What Makes Care Leaver More Vulnerable Than Other Young People and What are Children’s Social Care’s Responsibilities to Them?
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- What led them to be in care – overall 60% of children come into care because of maltreatment
- Their experience in the care system
- Lack of consistency – in homes, friends, carers and workers
- Lack of support
- A human desire to be part of a family, which makes care leavers more vulnerable to exploitation of all forms, including sexual exploitation and through gangs
- The young person may have very little experience of what healthy relationships look like
Lucy was 16 years old when she was murdered by her boyfriend. She was five months pregnant at the time of her death. The baby did not survive the attack either.

In legal terms Lucy was not a victim of domestic abuse when the first known assaults happened because she was under 16 and the legal definition of domestic abuse is for those over the age of 16.

16-19 year old girls are more likely to suffer domestic abuse than any other age group, the next age group is 20-24 year olds (Office for National Statistics 2018)

Nearly one in three women who suffer from domestic abuse during their lifetime report that the first incidence of physical violence happened while they were pregnant.
Findings from the review

• Professionals are challenged by the complexity that the risks associated with teenage victims of domestic abuse bring and revert to managing a single risk factor, which at the time appears more imperative, for example homelessness.

• There is no clear national or local strategy on how to work with young perpetrators of domestic abuse, as themselves, or as parents.

• The child protection system is designed for those who are being maltreated by parents/carers - Lucy was 16, pregnant, homeless and in an abusive relationship but she was seen as a child in need. The unborn baby was the subject of a child protection plan.
The Impact of Neglect
Neglect

- There is no single cause for neglect. Most neglectful families experience a variety and a combination of adversities. Adult mental ill-health, domestic abuse, substance use and poverty are amongst the factors linked to neglect.

- Inattentive or unresponsive parenting has been linked to non-organic failure to thrive in babies and young children and to injuries, even fatalities, resulting from lack of supervision (NSPCC, 2010).
The Minnesota Parent-Child Project

A longitudinal study that has followed a sample of 267 children since 1975, born to mothers identified as being at risk of parenting problems due to unstable life circumstances, youth, poverty, lack of support and low education. A major focus has been on the antecedents of abuse and neglect, as well as the long-term consequences of maltreatment on children’s development. The children were identified as suffering physical abuse, physical neglect and emotional neglect.
95% of the children developed a level of special educational need.

At age 17, 90% of the maltreated children received a diagnosis of mental illness. The highest rate was the “psychologically unavailable” group in which all but one child received a diagnosis of at least one psychiatric disorder and 73% were diagnosed with two disorders, or more.

The physically neglected children had high rates of school dropout and academic failure.

Maltreatment in the early years had devastating consequences for the children’s overall functioning in adolescence.
Neglect

- The internal world of the child, which underpins emotional development, identity and relationships, is rendered vulnerable by neglect.

- Children who experience neglect are likely to develop insecure attachments and show impaired social competence. They may also be smelly and scruffy; this can lead to social isolation and undermines the social skills required for social integration.
Some children have more emotional resilience than others. The experience of neglect is likely to undermine the key factors that foster resilience and that acts as a buffer to adversity, namely: a secure base, good self-esteem and a sense of self-efficacy.
Children’s Social Care’s Responsibility to Care Leavers
In Legal Terms
What is the Definition of “Care Leaver”?
A Care Leaver

A person aged 25 or under who has been looked after by a local authority for at least 13 weeks since their 14th birthday and who was looked after by the local authority at school-leaving age or beyond that date.
Eligible child is a child aged 16 and 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who is still being looked after.

Relevant child is a child aged 16 and 17 who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and who has left care. This also includes young people who were detained e.g. in a youth offending institution or hospital, when they turn 16.

Former relevant child who was previously eligible or relevant. Councils support this group until aged 21, or longer if they are in education or training.

Qualifying child is a any young person under 21, or 24 if in education or training, who stops being looked after or accommodated in a variety of other settings, or being privately fostered, after the age of 16. This also includes young people who are under a special guardianship order.

Former relevant child pursuing education is any former relevant child whose case was closed for any reason if the local authority is informed that they are planning to continue education or training they can ask the council to assess whether they can get any support. Any help would last until their 25th birthday.
Children and Social Work Act 2017

Has introduced corporate parenting principles:

- To act in the best interests, and promote their physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
Children and Social Work Act 2017

- to help these children and young people gain access to and make the best use of services provided by the local authority and it’s relevant partners
- to promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
- for those children and young people to be safe and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education all work;
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.
Local authorities must publish a “local offer” for care leavers, or former care leavers about services they provide under the Children Act 1989, plus anything else they or others offer that may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living, including services related to health and well-being, relationships, education and training, employment, accommodation and/or participation in society.
Children and Social Work Act 2017

The Act as a new provision to the Children Act 1989, extending the entitlement to a personal adviser beyond the age of 21, to all care leavers up to 25 years old, whether or not they are in education or training.

Local authorities now have a responsibility to make the offer of a personal adviser at least once a year to care leavers, and for them to carry out a needs assessment and to prepare a pathway plan for the care leaver.
Your Dilemmas
Finally

History is always relevant and important but a care leaver is a young person first and a care leaver second.