



**WEST YORKSHIRE
POLICE**



Office of the
**Police & Crime
Commissioner**
West Yorkshire

County Lines Exploitation

Briefing Document February 2018

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What is county lines?

County lines is the police term for urban gangs supplying drugs to suburban areas and market and coastal towns using dedicated mobile phone lines or “deal lines”.

It involves child criminal exploitation (CCE) as gangs use children and vulnerable people to move drugs and money.

Gangs establish a base in the market location, this can include taking over the homes of local vulnerable adults by force or coercion in a practice referred to as ‘cuckooing’.

County lines is a major, cross-cutting issue involving drugs, violence, gangs, safeguarding, criminal and sexual exploitation, modern slavery, and missing persons; and the response to tackle it involves the police, the National Crime Agency, a wide range of Government departments, local government agencies and VCS (voluntary and community sector) organisations.

County lines activity and the associated violence, drug dealing and exploitation has a devastating impact on young people, vulnerable adults and local communities.
(Home Office 2017)

Who does it affect?

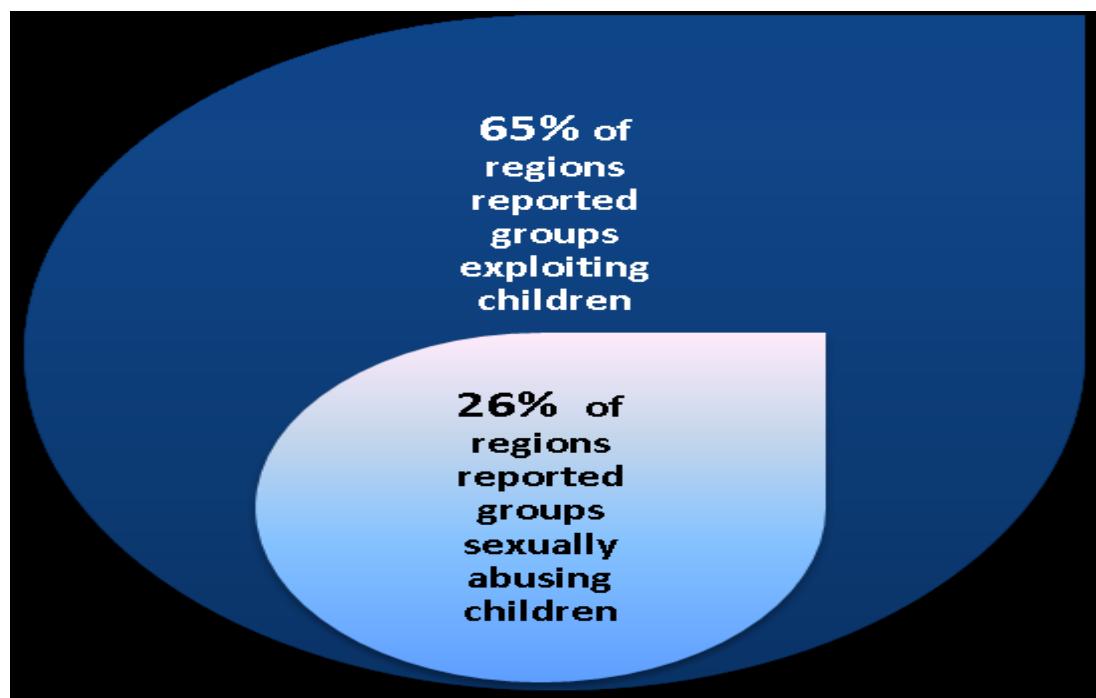
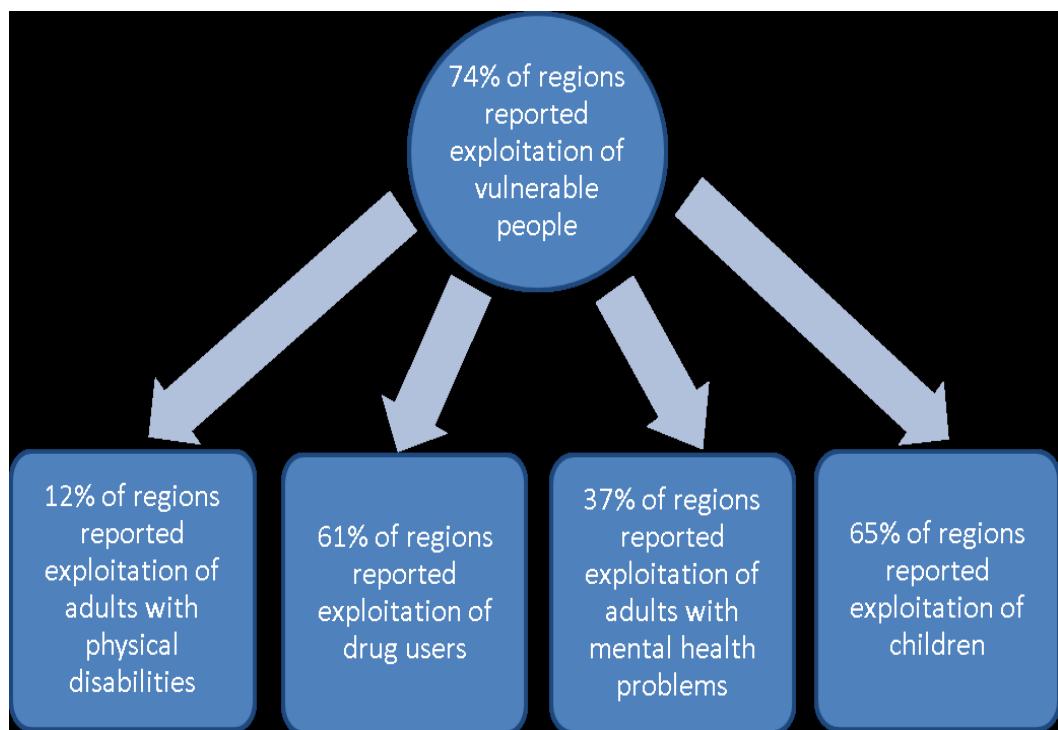
- Any child or young person. Children as young as 12 years old being exploited by gangs to courier drugs out of their local area; 15-16 years is the most common age range.
- Any vulnerable adult.
- Both males and females being exploited.
- White British children being targeted because gangs perceive they are more likely to evade police detection.
- Class A drug users being targeted so that gangs can take over their homes (known as 'cuckooing').
- We do know that county lines exploitation is widespread, with gangs from major cities including London, Manchester and Liverpool operating throughout England, Wales and Scotland.
- Can still be exploitation even if the activity appears consensual
- Can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and is often accompanied by violence or threats of violence.
- Can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, and young people or adults; and is typified by some form of power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the exploitation.
- Whilst age may be the most obvious, this power imbalance can also be due to a range of other factors including gender, cognitive ability, physical strength, status, and access to economic or other resources.
- One of the key factors found in most cases of county lines exploitation is the presence of some form of exchange (e.g. carrying drugs in return for something).
- Where it is the victim who is offered, promised or given something they need or want, the exchange can include both tangible (such as money, drugs or clothes) and intangible rewards (such as status, protection or perceived friendship or affection).
- It is important to remember the unequal power dynamic within which this exchange occurs and to remember that the receipt of something by a young person or vulnerable adult **does not make them any less of a victim**.

