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Criminal Exploitation, County Lines and Organised Crime

Louise Court PC – County Lines and Criminal Exploitation TPA

Child Criminal Exploitation

Involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where a child receives 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them completing a criminal task on behalf of another individual or group of individuals.

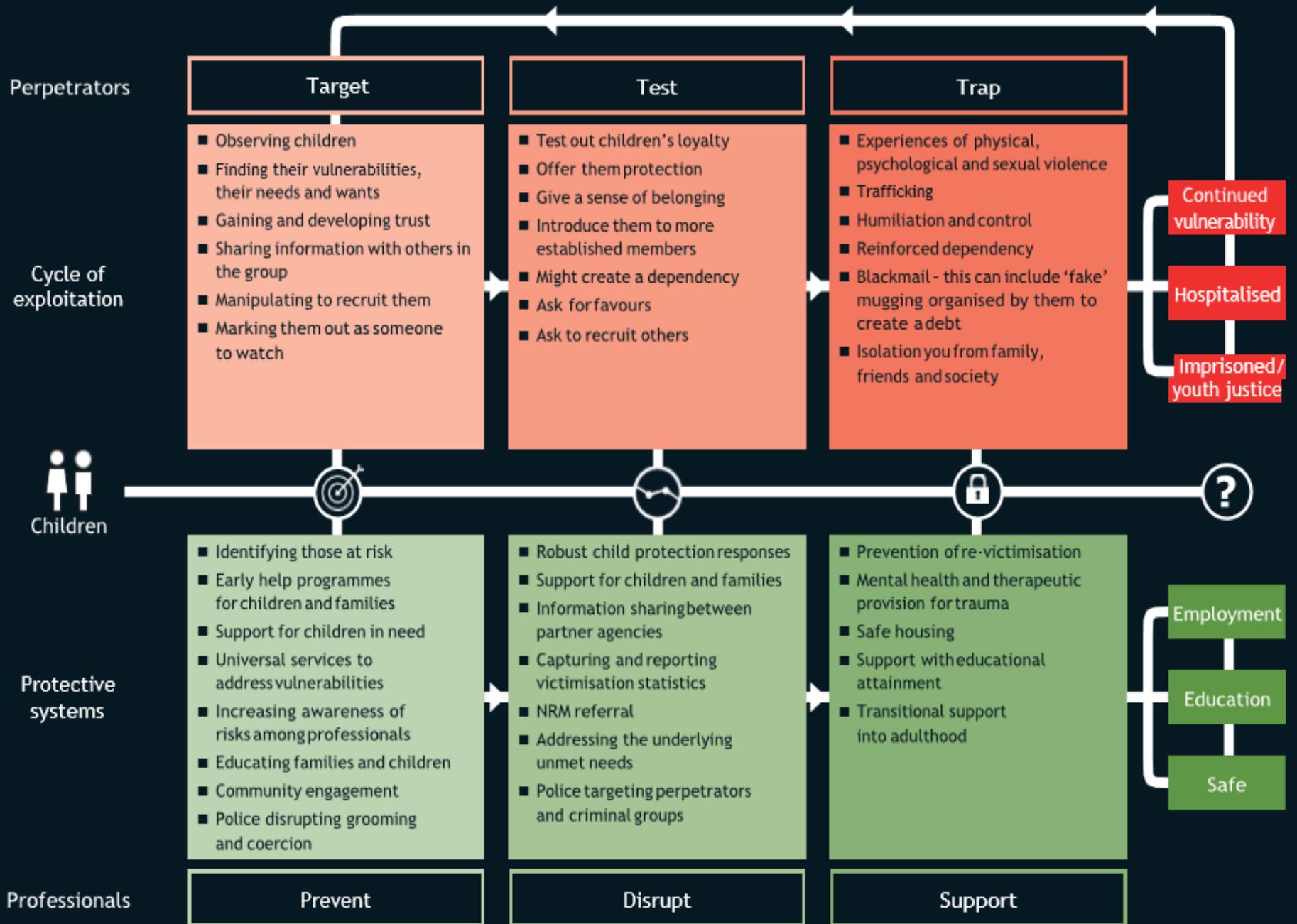
Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) often occurs without the child's immediate recognition, with the child believing that they are in control of the situation. In all cases, those exploiting the child have power over them. Violence, threats, coercion and intimidation are common.



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A child's journey through child criminal exploitation



Definition

County Lines:

- 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”. (Using deal line names is a method of marketing, to establish a ‘brand’ is also a key factor.)
- They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move [and store] the drugs and money.
- They will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.



County Lines - The 'line'

- The networks are establishing themselves as a 'business' with telephone numbers advertised via business cards / social media and offering deals to users to make themselves more favourable with drug users.
- Each drug line will be known by a name. This name is constant, although persons working / controlling the mobile telephone will likely change. This makes it difficult to identify the gang members.
- The line is operated usually by young persons. This line will send texts advertising drugs for sale to local drug users.
- The person controlling the line is not necessarily in contact with drugs themselves, with a second telephone number often arranging drug collection / drop off locations. Users can be given code names in order to collect drugs from a specified location.

