MODERN SLAVERY & HUMAN RIGHTS | POLICY & EVIDENCE CENTRE

Led by the University of Oxford

Complex patterns of child exploitation in an English semi-rural county

An exploratory study

November 2025

Author: **Dr. Craig Barlow, Honorary Research Fellow; Wilberforce Institute, University of Hull**

Photo by Umair Dingmar on Unsplash

Research by:

UNIVERSITY of HULL | Wilberforce Institute

Contents

Acronyms

CCE	Child Criminal Exploitation
CPS	Crown prosecution Service
CSAE	Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IICSA	Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse
IMD	Indices of Multiple Deprivation
LPA	Local Police Area
NCA	National Crime Agency
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
MSA	Modern Slavery Act
NRM	National referral Mechanism
POLIT	Police Online Investigation Team
ONS	Office for National Statistics
SVA	Statement Validity Analysis

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose

This report provides a detailed summary of the exploratory research conducted with the police service in the subject county. Identifying information has been excluded from this report, but the full research report may be provided on request and with the consent of the police service in the subject county.
The aim of the research was to examine patterns of child exploitation within the county and understand and compare the characteristics of perpetrators of child criminal exploitation (CCE) and child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) and the young people they target. The police sought insights that could inform policy development and strategic and tactical decision making in the context of child exploitation within the county.

1.2. Background

The subject county is in the East Midlands of England with an estimated population of 0.5-1m residents. This county is experiencing a rapid change in crime patterns involving drugs distribution, gangs, and child trafficking and exploitation (including Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) – CCE and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) – Consistent with the NCA National Threat Assessment (National Crime Agency, 2021), the police force in the subject area also explained that the online recruitment of children for exploitation is an increasing threat in the region.

Recent independent reports on both child sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation have been critical of law enforcement and local authorities' safeguarding services for a perceived failure to map patterns of child exploitation in their local areas, recommending stronger problem-profiling procedures (Longfield, 2019). The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, chaired by Baroness Jay, stated that child sexual exploitation had become eclipsed by the problem of child criminal exploitation and the county lines drugs distribution phenomenon and accused police and local authorities of losing sight of child sexual exploitation (Jay, et al., 2022). The term "exploitation" includes a variety of patterns of behaviour and abuse that can occur simultaneously as a broader pattern of exploitation in which children are multiply abused in different contexts over time. While local and national policies and procedures tend to separate exploitation into different categories, the necessity of a working definition of child exploitation became apparent and is addressed later in this report.

The subject county police have conducted and participated in several large operations to combat drugs distribution. In 2019, Operation #1 successfully disrupted county lines drug gangs operating in the county's capital town. Several gangs were disrupted, and their members were convicted. However, the team also discovered many teenagers and vulnerable adults that were exploited by the gangs. Further investigations by the subject county police since 2019 have been similarly successful and have resulted in the conviction of criminals under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 for trafficking of children with a view to their exploitation.

The subject county police have recently conducted Operation #2 (launched in 2020 and ongoing), a major investigation into historic child sexual abuse and exploitation that centred around a specific location in the county's capital town. This landmark was a place where predatory adults targeted teenage children who congregated there. The targeting and sexual exploitation of children by groups of adults through localised and street grooming has been uncommon in the county although not unheard of. In contrast, the targeting and sexual abuse and exploitation of children online has been far more common as the means by which children, particularly teenage girls, are abused by adults acting alone or in collusion with others. The subject area police online investigation team (POLIT)

can boast a high success rate in the identification and prosecution of online sex offenders and suggest that this context represents the greatest threat for sexual exploitation in the county.

Following a training course on interviewing children and vulnerable witnesses, facilitated by the author, Senior Officers discussed with the author patterns of trafficking and exploitation and perpetrator behaviours and motivations. They explained that as a force, they are keenly aware of the general criticisms raised in recent inquiry reports such as the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (2022). They nevertheless felt that the standard methods of problem profiling recommended in these reports and the general guidance available to the police on trafficking and exploitation of children, do not adequately reflect the challenges and needs of a semirural county such as theirs. The county has a diverse mix in terms of wealth and opportunity, as well as poverty and deprivation. Major communication links by road and rail run through the county, connecting it easily to several large cities and coastal towns. This makes the subject county a source area for the recruitment and exploitation of children (and vulnerable adults), as well as a destination area and transit point. Following this discussion, The Wilberforce Institute offered to conduct an exploratory research project to investigate patterns of child exploitation (all identified forms of exploitation) within the county, considering its geographical location, communication routes, demographics, and distribution of wealth and deprivation.

A further meeting was convened to identify research questions that would be of academic interest and helpful to the development of policy and practice. The questions and scope of the project were agreed upon by the core participants from the Police and the author, then formulated as a research proposal for the Wilberforce Institute. The proposal was approved by the Modern Slavery Policy and Evidence Centre (MSPEC) as part of a two-stream programme of research into legal enforcement and modern slavery led by the Wilberforce Institute (the other stream being financial investigations of modern slavery led by Dr Alicia Heys). The project has been funded by the AHRC/ MSPEC as an independent study supported by the Subject County Police service.

The research problem was formulated in consultation with specialists, senior police officers, and civilian practitioners (Police, Health, Social Care and Education).

1.3. Research problem

1.3.1. The problem with problem profiling

Responses to child trafficking and exploitation in England and Wales often fail to identify children as potential victims because of flawed assumptions about victims, perpetrators, and exploitation processes (Murphy et al., 2022; Heys et al., 2022). This results in a reductive understanding and policy and practice recommendations that are limited in their scope and practical application (Barlow, 2022). The reports of two recent independent inquiries are illustrative of this problem.

The 2013 Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into CSE in gangs and groups recommended regular problem profiling to analyse and understand exploitation patterns. This should inform multi-agency strategies, action plans, service commissioning and professional training (Borowitz et al., 2013). The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) report echoed this, stating that problem profiles should consolidate information from different agencies to enable a comprehensive understanding and effective action (Jay et al., 2022).

However, neither report details how to formulate problem profiles or appropriate data collection and analysis parameters. The Children's Commissioner's 2013 report suggested including data on exploited children, intelligence on risky locations such as businesses and schools, and information on gangs and networks (Berlitz et al., 2013). However, this broad scope could generate vast amounts of data without clear interpretation and operational guidelines.

The UK Government's Child Exploitation Disruption Toolkit recommends that problem profiles include the number of exploited children, profiles of suspected offenders, and information on locations and organized crime gangs. However, identifying exploited children and defining exploitation can be challenging, as this report will highlight.

Calls for statutory definitions of child exploitation, similar to the legal definition of CSE established in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and CPS guidance, aim to aid professional decision making (James, 2021). However, statutory definitions could face interpretation issues, as seen with the Section 45 defence for modern slavery victims forced into crime (Barlow, 2022; Burland, 2017).

This study aims to address the limitations of these shortcomings to formulate clearer, practicable recommendations for police forces and their partner agencies. It was designed by the author as exploratory research to answer specific research questions raised by the subject police force and to make recommendations for further development.

Exploitation patterns are context-specific and variable, making predictions and risk assessments/problem profiles (?) difficult. Lists of exploitation indicators, while useful, highlight correlates rather than causes, and their importance lies in their configuration over time (Barlow, 2019). This raises questions regarding the nature and impact of the risks identified in the problem profiles.

The College of Policing differentiates between problem and subject profiles. Problem profiles detail crime trends, hot spots, and patterns, aiding in subject identification, prioritisation, and identifying intelligence gaps. Subject profiles provide detailed reports on suspects or potential victims, assisting in investigations and protecting victims.

The College emphasises the importance of identifying patterns, relationships, and networks over time and suggests actions to counter or minimise identified risks (College of Policing, 2013). Whichever method is used for profiling the problem of child exploitation, there are three main challenges that make it a formidably difficult task:

Summary of key challenges

1. Hidden and underreported nature of exploitation

- Most child exploitation occurs behind closed doors, in online environments, or within networks that deliberately conceal abuse. Victims often do not report due to fear, shame, coercion, or a lack of understanding that they are being exploited. Professionals may also miss key indicators.

- The College of Policing (2013) states that "the true scale of CSE is likely to be significantly under-represented in crime recording systems, due to issues around identification, reporting and recording." As a result, problem profiles based solely on recorded crime data are likely to understate the scale and miss critical patterns of harm.

2. Inconsistent recording and definitions across agencies

- There is no nationally consistent operational definition of exploitation that is applied across policing, children's services, health, and other partners.

- The APP notes that "different areas may define and record exploitation differently, making it difficult to compare or aggregate data."

- In some areas, CSE may be recorded under missing persons, truancy, or youth offending, which masks the true extent of harm.

- Variations in IT systems, threshold criteria, and categorisation practices further undermine the ability to form a coherent multi-agency picture.

3. Complexity and adaptability of exploitation networks

Exploitation is a dynamic phenomenon. Perpetrators frequently change tactics, relocate, or exploit new digital and social environments.

- The APP highlights "the evolving nature of offender behaviour, technology use, and grooming methods" as a significant barrier to intelligence development.

- Young people may be subjected to multiple forms of exploitation (e.g., both sexual and criminal), and moved across local authority boundaries.

- Static profiling approaches are likely to fail without ongoing monitoring and adaptation to emergent local threats

Acknowledging these gaps in problem profiling, the following research questions emerged:

1. Can geographical profiling be applied to map offender behaviour, networks, and different contexts for potential child exploitation?
   a. If so, can we identify environmental factors that maintain or prevent/stop different patterns of child exploitation?

2. What is the causal pathway of predatory and exploitative behaviour in perpetrators of sexual abuse and violence during sexual or criminal abuse and exploitation against children and young people?

3. What are the emerging forms of communication, including language, codes, and symbols, used by offenders engaged in child exploitation?

4. How can risk assessment and management be improved, and evidence be adduced and articulated to and between partner agencies?

5. What are the relevant characteristics of those who might be in the dual situation of offender and victim (e.g., in the context of forced criminality), and how can investigators take account of this in adducing evidence of serious organised crime, weighing the public interest element of charging decisions and the positive obligation to safeguard offenders who are potential victims of trafficking and exploitation within the meaning of the MSA 2015?

6. How can Police collaborate with partner agencies (such as social care services, health, education, and third sector service providers) and other (civil) legislation to safeguard potential victims, pursue, disrupt, and prosecute individual and group offenders?

1.4. Summary of challenges in conducting research on child exploitation

1.4.1. Data limitations

- **Under-reporting:** Official crime data often under-reports child exploitation due to its hidden nature and difficulties in recording evolving forms, such as cybercrime. Victimisation surveys, while offering broader perspectives, may fail to effectively capture children's experiences (Pease and Tseloni, 2019).

- **Inadequacy of official crime statistics:** Sole reliance on these data sources is insufficient. Surveys often focus on adults, thus missing the nuances critical to understanding child exploitation. A comprehensive data analysis informed by both theory and local insights is necessary.

1.4.2. Definition and scope

- **Ambiguity in definitions:** Statutory and non-statutory definitions of key terms (e.g., child exploitation, trafficking, and gangs) are often narrow and lack consensus, excluding certain forms of exploitation.

- **Complex nature of key terms:** The definitions of child criminal exploitation (CCE) and child sexual exploitation (CSE) are operationally and contextually challenging. Statutory guidance (e.g., "Working Together to Safeguard Children and their Families", 2023) provides useful but limited definitions, often failing to account for the dynamic and adaptive nature of these forms of exploitation.

- **Overlap and variance:** Terms such as "gangs" and "organised crime" are highly variable and contested, complicating their application to CCE cases (Decker & Kempf-Leonard, 1991; Bjerregaard, 2002; von Lampe, 2019).

1.4.3. Complexity

- **Multi-faceted nature:** Child exploitation results from the interplay of vulnerable individuals, motivated perpetrators, and conducive environments, creating a highly interconnected and dynamic issue.

- **Static frameworks:** Existing tools, such as checklists and linear flowcharts (e.g., Home Office, 2018), fail to capture the relational dynamics and complexities of these cases (Barlow, 2019).

- **Data aggregation challenges:** Specific data on victims and perpetrators are often aggregated or unavailable at granular levels, limiting the precision of research and intervention strategies.

1.5. Literature review

1.5.1. Literature search

Literature was sought using the JSTORE electronic repository, Westlaw, and Lexis Nexis legal repository (for stated cases and commentaries), the Psychinfo literature repository, HEINONLINE, and open searches using Google and Google Scholar search engines.

The search terms used were child sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation + review, child sexual abuse/exploitation + report, child sexual abuse/exploitation+ inquiry, child criminal exploitation, child criminal exploitation+ review, child criminal exploitation + report, and child criminal exploitation+ inquiry.

The NSPCC repository of serious case reviews was searched, and an open-source search for official reports, reviews, and guidance was conducted using the search terms C.S.E., C.C.E, child sexual exploitation + guidance, child criminal exploitation + guidance, child exploitation+ threat assessments, child exploitation + technology + facilitators.

1.5.2. Literature selection process

Suitable literature was selected through a process of title and/or abstract screening. The inclusion criteria consisted of trafficking and exploitation of children, perpetrators of child criminal exploitation, perpetrators of child sexual exploitation, grooming behaviour, patterns of grooming, facilitators, online exploitation, online recruitment, victim impact, modus operandi of perpetrators of child exploitation, law enforcement strategies, and typologies. The typologies. literature included international sources and contexts and was then refined to focus on UK patterns of trafficking and exploitation. Literature that only examined the trafficking and exploitation of adults (aged 18 years and older) was excluded. The literature was organised thematically using NViVO 14. The above research questions were formulated and then used to analyse the literature searched which then led to the identification of the following themes.

1.5.3. Theme 1: Patterns of child exploitation

Child exploitation is a dynamic and evolving issue that, continuously adapts to different environments and criminal motivations. It encompasses various forms of abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological harm. Common characteristics among exploited children in England and Wales include extreme poverty, adverse family contexts, poor education, substance abuse, exposure to domestic violence, and prior victimisation (Barlow, 2019).

1.5.4. Theme 2: CSE trends and legal context

Nationally, a significant proportion of child sexual offences are related to exploitation and human trafficking. In 2021, the Modern Slavery and Exploitation Helpline reported that 27% of potential child victims experienced sexual exploitation (Office for National Statistics and NSPCC). Cases of child sexual exploitation have increased, with 17,486 cases logged in 2021/22, marking a 10% rise from previous years (NSPCC). These offences are often prosecuted under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and the Modern Slavery Act 2015 (Sentencing Council and Crown Prosecution Service).

1.5.5. Theme 3: Psychological and social impact

The harm resulting from exploitation is primarily psychological and emotional, impairing a child's emotional, psychological, and social development. This includes mechanisms of abuse, such as traumatic bonding, where victims develop paradoxical attachments to their exploiters (De Fabrique et al. 2007). Such relationships can make extraction from abusive environments challenging, as the child perceives threats to their established equilibrium (Logan, 2018). Similar dynamics are seen in domestic abuse cases, where victims may develop cognitive distortions to accommodate their abuser's behaviour (Graham et al. 1988).

1.5.6. Theme 4: ICT facilitated exploitation

The Internet facilitates various forms of exploitation, including child sexual abuse and criminal activities such as "county lines" drug distribution (National Crime Agency 2020). Social media is frequently used for initial contact, targeting children from poor backgrounds or those already engaged in offending behaviour (Barlow 2019; Murphy et al. 2022). Despite significant attention being paid toon ICT-facilitated sexual exploitation, research on its role in other forms of exploitation remains limited (Harding, 2020).

1.5.7. Theme 5: Online child exploitation

Grooming involves establishing an emotional connection with a child to facilitate abuse, including sexual assault and the production of indecent images. The Internet has expanded opportunities for grooming and exploitation (Kloess et al. 2014; Whittle et al. 2012; Tener, Wolak, and Finkelhor 2015; Mishna, McLuckie, and Saini 2009). The rise of live-streamed abuse and self-generated sexual content is particularly concerning, with a 168% increase in self-generated imagery from 2020 to 2021 (Internet Watch Foundation, 2021). Sextortion, involving blackmail using sexual images, has also increased, with victims often being females aged 16-17 (Finkelhor and Wolak 2016; Wolak et al. 2018; Patchin and Hinduja 2018).

1.5.8. Theme 6: Exploitation dynamics

Exploitation arises from complex interactions among perpetrators, targets, and their environments. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model highlights the importance of the relationship between biological development and environmental factors (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Belsky (1980) integrated models that considered psychological disturbances in parents, abuse-eliciting child characteristics, and dysfunctional family patterns. These models have limitations though, such as their failure to explain the varied nature of child exploitation (Byrne & Callaghan, 2014).

1.5.9. Theme 7: Theoretical perspectives

Various theories have been developed to explain child abuse and exploitation, incorporating biological, psychological, developmental, and cultural factors into the discussion. Finkelhor (2008) highlights the high victimisation rates among juveniles and the severe consequences for their development and education (Beckett & Warrington 2014; Bagley & King 1990; Dwivedi & Harper, 2004). Caplan (2011) emphasises the role of environmental factors in creating conducive environments for exploitation.

Combining complexity theory with evolutionary, criminological, developmental, and psychological theories provides a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of child exploitation. This approach frames exploitation as emerging from interactions between complex adaptive systems, addressing the limitations of other models (Green & McDermott 2010; Vanvan der Watt & Vanvan der Westhuizen 2017).

Practice guidance on child abuse often refers to signs and signals of child exploitation, which can be understood as interactions. Exploiters emit signals implying opportunity, while targets assess these signals based on the exploiter's trustworthiness and potential benefits (Gambetta 2009). Some studies have identified how criminals may value a child for their physical attributes and effectiveness as directed agents. Children that are deemed by their exploiters to have performed well or to be successful, may advance from exploited to exploiter roles, increasing their value to a crime group in terms of their criminal capital (Densley 2012; Zimmerman et al. 2006).

This literature review underscored the importance of drawing on both complexity theory and signalling theory to shape the methodological approach.

2. Methodology

2.1. Challenges

Self-report data often provides higher prevalence rates than official crime statistics for sexual offences (Kaylor 2022). Clayton (Clayton, et al., 2018) points out that empirical research on CSAE is extremely heterogeneous. Often, research depends to some extent on the retrospective recall of participants, be they victims or perpetrators. The strength or reliability of this evidence can be undermined by the risk of recall bias. Research with offenders can also suffer from socially desirable responding by participants, distorting the accuracy of their evidence. This latter problem can to some extent be mitigated by including tests to detect deception and dissimulation, such as the Paulhus Deception Scales questionnaire (Paulhus, 1998), which measures two forms of deception: impression management (conscious effort in socially desirable responses) and self-deceptive enhancement (a more unconscious overly self-enhancing response pattern that is more indicative of a pervasive lack of insight).

Most studies of offenders have relied on evidence from those who have been convicted of sexual offences and are in custodial or clinical settings. Consequently, such research is often influenced by the criminal legal definitions of CSA and those who have been proven, beyond a reasonable doubt, to have crossed the threshold for criminal prosecution. This means that there is far less empirical evidence concerning CSA that has not reached the threshold or that there was not a realistic possibility of successful prosecution being successful. Therefore, data on perpetrator behaviour are therefore more likely to be informed by retrospective victim accounts.

To address the challenges of profiling child exploitation and align with guidance from the College of Policing, this study employed a mixed-methods approach grounded in complex systems theory to ensure relevance for the subject area of police and partner agencies.

2.2. Data collection

Details of reported cases of child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, and other forms of exploitation (with or without trafficking) were collated from a review of local press reports. The period for inclusion was 2019 to 2023, and the author screened these reports for details of convictions, sentencing, and victims located in the subject county. Sources of these reports were subject area police press releases (n=15), the BBC, and local news media, such as e.g. print and radio (n=10).

2.2.1. Quantitative data sources

- Population and Density Data: Data was gathered for each Local Policing Area (LPA) from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Policy and Practice databases (Policy in Practice, 2023).

- Crime Data: Local crime statistics for LPAs were accessed via the police.uk crime maps on 6 June 2023 (police.uk).

- Child Deprivation Data: Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) were used to select data on child deprivation, focusing on income, education, crime, housing, and barriers to services. Additionally, ONS datasets on children living in absolute and relative poverty were included in the analysis.

National Referral Mechanism (NRM) statistics for trafficked children were collected from the UK government's National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify Statistics for the period 2019 to the first quarter of 2023. National data was collated for comparative purposes and data for the subject area was compared on the same criteria in nearby counties. Comparison focused on age, gender and ethnicity/country of origin, type of exploitation, local authorities, and police as first responders and to which Police area cases were referred for investigation following reasonable grounds decisions.

2.2.2. Qualitative data sources

A core research group of 8 professionals was formed with the assistance of officers from the child protection team, POLIT and serious crime/counter terrorism department and crime analysis team who utilised their connections with partner agencies to invite practitioners from health, social care and education with experience and specialist skills in safeguarding children in the context of trafficking and exploitation.

