
Are you listening to me?

Tuesday 14th November
14:00 – 16:00



BIRMINGHAM
**Safeguarding
Children**
PARTNERSHIP



West Sussex
SCP
Safeguarding
Children Partnership

Welcome and Introduction

Jane Armstrong, Co-Chairs BSCP Serious Cases Sub-Group

- Welcome
- Purpose of the Session
- Overview Child 'A' LCSPR
- Reminders

Webinar Programme

14:00	Welcome & Introduction – Jane Armstrong, Chair BSCP Serious Case Sub-Group
14:05	Case Overview and Key Learning - Joanna Nicolas, Lead Reviewer, Child A LCSPR
15:00	Quick Comfort Break
15:05	Adultification and Intersectionality – Jahnine Davis, Leading Specialist in Adultification
15:35	Question Time Panel – Chaired by Jane Armstrong, with Jahnine and Joanna
16:00	Finish

Profile of the family at the heart of the review

Child A was a 14-year-old girl living with her mother, they had recently moved to West Sussex. Most of Child A's childhood had been spent in Birmingham. Child A was of mixed heritage but considered herself "a Black woman", as did her mother.

Child A's mother had a partner, Adult A, who lived separately, although he was involved in Child A's life and wanted to support her and support his partner in caring for Child A. Adult A was dual heritage, equally proud of his Caribbean and his London heritage.

Background to the review



- Child A, was found guilty of fatally stabbing her mother's partner, Adult A, in October 2020
- The case met the criteria for a child safeguarding practice review
- The review team was made up of senior managers across Birmingham and West Sussex, with myself as the independent lead reviewer

Background to the review



- Child A's mother became pregnant with her when she was 17
- Child A's father had a long history of criminality and violence
- Evidence of a chaotic and neglectful homelife from when Child A was 6. One of the ways this manifested itself was she would sleep for hours at school but she also became increasingly aggressive and violent in school
- Child A attended a number of primary schools in 4 years, until finally, aged 8, she was permanently excluded from school, for violent behaviour.

Background to the review



- From then until the fatal incident Child A's education was patchy
- From aged 8 Child A was the subject of different types of multi-agency support plans
- As Child A got older her vulnerability increased and the adults around her were increasingly challenged by how this was manifesting itself in Child A. For example, when Child A was 10 she smothered her three-year-old half-sibling

Background to the review



- Really concerning sexualised behaviours started to be seen. Child A started going missing regularly and she was arrested on a number of occasions
- Child A first threatened her mother with a knife when she was 12
- From then until the fatal incident Child A's vulnerability and risk of harm became more and more apparent. She started self harming and her behaviours escalated

Background to the review



- From then on Child A frequently went missing, and she continued to attack and rob others and make further threats of harm
- In August 2019 Child A was admitted to hospital because she had contracted a medical condition that required treatment, which she refused
- In September 2019, when she was 13, Child A was assessed by a psychologist as functioning as a child of eight to nine years
- Later in 2019 Child A's half-siblings told professionals that there was abuse in the home, with Child A being both a victim and a perpetrator of physical and verbal abuse. Shortly after this, Child A's mother and the father of her half-siblings separated and the half-siblings went to live with their father, as directed by the court

Background to the review



- The police continued to have concerns that Child A could be being criminally exploited and used to deal drugs or run drugs.
- In 2020 the situation continued to deteriorate, and Child A's life became more and more turbulent.
- In April 2020 Child A's mother moved to London and advised she would be joined by her daughter, Child A. Child A's mother was offered an option of private rented accommodation in Crawley, West Sussex by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham Housing Department
- Following the move to West Sussex there was a significant reduction in Child A's offending and antisocial behaviour, violence / aggression and there were few reported incidents of her being missing

Background to the review



- There was also initially no evidence of exploitation in West Sussex
- The last known incident, prior to the fatal incident, was a fight between Child A and another female five weeks earlier
- The fatal incident followed a number of days of alleged threats by Child A to stab her mother. Child A's mother had had to return to Birmingham to visit a sick relative. She had left Child A in the care of Adult A but Child A had not remained in the home. Adult A informed Child A's mother, who reported Child A missing to the police. Child A was found and was taken to another relative's house. Child A later returned to her home. Adult A returned to the property, which had been damaged by Child A, and an alleged argument between Adult A and Child A ensued which culminated in the tragic and fatal incident when Adult A was stabbed and sadly died.