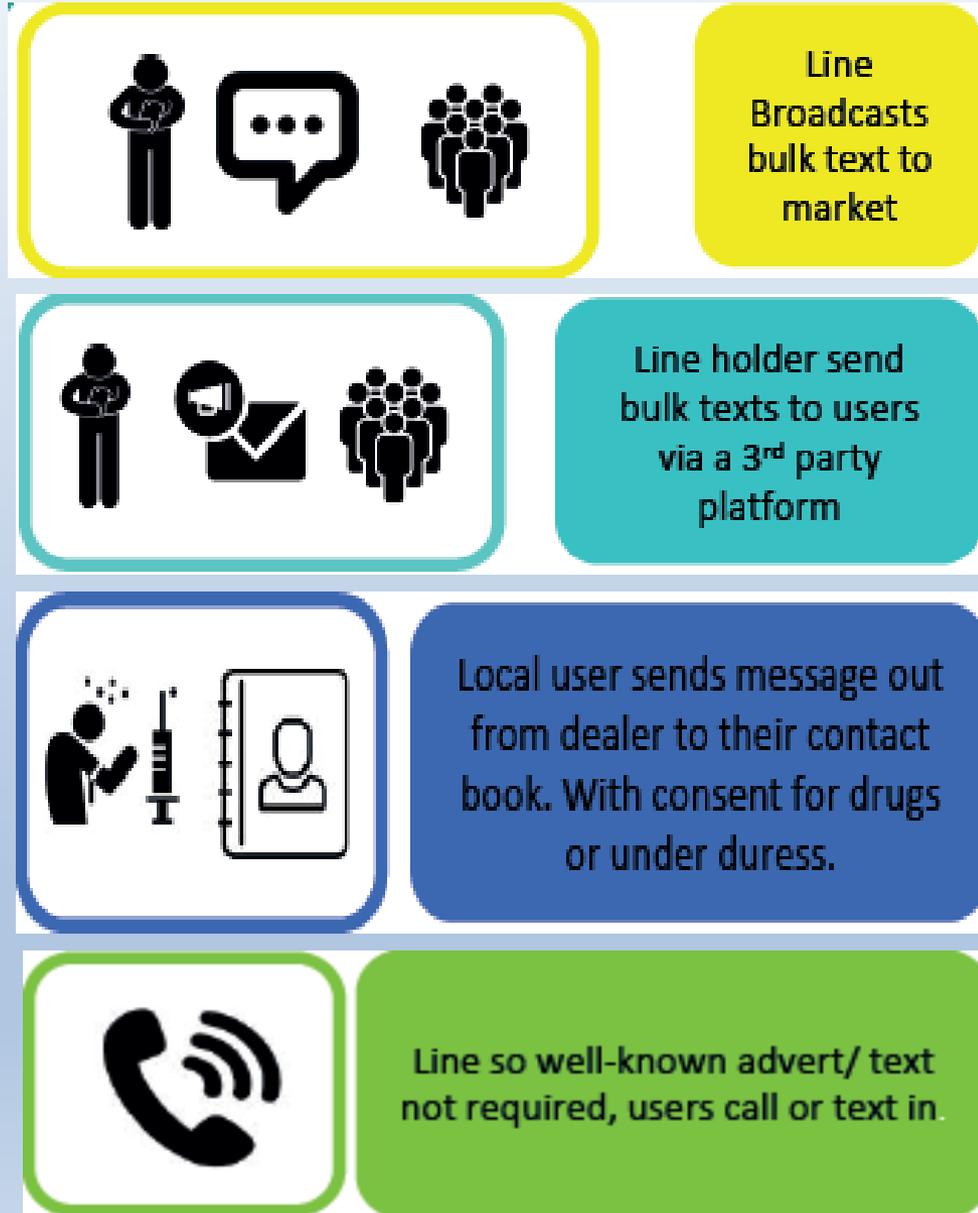


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The 'Line' cont...

- There are some deal line names that are seen very frequently but are believed to be run and controlled by different groups and be unrelated.
- However, the same group will often keep the same deal line name when they need to start a new line number, (for example if a line is closed following police arrest and seizure or a DDTRO).
- So when a deal line name is recognised, further research/intelligence is required before it can be established if it is linked to a line by the same name with a different number.



Debt Bondage

Debt bondage may be used by offenders when carrying out county lines activity. A real or perceived debt is used as a method to exert control over individuals, to recruit and/or ensure they continue working for the county lines network. Those held in debt bondage may be made to run or deal drugs to 'repay' the debt or in some cases provide the use of their properties for the preparation and/or dealing of drugs. 'Debts' can be incurred in a number of ways including:

- provision of food, drugs, accommodation or other items the individual believes are gifts but which they are then expected to repay the cost of;*
- staged robberies against those holding or running drugs who are then held responsible for the loss;*
- the seizure of drugs and/or money by police upon arrest can result in the arrested individual being held responsible for the debt caused by the loss; and*
- assumption of debt incurred by a friend or family member.*

Money Mules

Exploiters and gangs use vulnerable children and adults to launder money through their accounts to then withdraw the money legitimately. This is known as money muling.

