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Developing a framework for the prevention of sibling sexual behaviour

Kieran McCartan^{a,*}, Sophie King-Hill^b^a University of the West of England, BS16 1QY, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland^b University of Birmingham, B15 2TT, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

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ABSTRACT

Background: Sibling sexual behaviour (SSB) is an existing, but poorly defined, area of professional practice and an emerging research area. Much of the research conversations are focused on defining the issue and thinking about the treatment and management of people affected by it. However, in line with other forms of sexual abuse, focus should also be on how SSB can be prevented from happening, alongside the prevention of repeat behaviours.

Objective: In this paper the emerging debates around SSB prevention, what exists, and how it should develop is discussed.

Methods: The recently developed sibling sexual behaviour mapping tool (SSB-MT) is discussed along with the socio-ecological model and a merged model, the sibling sexual behaviour-socio-ecological mapping tool (SSB-SEMT).

Results: The alignment of SSB to existing EpiCrim frameworks.

Conclusions: The prevention of SSB fits within the broader Child Sexual Abuse frameworks and that the sibling sexual behaviour-socio-ecological mapping tool (SSB-SEMT) can be used to develop and introduce prevention interventions across the four prevention stages.

1. Introduction

This paper focuses on the theoretical rationale for the redevelopment of the sibling sexual behaviour-mapping tool (SSB-MT) (King-Hill & Gilsenan, 2023) into a more nuanced tool that allows for the prevention of SSB as well as more focused approach in responding to it in line with current epidemiological criminological (EpiCrim) approaches. In doing this the paper will link sibling sexual behaviour (SSB) and the SSB-MT to research and practice in the EpiCrim domains which relate to the prevention of child sexual abuse (CSA). Providing a socio-ecological model highlighting on how a readapted version of the mapping tool sits within these perspectives and can be effectively used as a bespoke framework for all SSB intervention strategies.

2. Methodological approach

This paper is theoretical in nature and sets out the alignment between the SSB-MT and EpiCrim approaches in CSA to create a model whereby professionals and practitioners can understand SSB in the context of CSA approaches to prevention. The SSB-MT is underpinned by a methodical process in its development. This consisted of a synthesis of the evidence across the Home Office funded Sibling

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: kieran.mccartan@uwe.ac.uk (K. McCartan).

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Sexual Abuse project (King-Hill, Gilsenan, & McCartan, 2023) in collaboration with Purple Leaf (West Mercia Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre) and the Yates and Allardyce guidance on SSB produced for the Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse (Yates & Allardyce, 2021). The compiling of this research demonstrated that a clear focus was required to enhance and support practitioner confidence and knowledge in the areas of whole family approaches and dynamics, more effective case recording and more consistent intervention pathway planning. This lack in provision for professionals, specific to SSB, led to the development and pilot of the SSB-MT. The SSB-MT is underpinned by the ‘Signs of Safety’ framework, developed by Turnell and Edwards (1999). This allows professionals to explore the barriers and enablers when considering a holistic approach to interventions in child protection cases. This familiarity was found to be useful to practitioners which makes the case for the further alignment of the SSB-MT to EpiCrim approaches that are specific to CSA prevention. Methodologically this learning has been built upon within this theoretical paper to incorporate the EpiCrim approaches using a ‘Best Available Research Evidence’ (BARE) model as set out by Puddy and Wilkins (2011) in relation to violence prevention. This recognises that in some fields research is difficult to undertake. Therefore, acknowledging that, in some fields, in this case SSB, research is still being developed or difficult to obtain. This makes a case for the BARE model of to be utilised when aligning the SSB-MT and EpiCrim approaches to the prevention of CSA.

3. Understanding & defining sibling sexual behaviour

The prevention of CSA is core to sexual abuse policy and practice, with these considerations being at the centre of international, national, and transnational policy and practice (Di Gioia & Beslay, 2023; Di Gioia et al., 2023; JRC Publications Repository, n.d). However, preventing first-time instances of CSA is in its infancy compared to tertiary and quaternary relapse prevention (Di Gioia & Beslay, 2023). This is the case across all types of CSA, online and offline, as well as across all types of victim and potential offender demographics/characteristics, including, sibling sexual abuse. Recently there have been discussions around the ‘emergence’ of SSB (King-Hill, McCartan, et al., 2023). Viewing SSB through research, practice, and policy lenses giving it a specific focus in the agendas on CSA and Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB) in children and young people (CYP). However, contemporary academic research on SSB is in its infancy, the evidence is limited but growing, and it is based on limited samples in specific countries (i.e., UK, America, Israel). Current research and debates on SSB are concentrated on relapse prevention rather than first time prevention or early intervention. SSB will be considered within a prevention framework as it is a gap in the research, practice, and policy evidence base. The paper will use the SSB-MT (King-Hill & Gilsenan, 2023) to frame this work as it is an evidence based, practitioner focused tool used in relapse prevention (i.e., tertiary, and quaternary prevention and shows potential for first time prevention (i.e., primary and secondary).