Five Key Themes of the Review



THE FIVE KEY THEMES PROVIDED THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE 10 LOCAL AND TWO NATIONAL LEARNING POINTS:

1. Identifying, understanding, and responding to the needs of those at greatest risk from children exhibiting the most harmful behaviour
2. The effectiveness of systems to protect those most vulnerable, particularly within the context of Intersectionality, Structural Racism, Adulthood and Extra-Familial Harm
3. Understanding Family Dynamics, Needs and History in its broadest context is vital
4. The importance of recognising and understanding the impact of Trauma and Abuse on Children and utilising a trauma-informed approach
5. The Importance of the Continuity of Care, Support and Information Exchange when a Child Moves Area

It is important to state that the review recognised and saw many good examples of the commitment, effort and time spent by frontline professionals working with this vulnerable child and family and what this report goes on to say does not diminish that but identifies a number of significant areas for systemic learning.

THEME ONE:

IDENTIFYING, UNDERSTANDING, AND RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF THOSE AT GREATEST RISK FROM CHILDREN EXHIBITING THE MOST HARMFUL BEHAVIOUR.

It is important to be clear that it is extremely rare for a child to murder an adult. It is even more rare for a girl to murder an adult. However, there were incidents and warning signs.

Stand Outs

- Child A smothering her 3-year-old half-sibling – she told school she was in a rage and could not stop herself. She was 10
- An escalation of concerning events and behaviours when Child A was 12 – going missing, being the subject of a significant assault, an escalation of violence towards others, including threatening her mother with a knife. Then at 13 continuous threats to stab her mother but now also evidence of racially aggravated attacks and threatening others with a knife

THEME ONE:

IDENTIFYING, UNDERSTANDING, AND RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF THOSE AT GREATEST RISK FROM CHILDREN EXHIBITING THE MOST HARMFUL BEHAVIOUR.

Challenges for Professionals

- Continually fire-fighting, rather than doing the preventative, reparative work set out in the Intensive Referral Order Child A was subject to. The constant incidents and Child A going missing made the work impossible to complete
- The barriers to meaningful engagement – the volatile relationship between Child A and her mother, Child A's mother inconsistency, in terms of requests for support and then withdrawal but ultimately, the significant and extreme abuse and trauma experienced by Child A and to a degree her mother, was a barrier to forming a trusting relationship that would facilitate change.

Learning Point One



If they are to understand a child's world and risks and vulnerabilities, professionals must look beyond the primary carer and also use critical thinking and challenge to reflect on what the child is trying to communicate through their behaviour and interaction with others.

There has to be professional curiosity, critical thinking and challenge about significant others in a child's life:

- **WHY** was a little girl sleeping for 3-4 hours a day at school?
- **WHY** was Child A's mother seeming to put barriers up?
- **WHY** was Child A putting barriers up?
- **WHAT** role did Adult A play in her life?
- **WHAT** impact did Child A's father have on her life?
- **WHY** is a 12-year-old carrying a knife/self-harming/smoking cannabis?/having suicidal thoughts?
- **WHY** is a 12-year-old child having to be admitted to hospital for refusing necessary treatment

Learning Point Two



There needs to be a much greater understanding of the factors which contribute to children committing the most serious of offences

Stand Outs

- Child A's offences did not meet the threshold for her to be considered under the framework for protecting the public against those who commit the most serious violent and sexual offences – Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements
- Very limited research about children who kill
- Agencies **MUST** talk to each other and risks to everyone around an individual who is displaying violent behaviours must be considered
- At aged 12 Child A had been assessed as having a functioning capacity of an eight-year-old – so what?