Students are also frequently used as the incentive to carry out this task is cash reward.

Online bank accounts have been used by exploiters due to the speed with which they can be opened and the virtual identification requirements. Anecdotal evidence recently suggests that partner agencies have seen Monzo used for these purposes

County Lines is an act of Modern Slavery.

- County Lines are closely linked to modern slavery. The legislation states that children cannot consent to being trafficked and movement from one side of the street to another is sufficient to prove the offence.
- The MSA allows for county line offenders to be prosecuted for exploiting children as runners for their lines.
- Often, despite all efforts a victim will not be willing to support an investigation or prosecution. However there have been a number of successful victimless / evidence based prosecutions under the MSA which removed the need for victim evidence or attendance



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Victim Not Criminal

- **Children who suffer CCE are often viewed as criminals and less sympathetically than victims of other types of abuse.**
- **Harm caused by CCE can be significant and life changing / threatening and children should be considered as victims**
- **Consider vulnerabilities and / or age before criminalising and when investigating those in custody**
- **Children should be considered as victims first**
- **The line between victim and criminal is not always clear, thorough research and investigation is required to understand the true context of a child's involvement in crime**



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Non Government Organisations (NGO's)



**St
Giles**

Non government organisations are predominantly charity funded organisations that professionals and emergency services work in collaboration with to carry out safeguarding and to promote best practise.

- **Rescue and Response (R&R) - Project which will support young Londoners affected by county lines activity. They have the capability to rescue a young person from anywhere within the UK if required and consent is given.**
- **St Giles Trust - Using expertise and real-life past experiences to empower people who are not getting the help they need. Can be those held back by poverty, exploited, abused, dealing with addiction or mental health problems, caught up in crime or a combination of these issues and others.**
- **Abianda - Support young women affected by gangs and county line activity through our unique model that combines a solution focused and competence based approach with participatory principles and techniques.**
- **Safer London - Support young Londoners, their families, peers and communities affected by violence and exploitation.**

A B I A N D A



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Girls under the Radar

“I've had a gun held to my head in country. My friends have been stabbed in country. When you're in the countryside it's business, no one's laughing and joking. We're here to make money and not get killed.”

Quote from victim of CCE Danielle, aged 15 years



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Girls Under the Radar

WHAT IS CUCKOOING?



- Cuckooing is a practice where people take over a person's home and use the property to facilitate exploitation. It takes the name from cuckoos who take over the nests of other birds.
- It is criminal exploitation often associated with County Lines - but not exclusively . Covid-19 may have increased the risk of cuckooing over lock down similar to increases in other safeguarding concerns.

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Reasons for Cuckooing



Drugs

TO GROW, PREPARE, STEAL OR STORE.

Sex work

PROSTITUTION AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Weapons

STORING OR HIDING KNIVES, GUNS & MORE

Second home

LIVING THERE OFTEN WITH YOUNG/MISSING PERSONS



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Typology

(Taken from Spicer J 2020)

Parasitic Nest Invading



The unwanted occupation of the home either by force or more subtle manipulation/deceit

Quasi-Cuckooing



Initial willingness often linked to obtaining drugs in return for staying and using the property

Coupling



Usually male County Lines dealers entering in to sexual relationships with vulnerable females, setting up in their home with other dealers



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HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?

- They may begin by befriending the adult at risk – gangs will select members who are charming and manipulative in order for them to quickly build a rapport. They will then offer the adult at risk something of interest to them, this could be a relationship, friendship, drugs and / or alcohol, money or clothing.
- In exchange they may ask to ‘borrow’ a room, to store something or meet other ‘friends’ at the property. In some cases, the gang may make it clear that this is for criminal purposes, i.e. drug supply, or they may use an excuse as to why they want to use the property.
- Gradually the ‘benefits’ will reduce and may eventually come to an end, and more and more people will come and go from the address.
- The gang members / drug dealers may threaten the adult at risk verbally or physically if they try to put a stop to their criminal activity. They will also discourage family / friends and support workers from visiting the vulnerable adult’s address.



Responding

- Immediate risks of harm – can move to safe accommodation
- Safeguarding referrals adults & children
- Extreme cases – LA & Police can seek 'closure orders' prohibiting access to the property for up to 3 months
- Injunctions can restrict who can enter the property
- Referrals for support services



Future Considerations



- Be interested, professionally curious. CCE is not necessarily a lifestyle choice.
- Consider the use of your language.
- Challenge professional views that are judgemental and oppressive
- Be persistent and approachable. There are many reasons a child may not 'engage'. They need to feel able to trust you before they can open up.
- Seize the opportunity, you often only get one chance.
- Build their resilience through considering their strengths, interests and aspirations.
- Be mindful of the repercussions that the children may face.
- Give the young person choices and open avenues for conversations.
- Share information to further understand connections and reduce intelligence gaps



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Contacts and useful resources

- In the first instance please contact police via 101 or 999 in an emergency
- PC Louise Court – louise.court@met.police.uk
- For Prevention work at The Children's Society, Danielle Riley Danielle.riley@childrenssociety.org.uk, Prevention Programme.



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