

HTMS Ambassador Programme

Criminal Exploitation

Human Trafficking & Modern Slavery (HTMS) is the exploitation of people through the use of threats, fraud, coercion or deception. One such form of exploitation is criminal exploitation.

CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION & ORGANISED CRIME GROUPS

Criminal exploitation is a sub-category of forced labour, whereby someone is forced, coerced, deceived or manipulated by another into committing a crime.

Criminal exploitation is the most common type of HTMS in the UK, with the majority of victims being British nationals, and mostly comprising of teenagers and vulnerable adults [1].

Crimes forcibly committed may include:

- forced begging
- forced shoplifting / theft / pickpocketing
- cannabis cultivation
- selling or storing drugs
- financial abuse and benefit fraud

Victims may be coerced or groomed into committing crimes through debts, violence, or manipulation, for the benefit of another, and these criminal activities are often integral to the activities of many organised crime gangs.

Already vulnerable individuals and those from deprived communities are most affected by criminal exploitation[1] and may be experiencing issues such as:

- substance misuse
- mental health issues
- learning disabilities
- homelessness
- deprivation

It is important to note that many victims of criminal exploitation do not recognise they are being exploited. If you are concerned about someone, you can call any of the helpline numbers listed on pg.4.

REFERENCES:

[1] <https://justiceandcare.org/policies-and-reports/criminal-exploitation-modern-slavery-by-another-name/>

[2] <https://www.catch-22.org.uk/resources/what-do-we-mean-by-child-criminal-exploitation/>

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

CHILD CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION (CCE)

All children are at risk of being criminally exploited but some may be at more risk due to unmet needs and existing vulnerabilities.

Many children are treated as criminals as opposed to victims, despite the harm suffered. There is no statutory definition for child criminal exploitation [2], and the lack of understanding amongst adults and professionals, including statutory services, can lead to missed opportunities, such as the failure to identify exploitation and abuse, the failure to intervene and to support these individuals out of their situation of exploitation. It is thus important to be able to spot the signs and act quickly if you think a child is being groomed or may be involved with a gang - the [NSPCC](#) has some helpful guidance on this topic [3].

The current definition for Child Criminal Exploitation in use by the government is as follows:

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

- (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or
- (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or
- (c) through violence or the threat of violence.

The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology [4].

Signs & Indicators

It is important that children are also aware of the risks and signs of criminal exploitation. CCE can occur alongside other forms of exploitation and no one experience of exploitation will be the same as another.

Barnado's is one of the leading charities supporting children and families affected by CCE. There is some helpful guidance on the Barnado's site, including a list of signs and indicators of CCE, which include[5]:

Behavioural signs:

- avoiding certain people, places or situations
- reluctance to participate in activities they once enjoyed
- emotional outbursts or extreme mood swings
- fear of being alone with certain individuals
- withdrawing from family and friends

Physical signs:

- unexplained bruises, cuts, or injuries on the body
- signs of restraint, such as rope burns or handcuff marks
- drug or alcohol addiction

Online signs:

- secretive or unusual computer or smartphone usage
- receiving gifts or packages from unfamiliar people
- being approached by strangers online or through social media platforms

REFERENCES:

[4] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/serious-violence-strategy>

[5] <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/get-support/support-for-parents-and-carers/child-abuse-and-harm/criminal-exploitation-children>

County Lines

County lines is a term used by the police and its partner agencies, and is noted to be a violent and exploitative form of drug distribution. It does not only occur across counties, but also within towns and between cities.

The Government definition is as follows:

County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas [within the UK], using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of “deal line”. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move [and store] the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons [6].

The exploitation of young people and people with vulnerabilities is noted to be a common feature in county lines. Gangs and drug dealers target such individuals for the specific purpose of running drugs or moving cash so that they themselves can stay under the radar of law enforcement. Those being exploited may quite often be exposed to physical, mental and sexual abuse, and some may also be trafficked across the UK to other areas to expand the network’s drug dealing business. The NCA has a video explaining the county lines methodology and the links between drug dealing, gangs, exploitation, violence and cuckooing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdYq2dhQ3qc>

Signs & Indicators

The **National Crime Agency (NCA)** works together with the police to tackle the county lines threat. The NCA has a list of signs to look out for if you have concerns of county lines drug dealing happening in your area :

- An increase in visitors and cars to a house or flat
- New faces appearing at the house or flat
- New and regularly changing residents (e.g different accents compared to local accent
- Change in resident's mood and/or demeanour (e.g. secretive/ withdrawn/ aggressive/ emotional)
- Substance misuse and/or drug paraphernalia
- Changes in the way young people you might know dress
- Unexplained, sometimes unaffordable new things (e.g clothes, jewellery, cars etc)
- Residents or young people you know going missing, maybe for long periods of time
- Young people seen in different cars/taxis driven by unknown adults
- Young people seeming unfamiliar with your community or where they are
- Truancy, exclusion, disengagement from school
- An increase in anti-social behaviour in the community
- Unexplained injuries

If you are concerned about possible county lines in your area, **do not approach the property or individuals yourself.**

You are advised to contact your local police by dialling 101 - in an emergency dial 999.

If you wish to remain anonymous, contact **Crimestoppers**.

If you witness something suspicious linked to the railways, you can contact the **British Transport Police** by texting **61016** from your mobile.

REFERENCES:

[6] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/serious-violence-strategy>

Cuckooing

“Cuckooing” is a practice in which a home is forcibly occupied in order to conduct illicit activities, such as drug dealing. It is a form of exploitation as it involves a form of control over another, whether it be financial, physical or psychological [7].

The homeowner is usually a vulnerable person unable to resist. Individuals most commonly impacted by cuckooing include:

- the elderly
- people with disabilities
- people with mental illnesses
- people experiencing social isolation
- people who may be financially vulnerable
- people with substance addiction
- undocumented migrants

This practice of cuckooing is commonly part of **county lines networks**.

If you are concerned about someone, you can report cuckooing to the police or local council. Alternatively you can also call Crimestoppers anonymously or the HTMS helpline at the numbers below.

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 are concerned about someone rough sleeping, you can contact the national rough sleeping referral line **StreetLink: <https://thestreetlink.org.uk/>**

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](#)**.

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/>**

REFERENCES:

[7] <https://hopeforjustice.org/what-is-cuckooing/>