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Criminal exploitation in Norfolk

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Chapter 1: Introduction

'County Lines' is a national issue which involves the exploitation of vulnerable young people and adults by violent gang members in order to move and sell drugs across the country (Crown Prosecution Service, 2018)

1.1: Background

Norfolk's proximity to London by train and increased accessibility by car after the dualing of the A11, the main road into Norfolk, is fortunate for businesses and individuals. However, it has opened up opportunities for networks of criminal activity, also known as 'county lines' to spread into the county.[1] One response to the problem is Operation Gravity which is a multi-agency attempt to disrupt and prevent organised crime in Norfolk.

Norfolk Constabulary and its partners have a good understanding of the extent of the issue. This report, therefore, focuses on the experiences of those exploited through county lines activity, the practitioners who support them and the residents living in communities where there is county lines activity and increased levels of drug dealing.

1.2: County lines exploitation

The emergent drug supply model, known as 'county lines' connects local drug users to dealers operating in their area via a hub city dealer (Coomber and Moyle, 2018). What is distinctive about the county lines business model is the exploitation of vulnerable populations for street-level supply (Coomber and Moyle, 2018). There are several ways in which children and adults can be exploited including acting as couriers of drugs from cities to smaller towns, selling drugs at street-level or the occupation of their accommodation by dealers, also known as 'cuckooing'. Such activities can expose them to *'an intensified drug habit, psychological harm, debt, violence and arrest'* (Coomber and Moyle, 2018, p.1338).

A child, young person or adult with any vulnerability can become a target and therefore the profile of victims of exploitation is broad. There is evidence that younger children are easier to exploit and control although they need to be able to effectively carry out the criminal activity expected such as travel and selling. Poverty, family relationship problems and being in care can also make young people vulnerable as they seek to gain material items and feel a sense of belonging elsewhere (Whittaker et al, 2019). Behavioural and/or developmental disorders and addiction to substances can make it difficult for individuals to understand the signs of exploitation. In order to reduce attention from authorities, including law enforcement, more affluent young people without criminal records (also known as 'clean skins') are sometimes recruited, tempted by the status it may afford them. In contrast, adults who are targeted are more likely to have drug addictions and histories of offending such as shoplifting or have precarious citizenship status (Whittaker et al, 2019).

There are many places where perpetrators recruit vulnerable individuals including schools and alternative education provision, residential and foster homes and homeless shelters. Perpetrators may take over the homes of vulnerable adults and use the premises to set up their local drug dealing

[1] From Local Government Association https://www.local.gov.uk/norfolk-county-council-moving-enforcement-early-intervention

business (NCA, 2019a). Cases where this has happened have, as mentioned above, been labelled as 'cuckooing' (Spicer, Moyle & Coomber, 2019). Spicer and colleagues (2019) have developed a typology of cuckooing in an attempt to identify its nuances:

- Parasitic nest invading – invading the home of an individual under false pretence or with force
- Quasi- cuckooing – cases where it was difficult to entangle willingness and consent where the individual had perhaps initially been willing in return for drugs
- Coupling – initiating intimate relationships to gain access to a home
- Local cuckooing – a practice local dealers may use when imitating county lines groups

What the above demonstrates is the complex nature of relationships and the consequent difficulties when law enforcement and support services attempt to intervene to protect and support vulnerable individuals. Some individuals will not see their experience as exploitation and in many cases the exploiters will themselves be victims of exploitation hence the line between victim and perpetrator is blurred (Hudek, 2018).

1.3: Process of exploitation

The process of grooming, identified as an aspect of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, is also evident in criminal exploitation (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2013; Spicer, 2018). Children and vulnerable adults are entrapped into working for drug dealers by offers of material items, relationships and status, money or drugs and later receive little or no remuneration (Robinson, McLean & Densley, 2019). The National Crime Agency stresses that '*Exploitation is a key element of the county lines offending model*' (NCA, 2019a, para 7).

Victims of exploitation are sometimes internally trafficked within the UK[2]. Moving children around the country can reduce risk for the perpetrators. Exploited children should always be considered as victims of trafficking when they are found and arrested in possession of controlled drugs (The Children's Society, 2019). Children suspected of having experienced trafficking should be referred through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). However, as the latest report from The Children's Society explains, the NRM has no official status in the criminal court and there is no process for stopping criminal proceedings against the child whilst awaiting a NRM decision. Children may therefore experience traumatic criminal proceedings in addition to the exploitation and abuse at the hands of their perpetrators but later found to be victims of trafficking (Stone, 2018; The Children's Society, 2019). Thus, the cases where protection can be provided through the Modern Slavery Act 2015 are likely to be those where the child is readily identifiable as a victim (Stone, 2018).

Trafficked children and young people commuting from cities to smaller towns are placed in harmful situations and their whereabouts are rarely known (Windle and Briggs, 2015). Windle and Briggs' study found that young people were exposed to violence, sexual assaults, risky behaviour and hazardous accommodation whilst away from home or care. With no trusted adults to look out for them they were extremely vulnerable. Evidence of this was found in a serious case review about a young person who was found in Norfolk, having travelled from Essex (Byford, 2016). James was a 16 year old frequently missing, although not always reported missing by his parents. During one such

[2] A person commits an offence of human trafficking if the person arranges or facilitates the travel of another person [A] with a view to [A] being exploited. Travel can be happening between different countries or within the same country (Modern Slavery Act 2015)

missing episode, he was found in the wardrobe of a woman in her 50s when her house was searched by police. At that time, concern was focussed on him apparently being homeless and the risk of exploitation was not addressed (Brandon et al, forthcoming). He later died by suicide.

The link between going missing and criminal exploitation is not straightforward. However, there is some evidence that children and young people who are missing from home or care, perhaps due to difficult family relationships, are vulnerable due to their need to belong and the feelings of support from gang members as well as the protection membership can offer (Smeaton, 2009; NCA, 2019a; DfE, 2019).

Recent data show that gang-associated children and young people are more likely than children who are not associated with gangs to go missing, be exploited sexually and trafficked. They are also likely to be in alternative education, excluded, have low attendance rates or be absent from school (Clarke, 2019; Sturrock & Holmes, 2015). A report by the Children's Commissioner (2019) stresses the link between the act of excluding a child and vulnerability to gang violence. Drawing on evidence from the Department for Education, they demonstrate a rise in permanent school exclusions of 67% between 2012/13 and 2016/17 potentially leaving even more children vulnerable to exploitation. Hudek (2018, p.20) found that some pupil referral units do not engage children and can be *'fertile ground for recruitment and continuing involvement in a variety of negative activities including county lines'*.