Qualitative case studies were then constructed from discussions with police colleagues in the core research group and from open sources such as press releases and media reports. Cases of child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation and cases of criminal exploitation were compared for similarity and difference. Some narrative accounts of investigations were also provided by individual police investigators.

As well as the participant core group, two additional focus groups were conducted with frontline professionals from within policing, social care, and health services. These focus groups explored professionals' perception and description of child exploitation within the county and local issues.

Ethical Considerations

This study presented no risks to participants' physical health or safety. Participants were highly qualified and experienced professionals drawn from policing, social care, and health services, all with in-depth knowledge of child protection practice and the communities in which they work. Their expertise contributed significantly to managing both ethical and practical dimensions of the project.

Participant recruitment followed ethical and pragmatic lines that were approved by the Institution's Ethics Board. The original research question was developed collaboratively with a Public Protection Team (PPT) Sergeant and Inspector. Once the proposal was approved for funding, the remaining participants were largely self-selecting, having been informed of the project and invited to participate by the same Sergeant. Initial recruitment was led by the PPT Sergeant and Inspector, who identified experienced officers with relevant knowledge. Following these introductions, additional professionals actively requested to join the study. All participants were fully briefed in the aims and objectives of the project and received information leaflets with their participant consent forms.

The focus group ultimately comprised officers from the PPT, Child Exploitation Team, and the Cyber and High-Tech Crime Unit. Their participation was further supported by a senior crime analyst with oversight of local child safeguarding and exploitation data. The participants' professional judgement, established networks, and commitment to the research process helped ensure that access to sensitive information was secure, proportionate, and ethically sound throughout.

Data extraction for both literature reviews and qualitative data analysis was conducted using NVivo 14 and for quantitative data using Microsoft Excel.

2.3. Methodological framework

- **Emergent Constructivist Framework:** The research integrated a constructivist approach with realist evaluation principles (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) to understand the mechanisms, contexts, and outcomes of child trafficking and exploitation.

- **Circles of Analysis Model (Barlow, 2019):** This framework examines the dynamics of child exploitation through three interconnected systems:

  1. **Suitable Target (Child):** Factors making children vulnerable, including visibility, accessibility, and ease of control.

  2. **Motivated Perpetrator:** Emotional and psychological factors driving abusive behaviour.

  3. **Conducive Environment:** Environmental conditions enabling exploitation, such as lack of guardianship or enabling social contexts.

By recognising the child, perpetrator and conducive environment as complex systems it is possible to evaluate how they intersect and interact .To understand the dynamic relationship between child and environment, child and perpetrator and perpetrator and environment, a concept from complex adaptive systems theory "Possibility Spaces" (Barlow 2019 and 2025) was applied. This model identifies "Possibility Spaces," represent the critical intersections where interventions can be most effective. Whilst the patterns of exploitation may be extremely diverse and complex, the fundamental rules that govern how the relational dynamics are initiated, maintained and evolved can enable the analyst to identify suitable interventions, anticipate the short to medium effects on the component parts of the overall system and how it will be likely to adapt to maintain its integrity and continuation.
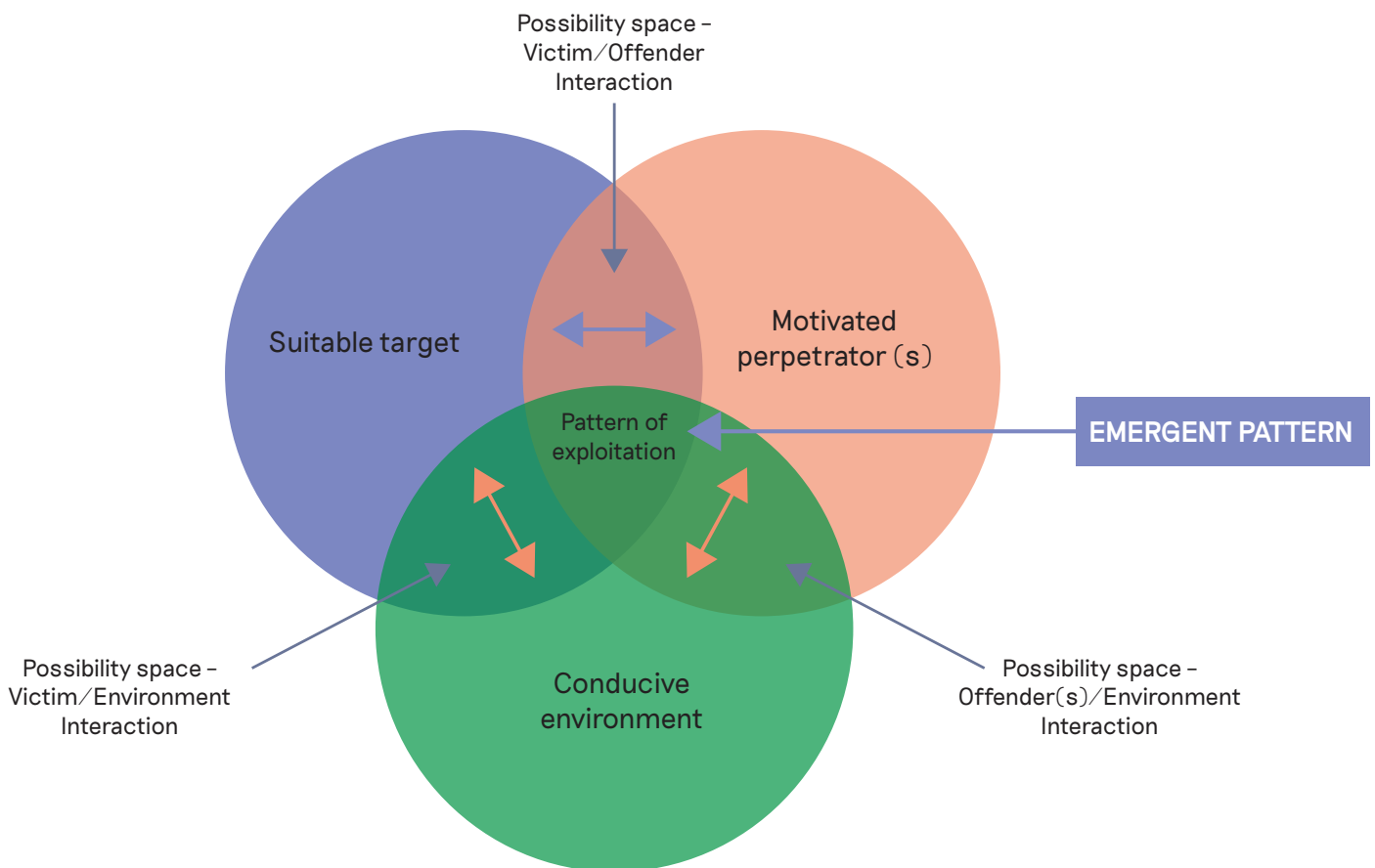

Figure 1: The Circles of Analysis with the Possibility Spaces.

2.4. Circles of analysis model for child exploitation

The Circles of Analysis model, developed by Barlow (2019), offers a way to understand Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) as a complex and evolving interaction between victims and perpetrators within a shared social and environmental context. Rather than viewing exploitation as a set of isolated incidents or traits, this model focuses on how patterns of behaviour emerge over time from the interaction of multiple influencing factors.

At its core, the model provides a structure for organising large volumes of diverse and sometimes fragmented information. It helps identify key variables—such as age, location, relationships, and environmental pressures—and examine how different combinations of these factors may interact. When certain conditions are met or specific triggers are present, these variables may give rise to mechanisms that lead to different patterns of behaviour. These behaviours, or "outputs," then change and adapt in response to the surrounding context.

The model has been applied by academics and practitioners in various ways, including:

- Research data analysis (Murphy et al., 2022),

- Professional judgement and decision-making (Barlow, 2019; Barlow, Green Heys & Derby, 2022),

- Case management and supervision (Barlow, 2025),

And in shaping policy development and evaluation frameworks.

In this study, as in Murphy et al. (2022), the Circles of Analysis model was used to structure the research process from the outset. It helped define the scope of the study using the model's three core "circles" (victim, perpetrator, and environment), classify and prioritise relevant data, and analyse patterns of exploitation by exploring correlations, confounding variables, and dependencies.

The novel contribution of this study lies in applying this theory-informed model to examine the characteristics of offenders, forms of exploitation, and relational dynamics between victim, perpetrator, and environment. Rather than relying solely on predefined "risk factors," indicators, or typologies, this approach seeks to explain how and why different patterns of exploitation emerge in different contexts and among different populations. This shift in perspective has important implications for how we assess risk and develop more responsive, evidence-based strategies for identifying and disrupting exploitation.

Child exploitation arises from the interaction of three main factors:

1. **The Child (Suitable Target):**
   Some children are more vulnerable to exploitation due to specific factors:

   - **Value:** The child has something the perpetrator wants, which could be emotional, financial, or other needs.

   - **Inertia:** How easy it is for the perpetrator to control the child, often influenced by a power imbalance or the child's dependence.

   - **Visibility:** How the child comes to the attention of a perpetrator, such as through their behaviour, online presence, or social isolation.

   - **Accessibility:** How easily the perpetrator can reach the child, often shaped by the child's environment and circumstances.

2. **The Perpetrator (Motivated Actor):**
   For exploitation to occur, there must be a perpetrator who is motivated to abuse. Their motivations often stem from emotional needs, poor self-control, or difficulty forming healthy relationships.

3. **The Environment (Conducive Conditions):**
   Even with a vulnerable child and a motivated perpetrator, abuse only happens if the environment allows it.

   - **Enabling factors** include:

     - Lack of protection, like absent or inattentive caregivers.

     - Physical opportunities, such as secluded locations or unsafe spaces.

     - Facilitators, like neglectful adults, corrupt officials, or unwitting helpers (e.g., landlords or taxi drivers).

Child exploitation is not controlled by one single factor. Instead, it develops from the way these three systems (child, perpetrator, and environment) interact.

- Patterns of exploitation and harm emerge when:

  - The child is **visible** and **accessible** to the perpetrator.

  - The perpetrator feels they will not be caught or punished.

  - The child's vulnerabilities align with the perpetrator's needs.

3. Adapting patterns of exploitation

When examining child trafficking and exploitation through the lens of complex adaptive systems theory, investigators can start to see how patterns of abuse tend to settle into stable routines over time. These routines—or patterns of harmful behaviour—become familiar and entrenched. However, when something disrupts them, such as a police intervention or safeguarding response, perpetrators often adapt their methods to maintain control. This can lead to new patterns of exploitation, which may be different in form but follow predictable dynamics (Barlow 2019, 2025).

3.1. Definition generation

There is no single, statutory definition of child sexual exploitation or criminal exploitation. There is no facility within police indices for recording cases of actual or suspected child exploitation. It was agreed by the core participants in the research group, that a working definition was required to establish the parameters for data collection and analysis. To achieve this a small panel of local experts was assembled to reach a consensus on the definition of child exploitation for the purposes of this project.

The definition was generated and refined using a Delphi method enabling all participants to contribute to the formulation of the definition through a process of comment, review, feedback, and refinement.

- **Focus Groups and Interviews:** Practitioners provided qualitative insights on child sexual exploitation (CSE), child criminal exploitation (CCE), and trafficking.
- **Delphi Survey:** A consensus-building method refined definitions and parameters of child exploitation over three survey rounds, culminating in a working definition tailored to local contexts.

The Delphi method is a qualitative research technique used to gather and distil the knowledge and insights of a group of experts on a particular topic. It is especially useful when dealing with complex issues where there may be uncertainty or disagreement. The Delphi method proceeds through the following stages:

3.1.1. Expert panel selection

The first step involves selecting a group of experts who have knowledge and expertise relevant to the research topic. Participants were recruited via an e-mail invitation to police officers and colleagues in partner agencies concerned with child exploitation and child safeguarding. From eleven invitations, six specialist professionals joined the panel

3.1.2. Round-robin questionnaire

The experts are presented with a series of open-ended questions or statements related to the research topic. Each expert provides their responses independently, without knowledge of the other participants' answers. This anonymity encourages honest and unbiased input.

3.1.3. Iterative process

After the initial round, the panellists' comments are collected, collated, and summarised. These summaries are then redistributed to the experts in subsequent rounds, along with additional questions or refinements based on the previous round's feedback.

3.1.4. Consensus building

The process continues through multiple rounds, typically until a consensus or convergence of opinions is reached among the experts. Sometimes, the facilitator may provide feedback on areas of disagreement or divergence, encouraging further discussion and refinement of ideas.

3.1.5. Final report

Once consensus is achieved or the predetermined stopping point is reached, the facilitator compiles the results into a comprehensive report. This report summarises the experts' insights, identifies key themes, areas of agreement, and areas of uncertainty or disagreement. The report may also include recommendations or implications for decision-making or further research.

The Delphi method offers several advantages in qualitative research:

- **Anonymity:** Experts can express their opinions freely without fear of judgement or bias.

- **Clarification:** The iterative nature of the Delphi method allows for the refinement and clarification of ideas over multiple rounds.

- **Consensus Building:** By seeking consensus among experts, the Delphi method can generate robust insights and recommendations.

- **Flexibility:** The Delphi method can be adapted to various research topics and settings, making it a versatile tool in qualitative research.

3.2. Key insights for practice

- Understanding perpetrator behaviours—including victim selection, coercion methods, and abuse opportunities—is essential for identifying vulnerabilities and improving intervention strategies.

- The complexity of child exploitation requires dynamic approaches informed by interconnected systems and emergent local knowledge.

This methodology balances quantitative data analysis with qualitative insights to provide actionable recommendations for improving policy and practice.

4. Results

4.1. Consensus based working definition

The ECPAT UK *Beyond Words* report（2025） highlights how the absence of a clear, consistent, and child-centred definition of exploitation in UK law and practice undermines the identification, support, and protection of exploited children. While definitions can guide identification, enable access to support, and shape policy, the report finds that current inconsistencies and legal rigidities create real-world barriers, particularly for older children, boys, and non-UK nationals. Fragmentation across sectors, definitional overlap, and divergence from international standards have contributed to high refusal rates in the National Referral Mechanism（NRM）and systemic under-recognition of certain exploitation types. The report provides insight into how definitional clarity could strengthen safeguarding, improve multi-agency responses, and ensure children do not fall through the gaps between agencies.

As part of this study, a Delphi survey was conducted to develop a shared, practice-informed definition of child exploitation. Over the course of three survey rounds, a high level of consensus was reached among expert participants, whose insights were grounded in their local knowledge and frontline professional experience. This consensus definition was used to guide the selection and interpretation of both qualitative and quantitative data throughout the research. The following definition of Child Exploitation was developed through a Delphi survey as part of this research project. The definition was achieved with a high level of consensus having been refined over the course of three survey rounds. As such the definition reflects the local knowledge and professional experience of the panel. It was therefore used to set the parameters for the identification and collection of quantitative and qualitative data and its analysis.

"Exploitation of children and young people, including young adults past the age of 18, is a multifaceted form of abuse that includes criminal and non-criminal behaviour.

The abusive behaviour:

a. *Includes sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, extortion, and fraud.*

b. *causes immediate harm physically, emotionally, psychologically, socially and economically and is detrimental to the child's long-term health, welfare, and safety.*

c. is a pattern that can combine different forms of abuse.

d. emerges, adapts, and evolves over time.

It is a particular characteristic of some abusive, coercive, or controlling relationships in which the abuser has the advantage of greater power and knowledge or experience. This advantage is used to recruit, ensnare, coerce, manipulate, or deceive a child or young person to establish control and dominance over them.

The exploitation may be facilitated by

a. others who collude with or condone the exploitation, and

b. gain directly or indirectly from the exploitation.

c. The use of property and accommodation services,

d. The use of privately owned or hired transport and public transport services,

e. ICT devices and online platforms and networks

Any child or young person may be purposely used by a motivated individual or group of perpetrators to meet their own personal, material, and social needs or advancement or as an outlet for their emotional, psychological, or sexual thoughts, feelings, and urges."

4.1.1. Evaluation of this definition

This definition, through refinement by the Delphi panel, helpfully categorises abusive behaviour into different types which emphasises the need to understand the multifaceted nature of child exploitation.

The definition is comprehensive and includes a wide range of abusive behaviours and considers the immediate and long-term impacts on the child. The inclusion of "young adults past the age of 18" adds to the comprehensiveness of the definition but may need some clarification or justification since the term "child" typically refers to individuals under 18; if the intention is to also address young adults (perhaps aged 18 to 21) this should be clearly stated and rationalised.

The working definition developed by the panel is extremely inclusive but, if the aim were to establish consensus and clarity, the detail of this definition could cause future difficulties that undermine that aim. To preserve the insights and advice provided by the expert panel, generative AI (Chat GPT) was used to formulate a more concise definition for use by this project. The use of generative AI in refining the working definition was a pragmatic decision made to preserve the insights of the expert Delphi panel while enhancing clarity, accessibility, and practical usability. The main advantage of this approach lies in its ability to systematically

condense and reorganise complex information without introducing new content, thereby maintaining the integrity of panel-derived insights. It also enabled a transparent, repeatable process for refining the language while preserving key concepts such as coercion, facilitation, and developmental harm. However, a potential limitation is that generative AI may prioritise linguistic clarity over contextual nuance unless carefully guided. To address this, the process was closely controlled by the author through iterative prompts and manual review, with each stage grounded in the original panel outputs. Transparency in documenting this process offers an additional safeguard, ensuring accountability and allowing others to appraise the methodology. This hybrid approach, combining human expertise with machine-assisted refinement, was chosen for its capacity to strike a balance between conceptual precision and communicative clarity, making the definition both credible and usable across professional and policy contexts.

Prompt or Step	Explanation
1. Initial Working Definition	Started with full text of definition as developed through three rounds of Delphi panel feedback.
2. Clarify Purpose and Audience	Targeted academic social scientists and informed lay readers—ensuring accessibility without losing depth.
3. Remove Redundancies	Removed repetition, such as restating types of harm or overlapping terms for abuse.
4. Merge Overlapping Points	Combined related ideas (e.g. coercion, power, and manipulation into one cohesive clause).
5. Simplify Complex Phrasing	Converted long, complex sentences into shorter, more accessible.
6. Use Headings/Subheadings to Group Ideas	Used bulleting and paragraph structure to organise key themes: abuse, impacts, power, facilitation, motivation.
7. Preserve Key Concepts (e.g. abuse types, coercion, facilitators)	Ensured all core categories from original were retained in the concise version.
8. Apply Consistent, Plain Language	Replaced jargon with clearer equivalents, e.g., 'used to recruit, ensnare…' became 'used to manipulate or control'.
9. Maintain Formal, Evidence-Based Tone	Retained academic register and professional tone throughout.
10. Reaffirm Delphi Process & Local Consensus	Opened with acknowledgment of Delphi process to ensure transparency and accountability.

Table 1: Generative AI prompts used to produce concise working definition

4.1.2. Concise definition:

"Child exploitation, including that of young adults beyond age 18, is a multifaceted form of abuse that may involve both criminal and non-criminal behaviours.

It includes acts such as sexual, physical, emotional abuse, neglect, extortion, and fraud, causing immediate harm and long-term damage to the child's health, safety, and wellbeing.

Exploitation often emerges as a pattern of abuse that evolves over time and may combine multiple forms of harm. It typically occurs within coercive or controlling relationships, where the perpetrator holds a power advantage— whether through age, status, knowledge, or access—which is used to manipulate, deceive, recruit, or control the child or young person.

Facilitators of exploitation may include:

- *Others who enable or benefit from the abuse*
- *Access to property, accommodation, or transport*
- *Use of ICT, online platforms, and digital networks.*

Exploitation serves the personal, material, or emotional needs of the perpetrator or group, and any child or young person may be purposely targeted or used to fulfil these ends."

This working definition brings much-needed clarity and structure to the concept of child exploitation by explicitly recognising its multifaceted, adaptive, and relational nature. By categorising different forms of abuse and emphasising both immediate harms and long-term impacts, it aligns closely with emerging research and practitioner frameworks.

Notably, the inclusion of "young adults past the age of 18" broadens the scope and reflects real-world challenges, such as the continued exploitation of care leavers or vulnerable 18–21-year-olds. However, it may benefit from further clarification, specifying whether this inclusion refers to transitional safeguarding concerns, or to exploitation patterns that begin in childhood but continue into young adulthood.

The definition is comprehensive enough to guide practical assessments and robust enough to support analytical work, including risk profiling, intervention planning, and cross-agency responses. It also offers a flexible foundation for use in training, evaluation, and policy development.

