

# **The NSPCC's Response to The Impact of the Commercial World on Children's Wellbeing**

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## **NSPCC response to**

### **Assessing the Impact of the Commercial World on Children's Wellbeing - A Call for Evidence.**

The NSPCC welcomes the call by the DCSF for evidence on the impact of the commercial world on children's wellbeing.

The NSPCC is the UK's leading charity specialising in safeguarding, child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children.

The NSPCC exists to end cruelty to children through a range of activities designed:

- To help children who have suffered abuse overcome the effects of such harm
- To prevent children from suffering abuse
- To prevent children from suffering significant harm as a result of ill treatment
- To help children who are at risk of such harm
- To work to protect children from further harm.

We have more than 180 teams and projects throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands. Their work includes:

- Family support, assessment, counselling and therapy to children and families experiencing abuse
- Investigations into allegations of child abuse
- Work within schools and other youth organisations to provide a voice for children and advocate their rights.

In February 2006, ChildLine formally joined with the NSPCC in a move that ensures even stronger services and a more influential voice for children and young people. ChildLine is the UK's free, confidential 24-hour helpline for children and young people. Between April 2005 and April 2006, ChildLine counselled 159,535 children.

The aim of our FULL STOP Campaign is to end cruelty to children. We believe that, given the will, most abuse can be prevented. In order to achieve this, it is vital that everyone takes responsibility for children's welfare and safety. This includes the business community.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 There has been no comprehensive consideration of the impact of the business world on the lives of children and young people under 18. In the past the focus has been fragmentary, with particular attention paid to the impact of marketing initiatives by companies and the use of the labour of third world children in the supply chain. There is clear evidence, outlined in this response, that the impact of the commercial world on children is much wider and more far reaching. *“To date the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) debate has yet to take children seriously as a key area of responsibility for companies”*<sup>1</sup> (Crane, 2007).
- 1.2 To compile this submission we have utilised and referred to a range of evidence<sup>2</sup>.
- 1.3 We have also attached a summary report on a consultation with a diverse group of children and young people undertaken as part of the preparation for this submission. The young people were asked to consider some of the risks and dangers of using new technology – particularly the internet and mobile phones. They also considered the impact of some of the more negative media images of young people. This report demonstrates the value of consulting children and young people as part of a research exercise in this area although the views expressed are not necessarily those of the NSPCC.
- 1.4 The NSPCC response includes areas where the commercial world relates directly to children, for example, as customers; where the impact is mediated through others, for example, parents; and where children are employees.
- 1.5 The specific concern of this NSPCC response is on the role of the commercial world on the safeguarding<sup>3</sup> of children. The evidence in this response relates to this aspect of children’s lives. An explicit part of the NSPCC FULL STOP Campaign is that cruelty to children can only be ended when action is taken by everyone. This includes the business world.
- 1.6 There is a public perception that the impact of the business world on children is growing and that childhood is becoming more materialistic which damages children’s wellbeing (Children’s Society, 2007; National Family and Parenting Institute, 2004). The evidence here is strong.
- 1.7 In the case of children and young people this acknowledgement of responsibility is focussed on where there has been external pressure – responsible marketing (National Family and Parenting Institute, 2004) and third world child labour (Crane, 2007; Ethical Trading Initiative, 2008). Alternatively, this responsibility is focused more on either the ‘comfort areas’

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<sup>1</sup> The arguments used here are contained in a special report produced for the NSPCC by Andrew Crane (2007) at the International Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility, University of Nottingham.

<sup>2</sup> This includes: Published materials including academic literature, the results of surveys and consultations and internal NSPCC reports (Reports produced by external bodies for NSPCC use, reports of consultations with children and young people, previous submissions to the UK government, the Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies).

<sup>3</sup>The NSPCC defines “safeguarding” as: doing everything possible to minimise the risk of harm to children and young people. Safeguarding is about being proactive and putting measures in place in advance of any contact with children to ensure that children are going to be kept safe.

of education and employability where companies choose to focus on interventions that are related to their business sector. See (Crane, 2006) for a discussion of this. In many of these areas, the business world has adapted their own procedures and policies or developed industry wide voluntary codes of practice. These identify clear limits about the extent of responsibility<sup>4</sup>.