Learning Point Three



It is equally important that professionals consider all the adults in a child's life, both from a strengths and risks perspective from the adult to the child, but equally from the child to all the adults, if the child is making serious threats of violence.

Stand Outs

- An adult does not have to live in the family home to be a risk or a strength
- Equally, an individual does not have to be living in the family home to be at risk

THEME TWO:

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SYSTEMS TO PROTECT THOSE MOST VULNERABLE, PARTICULARLY
WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF INTERSECTIONALITY, STRUCTURAL RACISM, ADULTIFICATION
AND EXTRA-FAMILIAL HARM.**

Jahnine will cover this in her presentation

Learning Point Four



A child's presenting behaviour needs to be recognised and considered as a form of communication, and behaviour that is challenging for professionals should be seen as a reason to work with a child not as a barrier, nor simply a pejorative label.

Jahnine will cover this in her presentation

Learning Point Five



Children involved in offending behaviours must be recognised as vulnerable too and resolving their unmet needs is critical to reducing the risk they present to others. These children have often experienced abuse, exploitation and trauma and their offending behaviour and risk towards others should be seen in this context.

Stand Outs

- **WHY** does a 12-year-old girl feel the need to carry a weapon?
- Offending behaviour in children should be seen as a symptom of their experiences and trauma, as opposed to the problem being tackled in isolation
- Whilst work is constantly being done to strengthen the collaboration between criminal justice agencies around diversionary activity for children, there is still work to do around raising understanding of the impact of trauma and the vulnerability in children
- The challenges for professionals of balancing the needs of incredibly vulnerable children with protecting the public
- A child can be both a victim and a perpetrator
- Use all available evidence
- Meetings and plans do not protect children

THEME THREE:

UNDERSTANDING FAMILY DYNAMICS, NEEDS AND HISTORY IN ITS BROAD CONTEXT IS VITAL.

Stand Outs

- Professionals can be too focused on what they are concerned about, rather than asking the family questions and making every effort to understand the family's perception and opinions. For any service to be effective, it is essential professionals understand the family's history and the family's position
- Just because a parent is not physically in a child's life, does not mean there will be no impact. How did Child A feel about her father? Did she have conflicting emotions about him? Did she feel there was a void in her life?
- What about the impact of the domestic abuse?
- Child A's mother was a child herself when she had Child A. She had disclosed domestic abuse during her pregnancy but was not recognised as a child needing protection – records state she "declined police involvement"
- What was the relationship like between Child A and her step-father, with whom she lived for several years?

THEME THREE:

UNDERSTANDING FAMILY DYNAMICS, NEEDS AND HISTORY IN ITS BROAD CONTEXT IS VITAL.

Stand Outs

- Child A and her mother seen as 'hard to engage'
- Child A's mother's perception was she was being blamed for her child's behaviour when what she wanted was help and support
- The psychological assessment concluded that Child A's mother masked her intellectual impairment well and "it is very likely that those supporting her will overestimate her intellectual abilities"
- Child A's mother told the review that she constantly asked for help with Child A's behaviour, for years and years, but she never received the help, and her perception was all the professionals talked about was her lack of parental control, her inability to parent and her failings, rather than offering any support that actually made a difference
- A high turnover of staff and families moving and the impact of the constant repletion of assessments/questions/interactions are not conducive to building trusting relationships
- Adult A wanted to help

Learning Point Six



All agencies need to constantly question and challenge themselves on how well they understand a family and how effectively they are working, both with the family, within their own agency and with each other.

- **Why** did Child A's mother often block return interviews?
- **Why** did Child A's mother refuse foster care?
- **Why** did Child A's mother not want to pursue charges against her?
- **All these things were frustrating for professionals**
- **Why** did Child A run away from her emergency foster placement?
- Were there any protective factors for Child A?
- What does the evidence tell us about a parent's ability to change?

Always ask yourself 'so what?' Supervision is crucial – another pair of eyes

Learning Point Seven



A child at risk of being permanently excluded should trigger a multi-agency safeguarding response.