4. Definitions of sibling sexual behaviour

One of the main complications in the definitions of SSB is ascertaining what constitutes a sibling, with a large disparity evident across professionals when referring to CSA between CYP (McCartan et al., 2024; Kiselica & Morrill-Richards, 2007, King-Hill, McCartan, et al., 2023; King-Hill, Gilsenan, & McCartan, 2023). Different research and practice documents define siblings as, step-siblings, blood siblings, children and young people that share the same home, including foster siblings for example which makes it challenging in research and practice when understanding the population referred to in SSB.

Another key difficulty in the definitions of harmful sexual behaviour between siblings, with the term evolving from sibling sexual abuse to behaviour. This paper will use SSB to refer to ‘sexual, physical and psychological abuse that is exhibited by one child sibling to another child sibling, in the context of sexual behaviour’ (McCartan et al., 2022, p.6; Yates & Allardyce, 2021). Which aligns with current terminology used in the UK context (Yates & Allardyce, 2021, 2023). When using SSB these behaviours refer to a range of acts, for example, penetrative (or attempted penetrative) sex, touching of genitals, forced watching of pornography and coercing/forcing a sibling to engage in sexual acts with other children (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 2005; Hardy, 2001; King-Hill et al., 2022). Although, it is worth noting that this definition is contested in some circles, currently it aligns with other key UK papers and research, making it functional and usable in the context of this paper. Additionally, the research that does exist in this space indicates some key difference. SSB is more likely to be more invasive, frequent, and prolonged (Adler & Schutz, 1995; Carlson et al., 2006; Stathopoulos, 2012; Daly & Wade, 2014; Yates & Allardyce, 2021; McVeigh, 2003; Kiselica & Morrill-Richards, 2007; McDonald & Martinez, 2017). SSB is also thought to be more strongly linked to other forms of abuse such as physical and emotional (Gilbert, 1992; Adler & Schutz, 1995; McDonald & Martinez, 2017).

The challenge with nuanced and overly complex definitions is that they become meaningless in clinical practice, whereas broader definitions can give frontline professionals more flexibility in their diagnosis and engagement with young people. Using SSB also fits within the wider definition of harmful sexual behaviour outlined by Hackett et al. (2019).

“Sexual behaviours expressed by children and young people under the age of 18 years old that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards self or others, or be abusive towards another child, young person or adult.”
(2019, p. 13)

When considering the research and literature that is available on SSB it is evident that sexual behaviours between siblings exist on a spectrum, much like harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) as set out by Hackett (2014) and terming the issue as ‘abuse’ risks negating the nuances that surround this behaviour.

SSB is further mapped onto the Hackett Continuum by Yates and Allardyce (2023) (see Table 1) reinforcing the idea of a range of escalating behaviours that need categorising, rather than ‘abuse.

The apparent difficulty in a consistent definition also appears to be linked to the lack of an agreed position of what constitutes behaviours that are of concern and behaviours that are developmentally appropriate, consensual, and harmless (Caffaro, 2020; Marmor & Tener, 2022; McCoy et al., 2022; Tener & Silberstein, 2019). Although the Hackett continuum is accepted in working with HSB in CYP, the adaption by Yates and Allardyce (2023) is relatively new and has not been fully accepted into practice and policy. This is evidenced by the lack of consensus also exists in how SSB is referred to with several differing terms being used to describe SSB which are constantly evolving, these currently include sibling sexual exploitation, mutual sexual acts sibling, child sexual abuse between siblings (Bertele & Talmon, 2023). All of which continue to complicate a challenging and overburdened set of terminology, reinforcing the need for a workable shared definition.

It is important to note that SSB refers to a range of behaviours and actions, which means that all sexual and sexualised behaviours that happen between siblings can be included. This reinforces what is known about other forms of HSB in CYP, both in terms of the range and escalation of sexual behaviour (Hackett, 2014). Therefore SSB can be defined as a form of HSB and providing a starting point for interventions. It is important to note that the use of the continuum does not justify or excuse the impact of certain behaviours (i.e., inappropriate, and problematic), but instead allows frontline professionals to engage with the young person in the most appropriate way to get the best result and prevent further harm.