- 1.8 It is an issue for research and public debate to determine the extent to which businesses are responsible for the impact of their activities. It remains clear that the business world has yet to fully acknowledge the impact of their activities on the lives of children. This is an ongoing process. Knowledge about these impacts will help this process as acknowledgment of responsibility can lead to positive action.
- 1.9 The NSPCC experience is that many businesses will address the potentially negative impact of their activity on the lives of children for three major reasons. Firstly, they are concerned to defend their reputation. Negative links between children and companies can pose enormous reputation risks because of the emotional power of stories and images. Secondly, some businesses have identified clear business benefits in behaving more responsibly. Thirdly, a few businesses that work in partnerships with public bodies and voluntary organisations are identifying a more values-based approach to responsibility. This goes beyond the strict compliance and business case arguments. (See Crane, 1997 for a discussion of these three drivers).
- 1.10 For this submission we have focussed on safeguarding children, the risks and dangers of the internet, child employment, alcohol, and the issue of sexualisation.
- 1.11 Our arguments are in line with Every Child Matters: Change for Children<sup>5</sup> and the Staying Safe Action Plan (DCSF, 2008) The Government's aim is for every child, whatever their background or their circumstances, to have the support they need to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being. Everyone, including the business world, has responsibility to help secure these goals.
- 1.12 Our arguments are also in line with the 1989 UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) and the UN Global Compact.
- 1.13 The United Nations Global Compact is a voluntary framework for businesses that are committed to aligning their operations and strategies with ten universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption . The Compact was established in 2000 to help build the social legitimacy of business and markets. The main focus is with children that live outside the UK. (see [unglobalcompact.org](http://unglobalcompact.org))

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<sup>4</sup> See for example the non-Broadcast Advertising Code from the Advertising Standards Authority ([www.asa.org.uk](http://www.asa.org.uk))

<sup>5</sup> source : <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/>

## **2. The NSPCC relationship with business**

- 2.1 One small way the business world can have an impact on the lives of children is by supporting and engaging with children's charities like the NSPCC. The relationships involve cause related marketing, volunteering, gifts in kind, donations and sponsorships.. These relationships are generally mutually beneficial.
- 2.2 We recognise that the relationships are driven by more than philanthropic desire, and increasingly by corporate social responsibility and clear business objectives that need to be met. Yet, in return, companies align with our messages and vision and through their employees and customers, can help us achieve our aims.
- 2.3 Work is a key part of people's lives and so building partnerships with companies allows us to access vast numbers of people (employees and customers) as well as a chance to influence and change behaviour. We therefore work with our corporate partners not only to enable us to raise vital funds, but as a conduit to deliver our messages and enable people in business to better understand the ways in which they can help safeguard children and young people in their communities.

## **The evidence**

### **3. Safeguarding**

- 3.1 *"The support and protection of children cannot be achieved by a single agency. Every service has to play its part. All staff must have placed upon them the clear expectation that their primary responsibility is to the child and his or her family."* (Lord Laming in the Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report 17.93 and 19.93)
- 3.2 For most companies, children are not a key stakeholder group (Crane, 1997). Safeguarding children has therefore been largely seen as a discretionary and ethical activity (for discussion of these, see Carroll, 1991). This contrasts with the series of obligations to safeguard children in the public sector. Increasingly there is evidence that safeguarding may fit in more with a company's economic priorities and legal obligations. See, for example, the 2003 Licensing Act which requires businesses that sell and supply alcohol, provide regulated entertainment and provide late night refreshment to secure a licence. One of the four main licence objectives is 'to protect children from harm'.
- 3.3 There is now evidence that some organisations in the private sector are developing safeguarding policies and procedures and see developing a 'safe culture' as part of their ongoing corporate social responsibility (CSR). A number of these are approaching the NSPCC and particularly the NSPCC Training and Consultancy Department for help in this area<sup>6</sup>.
- 3.4 A small number of media companies working in the internet and television sectors are seeking to ensure that their products and services are safe and

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<sup>6</sup> NSPCC Training and Consultancy is based at the NSPCC National Training Centre in Leicester and exists to provide excellence for learning and training on child protection and child care practice, drawing on research, policy and experience in order to raise standards of work with children.

do not put children at risk. They are trying too, to ensure that the messages they give out about children and young people are such that they do not contribute to the development of negative views about this group.