1.4: Understanding spaces and places

Gangs use public places to establish their territory and may use both built environments such as railways and parks and symbolic symbols such as graffiti to mark their space (Valasik & Tita, 2018). There is evidence that gangs are drawn to vacant buildings where there may be less of a police presence (Valasik and Tita, 2018). However, more densely populated areas with more people can also be desirable as a space for drug dealing and other criminal activity as gang members can hide in a crowd and conceal their activities (Venkatesh, 2000). This may also be the case for young people who are being exploited as loitering and selling drugs in a crowded space can make them invisible and therefore increase their vulnerabilities.

The internet and digital technology can provide a less regulated space to support criminal activity and exploitation. For gangs, such spaces can foster collective identity and incite violence, sometimes through songs and videos (Storrod and Densley, 2017). Storrod and Densely (2017, p.692) suggest that as for traditional outreach work with gang-involved youth, *'we need an agenda for street work where no street (or only a 'digital' one) exists'*.

Policing community spaces becomes increasingly important, not only to disrupt criminal activity and protect the public but to engage with communities so that crime and resulting exploitation may be prevented (Public Health England, 2018).

1.5: The relevance of adverse childhood experiences

There is a well-documented link between adverse childhood experiences (also known as ACEs) and later health and wellbeing (Hughes et al, 2017; Herzog & Schmahl, 2018). Originally the link was limited to direct harm within the home but other adversities outside the home, for example unsafe neighbourhoods, might be expected to have similar long-term impact on later life outcomes (NHS Highland, 2018). As with understanding criminal activity and gang cultures, a public health approach to adverse childhood experiences is important to understand prevalence, impact and prevention and to move away from individual responsibility and blame (LGA, 2019).

Although individuals with more than six of ten possible adverse childhood experiences[3] are at increased risk of poor health outcomes, the ACE questionnaire does not consider the severity of the issues, the age at which a particular problem presents or the duration of the problem. It is also limited in the kind of experiences recorded and therefore it is not suitable as a tool to predict subsequent behaviour or health outcomes.

Nonetheless, there are similarities between ACEs and risk factors for involvement with drugs and gangs. In line with ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the Home Office suggests that there are five domains of risk factors (Home Office, 2015):

- Individual (hyperactivity, lack of guilt and empathy, physical violence/aggression, positive attitudes towards delinquency, previous criminal activity)
- Family (poverty, violence/abuse, broken home, anti-social parents)
- School (low academic performance, low commitment to school, frequent truancy)
- Peer group (delinquent peers, commitment to delinquent peers, peer rejection)
- Community (neighbourhood disorganisation, exposure to drugs)

The same report indicates that little is known about protective factors but suggests, from review of the literature, the following as *strong* protective factors within each domain, none of which are surprising but perhaps difficult to achieve for the most vulnerable young people:

- Individual (belief in moral order, prosocial attitudes, low impulsivity)
- Family (good family management, stable family structure, infrequent parent-child conflict)
- School (high academic achievement)
- Peer (none)
- Community (low economic deprivation)

When investigating criminal exploitation, as in many other investigations, police increasingly focus on vulnerabilities of the victims and presumed perpetrators and recently ACE awareness and trauma-informed practice has been advocated (Ford et al, 2017). Having an understanding of earlier life experiences can allow early intervention but also impact on policing when dealing with offenders (Public Health England, 2018). However, awareness of adverse childhood experiences is mostly useful when thinking about prevention. Adverse childhood experiences need to be prevented rather than merely documented in adolescence or adulthood once difficulties have arisen (Public Health England, 2018).

1.6: Support, interventions and staff development

The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Norfolk has successfully secured funding from the Home Office Early Intervention Youth Fund that will increase the support and interventions for

[3] Adverse childhood experiences included in the ten are: emotional, physical and sexual abuse, neglect, poverty, broken home, domestic violence, parental substance misuse, parental mental health issues and parental history of criminality.

young people in Norfolk and raise awareness of child criminal exploitation within communities and amongst professionals.[4]

In addition, there are many voluntary agencies that support young people across Norfolk. Some are commissioned by Children's Services to provide support whereas other agencies rely on continuous bidding for funding to keep going.

The brief review here highlights the diversity of victims of exploitation and therefore *'there is not one simple solution'* as explained by The Children's Society's (2019, p.69) recent report. The report suggests some areas that could helpfully be explored including attitudes and language used by practitioners, resources available to respond to children's needs, interpretation of the legal framework including understanding of the National Referral Mechanism, training for professionals and multiagency working.

1.7: Conclusion

A recent scoping report exploring knowledge and understanding of County Lines recognised that although

> *'awareness of county lines is growing, full understanding and identification of the phenomenon and the aspect of exploitation of vulnerable children seems very variable across and within different geographical areas and organisations (police, youth offending, children's/social services, voluntary sector)'* (Hudek, 2018, p.2).

Using the National Referral Mechanism statistics as a proxy, it is clear that county lines and other criminal exploitation is increasing and becoming more recognised. Referrals for those under 18 years of age increased by 48% between 2017 and 2018 and reached 3,137 in 2018, with the majority linked to county lines (NCA, 2019b). Norfolk Constabulary recognised the risk to safety and life when young people and vulnerable adults in Norfolk communities are criminally exploited and commissioned the University of East Anglia to explore the experiences of those affected by county lines exploitation in Norfolk.

[4] The project will be evaluated separately https://www.norfolk-pcc.gov.uk/eiyf/

Chapter 2: The study

The aim of this study was not to look at the extent or types of criminal exploitation but to get an in-depth understanding of the experiences of local people including young people, vulnerable adults, community residents and practitioners. The research questions focussed on the following:

- How are local children and vulnerable adults targeted and groomed?
- What is the impact on communities where there is county lines activity?
- What is the level of awareness of county lines activity amongst safeguarding professionals in Norfolk?
- How are children and vulnerable adults who are victims supported?
    - What is the current support available?
    - How do victims of exploitation view the available support?

2.1: Methodology

A qualitative study was undertaken between March 2019 and February 2020. It included interviews with young people and vulnerable adults, interviews with residents in areas with county lines activity and focus groups with practitioners. In addition, a brief literature review was undertaken to establish key issues related to criminal exploitation and county lines.

Interviews with residents living in an affected community

Five interviews were undertaken with four females and one male participant. Interviews took place face-to-face in the homes of the participants or another local venue such as a quiet café. Two participants lived alone and the time lived in the area ranged from two years to 58 years (Table 1).

Table 1: Characteristics of residents in affected community

	Female 1	Female 2	Female 3	Female 4	Male 1
Who living with	Living alone	Living alone	Couple	Couple	Couple
How long in place	2 years	47 years	30 years	10 years	58 years

Interviews with young people and vulnerable adults

The researchers aimed to interview a total of ten young people and vulnerable adults but managed to interview 12 in the time period. The majority of participants (nine) were adults and included five males and four females. Their ages ranged from 27 to 53 years (mean age, 41 years). One vulnerable adult with mental health issues preferred for us to speak to both of his parents about his experiences. There were difficulties when recruiting young people through agencies as gatekeepers were often reluctant for us to speak to young people who they considered too vulnerable. Two young people were interviewed (one male and one female) and a third male was more comfortable for us to get the information about his exploitation from his parent. All interviews took place face-to-face in a venue where participants were accessing services apart from interviews with the parents which took place in their home and in a room at the University of East Anglia respectively.

