



West Midlands Anti Slavery Network.
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Presentation covers

- Signs and indicators of County Lines (CL)
- An ask to contemplate the role of Public Health on this agenda
- Overview of the National Referral Mechanism and data in respect of CLs



National Referral Mechanism

- The National Referral Mechanism is a framework for identifying victims of human trafficking or modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support.

On 29 April 2019 the Home Office assumed responsibility for all areas of the NRM, including referrals, decision making and data collection.



National Referral Mechanism

2018 NRM data:

6993 victims were referred to the NRM a 36% increase on 2017 5142.

UK, Albanian and Vietnamese were the highest nationality
Minors referrals increased 48% to 3147 compared to 2118 in 2017

Increase due to County Lines criminal business model of exploiting vulnerable individuals and other forms of criminal labour exploitation



What is County Lines

- County Lines' is a term used when drug gangs from big cities expand their operations to smaller towns, often using violence to drive out local dealers and exploiting children and vulnerable people to sell drugs. These dealers will use dedicated mobile phone lines, known as 'deal lines', to take orders from drug users. Heroin, cocaine and crack cocaine are the most common drugs being supplied and ordered. In most instances, the users or customers will live in a different area to where the dealers and networks are based, so drug runners are needed to transport the drugs and collect payment.

National Crime Agency website



Exploitation of young and vulnerable

- A common feature in county lines drug supply is the exploitation of young and vulnerable people. The dealers will frequently target children and adults - often with mental health or addiction problems - to act as drug runners or move cash so they can stay under the radar of law enforcement.
- In some cases the dealers will take over a local property, normally belonging to a vulnerable person, and use it to operate their criminal activity from. This is known as cuckooing.
- People exploited in this way will quite often be exposed to physical, mental and sexual abuse, and in some instances will be trafficked to areas a long way from home as part of the network's drug dealing business.
- As we have seen in child sexual exploitation, children often don't see themselves as victims or realise they have been groomed to get involved in criminality. So it's important that we all play our part to understand county lines and speak out if we have concerns.

National Crime Agency website



Signs and Indicators

Parental concerns / uncharacteristic behaviours

- Withdrawal to bedroom all day / secrecy/ obsession about door being closed.
- Withdrawal from normal activities & interests.
- Sudden interest in rap/drill music.
- Sudden interest in weights.
- Increasingly lying / manipulative / argumentative / aggressive / angry.
- Leaving home suddenly without explanation.
- Obsession with designer labels.
- Physically aggressive especially if met with obstacles or plans disrupted.
- Rapid / extreme change in appearance – from smart to ‘street’.
- Rapid / extreme change in language – from well-spoken and respectful to coarse and offensive language.
- Using coached responses such as ‘right to remain silent’ or ‘no comment’.
- Total denial of situation as it appears – despite evidence to contrary.
- Significant decline in school results / performance / behaviour.
- Obsession with postcodes & ‘boundaries’.
- Knowledge of areas with no legitimate links.



Signs and Indicators

- Presence of unexplained items
- Packets of (secreted) white substance.
- Traces of white substance (kitchen surface / rolling pin).
- Scrunched up cling film & foil.
- Paracetamol sheets missing / running out quickly without explanation
- Lighters / cigarettes / debit cards in unknown identities, explained as 'just found on road'.
- Knife / mobile chargers / dongles / cash / mobile data cards (Lycamobile).
- Notes with crime-orientated rap lyrics & street slang ('8 ways in, only 1 way out').
- Notes with sexualised female identities (social media?).
- After-shaves / perfumes / trainers / stationery items (gifted / stolen).
- Condoms & Vaseline (plugging).
- Train tickets
- Balaclava (personal use or holding for others).



Signs and Indicators

- Items missing from home
- Money
- Old family mobiles & chargers.
- Handbag shoulder chains.
- Kitchen knives.



Signs and Indicators

- Escalation indicators.
- Absence from school or disappearing during school.
- Isolation from peers at school.
- Total withdrawal & detachment from family.
- Suddenly disinterest in seeing family/cousins - 'nothing in common'.
- Sudden interest in parents' salary & mortgage payments.
- Obsessively and repeatedly demanding (re mobile, 'need' to go out etc.).
- Maintains 'story' despite lacking total credibility.
- Not divulging where going, who with or how travelling.
- Excessive receipt of unexplained texts / phone calls at all hours.
- Unexplained use of Tor app on mobile.
- Unexplained use of Uber app on mobile.
- Suspected use of taxis.
- Complete change / negative attitude towards Police / school / authority.
- From lack of eye-contact to bravado / squaring up / rudeness & aggression.
- Total lack of empathy towards those lied to or stolen from.
- Persistently going missing or being found out-of-area



Signs and Indicators

- Being hugely anti-Police ('Feds').
- Very defensive/argumentative about Muslims.
- Viewing family as enemy & associates as family.
- Obliterating identifying information from train (season) ticket.
- Deliberately avoiding having train ID card on person.
- Using trains without paying fares / not using own Oyster.
- Oyster card used by others.
- Debit card missing – used by associates for money laundering.
- Cutting off name labels from uniform items.
- Cutting off age labels.
- Suspected misuse of drugs/alcohol, and smoking.
- Involvement in crime.
- Direct involvement with gang members.
- Use of false identities, dates of birth, and addresses,
- Inappropriate sexualised behaviour.
- Involvement with older individuals / dropping friends from school.
- Unexplained injuries & suspicion of physical assaults.
- In cars in unexplained areas with unknown people ('hitch-hiking after party').
- Obsession with winter hats and gloves, even in warmer months (identification and from winter season).
- Wearing 2 layers of clothing from home - top layer shed to avoid Police detection.



Challenges include

- Role of PH England?
- Raising awareness and training incl parents and schools.
- Links to Modern Slavery
- National Referral Mechanism
- Children being 'Off rolled at school'
- S45 Modern Slavery Act 2015 Defence
- Abuse of S45 Defence



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