Stand Outs

- Eight out of ten children who are in custody have been excluded from school. If the child is a primary-aged child this should be seen as an additional concern
- When a child is permanently excluded there can be a time lag of a week, or so, before education is provided, and that may only be online. During that time there could be no professional eyes on that child at an extremely vulnerable time in their lives
- Three quarters of formal exclusions are for boys

Learning Point Eight



It is essential that housing authorities consider risk and vulnerability when placing vulnerable individuals and families into accommodation in discharge of its homelessness duties. It is equally essential that housing is routinely included in multi-agency working to support vulnerable families.

Stand Outs

- Housing provision is limited
- Common for vulnerable children and their families to be placed in accommodation with others unsuitable to be around children
- Housing and other agencies **MUST** work closely together

THEME FOUR:

UNDERESTIMATING THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA AND ABUSE ON CHILDREN.

Stand Outs

- The possible impact of domestic abuse in utero MUST be considered
- The psychological assessment concluded 'it is highly likely that Child A suffered emotional and psychological trauma from the impact of living in a household dominated by tension and fear'
- The national average for attendance at primary school is around 96%. Child A's averaged 50%
- The challenges for a school when a child is so disruptive. Child A was only one child
- Child A recalled one teacher who she said made the effort to take her out of the classroom, talk to her and explain things to her

THEME FOUR:

UNDERESTIMATING THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA AND ABUSE ON CHILDREN.

Stand Outs

- Referrals to CAMHS were not accepted because Child A was not seen as meeting their threshold
- 'There can be a tendency for CAMHS to describe how a child is presenting as 'behaviour' and therefore conclude the child does not meet the threshold for their service but if services are so rigid on 'behaviour' they lose looking at what is driving that behaviour, which should always be a vital component in any assessment'
- 'Frontline professionals spoke of the need for 'trauma-informed practice' but went on to say that relationship building was difficult due to Child A being chaotic and the need for constant 'firefighting' by practitioners. Sometimes, almost daily, they were responding to crises, there simply was not the time to do the preventative, strengthening, relationship-building work'

Learning Point Nine

It is essential that all services recognise the impact of childhood trauma, including in utero, on a child's development and behaviour and services are sufficiently flexible to create bespoke support packages that meet the needs of each individual child and their family.

Stand Outs

- Assessments must be as much geared towards provision of support as investigation of risk
- When asked about her safe places and who protected her when she was a little girl, Child A was not able to name anyone or anywhere. She described herself as very independent and said she would look after herself, even when she was a toddler. The concept of safe places or safe people was not one she seemed to understand

THEME FIVE:

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONTINUITY OF CARE, SUPPORT AND INFORMATION EXCHANGE WHEN A CHILD MOVES AREA.

Stand Outs

- Professionals in the new area can be left working almost in the dark with a highly complex family
- The huge challenges for professionals when families move around and professionals sometimes not even knowing where a family is going

Learning Point Ten

If agencies are to work effectively to protect the most vulnerable children, it is essential there is a clear framework and processes for both information and support for children and families transferring between local authorities.

National Learning Point One



There needs to be a much greater understanding of the factors which contribute to children committing the most serious of offences, including adultification bias and intersectionality, and children involved in offending behaviours must be better recognised as vulnerable too

‘Resolving the unmet needs of this cohort of children is critical to reducing the risk they present to others. These children have often experienced abuse, exploitation and trauma and their offending behaviour and risk towards others should be seen in this context.’

The Child Safeguarding National Review Panel is to undertake a thematic project about child protection, ethnicity and racial bias as part of its 2023-2024 work plan. The review respectfully requests the project considers the learning from this CSPR as part of its review.’

National Learning Point Two

Vulnerable children would be better protected if statutory procedures were strengthened in relation to the following:

1. Children on the verge of being permanently excluded from school
2. There being a greater requirement for housing to be involved routinely in multi-agency working and housing providers having to consider risk and vulnerability when placing vulnerable children and their families
3. The protection of deeply traumatised older children and children who are dangerous and potentially pose of risk of serious harm to others
4. Vulnerable children and families transferring between local authorities

Quick comfort break
Back in 5 minutes!