Ages and gender are set out below (Tables 2 and 3) but no other details will be given due to the sensitive nature of the issue. It is important to remember that for some of the participants, the exploitation took place at a younger age. For example, the young people who were exploited in some cases had those experiences as young as 14 years old. Participants came predominantly from the Norwich area but some lived in North and West Norfolk.

Table 2: Age and gender of vulnerable adult participants

Gender	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female
Age	27	37	38	40	46	32	46	51	53

Table 3: Age and gender of young people

Gender	Male	Male	Female
Age	17	18	18

Focus groups with professionals

Two focus group were run, one with practitioners supporting adults and another with practitioners supporting young people.

Focus group with practitioners supporting adults

Seven participants attended the focus group:

- A local counsellor
- Vulnerable women's charity support worker
- Personal assistant (Leaving care team)
- Drug and alcohol support service manager
- Homeless charity manager
- Police officer
- Social worker

Focus group with practitioners supporting young people

Thirteen participants attended the focus group. It is important to note that many more wanted to attend but it would have made the group too large and limited the time participants had to talk. It was also interesting to see how the focus group became a networking event for practitioners and despite the group taking place in the afternoon, most practitioners stayed on afterwards and chatted to others who they may have come across virtually but never met. Names and contact details were exchanged. Participants came from the following organisations:

- Police (2)
- Education (2)
- Voluntary sector (3)
- Youth offending (1)
- Children's social care (4)
- Public health (1)

2.2: Data analysis

All transcribed data from the interviews and focus groups were analysed using thematic analysis. This allowed themes to emerge from the data and provided insight into vulnerabilities, experiences of exploitation and community issues. Wherever possible, direct quotes have been used to ensure rigour and inclusion of the voices of the participants. Analysis was aided by NVivo 12 software.

2.3: Ethical considerations

The study abided by the guidelines for ethical practice from the British Sociological Association (British Sociological Association, 2002) and ethical approval was obtained from the School of Social Work, University of East Anglia ethics committee. In addition research governance was obtained from Norfolk County Council. All participants received clear information about the study and consented.

Reporting the findings

Quotes from interview participants have not been assigned to individuals but it is made clear whether the quote is from an adult or a young person. In the case of adults, we have also included the gender. For example, '**Adult male**' and '**Young person**'. We have deliberately not numbered participants as it may be possible to identify an individual from the quotes presented when taken as a whole.

Individual focus group participants are identified by the focus group they attended and not their individual agencies to increase anonymity. Quotes will be attributed to either '**FG YP practitioners**' when from a participant in the focus group with practitioners who support young people or '**FG adult practitioners**' when from a participant in the focus group with practitioners who support adults.

All community residents are referred to as '**Resident**'.

Chapter 3: Experiences of young people, vulnerable adults and those who support them

This chapter will explore the experiences of the young people and vulnerable adults who participated in the interviews as well as the views of practitioners who support them. For authenticity and to ensure that their expertise remains central, we have included many of the words from our participants.

3.1: Childhood adversity and vulnerabilities

Education journeys

Analysis revealed that the young people and adults subjected to criminal exploitation shared a number of vulnerabilities. Most notable is their education experiences. Often primary school was a place of safety and nurture but the transition to secondary education tended to be unsuccessful. A mother explained that *'high school was the beginning of the end'* for her child. One young person missed many school days due to a childhood illness which meant that they were behind with school work and that influenced their future school career:

> *So I didn't really like get to go to a nursery and reception [class] that much and I was always like in and out of school quite a lot because of like illnesses but then when it came to High School umm I was attending more but then I kept getting bullied and stuff…everyone would pick on me…* (Young person)

An adult who had been involved in crime both as a victim and a perpetrator for many years was not able to settle even at primary school:

> *My very first day at Infants, it's Primary School now but Infants back then, I got suspended because some kid scribbled on my trousers and I stabbed him in the leg with a pencil.* (Adult male)

Again, that set the scene for his journey through education which, like many of the participants, was dominated by school exclusions:

> *Every school I went to I got expelled from.* (Adult male)

Attending alternative education was also unsuccessful for many of the participants, some of whom had developed drug and alcohol dependencies by the time they reached adolescence:

> *My mum would make us a two litre bottle of squash each to go in our packed lunch and we would buy a bottle of vodka and we would pour half into each.* (Adult male)

> *Everyone was standing outside smoking weed and laughing at the teachers inside, you know.* (Young person)

It is perhaps not surprising that placing troubled and vulnerable young people together reduces the benefits of interventions, yet many services and agencies do just that as they remove young people from the mainstream and segregate them in groups. For example, young offender institutions or alternative education. Hemphill and Smith (2010, pvi) write in their overview of evidence on approaches to prevent violence among young people in Australia:

> *Consistently negative effects have been found for prevention approaches that involve grouping high-risk antisocial youth together in groups, programs or classrooms.*

Exclusion from mainstream school and a transfer to alternative educational provision led to another exclusion for two young people. They were subsequently educated at home which meant that they were no longer monitored by parents or teachers, further increasing their vulnerability to exploitation. One mother explained that when her child was excluded and given a laptop to work at home, she was not able to monitor him as she had to work. His education ended when he was 13 years old. There is evidence that children can be badly affected by exclusions but also that the point of exclusion may be a reachable moment in the cycle of exploitation (Hunter, Dickson & Allan, 2019; Hudek, 2018). That moment was missed for the children and adults we spoke to.

There were varied reasons for exclusions, including unacceptable behaviour, use of drug and alcohol within the school and carrying a dangerous weapon. Excluded children, whether out of school or attending alternative educational provision, were seen to be vulnerable due to their fractured networks:

> *Our pupils [in alternative provision] are obviously vulnerable to it because they are ostracised from their social group because they have been permanently excluded.* (FG YP practitioners)

Focus group participants from schools worried that children were often labelled as '*not good at something'* from a very early age. As they get older and are not expected to achieve well at GCSE level, they can feel even more detached from their learning environment and increasingly hopeless. Having failed at school they may be drawn to the promised rewards of county lines:

> *You're a failure, you're a failure, you're a failure, you are not going to earn anything and you are not going to amount to anything but you can earn £500 a week running this line.* (FG YP practitioners)

Looking back, practitioners remembered having facilities for young people who *'are not school shaped'*. Such alternatives are poorly funded and rarely available now.

Missing education impacts future opportunities for legitimate paid employment which can add to the push towards involvement with county lines and exploitation.

Case study: from school exclusion to exploitation

Daniel had a good experience at primary school where he was assessed by an educational psychologist and diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). He was well supported by teachers who understood him and were able to work with him to get the best out of him. He had an education, health and care plan (EHCP) outlining the provision required from the local authority.