- 3.5 Similarly, many UK holiday companies are now developing safeguarding approaches to planning and managing their holiday portfolios. The companies employ representatives that work directly with children and often offer children's clubs and other activities. In this instance the impact could potentially be on millions of families, children and young people.
- 3.6 Safeguarding is also becoming a growing concern among UK insurance companies who as part of their work on assessing risks are looking at whether companies are working towards developing safe cultures and providing advice on how this can be improved. Similarly, one city law firm advises a number of clients on the extent to which their policies and procedures are compliant with national legislation regulations. In many instances, the companies involved are seeking to develop 'best practice'.
- 3.7 At present, while the number of companies taking these steps may remain relatively small, this is a growing area of activity. This growth of interest demonstrates the wide range of safeguarding concerns that many companies have, even where children are not their direct customers. It also indicates that a growing number of businesses see safeguarding children as a key area of their responsibility.

#### **4. The internet**

- 4.1 The internet has brought considerable benefits to individuals and society which are discussed elsewhere. For example, the safe use of the internet has been the cornerstone of recent NSPCC contact with the mass population of children and young people (over five million in our Spring 2008 campaign). Children can and do use the internet safely, with the support of many internet businesses as a source of information, advice, and as a safe place to provide support to each other. It also helps children and young people in relation to learning and social networking. These are also the views of children and young people spoken to in NSPCC research.
- 4.2 In this submission we have focused on the more negative aspects of the internet focussing on the risks to children and young people. Much of the information is contained in the CHIS response<sup>7</sup> to the Byron review, (CHIS, 2008). There are a range of problems around contact, harmful content, cyber-bullying, and illegal content.
- 4.3 This CHIS response concluded that:
  - the internet and other technologies can facilitate children's sexual abuse by persuading and manipulating them into secretive relationships or meetings with abusers or potential abusers.
  - Some children engage in 'self-victimising behaviour'. Much of the grooming that we know about takes place in relation to older teenagers who deliberately put themselves at risk (Finklehor, 2007).

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<sup>7</sup> The Children's Charities' Coalition on Internet Safety (CHIS) consists of Barnardo's, ChildLine, The Children's Society, NCB, NCH, NCVCCO and NSPCC. Stop It Now! UK and Ireland campaign has also affiliated.

- children are known to come across and download age inappropriate content or disturbing or upsetting material.
- the internet provides access to information in an uncontrolled way which can be damaging for children, for example self harm sites, or sites that glorify alcohol, drugs, race hatred, or dangerous behaviour.
- children's access to age inappropriate goods and services because of the anonymity of some online payment mechanisms or difficulty in confirming a child's age in an online environment is problematic.
- children are bullied by other children through new technologies in ways that are disturbing and traumatic (ChildNet, 2007). Recent research suggests that one third of children experience so called cyber-bullying. According to research by the 'Anti-Bullying Alliance'<sup>8</sup> some forms of so called 'cyber-bullying' can be considered by children and young people to be worse than 'traditional' forms of bullying, for example when photos are taken and then circulated so that a record of the bullying stays in circulation (Smith et al., 2006).
- there is already a great deal of research evidence to show that bullying can have a devastating impact on children's social and emotional development. Bullying in general is one of the main reasons that children call ChildLine (Childline, 2007b)
- the internet presents new risks to children in relation to the rise in the mass market of child abuse images. This is both in relation to the children abused to make these images, but also in terms of the impact on potential perpetrators for whom viewing images may break down barriers to abusing. This helps generate trade in images and therefore increases the number of children being abused.
- what we know less about is whether this feeds into a greater sexual interest in children, but Operation Ore revealed an unexpected prevalence and cross section of society in terms of the number of predators who viewed the images of child abuse.<sup>9</sup> Currently there are over 20,000 images of children in the Interpol database and only a tiny fraction of these children (some 500) have even been identified and protected.
- In general, the perception of risk is shaped by the level of media interest rather than research and there is a shortage of up to date relevant and useful research into children's internet use. However we consider the risks of cyber bullying and of sexual abuse to be very serious. We know that bullying has often not featured in conventional approaches or concerns about children's online safety which has tended to centre on preventing sexual abuse. In the last few years it has become clear that the scope and scale of cyber-bullying is a serious harm to children. It is also only recently that we have become aware of the extent and level of sexual interest in making contact with children with the overview reports from the CEOP centre (CEOP, 2007).

