

NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

County Lines information sheet

Are you listening film - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_Ny_aOWI-k

What is CCE?

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) is a term used to describe when children and young people are manipulated or coerced into committing crimes. Targeted by individuals, gangs or Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) - both boys and girls can fall victim to CCE from as young as nine right up to the age of 17, we are seeing young people 18 and over involved however they are then deemed an adult. CCE is not a new issue. However, the understanding of it as a form of vulnerability is a new and continuing journey. CCE is considered to be a major child protection issue nationally and is considered a policing priority. The age of these children range from nine to 17, with the majority of being aged 15 and above. Of these the majority of cases are of boys but girls are also known to be targeted. While it is viewed children from disadvantaged backgrounds are often more at risk, any child can become a target. An exploited child often doesn't see themselves as victimised and, as such, they don't always look or act like a victim. The most common crimes children are encouraged or forced to be involved in nationally include: selling drugs (often as part of county lines activity), carrying or storing drugs or money, carrying or storing a knife, gun or other weapon and committing theft, burglary or robbery.

What is County Lines?

County Lines involves a gang from a large urban area, travelling to smaller locations to sell Class A drugs, usually Crack Cocaine and Heroin.

To establish the 'line', the gang will remove any potential competition from the area and maintain control, gangs will use coercion, intimidation, extreme violence (including sexual), and weapons including knives, corrosives and firearms.

The 'line' itself is a mobile phone, to which orders for drugs are placed, this will usually be controlled by a third party who is removed from the market (to minimise their own exposure to risk and harm), and will relay orders to a local supplier.

Routine operations are managed through the exploitation of children & the vulnerable.

It's not uncommon for children to be manipulated into joining a gang only to soon find themselves with what they perceive to be no way out, and forced to travel to another part of the country to sell drugs on behalf of the gang.

It's impossible to know how many young people across the country are being forced to take part in County Lines, but The Children's Commissioner estimates there are at least 46,000 children in England who are involved in gang activity

Terminology

- **Exploitation** – gangs recruit and force children between 12-17 years to carry drugs between locations. They can sometimes intimidate, use violence and sexually exploit the victim to keep them in their control
- **Sexual exploitation** - Young girls are often groomed and forced into relationships with gang members and are made to perform sexual acts.
- **Going country** - The act of travelling to another city/town to deliver drugs or money.
- **Trapping** - The act of selling drugs. Trapping can refer to the act of moving drugs from one town to another or the act of selling drugs in one.
- **Cuckooing** - Drug dealers take over the home of a vulnerable individual and use it as their base for selling/manufacturing drugs. Commonly, drug users are targeted and are offered "free" drugs in exchange.
- **Trap house** - A building used as a base from where drugs are sold (or sometimes manufactured). These houses usually are occupied by someone (usually adult drug users but sometimes young people are forced to stay in trap houses) location.
- **Trap line** - This refers to when someone owns a mobile phone specifically for the purpose of running and selling of drug.

Who is at risk?

The County Lines gangs will groom **children** into trafficking their drugs for them with promises of money, friendship and status.

Once they've been drawn in, these children are **controlled** using threats, violence and sexual abuse, often leaving them traumatised and living in fear.

However they become **trapped** in criminal exploitation, the young people involved feel as if they have no choice but to continue doing what the criminals want.

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Any child, young person or vulnerable person could be at risk of being criminally exploited by drugs or organised crime gangs. However, some are more vulnerable, including those who are:

- **Experiencing domestic violence, parental drug abuse or criminality**
- **Have an unstable home life**
- **Have an economic vulnerability**
- **Are excluded from school and suffering social isolation**
- **Suffering homelessness or living in insecure accommodation**
- **Have learning or physical disabilities and/or mental health issues**
- **Have associations with criminality or being in care**

The national picture on county lines continues to develop but there are recorded cases of:

- Children as young as 9 years old being exploited or moved by gangs to courier drugs out of their local area; with 15-16 years is the most common age range
- Both males and females being exploited
- White British children being targeted because gangs perceive they are more likely to evade police detection, but a person of any ethnicity or nationality may be exploited
- And the use of social media to make initial contact with children and young people

Why use young people?

'Clean skin' - The term 'Clean Skin' refers to someone who is likely to be unknown to the Police or social services etc. In recent years there have been several reports of gangs targeting children from private schools or 'middle class' families, hoping that they won't fit any stereotype of a 'drug runner' or being affiliated with a criminal gang.

Reduced sentence from courts - Younger people are often treated less harshly by the criminal justice system, as there is a concerted effort to avoid the unnecessary criminalisation of children. Gangs will try to exploit this by ensuring it is younger people exposed to the greater share of the risk of their activities.

Cost to 'employ' is lower - Rather than cut into the profits of the drug dealing itself, children can be 'employed' with the offer of free drugs such as Cannabis or gifts such as food or clothing. Though any such payment won't be long lasting as the exploitation measures soon take hold.

Disposable - The business of transporting and selling drugs is an extremely risky one, should a young person be arrested by the police or attacked and possibly seriously injured or killed by a rival gang, and they can soon be replaced.

Attract less attention - A child in a park or cycling down a street attracts far less attention than a stereotypical adult drug dealer, reducing the risk of detection.

Easier to groom and maintain control - Gangs keep children in their service by enforcing drug debts which will often be inflated or simply made up, and by threatening family members to ensure their obedience. Many young people involved in these gangs won't even see themselves as victims and will fully embrace their perceived status as a respected gang member, oblivious to their own exploitation

The risks to young people

Physical injuries, risk of serious violence and death	Sexual violence	Emotional and psychological trauma
Debt bondage	Poor attendance and/or attainment in school	Arrest and conviction

Knowing and spotting the signs

- Found with a large quantity of drugs, cash or weapons
- Unexplained amounts of money or other items/gifts
- Unexplained injuries or dishevelled appearance
- Change in behaviour; secretive and withdrawn
- Unexplained absences and not engaging
- Increasingly disruptive, hostile or physically aggressive
- Increasing use of drugs and alcohol
- Having multiple mobile phones or sim cards
- Getting agitated if unable to answer any calls
- Self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being
- New peer groups and or relationships
- Missing episodes

Signposting and Reporting

- Speak to a trusted adult
- Leicestershire Police – non emergency 101/ emergency 999
- www.fearless.org
- www.crimestoppers-uk.org
- www.victimfirst.org
- www.childrenssociety.org.uk
- www.turning-point.co.uk

Trapped - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLhGpS1f-F0>

Sky documentary report - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y11kNIQmz-U>

Consequences – Home office resource - <http://infed.org/mobi/soctoolkit/>

Fearless - <https://www.fearless.org/en/campaigns/county-lines>