

HTMS Ambassador Programme

Child Sexual Exploitation

Human Trafficking & Modern Slavery (HTMS) is the exploitation of people through the use of threats, fraud, coercion or deception. one form of exploitation is sexual exploitation. Children and young people can be trafficked into or within the UK for sexual exploitation and there are many forms this abuse can take. It is a complex form of abuse that can be difficult for parents and carers to understand and for children and young people to acknowledge.

DEFINITION [1]

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse.

It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity

(a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or

(b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator.

The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual.

Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

PERPETRATORS

Anybody can be a perpetrator of CSE, regardless of age, gender or race.

The relationship may be framed as one of friendship, mentorship, or romance. They may create an impression of authority over them, due to either age or another characteristic, but perpetrators may also use violence and intimidation to scare or force individuals, making them feel they have no other choice but to comply with the demands/continue a relationship. It is also possible that children and young people who are exploited may be forced to 'find' others to join groups and coerce them into exploitation.

it is important to note that though the age of consent is 16, young people over 16 can still be sexually exploited.[2]

REFERENCES:

[1] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-sexual-exploitation-definition-and-guide-for-practitioners>

[2] <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/child-sexual-exploitation/>

Around 75% of CSAE offences related to sexual offences committed directly against children, and around 25% relate to online offences of Indecent Images of Children. [3]

WHO IS VULNERABLE TO CSE?

CSE can occur in all communities and amongst all social groups and ethnicities.

CSE can affect both boys and girls - though it is more frequently observed amongst young females, boys are also impacted, though they may be less likely to disclose experiences of CSE.

There are heightened vulnerability factors which can make children and young people more susceptible to CSE, such as a prior experience of neglect or abuse, lack of a safe or stable home environment, social isolation, economic vulnerability and connections with others being sexually exploited, as well as being in residential care, amongst others.[1]

CSE can also be linked to other types of crime, including:

- child trafficking
- grooming
- drugs-related offences
- gang-related activity

GROOMING

Perpetrators usually groom children and young people to manipulate them into exploitative situations. This may occur over a short or a long period of time and it is also possible that the groomer may build a relationship with the individual's friends and family.

'Grooming is when a person builds a relationship with a child, young person or an adult who's at risk so they can abuse them and manipulate them into doing things. The abuse is usually sexual or financial, but it can also include other illegal acts.'[4]

Grooming can occur online and in person, either by a stranger or by someone known to the individual - it could also be a family member. They will shower the child/young person with attention and present themselves as understanding and trustworthy.

Online groomers will target children and young people through their social media, use the same sites they visit and approach them on gaming platforms to build a relationship via direct messaging, voice and video chatting in apps and forums.

It is important to note that children and young people may not understand or be able to identify that they have been/are being groomed, and may experience a range of complicated feelings, including that of loyalty.

REFERENCES:

[3] <https://news.npcc.police.uk/releases/vkpp-launch-national-analysis-of-police-recorded-child-sexual-abuse-and-exploitation-csae-crimes-report-2022>

[4] <https://www.met.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/gr/grooming/>

SIGNS & EFFECTS

Signs of grooming and CSE are not always obvious and can be difficult to identify, but the NSPCC and Barnado's have both compiled lists of signs, which include:

- being very secretive about how they're spending their time, including when online
- having an older boyfriend or girlfriend
- having money or new things like clothes and mobile phones that they can't or won't explain
- sexualised behaviour, language or an understanding of sex that's not appropriate for their age
- sudden change in physical appearance including clothes and hygiene levels
- spending more time away from home or going missing for periods of time
- issues with their mental health, emotional wellbeing or self-esteem
- being frightened of some people, places or situations
- changes in emotion, such as increased fear, anxiety or anger or being less able to regulate their emotions
- changes in behaviour, such as suddenly becoming withdrawn or isolated, or distrusting others
- alcohol or drug misuse

The impact of grooming and CSE can last a lifetime, and it is important to ensure immediate and continuous support. Some of the effects experienced include:

- anxiety & depression
- post-traumatic stress
- eating disorders
- self harm / suicidal thoughts
- drug & alcohol problems
- relationship problems with family, friends and partners
- drop in school attendance / unexplained absences

ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE & EXPLOITATION

With the continued advance of technology and surge in social media platforms and usage, online CSE is a recognised form of cybercrime, with many concerned about the targeting of children online.

Online exploitation is when individuals online use their power and/or influence to make a child/young person do sexual things - this may occur either online or offline in a number of ways [5]:

- *online grooming* - where individuals befriend and develop relationships with children/young people with the intention of abuse/exploitation.
- *live streaming* - live streams may be used by child sex offenders to commit or watch sexual acts via webcam.
- *online coercion and blackmail (OCB)* - OCB of a child/young person via the use of sexual images and/or videos for sexual/personal/financial gain.
- *indecent images of children (IIOC)* - online platforms can be used in the production of IIOC and prohibited images, such as screen-recording CSE perpetrated in a live-stream. Child sex offenders can use online platforms to store and share IIOC and prohibited images.

REFERENCES:

[5] <https://www.ceop.police.uk/Safety-Centre/what-is-online-child-sexual-abuse/>

If you are concerned about someone, seek help:

You are never wasting anyone's time if you raise concerns about possible harm.

If it is an emergency, call **999**

If you wish to report a crime anonymously, you may call **Crimestoppers: 0800 555 111**

If you suspect an incident of grooming, you can file a report online with the **Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP): <https://www.ceop.police.uk/ceop-reporting/>**

If you are concerned about a child's safety, you may contact the **NSPCC** helpline by calling **0808 800 5000**, emailing help@NSPCC.org.uk or completing their report **[abuse online form](#)**.

If you are worried about images or videos of a child being online, you can use the **NSPCC's Report Remove** tool to get these images taken down.

The Children's Society supports children and young people at risk of being groomed and has published some tips on online safety: <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/preventing-child-sexual-exploitation/online-safety>

You can also report any concerns to the **UK modern slavery and exploitation helpline**, a free 24-hour helpline where you will be able to discuss your concerns, receive advice and support.

You may call the helpline on: **08000 121 700** or you may visit the website and report your concerns online at <https://www.modernslaveryhelpline.org/>