- It is also important to note that the prevention of something negative can also fulfil the requirement for exchange, for example a young person who is coerced into county lines activity to stop someone carrying out a threat to harm his/her family. (Home Office 2017).

Scale and Scope.

Recent media reports (Radio 4, October 2017) have estimated that thousands of young people have been exploited and groomed by organised criminal gangs. The National Crime Agency has identified over 700 county lines operations across the country.

- 35 police forces in England and Wales evidenced the existence of County Lines.
- A conservative estimate is that 720 ‘lines’ are operating across England and Wales. Estimated 283 originate in London.
- The most common drug supplied is heroin
- It is a common factor that perpetrators involved carry weapons including knives and firearms.
- Linked violent crimes include assault, robbery, kidnapping and reports of some victims being stripped and scalded with boiling water.
- The possession or use of acid or ammonia in relation to vitriolage (acid throwing attacks) has been increasingly linked to county lines.
- Cuckooing (The exploiting of young or vulnerable persons, to achieve the storage and/or supply of drugs, movement of cash proceeds and to secure the use of dwellings) has been linked to county lines. This predominantly involves the exploitation of class ‘A’ drug addicts.
- County lines groups will target new premises by pursuing vulnerable individuals who attend recovery groups, dependency units and areas associated with those experiencing problems.



(National Crime Agency 2017)

West Yorkshire

Is an exporting force, this means that it has an internal drug market robust enough to prevent external organised crime groups establishing new drug lines in our area.

- Currently there are only 2 known county lines in West Yorkshire
- These are Bradford to Bridlington and Leeds to Scarborough
- Current intelligence picture very poor so true picture not fully understood
- Drug lines tend to have names i.e. 'Helen' Line, 'Billy' line – sign to look out for.