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<sup>8</sup> The Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) was founded by NSPCC and National Children's Bureau in 2002. It is hosted and supported by NCB, and Chaired by the NSPCC. The Alliance brings together over 50 organisations into one network with the aim of reducing bullying and creating safer environments, in which children and young people can live, grow, play and learn.

<sup>9</sup> Operation Ore is a large-scale international police operation that commenced in 1999 intending to indict thousands of users of websites featuring child abuse images. In the United Kingdom, it has led to 7,250 suspects identified, 4,283 homes searched, 3,744 arrests, 1,848 people charged, 1,451 convictions, 493 cautions, 879 ongoing investigations, 140 children removed from suspected dangerous situations and at least 35 suicides.

- 4.4 Research from NCH shows that most parents do not know what their children are doing online and this clearly makes it very difficult for them to protect and educate them about the risks (Carr, 2006). Some of these dangers and risks were also identified by young people in a special consultation undertaken in June 2008 (NSPCC, 2008a)

#### 4.5 **Recommendations to the business community**

A series of recommendations about safeguarding and the internet from a range of bodies have been made to the business community which identify the practical steps that they should be taking in acknowledging their safeguarding responsibilities towards children.

The CHIS response made the following recommendations to the business community, in addition to separate recommendations to the UK Government:

- all new internet enabled devices sold into the domestic market should come with child safety software preinstalled and set to the highest level of security.
- the point of sale of any internet enabled device should be a learning opportunity for both the child and their parent or carer.

A key point was made by the House of Lords Select Committee in relation to the range of technical measure available to protect children. At paragraph 8.7 the Select Committee asked for a reappraisal of the “end-to-end-principle”. In (paragraph 8.8) they explain that “*The current assumption that end users should be responsible for security is inefficient and unrealistic.*” There needs to be a review of how it would be possible to strengthen the measures that the industry can take to keep children safe. (CHIS, 2007)

According to CHIS “*There is a need to ask for improvement from industry at every level. Pre-installation is one measure but there are a number of other key things. CHIS also considers that there are roles and responsibilities for Internet Service Providers in terms of providing safety settings if they are selling internet connectivity and that ISPs could be better encouraged to police their own sites. We also support the House of Lords Recommendation (8.23) that it would be helpful to developing a kitemark for social networking web sites. The Good Practice Guide being developed within the Home Office Taskforce subgroup on social networking services could provide the basis of a kitemark of this kind. This would help to orientate parents as to the safety of different sites their children spend time and act as an incentive for sites themselves to comply with safety standards above and beyond the guidance*” (CHIS, 2007).

## 5. **Child Employment**

- 5.1 Child employment is a significant way that many businesses come into direct contact with children.
- 5.2 There is a need for a review of child employment that considers the key safeguarding concerns. Other recommendations directed to the Government

were made to the Better Regulation Commission and incorporated as part of their 2004 report on child employment<sup>10</sup>.

