liaising with other professionals and especially service users and those affected by the issues”

Two thirds of respondents also provided information on what they felt could be improved about the event. Many highlighted issues with the venue itself, including the layout and temperature of the room during the conference. Two respondents highlighted that each speaker and workshop needed more time, along with the suggestion that repeating the

morning workshops in the afternoon may have helped. Simultaneously, two further respondents highlighted that they felt there was too much information across the conference:

“It was a lot of speakers with a lot of information to take in. I would have liked less information and more techniques to implement with the young people I work with”

4. What next?

Attendees were asked if there was any further training or support that they felt they could benefit from following the event, with 14 out of 42 responding to this question. Several respondents discussed that they would like to see conferences and courses similar to this one taking place in other areas across the country, so that learning and knowledge could be shared with a wider audience. Three respondents also identified that follow up resources would be of benefit:

“A source of compiled slide shows. A page where we can refer our colleagues”

“Copies of the presentations from the conference”

“Practice resources to use when working with young adults with learning disabilities”

In addition, one respondent highlighted that going forward, thinking about diversity and BAME people within the additional support needs population would be beneficial.

CYCJ, SOLD and the Scottish Transitions Forum are currently discussing next steps from the conference.