



Would they actually have believed me?

A focus group exploration of the underreporting of crimes by Jimmy Savile

September 2013

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report was commissioned by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) and is authored by Louise Exton and Kamaljit Thandi. The authors are both qualified, registered social workers, and between them have twenty-five years' experience of working in child protection. They are employed by the NSPCC working in the NSPCC Helpline as Team Managers.
- 1.2 In March 2013, HMIC published, "Mistakes were made." their review into the allegations and intelligence material concerned Jimmy Savile between 1964 and 2012. In the executive summary of that report, they acknowledge their "serious concerns about the number of victims who felt unable to come forward at the time the assaults were committed to report Savile to the police."
- 1.3 The first recommendation in the review seeks to ensure that "guidelines are issued to all Police forces about how to deal with investigations of child abuse following the death of the alleged perpetrator." Further, in light of the low reporting rate, the second recommendation seeks to identify ways to encourage a culture in which victims feel able to report sexual crimes.
- 1.4 The NSPCC is one of the largest children's charities in the UK, working towards ending cruelty to children. Following the broadcast of an ITV documentary in October 2012, in which a number of women alleged abuse against Jimmy Savile, the NSPCC Helpline became one of the primary referral mechanisms for victims who wished to report their abuse as part of Operation Yewtree.
- 1.5 Based upon this contact with victims, and on the Helpline's existing capacity to provide emotional support as required, in April 2013, HMIC requested that the NSPCC carry out a series of focus groups with victims that had come forward. The aim of this was to identify common themes that prevented those victims from reporting to Police at the time of the abuse, and to explore how police can improve their management of the reporting process and subsequent interviews and contacts.
- 1.6 This report will detail the findings of the focus groups, identifying the broad themes that recurred throughout, and illustrating those themes with references to the specific experiences of those victims who participated. It will also highlight victims' recommendations in regards to areas of potential change or development within police forces to improve the reporting process for those seeking to report a sexual crime.

2. Methodology

- 2.1 It was agreed with HMIC that the NSPCC would conduct five focus groups, with a maximum of ten participants in each group. Groups would be arranged at a number of locations to minimise the distances that participants needed to travel.
- 2.2 HMIC provided the NSPCC with contact details of just under 160 victims who had at the time of reporting to Operation Yewtree, agreed to participate in a focus group later. These were separated into three broad geographical areas – North, Mid and South – to enable participants to travel to the most convenient location.
- 2.3 Up to three attempts were made to contact each victim by telephone, to explain the work that the NSPCC was undertaking and to establish whether they were still willing to participate. It was explained at this stage that there would be no requirement to discuss details of the specific offences, however many of the victims felt unable to attend a group due to the emotional trauma associated with their abuse.
- 2.4 A further percentage of people were not contactable, and those who lived abroad were removed from the sample group due to the practical implications of attendance. Those who lived abroad were offered the opportunity to contribute to this work by questionnaire.
- 2.5 In total, 57 victims indicated that they would still be willing to attend a focus group.
- 2.6 Based on the large number of victims whose details were passed to us, we initially intended to randomly sample, five groups of ten from those willing to participate. However, given the far smaller number of victims who felt able to participate at the time of arranging the groups, we felt that it was necessary to retain some control over the group make-up in the following areas:
 - Gender – we aimed to ensure that at least two males were present in each group, to ensure that male perspectives were represented
 - Location of abuse – we aimed to ensure that there were not large numbers of victims from the same setting (e.g., Stoke Mandeville Hospital, Leeds General Infirmary Hospital, Duncroft School for Girls) present in the same group, to ensure an inclusive environment, and to prevent victims feeling inhibited from contributing to the groups due to possible previous connections

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- 2.7 Based upon the numbers of participants and their geographical locations, two groups were arranged in London, one in Leicester, one in Liverpool and one in Leeds. Letters were sent to each potential participant to invite them to the scheduled date, and these were followed up by a telephone call five days later. At the point of the follow-up call, an average of two participants per group indicated that they would not be attending (predominantly due to their own health, or that of dependents). A further withdrawal was experienced on the day of each group, culminating in a final attendance of 26 participants out of the invited 50, across the five groups. Four of these participants were adults when they were abused.
- 2.8 Of those victims either who were living abroad, or who had initially confirmed their attendance and then withdrawn, 10 indicated that they would be willing to receive a questionnaire to enable them to contribute their views, and 3 of these were returned.
- 2.9 Each focus group lasted a maximum four hours. Participants signed consent forms at the beginning of each group, and were informed that the session would be voice recorded to aid the writing of this report, and that the recordings and transcriptions would then be destroyed. We discussed 'Ground Rules' with each group, including the need to breach confidentiality in the event that a current risk to a child was identified, and a reiteration that participants did not have to share any details about their abuse. Participants were also made aware that support would be available during and after the group for anyone who felt that they needed this.
- 2.10 The questions were divided into three broad sections, considering people's initial experiences, their current experiences, and their ideas around changes that could be made to improve the process of reporting abuse to the police. Within the section relating to change, in addition to seeking feedback from participants, two specific concepts – mandatory reporting and the advisory capabilities of the Police – were put before the groups. The same questions were used to guide the discussion at each group. The majority of these questions were open in style, to encourage participation and discussion, and we acted as facilitators in this respect.