Table 1

The continuum of sibling sexual behaviour.

Developmentally appropriate sexual interactions	Inappropriate sexual behaviours	Problematic sexual behaviours	Abusive sexual behaviours
<p>These interactions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • take place between young siblings (probably no older than eight or nine years) of a similar age and developmental stage, and • are voluntary, light-hearted and playful (e.g. games such as 'you show me yours; I'll show you mine' or 'doctors and nurses'), and • are about curiosity, involving exploration of bodies or gender roles, and • are balanced by a curiosity to explore all sorts of other things in the child's world, and • diminish if told to stop by an adult. <p>The more the behaviour deviates from this description, the more concerning it is.</p>	<p>These are behaviours. occurring in single, isolated instances, where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in the case of young siblings, the behaviour moves a little beyond a curious exploration of bodies or the context for the behaviour is inappropriate, or • in the case of older siblings, the context for the behaviour is inappropriate and misjudged. 	<p>Differentiating abusive from problematic behaviours is not always straightforward. Fundamentally, it is necessary to assess and understand the power dynamics in the sibling relationship to understand the power dynamics in the sibling sexual behaviour.</p> <p>These behaviours:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are repeated and patterned, or • fall more clearly outside developmental norms, or • involve a lack of clarity around consent or reciprocity but are not assessed as abusive. 	<p>Behaviours are clearly abusive if they involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • significant power differences (e.g. size, strength, cognitive ability, position of authority), or • a large age gap (of three years of more) between the children, or • the use of violence, threats, force or other coercion (e.g. bribes, trickery and manipulation, such as the giving or withholding of affection). However, there are many examples in the research of abusive sibling sexual behaviour taking place in the absence of these indicators. In these circumstances, an assessment of the power dynamics in the sibling relationship is crucial.

(Yates & Allardyce, 2023).

Considering the variation of definitions of SSB it is important that across fields that a consistent definition and associated terminology is used. If too much disparity exists across sectors, then there will be a risk of disjointed approaches which are counterproductive considering the findings of recent research which advocates for joined up, multi-agency, whole family approaches to intervention (King-Hill, McCartan, et al., 2023; King-Hill, Gilsean, & McCartan, 2023; King-Hill & Gilsean, 2023). Additionally, the lens of sexual abuse theories such as desistance, risk needs responsibility and strengths-based approaches have not historically been applied to SSB work (Meiselman, 1978; Uzieblo et al., 2022). This highlights the need for a more joined up approach when working in SSB with more consideration being given to prevention, intervention, desistance and community (re)integration for the children and wider family.

5. SSB: a historical issue

SSB is thought to be one of the most common forms of intrafamilial abuse (Carlson et al., 2006; Krienert & Walsh, 2011, King-Hill, McCartan, et al., 2023). Hackett (2014) estimates that up to one third of all CSA cases are carried out by another child, with Yates and Allardyce (2021) stating that a large proportion of this abuse is carried out is situated within the family setting, indicating that abuse between siblings is common. Despite the indications of the prolific nature of SSB there is a dearth of contemporary UK literature and research in this area. It is important to note that SSB is not a new phenomenon despite its recent emergence, interest and recognition within the research and practice fields (McCartan, Prescott, & Uzieblo, 2023). Professionals engaging in family therapy and sexual abuse treatment, especially in the USA, have been discussing SSB for several years, but via on-academic forums. It is only now that academic research is catching up with practice. Research has developed interest in SSB after the sexual abuse paradigm shift in the 1970s and 1980s after which sexual behaviour between siblings was thought of as harmful, risky, and problematic, ultimately abusive, and a cause for concern (Yates, 2018). Research has subsequently recognised that sexual behaviour between siblings can be abusive, and enduring myths of harmlessness have been disproved (Cole, 1982; McVeigh, 2003; O'Brien, 1991; Yates, 2017).

Due to the sporadic nature of research and literature on SSB it often results in inconsistent frameworks and approaches when working in this arena. Past research and approaches are an important part of understanding the issues surrounding SSB and underpin current understanding. However, these must be correctly contextualised with newer ways of thinking about SSB. In relation to terminology there is a distinct move away in all forms of HSB carried out by children and young people (CYP) from terms such as 'perpetrator' and a move towards wording that does not criminalise the child, such as 'child who has harmed'. This is also the case for SSB. This is especially pertinent as CYP who sexually harm a sibling may have also been harmed themselves, having the dual position of both the child who has harmed and has been harmed (Stathopoulos, 2012; Caffaro, 2020; Welfare, 2008; Adler & Schutz, 1995; Johnson, 1988).

