

Research into gang-associated sexual exploitation and sexual violence

Interim Report

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Introduction

This interim report outlines the progress of the ongoing research into gang-associated sexual exploitation and sexual violence in England, being conducted by The International Centre for the Study of Sexually Exploited and Trafficked Young People and The Vauxhall Centre for the Study of Crime within the Institute of Applied Social Research (IASR) at the University of Bedfordshire.

The research has been commissioned by the Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England (OCC) as part of their Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups (CSEGG).

Information on the remit of the OCC Inquiry and interim findings from year one can be found at www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

The research project

The research into children and young people's experiences of gang-associated sexual exploitation and sexual violence is exploring:

- The scale and nature of the issue in the specific areas of England under study;
- Pathways into gang-associated sexual exploitation and sexual violence for young people living in these gang-affected neighbourhoods; and
- Potential models of response.

The research is being conducted over the two-year period of the OCC Inquiry (Autumn 2011 to Autumn 2013). It has a narrower focus than the Inquiry, considering only those forms of sexual exploitation and sexual violence occurring in or related to gangs, as defined below.¹ As the prevalence and nature of such gangs varies significantly across the country, exposure to these issues also varies significantly for young people living in different communities and locales.

GANG: 'A relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who (1) see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group, (2) engage in a range of criminal activity and violence, (3) identify with or lay claim over territory, (4) have some form of identifying structural feature, and (5) are in conflict with other, similar, gangs' (Pitts 2008; Centre for Social Justice 2009).

Fieldwork is being undertaken in six different areas of England with differing gang histories and experiences. The identity of the research sites is not being released in order to protect potential participants; they do however reflect a broad range of experiences and different demographic profiles.

Executive summary of emerging reflections from year one of the research

A tentative preliminary analysis of the first set of young people's interviews, conducted in year one of the research, suggests that:

- 1 Sexual violence and exploitation between young people in gang-affected neighbourhoods largely reflects what we know about sexual violence and sexual exploitation in general:
 - Perpetrators are predominantly male, victims are predominantly female;
 - It invariably takes place between people who are known to each other; and
 - It is used as a means of boys and young men exerting power and control over girls and young women.
- 2 There are however certain features of gang-associated sexual violence and exploitation that are unique to, or exacerbated by, the gang environment. These include:
 - Using sex as a means of initiating young people into a gang;
 - Sexual activity in return for (perceived) status or protection;
 - Young women 'setting up' people in other gangs;
 - Establishing a relationship with, or feigning sexual interest in, a rival gang member as a means of entrapment; and
 - Sexual assault as a weapon in conflict.

¹ The definition of child sexual exploitation is that provided in the DCSF 2009 guidance, as outlined on page 8 of the report

- 3 There are some incidents of sexual violence against young men, but this information is less forthcoming than that related to incidents against young women. Sexual violence against young men is viewed differently than that against young women.
- 4 Not all young women are viewed as having equal rights to assent to or decline sexual activity. Young women who are seen as engaging in casual sex are viewed by some as having lost their right to withhold consent. Experiences of sexual violence also increase vulnerability to further incidents of the same.
- 5 Incidents of gang-associated sexual violence and exploitation are rarely reported. There are a variety of reasons for this including:
 - Resignation to, or normalisation of, such experiences;
 - Fear of retribution or retaliation;
 - Low levels of reporting of sexual violence amongst young people in general; and
 - A lack of confidence in the ability of police and other statutory services to offer adequate protection following a disclosure.

The context

Although some of today's youth gangs can be traced back to the late 1980s, the 21st century has seen a proliferation of these groupings in the poorest parts of England's major towns and cities. This proliferation has been paralleled by increased public concern, particularly in those communities most likely to feel the effects of gang violence. Although previous governments developed guns and knives policies and supported regional gangs initiatives, it was in the wake of the 2011 riots that the national strategy *Ending Gang and Youth Violence: A Cross-Government Report* (Home Office 2011) was formulated (although only around 10% of those known to have been involved in the riots appeared to have a gang affiliation). This strategy, based on a multi-agency partnership approach involving both the statutory and voluntary sectors, is being 'rolled out' in 29 gang-affected areas in England, supported by a virtual network of 60 'expert advisors'. Working alongside, and in liaison with, the Gangs and Youth Violence Initiative is the new Department for Communities and Local Government Troubled Families Unit which aims to turn around the lives of 120,000 troubled families in England by 2015.

