

#NOMORE | A MOTHERWELL CHESHIRE CAMPAIGN

AN INTRODUCTION TO COUNTY LINES

Learning Objectives

- ❖ To raise awareness about County Lines
- ❖ To build resilience against becoming involved in county lines operations
- ❖ To recognise the signs that someone may be involved in county lines
- ❖ To learn about the law
- ❖ To know how to get help

What does County Lines mean?

- ❖ County Lines is the practice of trafficking drugs into rural areas and smaller towns, away from major cities. Traffickers recruit vulnerable children, as drug dealers
- ❖ Some young people are recruited via "debt bondage", whereby they enter county lines to pay off drug debts
- ❖ Others take part through choice due to lack of knowledge, misinformation, boredom, and a lack of legitimate opportunity in marginalized communities
- ❖ The term "county lines" refers to the phone numbers, or lines, dedicated to this activity. The practice is also known by those involved as "going country" or "going OT" ("outta town")

Gangs have been a part of our history for more than 2000 years!

Back in ancient Rome, politician Marcus Cicero (born around 100 years BC) complained about gangs on the streets of Rome.

1873-1950s: The Forty Elephants. This was a notorious all-female shoplifting gang based in London but operating all over the country. They wore specially modified clothes to conceal valuable items.

Late 1800s to 1930s - Peaky Blinders (now well-known following the hit TV series). This gang waged street warfare with other gangs. Originally it started as a disorganised street crime (eg robbery) but eventually became properly organised and progressed to gangs seizing land and running protection rackets and largescale frauds/smuggling/bookmaking operations. Their name is believed to come from the practice of sewing razor blades into the peaks of their caps and using them as weapons (causing blindness either by slashing the eyes or through blood from facial slashes running into the eyes). However, this has not been proven and may come from the Birmingham slang of 'blinder' simply meaning looking fantastic!

Scale

Between the years of 2018 to 2019, National Crime Agency figures showed there were 1,500 drug trafficking routes of this sort in the United Kingdom, rising to 3,000; in that year the agency estimated the total turnover of county lines activities throughout the UK to be roughly £500 million. A 2020 report for the Home Office by Professor Dame Carol Black states that the county lines drug trade involved 27,000 young people in the UK.

Causes

In 2019, Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, blamed cuts in police numbers for the rise of county lines gangs.

Also, in 2019, police said that they lacked the resources to tackle County Lines. They mentioned cuts to youth services may have been a contributing factor. They mentioned it was difficult to get the funding. County Lines operation unit run by the National County Lines Coordination Centre. Jointly run by the National Crime Agency and National Police Chief's Council, it opened in September of 2019. It is thought that it has helped to find suspects and help victims of drug trafficking.

A 2020 report for the Home Office by Professor Dame Carol Black traces the causes of the phenomenon to a combination of government cuts in youth services and drug recovery services, absence of parents, poor parenting, increased child poverty, school exclusions, and availability of purer forms of drugs.

Response

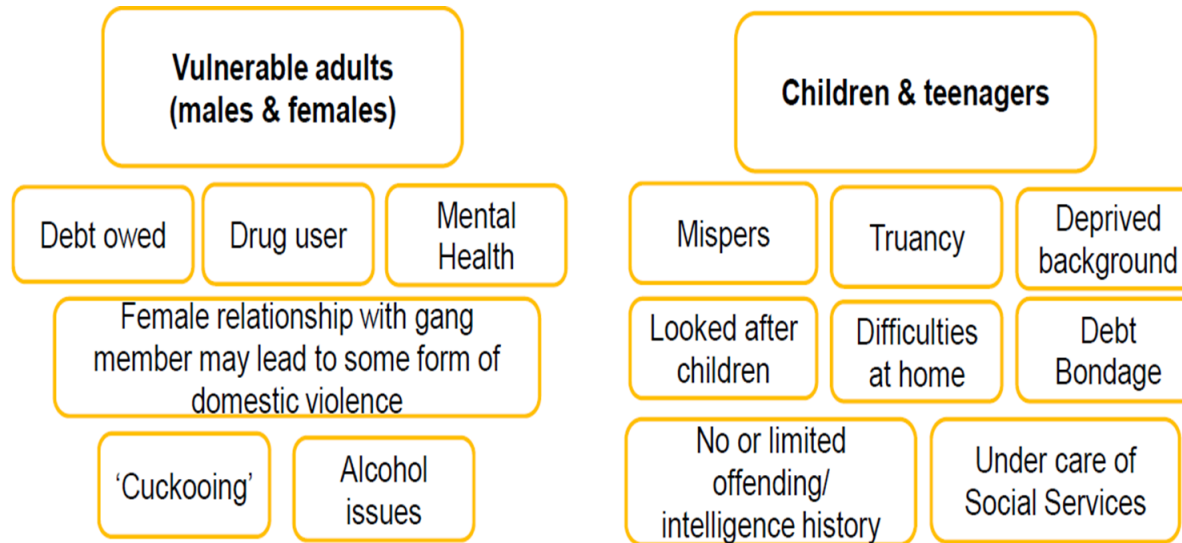
In 2018, a drug dealer was convicted of offences under the Modern Slavery Act relating to "county lines" activities. In 2018 The Children's Society criticised what it said was an inconsistent approach by professionals working with children, being concerned that, while some police and social workers viewed the practice as child exploitation, others treated vulnerable young people solely as criminals.