Another key change in the concepts and approaches to SSB is the focus upon the family system – rather than a focus only on the children involved in the SSB and the behaviour itself. For example, environmental factors within the home and family dynamics play a key role in the occurrence of SSB. Current UK research and literature (McCartan et al., 2024, King-Hill, McCartan, et al., 2023; King-Hill, Gilsean, & McCartan, 2023; McCartan, King-Hill, & Gilsean, 2023; Yates & Allardyce, 2021, 2023) also indicates that due to the complexity of where SSB is situated it is vitally important for professionals to understand the family context and foster a whole family approach across both disciplines and agencies. Although family context and SSB has been discussed before this has mainly been within practitioner and frontline circles, rather than research. The SSB-MT (King-Hill & Gilsean, 2023) and the practice guidance produced by Yates and Allardyce (2021, 2023) being the first research, evidence based academic pieces linked to understanding the context of the family in SSB prevention and response in the current UK context. Additionally, newer thinking on SSB situates the sexual behaviour of siblings within the context of other aspects of the sibling relationship, not just sexual behaviours (Yates & Allardyce, 2021).

One of the key contributing factors of the (re-)emergence of this field is the recognition that SSB is distinctly different from child sexual exploitation and peer-on-peer abuse and is a stand-alone category within CSA (Yates, 2017). SSB has a complexity due to how it is situated within the family context with contributing factors being multi-level. This complexity makes it difficult to have robust policy and for professionals to work effectively in this area and professional confidence is severely lacking (King-Hill, Gilsean, & McCartan, 2023) which adversely impacts upon the children and their families.

Another contributing factor that adds to the complexity of SSB to consider is that it is not situated within one clear field. Literature and research in this area draws from a range of disciplines such as psychology, social work, social policy, sociology, criminology, and children's studies. Therefore, a contextual awareness is required when considering the lens that is being applied when addressing the complex contributing factors of SSB such as trauma, violence, sexual behaviours, terminology, and family dynamics. This is also embedded within the contemporary context of a post-Covid world, with the impacts of lockdowns and the associated trauma linked to this. Another key aspect that also requires contextual consideration is the accessibility to pornography and the ease of access to stepbrother/sister categories, normalising incestuous relationships (Etheredge & Lemon, 2015). All of these complex factors require consideration for both researchers and professionals when working in the field of SSB.

The complexities outlined above may have contributed to the dearth of literature in the field of SSB. The newer contextual aspects of SSB also require consideration when looking at older literature and approaches. Due to the intersection of these complexities a need for a multi-disciplinary approach across both research fields and professional practices is vital to fully understand SSB successful intervention planning and, crucially, prevention.

6. The family context

More recent research studies have indicated the importance of understanding the impact of the family systems on both the reasons

for and the interventions planned when SSB is presenting. A small qualitative study carried out by McCartan, King-Hill and Gilsenan (2023) highlighted key identifying factors that exist in SSB in relation to the family systems. Whilst these factors are not explicitly indicative that SSB will take place, they do provide a useful lens through which to explore the family systems and how these can contribute to the reduction of SSB. Given the sample size in this study the findings cannot be linked to all cases of SSB, but offer a good starting point for understanding it.

These factors indicate that understanding the family systems can be perpetuate causal factors or inhibitors to SSB depending on the levels of dysfunctionality that are present. These refer to abuse and dysfunction being as a central component of broader family systems and commonplace in the nuclear/immediate family, the dual status of sexually harmful children, conflicted, paradoxical feelings towards the abusive sibling, poor and inconsistent parental engagement and communication, denial of abuse and downplaying child's voice, normalisation of dysfunction and acceptance of abuse (McCartan, King-Hill, & Gilsenan, 2023). It is important to define what is meant by a functional and dysfunctional families. A functional family creates an environment where everyone feels safe and valued, with established and enforce rules that are not overly rigid and inappropriate behaviours are carefully managed in a healthy fashion, and boundaries are explicit and consistent, all of which help minimize conflict. Dysfunctional families are not defined by external factors such as socioeconomic status or family size, but rather by internal intrafamilial dynamics where the relationships among family members are not conducive to emotional and physical health, and may including a range of problematic behaviours such as sexual, emotional, or physical abuse, alcohol and drug addictions, delinquency and behavioral problems, eating disorders, and extreme aggression. Although, functional and dysfunctional families are not ridged binary systems and families can fluctuate between the two, therefore it is important to look at each family independently and understand its unique challenges (see Fig. 1). The role of the functional and dysfunction family also ties into ideas of life course development, attachment, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma, all of which are contributing factors when considering harmful sexual behaviour (Hackett, 2014; Kemshall & McCartan, 2022).

