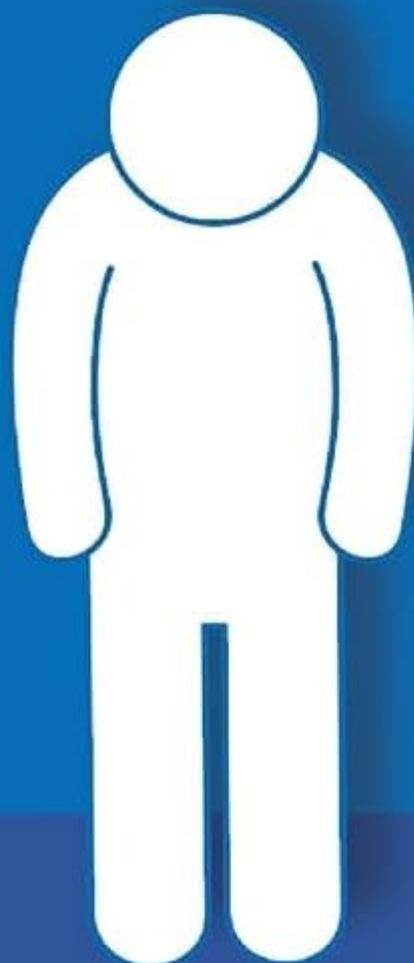


THE SEXUAL
ABUSE OF
BOYS
AND
MEN



Creating an Approach for Neglected Victims

Phil Mitchell

Our interview with author Phil Mitchell

Hello Phil, please tell us about your book.

Simply put, my book addresses the sexual abuse and exploitation of boys and men. I share my own experience of sexual exploitation and rape and explore how male victims are often neglected or treated poorly by society and a wide variety of professional sectors. I highlight how the warning signs to alert the risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE) are often assumed to be linked criminal exploitation and not sexual exploitation when they are displayed by boys, and I explore how nurture, nature and average sex differences can affect how male victims respond to abuse and engage with support. The last two chapters address how to utilise elements of therapeutic modalities when working with different types of male victims, and how to adapt practice to make it more accessible and attractive to boys and men. Unlike many other books mine does not demonise or pathologise masculinity or imply that it is some sort of problem. Referencing variety of psychological research, it explores how we can utilise elements of masculinity in therapy to help male victims access and engage with therapy and achieve a positive outcome.

How long has your book been in the making?

It took years to write as I was also

managing a boys' counselling and supervision practice. The core structure changed several times, and with hindsight I would make some changes, but I am happy enough with the finished product.

Was there a pivotal moment that inspired you to write this book?

For a number of years, I coordinated a service that supported only boys who had been, or were at risk of being sexually abused/exploited. During this time, I noticed the poor responses many boys were receiving. I would be sitting in safeguarding meetings with several professionals from various services where girls were being discussed. The girls were going missing, being secretive about their whereabouts, turning up with unaccounted gifts and items, being seen with unknown adults - all indicators of potential CSE. The professionals would express concern, discuss further, conduct assessments, consider CSE and plan actions. When boys displaying the same or similar indicators were discussed, CSE was rarely considered, but child criminal exploitation (CCE) was. The assumption was that the girls may be being sexually exploited but the boys may be being criminally exploited, eg coerced to sell or move drugs, often referred to today as county lines. This was when I realised how narrow-minded perceptions of gender were affecting assessment of risk. This coincided with seeing an increase in