This working definition emerged inductively from thematic analysis of case data, practitioner interviews, and literature synthesis, aiming to bridge conceptual

clarity with operational utility. Its inclusion of transitional safeguarding and non-criminal exploitative behaviours reflects the complexities encountered in real-world practice (*More-than-Words-ECPAT-UK*, n.d.). The next step is to test the definition's resonance and utility through structured feedback loops with both practitioners and people with lived experience (PWLE). This includes exploring whether the language used is accessible, whether it supports accurate identification and intervention, and whether it captures the evolving nature of exploitation across age thresholds.

Definitions are not neutral, they shape policy, practice, and perception, so care must be taken to ensure this formulation informs rather than constrains multi-agency responses. If refined through collaborative feedback, this definition could serve as a foundational reference point for training, assessment tools, and cross-sector safeguarding frameworks.

To ensure the working definition is not only conceptually sound but also practically effective, its application should be empirically and operationally evaluated. This involves assessing whether the definition improves clarity in frontline assessments, supports consistent identification across agencies, and helps practitioners distinguish exploitation from other forms of harm. Evaluation could include:

1. **focus groups and structured interviews** with practitioners using the definition in training or casework;

2. **scenario-based testing**, where professionals apply the definition to varied case examples and provide feedback on fit and limitations; and

3. **consultation with PWLE**, to explore whether the language and scope reflect their lived realities. Key outcome measures would include clarity, relevance, consistency, and usability across settings. Findings could inform further refinement and potential adoption as part of local or regional safeguarding protocols.

4.2. Conducive environments

To better understand the relationship between social and environmental factors and child exploitation, regression analysis, a statistical tool for understanding the relationship between different variables. was used to identify how variables such as , population density, and crime rates are linked to child exploitation.

This method helps isolate the impact of factors like population size and poverty while controlling for others, moving beyond assumptions to test which factors truly matter. This is important as it helps research to support evidence-based policy decisions and to guide resources to where they'll have the greatest impact.

Despite some limitations in terms of the quantity and scope, the data collected was complex in its nature. For this reason, an additional LASSO Regression analysis was conducted. This version of regression analysis automatically filters out less important variables. It helps identify which risk factors are doing the most work, especially in complex data sets.

By using a Lasso regression model it was possible to pinpoint the most influential predictors, such as total population and relative poverty. This approach was used to add statistical rigour to the findings and helps uncover underlying structural conditions that may contribute to child vulnerability.

The benefits of this model are that it highlights key drivers of child exploitation, supports focused, cost-effective intervention, and handles complex and overlapping risk factors. It has some limitations too that are important to recognise: it still shows association, not causation and its reliability depends on the quality and completeness of available data. There is also the possibility that it can simplify complex, real-world dynamics, an important caveat given the small population sample used in this study.

4.3. Residence of perpetrators and victims

The comparative analysis of NRM data highlights the subject county police's leading role in regional referrals, the data indicates that the subject county police made a proportionately higher number of NRM referrals relative to other police forces in the region, particularly in relation to children aged 17 and under. While this police force also performs strongly in adult referrals, the comparative overrepresentation is most pronounced in child criminal exploitation cases, where the county consistently reports higher totals and proportions. This suggests effective identification practices in relation to exploited children, though it may also reflect under-identification in neighbouring regions. Regional disparities suggest that practices and resource allocation significantly influence the effectiveness of trafficking victim identification and referrals. A fuller population-normalised comparison would strengthen this conclusion.

30 CSAE cases were collected through open-source searches (Police Press Releases, local news media reports) were examined to indicate that offenders typically exploit children online or target those living nearby. None of the victims in this study were transported out of the county, though two offenders travelled into it. In contrast, half of the offenders in the CCE sample came from outside the county.

An analysis of thirty convicted sex offenders showed that their residential addresses at the time of conviction were disproportionately concentrated in the county's principal town. While this area has the highest population density and crime rates overall, the clustering of offender residences appeared elevated even

when considered in proportion to population share[1]. This suggests that residence patterns may reflect more than just statistical expectation, potentially indicating local conditions that heighten exposure to or involvement in serious offending. The sample sizes are small making it difficult to generalise nationally, but these patterns suggest similar analysis with larger samples from wider regions has merit in the development of further insights e.g. whether certain locations feature higher concentrations linked to patterns of policing rather than patterns of crime.

A similar pattern was evident in relation to child criminal exploitation (CCE), where the home addresses of convicted individuals tended to map onto areas with known concentrations of drug-related, violent, and sexual crime. One town, in particular, stood out as a hotspot. Importantly, an equal number of convicted CCE offenders were resident outside the county as within it, suggesting that risk is not solely linked to local residency but may also involve cross-boundary movement and targeted exploitation.

Child sexual abuse and exploitation increasingly occur online, with contact offences typically committed by local offenders. By contrast, the available data indicated that CCE victims are as likely to come from outside the county as from within. Offenders recruiting and controlling children for CCE often live locally, exploiting their knowledge of the victim's background and using threats or violence to exert control. These offenders transport victims within, into, and out of the county, making it a source, destination, and transit area for child exploitation.

4.4. ICT facilitated child exploitation

The analysis of the sample of thirty convicted sex offenders reveals clear patterns in the use of non-human facilitators based on offender age and offence type in relation to the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. Younger offenders (18-21) favour phones, while middle-aged (41-60) offenders use a broader range of digital equipment and social media platforms. Older offenders (>70) are less likely to use multiple facilitators, with specific instances of using gifts, payment, and internet distribution. These insights can guide targeted strategies for monitoring and prevention based on demographic and behavioural patterns.

---

1. While a higher number of offender residences might be expected in more densely populated areas, the observed distribution was compared against population share and crime rates. The findings indicate a disproportionate concentration that may reflect underlying social or environmental vulnerabilities, rather than a simple scaling effect.

4.5. Age demographics of perpetrators

Ward and Seigert's Pathways Model (Ward & Seigert, 2002) explains sexual offending through five distinct pathways, each shaped by different psychological or social factors. Rather than assuming all offenders share the same motivations, this model proposes five distinct pathways, each driven by different psychological or social factors. This nuanced perspective, drawing upon diverse theoretical approaches, emphasises the need for individualised intervention and management plans. While the model is comprehensive and promising for offender assessment and treatment, it has limitations. Empirical validation of the Pathways model is limited, and its complexity may challenge practical application. Nevertheless, empirical validation is not the aim of this research and the model it represents a significant step towards understanding sexual offending behaviours.

4.5.1. Child sex offenders: age, diversity, and offending patterns

The analysis of thirty convicted child sex offenders in this exploratory study shows they are not a homogeneous group:

- **Age and offending trends:** In this sample, the highest number of offenders were aged 21–30, but those aged 41–60 committed the greatest number and diversity of offences. Offending decreased with age overall, but older offenders were more prolific, committing a broader range of offences against diverse victims. This is consistent with larger national studies which have found that younger adults (20s–30s) are *more frequently convicted* for child sexual offences (Weston & Mythen, 2023; Ministry of Justice 2022; Knight & Calobrisi (2025)

  Wider research also indicates that Middle-aged offenders (40s–50s) tend to be *more persistent or prolific*, often committing multiple and varied offences across victims (Widanaralalage et al. 2020ffending generally declines in older age, but older offenders often show more complex offending behaviours, possibly due to increased opportunity, digital literacy, or sustained deviant interest (Widanaralalage et al. 2024; Knight & Calobrisi 2025; Wager 2024).

- **Facilitators by age:** Younger offenders predominantly used mobile phones. Middle-aged offenders used a wider range of digital tools and social media, while older offenders relied on non-digital methods, such as gifts and payments, as well as internet distribution (Sharing child abuse material online or via electronic communication) (Giles et al. 2023)

4.5.2. CCE traffickers: age and trends

The sample of fifteen convicted CCE traffickers contrasted with the sex offenders in several ways.

- **Age trends:** Most offenders were aged 31–44, with a median age of 39. The youngest was 19, and the oldest was 60. Unlike sex offenders, the number of trafficking offenders increased with age.

- **Offending diversity:** Traffickers exhibited less diversity in offending compared to sex offenders, focusing on trafficking-related activities. Whilst this may be an artefact of a smaller sample group, findings in other research are broadly supportive of this local observation. Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse (2021) Notes that while CSA and CCE sometimes overlap, CCE offenders rarely diversify, and usually have prior histories of drug/gang crime.

These local findings are also broadly consistent with national data and wider research. Cockbain and Sidebottom (2022) explored criminal networks behind CCE and county lines. They found that CCE offenders are often in their 30s–40s, exploiting children operationally rather than impulsively. The joint report by Ofsted, HMICFRS, CQC, and HMI Probation (2020) found that CCE controlling figures are often older males (35-60), particularly in cases involving cross-border exploitation. Similarly, the thematic inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation (2021), adult CCE offenders were frequently aged 35+, many with criminal histories dating to adolescence.

4.5.3. Life course trajectories and comparative insights

Within this data, offenders' life trajectories differ by exploitation type:

- **Child sexual offences:** Offences become more diverse with age, although the number of offenders decreases. Older offenders are fewer but more prolific.

- **CCE trafficking:** Offending remains less diverse but increases in frequency with age, reflecting a distinct trajectory compared to sexual offences.

These findings align with broader trends observed in offender data within the UK and internationally, offering valuable insights for developing intervention and prevention strategies (see conclusions of this report s6).

4.6. Characteristics of victims

This exploratory study found significant local variations across the region in the gender distribution of victims of sexual and criminal exploitation among children aged seventeen and under in the subject county LPAs and when compared with national NRM data for other policing areas. While female victims are more prevalent in cases of sexual exploitation, male victims dominate criminal exploitation cases. While gender is a prominent axis of differentiation, with females more frequently referred in sexual exploitation cases and males in criminal exploitation, the comparative analysis suggests that gender alone is insufficient to guide effective intervention design. The intersection of gender with other variables such as age, type of exploitation, and regional referral patterns reveals distinct victim profiles. For example, the subject county shows a higher proportion of male children referred for criminal exploitation, mostly linked to County Lines activity, whereas sexual exploitation cases, while fewer, involve both genders across regions, with subtle variation. Regional disparities in referral volume and exploitation type also point to differences in local awareness, resourcing, and practice, not just victim demographics. Thus, effective intervention requires not only gender-sensitive approaches, but also context-aware and locality-specific strategies that consider the type of exploitation, agency practices, and community context alongside demographic characteristics.

4.7. Qualitative differences between victims and perpetrators when comparing patterns of CSAE and CCE

Analysis of the sex offender data set and CCE perpetrator data set, and the thematic analysis of the qualitative case studies revealed significant differences exist between CSAE and CCE regarding victimology, perpetrators, modus operandi, use of facilitators, and levels of organisation. CSAE offenders demonstrate greater sophistication in accessing victims, employing psychological and emotional coercion. Victims, often but not exclusively female, may be coerced by exploiters into further exploitation. CCE perpetrators, while also using psychological control, rely more heavily on overt violence and threats.

Signalling theory can inform methods to analyse the interaction between a child that is targeted for exploitation and a motivated perpetrator. This theory focuses on how two parties, each with different knowledge and needs, communicate and interpret signals to establish a relationship.

- Both the potential victim and the exploiter have needs that must met for them to form a relationship.

- However, they might not be truthful in their communication.

The perpetrator, seeking to exploit the child, may send out signals that suggest positive attributes like opportunity, generosity, and affection, even if these are untrue. The costs for the perpetrator in sending these misleading signals are low, especially when compared to the potential benefits of exploiting the child. Even if the child rejects their advances or discovers the deception, the perpetrator experiences minimal losses. On the other hand, the child, hoping for genuine benefits like protection or support, is more vulnerable. Misinterpreting signals or having their own signals rejected poses a greater risk for them. Perpetrators can exploit this vulnerability, using various means to assess and manipulate the child's willingness to engage in the exploitative relationship. The likelihood of the child believing the perpetrator's signals increases if they are familiar, share common traits (such as background or values), or are perceived by the child as trustworthy.

4.7.1. Key themes for CCE, distinct from CSAE, include:

- **Home and family life:** Children from unstable backgrounds were drawn to gangs for perceived support. Criminal elements in residential areas destabilised families, necessitating protective interventions, including relocating families due to gang threats. Such interventions were absent in CSAE cases.

- **Violence of criminal gangs:** High risk of violence due to turf wars and confrontations, with gangs frequently using knives, corrosive substances, and firearms for control and intimidation. CSAE cases predominantly involved psychological coercion, with limited use of physical violence or weapons.

- **Weapons use:** Frequent knife use and incidents of stabbings in CCE, contrasting with CSAE, where weapons were less commonly involved.

4.8. Degrees of organisation for CSAE-v-CCE

CCE gangs identified in this study are hierarchically structured, employing consistent recruitment and coercion methods. Consistent with accounts of CCE in the literature, threats and violence are central to their operations. The CSAE offenders, in contrast, tend to operate alone or in loosely connected networks, often with weaker ties and less hierarchical organisation.

- **CSAE:** Offenders' relationships are transactional, involving activities like sharing abuse images. The academic literature on sexual exploitation and trafficking of human beings suggests that Organisation strengthens only when linked to broader criminal enterprises (e.g., prostitution), increasing the likelihood of violence and systematic exploitation. Such levels of organisation

were not evident in the sample of cases analysed in this study with the possible exception of the offenders that were making and distributing indecent images of children within an online network.

- **CCE:** The literature shows that CCE offenders operate within more tightly organised groups, leveraging hierarchies for recruitment and control as described and explained in detail by Whitaker, et al. (2018). The OCGs identified in this study reflect this description.

The Degrees of Organisation Diagrams illustrate the sophistication of CSAE and CCE, reflecting the dynamics between victims and perpetrators.

4.8.1. 1st degree

CSAE: The child perceives the relationship as romantic or consenting, with minimal organisation and no group involvement.

CCE: A child engaging in crime independently retains the gains but becomes visible to predators, increasing vulnerability.

4.8.2. 2nd Ddegree

CSAE: Perpetrators may have close connections to victims' families, isolating victims and exploiting trust to sustain abuse.

CCE: Criminal activity within families may indicate poverty or systemic anti-social narratives, making both child and family vulnerable to predators.

4.8.3. 3rd degree

CSAE: Increased sophistication and collaboration among offenders, though connections remain weaker than in CCE.

CCE: Proceeds from criminal activity are handed over to others in exchange for protection or debt repayment, highlighting greater organisational complexity.

PATTERN OF CSA/E

LONE VICTIM LONE PERPETRATOR

Face to face or online

Relationship orientated

No or few facilitators used

1st degree

LONE PERPETRATOR

1 or more victims

Face to face or online

Sex/control orientated

Sophisticated in victim identification and accessing

Multiple offence types

Multiple facilitators used

Abuse may be recorded and stored or shared

Physical and/or psychological coercion and control

2nd degree

2 OR MORE PERPETRATORS

Multiple victims

Victims may be trafficked

Mixed exploitation types

Multiple offence types

Multiple facilitators used

Co-ordinated group or network

2nd order beneficiaries/ human facilitators

Engaged in wider criminality

3rd degree

Figure 2: Degrees of organisation in CSAE

CHILD ENGAGED IN CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

Gains/benefits retained by child

Gains/benefits retained by family or affiliation group

Gains/benefits represent family income

Gains/benefits service debt

Gains/benefits retained by controller

Gains/benefits service other criminal activities

Gains/benefits service other legitimate activities

Opportunity for co-operative activities

1st degree

2nd degree

3rd degree

Figure 3: Degrees of organisation in CCE

To assess the validity and practical utility of the proposed CSAE and CCE organisational typologies, structured feedback should be gathered from both practitioners and people with lived experience (PWLE). For practitioners, scenario-based workshops and Delphi panels could be used to evaluate how well the model maps onto real-world cases and informs safeguarding or disruption responses. For people with lived experience, facilitated narrative mapping and youth advisory group sessions could explore whether the diagrams reflect their experiences, capture the evolving nature of exploitation, and are accessible in language and structure.

Early testing suggests the diagrams may support case triage, training, and multi-agency strategy by distinguishing opportunistic, familial, and networked forms of harm. Feedback loops from both groups will inform refinement, ensuring the model captures the complexity of victim–perpetrator dynamics without reinforcing oversimplified binaries.

5. Summary of key findings

Finding No.	Summary	Evidence Source	Linked Research Questions – RQ(s)
1	Lack of statutory definition for exploitation complicates identification. Indicators used in profiling are correlational, not causal.	Thematic analysis; Delphi panel; literature synthesis	RQ1, RQ4, RQ7
2	Antisocial behavior and crime cluster in deprived, high-density areas. Violence is normalised; substance use exacerbates risks.	Quantitative analysis (IMD, ONS crime data)	RQ1, RQ2
3	Structural environments shape exploitation likelihood, but data only shows correlation, not causation.	Lasso regression model, GIS mapping	RQ1
4	Exploitation depends on exploiter goals + child's resilience. Resilience is shaped by environment.	Circles of Analysis model; case study data	RQ2, RQ3

Finding No.	Summary	Evidence Source	Linked Research Questions – RQ(s)
5	Exploitation patterns vary by offender age group and align with abuse etiology theories.	Age-offence data analysis; Pathways Model	RQ2, RQ5
6	Role of ICT in criminal exploitation (beyond CSE) is under-researched.	Literature gap + offender demographic patterns	RQ2, RQ3
7	Exploitation is non-linear and needs complex-systems modelling.	Methodological framework; Circles of Analysis	RQ2, RQ4
8	Victim-exploiter dynamics vary by motivation and environment. Environmental factors mediate resilience.	Thematic analysis: practitioner focus groups	RQ2, Q3
9	Could not identify communication patterns due to data limitations.	Methodological limitation	RQ
10	CCE and CSE victims share preconditions: family breakdown, visibility, substance use, health harm.	Thematic analysis; qualitative case data	RQ2, RQ4
11	Gaps in interagency knowledge, inconsistent safeguarding protocols, dual-status children poorly handled in NRM and prosecutions.	Policy/practice review; focus groups	RQ5, RQ6

6. Answers to specific research questions:

Q1. Can we apply geographical profiling to map offender behaviour, networks and different contexts for potential child exploitation? If so, can we identify environmental factors that maintain or prevent/stop different patterns of child exploitation?

The Children's Commissioner's Inquiry (2013) and the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (2022) both recommend problem profiling to understand exploitation, inform service commissioning, train staff, and prioritise action. However, neither provided guidance on creating these profiles or establishing appropriate data collection and analysis parameters.

Efforts at problem profiling for child exploitation often face challenges due to vague definitions and poorly defined scope. The 2013 Children's Commissioner Report outlined a broad definition for problem profiles, risking data overload and unclear application, an issue mirrored in the UK Government's Child Exploitation Disruption Toolkit. These reports also fail to address the complexities of identifying exploitation, as highlighted in Caroline Haughey's 2016 review of the Modern Slavery Act, which underscores the difficulty in defining and identifying exploitation.

Although traditional problem profiling lacks precision due to vague definitions and data overload, this study applied geographical and environmental analysis (supported by regression modeling) to identify key correlations such as poverty and population density. This study advances current understanding of child trafficking and exploitation by offering a grounded, data-informed account of the *differentiated structures and mechanisms* underpinning CCE and CSAE in a semi-rural policing context. Through comparative analysis of NRM referrals, demographic patterns, and regional disparities, it challenges monolithic conceptions of exploitation and foregrounds the importance of *local variation, contextual vulnerability, and degrees of organisational complexity.* The proposed 'Degrees of Organisation' framework introduces a novel typology for interpreting how exploitation evolves across a spectrum from isolated opportunism to structured group-based control, with practical implications for identification, intervention, and disruption. By integrating insights from lived experience and front-line practice, the study bridges analytical and operational perspectives, offering a scalable model for both academic inquiry and practitioner response.

Q2. What is the aetiology of predatory and exploitative behaviour in perpetrators of sexual abuse and violence against children and young people?

Victims and perpetrators of child exploitation are highly heterogeneous, with motivations and methods varying widely. This diversity shapes the relational dynamics between victim and perpetrator, depending on the context and objectives of the exploitation.

Role of ICT and non-human facilitators

The role of ICT in child exploitation, particularly for criminal exploitation, remains under-researched compared to its role in CSE. While ICT has been extensively studied by academics and professionals in the context of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation, less attention has been paid to its use in forced criminality, labour exploitation, and servitude. In the UK, county lines operations exemplify this, relying heavily on mobile phone technology to establish drug deal lines and coordinate recruitment, control, and operations (Harding, 2020; National Crime Agency, 2020; Whitaker et al., 2018).