3. Responses to Focus Group Questions

- 3.1 This section of the report will consider each question asked to the focus groups, and will begin to explore the responses given by participants.
- 3.2 In order to put the decision to report or not to report into context, we began by exploring how aware participants were that what had happened to them was wrong. The responses to this question were mixed, with some immediately identifying that what had happened was abuse, and others not having understood it at all.

At the time of the abuse, how aware were you that what had happened to you was abusive?

“I knew within two minutes of meeting him...”

- 3.3 A proportion of participants in the focus groups reported having been immediately aware that what they had been subjected to by Jimmy Savile was in fact abuse. Some participants indicated that they had been abused previously by other perpetrators, and so were already vulnerable. Others were adults and therefore, had a greater understanding of what was happening to them. A small number identified ‘just knowing’ that they had been abused.

“I knew that it made me feel uncomfortable... I knew that it wasn’t right.”

- 3.4 Other participants reported that they were not aware that what had happened to them was ‘abusive’, although most identified having known that it ‘wasn’t right’. Some reported feeling ‘uncomfortable’ with what was happening to them, and being ‘frightened’, even though they did not fully understand that this was abuse. For others, their understanding of acceptable boundaries and behaviour was already ‘blurred’ due to their earlier experiences.
- 3.5 On exploring this feeling of something ‘not being right’, it became clear that one key factor influencing their perspective was that participants had, as children and teenagers, felt that the source of this feeling was located within them, and that they were somehow at fault. These participants described how they had initially blamed themselves, assuming that they must have done something wrong, or had ‘been naughty’. Some remembered feeling that an elder – particularly a celebrity like Jimmy Savile – must know better than they did. There were also cases where participants also remembered feeling conflicted, and wondering if they should feel flattered or grateful that he had ‘chosen them’.

“I didn’t understand it, with being such a young child.”

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- 3.6 Other participants explained that, in addition to not recognising the abuse itself, they did not understand that what was happening to them was ‘sexual’ in nature, as their understanding and knowledge of sexual behaviour was limited.
- 3.7 In addition to their own specific experiences, participants also provided commentary on the wider values and behaviours within society at the time of their abuse. This was particularly true for those who were abused during the 1960s and 1970s, who said that abuse was not openly acknowledged or discussed. They had never heard the word ‘paedophile’, and feared that they would be seen as ‘bad’ or ‘to blame’ as children. Some indicated that they would not have been able to find the words or terminology to describe what had happened to them.
- 3.8 In summary, even those participants who did not understand that what had was abuse, almost all of them could remember feeling uncomfortable, and that something ‘wasn’t right’. Feelings of ‘adults knowing better’ caused confusion for many.

4. Q: Did you tell anyone about the abuse at the time?

- 4.1 The next question was intended to establish whether participants disclosed to anyone at the time of the abuse, and if so, who. We also wanted to explore the inhibitors that had prevented participants from disclosing to anyone.
- 4.2 In this sample, a minority of participants had disclosed their abuse to people at the time that it happened. Of those who did, one had reported it to Police at the time – it is unclear what action was taken following this. The other recipients of the disclosure were hospital staff, and extended family or friends. Regardless of who the disclosure was made to, participants all perceived there to have been no action or follow up, and a number remembered how people had laughed at them, or had minimised what had happened, and had suggested that they should feel ‘lucky’ that someone like Jimmy Savile had paid them attention.
- 4.3 Across all groups, a key reason given for not disclosing abuse was an overwhelming belief that if the abuse had been reported, victims would not have been believed. Jimmy Savile was a powerful and influential adult, who was seen as a ‘charitable, good guy’, raising a lot of money for charity. This led to feelings of helplessness and inferiority in his victims, who felt there was no way that their word, would have been believed over his. This was true for those victims who had been adults when they were abused, as well as for those who were children.