When he transferred to a local high school, he soon started having difficulties. The school was not aware that he had ADHD and an EHCP in place. Once made aware, he had minimal support from a teaching assistant and made little progress at school. His mother went to many meeting at the school and was eventually told *'we just can't educate him'*. The school staff suggested that he would be better off in a school that understood his disabilities which his mother was very pleased about, hoping that he would get the support he required and deserved. The plan was for him to attend the new school for half the week and continue in his high school the rest of the time so that his peer network was not disrupted.

His mother explained how she felt when she went to the new school: *I went along there and went through the door and the penny dropped and I thought 'this is a Pupil Referral Unit'… it was bedlam, I mean you walked in and they were all effing and blinding at each other and threatening to kill each other and stuff like that and I walked in with Daniel and I just thought 'oh my God''*.

Daniel was not able to settle and learn in the environment of the Pupil Referral Unit despite trying hard to fit in. After a move to another alternative provision and no longer spending any time at his original high school, it was recommended that he was home schooled. Daniel was at home unsupervised, working on a laptop and things soon changed for the worse. His school career had ended at the age of 13. He was out every day, hanging around with older people. His behaviour changed and he wore new and expensive clothes. Kitchen knives, black and white bin bags as well as cling film disappeared from the kitchen. Daniel was being exploited.

Childhood and family relationships

In addition to interrupted school careers, vulnerabilities included experiences of childhood sexual abuse, criminality, poverty and homelessness. There were also frequent experiences of family breakdown or loss of contact with a parent:

> *And my mum, I don't even know who the fuck she is.* (Adult male)

> *Umm my mum and dad split up when I was about one or two years old so I never remembered my dad.* (Adult male)

> *My dad when I was twelve like I found out that he was cross-dressing and that he cheated on my mum with men and she kicked him out so I had a lot of responsibility on my shoulders for that because he left her with a mortgage and four children so I sort of felt responsible for that*. (Adult female)

Abuse and neglect within the home was not uncommon. One participant remembered being made to eat her own excrement and others had experienced physical and emotional abuse:

> *She [mother] used to hit me with a horse whip and general stuff like that you know, threw me in a bath with my clothes on cold, you know, out in the snow, stuff like that.* (Adult female)

Some participants had witnessed unpredictable parental behaviour due to substance misuse and mental health problems:

> *He [father] had his mental health problems and he was err he was sectioned and the police were called to the house, when he completely lost the plot.* (Young person)

For another young person, family dysfunction meant that they were no longer able to live at home and ended up street homeless, further increasing their vulnerability to exploitation:

> *If you are on the street you don't want to be on your own you should always be at least with someone, whether you get along with them or not just like the way you get people treating the homeless was just disgusting.* (Adult male)

Participants recounted episodes of going missing when things became too difficult at home and some went missing during their exploitation when they were expected to work for long periods of time. Practitioners also had experience of trying to work with young people who go missing:

> *Young people in my area are going missing overnight for long stretches of time or days at a time, we obviously don't know where they are being moved to, other towns over in East Anglia or elsewhere and it is absolutely blatant and absolutely rife.* (FG YP practitioner)

Clearly many of the participants, both the young people and the adults, had several adverse childhood experiences. Adverse childhood experiences tend to focus on the individual rather than adverse environmental and community experiences and there is no consensus as to what constitutes childhood adversity. Despite this, ten adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are included in ACE questionnaires which serve as screening tools for later health and social disadvantage (Felitti et al, 1998)[5]. ACEs include abuse and household dysfunction, as experienced by the participants in this study. However, the ACE questionnaire does not take into account the severity or duration of the experiences. For some participants in this study, the experiences were brief but for most there was a whole childhood of adverse experiences. For some participants there appeared to be clear links between particular abuse, over time, and subsequent issues. One example was sexual abuse in childhood:

> *…but that definitely had an influence on my early sexual exploration do you know what I mean, which twisted me up even more, so by the time I was in my mid to late teens I was fucked, excuse my language, I was really screwed up, I didn't know, I didn't know what was up and what was down.* (Adult male)

Practitioners echoed many of the vulnerabilities and particularly stressed social isolation as a pre-cursor to exploitation for many of their service users:

> *I find that we talk about in case management having concerns about potential cuckooing umm a lot of them you really can pin it down to social isolation and there are no significant vulnerabilities that sort of puts them beyond any of our generic client group but they are just massively socially isolated and some of those are people who come from residential you know shared housing, suddenly they are alone you know and the next thing they know the people who they have surrounded themselves with in their property they just can't rid of, so yeah it's not always that there is such a thing going on it's just loneliness.* (FG adult practitioners)

[5] This study did not use an ACE questionnaire but adverse childhood experiences were explored during interviews with participants.

In addition to social isolation and loneliness, many adults were vulnerable due to poverty. Focus group participants expressed their concerns about the system of financial support. For example, a move into a hostel can result in a vulnerable adult having to give up work (see also Chapter 5):

> *We actually create a lot of the issues that we're designed to sort out, for example if I was going to remove somebody, get somebody off the streets in front of me into a hostel, so I have got rid of the barrier of homelessness and now I have created the barriers to employment because they can't afford to work.* (FG adult practitioners)

Some practitioners working with young people suggested that vulnerability was also to do with age, risk-taking and thrill seeking:

> *I just think they are teenagers and they are thrill seeking and they have not got the experience behind them about risk and consequence and you know going out with your mates and taking that risk, getting the money for it which is really exciting.* (FG YP practitioners)

Practitioners also gave examples of children in what appeared to be well-functioning families who were vulnerable to exploitation. However, there was also a view expressed that children from deprived backgrounds, or those where parents were already involved in criminal activity, were more vulnerable:

> *It does tend to be deprived backgrounds though I am finding more and more.* (FG YP practitioners)

Practitioners were aware of the context of exploitation. That is, as well as acknowledging individual vulnerabilities, they recognised wider environmental and social contributors to vulnerability to exploitation. Some young people leaving care resided in hostels and that environment could expose them to exploitation:

> *I have got quite a few youngsters in hostels dotted all over umm and there appears to be like a drug issue around them, not necessarily in them but certainly around them umm and that's quite common in my experience.* (FG YP practitioners)

There was agreement that when a young person's needs are not being met, they may become exploited, although the young person may not view it as exploitation:

> *What needs are not being met for these children elsewhere and what they are getting from being exploited and that journey that they take not realising that they are being exploited but it is always filling a gap*. (FG YP practitioners)

> *Any sense of belonging with somebody and they belong to this gang and their way of fun is to break some people, cause someone else some havoc because it kind of distracts them from their own home lives where they are not happy.* (FG YP practitioners)

Summary

- Poor and interrupted education experiences and exclusions were common among the young people and vulnerable adults who experienced criminal exploitation.
- Exclusions or limited school contact time left children with significant free time on their hands and at increased risk of exploitation.
- Family breakdown and abandonment led, for some, to homelessness and social isolation.
- There appeared to be links between early childhood trauma and later behaviour but adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) always appeared to be identified retrospectively.
- All children and adults with any (or no apparent) vulnerabilities can become targets for those who seek to exploit others.