Although historically the discussion of youth gangs has focussed upon young men, recent research (Firmin 2011) has highlighted the involvement of girls and young women in youth gangs and the potential risks associated with this. Both *Ending Gang and Youth Violence* and the *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan* (DfE 2011) acknowledge that gang-associated girls and young women can be vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation within gang-affected neighbourhoods. Although young men can also be vulnerable to gang-associated sexual violence or exploitation (a risk that must not be overlooked), as with other forms of sexual exploitation and violence, young women appear to be disproportionately impacted. This includes both young women who are directly associated with gangs and those with secondary association through relationship, such as siblings.

This recognition of the risks facing young women and girls in gangs has led to the establishment of a Women, Girls and Gangs Working Group within the Home Office and the provision of funding to improve services for under 18s involved in gang-related rape and abuse (DfE 2012). There is also provision in the Ending Gang and Youth Violence initiative's £11,250,000 budget for the appointment of 15 special advisers on girls and young women in gangs. Although these developments mark a significant step forward, it is, as yet, too early to evaluate their impact.

The approach

As with all research undertaken at the IASR, the work on gang-associated sexual violence and exploitation is 'applied' in nature, with a clear focus on improving outcomes for those affected by the concerns under review. The conduct of the project is informed by a collaborative, partnership approach that proactively engages both young people affected by these issues and a range of professionals working with them in understanding the nature of concerns and identifying sustainable responses to them.

The project involves a number of complementary data gathering exercises conducted in different phases over the two year period of the research. These are:

Policy/literature review: An initial review was completed at the start of the research (Pearce and Pitts, 2011). This is available to download from www.beds.ac.uk/research/iasr/centres/intcent

Rapid Assessment Exercise: Existing sources of relevant secondary data have been collated as part of a rapid assessment exercise in year one of the research. This data has been supplemented and contextualised by conversations with local partners and by a request for additional statistical data in the different research sites. The data that has been collated will inform the conduct of the research in the different sites and contextualise the data elicited in the interview and focus group phases of the research.

Interviews with young people: Face to face individual interviews are being conducted with approximately 150 young people, aged 11-25 years, drawn from across the six different research sites. Over half of these interviews have been conducted to date and the remainder will be completed during the last quarter of 2012.

Focus groups: A small number of single-gender focus groups will be conducted with selected young people in each of the six research sites in early 2013 to consider emerging themes from the previous interviews with young people. These focus groups will also explore ideas about effective responses to the problems identified. Parallel focus groups will be conducted with professionals in each of the six research sites.

Ethics and governance

The guiding principle of the research is that no harm should come to any individual as a result of their agreement to facilitate or take part in the research. In order to ensure this principle is upheld throughout the entire research process, the research team works with recognition of what they term 'ethics in process'. This approach recognises that additional unexpected ethical issues and risks may emerge as fieldwork progresses. Therefore, in addition to fulfilling formal governance requirements, the team has established a number of different advisory bodies to provide a source of ongoing ethical advice and help ensure research governance for the lifetime of the project:

- An overarching Research Project Advisory Group meets every three to four months, with consideration of ethical issues a standing item on the agenda. The group consists of a wide range of professionals working across the fields of research, policy and practice.
- A Young Person's Advisory Group meets 4-6 times a year to advise on the conduct and dissemination of the research, with a particular emphasis on ensuring that the focus of the research remains child-centred.

- Local Multi-Agency Advisory Groups have been established in each of the six research sites to help steer and support the research in that locale, within the parameters of the research protocol. These groups also ensure that relevant local issues are taken into account when planning the research and provide a forum whereby agencies can begin to consider the longer term implications of the research and the development of sustainable interventions to support young people affected by these issues.

A detailed ethical statement has been developed outlining the ethical approach being adopted within the work. This is available to download from www.beds.ac.uk/research/iasr/centres/intcent

Involving young people

The IASR is committed to facilitating the meaningful participation of young people in research that is relevant to their lives. Young people have a vital role to play not only in sharing their knowledge and experiences of an issue, but also in helping to identify meaningful solutions to it. Young people also have a crucial role to play in helping ensure that the research is conducted and disseminated in a way that is meaningful to their peers, a role that has ably been taken on by the Young People's Advisory Group.