This study yielded limited direct data on *non-human facilitators* (e.g., digital platforms, financial infrastructure, or transport/logistics systems) within the available case reports (a contrast to the more detailed accounts often found in sex offender profiling literature). Unlike such studies, which typically benefit from extensive post-conviction disclosures and forensic digital evidence, the cases analysed here were often constrained by incomplete information or focused primarily on victim presentation. However, patterns in *modus operandi*, such as the use of consistent contact methods, movement patterns, or debt-based control, did allow for inferred insights into the operational dynamics of the exploitation. These inferences were particularly useful in identifying the presence and function of organised crime group (OCG) processes, even where the structure or membership of such groups was not explicitly documented. As such, while non-human enablers were underreported, their role could be indirectly reconstructed through consistent behavioural indicators across the case studies.

Complexity of child exploitation

Unlike single-event crimes such as murder or theft, child exploitation involves complex and ongoing dynamics where the boundaries between victims and perpetrators are not always clear (van der Watt & van der Westhuizen, 2017). While crimes committed by exploited children can be quantified the nature of the exploitation itself is harder to define.

Typologies for trafficking and modern slavery, based on empirical data, often assume linear causality, enabling predictions that inform traditional policing strategies (Cooper et al., 2017; Barlow, 2019). However, such approaches

are less effective for child exploitation due to its non-linear nature and the interplay of complex systems (van der Watt & van der Westhuizen, 2017). Understanding these interrelationships is crucial for effective tactical and strategic responses.

Motivations and Dynamics

CSAE and CCE reflect the interplay between a child's characteristics and a perpetrator's motivations or objectives. This nuanced dynamic highlights the importance of tailoring interventions to specific contexts.

Child exploitation is shaped by heterogeneous offender motivations, contextual factors, and relational dynamics. Offenders vary in age and method; CSAE tends toward psychological coercion, while CCE is more likely to involve overt violence. ICT use differs by age, with digital tools playing an increasing role. Complexity theory provides a better explanatory model than traditional typologies.

Q3. **What are the emerging forms of communication including language, codes, and symbols that re used by offenders engaged in child exploitation?**

Offenders involved in both child sexual exploitation (CSE) and child criminal exploitation (CCE) are adopting increasingly covert and coded forms of communication to groom, manipulate, and coordinate their activities. These communications are often platform-specific, rapidly evolving, and intentionally ambiguous to avoid detection by parents, professionals, and law enforcement.

Key features include:

- **Emojis as symbolic language:** Specific emojis are used to convey drugs, sexual references, or violence without using explicit language.

- **Slang and acronyms:** Offenders and networks use subcultural slang (e.g., *plug* for supplier, *line* for drug route, *OT* for "out of town") to coordinate criminal activity, particularly in county lines trafficking.

- **Encrypted and ephemeral platforms:** Snapchat, Telegram, WhatsApp, and Instagram are frequently used due to features like disappearing messages, alias profiles, and voice notes that are harder to trace.

- **Codes and euphemisms:** Groomers may use terms like "session", "link up," or "job" to mask the nature of the exploitation, particularly in CCE cases where work or reward is implied.

These communication strategies reflect a broader shift towards digitally mediated, coded interaction, often aligned with gang or youth subcultures. The ambiguity and adaptability of this language present ongoing challenges for safeguarding and policing responses.

The study could not identify new communication patterns due to data limitations. However, national evidence suggests use of emojis, slang, encrypted messaging, and ambiguous language—particularly in CCE. These communication strategies are dynamic and platform-specific, making detection challenging.

Q4. How can risk assessment and management be improved and evidence be adduced and articulated to and between partner agencies?

A review of literature on human trafficking, modern slavery, labour exploitation, and criminal exploitation reveals limited academic research specific to risk assessment and management for criminal exploitation. Existing studies often reiterate similar conclusions with minimal new insights, typically focusing on narrow aspects of a broader phenomenon, such as children going missing (Shipton et al., 2016), county lines (Robinson et al., 2018), or providing general overviews (Setter & Baker, 2018; Brotherton & Waters, n.d.). These contributions have helped identify the scope of criminal exploitation and its intersections with other abuse forms (Setter & Baker, 2018). However, they often adopt the language of risk, centring on child vulnerability while neglecting the child's agency and relationships with exploiters.

The terminology of risk in child criminal exploitation is problematic, as it is rarely tied to formal risk theory. Hart et al. (2003) describe two common approaches to risk assessment:

- **Professional judgement:** Includes unstructured professional judgement, anamnestic risk assessment (partially structured), and structured professional judgement.

- **Actuarial approaches:** Either using psychological tests or actuarial risk assessment instruments.

While systematic risk assessment models have gained popularity, few are empirically based (Lyons et al., 1996) or adequately tested for child outcomes or unintended effects (Barlow et al., 2012).

The term "at risk" is often used interchangeably with vulnerability, leading to ambiguity that undermines risk assessment, management, and investigation of criminal exploitation across practice and policy. Hart et al. (2003) explain that "risk" refers to an incompletely understood hazard, with characteristics such as likelihood, frequency, seriousness, and imminence, all of which are context specific.

Few child exploitation protocols account for this complexity. Instead, practitioners are often reliant upon checklists of "risk factors" weighted numerically (Jay, 2014). These risk factors, however, lack predictive value,

as they are merely correlates of exploitation, rendering such protocols pseudoscientific and ineffective.

Current approaches rely heavily on checklists and lack theoretical robustness. A shift toward multi-source, structured models that incorporate ecological and life-course frameworks is recommended. Circles of Analysis and complexity-informed approaches offer more nuanced ways to capture dynamic risk and relational factors.

Q5. What are the relevant characteristics of those that might be in the dual situation of offender and victim (e.g. the context of forced criminality) and how can investigators take account of this in adducing evidence of serious organised crime, weighing the public interest element of charging decisions and the positive obligation to safeguard offenders who are potential victims of trafficking and exploitation within the meaning of the MSA 2015?

Children and criminal exploitation

Differentiating between older, teenage children and young adults poses significant challenges for assessors and investigators, raising questions about the agency, and thus the criminal responsibility, of exploited children. Some exploited children take on responsibilities beyond their years, complicating the question of their intentionality in criminal acts. Are these children entirely passive victims or 'miniature' adults with criminal intent? Neither conclusion is appropriate, but the element of intentionality must be addressed alongside societal attitudes towards children and childhood (Buller, Pichon, McAlpine, Cislaghi, & Meiksin, 2020).

The victim's age, gender, and developmental level significantly influence the nature of criminal activities, motivations, and the organisation of exploiters. Recruitment processes, social norms, and attitudes towards age and gender all shape the dynamics of exploitation.
The relationship between the child victim and their controller is critical, with implications for investigations, prosecutions, and remedies.

Non-prosecution principles

The UK is bound by international laws and standards ensuring trafficked children are not prosecuted for crimes committed as a direct consequence of their trafficking (Piotrowicz & Sorrentino, 2016). Courts must consider whether defendants might be trafficking victims; failing to do so breaches Article 26 of the Council of Europe's Convention Against Trafficking of Human Beings (2005), which requires states to:

"[P]rovide for the possibility of not imposing penalties on victims for their involvement in unlawful activities, to the extent that they have been compelled to do so."

Criminally exploited children, and some sexually exploited children, face the dual identity of victim and offender. Investigations must involve joint efforts between law enforcement and social care agencies, with collaborative safeguarding plans. Safeguarding and crime prevention are interconnected—failure to protect exploited children undermines opportunities to investigate and prosecute exploiters.

Despite consensus among researchers, practitioners, and statutory agencies (GRETA, 2016; Haughey, 2016; Rosser, 2019; Crown Prosecution Service, 2017; Southwell, 2018; Field, Butler-Sloss, & Miller, 2019; Setter, 2019; Turner, Belcher, & Pona, 2019; Barlow, 2022), responses to child criminal exploitation remain inconsistent. Variability across regions and agencies affects the application of the statutory defence under s45 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, with ongoing uncertainty over how evidence for this defence is identified (Haughey, 2016) and presented in court (Rosser, 2019).

Dual-status children (those exploited through forced criminal offending) are often older teenagers with agency-conflicted needs and problems. Safeguarding responses must integrate non-punishment principles, especially in CCE cases. Legal protections under the MSA 2015 are inconsistently applied, and professional judgement must account for coercion, victim status, and safeguarding duties.

Q6. How can we collaborate with partner agencies and other (civil) legislation to safeguard potential victims, pursue, disrupt, and prosecute individual and group offenders?

Since the Laming Inquiry into Victoria Climbié's death, safeguarding policy has emphasised joint agency working. However, this approach remains challenging, as inter-agency collaboration requires professionals to navigate boundaries between roles and remits while simultaneously specialising (Hood et al., 2016).

Although child exploitation is recognised by practitioners, their managers, lawyers, and policy makers as abuse, it is not directly addressed by current safeguarding legislation. This contributes to the parallel rather than convergent operations of the criminal justice system (CJS) and safeguarding systems (Moore, 1995). Between 2016 and 2019, county lines operations quadrupled (National Crime Agency), yet from January 2016 to September 2020, there were only eighteen prosecutions for modern slavery offences involving victims aged seventeen and under, resulting in just seven convictions (Watson, 2021).

The CJS and safeguarding systems share a common concern that is trafficking and exploitation but differ in their focus and responses: the CJS identifies a criminal event, while safeguarding emphasises harm to the victim (Moore, 1995). Both perspectives can be reductive, yet statutory responses often prioritise the CJS approach, treating exploitation primarily as a crime and only secondarily as a safeguarding issue (HM Government, 2014; 2015).

Despite policy aspirations, safeguarding and CJS responses remain parallel rather than integrated. Structural barriers, poor data-sharing, and lack of shared frameworks impede collaboration. Multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASH) and exploitation panels should apply shared definitions, relational mapping, and evidence-informed interventions.

Future research directions: As an exploratory study, this research lays the groundwork for more targeted and longitudinal investigations. Future studies should focus on

1. Validating the proposed 'Degrees of Organisation' framework through multi-site comparative analysis, ideally combining NRM data with qualitative case reviews and professional insights;

2. engaging people with lived experience and practitioners in co-produced research to test the applicability and refinement of victim-perpetrator typologies;

3. examining under-reported forms of exploitation (e.g., online-facilitated CSAE and familial criminal exploitation); and

4. evaluating intervention strategies in light of local organisational dynamics. Mixed methods approaches — incorporating ethnographic work, machine learning analysis of case records, and regional policy audits — would strengthen the field's capacity to respond to the complexity of modern child exploitation.

7. Recommendations

Recommendation	Linked finding(s)	Responsible agency
Strengthen Local Data Analysis for Early Detection	Finding 1, 2, 3	Local Authority Analysts and Community Safety Partnerships
Investigate Digital Enablers by Offender Age Group	Finding 6	Academic partners and digital forensics teams
Design Targeted, Age-Specific Interventions	Finding 5	Youth Offending Teams, Probation, and Police Intelligence Units
Implement Multi-Modal, Contextual Safeguarding Approaches	Finding 4, 8	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) and local exploitation panels
Improve Victim Testimony through Specialist Recall Techniques	Finding 10	Forensic psychologists and police investigators
Enhance Interdisciplinary Collaboration Using Shared Frameworks	Finding 7, 11	Local Safeguarding Boards, Police, CPS, Health & Education
Reform Exploitation Profiling and Definitions	Finding 1	Home Office policy units and frontline safeguarding leads
Introducing Structured, Multi-Source Risk Assessment Models	Finding 4, 10	Social care teams, police risk officers, and case managers
Identify Dual Victim-Offender Roles in Trafficking Contexts	Finding 11	Police, CPS, and Modern Slavery Unit
Improve Accuracy in National Referral Mechanism (NRM) Reporting	Finding 11	NRM coordinators and first responders
Tailor Interventions Based on Exploitation Typology and Child Needs	Finding 8	Child protection practitioners and strategy meeting leads

References

Barlow, C., 2019. *Child Criminal Exploitation: A New Systemic Model to Improve Professional Assessment, Investigation and Intervention*. Hull: University of Hull.

Barlow, C., 2022. Victims Perpetrating a Crime: A Critique of Responses to Forced Criminality and Modern Slavery in the UK Courts. In: C. Murphy, R. Lazzarino & Hodges, eds. *Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking: The Victim Journey.* London: Policy Press.

Barlow, J., Fisher, J. D. & Jones, D., 2012. *Systematic Review of Models of Analysing Significant Harm*, London: Department for Education. ("Using risk factor statistics in decision making: prospects and challenges")

Beckett, H. & Warrington, C., 2014. *Suffering in Silence: children and unreported cri*m, Luton: University of Bedfordshire.

Bjerregaard, B., 2002. Self-definitions of Gang Membership and Involvement in Delinquent Activities. *Youth & Society*, pp. 31-54.

Brotherton, V. & Waters, F., 2013. *Victim or Criminal? Trafficking for Forced Criminal Exploitation: UK Chapter*, s.l.: ECPAT.

Burland, P., 2017. *Villains not Victims? An Examination of the Punishment of Vietnamese Nationals Trafficked for Cannabis Cultivation in the United Kingdom.*. s.l., UN-ACT.

Calobrisi, E.A. and Knight, R.A., 2025. *Comparing treatment professionals' risk and disposition judgments of child and adult sexual offences*. Journal of Sexual Aggression. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13552600.2025.2461618

Cantor, C. & Price, J., 2007. Traumatic entrapment, appeasement and complex post-traumatic stress disorder: evolutionary perspectives of hostage reactions, domestic abuse and the Stockholm Syndrome. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, pp. 377-384.

Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse (CSA Centre), 2021. *Characteristics and motivations of perpetrators of child sexual abuse and exploitation.* [online] Available at: https://www.csacentre.org.uk/

Children's Commissioner for England, 2022. *Still not safe: The public health response to serious youth violence*. [online] Available at: https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/report/still-not-safe/

Cockbain, E. and Sidebottom, A., 2022. *The problem with "county lines": a critical review of the drug supply and exploitation debate*. Trends in Organized Crime. Available at: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12117-022-09447-z

College of Policing, 2013. *Intelligence products.* [Online] Available at: https://www.college.police.uk/app/intelligence-management/intelligence-products [Accessed October 2023].

Cooper, C., Hesketh, O., Ellis, N. & Fair, A., 2017. *A Typology of Modern Slavery Offences in the UK Research Report 93*, London: Home Office.

Craig, J.M. and Malvaso, C., 2025. *The association between adverse childhood experiences and different types of offending behaviour: An examination across two generations of British males.* International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology. Available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0306624X231198808

Crown Prosecution Service, 2021. *Human Trafficking, Smuggling and Slavery.* [Online] Available at: https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/human-trafficking-smuggling-and-slavery

De Fabrique, N., Roman, S. J., Vecchi, G. M. & Van Hasselt, V. B., 2007. Understanding Stockholm Syndrome. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, July.

Decker, S. & Kempf-Leonard, K., 1991. Constructing Gangs: The Social Definition Of Youth Activities. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, pp. 271-291.

Densley, J. R., 2012. Street Gang Recruitment Signalling, Screening, and Selection. *Social Problems*, August, 59(3), pp. 301-321.

Drummond, J. and Skidmore, M., 2021. *Controlling the narrative: Understanding adult facilitators of child criminal exploitation.* British Journal of Criminology, 61(2), pp.312–332. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azaa060

Felitti, V. J. et al., 1998. Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of theLeading Causes of Death in Adults : The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, pp. 245-258.

Finkelhor, D., 2008. *Childhood Victimisation: Violence, Crime and Abuse in the Lives of Young People.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Finkelhor, D., 2008. *Childhood Victimization: Violence: Violence, Crime and Abuse in the Lives of Young People.* s.l.:Oxford University Press.

Finkelhor, D. et al., 1986. *A Sourcebook on Child Sexual Abuse.* s.l.:Sage.

Firmin, C. E., 2017. Contextual risk, individualised responses: an assessment of safeguarding responses to nine cases of peer-on-peer abuse. *Child Abuse review*, 21 February.

Giambetta, D., 2009. *Codes of the Underworld: How Criminals Communicate.* s.l.:Princetwon University Press.

Graham, D. L., Rawlings, E. & Riminy, N., 1988. In: K. Yllö & M. Bograd, eds. *Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse.* s.l.:Sage, pp. 217-233.

Giles, S., Alison, L., Humann, M., Tejeiro, R., and Rhodes, H., 2023. ("Estimating the economic burden attributable to online only child sexual …") *Estimating the economic burden attributable to online only child sexual abuse offenders: implications for police strategy.* European PMC. Available at: https://europepmc.org/article/pmc/pmc10794534

Harding, S., 2020. *County Lines.* s.l.:Bristol University Press.

Harding, S., 2020. Emergence and Change. In: *County Lines: Exploitation and Drug Dealing Amongst Urban Street Gangs.* s.l.:Bristol University Press.

Hart, S. D., Kropp, R. & Laws, D. R., 2003. *The Risk for Sexual Violence Protocol (RSVP).* s.l.:the Mental Health, Law and Policy Institute, Simon Fraser University.

Heys, A., Barlow, C., Murphy, C. & McKee, A., 2022. A review of Modern Slaveery in Britain:Understanding the unique experience of British victims and why it matters. *Journal of Victimology*, pp. 1-7.

Home Office, 2018. *Criminal Exploitation of Children and Vulnerable Adults: County Lines Guidance.* London: Home Office.

HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2021. *Desistance and young people: A thematic inspection.* [online] Ministry of Justice. Available at: https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/11/Desistance-and-young-people-thematic-inspection-report-v1.0.pdf

HM Government, 2022. *Serious Violence Duty: Evidence base.* [online] Home Office. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/serious-violence-duty-evidence-base

Hood, R., Gillespie, J. & Davies, J., 2016. A Conceptual Review of Interprofessional Expertise in Child Safeguarding. *Journal of Interprofessional Care*, pp. 493-498.

Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), 2023. *Annual Report 2023*. [online] IWF. Available at: https://www.iwf.org.uk

James, E., 2021. *Exploited and Criminalised: What can the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill do to ensure that children who are criminally exploited receive the care and support they need?*, Ilford: Barnardo's.

Jay, A., 2014. *Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham 1997-2013*, s.l.: s.n.

Jay, A., Evans, M., Frank, I. & Sharpling, D., 2022. *Child sexual exploitation by organised networks Investigation Report*, London: HM Stationery Office.

Jay, A., Evans, M., Frank, I. & Sharpling, D., 2022. *The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse*, London: HMSO.

Logan, M. H., 2018. Stockholm Syndrome: Held Hostage by the One You Love. *Violence and Gender*, 5(2).

Longfield, A., 2019. *Keeping Kids Safe: Improving safeguarding responses to gang violence and criminal exploitation*, London: Office of the Children's Commissioner for England.

Lyons, P., Doueck, H. J. & Wodarski, J. S., 1996. Risk assessment for child protective services: A review of the empirical literature on instrument performance. *Social Work Research*, 20(3), pp. 143-155.

Maslow, A., 1943. *Toward a Psychology of Being*, s.l.: Start Publishing LLC.

Maslow, A. H., 1943. *A Theory of Human Motivation*. 2012 ed. s.l.:Start Publishing LLC (E Book).

McNoughton-Nichols, C. et al., 2014. *Research on the Sexual Exploitation of Boys and Young Men: A UK Scoping Study Summary of Findings*, s.l.: Banardos.

McPherson, L., Gatwiri, K., Graham, A., and Rotumah, D., 2024. *What helps children and young people to disclose their experience of sexual abuse and what gets in the way? A systematic scoping review*. Child & Youth Care Forum. Available at: https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s10566-024-09825-5.pdf

Ministry of Justice, 2022. *Criminal Justice Statistics Quarterly: December 2022*. [online] Ministry of Justice. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-december-2022

National Crime Agency, 2019. *Intelligence Assessment: County Lines, Drug Supply, Ability Harm 2018*, s.l.: national crime agency.

National Crime Agency, 2020. *National Strategic Assessment of Serious and organised crime*, s.l.: National crime Agency.

National Crime Agency, 2021. *National Strategice Assessment of Serious Organised Crime*, s.l.: NCA.

National Crime Agency (NCA), 2023. *County lines drug supply, vulnerability, and harm: 2023 Strategic Assessment*. [online] Available at: https://nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/what-we-do/crime-threats/drug-trafficking/county-lines

Ofsted, HMICFRS, CQC and HMI Probation, 2020. *Joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to child criminal exploitation and county lines*. [online] Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/870035/JTAI_CCE_2020.pdf

Pawson, R. & Tilley, N., 1997. *Realist Evaluation*. s.l.:Sage.

Robinson, G., McLean, R. & Densley, J., 2018. Working County Lines: Child Criminal Exploitation and Illicit Drug Dealing in Glasgow and Merseyside. *International Journal of Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 63(5), pp. 694-711.

Saker, A., 2022. *Practitioner Responses to Child Trafficking: Emerging Good Practice,* London: Cumberland Lodge and Office of the independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner.