From this perspective understanding the family systems in relation to the key factors outlined in table four is an important element to understanding, preventing and reducing SSB in CYP.

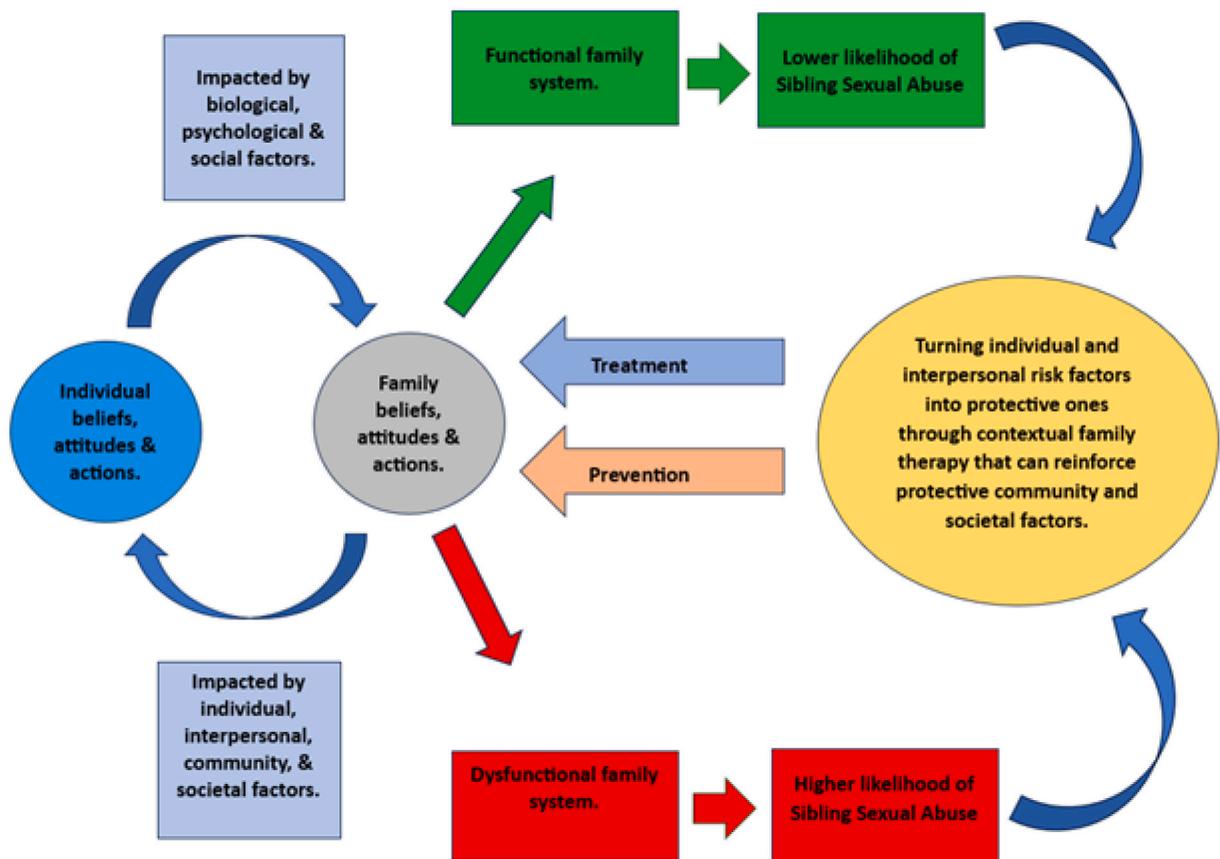


Fig. 1. Context mapping of sibling sexual abuse in the family system. (Taken from McCartan, King-Hill & Gilsenan, 2023).

7. Mapping the contributing domains of SSB

The SSB-MT accounts for the complex and multi-domain picture that needs to be understood when working with CYP and their families in the SSB context (King-Hill & Gilsenan, 2023; King-Hill, Gilsenan, & McCartan, 2023; McCartan, King-Hill, & Gilsenan, 2023; King-Hill & Gilsenan, 2023 and Yates & Allardyce, 2021, 2023). Rather than direct work with CYP and their families the SSB-MT is designed to scaffold practitioner planning when considering SSB interventions, an aspect that was found to be lacking in the research that has been carried out in respect of this. The amalgamation of the research highlighted some key issues and barriers experienced by professionals, CYP and their families when considering SSB. These being, SSB presenting a significant point of professional anxiety. This was largely due to a lack of specific training and information, the need for SSB to be considered within the whole family, a sporadic approach nationally to SSB impacting on intervention and the need for a reflexive approach from professionals due to its complex nature (King-Hill & Gilsenan, 2023). As a result of the findings the SSB-MT was developed to support professionals in mapping their understanding of the complex factors that needs considering when dealing with SSB.