Involving young people as advisors

The members of the Young People's Advisory Group have played a vital role in the first year of the project. Their commitment and insights have been invaluable and the research is most certainly more relevant and meaningful as a result of their contributions. Amongst their many contributions to date they have advised on:

- appropriate means of describing the topic of research to potential participants;
- the tone and content of information leaflets and consent forms;
- explaining limits to confidentiality in a way that makes sense to young people;
- the interview schedule and approach to interviewing; and
- potential phrases/words that participants might use and what this might mean.

In the coming months, advisory group members will meet with the research team to consider the initial findings of the research and potential responses to these. They will also consider how best to disseminate the findings of the research to younger audiences.

Involving young people as research interviewees

Interviews with young people from the six research sites form the key component of fieldwork in this project. Having first-hand experience of these issues, young people growing up in gang-affected areas and/or those affected by gang-associated sexual violence are best placed to help us understand the nuances of their lived experiences and the most appropriate means of responding to these.

Given the sensitivity of the topic under review and the potential negative implications associated with discussing these issues, care has been taken to identify an appropriate, minimal-risk means of eliciting young people's perspectives within a research interview environment. An important safeguard in this respect is the commitment that all potential interviewees will be accessed through agencies that can advise of any potential risks associated with involvement in the research and ensure appropriate follow up support is in place.

In order to make the interviews as comfortable as possible for young people, they are set up in a way that allows young people to comment on issues in the third person, unless they actively choose

to do otherwise. Interviews are informal and flexible in nature, with the interview schedule used as a framework for discussion rather than a verbatim script. Active steps are taken to maximise the control young people retain over their contributions, with time taken to explore how to safely talk about these issues within the interview environment. Researchers also actively check at the end of each interview if the young person has shared anything they would rather not be used and honour any request to withdraw contributions. Experience to date indicates that this approach is working well, with young people feeling comfortable within the interview environment and rich data being generated for analysis.

Issues of language and perception are of vital importance in a project like this. Although the primary focus of the work is gang-associated sexual exploitation and sexual violence, this is being explored in the wider context of 'relationships, sex and gangs (the good and the bad)' in interviews with young people. This is in order to make the topic more accessible for participants (on the basis that 'sexual exploitation' is not a meaningful term for many young people) and to broaden the range of experiences that they may interpret as relevant to the research. This is important given that many young people do not necessarily recognise the exploitation or violence inherent in their circumstances or experiences. Such an approach also helps to illuminate the wider context within which sexual violence and exploitation can occur for young people living in gang-affected neighbourhoods.

Involving young people in a parallel participation project

The University is running a young person's participation project in parallel to the research, through funding from Comic Relief and the OCC. This initiative allows young people to explore some of the themes emerging from the research and potential responses to these through the medium of film. Further information on this accompanying project can be found in Appendix One.

Emerging reflections from year one of the project

Although the young people's interviews are not yet complete, the research team has had an opportunity to undertake a tentative preliminary analysis of the themes emerging from the first 68 interviews, conducted across four different research sites. Half of these interviews were conducted with young women, half with young men. Participants ranged in age from 14 to 25 years and were drawn from a range of ethnic backgrounds: 41% described themselves as 'Black/Black British', 27% as 'White', 10% as 'Asian/Asian British' and 22% as 'Dual Heritage'.² The vast majority had direct exposure to the issues of gang-associated sexual violence or exploitation, although perhaps unsurprisingly many did not conceptualise their experiences as such.

The preliminary analysis of these early interviews indicates that there are a number of different area-based gangs in each of these research sites that vary in terms of their size, ethnic composition, origins, *raison d'être* and positioning within the community. Although a couple of female-only gangs have been identified, most of the gangs that have been discussed to date have been solely or predominantly male in terms of their membership and the discussion presented below reflects this.

It is important to highlight that the emerging reflections offered below are tentative observations on a small subset of the data and not definitive research findings. The observations presented here may or may not be replicated in subsequent interviews in the other research sites or emerge as significant in the final analysis. They are however highlighted at this point as they raise important considerations that the research team, and others working in this field, should be aware of in their interactions with young people affected by these issues.

² It is not yet feasible to comment on the representativeness of the overall research sample given the absence of baseline data in some of the research sites and the fact that the interview phase of the research is only partially complete at this stage – this issue will be addressed in the final report.