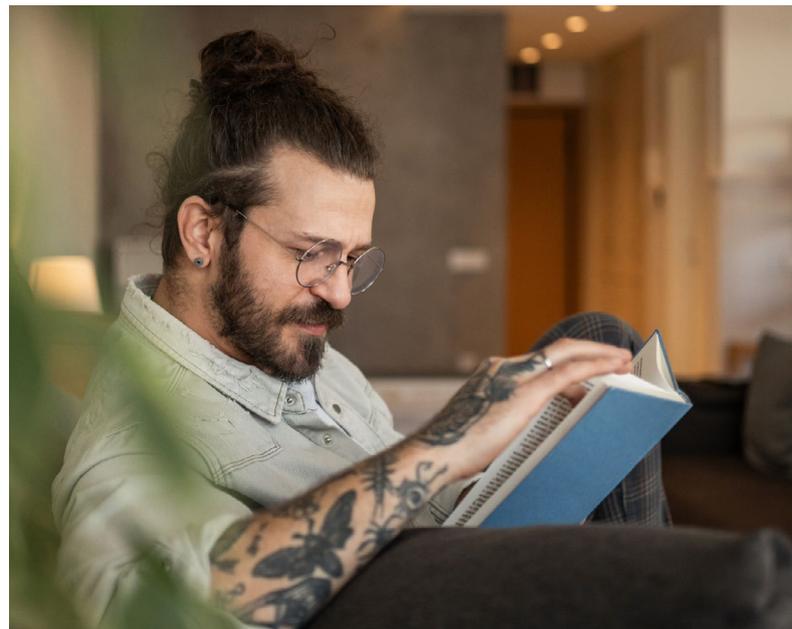
men in private practice who experienced various forms of abuse and who disclosed being treated poorly, not just by their perpetrator but by statutory services, in many cases, because they're men. This was when I decided to write the book. Interestingly, I have worked and spoken with a number of men who said that they were sexually abused/exploited when they were younger, but that professionals at the time assumed they were involved in crime, drugs and youth offending. A classic example of the risk of CSE being dismissed when the warning signs are displayed by boys.

What was your main goal when writing this book?

There were a few. I wanted to highlight the gender bias that was prevalent when boys were being assessed. In fact, I dedicated an entire chapter to this issue, but I also wanted to highlight that, despite what we often see in the media, masculinity is not toxic, or bad, or some sort of inherent problem. I wanted to show that we can actually use elements of masculinity to help boys and men tackle the abuse they have experienced and deal effectively with the adverse consequences. I summarise this by using what I call the CHAPS approach:

Communication
Humour
Action-Orientated
Psychoeducation
Solution-Focused

By using action-orientated language linked to masculinity; appropriate humour; involving action/movement in the sessions; providing



psychoeducation where relevant; and including a solution-focused approach, I find that not only can we attract more men and boys to therapy, but also increase the chances of achieving engagement and a positive outcome. I've found this approach works. If it didn't, I wouldn't continue to use it.

Do you have a favourite quote from this book?

Yes, but it's not my quote; it's a quote from psychologist Martin Seager: **"A hammer can be used to hit someone and kill them, but it can also be used to build a house and provide shelter for someone. The hammer itself is not**



toxic or tonic, it is the purpose to which it is put.” I find this to be a powerful quote which shows that masculinity can be expressed in a helpful way.

What has been the most influential book you've read?

There are quite a few. The Palgrave Handbook of Male Psychology and Mental Health validated the way I work. I was starting to use male-centric methods with male clients, but as masculinity was getting such a bad press everywhere I looked, I didn't think this was something I should be openly discussing. After reading the Palgrave Handbook, I felt completely validated and realised that what I was

doing was safe, legal, ethical and helpful. It was just a less traditional therapeutic approach. The book Perspectives in Male Psychology was also rather validating. I have also read The Empathy Gap, The Second Sexism, and The Myth of Male Power. All very good books which not only address how male victims are often poorly treated, but also the adversities faced by men and boys that we often ignore.

What book is currently on your bedside table?

Well, I don't take books to bed, as I use the time before going to sleep to try and relax, but the book I'm currently reading, when I can find the time, is called The Ape that Understood. It's an interesting book that explores evolution and average sex differences. A lot of my time at the moment, is spent writing my second book. I have collected so much information about how many and boys are often demonised and neglected in a wide variety of arenas, it feels right to share and publish this. I have no idea when the book will be published, and I'm in the very early stages, but watch this space.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

I've recently started exercising and doing four workouts a week. It's hard work but I'm burning fat and building muscle. It's a bit like writing a book. The process is tough, but I enjoy the results. I like to spend my Sundays having a treat and eating cheesecake. I love cheesecake, and when I am not doing that I spend time with my partner, having evenings in with friends, and playing online quizzes.