The SSB-MT considers concerns, strengths and current support, impact, support/intervention required and action points, across six domains. These domains being the sibling sexual behaviour displayed, family dynamics and parenting, home circumstances and housing, health and development and social context. The SSB-MT, therefore, intends to move the focus of the planned interventions away from the behaviour itself exclusively and fosters thinking in relation to the multi-systemic contributing and inhibiting factors to SSB.

8. The prevention of sibling sexual behaviour

The paper has highlighted that SSB conversations are firmly rooted in relapse prevention and ongoing restoration, recovery and harm reduction, focussing on post sibling sexual behaviour. Over the past 30 years policies and practices have developed that are linked to the prevention of CSA (McCartan & Gotch, 2020), with many of these focusing on the prevention of sexual abuse by adult men and non-familial peer on peer abuse (Di Gioia et al., 2023; Di Gioia & Beslay, 2023). This raises the consideration of where SSB is situated. Over recent years EpiCrim perspectives have emerged (Akers & Lanier, 2009) focusing on public health and wellbeing approaches to understand, preventing, and responding criminal behaviour and related issues. The development of a public health frame in criminal justice allows a reconsideration of traditional responses, a move from reaction to reaction and prevention (McCartan et al., 2022). While this may seem like a significant step change, it is not, as public health and criminal justice share similar core values. For instance, the importance of life course development, a focus on trauma informed practice, the need to hear and develop the service user voice, they use strengths-based approaches and a drive towards individual and community risk management (McCartan et al., 2022; Kemshall & McCartan, 2022). However, there are differences that need to be recognised. Risk and trauma informed practice is considered differently in public health and criminal justice and that there needs to be a different balancing between support and accountability (Senker et al., 2023). Although public health narratives are emerging across criminology, the one area where they really take root is in the field of sexual abuse. Over the last 30 years narratives have developed across research, policy and practice that child sexual abuse is preventable (Brown, 2017; Kemshall, 2017; Smallbone et al., 2008). Although the theoretical underpinning is well defined in the prevention narrative, the evidence base is not. Most research and evidence is based on small scale studies that run for short periods and are not underpinned by research. However, despite a professional and research appetite for prevention narratives and interventions, the evidence base is not fully developed, with no clear key performance indicators or ideas how prevention, and its impacts, can be measured.

The prevention of child sexual abuse has many types of interventions, each operating at different levels i.e. primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary prevention (McCartan, King-Hill, & Gilsenan, 2023). These operates across four socio-ecological levels, individual, interpersonal, community, and societal (Di Gioia & Beslay, 2023).

A majority of this preventative framing is focused on men at risk of committing a sexual offence against children (Di Gioia et al., 2023; Di Gioia & Beslay, 2023) with an emerging conversation about how to work preventatively with children at risk or in the early stages of displaying HSB (Hackett, 2020). Currently, there is no research and practice on how to prevent SSB. Therefore, it is useful to explore how SSB aligns to a public health model of prevention and what services could and should be adapted for it.

A public health frame prevention is built around core frames context the socioecological model and the four stages of prevention model, indicating that prevention is tied to individual and societal interactions. It is important to understand SSB in respect to context before looking at behaviour and interventions. The prevention of SSB would also need to align and function across the socio-ecological model, with preventive interventions taking account of the individual, interpersonal, community, and social. However in the case of SSB these levels need to be further refined. Due to the nuanced nature of SSB some of the stages in the traditional socioecological model need to be expanded to capture this complexity.

- **Individual** traditionally relates to the psychology, develop, actions and behaviours of the individual, but in the case of SSB this needs to be refined to discuss both siblings, as the abuse is more normalized than other forms of sexual abuse and both siblings need to be considered separately. Therefore, an individual is broken down into (1) **individual: child who has harmed**, and (2) **individual: child at risk of being harmed**.
- **Interpersonal** traditionally relates to the interaction between two people, generally the harmed and the harming child; however, given the importance of family dynamics in cases of SSB there needs to be a separate, but related, consideration of the relationship of the sibling to the family. Therefore, interpersonal is broken down into (1) **interpersonal: sibling dynamics** (i.e., the

relationship and interactions between individual siblings, that is the child who has been harmed and the child who has harmed), and (2) **interpersonal: family dynamics** (i.e., the relationships and interactions of all family members, not just the ones involved in SSB).