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- 4.4 This belief was reinforced by feelings of guilt, as if; it was ‘their fault’, and being scared about the repercussions of this as a result. Some feared that they would be ‘beaten’ by their parents if they were to disclose what had happened, whereas others feared their parents would ‘kill him’ if they knew.
- 4.5 Feelings of shock, embarrassment, and shame were also reported. For some participants, this was compounded by a wider cultural meaning of shame and honour. Others felt that they did not want to be ‘the child who had been abused’, and were afraid of the potential labelling that could follow.
- 4.6 As has already been acknowledged, some participants did not fully understand that they had been abused, and therefore would not have been able to express themselves clearly enough to report. Others felt they had lacked the confidence that would have been needed to report, and had not known enough about what would happen next.
- 4.7 For those participants who had been residing in some form of residential setting at the time of the abuse, there was a concern about how a disclosure of this nature would affect decisions about their long-term care, and ultimately their futures.
- 4.8 In summary, of those participants who disclosed what happened to them, in this sample only one reported it directly to Police as abuse – the others disclosed to family, friends, or hospital staff. Those who did not report cited feelings of shame, guilt and a fear of not being believed as the reasons for not telling anyone, as well as feeling intimidated by Jimmy Savile’s profile.

5. Q: In recent years, prior to the media coverage, have you spoken to anyone about the abuse?

- 5.1 This question was asked to establish whether people felt more able to disclose their abuse after a period of time had passed.
- 5.2 Some participants reported that they had discussed the abuse with other people more recently (although still prior to the media coverage). This was usually with a partner, extended family or close friends.
- 5.3 In this sample, none of the participants approached Police or other authorities prior to the media coverage, and even after reporting, some have not told partners or family members about their abuse.
- 5.4 Some participants remembered occasions where others had been speaking positively about Jimmy Savile, and they had felt the need to challenge this. They had wanted people to 'know the truth' about him.
- 5.5 The participants who had talked about their abuse in later years reported a mixed response from those they told – some experienced a supportive, understanding response, others were laughed at or dismissed.

“Everyone found it hilarious so I eventually I just stopped talking about it...”

6. Q: Although you did not contact the Police at the time of the abuse, did it occur to you that you could report to them directly?

- 6.1 This question was asked to find out more about how participants had viewed their relationship with the Police as young people or young adults.
- 6.2 As previously noted, one participant reported their abuse directly to the Police, almost immediately after it occurred, and therefore, they did not contribute to this question.
- 6.3 Of the remaining participants, those who were adults at the time of the abuse recalled being aware that they could report to the Police, but chose not to, for the reasons identified in section three.
- 6.4 Of those participants who were abused as children, none had considered that they could report to the Police directly at the time. This was partly down to a

limited understanding of the role of the Police, and was compounded by those feelings of blame, guilt and shame already identified. There was also a more general feeling that reporting to the Police was ‘something that adults did’.

“I never I thought I could go to the Police on my own... children’s minds work completely differently, don’t they?”

7. Q: What enabled or encouraged you to report the abuse at this time?

- 7.1 Given that the vast majority of participants had only approached authorities following the launch of Operation Yewtree, we wanted to explore the factors that had enabled them to come forward at this time.
- 7.2 Across all of the focus groups, it was clear that the media focus on the allegations against Jimmy Savile was key in enabling people to report their abuse, although many had found the support of family and friends to be essential in giving them the confidence to go forward with this. Crucially, all participants said that they would not have come forward now had they not seen the stories of other victims in the press.
- 7.3 There were two key reasons given for reporting abuse. The first related to participants’ individual feelings about the abuse and the impact of it. Some hoped that formally recording their abuse would provide them with a sense of closure. In other cases they had spent decades suppressing memories of the abuse, or blaming themselves, and saw this as a chance to be vindicated. For others, it helped them to acknowledge the impact that their abuse had had on them throughout their lives. A number of participants reported having kept items or photographs to prove that they had met Savile and were only now beginning to understand the significance of this.
- 7.4 The second reason participants cited for reporting their own abuse was to support and corroborate the experiences of those who had spoken out in the documentary and were not believed. All could identify occasions where they had read stories in the media or overheard conversations that suggested victims were ‘after his money’ or ‘attention-seeking’, and they felt very strongly that they wanted to assist in ‘setting the record straight’. Some described this as feeling a sense of ‘duty’ to report.
- 7.5 In light of the significance of the role that the media played in enabling people to report their abuse, participants were asked if they thought that they would have been able to report at an earlier stage had the media attention come sooner, or had they known that there were other victims. In this sample, the

majority of the participants felt that they would have - had they known that they 'were not the only one' and 'were not alone', they would have felt more confident in approaching someone and disclosing what had happened to them.

- 7.6 In summary, an important factor in encouraging people to approach the authorities was the media attention. Seeing others with similar stories in the press took away the feeling of 'being the only one', which in turn reduced the fear of not being believed. A key issue motivating participants to speak out was that they wanted to support those who had come forward and add corroborating evidence.

