

Study highlights complexities of child trafficking in Scotland, recommends child-centered approach

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A team of experts from the University of Stirling commissioned by the Scottish Government to research the professional response to child trafficking in Scotland has published its research.

The study, which was led by social work lecturer Dr. Paul Rigby and released ahead of Anti-Slavery Day, explores victims' experiences and sets out a series of recommendations to ensure [children](#) are identified and protected.

For the first time, the academics analyzed case files over a one-year period and interviewed [young people](#) identified as victims and professionals involved. No UK nationals were identified during the case file analysis and so the focus of the research was on children and young people who came to the UK across international borders.

Dr. Rigby said: "The study highlighted very few clearly identifiable common background circumstances, journeys or exploitative experiences that could easily inform training, identification and support; reiterating the importance of working with each young person's unique and individual story in a [child](#)-centered approach.

"There was a concern from professionals that systems and processes endured by children and young people on arrival in Scotland, that span U.K. and Scottish legislative frameworks, led to additional trauma—including long periods of not knowing what would happen to them as they waited on asylum decisions."

The research team included Professor Jane Callaghan, Director of the Centre for Child Wellbeing and Protection, Margaret Malloch, Professor of Criminology with the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research, and Research Assistant, Tanya Beetham.

Dr. Rigby added: "Despite the complexities, support for children and young people is apparent across agencies and is appreciated by young people."

The Scottish Government Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy (2017)

identified the need for Scotland-wide research to explore experiences of child [trafficking](#) in Scotland.

Minister for Children and Young People, Maree Todd said: "Child trafficking has a devastating impact on children and young people, which is why both tackling the root causes and supporting victims to recover are key priorities for the Scottish Government.

"This research was commissioned as part of our Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy to give us a better understanding of the routes that children and young people are trafficked into Scotland.

"The Scottish Government and members of the Child Trafficking Strategy Group are working together to take forward the recommendations in the report. Importantly, the research includes interviews with trafficked children and young people in Scotland. Those first-hand accounts will inform how we continue to improve the support and services available and I'd like to thank those who took part for sharing their experiences.

"A key part of the Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy is the development of an Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship service to ensure children and young people, whom no one in the UK holds parental responsibilities for, and who have been trafficked or at risk of being trafficked, are given additional support and care. The new service will put the role of the guardian on statutory footing with other support services and will be a national service across Scotland."

The full recommendations of the report are:

- At present the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) appears to take priority over a child protection referral. There is a need to ensure that a multi-agency child protection response takes

priority above referral to the NRM

- There remains some confusion among professionals about what constitutes trafficking and what information is included on NRM referrals in relation to potential indicators of trafficking. Work is required to clarify which of the indicators relate to possible exploitation and which reflect movement and migration.
- In Scotland, the majority of referrals to the NRM are for non-UK nationals. The identification and support of UK children as potential victims of trafficking requires attention; this may include additional training and awareness-raising for professionals.
- There is confusion about what information about a child can be shared across agencies, and when. Clearer guidance is required for professionals in respect of what information must be shared with which agencies and for what purpose.
- The experiences and complex background journeys of children need to be fully acknowledged in relation to concerns about the possibility of changing narratives and stories emerging as children are interviewed by different professionals. For those agencies providing support for children and young people in Scotland, issues of credibility and consistency of their stories should not become the prime focus for professionals. It is important that children and young people are given time to share their background stories as trusting relationships develop, while ensuring sufficient information is available to ensure their safety.
- There is currently no single agency in Scotland that has an overview of concerns in relation to child trafficking. A central Scottish repository is required to collate information and to monitor prevalence and patterns relating to children exploited through trafficking. The information contained in this repository should be more comprehensive than information contained in current referrals to the NRM and the published statistics.

More information: Child Trafficking in Scotland:
[www.gov.scot/publications/chil ... g-scotland-research/](http://www.gov.scot/publications/chil...g-scotland-research/)

Provided by University of Stirling

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