- **Community** relates to the broader community that surrounds the individual, whether that is a physical, social, or online community; in many ways this should be referred to as communities rather than community. However, with SSB, there is another community that needs to be considered as research indicates that the broader family, that is the extended and not nuclear family, plays a role in the celestializing of the behaviours, as well as the traditional communities. Therefore, community is broken down to, (1) **community: the broader family system**, and (2) **community: the wider communities**.
- **Societal** relates to the broader social and societal norms and values and remains the same. Although, the overall concept and designation of the societal level does not need to change or be sub-divided to fit with SSB additional considerations do need to be considered, for instance, social stigma, shame, and challenges in social recovery integration. The fact that the abuse has happened within the family setting adds an additional layer to the narrative of the abuse that can result in more judgement, embarrassment and contained victimization.

In developing interventions at any of the four prevention levels it is important to map the socio-ecological frame to make sure that you have a rounded and developed intervention. One way of doing is using the SSB-MT (King-Hill & Gilsean, 2023). King-Hill and McCartan, in this paper propose a model that is underpinned by the SSB-MT and overlaps and aligns with the social ecological perspective to support professionals developing interventions that are focused upon all levels of prevention (see Table 2).

The proposed SEMT-SSB can be used to develop the planning a series prevention intervention, as well as a response intervention. When considering the development of SSB prevention interventions across the the four identified stages of prevention are from a criminal justice perspective.

- **Primary prevention** is an action to prevent criminogenic &/or risky behaviour in people who are not criminogenic &/or risky, which typically means in respect to preventing sexual abuse that you raise public awareness of the reality of sexual abuse and dispelling common myths about victims and preparators. In respect to SSB this would a clearer definition of SSB, better recording and processing of SSB cases, the development of better public and media campaigns on the topic, better education in schools about SSB, and a broader discourse by professionals about what SSB is. This would lead to better individual, interpersonal and community understating resulting in more, and more appropriate, bystander intervention models. Additionally, there needs to be a separate conversation about access to and type as well as nature of harmful sexual context online, for instance, the seeming rise of sibling-based pornography.
- **Secondary prevention** is about identifying and working with people displaying SSB related behaviours at an early stage for children without a criminal conviction. In respect to SSB this means creating a supportive narrative that allows children at risk to seek help and get support, better professional prevention interventions and networks, these interventions should be a roll forward for traditional multi-agency tertiary/relapse prevention programs with the family at the center and potentially being led by schools and or social work. Secondary prevention with adults at risk of committing sexual abuse is often rooted in the individual, but because of the nature of SSB these need to be rooted in the individual, interpersonal (i.e., sibling) and the family/community. Potential examples could be a readaptation of contextual safeguarding or a model based on family systems therapy.

Table 2
King-Hill and McCartan Socio-Ecological Mapping Tool model for Sibling Sexual Behaviours (SSB-SEMT).

Domain	Mapping tool	Extended socio-ecological model
1	Sibling Sexual Behaviours	- individual: child who has harmed, - individual: child at risk of being harmed.
2	Family Dynamics and Parenting	- interpersonal: sibling dynamics - interpersonal: sibling dynamics, - interpersonal: family dynamics.
3	Home circumstances and housing	- community: the boarder family system - interpersonal: sibling dynamics, - interpersonal: family dynamics. - community: the wider communities.
4	Education	- community: the wider communities. - Societal
5	Health and development	- Individual: child who has harmed, - individual: child at risk of being harmed.
6	Social context	- community: the wider communities. - Societal

- **Tertiary prevention** is about working with people convicted of sexual offences to hold them accountable for their past problematic behaviour, get support and move forward, integrate back into their communities. In respect to SSB this means better focused treatment interventions that address SSB as a distinct type of offence, interventions that work holistically with the family of the child that has harmed and broader community. Examples of this currently exist, whether it be Contextual Safeguarding or family systems therapy. This form of prevention, like in the prevention of child sexual abuse by adults or peer-to-peer, is our most well-developed stage; however,
- **Quaternary prevention** is about working protectively with individuals with a criminal conviction from criminal justice interventions that would result in future criminogenic &/or risky behaviour. In respect to SSB that would mean supporting young people in a strengths-based way that allows them to accept and move on from the abuse within and live productive lives. Currently, this is the most underrepresented of the four stages and needs to be developed, with the idea of harm reduction being placed at the heart of what's being done to support individuals and families. Some promising examples could be the restorative practices that bring mentoring and community integration approaches being used by organisations such as Circles SouthWest and Thriving Survivors.

