

Wood End Park Academy

Child Protection Training: County Lines



Course objectives – to understand how:

1. 'County Lines' operates
2. young people become vulnerable
3. to identify risk factors
4. to safeguard and report concerns

What is the County Lines?

'County lines' is a term used to describe the expansion of city drug dealing into smaller towns, coastal or rural areas.



The term is used when drug gangs from large urban cities expand their operation into these areas. Often using violence to drive out local dealers by grooming and exploiting children and vulnerable people to sell drugs.

The most commonly ordered and supplied are **Class 'A'** drugs:

- Heroin
- Cocaine
- Crack cocaine
- MDMA
- Cannabis
- Amphetamines
- Spice

Children as young as 7 are being put in danger by criminals who are taking advantage of how innocent and inexperienced these young people are.

'Going Country'

Going country is the most popular term that describes county line activities.

No one knows exactly how many young people across the country are being forced to take part. But the children's commissioner estimates that:

46,000 children in England involved in gang activity

4,000 teenagers are being exploited through child criminal exploitation or county lines in London alone

Cuckooing

A common feature in county lines drug supply is the exploitation of young vulnerable people often with:

- Mental health
- Addiction

They are targeted, their home taken over and used as a base for exploited children to operate from.

This practice is known as **Cuckooing**.

Cuckooing

People exploited in this way will often be exposed to:

- Physical abuse
- Mental abuse
- Sexual abuse



-and sometimes trafficked to other areas a long way from home as a part of the networks drug dealing business.

Any child can be exploited regardless of their background.

Plugging

Children are often recruited to move drugs and money between locations and are known to be exposed to techniques such as **Plugging**.

- Drugs are concealed internally to avoid detection

Children can easily become trapped by this type of exploitation as county lines gangs create drugs debts and can threaten serious violence and kidnap towards victims and their families if they attempt to leave the county lines network.



Indicating factors of 'county lines'

There are many factors that could indicate that county lines activity may be happening from a base.

- New, unfamiliar children or young people living with a resident
- An increase in the number of visitors and cars to a house or flat
- New and regularly changing residents
- Children, young people and residents with different accents to the local accents, living with a resident
- Children or young people being unfamiliar with the community or where they are living
- Change in a residents mood and/or demeanour – secretive, withdrawn, aggressive, emotional
- An increase in anti-social behaviour in the community

'Deal' or 'trap' lines

Advances in mobile technology and social media have greatly assisted this process.

The internet and mobile network assist in providing covert means for the county lines process.





The dealers use dedicated mobile phones known as deal lines or trap lines to receive drug orders from drug users. The dealers live in a different area to where their customers are based so drug runners are needed to transport drugs usually on trains and coaches, collect payments and move cash. Using young people in this way as runners distances the dealers from the risks of direct dealing which helps the deals stay under the radar from the police.

Grooming



The county lines process relies on a gang culture where children are groomed to become involved. It is a manipulative process where children don't see themselves as victims or realise they are being groomed to get involved in criminality. The dealers are proficient in spotting factors that make a child vulnerable and exploit them.

Grooming

Criminals deliberately target vulnerable children. Those that are:

- Homeless
- Experience learning difficulties
- Going through family breakdowns
- Struggling at school
- Living in care
- Trapped in poverty

Grooming

Criminals also target children who do not have a secure home life. For example:

- Where family relationships are poor or dysfunctional
- Families affected by domestic abuse or substance misuse
- Households where there is little or no income and children feel the need to provide financially for their family
- Where other members of the family are involved in criminal activity

Control

The criminals groom children in trafficking their drugs for them by promising them money, friendship and status.

Once they have been drawn in children are controlled by:

- Threats
- Violence
- Sexual abuse

This leaves them feeling traumatised and living in fear. Often these children lack aspiration and feel trapped by their situation. They may disengage from systems where they feel protected. For example through truancy or exclusion from school. Manipulating this feeling of hopelessness, dealers exploit these children. As all gang culture, children are initially made to feel important and valued. This sense of belonging along with financial incentives secures their involvement.

Contextual safeguarding – ‘local picture’

Issues that are prevalent in the local area are risks outside of school, the home and family. This is known as contextual safeguarding. Which simply means the assessment of children should consider the wider environmental factors are present in a child's life that are a threat to their safety and/or welfare. These may be factors that the family are not aware of.

Contextual issues vary between communities and individual children. For example, different areas and communities have different levels of crime, gangs and radicalisation. Individual children will have different levels of exposure to wider risk factors.

Contextual safeguarding – ‘local picture’

Contextual safeguarding recognises that the different relationships young people form in their neighbourhood, schools and online can feature violence and abuse, with parents and carers having little or no influence over these contexts. It is important to remember that not all children involved in county lines experience dysfunctional home lives. As with contextual safeguarding, the family may be unaware or relationships being built outside the family unit and their child's involvement.

Care system



Children with previous or current social care involvement and those within the care system are known to be vulnerable for being targeted for county lines involvement.

Care system

By relocating children that are a risk of or involved in drug activity or family dysfunction to neighbouring towns, often meant that they remained vulnerable to exploitation by dealers from their previous home town or cities.

The use of the internet and phone technologies enables them to be easily targeted. Once involved children and vulnerable adults recruited as part of the county lines process will often be exposed to physical, mental and sexual abuse.

Trafficked

Children may be trafficked to areas along way from their home as part of the networks drug dealing business. Whilst they are holding drugs or cash the children are held responsible by the dealers for securing them. If lost by any means this will result in being in debt with the dealer which strengths their control over the children.

Gangs violently assault children and young people working for them if they find their drugs or money to be missing. Weapons such as fire arms, knives, bats and acid are used to make violent threats. To mitigate risks children often carry knives or other weapons. This is an abuse system where children rationalise criminal behaviour, violence as part of their everyday life.



Boys and Girls

Boys and girls are equally vulnerable to being targeted for county lines involvement. Their roles could be:



Sexually exploited

Shoplifting

Money laundering

Dealing

Drug running

Statistics

- In 2017, nearly 500 girls under the age of 18 were referred to the Home Office as suspected victims of sexual exploitation – a 50% rise over the last three years
- 66% increase in British nationals identified as potential child trafficking victims
- 38% of these victims were female
- 110 girls were also referred for labour exploitation

The National Crime Agency (NSA) attribute these rises to the increase in county lines exploitation.

Possible indicators of 'county lines'

- Truancy, exclusions, disengagement from education
- Possession of unexplained and/or unaffordable new items – clothing, phones, jewellery, cars
- Disengagement from relationships with peers and developing new relationships especially with older adults
- Substance misuse
- Changes in the way a young person dresses
- Involvement in, or increased, anti-social behaviour
- Unexplained injuries
- The child becoming secretive, withdrawn, aggressive or emotionally unstable
- Children being seen in unknown cars or taxis
- Children going missing or regularly being away for periods of time
- Sexual knowledge or activity inappropriate for their age

Act on concerns

- Be vigilant
- Act on concerns
- Action should always be taken
- CPOMS
- Notify DSL or deputy DSL immediately

The NCA have reported that there are currently 1000 lines in operation.

Any questions...