

Prosecution Service (CPS) and jurors.’ (Cockbain, 2018, p.137). Worryingly, police participants gave examples of numerous similar or linked incidents where the CPS had dropped charges, including ones where there was clear-cut forensic evidence showing a much-older suspect had abused a 13 year-old (this case was later re-opened but I still find it very troubling that it was not considered to meet the public interest and evidential tests). Even more worryingly, police on one operation told me that so many charges they had put to the CPS had been discontinued that they had all but given up putting such cases forward. Somewhat ironically, therefore, the prosecutors I interviewed were less likely than the police participants to say that a change in organisational culture was needed. Those prosecutors who did argue for change, described approaches to assessing victim credibility in the CPS as all too often being ‘cynical’, ‘paternalistic’ and ‘black and white’ (Cockbain, 2018, p.143).

19. **Theme 2 (continued):** One thing that the prosecutors I interviewed reported finding challenging was how best to make juries understand why victims of CSE might repeatedly return to their abusers. As one said, ‘[V]ery often juries don’t really understand that type of relationship ... they can’t understand why complainants would allow themselves to be, as they would see it, repeatedly abused.’ (Cockbain, 2018, p.138). I was told that the effects of CSE are far harder to convey to jurors than, say, domestic violence or familial child sexual abuse. Part of the issue here was apparently the lack of an established research base or common understanding to draw on to explain behaviours that might otherwise seem counter-intuitive. It might therefore be useful, in my opinion, to develop a sample direction for judges that addresses the issue around victims repeatedly (and supposedly ‘voluntarily’) returning to their abusers. This direction is not yet among the numerous sample directions that exist to help judges address myths and stereotypes in sexual offence cases (see Cockbain, 2018). Given how concerned participants in this study were about victims’ credibility, it is worth noting here too that I found that the eventual conviction rates across the six cases were actually in line with or above comparable national averages - and that was despite the overall complexity of the cases and high rates of not guilty pleas (see Cockbain, 2018).
20. **Theme 2 (continued):** In terms of the availability and appropriateness of services, and specifically of those for BME and LGBTQ+ victims/survivors, I want to stress several points. First, in our study involving 9,042 children accessing Barnardo’s CSE services, we found around one in five was black or minority ethnicity (Cockbain et al., 2015). That figure (widely in line with the general population) was notable since it has often been suggested, and may well be the case, that BME children are even less likely to be identified by the authorities as victims of CSE than their white counterparts. Second, empirical research focusing on sexual abuse/exploitation of Asian/Muslim girls (Gohir, 2013²⁷) and black girls (see Jahnine Davis’ ongoing work²⁸) has highlighted particular issues in responding effectively to abuse of different minority groups - including reasons linked to institutional bias (e.g. Jahnine Davis’ findings indicate that sexualised stereotypes of black girls can affect professionals’ readiness to identify and respond appropriately to their abuse). Third, sexual offence support services *in general* are woefully under-funded in the UK. I am concerned that support services will be liable to even further reductions in funding amid the pandemic/post-pandemic financial landscape, leaving those who need help in an even more precarious position. Fourth, even within the general context of scant

²⁷ Gohir, S. (2013). *Unheard Voices: Sexual Exploitation of Asian Girl and Young Women*. Birmingham: Muslim Womens Network.

²⁸ For example, <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2019/11/20/where-are-the-black-girls-in-our-services-studies-and-statistics-on-csa/> and <https://www.ccinform.co.uk/practice-guidance/initial-meetings-with-young-people-an-intersectional-and-systemic-approach/> and <https://www.ccinform.co.uk/research/child-sexual-abuse-and-safeguarding-black-girls-messages-from-research/>