

Information sheet

'County Lines' and 'Cuckooing'

The National Crime Agency (NCA) - the UK body charged with fighting organised crime – is very concerned that city-based organised crime gangs are taking over drug networks in coastal and market towns by using telephone hotlines, who are recruiting vulnerable people, often children, to act as couriers and to sell drugs.

According to a recent NCA report, there is "growing" evidence of gangs - particularly from London and the South East - using mobile phone lines to extend drug dealing into new areas. The issue now affects the majority of UK police forces and has been highlighted a major safeguarding concern, it said.

The name of '**county lines**' refers to the use of a single telephone number for ordering drugs, operated from outside the area, which becomes the group's brand. Unlike other criminal activities where telephone numbers are changed on a regular basis, these telephone numbers are maintained and protected; this crime is on the rise and is becoming a major safeguarding concern across the capital.

How does the operation work?

The gangs begin by taking over premises in the target town, sometimes by coercion, by using property belonging to local addicts who are paid in drugs, or by beginning a relationship with a vulnerable female. This is a process known as cuckooing. One in place they use common marketing tactics to get established, including introductory offers.

They will then expand the workforce, recruiting local runners to deliver drugs and money. The groups often use children, because they work for little pay, are easy to control, and are less likely to be detected.

The NCA report found that most runners are boys aged between 14 and 17 and that grooming with gifts and money to control them via a 'debt' was common. Where girls were used they sometimes also became the victims of sexual violence.

The gangs tend to use a local property, generally belonging to a vulnerable person, as a base for their activities. This is often taken over by force or coercion, and in some instances victims have left their homes in fear of violence - a practise known as cuckooing.

They employ various tactics to evade detection, including rotating gang members between locations so they are not identified by law enforcement or competitors, and using women and children to transport drugs in the belief that they are less likely to be stopped and searched.

The urban gangs were attracted to Somerset by the combination of a lack of competition the potential customer base, and low resistance from local dealers.

Cuckooing

'Cuckooing' is the term used to describe the practice where professional drug dealers take over the property of a vulnerable person and use it as a place from which to run their drugs business. The drug dealers will target those who are vulnerable, potentially as a result of substance abuse, mental health issues, or loneliness, and befriend them or promise them drugs in exchange for being able to use their property.

By using an unassuming property, criminals can operate their drugs supply out of sight in an attempt to stay below the police radar. They are often only in the premises for a short amount of time before moving on to their next victim.

As the victims of cuckooing are vulnerable, they are often fearful of going to the police and worry that they will be incriminated in the criminality.

Please see link below for detailed information

<http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/753-county-lines-gang-violence-exploitation-and-drug-supply-2016/file>

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