Exploring Adultification and Intersectionality: Child A

Jahnine Davis
Listen Up



@ListenUpCo



Understanding the theory and research

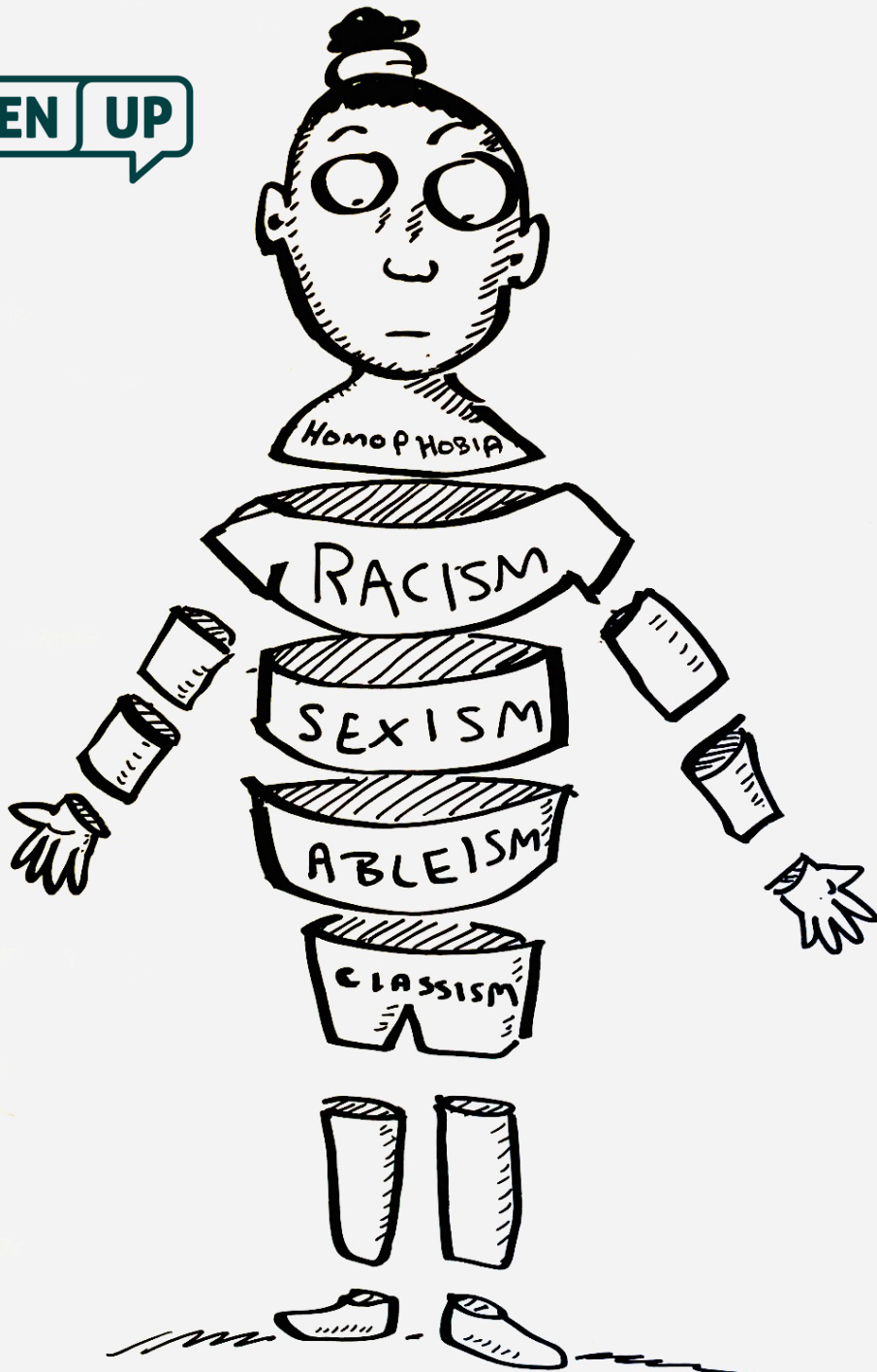


@ListenUpCo



www.ListenUpResearch.org

LISTEN UP



Intersectionality

Crenshaw (1989) identified that a person's interactions with the world are not just solely based on one aspect of their identity but are rather layered and multifaceted; interactions in which racism, sexism, ableism, classism, homophobia (and other forms of oppression) are experienced simultaneously and are inter-related and overlapping.