Schneider, E. M., 1992. Particularity and Generality: Challenges of Feminist Theory and Practice in Work on Woman Abuse. *Brooklyn Law School Brookly Works.*

Setter, C. & Baker, C., 2018. *Child Trafficking in the UK in 2018: a Snapshot*, s.l.: ECPAT UK.

Shipton, A., Setter, C. & Holmes, L., 2016. *Heading Back to Harm: A study of trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing from care in the UK*, s.l.: ECPAT.

Summit, R. C., 1983. The Child Sexual Abuse Accommodation Syndrome. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, Volume 7, pp. 177-193.

UNICEF, 1989. *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child,* London: UNICEF.

van der Watt, M. & van der Westhuizen, A., 2017. (Re)configuering the criminal justice response to human trafficking: a complex systems perspective. *Police Practice and Research.*

von Lampe, K., 2019. *Definitions of Organised Crime.* [Online] Available at: http://www.organized-crime. de/organizedcrimedefinitions.htm

Wager, N., 2024. *Policing Child Sexual Abuse.* In: Wager, N. ed., Policing Public Protection: A Companion Guide. Springer. (Duplicate for thematic continuity). Available at: https://link.springer.com/ chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-74504-1_9

Ward, T. & Seigert, R. J., 2002. Toward a Comprehensive Theory of Child Sexual Abuse: A Theory Knitting Perspective. *Psychology, Crime and Law*, Volume 8, pp. 319-351.

Watson, L., 2021. *Personal Communication* [Interview] (23 August 2021).

Whitaker, A. J. et al., 2018. *From Postcodes to Profit: How Gangs Have Changed in Waltham Forest*, London: London South Bank University. ("From Postcodes to Profit – Open Research.pdf – thebookee.net")

Wolak, J., Finkelhor, D., Walsh, W. & Treitman, L., 2018. Sextortion of Minors: Characteristics and Dynamics. *Journal of adolescent health*, 62(1), p. 72 – 79.

Youth Justice Board, 2023. *Review of child criminal exploitation and youth offending.* [online] Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/youth-justice-board-review-of-child-criminal-exploitation

Weston, S. and Mythen, G., 2023. *Child Sexual Exploitation and the Adoption of Public Health Approaches to Prevention.* Springer Nature. Available at: https://pure-oai.bham.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/ portal/202609822/s41300_023_00183_3.pdf

Widanaralalage, B.K., Jennings, S., et al., 2024. *Prevalence, disclosure, and help seeking in Black and Asian male survivors of sexual violence in the United Kingdom: A rapid review.* Trauma, Violence, & Abuse. Available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/15248380241246217

Appendix 1: General crime data by local policing area (LPA)

LPA1 (Rural)	April 23	%	May 22-April 23	%3	Jun 20-April 23	%
Theft from person	1	1.1	6	0.4	15	0.4
Drugs	1	1.1	32	2.3	94	2.3
Public order	2	2.2	72	5.1	241	5.9
Shoplifting	5	5.5	165	11.7	336	8.2
Anti social behaviour	5	5.5	179	12.7	783	19.2
Burglary	6	6.6	82	5.8	178	4.4
Crim damage & arson	8	8.8	96	6.8	273	6.7
Vehicle crime	9	9.9	62	4.4	148	3.6
Other theft	17	18.7	144	10.2	431	10.6
Violence & sex offences	37	40.7	508	36.1	1426	34.9
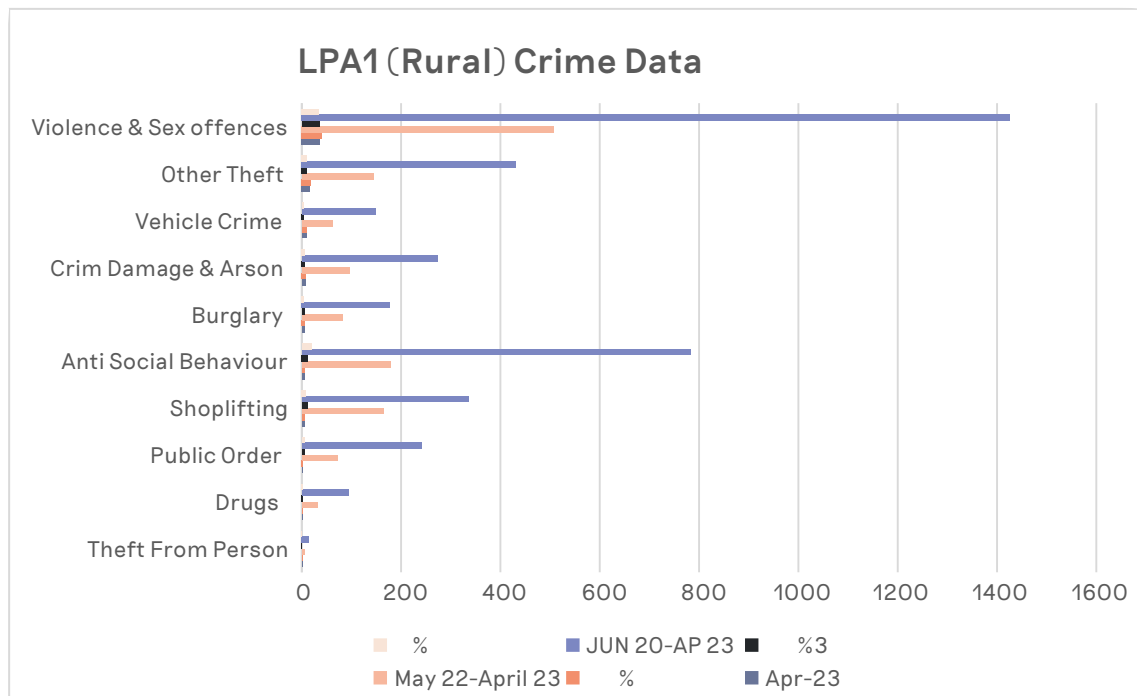
LPA2 (Town)	April 23	%	May 22-April 23	%3	Jun 20-April 23	%
Theft from person	2	0.4	28	0.4	76	0.4
Bicycle theft	3	0.5	57	0.9	156	0.8
Possess weapons	6	1.1	101	1.6	274	1.4
Robbery	7	1.3	76	1.2	230	1.1
Other	8	1.4	143	2.2	449	2.2
Drugs	9	1.6	147	2.3	398	2
Vehicle crime	18	3.3	224	3.5	703	3.5
Shoplifting	24	4.3	466	7.3	1060	5.3
Public order	28	5.1	353	5.5	1296	6.4
Other theft	32	5.8	365	5.7	1023	5.1
Burglary	35	6.3	252	4	696	3.4
Crim damage & arson	53	9.6	537	8.4	1632	8.1
Anti social behaviour	99	17.9	1004	15.8	3926	19.4
Violence & sex offences	229	41.4	2608	41	8296	41

LPA 2 (Town) Crime Data
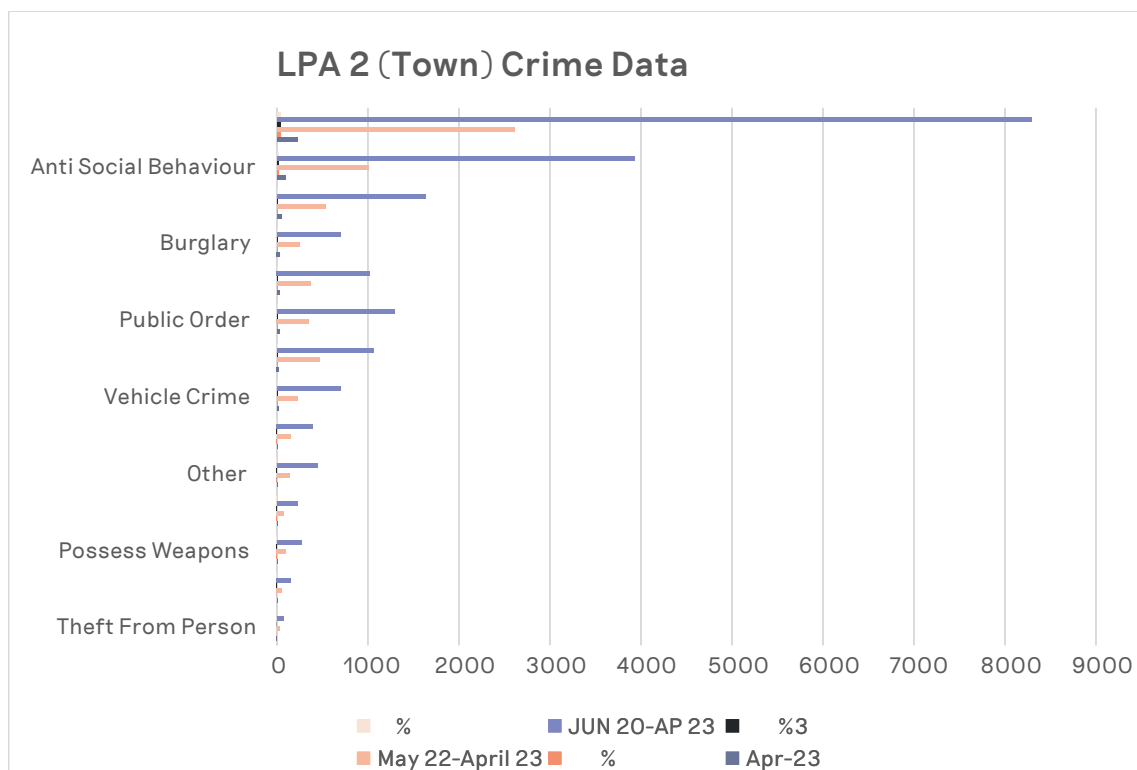
LPA3 (Rural)	April 23	%	May 22-April 23	%3	Jun 20-April 23	%
Theft from person	4	0.7	36	0.3	109	0.3
Bicycle theft	6	0.7	58	0.5	182	0.6
Other	10	1.1	210	1.9	633	2
Robbery	12	1.4	117	1.1	321	1
Possess weapon	18	2	141	1.3	346	1.1
Burglary	23	2.6	393	3.6	1091	3.4
Vehicle crime	23	2.6	411	3.8	1164	3.6
Drugs	28	3.2	385	3.6	1029	3.2
Shoplifting	50	5.7	686	6.4	1545	4.8
Public order	63	7.2	673	6.2	2221	6.9
Other theft	64	7.3	684	6.3	1870	5.8
Crim damage & arson	82	9.3	820	7.6	2405	7.5
Anti social behaviour	134	15.2	1668	15.4	6160	19.1
Violence & sex offences	362	41.2	4517	41.8	13152	40.8

LPA 3 (Rural) General Crime Data
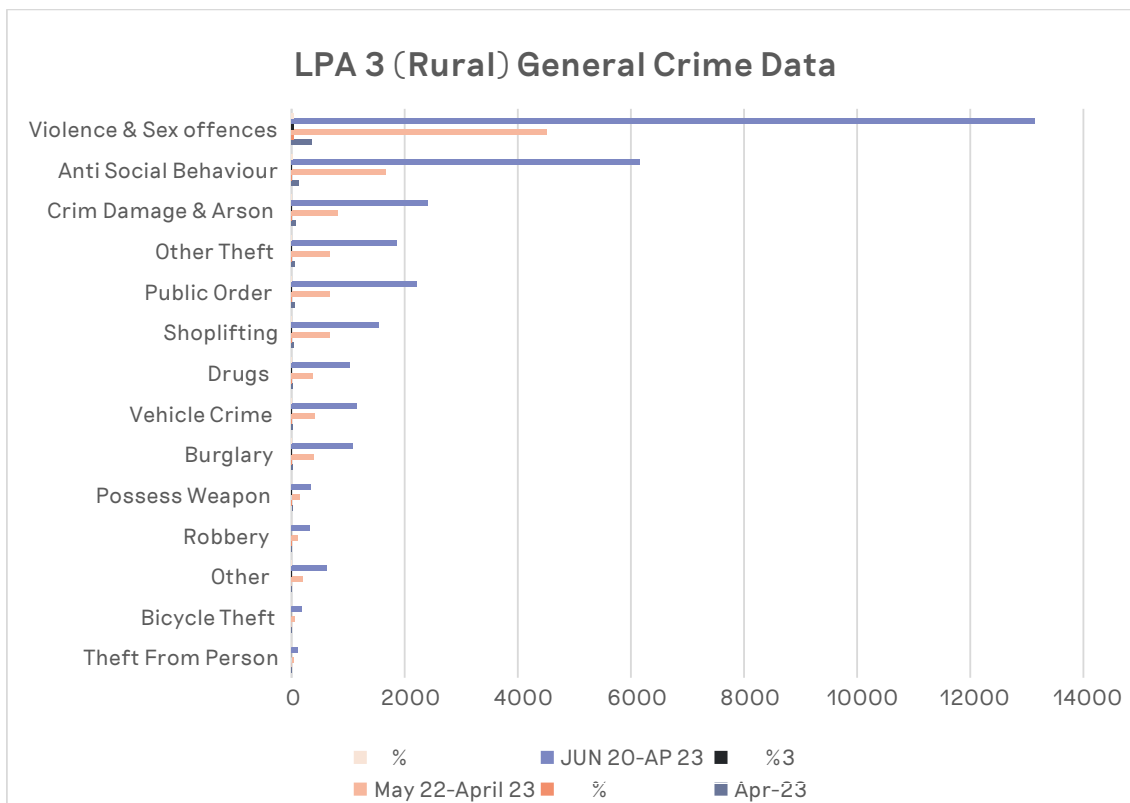
LPA 4 (Town)	April 23	%	May 22-April 23	%3	Jun 20-April 23	%
Bicycle theft	3	0.5	51	0.7	150	0.7
Theft from person	4	0.7	33	0.4	101	0.4
Other	7	1.2	138	1.8	432	1.9
Robbery	9	1.5	95	1.2	261	1.2
Burglary	10	1.7	252	3.3	705	3.1
Vehicle crime	12	2	249	3.3	710	3.2
Possess weapon	14	2.3	108	1.4	250	1.1
Drugs	22	3.7	326	4.3	805	3.6
Shoplifting	46	7.7	525	6.9	1281	5.7
Public order	47	7.9	498	6.5	1609	7.2
Crim damage & arson	48	8.1	556	7.3	1594	7.1
Other theft	50	8.4	527	6.9	1396	6.2
Anti social behaviour	82	13.8	1120	14.6	4128	18.4
Violence & sex offences	242	40.6	3183	41.5	9062	40.3

LPA 4 (Town) General Crime Data
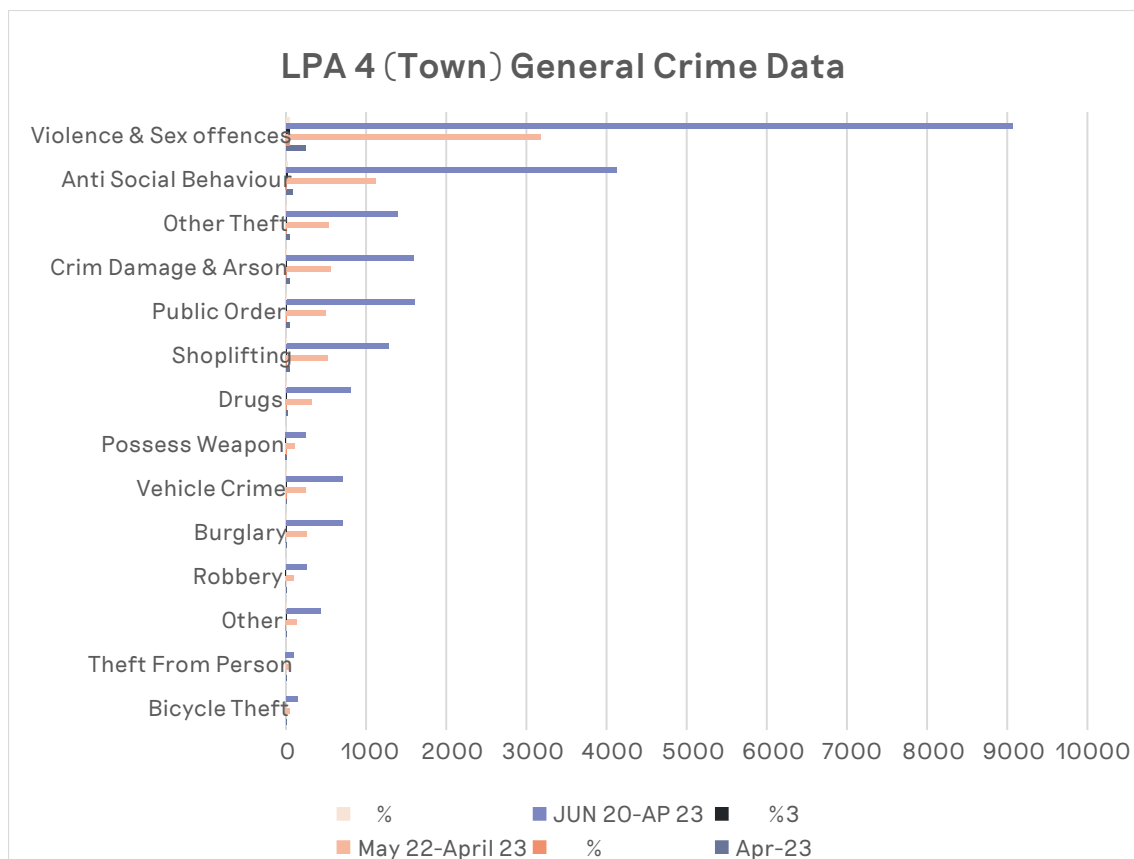
LPA 5 (Town)	April 23	%	May 22-April 23	%3	Jun 20-April 23	%
Bicycle theft	0	0	3	0.1	14	0.2
Robbery	0	0	13	0.6	44	0.6
Theft from person	1	0.5	3	0.1	7	0.1
Possess weapon	1	0.5	24	1.1	52	0.7
Shoplifting	3	1.6	39	1.7	125	1.8
Other	3	1.6	57	2.6	153	2.2
Drugs	4	2.2	59	2.6	158	2.3
Burglary	9	4.9	80	3.6	279	4
Crim damage & arson	10	5.5	192	8.6	594	8.5
Public order	11	6	125	5.6	425	6.1
Other theft	13	7.1	121	5.4	356	5.1
Vehicle crime	21	11.5	143	6.4	372	5.3
Anti social behaviour	32	17.6	432	19.3	1608	22.9
Violence & sex offences	74	40.7	942	42.2	2820	40.2

LPA 5 (Town) General Crime Data
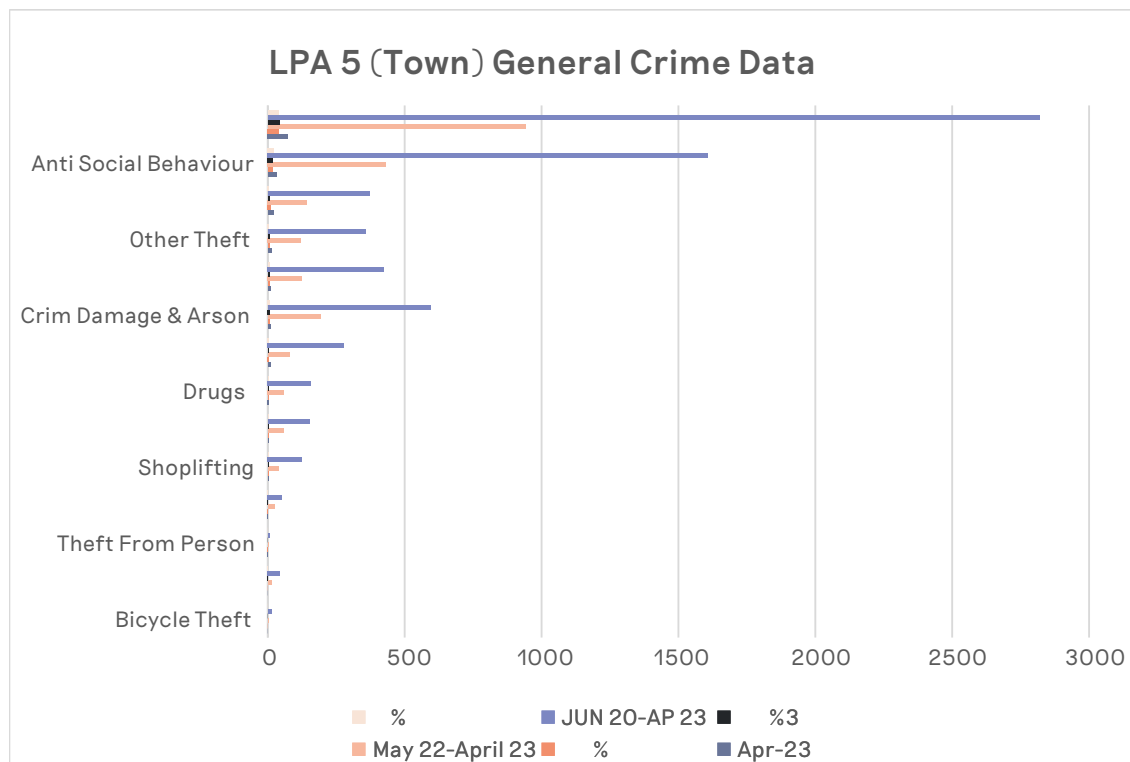
LPA 6 (Town)	April 23	%	May 22-April 23	%3	Jun 20-April 23	%
Bicycle theft	0	0	3	0.3	8	0.3
Other	0	0	22	2.4	49	1.9
Possess weapon	1	0.8	5	0.5	10	0.4
Robbery	1	0.8	6	0.7	11	0.4
Shoplifting	1	0.8	6	0.7	62	2.4
Drugs	3	2.3	12	1.3	32	1.2
Burglary	7	5.4	57	6.2	211	8
Other theft	9	6.9	88	9.6	227	8.6
Vehicle crime	null	null	54	null	null	null
Anti social behaviour	13	10	168	18.3	532	20.2
Violence & sex offences	42	32.3	294	32	855	32.4
Crim damage & arson	44	33.8	130	14.1	271	10.3
Theft from person	null	null	3	0.3	5	0.2
Public order	null	null	47	5.1	166	6.3