3.2: Process to substance misuse and associated vulnerabilities

As evidenced above, some young people and adults started using drugs and alcohol when very young, during their school years. Some started later and got involved through recreational use initially, which resulted in addiction and use of harder drugs:

> *I have always sort of been a recreational user but umm I sort of had a friend who I have known since about seventeen or eighteen and he started using heroin, crack cocaine and umm yeah and I started using it with him…yeah so I basically lost control of it and that's where I've been the last five and a half years so…* (Adult female)

> *I got into doing heroin and that and then after I had done my A levels and that I was going to have a gap year and then go to university and I went travelling around the Middle East and that and started taking heroin.* (Adult female)

Being dependent on drugs was expensive and participants became vulnerable to exploitation. Some participants had resorted to begging, sex work or stealing. Others had got involved in selling drugs:

> *I wasn't always a user, do you know what I mean? I started using drugs heroin and crack at sixteen but then I'd stop and I would start sniffing cocaine and I would sell drugs and I would make a lot of money but then like I said I can only do that for so long before I start taking it again. I have sold cocaine, I have sold weed, I have sold crack and heroin so you name it, pills and after a period of time I ended up getting fucked on it but for a very short period of time I can boom.* (Adult male)

Their vulnerabilities were further increased as they became identifiable as drug users by dealers who would target them:

> *I would be walking down the road and you know a car goes past and that and you know 'do you want a number?' so they can tell, like they would know not to do that to you but to me you see you could be walking down the road like two hundred yards in front of me and they would drive straight past you but they get to me.* (Adult female)

Even if they moved away from the area in an effort to stop their drug use, participants felt certain that they would still be targeted due to their 'look'. Being targeted increased temptation which made attempts at rehabilitation futile for some. County lines dealers actively look for users to target and will offer discounts and easy supply:

…a couple of black guys will come up here in a car yeah, they will drive around, look for gangs of addicts, you can fucking spot an addict a mile off yeah, see them 'come here, come here, come here, a couple of bits, there's a number'. (Adult male)

Yeah with the crack, I mean with the gear and that yeah because you are not very well but with the crack you just want it, however much money you have got is not enough. (Adult female)

3.3: County lines in Norfolk

The model of dealing called 'county lines' is present in Norfolk. Participants had experience of being approached by dealers from out of county, buying from them and being exploited by them, including being cuckooed. Mostly dealers were from London and Liverpool if they were from out of county. Some participants had a good idea of the business model:

Say you start off with, with at the time, I don't even know what the prices are now but at the time it was £700 an ounce, yeah of heroin, £700 an ounce of crack yeah, you will flip that an ounce, you could flip that in two hours and double your money yeah so you sell it, buy it for £700 and sell it for £1400 yeah, so then you go back and you do it again and again and again, so imagine you are selling four ounces a day of each yeah, that's a lot of money, so what you do you build your money up and then you buy your own line yeah so then you start off yourself, so then what you do, you're going back to that guy and you're buying wholesale and then you're selling it and then that's how people work up you see. (Adult male)

They also had awareness that working for dealers was exploitative but at the same time it could carry some status:

Someone will come to you and they will say 'there's a hundred shots, yeah they are point three of a gram yeah, at £20 each there's a hundred of them and a hundred of them yeah, I will pay you £250 flat, right you go and sell all that, when you get all the money bring it back to me and I'll give you more' yeah right and then that's what you're doing, you are taking all the risks for him, you are earning £250 for a day's work, you think you're the big bollocks at sixteen years old. (Adult male)

Exploitation in all guises was experienced by participants exposed to county lines. As well as the targeting of vulnerable young people and adults for the purpose of selling them drugs, some were targeted for the purpose of working for the dealers and some for the use of their flat or house as a convenient base for dealers. One young person, who was not in education, explained how they were approached:

Me and my mates were all at the park and these boys came over and asked if we wanted to make quick money and then all of a sudden like all these other boys just started like crowding around and stuff, so umm me and my mates were like 'yeah alright then'. There was a lot more of them and they were like a lot bigger than us, we were just like 'alright then'. (Young person)

Case study: process to involvement

Sam lived at home in a family where there was domestic abuse and substance misuse. He smoked weed and was intermittently supplying friends. He was not in school due to bullying. The family experienced financial strain.

Sam was approached in a park when out with friends, smoking weed in a local park. He was 15 years old. The men who approached the friendship group were not local. Sam and his friends were promised the opportunity to make 'quick money'. Sam was separated from his friends and taken to a flat where he witnessed the preparation of drugs for sale until the early hours of the morning. The following day he was contacted and paired up with another young person, aged 13, for selling the drugs which he did throughout the night. One boy would carry the drugs and the other would carry the money. Whenever they needed more supplies, they would return to the flat.

The exploitation lasted a few days and then the men disappeared. Apparently a friend of Sam's had told the police because he was annoyed at not being asked to be part of it. Sam felt disappointed as he had hoped to earn £300 if he had completed the trial week. The money was tempting but so was the excitement of being involved: *'it was sort of like exciting in a way like I had a pump of adrenaline because it was like holding like over a grand and stuff like that'*.

Some participants had more active involvement in exploiting others. In one case a vulnerable drug user decided to try dealing as the rewards were so tempting:

> *I started smoking crack, we were introduced to some Scousers who I was buying off and when I used to see them they had wedges of money and I was thinking 'I've got a few quid what should I do?' So I hired a car went up to Liverpool and fronted the money up for a lot of crack and heroin. I had to put my name out and my phone number and that, I was sort of like err going round all these different places where I knew and just giving my phone number and saying 'look score off me'.* (Adult male)

The participant had runners who were rewarded with a few shots and £100 per day. On a good day he managed to earn £6000, *'I've had bags of money, shoe boxes of money stacked up'*. Another participant was looking for a place to belong:

> *I moved back to London when I was sixteen, I moved in with my friend's older sister err she had got a black boyfriend, started selling drugs for him umm and you know there was a big gang of us, umm they was my family.* (Adult male)

Some unwittingly became more involved than they intended and ended up in dangerous situations:

> *This is a white chap actually, he is a white boy, he is about sixteen but he come from London and umm the dealer had known him since he was ten and he had been selling weed since he was ten and he brought him into the city to shop, so anyway we took him to this house, this lady had a really big order about thirty shots or something, we parked literally outside the front of her house, he went in the door and there was about six or seven hooded men run in the house, they ran in the house and then the black chap who was in the back of the car had a Samurai sword down his pants.* (Adult female)

Young people were aware that their parents may be suspecting that they were involved with drugs and being exploited:

