Systematic literature review on social norms and preventing sexual exploitation of children and adolescents

LINEA biennial meeting
16\textsuperscript{th} October 2017, Windsor, UK

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Identified gap in research and programs

Considerable time and resources invested to reduce SEC prevalence around the world

Yet, funding and interventions focused on response, not primary prevention
  - Perpetrator prosecution
  - Victim / survivor rehabilitation
Defining sexual exploitation of children

“…exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people [under 18 years of age] (or a third person or persons) receive ‘something’ (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, or others performing on them, sexual activities.” (UKDE 2016)
Increasing recognition some young people sexually exploit other young people (Firmin 2015)
Integrated theoretical framework needed to analyse both:

1. Structural factors sustaining SEC; and

2. Contributing individual and social factors
Review purpose

Assess existing evidence on individual and social factors perpetuating SEC to facilitate primary prevention
Individual, relationship and community level factors
Structural factors

- Economic
- Political
- Legal
- Environmental

## Analytical framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Empirical</th>
<th>Normative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual</strong></td>
<td><strong>Factual beliefs:</strong> Facts people believe about the world</td>
<td><strong>Personal Attitudes:</strong> People’s personal preferences</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social</strong></td>
<td><strong>Descriptive norms:</strong> People’s beliefs about how common a behaviour is among others</td>
<td><strong>Injunctive norms:</strong> People’s beliefs about what others think is appropriate or inappropriate, good or bad</td>
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Methods

- Searched bibliographic databases, grey literature
- Consulted 15 experts
- Hand-searched internal study database
- Inclusion criteria based on UKDE definition
- Coded and analysed text in NVivo
Data sources

Primary studies from peer-reviewed journals presenting unique findings

No papers explicitly on social norms and SEC

Majority of studies used purposive or convenience sampling and qualitative methods
Types of SEC included

- Commercial SEC
- Child sex tourism
- Child pornography
- Internet live-streamed sex
- Informal sexual exchange
- Intergenerational sex and age mixing
Inclusion criteria
Study selection process

**Identification**

- Records identified through database searching (n = 3,796)
- Additional records identified through other sources (n = 279)

**Screening**

- Records after duplicates removed (n = 3,017)
- Records screened (n = 3,017)
- Records excluded (n = 2,683)

**Eligibility**

- Full-text papers assessed for eligibility (n = 336)
- Full-text papers excluded (n = 293)
  - Reasons for exclusion: trafficking study, non-empirical data, methods unclear, wrong age group, study on structural factors, etc.

**Included**

- Papers included in literature review (n = 43)
Codes on injunctive norms linked to SEC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INJUNCTIVE NORMS</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Social</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Expectations and observations of relationship, sexual and gender role behaviours</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Notions of young people as financial/material contributors to the family</td>
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<td>• Social sanctions</td>
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<td>• Social tolerance</td>
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# Findings on factual beliefs

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>The general assessment of CSEC as a practice that is not ‘good’ nor morally acceptable is constantly strained by affirmations, such as: ‘the adolescents need to earn a living’, it is a voluntary practice’. - South America</th>
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<td>Notions of childhood</td>
<td>The physical development approach to acceptability was quantified in two of the focus groups. A participant in Belize City said, and others agreed, the acceptable weight on the street is 60 pounds, ‘60 pounds and dat good’. [...] Participants felt there were no men out there who had no regard for the age of the child: ‘as long as there is flesh out there, it’s okay’. - Belize</td>
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## Findings on attitudes

| Acceptance of SEC | Most talk (in FGDs) presented the practice (exchange of money or goods for sex) matter of factly or approvingly. There was no overt stigma attached to it. - Nigeria |

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Findings on descriptive norms

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Beliefs about how common SEC behaviors are</th>
<th>Marcy thought that having sex for some kind of profit was ‘normal’. - Report on perspective of female who began selling sex as an adolescent in Canada</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>65% of interviewees believed that ‘most men pay for sex’. - Report on interviews with London men who have bought sex from women, UK</td>
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### Findings on injunctive norms

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<tr>
<th>Expectations and observations of relationship, sexual and gender role behaviors</th>
<th>“…he asked me to show him that I loved him by having sex with him and I complied. I could not refuse because I was ashamed of all the things he had done for me.” - Rural, out-of-school girl, adolescent girl with partner 15 years older, Uganda</th>
</tr>
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<td>Young people as providers for the family</td>
<td>…they used prostitution as a way of fulfilling what they understood to be their filial duties. The children felt that, by earning money for their parents and keeping the family together, they were acting in socially sanctioned roles as dutiful daughters and sons, and that prostituting themselves with the ‘right’ intentions meant that there was no moral approbrium attached to what they did. - Thailand</td>
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Limitations

• Geographic and population diversity
• Few studies on descriptive norms or links with behavior
• Boundaries blurred between codes
• Need to work on targeted sets of norms that closely intertwine with beliefs and attitudes affecting SEC
Discussion

• Silence, inaction, turning a blind eye perpetuate SEC

• Attitudes alone seem not to result in individual or collective social action

• Debates, yet intervening on injunctive norms may lead to impact
  – Positive reinforcement of norms approving of preventative behaviors
Thank you

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