Adultification

The concept of adultification is where notions of innocence and vulnerability are not afforded to certain children. This is determined by people and institutions who hold power over children and young people. When adultification occurs outside of the home it is always founded within discrimination and bias.

There are various definitions of adultification, all relate to a child's personal characteristics, socio-economic influences and lived experiences. Regardless of the context in which adultification takes place, the impact results in children's rights being either diminished or overlooked.

(Davis and Marsh, 2020)



The Adultification of Black Children

A persistent and ongoing act of dehumanisation, which explicitly impacts Black children, and influences how they are safeguarded and protected. This form of bias spans pre-birth and remains on a continuum to adulthood.

Where at this juncture it becomes absorbed within the normative negative racialised experiences many Black adults encounter throughout their life course. Adultification may differ dependent on an individual's intersecting identity, such as their gender, sexuality, and dis/abilities. However, race and racism remain the central tenant in which this bias operates.

(Davis ,2022)



The Adultification of Black Children



Black children are more likely to be perceived as being a threat, less innocent and more resilient. Therefore, in less need of protection.

This is based on racist tropes which stem from slavery and colonialism.

(Goff et al., 2014; Ocen, 2015; Epstein et al., 2017, Davis, 2019; Davis and Marsh, 2020; Davis, 2022; Farrer, 2022)





Child A's Mother



@ListenUpCo



www.ListenUpResearch.org



Language Matters: Child A's Mother

	Language	Context	Consequence
1	Hard to engage		
2	Inability to parent		
3	Failure to protect		



Omissions and Silences: The trope of Strong Black Woman

- A child
- 17- year old young mother
- Victim/survivor of domestic abuse
- 'Significant intellectual impairment'
- Other experiences of trauma/loss (other children living with previous partner)
- Mother terminally ill

Child A's mother felt professionals working with the family did not listen to her and hear what she was saying, and her reasons for her actions/decisions. The review finds that Child A's mother's experience of services is valid and reflective of the wider findings of the review.....The emphasis was always on the mother's 'failure to protect' her child, rather than offering her support that actually made a difference.



Omissions and Silences: The trope of Strong Black Woman

Evidence suggests that Black women experiences of the world are situated within multiple prisms, including gendered racism: e.g -the strong Black woman stereotype

- Over-reliance on mother's capacity
- Responsibilisation
- Overlooking of mother's vulnerability both physically, intellectually and emotionally
- Recommendations regarding mother parental capacity not actioned

Reflection: Why was mother's vulnerability not considered in decision making? How did individuals and services ensure that racial stereotypes were not implicit in the decision-making process?



Child A



@ListenUpCo



www.ListenUpResearch.org



Language Matters: Child A

	Language	Context	Consequence
1	Dangerous		
2	Violent		
3	Aggressive		
4	No remorse, No compassion		

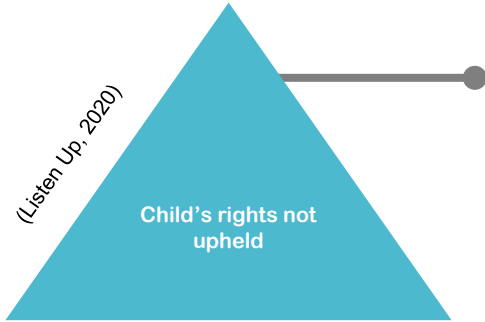
Who was protecting Child A?