- 5.3 Research indicates that part time employment is a regular part of most children's lives. The most recent estimates suggest that up to 1.5 million 13 - 16 year olds will have been employed at some point, out of a total population of 2.64 million (Mckechnie et al., 2004).
- 5.4 There are specific rules applying to children that work who are under compulsory school leaving age (which ends on the last Friday in June of the school year in which the young person reaches the age of 16). At this point any child can enter full time employment. Although these young people remain children different rules apply in the adult labour market.
- 5.5 There are also different rules applying to those children involved in performances, sports and modelling where a payment is made for the child's participation. In these cases a child needs to secure a licence from their local authority.
- 5.6 The legislation on child employment stipulates:
  - the number and arrangements of hours of work that children are able to do in both term time and school holidays at ages 13-14 and 15-16;
  - the types of 'light work' that children are allowed to do. Local authority byelaws do vary on this.
  - the types of work that are specifically forbidden or restricted by national legislation.
- 5.7 Employers have a range of responsibilities when they employ a child under compulsory school leaving age. They must:
  - undertake a risk assessment and notify the local authority of the hours and conditions of a child's employment;
  - apply for a work permit for each child employed from the local authority, signed by the parents.
- 5.8 Research indicates that employers of children are failing in these duties. Only about 10-15 per cent of employers are undertaking risk assessments and applying for work permits (O'Donnell and White, 1998; GMB, 1995; Hobbes and Mackenzie, 1997; Penrose Brown and Blandford, 2002; NSPCC, 2008). Most children are working without the permission and knowledge of the local authority yet the permit is the only child protection element in the system. A permit allows the local authority to know where a child is working and whether there are any risks or concerns. This leaves children at considerable risk. A significant proportion of children are working illegally in terms of the hours they work and the jobs they are employed to do (Mckechnie et al., 1994; NSPCC, 2008b).
- 5.9 Further it is not clear whether employers are aware of recent measures which prohibit individuals who have committed a Schedule One Offence<sup>11</sup> against

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<sup>10</sup> The Better Regulation Commission was previously known as the Better Regulation Task Force. See report "The Regulation of Child Employment" February 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Schedule One Offences, from the Sexual Offences Act 1956, are those involving offences of a sexual or violent nature towards children; a disqualification order is put in place where a custodial sentence of more than 12 months has been imposed.

children, and who have a disqualification order, from either employing, or supervising or training children in the course of their employment<sup>12</sup>.

The failure of employers to honour their duty is exacerbated by other problems with the regulation of child employment:: complex legislation (Hamilton, 2002), weak enforcement (NSPCC/TUC, 2004; Mckechnie et al., 2004), high accident rates (O'Donnell and White, 1999).

## **6. Alcohol**

6.1 Alcohol manufacture and sale to adults is legal in the UK but research indicates that there is a clear link between the consumption alcohol and child abuse in two ways. Problem drinking can lead to abusive behaviour and poor parenting by some parents. On the other hand young people use alcohol to manage difficult and sometimes dangerous situations (ChildLine, 2006).

### **6.2 Alcohol and adult behaviour**

It is estimated that between 780,000 and 1.3 million children in England are affected by parental alcohol problems (Prime Ministers Strategy Unit, 2004). Nearly four million people in the UK have grown up in a family where one or both parents drank to excess (NACOA, 2001-2).

The effects of problem drinking are broad and wide-ranging, reaching into every facet of human life, including physical and psychological health. Problem drinking increases the risk of familial divorce and separation (Robinson and Hassell, 2000 in Alcohol Concern, 2008).

In families where one or both parents are problem drinkers this will:

- have significant effects on children's behaviour (Barber and Crisp, 1994; Connelly, et al. 1993),
- lead to children starting drinking at a younger age and in a problematic way (Velleman, 1993),
- result in children displaying psychiatric problems such as mood disorders, depression and anxiety (Lynskey et al., 1994; Alcohol Concern 2003).

The links between alcohol abuse in the family are well documented: research shows that alcohol is a factor in one third of child abuse cases (ChildLine, 2007a).