8. Q: How did you report your concerns?

- 8.1 This question was asked to establish what channels people had chosen to use to report now.
- 8.2 In the days or weeks following the broadcasting of the documentary, participants reported their abuse to the police directly or to the programme makers, ITV, the NSPCC Helpline, or a solicitor, who then put them in contact with the police. In this sample, the majority contacted the police directly, some contacted the Metropolitan Police and spoke directly to officers that were part of Operation Yewtree, whilst others called or visited local Police to make their initial reports.

9. Q: How affected were you by the media coverage?

- 9.1 Although the media clearly played an important role in facilitating the reporting of Jimmy Savile's crimes, we wanted to explore whether there were other consequences to the high level of media attention.
- 9.2 Although that the media coverage in the weeks and months that followed the launch of Operation Yewtree had facilitated disclosure, adverse impacts of the coverage were also discussed. This was primarily down to the scale of the media coverage – it felt that Jimmy Savile's face was on every paper and every news broadcast, and that the allegations were being discussed wherever they went.
- 9.3 This resulted in feelings of anger – not only towards Savile, but also towards the media, who participants felt had little regard for the impact that this was having on those who had been abused. Some reported having flashbacks, 'feeling physically sick' and experiencing vivid memories of him as a person.

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- 9.4 Although there was a very clear link between the media coverage of the emerging allegations, and the participants' confidence in reporting their own, there was also a fear of being exposed or made vulnerable by the media. Participants had witnessed people telling their story, and then be made out to be 'liars' or 'out for money'.
- 9.5 The view was also expressed that the media reporting of sexual abuse trials might also have a role in the decisions of victims not to come forward, although not necessarily specifically in the case of Jimmy Savile. Participants discussed the perception that victims 'take the stand as a witness and the prosecution tears you to shreds', and acknowledged that the media commonly perpetuates this idea through written articles, as well as television drama.
- 9.6 However, the negative impact of the coverage was balanced by the acknowledgment that the media had increased the profile of abuse and that this might enable people to speak more freely on the subject, which was felt to be a very positive outcome.
- 9.7 In summary, while positive aspect to the reporting on Operation Yewtree was recognised, in that it enabled so many people to speak out about what had happened to them, participants also discussed the adverse effects of the high level of media attention on them. It was felt that little regard was given to the possible impact on victims of showing Jimmy Savile's face on every newspaper and news bulletin, and this was very difficult for some people.

10. Q: What was your experience of reporting the abuse now? What support where you offered afterwards?

- 10.1 It was important to explore people's experiences of reporting to the Police after making the decision to speak about what had happened to them. This question aimed to explore the initial reporting, subsequent process, and the support available afterwards.
- 10.2 For the participants involved in these focus groups overall, their experiences of liaising with the Police to report their abuse now were largely positive. However, the degree to which police seemed to be responding formally to their disclosure influenced participants' feelings about the response.
- 10.3 Many people expressed their shock that the Police had listened to them, and had taken what they had to say so seriously. A number of participants left details with a call-handler initially and were told that they would be called back.

They had not expected to hear anything more, and had been surprised when they were then contacted.

- 10.4 There were inconsistencies in the way in which participants' disclosures were initially received by the Police. Some were visited by officers or attended local Police stations, where they provided written, signed statements, others provided only verbal accounts via the telephone and had not signed any statement. These participants had questioned whether this was because their stories were 'not as important' as those that had been provided face-to-face, and also wondered whether their abuse was counted in official statistics and reporting. Some wondered if the Police 'cared' as much about their verbal account.
- 10.5 Some participants were given crime reference numbers and others were not. For those who were not given a reference, this led them to question the Police view regarding the validity of their report. Similarly, not all participants were given advice about how to contact officers if they remembered further details, and this again led to questions around the value of their information.
- 10.6 For those participants who were interviewed in person, the location of their interview was also an important factor. Some participants were offered a choice between officers visiting their house or going to a Police station, and this gave them a level of control within the process. Others, however, were not given the choice and were told to attend a particular station, or that officers would visit them at home. One participant indicated that officers "just knocked on the door... I got a phone call and they were outside." Some participants felt strongly that they wouldn't have wanted a Police car to pull up outside their house, or to see uniformed officers approaching, as they wouldn't have wanted to have to explain or lie to their neighbours.
- 10.7 Some participants commented on the length of time that taking statements took. A number of participants spent several hours being interviewed and providing statements, but were not offered any refreshments during that time.

"We travelled to a disused Police station to take my statement... neither of us were given any coffee or water or anything, and we were there for just over three hours..."