- Evidence of a **chaotic and neglectful homelife from when Child A was 6**
- One of the ways this manifested itself was she would sleep for hours at school, but she also became **increasingly aggressive and violent in school**
- Attended a number of primary schools in 4 years, until finally, **aged 8, she was permanently excluded from school, for violent behaviour.**
- When asked about her safe places and who protected her when she was a little girl, **Child A was not able to name anyone or anywhere.**
- She described herself as **very independent and said she would look after herself, even when she was a toddler.** The concept of safe places or safe people was not one she seemed to understand
- Child A was victim of two assaults in the same year, however, she was **criminalised for her behaviour** and professionals failed to recognise how vulnerable she herself was, as a 12-year-old girl - no referral was made to CSC.
- Child A's needs **did not meet the threshold CAMHS** – albeit later she was **diagnosed with PTSD**
- Child A and her mother seen as **'hard to engage'**



Professional Inter-Adultification

The PIA Model



Children's rights
 Adultification erodes children's rights.
 It leaves children unsupported, unprotected and unsafe;
 consequently, more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation
 (whether in or outside of the home)

Impact on children

Notions of childhood

By framing children as more adult-like, their innate vulnerability is decreased. Adultification influences responses in health, justice, education and safeguarding



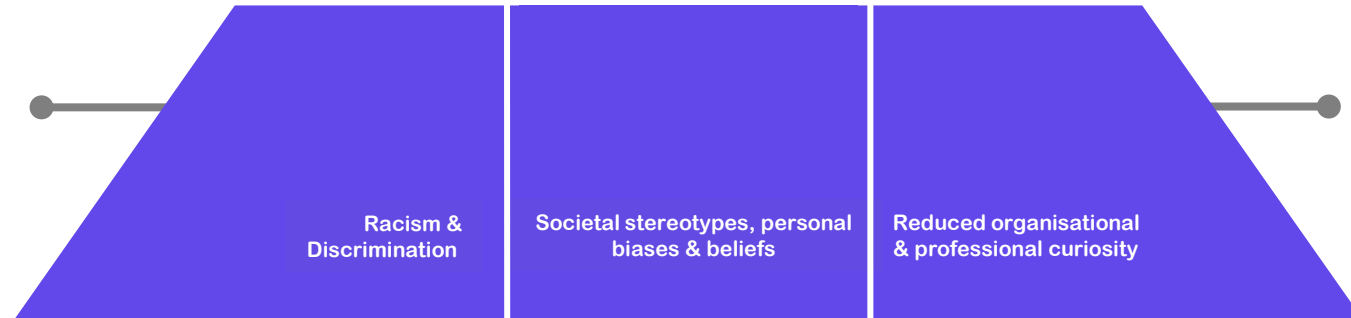
Increased responsibility

When children are ascribed adult-like characteristics they are viewed as being more responsible and culpable than their peers

Framing of children

Discrimination & Biases

It is important that we recognise the role of biases and prejudices and the power we hold as individuals. We must apply an intersectional lens when considering a child/ young persons needs and experiences



Reduced curiosity

Professional interactions and interventions focus on the application of procedures and standardised approaches, which do not account for the intersectional elements of a child's life or their needs.

Preconditions of adultification

INTERSECTIONALITY

Getting to the why...

Child A told the review schools need to understand that when a child is “*messing around, or misbehaving*”, they are doing that because the work is too hard, or they are not enjoying it. Child A only remembers one teacher who she said made the effort to take her out of the classroom and talk to her and explain things.

Child A was eight years old and whilst the school wanted a EHCNA there was no consideration that her behaviour might be as a result of trauma