They [parents] found out a few times that I had a knife, they would go in my room and search my room and find them. (Young person)

A parent was able to spot the signs of grooming and exploitation although she had no awareness of county lines model:

His behaviour started to change… he was getting very angry with me when I was challenging him which is not like him at all, I tried to take his phone away from him once and I honestly thought he was going to hit me and that is so out of character… odd things were going missing from the kitchen, black plastic bin liners, err cling film and knives. So all my knives went missing, he completely denied he had had them and at that point I hadn't put, naively hadn't put the two and two together that he had been dealing drugs and that he would need a knife. (Young person)

Practitioners expressed concern that Norfolk appeared to be the ideal place for county lines to operate due to the size of the county and the rurality. Many rural areas in Norfolk are poorly served by agencies and travel can be difficult without private transport and expensive when using public transport. As one practitioner expressed:

It's these places in-between and I think they are the ones that are really struggling and that's why we are a model county for county lines because you know it's a place like, you know thinking of Kings Lynn I was meant to allocate a client to Kings Lynn because they are Fakenham which comes under our Kings Lynn catchment area but to get to Kings Lynn takes twice as long as to get to Norwich and so you get these little pools of people scattered around and then that's great for dealers to get in and then they're all completely isolated and you can't really get out to do welfare checks very often and stuff like that so who knows what's going on in those properties. (FG adult practitioners)

Certain populations were reluctant to confide in authorities, including asylum seekers and individuals who had been trafficked to the UK:

We had some clients, especially young people, particularly from some communities for instance Vietnamese, being used on cannabis farms and they are reluctant to come out because they are coached not to trust the authorities and because they are undocumented. (FG Adult Practitioners)

Cuckooing

A known danger for the young people and vulnerable adults who become involved in delivering drugs is being robbed, usually a staged robbery by their exploiters. Subsequently they would be in debt to their bosses which sometimes meant that a runner from another city had to stay for an extended period in Norfolk to work off the debt. One participant explained how someone staying at her flat had been exploited:

He owed them money, so he was like, he had to work off a debt, he had been robbed or something and that and lost their stuff or what have you so he had to pay, although you know he was like one of, they were all from, oh where were they from? Sierra Leone, yeah they all came from round there. (Adult female)

The practice of taking over a vulnerable person's home has been termed 'cuckooing'. It was a common practice experienced by several participants, either because runners had been in flats which had been taken over or participants had experienced their own homes taken over. They were also fully aware of other flats which were being used by dealers, or had in the past been used, within

their area. One young person was in a flat during their exploitation where the resident had been cuckooed:

> *The first flat we went to was some old person, like I recognised them and stuff and I knew like he was involved in it and I have seen him about quite a lot and then the second house we were, the second flat we went to, we went to some like woman's flat which I then later found out that umm was the, umm, the woman was a mum to someone I was mates with so it was sort of like 'oh yeah I remember your mum' sort of thing*. (Young person)

Participants rarely recognised the practice as exploitative. Rather, it was seen as having mutual benefits and often portrayed as just helping someone out for a bit:

> *Like you have been up to score or something and they will say they are in a muddle and they need somewhere for a short time and they just won't go.* (Adult female)

> *I made friends with some people and they had made friends with a drug dealer from London and they were quite friendly with him umm and they are like 'he needs somewhere to stay, can you help him out?*' (Adult female)

> *I had people like, I had people staying I would never say no to someone sort of staying in the flat for sort of any sort of period of time.* (Adult male)

Some were quite explicit about the benefits of allowing their home to be taken over in return for drugs:

> *I invited them in, they pay me in drugs yeah, I am a desperate drug addict so each morning I wake up, I need money yeah so I have either got to go out and commit crime, well I have got to go out and commit crimes to get my drugs. They come in and they pay me in drugs to sit in my house… I used to run the drugs out, obviously I am taking all the risk but I don't care because I'm getting my free drugs yeah, some of them pay different amounts yeah but you find the ones who pay the most and you look after them and then they look after you.* (Adult male)

The arrangement was seen as suiting both parties *'you have got something they want and they have got something you want, its business',* stressing the model of dealing as a business model.

There were also examples of intimidation and feeling exploited when a home was taken over and all choice had gone:

> *They said 'I want to just pop in for five minutes' you know and then some people started taking over and nicking my keys and it was just mental for want of a better word…I didn't even have the keys to my own flat.* (Adult male)

One participant explained that the people who had taken over her flat had weapons for intimidation:

> *To some people it seems really normal but to me it doesn't seem normal to have a bunch of people in a room with big knives and stuff on the table and to me that just doesn't seem like a normal thing.* (Adult female)

> *He give me a load of the drugs and that, and then he started in that 'well you owe me £2000 and your fella owes us £2000'. I said 'well I haven't got it' and that you know 'your man's gone' like he, you know he must have been there about three weeks by this, you know and umm so like threatened to stab us and that and then they sent another guy in his place and*

he only wanted to work for like a little while, again he was one of them, not a user, he was one of the black guys. (Adult female)

What had initially seemed like a good idea, with benefits for both parties, would eventually turn sour:

To begin with that was like okay but I soon got fed up with them so in the end it resulted in me being in my back bedroom and they just basically took over my living room and umm I was just sort of in my bedroom, I would just come out of my room, ask for my shots and then just go back in my room and that sort of went on for a couple of weeks and I was basically, I just basically sort of put my laptop up in my backroom, shut the door and umm I just stayed out of their way and they sort of just did whatever they did in the front room and I, I you know had very little to do with them really. (Adult female)

Participants took desperate measures to reclaim their homes. One participant who lived alone pretended that relatives would arrive:

I said my mum was coming round and umm they were like 'well how much longer can we stay?' I was like 'look she is going to come round'… so if she come round and she see you boys here she is going to call the police…but they tried to stretch it out as long as they could umm how it ended I was like umm, I was like umm 'she is coming at seven o'clock, you need to be out by half past six'. (Adult female)

One vulnerable adult was fortunate to have the help of his parents who did come to his flat and managed to get the dealers to leave:

He was uncomfortable about us coming up to collect him from his first floor flat which he normally would obviously allow us to, we are in and out all the time and we insisted, we went upstairs to his flat and there was a strange atmosphere you couldn't you know determine really quite what was going on umm the bedroom door was shut and we tried to open it and umm with effort after pushing, the umm, the three black drug dealers emerged umm and umm they were hiding behind the door there and umm so eventually umm we persuaded them to leave…he was very anxious, they threatened him a lot, they threatened to harm him, they obviously did have knives. (Adult male)

Another participant reported the occupation of his house to the police and they removed the dealers. For safety the participant was accommodated elsewhere for a month after which time he was expected to return to his home. He was anxious about returning home and was reluctant to even return to the area where it had happened which meant that he became homeless:

One minute they are saying 'it is not safe for me to live there' the next minute they are saying 'the locks have been changed we can put alarms in there.' Well what happens when I walk outside? (Adult male)

In one case, the vulnerable adult whose flat had been taken over after the promise of drugs which dried up as soon as they moved in, felt that her only option was to leave the flat and all her belongings which resulted in her sofa surfing.