- 10.8 The majority of the participants remembered having to repeat their disclosure a number of times, sometimes to a number of different officers. Participants accepted that this was 'part of the process', but some felt at times as if they were 'being tested' or that officers were trying to 'catch them out' with the information that they provided. Nobody recalled any explanation being given as to how the reporting process would work, or why there were, various stages and statements required. It is worth noting that, for some people, this process

of repetition reassured them that their disclosure was being taken seriously, and made them feel that the Police were interested in what they had to say.

- 10.9 Participants in each group also discussed the style of questioning used by the Police, and generally felt this to be very 'matter of fact', concerned with the minute details of what had happened, rather than the emotional impact. Whilst there was an overall understanding of the need for this approach, a number of participants felt that the on-going impact of their abuse was not given the same level of importance within the process, and some reported feeling that impact more strongly following their report.
- 10.10 There were also examples of comments made by officers, or the presentation of officers, that were experienced by the participants to be unhelpful or inconsiderate, although it was acknowledged in each case that that had not been their intention. One participant remembered how, in response to their disclosure, an officer had said, "I think I would have pushed him off..." This caused the feelings of blame that the participant had felt as a teenager to resurface again, "I remembered feeling, 'Oh, I've got this wrong again'..." Other examples included officers "looking like they were in riot gear," refusing to close the door of an interview room, and interview rooms being quite bare and stark. Some participants found this intimidating, and even frightening.
- 10.11 In terms of follow-up, most participants in this sample were offered signposting to counselling or emotional support of some form, although few accepted this offer at that stage. Very few identified any level of follow-up from the Police – once they had clarified all the necessary information, there was little contact from officers, and limited communication about what would happen next, or the timescales of this. Some people felt that they would have benefitted from some follow-up contact from the Police, to be kept informed about what was happening with their information.
- 10.12 In summary, some participants felt that Police had managed Operation Yewtree well, and had made real efforts to put people at ease and to reassure people that they were believed. However, other participants felt that there were a number of areas where the process could have been improved, including officer training, degree of choice given to those who were reporting, and consistency throughout the process.

11. Q: Do you think there are any barriers to reporting abuse now?

- 11.1 We also wanted to explore what participants perceived to be current barriers to reporting abuse.

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- 11.2 Participants felt that the feeling of being a 'lone voice' may still be a concern for victims of abuse, and may still prevent some people from coming forward to report their experiences.
 - 11.3 There was also a feeling that the lack of a specialised channel through which to report incidences of abuse may also create a barrier for victims. Most participants felt that the thought of picking up the phone and dialling 101 or 999 would be quite daunting for someone who needed to contact the Police, and that visiting your local Police station, or speaking to a local Police officer, was not as easy as it had once been, due to the structure of Police forces.
 - 11.4 Further comments suggested that, although participants felt that abuse is far more openly spoken of now than decades ago, there is still a stigma attached to being a victim of a sexual crime, and that until this changes within society, victims may continue to be reluctant to come forward.

12. Q: What changes could be made by the Police to encourage people to report abuse at the time that it occurs?

- 12.1 Following on from the barriers, we explored what developments could be made to the reporting process to encourage.
- 12.2 Another barrier to disclosure identified by participants was the feeling that the Police had become detached from communities to some extent. Several participants felt that the relationship between the Police and members of the public was "better in the old days" – they remembered seeing "the local bobby" in their communities, and viewing them as "someone that you could say 'hello' to." They felt that this had changed more recently, and that this was largely down to decreasing resources.
- 12.3 It was also felt that it was not "as easy as it used to be" to go along to a local Police station and speak to an officer. This was put down to limited opening times, inaccessible locations and a reduction in the number of officers available. Participants felt that Police should develop a greater presence at the centre of communities, and should be easily accessible, located in smaller "hubs" within estates, towns and villages.
- 12.4 Following on from this, participants felt that the Police could do more specifically in schools to inform children and young people about their roles, so that they are not just seen as "there to get you into trouble," but are seen as a source of help and protection. In discussing this, a number of participants

referred to wider initiatives such as the Young Firefighters' Association, and felt that Police could change how they were viewed by children, young people, and the wider community if they were to develop similar initiatives that worked with children from an early age. Other suggestions included the Police becoming actively involved in educating children about abuse from an early age, for example, by reading age-appropriate storybooks with children, and talking to children about how they help people. It was also acknowledged that these messages needed to be reinforced by parents, teachers and other professionals.

“Police should go to schools to give talks so that it’s a friendly policeman rather than a scary policeman...”

- 12.5 The idea that Police should work with children to develop their understanding of their role was also felt to be relevant on a wider scale. It was felt that changing the public’s perception of the Police was a key factor to encouraging victims to report crime. They felt that the public do not always trust the Police, and that they feel they will not be believed by Police about particular types of crime. One participant remembered a story of an acquaintance who had disclosed to the Police that they had been raped by their father repeatedly during their adolescence, adding “...the Police took them home again, confronted their parents, who denied it, and nothing else was done”. Other participants recounted similar stories, and these seemed to heavily contribute to this lack of trust.

