



JDiBrief – Crime

Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation: CRIME OVERVIEW (2 of 5)

Authors: Helen Brayley and Ella Cockbain, UCL Jill Dando Institute

DEFINITION: The UK Department of Schools, Children and Families guidance states that:

'Sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, drugs, alcohol, accommodation, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities'.

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) can be broken down into the four general categories; online, peer-on-peer, institutional and community-based. Familial offences are not normally considered CSE. This document addresses community-based CSE, which includes the sex trafficking of children within the UK. As the exploitation of UK and foreign victims differs greatly, we focus here on British children. The following UK police operations have employed innovative methods in their investigation of CSE crimes and evidence-gathering for prosecution.

Landmark UK police operations		
Retriever (Derbyshire) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 14 offenders, 27 victims• Successful use of covert tactics	Span (Greater Manchester) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 9 offenders, 5 victims• 1st conviction for internal sex trafficking of Britons	Engage (Lancashire) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• On-going since 2006• 1st use of a co-located multi-agency team

CRIME CHARACTERISTICS: In simplified terms, this crime consists of three stages: 'find', 'groom' and 'abuse'. When not recruiting new victims via existing ones, offenders typically search for targets in public places. After initiating conversation, they obtain the child's name, age and contact details. Grooming starts immediately and can continue during and after abuse. Both positive and negative grooming manipulations are used, such as flattering victims, providing free drink, insulting and threatening them. The actual abuse occurs at various locations, including parks, cheap hotels and 'party' flats. Victims may be abused by a single offender, multiple offenders at once, or numerous men in quick succession. Levels of repeat victimisation are high, leaving many victims embroiled in the cycle of abuse for weeks, months, even years.

LEGAL: Group-based CSE is a pattern of abuse, not a distinct criminal offence. It can include a wide range of offences, such as rape, sexual activity with a child, false imprisonment and internal sex trafficking.

HARMS: CSE carries high costs both to individuals and to society, in the short, medium and long term. Alongside immediate trauma to victims, CSE puts strain on the healthcare, education, benefit and criminal justice systems.

RISK FACTORS: Barnardo's have identified key indicators to help recognise when a child may be at risk of sexual exploitation. Individually, many are part of 'normal' teenage behaviour, which can impede detection of CSE. They include: going missing; disengagement from school; unexplained gifts; associating with other victims; negative changes in behaviour; drugs/alcohol misuse; highly sexualised behaviour.