**Multi-agency Practice Guidance:**

**Adults who are survivors of sexual abuse**

This document / guidance has been developed with input from key safeguarding partners within Buckinghamshire including the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Adult Board (BSAB), Serious Adult Reviews (SAR) subgroup, Buckinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Thames Valley Police (TVP). It was signed off by the BSAB Policy, Practice and Procedure (PP&P) subgroup in November 2020.

This guidance derived from a Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR) with these specific recommendations:

1. ”Multi-agency guidance should be developed around the pathways accessible for adults who are or who have potentially been survivors of adult sexual abuse. This should expressly outline the responsibility of all agencies to ensure survivors receive timely access to emotional and physical support”.
2. “Active promotion of the Sexual Assault Referral Centre and how it can be of benefit in cases of sexual abuse”.

In June 2020 a Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR) was conducted following an instance where a female in a care environment reported being sexually assaulted. Due to underlying medical conditions an assumption was made that the assault was unlikely to have occurred. This led to a delay in subsequent reporting to Adult Social Care (ASC) and consequently to the Police. The delay impacted on the effectiveness of the response.

In order to ensure that care and investigative opportunities are not missed it is important that there is immediate notification if there is allegation of a possible crime. This is irrespective of the likelihood or not of the incident having occurred. By doing so key partners will be able to ensure that - appropriate safeguarding measures are in place, an evidential assessment is conducted, the Mental Capacity Act (MCA) is utilised if needed, and suitable emotional and physical support is received by the Adult. Early notification also ensures that the appropriate lead agency is designated from the outset.

There are specialist Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) available within the Thames Valley area for all complainants of serious sexual assault and rape. Here, those affected receive specialist care including healthcare, together with evidence gathering and signposting for emotional support.

Not only do they work with people in the immediate aftermath of a crime, but their service also extends to those that have previously been a victim of a crime.

Further information around the SARC provision can be found here:

<https://www.solacesarc.org.uk/>

**Who is this guidance for?**

• This guidance applies to all staff in Buckinghamshire who have identified that an Adult may have been sexually abused.

• All BSAB partner agencies, organisations and commissioned services must refer to this guidance whilst adhering to their own policies and procedures.

**Definition of ‘Adult sexual abuse’**

“Sexual abuse is sexual behaviour or a sexual act to which the adult at risk has not consented, could not consent or was pressured into consenting” (Safeguarding Adults Derbyshire).

Types of sexual abuse

* Any sexual activity that the person lacks the capacity to consent to

Possible signs of sexual abuse

* Bruising, particularly to the thighs, buttocks and upper arms and marks on the neck
* Torn, stained or bloody underclothing or incontinence pads
* Bleeding, pain or itching in the genital area
* Unusual difficulty in walking or sitting
* Foreign bodies in genital or rectal openings
* All of the above are rare, most people are not injured
* Infections, unexplained genital discharge, or sexually transmitted diseases
* Pregnancy in a woman who is unable to consent to sexual intercourse
* The uncharacteristic use of explicit sexual language or significant changes in sexual behaviour or attitude Incontinence not related to any medical diagnosis
* Self-harming
* Poor concentration, withdrawal, sleep disturbance
* Excessive fear/apprehension of, or withdrawal from, relationships
* Fear of receiving help with personal care
* Reluctance to be alone with a particular person Suicidal ideation attempts and completed
* Depression, anxiety, eating disorder, loss of interest etc.

**Mental capacity in relation to sexual relationships**

Practitioners face the challenge of balancing the promotion of the rights and needs of the Adult (which include their right to a sexual life) with the need to support the Adult to manage and reduce their risk of sexual harm. Adults should be supported to make their own decisions wherever possible, however in cases where there are questions about decision-making and risk of harm, assessment of the Adult’s mental capacity to make decisions about their safety is key. Sexual acts with an Adult who lacks the mental capacity to consent are sexual assault and are a criminal offence under Sexual Offences Act 2003; such instances should be brought to police attention at the earliest opportunity.

There may be instances where an adult with capacity is strongly opposed to police involvement. The SARC have the capability to support and secure immediate evidence without referral to police until a client is ready.

In addition, please note that all actions must be clearly recorded in accordance with your organisation’s best practice recording standards.

*Cases which are being investigated using a Section 42 Safeguarding Enquiry are guided by the ‘Making Safeguarding Personal’ ethos in line with the Care Act statutory guidance and the BSAB safeguarding policy and procedure. It is essential to ensure the service user’s views and wishes remain fundamental.*

**This guidance was devised by:**

DI Carl Wilson - TVP PVP

Ludmila Ibesaine - Lead Nurse Safeguarding Adults (Children) Buckinghamshire CCG

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**This guidance was agreed and signed off by:**

BSAB PP&P subgroup

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**Glossary of terms and abbreviations**

ASC - Adult Social Care

BSAB - Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Adult Board

CCG - Clinical Commissioning Group

MCA - Mental Capacity Act

PP&P - BSAB Policy, Practice and Procedure

SAR - Safeguarding Adult Reviews

SARCs - Sexual Assault Referral Centres

TVP - Thames Valley Police

**References**

Hampshire Safeguarding Adult Board (2018) *Adult Sexual Exploitation (ASE) Hampshire Multi-agency Practice Guidance* [online] Available at: <http://www.hampshiresab.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/ASE-operational-guidance-final-draft-March-2018.pdf> (Assessed September 2020).

Department of Health (2005) *Mental Capacity Act.* London, HMSO.

Social Care Institute for Excellence (2020) *Safeguarding Adults - Types and indicators of abuse* [online] Available at: <https://www.scie.org.uk/safeguarding/adults/introduction/types-and-indicators-of-abuse#sexual> (Assessed October 2020).