Children of substance abusers (including alcohol) have high rates of removal into care (Kroll and Taylor, 2003 in Alcohol Concern, 2008). In their review of long term social work cases Harwin and Forrester (2002 in Alcohol Concern, 2008) found that *"the substance that caused most harm to children – and appeared to cause the most professional difficulties – was undoubtedly alcohol."*

There is also a clear link between alcohol abuse and domestic violence: thirty percent of men who assault their partners do so under the influence of alcohol (Prime Ministers Strategy Unit, 2004)

### **6.3 Alcohol consumption by young people**

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<sup>12</sup> See s. 36(1)(e) and (f) of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000.

Information collected by ChildLine<sup>13</sup> indicates that alcohol played a part in decision making by young people to have unprotected sex. There is evidence that young people are drinking more. While the proportion of 11-15 year olds who do not drink has remained at 40 per cent, the amount of alcohol consumed by 11-15 year olds that do drink has doubled between 1990 and 2000 to the equivalent of five pints of beer a week. (Alcohol Concern, 2002)

More than 15 per cent of calls ChildLine<sup>14</sup> receives about peer pressure are related to sex. Some girls spoke of peer pressure – sometimes from other girls – to begin having sex as young as age 12, and said that they used alcohol to help them get over their own reluctance to become sexually active. The report concludes that *“The calls...reveal a profoundly worrying level of pressure on young people to be sexually active, often at a very young age and before they are ready for such a relationship. These callers... are living in a highly sexualised culture, yet are not equipped to deal with its pressures.”* There is evidence that drinking leads to reduced use of contraception. *“Sometimes they use alcohol to cope and sometimes they are more vulnerable as a result”*<sup>15</sup>. This is supported by Norwegian research which suggests that young people are less likely to use contraception when moderately intoxicated and far less likely to use it when strongly intoxicated (Kvalem, 1996).

## 7. Sexualisation of children

7.1 The sexualisation of children is an area that has not been extensively researched and the evidence base is therefore weak. Nevertheless, this is an area of considerable concern to the NSPCC because of concern about the effects on the behaviour of young people and some adults. Sexualisation of children is an area that needs further research, particularly to:

- quantify the prevalence, and rate of change in prevalence, of sexualised images of children in the media.
- see if there is a common path that leads people convicted of child abuse image offences to such activity.

7.2 The sexualisation of children is exhibited by:

- the use of overtly sexual images of children in advertising and elsewhere;
- children’s fashion mimicking adult women’s clothing and activity for example; pole dancing kit for pre-teens in supermarkets;
- images or activities, such as child beauty shows, which encourage the sexualisation of children by requiring them, for example, to dress in provocative clothes or wear make-up;

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<sup>13</sup> ChildLine provides a confidential telephone counselling service for any child with any problem., 24 hours a day every day. In February 2006 ChildLine joined the NSPCC as a dedicated service, in order to help, support and protect even more children. The content of ChildLine counselling conversations is captured through written records. For each recorded call a counsellor notes the main reasons that the child called, any other concerns raised, and details of the family and living circumstances revealed by the child, and a narrative of the discussion. Conversations are child-led, and not conducted for the purposes of research, but it is precisely for these reasons that they often reveal information that formal research might not uncover.

<sup>14</sup> Just under 140,000 children and young people called ChildLine in 2004/5. Of that number 5,843 (5,459 girls and 384 boys) spoke about pregnancy.

- the widespread exposure of children to mainstream pornography – much of which is available on the internet;
- the popularity of child abuse images on the internet and the increase in the prevalence of these images<sup>16</sup>. This is both in relation to the children abused to make these images but also in term of the impact on potential perpetrators for whom viewing images may break down barriers to abusing.

7.3 The effects of sexualised images of children on societal attitudes towards children and the possible consequent increased risk of abuse has been widely discussed in the media and elsewhere. Finkelhor (1984) suggests that it may help produce sexual arousal, required for abuse to occur. Kilbourne (1986) suggests that the “myth of Lolita” increases society’s readiness to blame the child victim for abuses against them in the same way as much of society is still ready to unduly apportion responsibility to a woman victim for her rape or sexual abuse.