There were instances where the person, or people, who had taken over a home and were perhaps working off a drug debt, became further indebted due to their lifestyle and drug use. These, too, were young people exploited by those above them and some ran away from fear of retribution, leaving the tenant even more vulnerable:

His [dealer's] girlfriend had just had a baby and moved to [town] and he said and that you know like 'I'll have the money I've earnt and you take the drugs I want out, I want to go, I am going anyway will you help me or not?' I said 'well you are going anyway but they are going to come back to me' so that was when I had to change like address because they were threatening to stab me and that because like they have lost two of their guys so they are like blaming me. (Adult female)

Summary

- The temptation of drugs and money was at times too great when there were no other alternatives available for young people out of education and adults who were using drugs.
- The practice of cuckooing was rarely recognised as exploitative by vulnerable young people and adults.

3.4: The consequences of exploitation

The world of drugs and county lines is an unsafe environment. The above has already identified many adverse consequences due to exploitation. They include increased drug use, exposure to dangerous situations, people and weapons, restrictions to movement, threats and intimidation. Witnessing addicts' behaviour and having a knife pulled on him were just a couple of the experiences a young person had encountered during their exploitation. Several participants had experienced violent behaviour towards them and some had permanent disfigurements due to serious violent attacks. One young person explained how he got caught up in what he believed was rivalry between dealers. The attack was so serious that it left him with scars across his face and body:

This person came up to me and like smacked me in the head, so I turned round and smacked him and the next thing I know like this big group of people started pinning me on the floor and two people were just slashing at me. (Young person)

Despite the seriousness of the attack, he did not press charges for fear of retribution. Others had similar experiences:

I was coming out of the chippie just across the road from there and this guy had seen me, he obviously got out of his car, I hadn't seen him get out of his car, he just come and smacked me in the back of the head I went clean to the floor and knocked out. (Adult male)

I have been stabbed, stabbed in the leg, I have got a few little scars on my face, one down that side, a little one there which runs through my eyebrow do you know what I mean. My teeth are fake. (Adult male)

A vulnerable adult explained how she was punched so hard that her jaw was dislocated as her attacker tried to throw her in the river. She reported the incident to the police but was disappointed with what she interpreted as lack of interest:

I had to go up the hospital and have my jaw put back in, so I went to the police, I told them 'this is what happened' and they said 'we haven't got the services to take a statement or

take the notes now, if we find the suspect then we'll take an official statement' and that was it I never heard nothing more about it. (Adult female)

In addition to criminal exploitation, some also experienced sexual exploitation but it was never reported to the police. For a young male, that was particularly difficult to talk about. Participants did not have faith in authorities to support them, often due to their earlier experiences. The people who were exploiting them were often seen as *'untouchable' (*Adult female) by the participants as there was an awareness that the police were interested in the top people rather than the local dealers who were exploiting local people. That was also the experience of residents living in communities affected by county lines as reported in Chapter 6.

Fear of violence and retribution impacted the participants' daily lives. Many felt that the only way to keep safe was to become as isolated as possible. Their experiences of exploitation had left them scarred and anxious. For one participant, the experience of having dealers taking over his flat had a lasting and devastating effect as explained by one of his parents:

[He] was terrified you know he wouldn't go out, he still doesn't really go out properly, won't pick up the phone, he is totally traumatised. He regularly rings Samaritans, he is, you know he is still all over the place… life is appalling for him, I mean really his quality of life is so poor. (Adult male)

The offenders were still making contact which meant that he would not answer his phone unless he recognised the number and that consequently resulted in contacts from hospital and other services he was receiving not getting through. This in turn had an impact on his health and wellbeing.

Felling unsafe meant that one young person felt the need to carry a weapon for a time:

I was one of the first people pretty much in Norwich to start like carrying a knife properly and that sort of thing and it was always like trying to, everyone was trying to like fight each other and stuff like that but then now it is mostly about money. So it is always like you have got to keep like one eye over your shoulder sort of thing. (Young person)

Everyday life was thus impacted by the experiences of exploitation and the feeling that they may still be watched, attacked or approached again.

Many of the adult participants talked about their lives being lonely due to the need to get away from their exploiters:

Yeah but it's a lonely life let's put it like that, I mean I have got a new phone, changed my number, broke my other SIM card up and threw it away. (Adult female)

As explored above (section 3.1), participants had often experienced adverse family relationships during childhood. Family relationships were further affected by drug use and their vulnerabilities. Many participants had acrimonious relationships with family members who did not approve of their lifestyle. One vulnerable adult had lost touch with his father and was not aware that he had sisters until he met them in a hospital when visiting a dying grandparent:

I was sitting there in this fucking room and my dad is there and I'm like 'I am just going to kick your fucking head in in a minute' and then it was all a bit turmoil really you know and then I meet my sisters. (Adult male)

There was much talk of 'letting family down', 'family having enough of their behaviour' and of efforts to try and re-engage with family:

I think I have patched things up with my mum but I think my brother and sister is going to take a bit more time… (Adult male)

One participant had a strained relationship with his family and always felt that he did not fit in, even as he grew up. Later his family had little contact with him because of his addiction:

I never fitted in with my family never! Umm like you know I talk different, I act different, I feel different, they really, I mean my dad is a blue collar, my mum's a white collar you know her family come from [town] middle class proper accountants and this and that and my dad, even my dad he's well spoken, he's intellectual and I just don't fit in. I'm not saying I am not intellectual but I don't fit in, I talk a different way and maybe that's because of the area I grew up in. (Adult male)

Partner relationships were at times supportive and could be an incentive to make changes:

My relationship was starting to crumble with my missus yeah and I have never been in a serious relationship, all I have ever done was fucked you know and so [partner] like we've been together seven years and I don't want to lose her. (Adult male)

One participant lived with a partner who also used drugs. She explained that they cared for each other and looked out for each other which was helpful at a time when living alone signalled further vulnerability to exploitation.