Routes into gang involvement/association: One of the primary aims of the research is to identify pathways into gang-related sexual exploitation and sexual violence for young people living in gang-affected neighbourhoods. A fundamental element of this question relates to young people's pathways into the wider gang environment. Asked why young people became involved in or associated with gangs, initial interviewees identified a range of individual, familial, cultural and structural factors to be at play within their locales. These included (in no particular order):

- the involvement of family or friends in gangs and the normalisation of gang-involvement within their social network;
- a desire for a sense of belonging, status, power and/or respect;
- a need for protection;
- disaffection with or disengagement from education;
- a lack of training or employment opportunities;
- inadequate youth provision (particularly given the impact of recent cuts); and
- difficulties at home or in care.

Obviously not all young people who experience these factors become involved or associated with gangs. Important questions therefore exist as to what co-existent factors mediate against this and why young people with similar experiences of dislocation or disaffection may or may not be drawn to gangs.

The nature of gang-associated sexual exploitation and sexual violence: The sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where a young person (or a third person) receives 'something' in return for involvement in some form of sexual activity (DSCF 2009). Sexual violence incorporates any behaviour that is perceived to be of a sexual nature, which is unwanted or takes place without consent or understanding. A number of different types of sexual exploitation or sexual violence were identified as occurring within many of the gang environments discussed in the initial set of interviews. These include:

- pressure to engage in sexual activity;
- engagement in sexual activity due to fear of force, violence (physical and/or sexual) and intimidation;
- the recording and distribution of images of sexual activity via mobile technology;
- sex as initiation into the gang;
- sex in return for (perceived) status or protection;
- sex as a means of achieving material gain;
- young women 'setting up' people in other gangs; and
- cases of rape (single and multiple perpetrator) and other sexual assaults – as punishment, a weapon in conflict and/or for sexual gratification.

As the research progresses, careful consideration will be given to both the prevalence of such incidents in different gang environments and young people's understanding and experience of these. As discussed below, consideration will also be given to the ways in which these incidents and experiences are related to, or independent of, factors unique to the gang environment.

Assigned roles and consequent vulnerability to sexual violence: Whilst recognising that each gang environment is unique, initial interviewees' contributions would suggest that a young person's gender and relative positioning within the gang can have a direct bearing upon their risk of sexual violence or exploitation. Whilst young men were not immune from this, it did appear to be particularly the case for young women, whose status within male-dominated gangs was generally determined by their relationships (familial or sexual) with young men and/or their (real or perceived) sexual availability. The one apparent exception to this was a minority of young women who appeared to have achieved status in their own right by virtue of adopting a masculine presentation and acting in a manner akin to their male counterparts within the gang.

'Links' or 'groupies' (young women who associated with gang-involved young men, but had no formal status or relationship) were identified as those most at risk of sexual violence or exploitation in this first set of interviews. Young people's narratives indicated that these young women are often viewed as sexual objects, with little consideration given to their wishes, agency or protection. In some instances this was noted to extend to sexual interaction in situations of coerced consent:

"Most girls get used in gangs...unless they're in relationships or their families are higher, then these girls are probably going to get used at some point in their life... If she's known to be scatty, if she's known to be loose, the guys will, if you look from the outside it might be looked as force, but to them they're not forcing her, they're just talking her into it. So they'll be like 'oh, come on, you might as well just do it... Depends what the guys are like though, because certain guys might just force her" (21 year old young man, ex-gang involved)

As indicated in the above quotation, young women who had a recognised relationship with a gang-involved male (familial or sexual) were identified by participants as potentially experiencing a degree of protection from sexual violence and exploitation within that male's gang. This protection was however clearly tenuous in nature, directly dependent on their relationship to the gang-involved male and easily withdrawn in the case of non-familial relationships. Relationships with gang-involved males were also observed to expose young women to heightened risk of exploitation or violence from other gangs. Girlfriends were noted to be at particular risk of domestic violence within their relationship and/or risk of sexual violence, as an expression of punishment or retaliation, should anything go wrong in the relationship:

"Like my friend, it happened to her in the past...She was walking in the park and there was a gang of boys and then that [rape] happened to her...that's cos of who her brother was. Cos's he's a top boy, they thought cos they can't get to him, cos I think he was in jail, they can't get to him, they'll get to her" (21 year old young man, ex-gang involved)

"Take me for instance, I liked her [my child's] dad because he was this bad boy, that attracted me when I was younger for some reason to have someone stronger. I felt safe with him, like no one could, because he'll just deal with things. But, that all came back in my face years after because he put his hand on me, and that's when things got rocky...At home, when the doors were closed, when there were no visitors around, anyone to see, he was a monster, yeah he turned into a monster over the years. Threatened me with a sword. He beat me up when I got pregnant with [child], tried to force me to have an abortion, so I ended the relationship.... It's normal, like... say if I told someone I had to call the police on my baby father because he pulled a knife out, this is true, it happened, they would go, "oh!" - not at the fact that he pulled a knife out on me, but because I called the police. That's how normal it is" (24 year old young woman, father of her child is gang-involved)