7.4 In trying to find a correlation between child sexual abuse<sup>17</sup> and pornography, Knudsen (1988) concluded that *“the available evidence seems to suggest that pornography is neither responsible for the initial sex offences against children nor the reason for their vulnerability.”* Other research has found a correlation between violent adult pornography and men’s attitudes towards the acceptability of, and women’s desire for, rape (Sommers and Check, 1987) and also on the changed sexual practices in consensual adult sexual practices (Forsberg, 2000).

7.5 A recent report by the American Psychological Association, reviewing a number of studies, suggests that women and men exposed to sexually objectifying images of women from mainstream media were found to be more accepting of rape myths, sexual harassment, sex role stereotypes, interpersonal violence and adversarial sexual beliefs (APA, 2007). The authors conclude cautiously that, *‘viewing sexualised portrayals of girls may also lead to these same effects and to greater acceptance of child sexual abuse myths, child sexual abuse, and viewing younger and younger girls as acceptable partners’* (APA, 2007: 34)<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Operation Ore is a large-scale international police operation that commenced in 1999 intending to indict thousands of users of websites featuring child abuse images. In the United Kingdom, it has led to 7,250 suspects identified, 4,283 homes searched, 3,744 arrests, 1,848 charged, 1,451 convictions, 493 cautioned, 879 investigations underway, 140 children removed from suspected dangerous situations and at least 35 suicides.

<sup>17</sup> The Government definition of child sexual abuse states that: “Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child too take part in sexual activities, including prostitution, whether or not eh child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative(e.g. rape, buggery or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways”. (DCSF 2006)

<sup>18</sup> The Government definition of child sexual abuse states that: “Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child too take part in sexual activities, including prostitution, whether or not eh child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative(e.g. rape, buggery or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways”. (DCSF 2006)

## 7.6 Underage sexual activity

Exposure to the sexual representations of adults has been shown to influence a young person's attitude towards sex as a norm (Wartella et al., 2000). It is currently methodologically impossible to prove that the increasing sexualisation of children in the media has led to an increase in premature sexual relationships between children. However, research has shown that more than a quarter of young people are sexually active before they reach 16 (Wellings et al., 2001)

In 2006 more than 15 per cent of all calls that ChildLine receive about peer pressure are related to sex . Some girls spoke of peer pressure, sometimes from other girls, to begin having sex as young as age 12 and that they use drugs and alcohol to conquer their inhibitions. ChildLine counsellors report that children do not appear to be receiving practical advice in school sex education classes in how to navigate in a sexualised world, for example, how to buy condoms; or about the sexualised world they are growing up into (ChildLine, 2006). This pressure was also illustrated in the recent NSPCC/Sugar survey of girls (NSPCC, 2006)

Abuse images are not seen as mainstream pornography, but the increasing number of images available on the internet, and the popularity of pornography sites in general, go some way to counter the belief that viewing such images is just an 'underground' activity pursued by a few people. It is possible that the sexualisation of children, and its normalisation, also has an effect upon the willingness of adults to become engaged in commercial sexual exploitation of children.

## **8. Recommendations**

### **General issues**

- 8.1 Future research on the impact of the commercial world should provide clarity about the responsibility of the business world to safeguard children. This will help the commercial world identify the steps that they can take to ensure the safety of children within their sphere of influence.
- 8.2 Research on these issues should gather and include the views and experiences of children and young people. Therefore consulting and involving children and young people must be a key part of any information gathering exercise.

### **Specific Issues**

- 8.3 The Internet
  - All new internet enabled devices sold into the domestic market should come with child safety software preinstalled and set to the highest level of security.
  - The point of sale of any internet enabled device should be a learning opportunity about safeguarding and the internet for the child and their parent or carer
- 8.4 Child Employment
  - There should be a review of child employment that considers the key safeguarding concerns.
- 8.5 Sexualisation
  - There should be research into the sexualisation of young people, particularly to:
    - quantify the prevalence, and rate of change in prevalence, of sexualised images of children in the media.
    - identify if there is a common path that leads people convicted of child abuse image offences to such activity.
  - The impact of the media on the lives of children and young people should become a standard part of professional training in journalism and media studies.

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