“People need to be able to go up to the Police and say ‘I need help’, and not feel scared...”

- 12.6 The distinction between sexual assaults and other types of crime was also important to participants. It was argued that it was not appropriate to respond to sexual crimes in the same way as other crimes, but that, as there is not a separate reporting method in place currently, victims of sexual crime may frequently end up reporting to generic call-handlers or officers who do not have any additional training in receiving these kinds of disclosures.
- 12.7 It was suggested that a specific reporting helpline would perhaps reassure victims, and enable them to feel more confident in picking up the telephone and speaking about their experiences. Participants noted that it would be important for staff at such a helpline to be suitably trained in child protection, non-recent abuse allegations, and interview techniques, as well as to have an understanding of the impact that sexual abuse may have on the emotional well-being of those reporting it.
- 12.8 In addition to training the members of staff who initially receive disclosures, participants also felt strongly about the skills needed by investigating officers to

support victims appropriately throughout the process. They felt that officers needed to have specialist training and knowledge, and know the right questions to ask to get the information that they needed, to minimise the need for repetition and to keep interviews as short as possible. It was also suggested that they need to “really listen to what is being said...” and to hear the impact, as well as they story.

“Sometimes the Police don’t realise that there is a young person sitting here saying ‘this has happened to me’, and it’s actually going to mess their head up for the rest of their life...”

- 12.9 Transparency and openness throughout the process was also cited as something that was very important. Participants felt that officers needed to communicate effectively with victims, so that they were aware of why certain steps were being taken, and what would happen next. The view was also expressed that more experienced officers could sometimes present as more “cynical” than less experienced colleagues.
- 12.10 In summary, participants felt that Police could do more to change how they are perceived within communities, particularly with young people, and to be more accessible and approachable. Greater emphasis on the impact of abuse, as well as the details of it, was also an important factor, as well as consideration of a clearer and more specialised reporting channel.

13. Mandatory Reporting and Advisory Capacity of Police

Mandatory Reporting: If other professionals were given a legal obligation to report all allegations of abuse that they became aware of, would this improve the protection of children?

- 13.1 In addition to the suggestions and feedback that were volunteered by participants, there were two specific concepts that we introduced and explored with the groups - those of mandatory reporting and of Police Officers as advisors.
- 13.2 Among the participants involved in this research, there was unanimous agreement that it would be beneficial for children if greater responsibility were placed on professionals in respect of reporting concerns or allegations of abuse. Taking away the burden from children and young people, and also from their parents, was seen to be a positive idea. However, concern was expressed about the idea of criminalising professionals who did not report allegations, and also that this may lead to professionals becoming very anxious and almost reluctant to engage with young people in the same way.

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- 13.3 It was acknowledged that mandatory reporting would only lead to an improvement for victims of sexual abuse if other agencies ensured that they had appropriately trained staff and adequate systems in place to move disclosures forward once they had been received.

Advisory Capacity of Police: If victims were able to contact Police officers to discuss their abuse and seek advice, without the fear that this would automatically be reported as a crime and acted upon, would this encourage victims to interact with the Police?

- 13.4 The majority of participants felt that this would be a positive development in the services offered by Police, but that it would be beneficial for this to be provided by one nationally recognised service, rather than going to local officers. They felt that it would be good to talk through their experiences, seek advice about their options, and have an opportunity to ask “What if?” questions, and that this would then make people feel more confident in the service that they would receive if they were to make a report. Similarities were drawn between this concept, and the services offered in Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARC).

14. Wider Context – Impact of Abuse

- 14.1 In sharing their views and experiences within the focus groups, in addition to providing answers to specific questions, participants contributed towards building a clear picture of the impact that sexual abuse can have on children, young people, and adults of all ages. Whilst this section specifically relates to the experiences of the focus group participants, it is also likely to represent similar themes and feelings for many other people who are abused in childhood.
- 14.2 A number of participants indicated that, although their abuse was traumatic, they had been able to “push it away” and did not feel that they suffered any significant long-term effects from it. However, this was not the experience of the majority of this sample of victims. Some participants could readily identify links between the abuse that they were subjected to by Jimmy Savile, and the difficulties that they experienced during adolescence, early adulthood, and into later life. Others were only now beginning to consider the scale to which their abuse appears to have affected them.
- 14.3 In discussing their experiences of being unable to report their abuse, some participants referred to a wide range of social and developmental difficulties

that affected them following it. This included drug and alcohol misuse, risk-taking behaviours such as running away, anti-social behaviour and poor relationships with parents and carers. This led to some participants having contact with the Police in a punitive capacity, furthering their feelings of mistrust.