LPA 6 (Town) General Crime Data
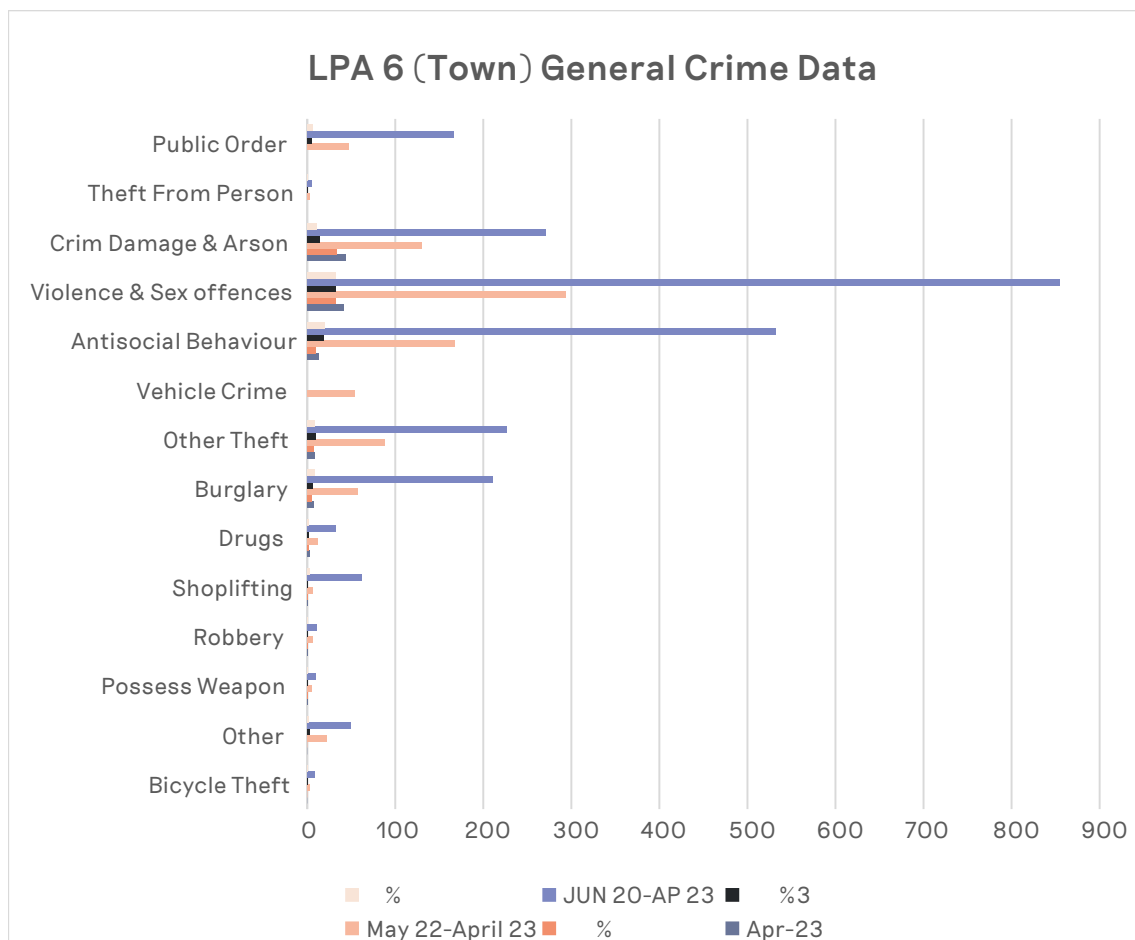
LPA 7 (Town)	April 23	%	May 22-April 23	%3	Jun 20-April 23	%
Other	2	0.6	73	1.9	208	1.9
Possess weapon	5	1.6	47	1.2	117	1.1
Robbery	7	2.2	51	1.4	118	1.1
Burglary	7	2.2	134	3.6	367	3.3
Drugs	14	4.5	115	3	288	2.6
Vehicle crime	15	4.8	188	5	496	4.5
Other theft	16	5.1	211	5.6	616	5.5
Public order	19	6.1	207	5.5	696	6.3
Crim damage & arson	29	9.3	344	9.1	889	8
Shoplifting	37	11.8	371	9.8	813	7.3
Antisocial behaviour	48	15.3	634	16.8	2388	21.4
Violence & sex offences	114	36.4	1353	35.9	4032	36.2
Theft from person	null	null	12	0.3	32	0.3
Bicycle theft	null	null	32	8	76	0.7

LPA 7 (Town) General Crime Data
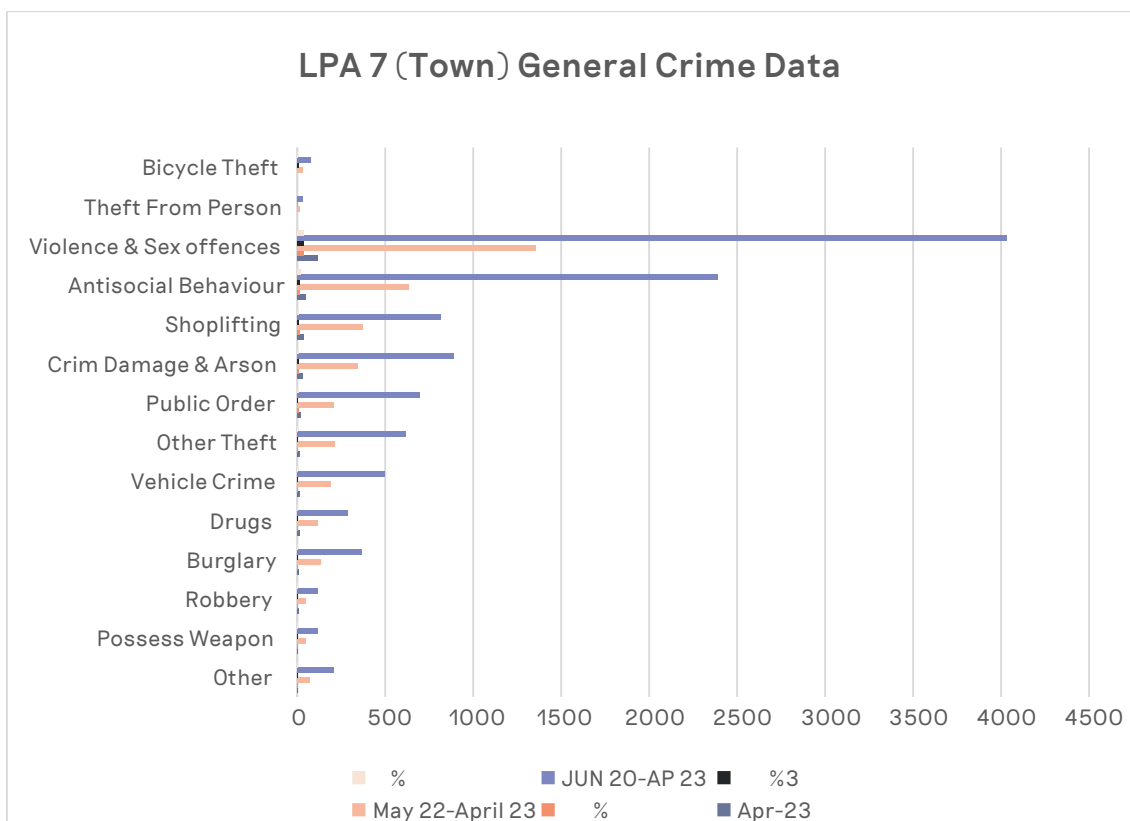
LPA 8 (Rural)	April 23	%	May 22-April 23	%3	Jun 20-April 23	%
Theft from person	0	0	1	0.1	9	0.2
Shoplifting	0	0	57	3.5	111	2.2
Bicycle theft	1	0.9	6	0.4	19	0.4
Robbery	1	0.9	17	1.1	36	0.7
Possess weapon	1	0.9	26	1.6	49	1
Drugs	2	1.7	51	3.2	126	2.4
Vehicle crime	4	3.4	587	36.4	278	5.4
Other theft	8	6.8	128	7.9	383	7.4
Public order	9	7.7	88	5.5	303	5.9
Burglary	9	7.7	110	6.8	321	6.2
Crim damage & arson	9	7.7	157	9.7	494	9.6
Anti social behaviour	27	23.1	251	15.6	1028	19.9
Violence & sex offences	44	37.6	587	36.4	1900	36.8

LPA 8 (Rural) General Crime Data
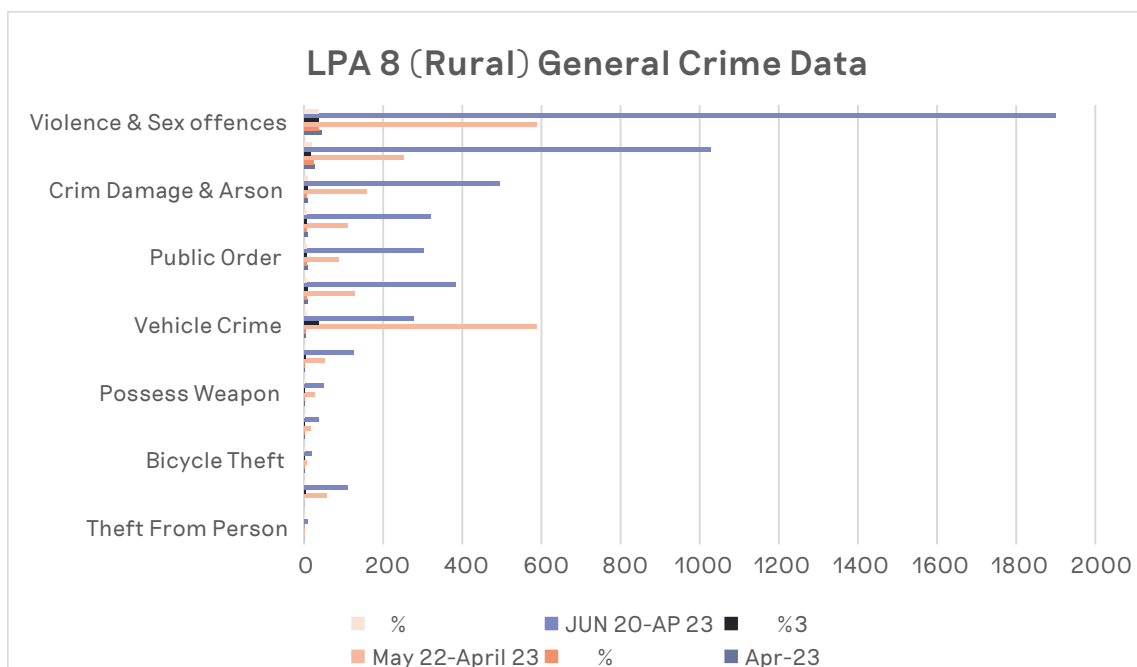
LPA 9 (Town)	April 23	%	May 22-April 23	%3	Jun 20-April 23	%
Bicycle theft	4	0.6	69	1	206	0.9
Theft from person	5	0.8	34	0.5	95	0.4
Robbery	5	0.8	110	1.6	328	1.5
Possess weapon	8	1.2	113	1.6	307	1.4
Burglary	18	2.7	255	3.6	725	3.3
Shoplifting	24	3.7	294	4.1	975	4.5
Other	27	4.1	260	3.7	573	2.6
Drugs	28	4.3	271	3.8	711	3.3
Public order	33	5	421	5.9	1462	6.7
Other theft	38	5.8	408	5.7	1171	5.4
Crim damage & arson	46	7	542	7.6	1737	8
Vehicle crime	54	8.2	278	3.9	807	3.7
Anti social behaviour	111	16.9	1135	16	3992	18.4
Violence & sex offences	256	39	2906	41	8600	39.7

LPA 9 (Town) General Crime Data
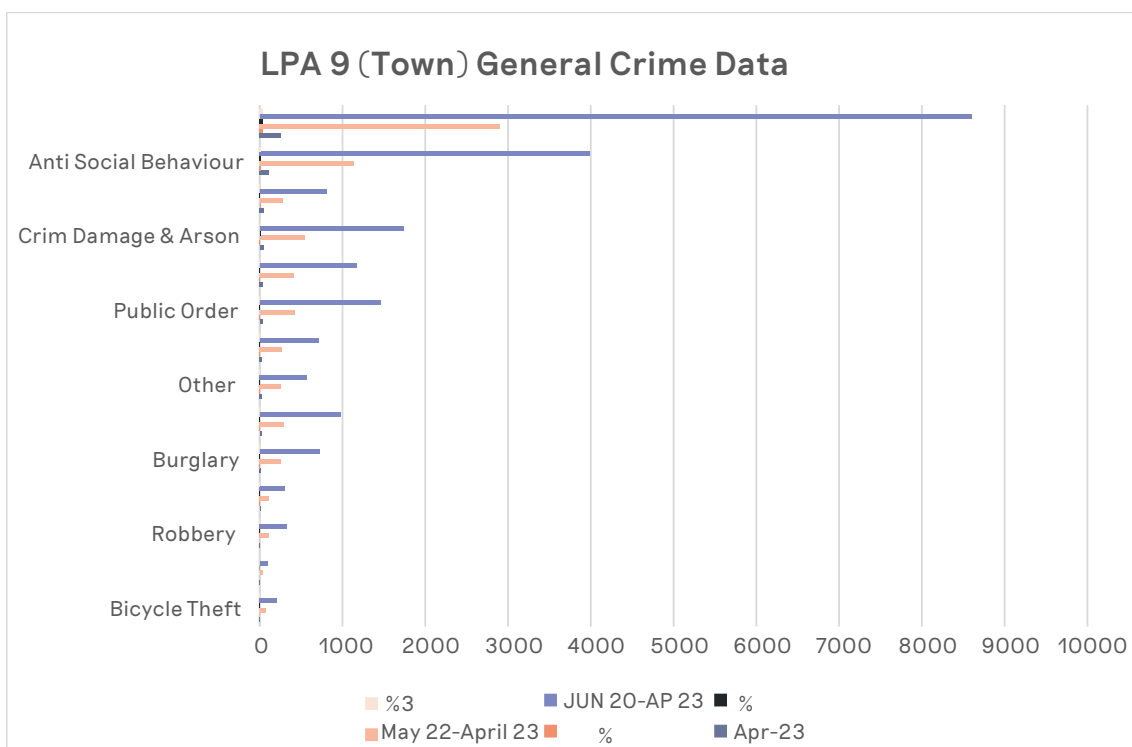
LPA 10 (Rural)	April 23	%	May 22-April 23	%3	Jun 20-April 23	%
Bicycle theft	0	0	9	0.1	32	0.2
Theft from person	2	0.4	16	0.3	47	0.2
Robery	0	0	23	0.4	78	0.4
Possess weapon	7	1.5	58	1	137	0.7
Shoplifting	13	2.9	129	2.1	306	1.6
Drugs	7	1.5	152	2.5	445	2.3
Other	9	2	173	2.9	517	2.7
Burglary	21	4.6	247	4.1	730	3.8
Public order	22	4.8	322	5.4	1148	6
Vehicle crime	22	4.8	424	7.1	1180	6.2
Crim damage & arson	45	9.9	453	7.5	1421	7.5
Other theft	43	9.5	475	7.9	1196	6.3
Anti social behaviour	74	16.3	961	16	4090	21.5
Violence & sex offences	190	41.8	2569	42.7	7662	40.3

LPA 10 (Rural) General Crime Data
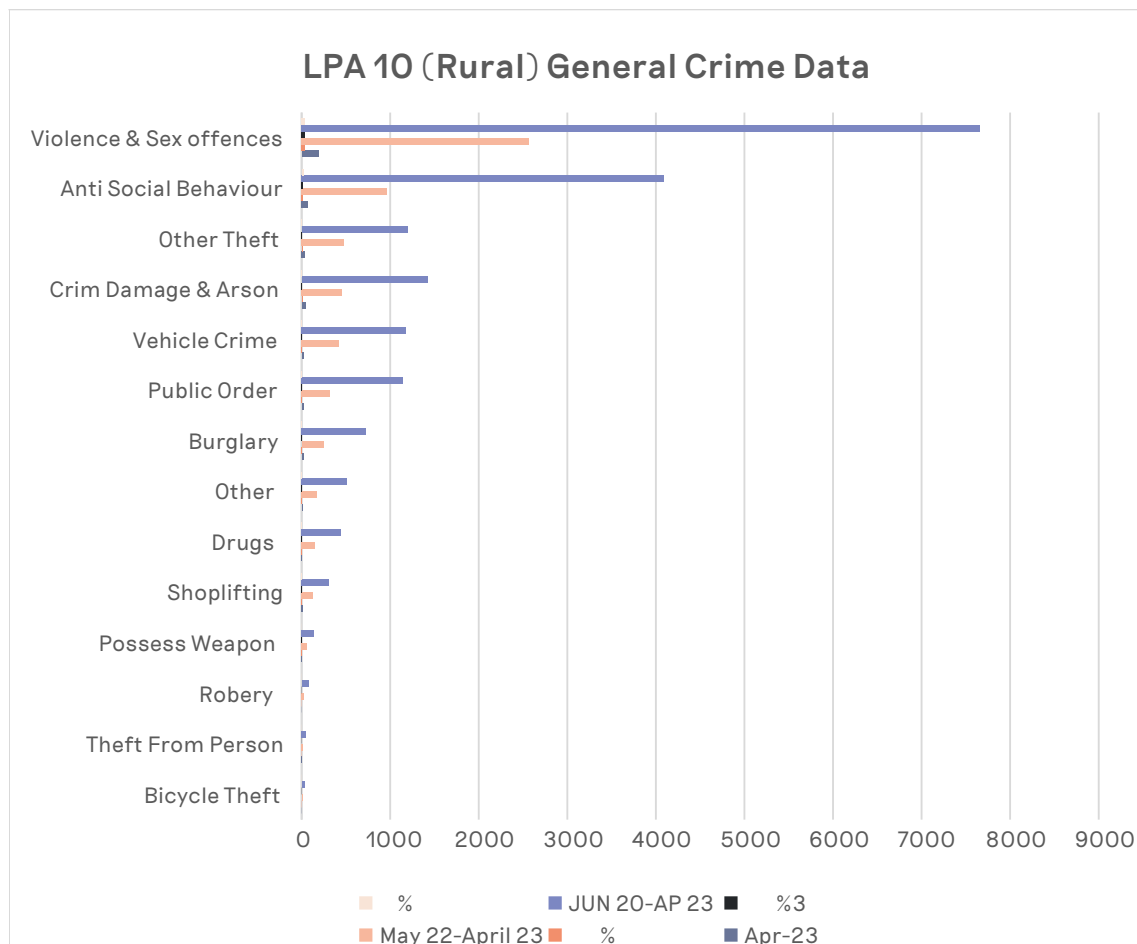
LPA 11 (Town)	April 23	%	May 22-April 23	%3	Jun 20-April 23	%
Bicycle theft	0	0	7	0.3	25	0.3
Robery	0	0	12	0.5	45	0.6
Theft from person	1	0	11	0.4	34	0.4
Other	3	1.6	59	2.4	180	2.2
Drugs	3	1.6	63	2.5	189	2.3
Possess weapon	4	2.2	32	1.3	77	0.9
Burglary	5	2.7	68	2.8	211	2.6
Vehicle crime	6	3.3	140	5.7	311	3.8
Public order	10	5.5	142	5.7	525	6.5
Shoplifting	11	6	89	3.6	218	2.7
Other theft	14	7.7	157	6.4	446	5.5
Crim damage & arson	17	9.3	176	7.1	602	7.4
Anti social behaviour	33	18.1	420	17	1922	23.7
Violence & sex offences	75	41.2	1095	44.3	3328	41