"She wants to leave, then she may have to face the consequence of that...when I was at school that was common...[researcher asks what might those consequences be?]....maybe rape...so like even if she didn't want to have sex with someone else in the gang she would have to. It's just nasty the things that people have to do" (18 year old young woman, ex-boyfriend was gang involved)

Gradients of consent: A concerning motif emerging in initial interviews was that not all young women are viewed as having equal (or in some cases any) rights to assent to or decline sexual interaction. Initial interviews suggest that young women who are seen as engaging in casual sex are viewed by some as having lost their right to withhold consent:

'If she has a name and someone tries to sleep with her and she won't let them, they know that she's slept with loads of other people, they'll force her into it. They would rape her. They would rape her, if you class that as rape, yeah... You've got girls like, one girl, I won't say her name but if you go to [area] and say her name everyone will know her. She's slept with everyone. Everyone. But it's got to a point that cos she's slept with so many people, when people see her it's more forced onto her 'Just touch it, man, just do that, just do this' and then she'll have to do it cos she'll be scared'
(21 year old young man, ex-gang involved)

A number of interviewees indicated that other young women can be viewed as 'fair game' by association, because of their friendship with these young women. This belief that a young woman's sexual behaviour/history, or indeed her mere association with another young woman, can invalidate her right to say 'no' has serious implications for the acceptability and consequent prevalence of sexual violence within these environments.

Gendered assumptions about perpetrators and victims: Although the majority of the incidents of sexual violence and exploitation identified to date have involved male perpetrators and female victims, it is important to recognise that the converse can also be true, as can same-sex incidents. Initial interviews have revealed gendered assumptions about perpetrators and victims that can inadvertently mask the existence of incidents of sexual violence and exploitation, particularly against young men. Most obvious of these is the fact that virtually all young people to date have answered questions about sexual violence and exploitation solely in relation to incidents against young women, identifying incidents against young men only when specifically prompted to do so. Interestingly, a similar gender bias was observed when approaching practitioners about potential interviewees, with some assuming (given the focus of the research) that we only wanted to interview young women. Awareness of this unintended bias is critical to the effectiveness of both the research and policy and practice responses to this issue.

The importance of language and categorisation: Related to the point above, initial interviews with young people have revealed that the types of experiences recounted as impacting upon young men and young women are described differently and reacted to differently. Incidents of sexual violence against young men were presented more as acts of humiliation than sexual acts. This raises questions as to how such incidents are most accurately described. Language and categorisation are not neutral concepts – they affect young people's self perception, their access to services and the manner in which incidents are responded to. It is therefore important that they are appropriately applied. This is something that will be further explored as the research progresses.

Normalisation of sexual violence: Whilst initial interviews gave little indication of a similar process in terms of sexual violence against young men, participants' contributions would suggest that particular forms of sexual violence against young women may be becoming in some way normalised within certain gang-affected neighbourhoods. This has implications not only for young people's exposure to risk, but also in terms of how they understand and conceptualise their experiences (both as victim and perpetrator) and consequently their propensity to report an offence and/or access support.

Reporting of incidents and accessing support: A key issue that has emerged from initial interviewees' commentary on responses to sexual violence and exploitation is the infrequency with which the young people affected by these issues are reporting them or accessing any form of formal support. Initial interviewees indicated that going to the police was not a viable option for most young people who experienced gang-associated sexual violence or exploitation. This was variably noted to be because of resignation to the existence of such incidents amongst the peer group, 'handed down' perceptions of the police, previous experiences of contact with them, a lack of confidence in the ability of statutory services to protect a young person following a disclosure and/or fear of potential retaliation should such a disclosure occur. There was also a strong sense amongst some of these initial participants that, as a result of cuts to services within their community, there was an absence of other viable options for seeking support:

“Let me give you an example of why people don’t [go to the police]. Because if you go to the police station and say ‘this gang member raped me’ that gang member might be found guilty and go to jail, but remember he’s part of a gang. So all the ones in the gang, 500 people, 400 people, will come back to you, to your house. Could go to your family’s house, you know. So you might as well keep it on the low and move on with your life innit...If you go to the police, that’s the wrong move. That’s the worst thing a person could do...It’ll come back cos with gangsters they got to win innit. They never give up” (17 year old young woman, father of her child is gang involved)

