Teenagers and their sexual partners: what age difference should raise concerns of sexual exploitation?

Dr Louise Cook
Associate Specialist
Aneurin Bevan University Health Board
Overview

• Background
• Why be concerned about partner age difference?
• What we did?
• Results
• Recommendations
Acknowledging my co-author

Dr Alison Mott, Designated Doctor, Safeguarding Children Service, Public Health Wales
What have I been doing?
Safeguarding young people

• Research led to the development of a Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) checklist
  ➢ to be used in clinical settings
  ➢ by busy health professionals
  ➢ support them in making informed decisions about a young person’s risk of sexual exploitation

• Referred to as CSERQ

• Adapted from All Wales SERAF¹
Why be concerned about age difference between sexual partners?
Young people who are being sexually exploited...  
...may have older boyfriends or girlfriends

2011: Safeguarding Children and Young People from Sexual Exploitation

Significant risk indicators include:

– older ‘boyfriend’ (or ‘girlfriend’) or relationship with a controlling adult
How is ‘older’ defined?
Audit of under-14s attending our contraception clinics during 2003

- 242 under-14s
- 598 visits
- partner age recorded at 29% of visits
Audit of under-14s attending our contraception clinics during 2003

- 242 under-14s
- 598 visits
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That was then, what about now?
Comprehensive electronic history sheet templates for under-18s

### Consultation Details

- **Input Profile**: Integrated female history - 17 or under
- **Date and Time**: 06/02/2018 14:31
- **Episode**: None Selected
- **Taken By**:
- **Reason**:
- **Overall Result**:

### Consultation Data (74 items)

- **Reason for attendance details**
- **Symptomatic?**
- **Limit of confidentiality discussed with young person?**
- **UPSI since LMP?**
- **CSERQ (Child sexual exploitation risk questionnaire) completed?**
- **CSERQ-1 Have you ever stayed out overnight or longer without permission from your parent(s) or guardian?**
- **CSERQ-a How old is your partner or the person(s) you have sex with? Please enter whole number only. If no current sexual partner enter 0**
- **CSERQ-2 If age difference between client and person(s) they are having sex with is 4 or more years, please tick yes.**
- **CSERQ-3 Does your partner stop you from doing things you want to do?**
- **CSERQ-4 Thinking about where you go to hang out, or have sex. Do you feel unsafe there/are your parent(s) or guardian worried about your safety?**

If answered "yes" to any one or more of the CSERQ end dot questions this indicates that a child is at increased risk of child sexual exploitation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CSERQ4 questions</th>
<th>Yes / No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever stayed out overnight or longer without permission from your parent(s) or guardian?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How old is your partner or the person(s) you have sex with? Age of partner ______ Age of client/patient ______ Age difference ______</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If age difference is 4 or more years then answer ‘YES’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your partner stop you from doing things you want to do?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about where you go to hang out, or to have sex. Do you feel unsafe there, or are your parent(s) or guardian worried about your safety?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ACTION:** If one or more of CSERQ4 questions is answered in the affirmative then a child protection referral is indicated.
What age difference should raise concerns of sexual exploitation?

Reviewed records of all 13-17 year olds attending a sexual health clinic over consecutive six month period

Looked at:

• Age of partner
• Age difference between client and partner
What did we find?

1526 visits by 13-17 year olds

n = 1417 (93%)

n = 109 (7%)
Proportion of visits where partner age was documented (n = 1526)

- Females (n = 1106): 72%
- Males (n = 83): 6%
- No partner (n = 281): 18%
- No age recorded (n = 56): 4%
Partner age difference for female clients (n = 1106)
Partner age difference for male clients (n = 83)
How many referrals would result?

Clients aged 16yrs and under (n = 478)

4 or more year age difference

6 or more year age difference

Potential % to be referred

n = 10

2%
How many referrals would result?

Clients aged 16yrs and under (n = 478)

4 or more year age difference
n = 10
Potential % to be referred
2%

Clients aged 17yrs (n = 711)

6 or more year age difference
n = 12
1.7%
Recommendations

• When considering a young person’s potential risk of CSE we recommend that:
  ➢ For 13-16 year olds a 4 or more age difference is significant, whereas
  ➢ For 17 year olds a 6 or more age difference is significant

• We encourage clinicians to consider age difference as part of their holistic approach to assessing CSE risk

• Referral on grounds of age difference alone would not overwhelm statutory partners

• This has practice implications for all multiagency partners
Thank you for listening

Questions?
References