LPA 11 (Town) General Crime Data

Legend: % | JUN 20-AP 23 | %2 | May 22-April 23 | % | Apr-23
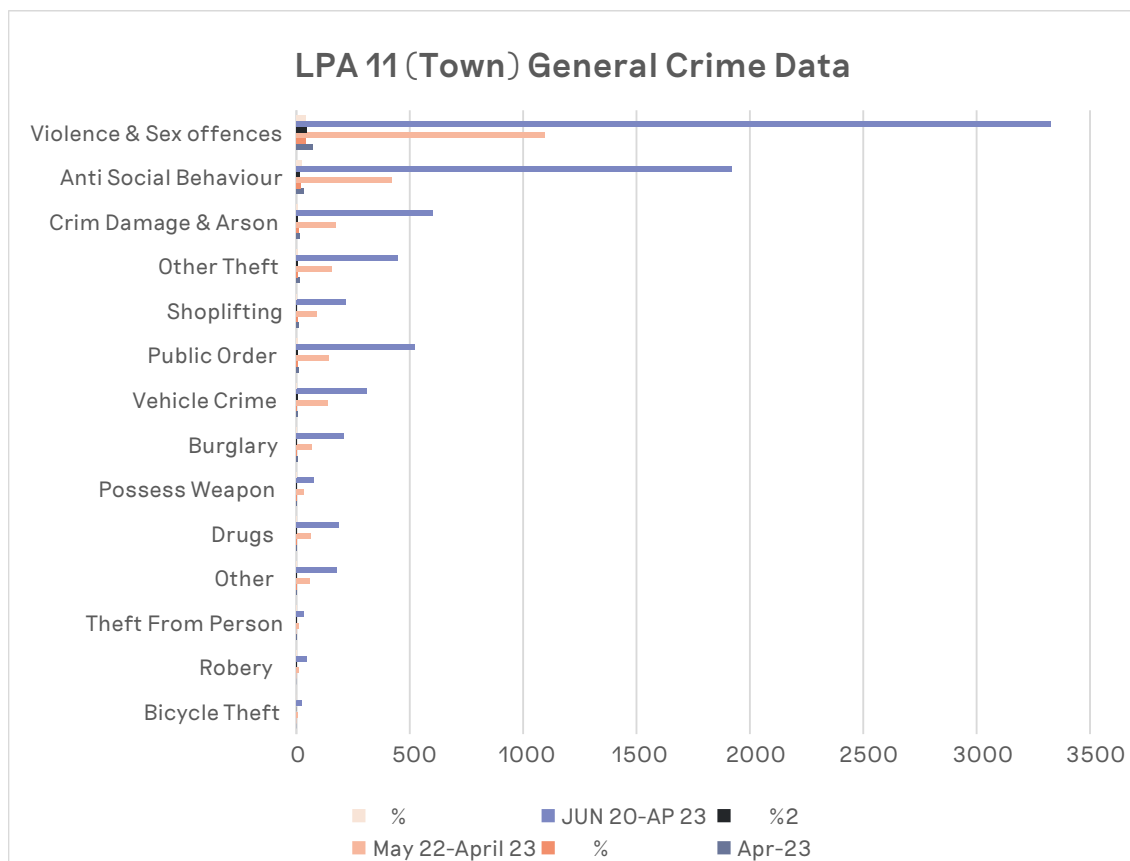
LPA 12 (Town)	April 23	%	May 22-April 23	%3	Jun 20-April 23	%
Theft from person	7	1	140	1.6	343	1.4
Bicycle theft	8	1.1	111	1.3	470	1.9
Other	11	1.6	121	1.4	327	1.3
Robbery	12	1.7	158	1.8	437	1.7
Burglary	16	2.3	256	2.9	730	2.9
Possess weapon	19	2.7	167	1.9	398	1.6
Drugs	26	3.7	350	4	998	6.7
Vehicle crime	31	4.4	534	6.1	1272	5
Public order	43	6.2	648	7.4	2041	8.1
Shoplifting	44	6.3	412	4.7	1239	4.9
Crim damage & arson	51	7.3	597	6.8	1706	6.7
Other theft	54	7.7	715	8.2	1725	6.8
Anti social behaviour	98	14	1163	13.3	4137	16.3
Violence & sex offences	279	39.9	3371	38.6	9493	37.5

LPA 12 (Town) General Crime Data
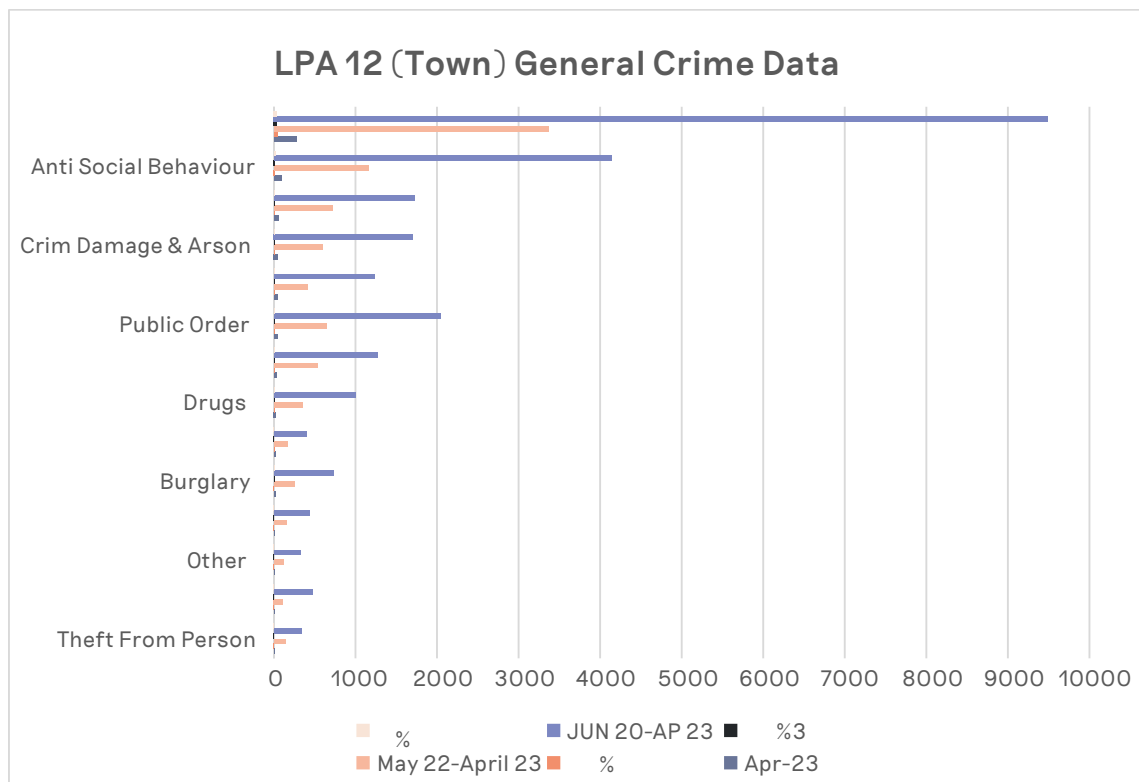
LPA 13 (Town)	April 23	%	May 22-April 23	%3	Jun 20-April 23	%
Bicycle theft	5	0.4	110	0.8	274	0.7
Theft from person	6	0.5	42	0.3	126	0.3
Robbery	13	1.1	140	1.1	364	0.9
Possess weapon	19	1.5	162	1.2	390	1
Drugs	25	2	279	2.1	812	2.1
Other	27	2.2	267	2	785	2
Public order	57	4.6	666	5	2340	6
Other theft	67	5.4	917	6.9	2363	6
Burglary	69	5.6	762	5.8	1950	5
Vehicle crime	90	7.3	874	6.6	2553	6.5
Crim damage & arson	103	8.3	1120	8.5	3226	8.2
Shoplifting	125	10.1	792	6	1781	4.5
Anti social behaviour	213	17.2	1959	14.8	6713	17.1
Violence & sex offences	416	33.7	5151	38.9	15571	39.7

LPA 13 (Town) General Crime Data
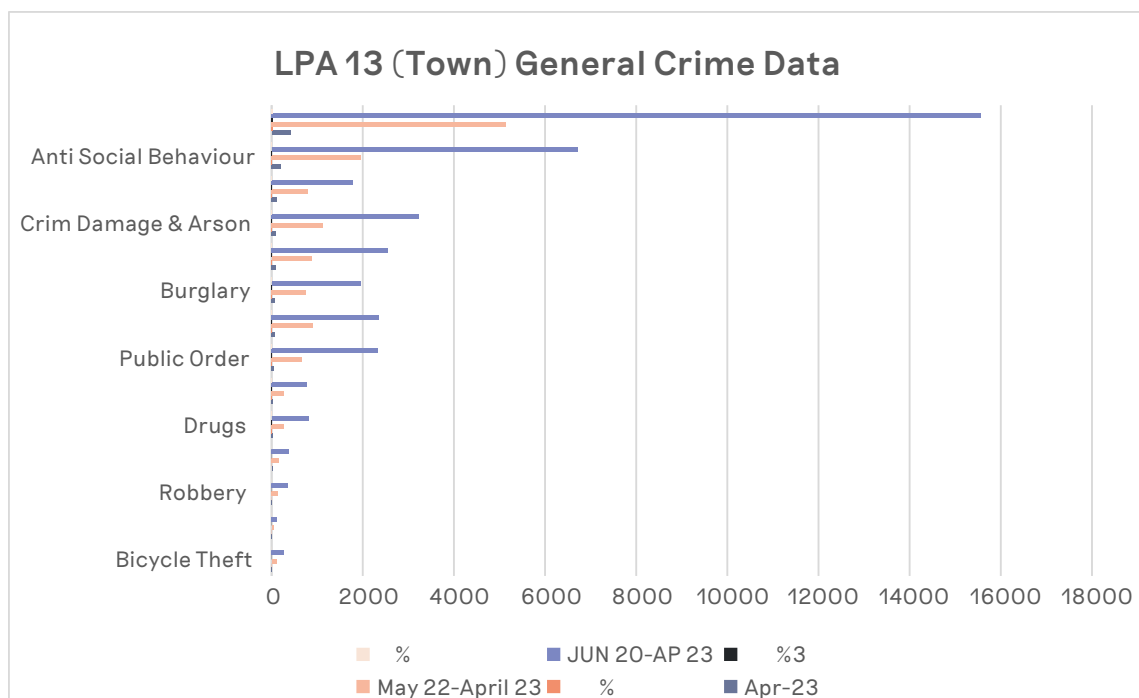
LPA 14 (Town)	April 23	%	May 22-April 23	%3	Jun 20-April 23	%
Anti social behaviour	105	13.9	1193	14	4737	18.3
Bicycle theft	1	0.1	43	0.5	200	0.8
Burglary	36	4.8	363	4.2	1129	4.4
Crim damage & arson	59	7.8	704	8.2	2078	8
Drugs	21	2.8	242	2.8	674	2.6
Other	17	2.2	179	2.1	551	2.1
Other theft	57	7.5	689	8.1	1851	7.1
Possess weapon	5	0.7	85	1	220	0.8
Public order	39	5.2	543	6.4	1657	6.4
Robbery	14	1.8	78	0.9	212	0.8
Shoplifting	67	8.9	309	3.6	687	2.6
Theft from person	2	0.3	34	0.4	77	0.3
Vehicle crime	31	4.1	446	5.2	1407	5.4
Violence & sex offences	303	40	3635	42.5	10461	40.3

LPA 14 (Town) General Crime Data
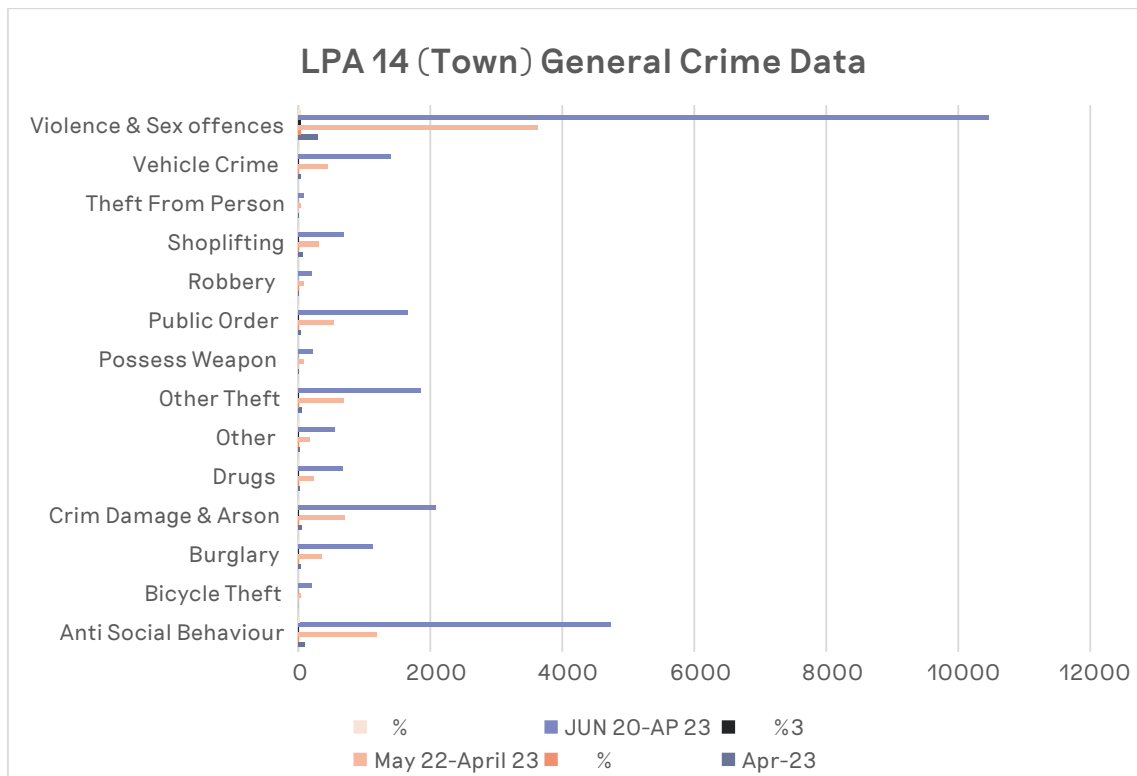
South of county

LPA 15 (Town)	April 23	%	May 22-April 23	%3	Jun 20-April 23	%
Theft from person	0	0	2	0.1	5	0.1
Bicycle theft	0	0	2	0.1	8	0.2
Robbery	0	0	4	0.3	13	0.3
Possess weapon	0	0	9	0.6	27	0.6
Shoplifting	2	1.7	61	4.2	157	3.5
Drugs	3	2.5	22	1.5	61	1.4
Other	4	3.3	26	1.8	79	1.8
Vehicle crime	6	5	100	6.9	331	7.4
Public order	7	5.8	81	5.6	298	6.7
Burglary	8	6.7	73	5	228	5.1
Crim damage & arson	10	8.3	113	7.8	320	7.2
Anti social behaviour	13	10.8	226	15.6	852	19.1
Other theft	14	11.7	181	12.5	356	8
Violence & sex offences	53	44.2	551	38	1727	38.7

LPA 15 (Town) General Crime Data
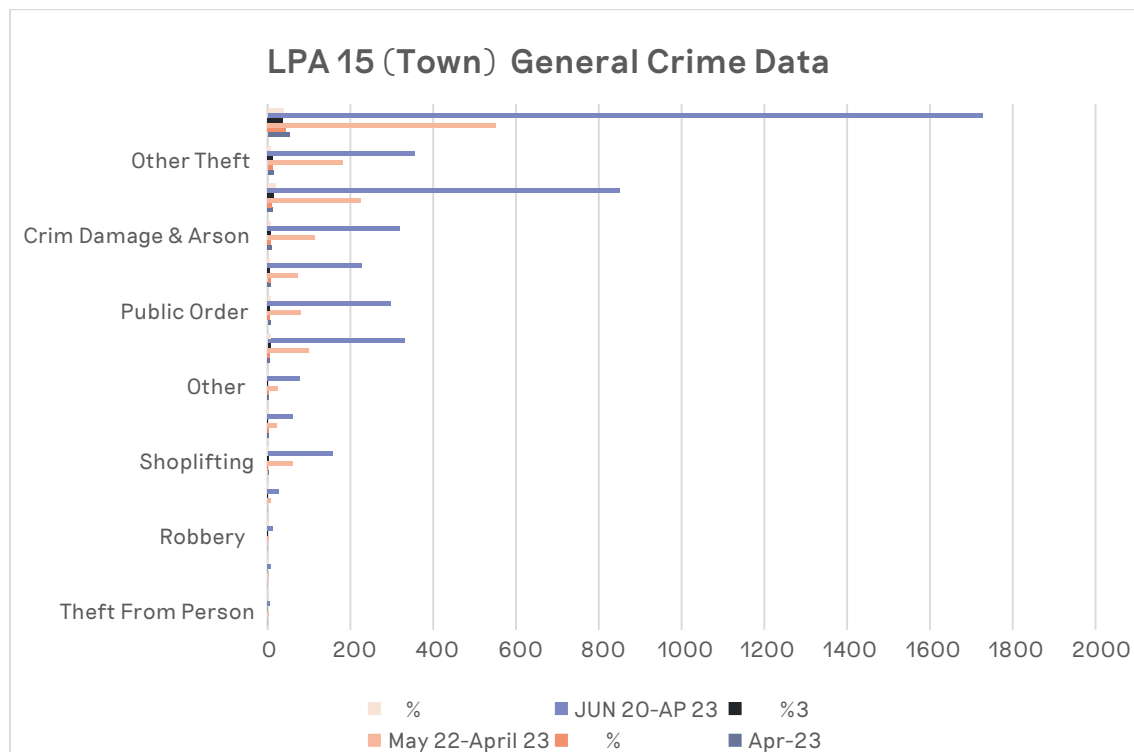
LPA 16 (Town)	April 23	%	May 22-April 23	%3	Jun 20-April 23	%
Bicycle theft	0	0	9	0.3	30	0.3
Theft from person	1	0.3	7	0.2	19	0.2
Robbery	1	0.3	17	0.5	52	0.6
Drugs	1	0.3	53	1.7	139	1.5
Possess weapon	4	1.4	42	1.4	71	0.8
Shoplifting	7	2.4	69	2.2	152	1.6
Other	9	3.1	67	2.2	194	2.1
Burglary	12	4.2	135	4.4	410	4.4
Crim damage & arson	14	4.9	226	7.3	712	7.7
Public order	16	5.6	174	5.6	588	6.3
Other theft	28	9.8	291	9.4	911	9.8
Vehicle crime	30	10.5	237	7.7	704	7.6
Anti social behaviour	41	14.3	432	13.9	1640	17.6
Violence & sex offences	122	42.7	1339	43.2	3685	39.6

LPA 16 (Town) General Crime Data
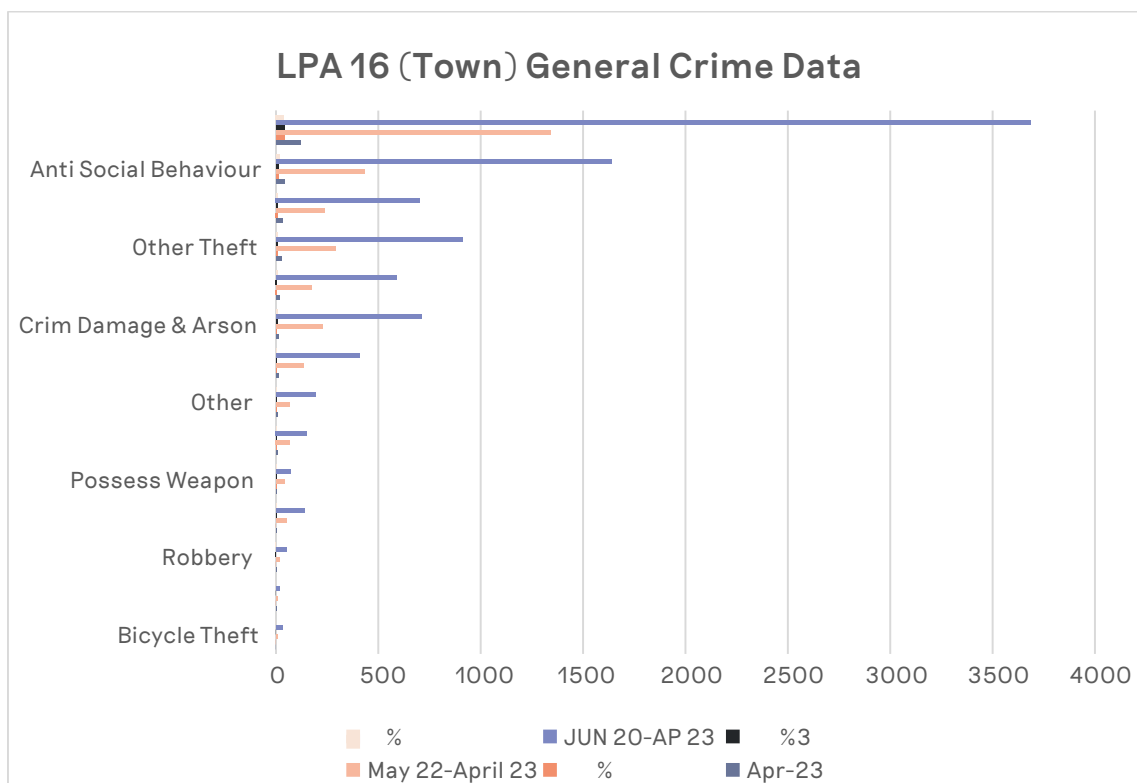
Appendix 2. NRM data