Vulnerability Factors

Factors that heighten a person's vulnerability include:

- Having prior experience of neglect, physical and/ or sexual abuse;
- Lack of a safe/stable home environment, now or in the past
- (domestic violence or parental substance misuse, mental health issues or criminality, for example);
- Social isolation or social difficulties;
- Economic vulnerability;
- Homelessness or insecure accommodation status;
- Connections with other people involved in gangs;
- Having a physical or learning disability;
- Having mental health or substance misuse issues;
- Being in care (particularly those in residential care and those with interrupted care histories).

(Home Office 2017)

Signs and indicators (criminally exploited children)

As with children who are sexually exploited, gangs and networks will often target the most vulnerable young people, including those who are looked after by local authorities, who have a history of going missing, or who have chaotic or traumatic lives. Indicators of child criminal exploitation include:

- Persistently going missing from school or home and / or being found out-of-area;
- Unexplained acquisition of money, clothes, or mobile phones
- Excessive receipt of texts / phone calls
- Relationships with controlling / older individuals or groups
- Leaving home / care without explanation
- Suspicion of physical assault / unexplained injuries
- Parental concerns
- Carrying weapons
- Significant decline in school results / performance
- Gang association or isolation from peers or social networks
- Self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being

(Home Office 2017, Tri-X briefing 222)

Signs and indicators (cuckooing)

- Usually takes place in a multi-occupancy or social housing property (but not always)
- Houses being attended by people who would not normally be associated with the occupant.
- Does the occupant seem in fear or controlled by the ‘visitors’?
- Is the occupant not staying at the address when the ‘visitors’ are present?
- Are there weapons in the address or kitchen knives with cling film wrapped around the handle?
- Are neighbours saying there is dealing or ‘druggies’ at the address?
- New vehicle or hire cars outside the property
- Reports or signs of new people living or staying in the property
- Damage to the property
- Need for repairs or replacement locks
- Reports of drug use at the property
- Increased attendance of police or ambulance service
- Indications that young women are attending the address

(Op Gravity Norfolk, Slough County Council)

How to respond

Where there are concerns that a child or young person may have been criminally exploited, the Police and Children's Social Care should, form the first point of contact with the young person, pursue a safeguarding, rather than criminal justice, response.

Whenever a young person is arrested for drugs offences a long way from home in an area where they have no local connections and no obvious means of getting home, this should trigger concerns about their welfare and they should potentially be treated as victims of child criminal exploitation and trafficking rather than as an offender.

Agencies should also make contact with statutory services in the young person's home area to share information.

(Tri-X briefing 222)

In respect of vulnerable adults or adults at risk reference to the combined area multi agency safeguarding adult's policy and procedures is advised.

County Lines may involve offences of trafficking and consideration of modern day slavery guidance and referrals should be made to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) as potential victims of modern slavery / human trafficking.

Challenges, gaps and considerations.

This is an emerging picture and the scale and scope of the problem is still developing.

- There is a need to collate and share intelligence with partner agencies.
- Awareness raising within organisations and communities is required to identify victims, and gather intelligence.
- Whilst there are confirmed links between child sexual exploitation and county lines further intelligence is required to develop this picture.

- Consideration of county lines and the criminal exploitation of children being incorporated in local multi agency safeguarding strategies and actions plans.

Sources

Crossing the Line - Britain's Teenage Drug Mules, File on Four (BBC Radio 4, October 2017)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b099yh8j>

Criminal Exploitation of Children and Vulnerable Adults: County Lines (The Home Office) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criminal-exploitation-of-children-and-vulnerable-adults-county-lines>) - This guidance outlines what county lines (and associated criminal exploitation) is, signs to look for in potential victims, and what to do about it.

County Lines Violence, Exploitation & Drug Supply (National Crime Agency, 2017)
<http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/832-county-lines-violence-exploitation-and-drug-supply-2017/file>

County lines exploitation in London (House of Commons January 2018)

<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2018-0009/CDP-2018-0009.pdf>

Combined area multi-agency safeguarding adults policy & procedures West Yorkshire, north Yorkshire and York (final approved version v9)
<http://www.wakefield.gov.uk/Documents/health-care-advice/adult-services/safeguarding/safeguarding-adults-from-abuse/safeguarding-adults-board-policy-procedure.pdf>

Modern Slavery Slough <http://www.slough.gov.uk/council/strategies-plans-and-policies/modern-slavery.aspx>

Summary Briefing Paper for Partners in relation to, County Lines and Serious Youth Violence and its impact on Safeguarding of Vulnerable People
County <https://www.norfolkscb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/County-Lines-SummaryBriefingPaperforPartners.pdf>