Final Reflections



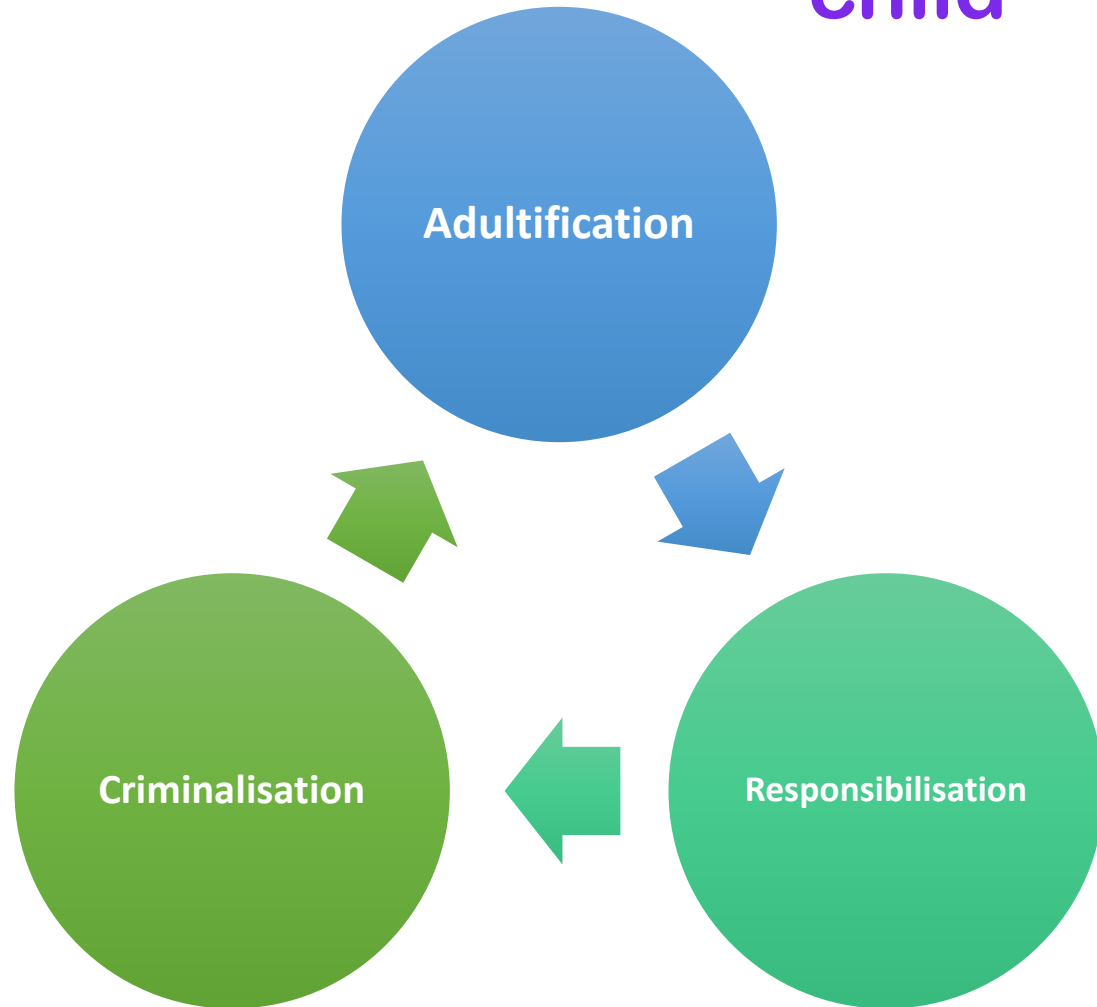
@ListenUpCo



www.ListenUpResearch.org



Missing the voice/experience of the child



Consideration of tone, framing and language

- LCSPRs
- Rapid reviews
- Assessments
- Case recording
- Referral pathways



The challenge of new/emerging theories and concepts

- Is Adultification becoming the new buzz word?



Reflection point

1. What checks and balances are in place to consider intersecting identities in assessments and planning?
2. What would be done differently? How has practice and overall responses to families with similar challenges be managed differently?
3. Do we need to be able to evidence overt racism in order to recognise or consider racism as a factor in child protection responses and decision making?



Thank You & Questions



@ListenUpCo
@JahnineDavis



www.ListenUpResearch.org



Question Time Panel

Chaired by Jane Armstrong, with Jahnine and Joanna

Closing remarks

- A special thanks to our presenters!
- Thank you to all attendees for your participation in this webinar and all that you do to safeguard children.
- Please visit www.lscpbirmingham.org.uk for further LCSPR resources.