	2019	2020	2021	2022	1st Qtr 2023
Age 17 and under	33	38	54	142	42
Age 18 and over	16	21	23	27	7
Age not specified or unknown	0	1	1	2	0
Total	49	60	78	171	49

2019

Child exploitation types

Claimed exploitation type(s)	Age group at exploitation	Gender	Chinese	Filipino	Indian	Portuguese	Total
Sexual & criminal	Not specified or unknown	Female	1	0	1		2
Sexual	Child (17 or under)	Female	1	1	2		4
Labour & criminal	Child (17 or under)	Male	0	1	1		2
Criminal	Child (17 or under)	Male	9	0	9		18

2020

Child exploitation type

Claimed exploitation type	Age group at exploitation	Gender	Afghan	Albanian	Eritrean	Polish	Romanian	Sudanese	UK	Unknown	Total
Sexual	Child (17 or under)	Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Not specified or unknown	Child (17 or under)	Male	1	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	5
Labour & Criminal	Child (17 or under)	Male	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	3
Criminal	Child (17 or under	Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
	Child (17 or under	Male	0	0	1	1	1	0	7	1	11

2021

Child exploitation types

Claimed exploitation type	Age group at exploitation	Gender	Afghan	Albanian	Eritrean	Polish	Romanian UK	Sudanese	UK	Ukrainian	Unknown	Total
Sexual	Child (17 or under)	Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Unknown	Child (17 or under)	Male	1	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	5
Lab & crim	Child (17 or under)	Male	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	3
Crim	Child (17 or under	Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
	Child (17 or under	Male	0	0	1	1	1	0	7	0	1	11

2022

Child exploitation type

Claimed exploitation type	Age group at exploitation	Gender	Albanian	Albanian German	Polish	Polish UK	Romanian Spanish	UK	UK Vietnamese	Unknown UK	Vietnamese	Zim	Total
Crim	Child (17 or under)		1	0	1	1	0	18	0	1	0	1	24
		F	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
		M	1	0	1	1	0	16	0	1	0	1	22
Lab & Crim	Child (17 or under)	F	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
		M	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
	Unknown		0	1	0	0	1	0	6	0	0	0	0
Sexual	Child (17 or under)	F	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1

1st Qtr 2023

Child exploitation type

Age at exploitation	Gender	UK	Vietnamese	Total
Child (17 or under)		6	1	7
	Male	6	1	7
Child (17 or under)		0	0	1
	Female	0	0	1
		12	2	16

Appendix 3. Diversity in CSAE

Table: Child sex offences by age of perpetrator n=30

Set 1	Contact Sex Offence	Age 18-20	Age 21-30	Age 31-40	Age 41-50	Age 51-60	Age 61-70	Age 71+	Total for Specified Offence	V<13
1A	Rape	0	2	5	0	2	0	1	10	2
1A (att)	Attempted Rape	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	1
1B	Assault by Penetration	0	0	3	0	2	0	0	5	3
1C	Sexual Assault Against a Child	0	0	1	1	16	2	4	24	1
1D	Assault – Touching	0	7	2	0	2	0	0	11	0
	Total for age group	**0**	**10**	**11**	**2**	**22**	**2**	**5**	**52**	**7**

Set 2	Engagement in Sexual Activity	Age 18-20	Age 21-30	Age 31-40	Age 41-50	Age 51-60	Age 61-70	Age 71+	Total for Specified Offence	V<13
2A	Engaging in Sexual Activity with a Child	0	12	3	6	0	1	0	22	1
2B	Engaging in Sexual Activity in their Presence of a Child	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
2C	Causing/Inciting a Chid to Engage in Sexual Activity	0	0	0	2	7	0	5	14	2
2C(p)	Causing/Inciting a Chid to Engage in Sexual Activity – Penetration	0	0	0	3	2	0	0	5	0
2C (att)	Attempt to Causing/Inciting a Chid to Engage in Sexual Activity	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
2D	Paying for the Sexual Services of a Child	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total for age group	**0**	**12**	**0**	**12**	**10**	**1**	**5**	**43**	**11**

Set 3	Communications	Age 18-20	Age 21-30	Age 31-40	Age 41-50	Age 51-60	Age 61-70	Age 71+	Total for Specified Offence	V<13
3A	Engaging in sexual Communication With a Child	0	9	0	3	1	0	0	13	3
3B	Arranging/Facilitating a Child Sexual Offence	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	0
	Total for age group	**0**	**9**	**0**	**3**	**2**	**1**	**0**	**15**	**3**

Set 4	Images	Age 18-20	Age 21-30	Age 31-40	Age 41-50	Age 51-60	Age 61-70	Age 71+	Total for Specified Offence	V<13
4A	Making Indecent images/Photographs/Videos of a Child	0	4	0	2	10	3	3	0	0
4B	Distributing Indecent images/Photographs/Videos of a Child	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	4	0
4C	Uploading Indecent images/Photographs/Videos of a Child	0	0	4	2	0	0	0	6	0
4D	Possession of Indecent images/Photographs/Videos of a Child	0	0	0	0	3	3	0	6	0
4E	Taking Photographs of a Child	0	0	0	0	5	5	0	10	0
4F	Recording Under Clothes Without Consent	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4G	Possession of Extreme Pornography	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	0
	Total for age group	**0**	**6**	**4**	**4**	**21**	**12**	**3**	**29**	**0**

Set 5	Other	Age 18-20	Age 21-30	Age 31-40	Age 41-50	Age 51-60	Age 61-70	Age 71+	Total for Specified Offence	V<13
5A	Voyeurism	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	5	0
5B	Breach of SHPO	0	3	1	0	0	0	3	7	0
5C	Possession of a Paedophile Manual	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
	Total for age group	**0**	**3**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**5**	**13**	**0**

Diversity of offending by age

Victimology/age of perp	Age 18-20	Age 21-30	Age 31-40	Age 41-50	Age 51-60	Age 61-70	Age 71+	Total Abuse
<13	0	2	3	0	2	0	1	**8**
>13	0	3	4	2	2	1	0	**12**
<13 +>13	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	**2**
boy	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	**1**
Girl	0	5	5	2	3	1	2	**18**
Boy + Girl	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	**1**
Age Unknown	0	2	2	2	0	0	2	**8**
Sex Unknown	0	3	3	2	0	0	1	**9**
Total Diversity Score	**0**	**14**	**17**	**8**	**10**	**2**	**6**	
Diversity less Unknown Score	**0**	**11**	**12**	**4**	**10**	**2**	**3**	

Total diversity diversity minus unknown variance:

Correlation between nonhuman facilitators and age of offender

Age group	Phone	Private vehicle	PC/laptop/tablet	Digital camera	Dating site	Upload/ext storage	Gifts	Payment	Internet distribution
21-30	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
31-40	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
41-50	1	0	1	2	0	1	1	0	0
51-60	1	1	1	2	0	0	1	0	1
61-70	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
71+	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0

Variables	r	ρ	Significance
Total facilitators/ Number of offences	0.7284	0.100632	There is a strong positive correlation between the number of offences and the number of facilitators used by different age groups, but this correlation is not statistically significant given the p-value of 0.1006. This suggests that we do not have enough evidence to confidently state that the observed correlation is not due to random chance.
Number by age group/phone and computer	-0.8281	0.0418	• **Phone Usage**: There is a strong negative correlation between age group and the use of phones, but it is not statistically significant. • **PC/Laptop/Tablet Usage**: There is a very strong negative correlation between age group and the use of PC/Laptop/Tablet, and this correlation is statistically significant
Number by age group/online services	0.4140	0.4144	• All correlations (dating site, upload/external storage, and internet distribution) between age group and the use of these online facilitators are weak. • None of the correlations are statistically significant
Number by age group/ Cam/vid	-0.9165	0.0102	• There is a very strong negative correlation between age group and the use of digital cameras to facilitate offences. • This correlation is statistically significant, suggesting that the relationship between age and the use of digital cameras in committing offences is reliable and not due to random variation.
Number by Age Group/ Payment/Gift	Gifts 0.4880 Payment: 0.3928	Gifts 0.3262 Payment: 0.4411	**Gifts Usage**: There is a moderate positive correlation between age group and the use of gifts, but it is not statistically significant. **Payment Usage**: There is a weak positive correlation between age group and the use of payments, but it is not statistically significant. In both cases, the correlations are not strong enough to be statistically significant, suggesting that the observed relationships may be due to random chance rather than a true underlying pattern.

Appendix 4. Offence codes

Sex offences

Coding Offences

Set 1: Contact Sex Offences

1A	Rape
1A(att)	Attempted Rape
1B	Assault by Penetration
1C	Sexual Assault Against a Child
1D	Assault – Touching

Set 2: Engagement in Sexual Activity

2A	Engaging in Sexual Activity with a Child
2B	Engaging in Sexual Activity in ther Presence of a Child
2C	Causing/Inciting a Chid to Engage in Sexual Activity
2C(p)	Causing/Inciting a Chid to Engage in Sexual Activity – Penetration
2C(att)	Attempt to Causing/Inciting a Chid to Engage in Sexual Activity
2D	Paying for the Sexual Services of a Child

Set 3: Communications

3A	Engaging in sexual Communication With a Child
3B	Arranging/Facilitating a Child Sexual Offence

Set 4: Images

4A	Making Indecent images/Photographs/Videos of a Child
4B	Distributing Indecent images/Photographs/Videos of a Child
4C	Uploading Indecent images/Photographs/Videos of a Child
4D	Possession of Indecent images/Photographs/Videos of a Child
4E	Taking Photographs of a Child
4F	Recording Under Clothes Without Consent
4G	Possession of Extreme Pornography

Set 5: Other

5A	Voyeurism
5B	Breach of SHPO
5C	Possession of a Paedophile Manual

CCE

Set 1

1A   Conspiring to arrange or facilitate persons under 18 with a view to their exploitation

1B   Modern Slavery

Set 2

2A   Conspiracy to supply heroin

2B   Conspiracy to supply crack cocaine and possession

2C   PWITS Class A

Set 3

3A   Possession of an offensive weapon

3B   Possession of a firearm (CS Spray)

Set 4

4A   Refusing to disclose a mobile phone password

4B   Posession of Criminal Property

Set 5

5A   Affray

5B   Dangerous Driving

Appendix 5. CSAE case examples

Correlation of CSAE with online services is weak and not statistically significant.

Case examples:

There is a positive correlation between age group and use of online services such as dating sites and messaging services or social media during sexual offending against children. However, the statistical significance of this correlation is marginal. This means that online services do not cause predatory and exploitative behaviour by adults towards children but they enable it in those who are motivated to sexually abuse children.

CSEA-P5 Age of Offender: 29
Residence: LPA 1
Victim: Female under the age of 16
Offence Code: 2x 2A, 1x 3A.
Modus Operandi: Sent his victim messages on social media in 2019,asked her if she had performed a sex act then an unsolicited sexual image of himself and asked for an image in return.

CSEA-P10 Age of Offender: 36
Residence: LPA13 ⁄ 14
Victim: 15-year-old female
Offence Code: 3x 2A, 3x4C
Modus Operandi: Met on Gaming platform – contact began with conversations purely about the game,

CSEA-P10 began to groom the girl, sending her sexual messages and requesting photos and videos, before the abuse escalated with him sexually abusing her in person. In this case the first contact with the child is via a gaming platform providing a shared space and interest through which to identify and engage a suitable target.

CSEA-P16 Age of Offender: 45
Residence: LPA 13
Victim: Male aged 14
Offence Code: 1x 3A(att). 1X 2C+att
Modus Operandi: Grindr & Snap to engaged sexual comms with whom he believed to be 14 yr old boy. Police Online Sting – Offender was a Special Constable.

CSAE very strong negative correlation between age and abuse facilitated by cameras and video recorders

Case examples:

As individuals get older, they are less likely to use digital cameras and recording devices to commit sexual offences offences. This relationship is strong and not just a random occurrence(i.e. statistically significant). However, it should be noted that offenders in the two youngest age groups (21 to 30 and 31 to 40) make less use of cameras and video recording than those in the two middle-aged groups.

CSEA-P13 Age of Offender: 41
Residence: LPA3/4
Victim: age and sex of victim unknown
Offence Code: 3x 4A and 3X5A
Modus Operandi: Uploading CSA Images. He had also been involved in making first-generation images, which he had obtained by using hidden devices.

CSEA-P24 Age of Offender: 60
Residence: Outside County
Victim: female aged 13
Offence Code: 2x 1C, 3x 4A, 3x 4D, 5x 4E, 1x 5A
Modus Operandi: Between December 2020 and August 2021, groomed 13-year-old girl offering lifts to places and giving her money. Later sexually assault her by touching her and attempts to kiss her. Digital devices were seized, and indecent images of children found on them, including photos he had taken of the 13-year-old girl and other members of her peer group.

CSEA- P24 Age of Offender: 73
Residence: Outside County
Victim: female children and one adult
Offence Code: 3x 4A, 2x 5A, 2x 1C, 2x 2C
Modus Operandi: Single Victim of Sexual assault in Northampton, but 5,000 indecent images of children were found on his devices. The 2X Voyeurism related to photographs taken of a woman naked without her knowledge.

Moderate positive correlation for age and gifts and a weak positive correlation for payment

The use of gifts and payments to victims during sexual offending against children is correlated with age but is not statistically significant. The oldest offenders (age group >70) only use gifts and payments as a facilitator with offenders in the 61 to 70 age group been found to use only gifts and payments to victims and online services. The age groups 41 to 50 and 51 to 60 offered gifts and payments to victims of child sexual abuse as well as using other nonhuman facilitators. The correlation between age and the use of gifts and payment to facilitate offending may therefore be as likely to happen by chance, meaning other factors in the offenders' modus operandi should be considered as potentially more significant.

Case examples:

CSEA- P17 Age of Offender: 45
Residence: LPA 3
Victim: female aged 14
Offence Code: 3x 2A, 4x2C,2x 4C
Modus Operandi: Began with giving her extra change when paying for items and giving her free sweets and soft drinks. Progressed and led to sexually abusing her, both inside the shop and at his home.

CSEA-P26 Age of Offender: 90
Residence: LPA12
Victim: female under the age of 13
Offence Code: 4x 5B, 1x 1C ‹ 13, 1x2C ‹13
Modus Operandi: On multiple occasions in August 2020, CSEA -P26 spoke to numerous children outside his address – offering them sweets and money and inviting them into his house.

Appendix 6. CCE case examples

Age Group 19 to 30

CCE-P 11: age 19 (single offender)
Location: Outside County
Offence Code: 1A
CCE-P 11 trafficked a 15-year-old boy from London and a 17-year-old boy from Rushden. Police investigators also found two girls at his home. These girls were aged 15 and 16. He was convicted in relation to the two boys.

CCE-P 13: age 27 (Operation Cloak)
Location: LPA 8 ⁄ 9
Offence Code: 1B and 2B
CCE-P 13 supported his older stepbrother in the organisation and operation of drug line. He was responsible for sourcing supply of multiple kilos of heroin and crack cocaine. He is reported to be second-in-command of the OCG (for co-defendants).

CCE-P 14 age 20 (Operation Cloak)
Location: LPA 8 ⁄ 9
Offence Code: 1B, 2B and 5A
CCE-P 14 had a significant role in the gang and reputation for violence. He did not hold a senior position within the gang (for co-defendants.

Age Group 31 to 40

CCE-P 1: age 31 (Operation Poetry)
Location: Outside County
Offence Code: 1A, 2B, 3A
CCE-P 1 was part of a large conspiracy to supply heroin and crack cocaine and was one of several members of that organised crime group or network to be convicted of conspiring to arrange/facilitate persons under the age of 18 with a view to their exploitation

CCE-P 6: age 39 (Operation Poetry)
Location: no fixed abode
Offence Code: 1A, 2B
CCE-P 6 was part of a large conspiracy to supply heroin and crack cocaine and was one of several members of that organised crime group or network to be convicted of conspiring to arrange/facilitate persons under the age of 18 with a view to their exploitation.

CCE-P 9: age 39 (Operation Poetry)
Location: LPA 3/4
Offence Code: 1A, 2B
CCE-P 6 was part of a large conspiracy to supply heroin and crack cocaine and was one of several members of that organised crime group or network to be convicted of conspiring to arrange/facilitate persons under the age of 18 with a view to their exploitation.

CCE-P 12: age 32 (Operation Cloak)
Location: LPA 8/9
Offence Code: 1B and 2B
CCE-P 12 was head of the OCG which was also associated with firearms. He used "Youngies" from the local estate. One of the identified victims was a 14-year-old boy with cognitive impairments and the other was a 15-year-old boy. Debt bondage was used to ensnare victims who were then controlled through the use of violence and threats to them and their families. This gang did not run a typical drug line in that they did not send mass messages, the drug line number did not change and they served their market through word-of-mouth.

Age Group 41 to 50

CCE-P 3: age 44 (Operation Poetry)
Location: LPA 3/4
Offence Code: 1A, 2B
CCE-P 3 was part of a large conspiracy to supply heroin and crack cocaine and was one of several members of that organised crime group or network to be convicted of conspiring to arrange/facilitate persons under the age of 18 with a view to their exploitation.

CCE-P 5: aged 42 (Operation Poetry)
Location: LPA 3/4
Offence Code: 1A, 2B
CCE-P 5 was part of a large conspiracy to supply heroin and crack cocaine and was one of several members of that organised crime group or network to be convicted of conspiring to arrange/facilitate persons under the age of 18 with a view to their exploitation.

CCE-P 8: aged 46 (Operation Poetry)
Location: LPA 3/4
Offence Code: 1A, 2B
CCE-P 8 was part of a large conspiracy to supply heroin and crack cocaine and was one of several members of that organised crime group or network to be convicted of conspiring to arrange/facilitate persons under the age of 18 with a view to their exploitation.

CCE-P 10: aged 41 (Operation Poetry)
Location: LPA 3/4
Offence Code: 1A, 2B
CCE-P 10 was part of a large conspiracy to supply heroin and crack cocaine and was one of several members of that organised crime group or network to be convicted of conspiring to arrange/facilitate persons under the age of 18 with a view to their exploitation.

Age Group 51 to 60

CCE-P 2: aged 55 (Operation Poetry)
Location: LPA 3/4
Offence Code: 1A, 2B, 3 A, 3B and 4 A
CCE-P 2 is female and was part of a large conspiracy to supply heroin and crack cocaine and was one of several members of that organised crime group or network to be convicted of conspiring to arrange/facilitate persons under the age of 18 with a view to their exploitation. She shared the same family name and address as CCE-P 1 suggesting a family connection between the two.

CCE-P 7: age 60 (Operation Poetry)
Location: no fixed abode
Offence Code: 1A, 2B
CCE-P 7 is female and the oldest person within this sample. She was part of a large conspiracy to supply heroin and crack cocaine and was one of several members of that organised crime group or network to be convicted of conspiring to arrange/facilitate persons under the age of 18 with a view to their exploitation.

MODERN SLAVERY & HUMAN RIGHTS | POLICY & EVIDENCE CENTRE

Led by the University of Oxford

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

HUMANITIES DIVISION

The Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) at the University of Oxford exists to enhance understanding of modern slavery and transform the effectiveness of laws and policies designed to address it. The Centre funds and co-produces high quality research with a focus on policy impact, and brings together academics, policymakers, businesses, civil society and survivors to collaborate on solving this global challenge.

The Centre is a consortium of three Universities of Oxford, Liverpool and Hull, and is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) on behalf of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

office@modernslaverypec.org

www.modernslaverypec.org

Our partners:

UNIVERSITY of HULL | Wilberforce Institute

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

Bonavero Institute of Human Rights

Funded by:

UKRI | Arts and Humanities Research Council