As illustrated in the quotation above, what emerged as the central motif in these initial narratives was a sense that there was little anyone could do about sexual violence against young people, particularly young women, and a consequent attitude of these things happen so just ‘move on with your life’. Interestingly, and alarmingly, there was little sense amongst the initial set of interviewees that the situation would change. This presents significant challenges in terms of prevention of, and appropriate responses to, gang-related sexual exploitation and sexual violence. The implications of this and potential resolutions for it will be considered in greater depth in phase three of the research.

Relationship between sexual violence and gang involvement/association: An important question that must be borne in mind in considering these emerging themes is that of the degree to which the incidents of sexual violence and exploitation being identified within the research are unique to, or as a result of, the gang environment. We know from other research that peer exploitation and sexual violence occurs within other adolescent relationships and some of the scenarios identified in the research to date share similarities with experiences reported in other studies of sexual exploitation that are not connected to the gang experience. Caution must therefore be exercised not to inappropriately conflate incidents of sexual violence or exploitation with gang-involvement/association, where the relationship between the two may in fact, in some situations, be purely incidental.

This is not to say that gang-involvement/association has no bearing on risk of sexual violence and exploitation. It is evident from the initial interviews that sex can be used as a weapon in tensions between groups of young people affiliated to different gangs. It is also evident that sex can be used as leverage for status and protection or as a means of punishment or retaliation within some gangs. What remains to be seen, as the research progresses, is the degree to which such incidents are replicated in other young people’s experiences of other gangs and the ways in which gang-associated sexual exploitation and sexual violence differs from comparative non-gang-associated scenarios both in terms of how this is experienced and propensity to access support.

Future Work

Phase Two (in process until winter 2012):

The research team will continue to undertake interviews with young people across the six research sites, and commence the initial coding of data. The collation of national and local data on sexual exploitation, sexual violence and gang-association will continue in parallel.

Phase Three (winter 2012 – spring 2013):

The research team will concentrate on the coding and analysis of data and identification of emerging findings. A series of focus groups with professionals, and separate groups with young women and young men, will then be facilitated to consider emerging findings in terms of accuracy, contextualisation and response.

Phase Four (spring – autumn 2013):

The research team will conclude data analysis, produce written outputs and develop a dissemination strategy for the work. This will include feedback to research participants and partners in the six research sites and dissemination to a wider audience of policy makers and practitioners. Young people's outputs will also be developed in conjunction with members of the Young People's Advisory Group in order to increase young people's awareness and understanding of this issue.

For further information about any aspect of the research please do not hesitate to contact Dr Helen Beckett at helen.beckett@beds.ac.uk

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Appendix One: Participation Project

The University of Bedfordshire has received additional funding from Comic Relief and the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England (OCC) to undertake a young people's participation project running in parallel to the national research into gang-associated sexual exploitation of children and young people within England.

The project will engage 50 young people from up to six local projects across England in the production of 4-6 short documentary films. The films will support young people to explore some of the themes emerging from the research and consider how we can better support young men and women affected by these issues.

The aim of the project is to deliver a creative response to the themes of the research and enable young people to take an active role in considering how issues relating to gangs, sex and relationships are communicated to other young people and professionals. The project seeks to develop an inclusive and participatory process which promotes the representation of voices normally absent from policy dialogue. In addition we hope that it will provide an opportunity for participants to develop their knowledge and skills, working within a safe and supportive environment.

The first stage of the project started in late August, delivering workshops to a group of 10 young women to produce the first of the short films. This will be followed by projects with young men and young women in other areas across England, running between August 2012 and June 2013. The final films will be showcased and launched at a series of local and national events coinciding with the launch of the research findings in autumn 2013.

The project will be delivered in partnership with Latimer Creative Media who have extensive experience of delivering participatory filmmaking workshops with young people on a range of issues including serious youth violence, domestic abuse and young parenthood. In addition workshops will be supported by Abi Billingham (ABIANDA) who has developed models of working with gang associated young women affected by sexual violence.

For further details about this project, please contact Camille Warrington at camille.warrington@beds.ac.uk



The International Centre for the Study of Sexually Exploited and Trafficked Young People
and The Vauxhall Centre for the Study of Crime
within the Institute of Applied Social Research (IASR)