“I completely went off the rails...”

“I became very withdrawn... They took me to the doctor and put me on anti-depressants and I’ve been on and off them ever since...”

- 14.4 A number of participants felt that these changes in their behaviour were very obvious to those closest to them, as well as to teaching staff and other professionals, yet no-one remembered any adults asking them why they were behaving in that way. They felt that, had someone spent some time with them, talking and listening to them, this might have encouraged them to be more open.
- 14.5 For some, a further consequence of these difficulties was a sense of “blurred boundaries.” As young people, they were unsure what to expect from adults, or what to accept as appropriate or “normal” behaviour, leaving them even more vulnerable than other young people their age were. In some cases, this left them open to abuse and exploitation by other adults, not only Jimmy Savile.
- 14.6 Many of the difficulties that emerged during childhood and adolescence followed participants into adulthood. Across the groups, there were again reports of drug and alcohol dependencies, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Some participants had experienced poor relationships with partners, struggling to trust them, and feeling anxious and “paranoid.” Some also felt that their own difficulties had impacted upon their relationships with their children, and to some extent, on their children’s development.
- 14.7 For a number of participants, the memories of the abuse and of Jimmy Savile himself are very much present for them. They were able to recall with ease and precision details such as the clothes they were wearing, the exact location in which the abuse occurred, the smell of Jimmy Savile and the last words that he said to them. These lasting memories, coupled with the fact that many participants have never spoken of the abuse, appears to have for, some had, a profound impact. A significant number of participants have still chosen not to disclose their abuse to family or friends.

15. Themes and Findings

- 15.1 This section will identify the key themes that were highlighted by focus group participants as potentially needing further consideration by Police.
- 15.2 *“I didn’t understand it was a crime... I didn’t know you could report it...”*
For the focus group participants, whether they recognised that what had happened to them was abusive or not had no bearing on how likely they were to disclose the abuse, and therefore, it appears even more important that adults (whether in the role of carer or professional) respond appropriately to behavioural changes and other signs and symptoms of abuse. This includes asking the ‘right’ questions, and encouraging an open conversation, in which young people do not fear ‘getting into trouble’.
- 15.3 Further, as children and young people, almost none of the participants in this sample had any concept that they could report crimes to the Police independently of their parents or carers. Reporting to the Police seemed to them to be a decision that an adult needed to make, and it was felt that developing a relationship between the Police and children and young people would increase the likelihood of them approaching the Police when they needed help, and would change the perception of them as ‘there to get you into trouble’.
- 15.4 This was linked in to a wider theme of developing children’s understanding of abuse, and it was felt vital that Police play a more ‘hands on’ role in this in schools and communities.
- 15.5 *“I didn’t say anything ‘cause I didn’t think they would believe me... ‘cause again, he was the grown up...”*
The importance of ‘being believed’, and of not being believed, was clear in each group, and played a central role in most participants’ decisions not to report the abuse at the time that it occurred. For them, the need for young victims to feel confident that their disclosures will be taken seriously, and that they will be offered care and protection if they talk to authorities, cannot be overstated.
- 15.6 *“I thought I was the **only one**...”*
It was clear throughout the groups that none of the participants in this sample would have been likely to come forward had it not been for the media focus on the crimes committed by Jimmy Savile. However, it was not the media per se that encouraged their disclosures but the realisation that they were not ‘the only one’. Had the crimes been made public at the time of their abuse, these participants would have been significantly more likely to report theirs.

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- 15.7 This was closely connected to the concept of being believed – there was a strong feeling that, alone, they would not have been listened to, but as part of a group, they would now be believed, and importantly could add weight and corroboration to each other’s stories.
- 15.8 In this sample, most participants chose to report their abuse directly to the Police on the launch of Operation Yewtree, which would suggest a level of initial confidence in the way in which their reports would be managed from that point. However, this may not have been the case for victims not involved in this research.
- 15.9 *“We were on our own... we didn’t know what next steps to take...”*
Participants discussed feeling uncomfortable that the initial process of reporting a sexual offence would follow the same process as any other crime. The thought of picking up the telephone or going into a Police station and making that type of disclosure to someone who is routinely responding to, for example, thefts or break-ins felt daunting, and a number of groups suggested that a specialised reporting channel would make this process easier.
- 15.10 They felt that such a reporting mechanism could be staffed by ‘specially trained’ advisors, whose primary role was to receive disclosures of sexual abuse or assault, and talk victims through the ‘next steps’ and the process that would follow. This advisory capacity was felt by several participants to be missing from the current process – they found themselves with questions such as, “Do I need a solicitor?” or “How long will it be until I hear from the Police again?”, but felt unsure who to approach for the answers.
- 15.11 In a wider context, the idea of the Police providing an ‘advisory’ service, where victims of crime could discuss their options and find out what would happen next if they wanted to report, was positively received.
- 15.12 *“When I was **making that statement**, I might as well have been 14 again... I thought “I’ve got it wrong again”...”*
- 15.13 Following on from the participants’ thoughts on training for those receiving disclosures, the importance of investigating officers being appropriately trained was also evident. As discussed earlier in this report, some participants had experiences of officers making unhelpful comments or presenting in intimidating ways, which compounded some of the feelings of helplessness or blame that had been reported. It was felt that this was never intentional, and was perhaps instead down to a lack of recognition of the on-going impact of sexual abuse, and of how their words and presentation could affect this.
- 15.14 Further to this, the impact of giving a Police statement, particularly relating to sexual abuse, was also hugely significant. In discussing the experience, the