All the approaches discussed so far sit with one prevention stage, or one or more socio-ecological stage but one prevention approach that is comprehensive and inclusive of all is Together for Childhood, a place-based approach being implemented in for different cities across the UK (NSPCC, 2023). The idea behind Together for Childhood is that the city in question is made a child abuse free area and that this is present across the four socio-ecological stages and all for prevention levels. Currently, there is a focus on reduction and eradicating child sexual abuse and neglect in general, but this is model that could be used to discuss, educate and empower individuals and communities around SSB. The adaption of this approach to include SSB would enable the intervention to fall in line with current professional thinking. The development of a SSB orientated version of Together for Childhood, would enable both the SSB-MT and SSB-SEMT to be effectively used, with clear examples and referrals at each stage and an understanding of how to best develop local practices based on existing provision. In doing so this would highlight the need, as well as give potential opportunities/examples, of new SSB interventions across the socio-ecological spectrum and the four prevention stages,

Notably, although we discuss the prevention of SSB, it will be challenging to fully eradicate. Many of the prevention strategies that have been discussed are mainly psychoeducational, cognitive behavioral interventions that rely on the engagement and interaction of the client and for different populations at each stage, which can be challenging. For instance, members of the public and communities may not interact with primary prevention interventions because they do not think they apply to them. Secondary prevention relies on people recognizing their problematic behaviours and being willing, and able to seek help. In respect of tertiary, individuals need to have been caught offending, be arrested, charged and in the system as well as being eligible for the intervention and being willing to engage. Quaternary refers to the need of harm reduction services being available, adequately funded and accessible. While CSA prevention interventions in the short to medium term may not eradicate child sexual abuse, they will raise awareness, alter community understandings, and better enable the state and third sector to better support people who have harmed and people who have been harmed. The eradication of child sexual abuse is the long-term goal, and these interventions can pave the way. Therefore, considering how to be engaged across the six stages of the SSB-SEMT outlined here is one way to start to build towards an aligned understanding and response to SSB, especially in respect to identifying it early and preventing its escalation.

9. Conclusions

This paper has highlighted the need for a more nuanced understanding of SSB, particularly in respect to how it is both responded to and prevented. Current research and practice indicate that SSB is being discussed more and is being recognised as a significant form of CSA and HSB in CYP, but that there is no clear, evidenced based approach to this for professional and frontline practitioners. The development and expansion of the SSB-MT into the SEMT-SSB model has implications for the way that professionals can respond to SSB in a nuanced way that works with a family focus. Enabling professionals to work with everyone involved to reduce risk and promote desistance. The SEMT-SSB model also allows for practitioners to be able to gain a structured understanding of points of intervention across the current wider, socio-ecological model and work with at risk families and CYP, to prevent first time or early stage SSB to that harm can be reduced and criminal justice as well as social justice interventions can be limited. This paper highlights the need for a nuanced, individualised approach to understanding and responding to SSB that aligns with other areas of CSA and HSB in CYP. Although SSB may be seen as an emerging area it is not, which means that there are other areas of work that it can draw from and consider in moving forward.

SSB is not a new form of sexual abuse but is an emerging research area. The current research interest and proliferation of studies and publications means that the academic arena is catching up on practices and interventions that have existed in the professional, therapeutic conversations for many years and are starting to build a coherent evidence base. As research, policy, and practice around SSB continues to evolve and expand one of the areas within this that holds the most promise is that of prevention. Like with other forms of CSA most of the prevention work that exists is at the tertiary level, with emerging practices in primary, secondary and quaternary levels. King-Hill and McCartan have proposed a comprehensive multistage and cross socio-ecological approach to the prevention of SSB based on the original SSB-MT. Unlike the development of CSA by adults prevention and peer on peer prevention, which were developed in a vacuum, there is an emerging evidence base on prevention that needs to be engaged with. Using both the SSB-MT and the SEMT-SSB model a holistic, personal, and family centred approach can be used that allows us to use the interventions available locally and nationally most effectively and at the right point. In addition, it also allows professionals to identify good practices,

challenges, and gaps.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Kieran McCartan: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization.
Sophie King-Hill: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization.
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Data availability

Data that underpinned the tools/research outlines is in the public domain

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