In the same year Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, set up a "rescue and response" programme, which in its first year referred 568 young people to support channels. In 2019 he said that more than 4,000 children and young people had been found to have links with county lines activities.

In October 2019, a nationwide police crackdown led to the arrests of 700 people alleged to be connected to county lines trafficking.

- ❖ A 'county lines' enterprise almost always involves the exploitation of vulnerable persons; this can involve both children and adults who require safeguarding
- ❖ There is a need for a multi-agency approach at a national, regional, and local level
- ❖ Secure operating bases are an essential feature of these enterprises which can be successfully disrupted through the concerted application of conventional law enforcement tactics

Exploitation



What is Cuckooing?

Cuckooing is a form of crime, termed by the police, in which drug dealers take over the home of a vulnerable person in order to use it as a base for county lines drug trafficking. The crime is named for the cuckoo's practice of taking over other birds' nests for its young.

The Impact on Families

Drugs & corruption don't always involve just 'the user' drugs and corruption wipes out whole families.

The Law

Possessing or selling drugs is a crime under the Misuse of Drugs Act of 1971. Selling (referred to as supply) carries harsher penalties and can result in imprisonment.

Some gang members, or those worried about gang pressures, end up carrying weapons to protect themselves. Getting caught with a knife or weapon is also an offence under the Criminal Justice Act of 1988 and the Prevention of Crime Act of 1953. Criminal proceedings can vary from a locally agreed low-level resolution agreed out of court, which doesn't result in a formal criminal record, right up to imprisonment. Knife crimes generally carry higher sentences and usually result in a charge to court. Police and prosecutors will make decisions depending on the age of the person carrying the weapon and the circumstances.

Police have recognised that many young people drawn into gang association are very vulnerable and should be treated as victims. Sometimes those victims will have committed an offence that needs dealing with as well, but the police focus has now changed to try to protect unwilling victims caught up in gang membership.

- One law used to prosecute those who exploit young people in this way is the Modern Slavery Act of 2015
- Anyone forced into selling drugs, whether locally or by being transported to other areas, is a victim of slavery and trafficking
- They can be supported through a process called the National Referral Mechanism
- This gives the victim a legally protected period during which they can receive advice about what to do next
- For anyone particularly vulnerable, such as teenagers, additional help may be available. The criminal penalties for those convicted of offences under the Modern Slavery Act are severe
- Criminal convictions can result in you being prevented from carrying out certain types of jobs or visiting certain countries

Recognising Risk

- ❖ Based on what you have learned from the discussion, make a list of things that may be a sign that someone is being groomed for gang or county lines purposes
- ❖ How would someone act?
- ❖ Where could they be found?
- ❖ Who or What could they be found with?

Getting help and finding out more

- ❖ Police - the police have a duty to protect young people and while they have to investigate and deal with crime, safeguarding is always the top priority
- ❖ They can refer young people caught up in gangs to other sources of help and support
- ❖ Local councils can refer to the National Referral Mechanism
- ❖ A number of other authorities can help and some charities, such as Evolve www.evolenorthwest.com
- ❖ You can also look at Fearless <https://www.fearless.org/en> (Crimestoppers Youth version)
- ❖ Fearless provides non-judgemental advice and is anonymous. It is aimed at ages 11 to under 24 years
- ❖ www.fearless.org/en/campaigns/county-lines - This contains an explanation of how county lines work, definitions, and how to get help

Need Help?

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