importance of being given choices became clear – ultimately, those who were given a choice in terms of where they provided their statement generally reported a more positive experience than those who were not. This would also redress some of the inconsistencies that were identified in people’s experiences of providing statements.

- 15.15 It was also felt that Police needed to recognise that details that may not be important to them were in fact very important to victims. Some participants felt that, when giving their statements, they had wanted to record certain things within them that were felt to be irrelevant by the Police. The focus had been very much on collecting the precise details of the abuse, which everyone agreed was essential, but there was a feeling that the emotion and the impact became lost in this process.
- 15.16 There should also be on-going communication between Police and victims, including a full explanation of what will happen next, the timescales that Police will work to, and how victims can contact them if they need to discuss anything relating to their case. Victims should also consistently be offered on-going support during the investigation, but also on conclusion of investigation or proceedings, through referrals to other agencies or professionals where appropriate.
- 15.17 In summary, participants felt strongly that Police should not approach the investigation of sexual crimes in the same way as other crimes – there should be a constant awareness of the impact of abuse on victims, and as a result, the process should be more tailored towards their needs.

16. Conclusion

- 16.1 It is important to state that in this sample the majority of participants praised the Police officers that they had met with or spoken to as part of Operation Yewtree, and felt that overall, they had been helpful, supportive and understanding - that they were ‘really trying to get it right’. It is, of course, not possible to know what victims who were not involved in this research felt.
- 16.2 It has become clear from the focus groups that, for many of the participants involved, a range of factors came together to make reporting their abuse at the time that it occurred feel impossible. Their perceptions about the likely Police response was one of these factors, with participants having had the sense that Police may not have been understanding at the time, and would not have managed any disclosures effectively. Many others were also at play, including their family circumstances, their understanding of what had happened to them, and societal values about sexual abuse. Participants felt that there was – and to some degree still is – a stigma attached to being a victim of abuse, and that

society will at times 'blame victims', making the prospect of disclosing abuse particularly daunting.

- 16.3 In addition to the considerations in the previous section, it was felt that increased visibility of Police within communities would encourage more people to come forward and seek help. It is worth noting that some participants, their abuse occurred at a time when they perceived policing to have more of a community-based strategy, yet they still felt unable to report what had happened to them, which highlights the need for change not only within the Police, but within other agencies, and at a societal level also.
- 16.4 Participants indicated that fears about the Court process may also have contributed to their reluctance to report, and they felt that this was another area for consideration.
- 16.5 It is important to acknowledge the impact of the media on victims of abuse. Although the media have clearly played a very important role in bringing the crimes of Jimmy Savile to light, the intensity and longevity of the media coverage have had detrimental effects on many victims, and they would like this to be considered in any future investigations.
- 16.6 The participants' willingness to share their experiences, thoughts, and feelings created environments in which they were able to discuss and debate developments and changes, as well as seek support and comfort from each other. The vast majority of participants felt that such groups would benefit victims in any major inquiries.
- 16.7 It is also important to note that many of the factors that were important to participants were not things that required structural reform or financial investment. These included listening to the impact of abuse, as well as to the facts of an allegation; offering victims a choice in where and when they were spoken to; reassuring a victim that, they themselves are not being investigated; and providing a cup of tea/offering a drink to a victim who is finding the process of making a statement to be incredibly daunting. These considerations may seem insignificant or unimportant to those who are involved in criminal investigations each day as part of their working lives, but their value to someone who is disclosing abuse for what may be the first time should not be underestimated.

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About the NSPCC

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) is the UK's leading charity specialising in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children.

The NSPCC aims to end cruelty to children by seeking to influence legislation, policy, practice, attitudes and behaviours for the benefit of children and young people. This is achieved through a combination of service provision, lobbying, campaigning and public education.

Our services include the NSPCC Helpline, for adults worried about a child, and ChildLine, the UK's free, confidential helpline for children and young people.

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