Summary

- The consequences of criminal exploitation are serious and can leave individuals with permanent difficulties.
- Young people and adults are reluctant to report exploitation due to fear of retribution by their exploiters.
- There is a view that the police are mainly interested in the people at the top of the exploitation chain.
- For some, social isolation was a way to keep safe which could exclude them from support.
- There are particular difficulties with safeguarding adults who are deemed to have capacity

3.5: Safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults

As soon as they hit that magic age of eighteen everything goes puff, disappears. (FG adult practitioners)

County lines activity within Norfolk was encountered by those working with adults and children and young people. Exploited adults had histories of trauma, substance misuse, mental health issues and many were financially vulnerable. Working with adults who were deemed to have capacity presented difficulties for practitioners:

She has a history of trauma, domestic abuse and she, it is very much about socialisation but umm she also uses crack quite heavily so she gets kind of supplied for free but she has got some of the most dangerous guys named that we know of that come to her flat but it is very much she has a buzzer but she just can't say no when they ask. (FG adult practitioners)

The above is a typical scenario which leaves practitioners feeling frustrated and ineffective:

> *That is really frustrating, there is no sort of mechanism to support and engage unless they are up for it which obviously they're not*. (FG adult practitioners)

Adults were often seen as making a deliberate choice when engaging with drugs, dealing and having people staying in their homes. However, practitioners were clear that they did not see individuals as having real choices, particularly if they were dependent on drugs and the lack of assessment of capacity was a concern:

> *I have some difficulty with things being kind of said as 'choice' or things like that but actually if we are not properly, the law is there to actually assess people's capacity umm so I think some safeguarding decisions are being made on referrals without actually properly taking into account somebody's capacity to make these so called 'choices'.* (FG adult practitioners)

Balancing punitive/criminal justice approaches with support and education was raised as a difficulty within the focus group with practitioners working with young people. Some felt that the consequences of active involvement in county lines were not clear to young people early enough in any criminal activity:

> *I don't think from the young people that we've been dealing with that the consequences are necessarily there early enough, umm they don't seem to have a consequence of their carry on until there is a significant consequence for them, that seems to be the pattern at the moment.* (FG YP practitioner)

Some young people had been picked up by police whilst at school and in front of peers which some practitioners felt inadvertently added to the young person's perceived status and was not helpful:

> *So they were arrested Friday afternoon as they are going home, virtually as they are getting in the taxi to go home and then umm they have spent a period of time in the cells and then they have been released and so then what's going to happen? And they are going to do some sort of voluntary Youth Offending Service or meetings and then they are not going to get anything on their record, which I haven't got a problem with that but I had about, probably about forty other people to witness that and then they are going to come in, when they are next going to come in we will do an exclusion to show that actually in school you can do whatever you want can't you in terms of sanctions in school but actually they are going to walk into school as bold as brass and they have got a lovely sort of you know umm – kudos.* (FG YP practitioner)

It was even suggested that a young person's 'release from custody' slip was used to raise their status further as it would be shown around to peers *'it's their certificate'*.

Safeguarding referrals were at times difficult, especially for the police who often made the initial contact with vulnerable adults and young people:

> *I have got no route to go you know what I mean in a lot of cases because they are now deemed an adult and yet it can only be a difference between a day. It is all very well making a referral but how long is a piece of string as to when will they actually step in and do something, you know you can ring and ring and ring and ring…* (FG adult practitioners)

The lack of support from other safeguarding agencies, often due to funding and resource issues, resulted in police feeling that they bore the brunt of the safeguarding responsibilities:

> *…it's kind of looking at it from the wrong end really, it shouldn't be that the Police safeguarding responses and the welfare visits that they are doing and initiating doesn't sit comfortably with me but that actually seems to be the core policing role in my area where it is actually a public health issue.* (FG adult practitioners)

Practitioners who work with young people also expressed concern about processes and systems related to referrals when they just wanted the best for the young people they were working with

> *I find myself often feeling quite frustrated about the youngsters that are in my system because they have come through a lot of systems to get to a Leaving Care Team and you know I think you have got a lot of people surrounding them but I'm not quite seeing what the outcomes are*. (FG YP practitioner)

There were particular issues when working with young adults who had just transitioned from children's services, as one worker explained:

> *You know 'Oh I'm hungry, I haven't eaten for three days' 'sorry mate you have turned twenty-one I can't do anything'. You know they have used all their food bank vouchers but then I am kind of stuffed and I have to go cap in hand to ask my boss, 'I know they are over twenty-one but' and it is depending what mood they are in but it's terrible.* (FG adult practitioners)

Expectations that young adults can satisfy certain requirements in order to receive benefits were seen as unrealistic and could leave them without money and even more vulnerable to exploitation. One practitioner felt very upset by the sanctions imposed on some of their service users, without any apparent consideration of the context:

> *They are very quick to sanction which then forces our youngsters with no choice but to go down the drugs route if they are already on the peripheral of it or involved in it umm and I find services can be very harsh and cold and calculating… yes that might be the letter of law but you have got x, y and z that gives you an understanding of why that happened umm made intentionally homeless but out on the street and then you just shut down sanction that's it, they are shut down with no money, no other way of getting hold of any money.* (FG adult practitioners)

For some vulnerable adults, moving away can be seen as the safest option to remove themselves from their exploiter. Focus group participants felt that moving individuals within areas in Norwich was not successful as they were soon found by their exploiters:

> *There is no point moving them from Earlham to Heartsease because like you say Norwich is small…within twenty-four hours someone will find them…* (FG adult practitioners)

Moving to another part of the country is likely to be more effective but whereas it can disrupt the exploitation, it also disrupts established friendships and support networks and may leave the person more vulnerable to new exploiters:

> *So we have had experience of women being asked to move county and their answer, fairly so, is 'why should I leave?' And we struggle all the time because most of the women have quite like multi-disadvantage there are things like they're on medication for mental health, they have a support network here whether its Change, Grow, Live or the mental health services or they are under some sort of support network, there is nothing joined up when they go to the next county so you land somebody who may be dual diagnosis and whatever else into*

Lowestoft and say 'there's emergency accommodation there' but none of that follows over so you have got someone really chaotic who has just had all this happen and they are just left. (FG adult practitioners)

Findings from interviews with vulnerable adults also suggests that wherever they are, they can be identified as drug users (see section 3.2) which makes it less likely that a move, which potentially can leave them without any support network, will be effective.

It is perhaps not surprising that moving away was not considered a helpful option by practitioners or vulnerable adults unless better processes for support and transfer are developed. Another problem with moving vulnerable adults to other areas is that Norfolk receives people from out of area who require treatment and one agency felt that Norwich had suddenly become the place to go to for getting into treatment:

So we are getting a definite, I think we are getting regular transfers, it was normally just in places like Suffolk and local places but now people who are being banned from all services in the counties they are in and they have to find a new county to go to, now possibly it's because we don't operate a waiting list, the minute you turn up you're in treatment umm but yeah we are getting big numbers through the door and with them they bring a lot of issues, a lot! (FG adult practitioners)

Police and social care

Criminal exploitation is a form of modern slavery and a criminal offence but often those who experience exploitation do not feel in a position to report it. Participants did not think that the police would, or could, do much to help them which was partly due to the reluctance of participants to give formal statements:

Well I have gone to the police and that before when I have had people saying that I have owed them like a couple of thousand pounds and that yeah but unless you make a statement, but if I make a statement I am not going to be walking about am I? (Adult female)

If a crime was reported and the police did take action, it was at times putting the victim in more danger through thoughtless handling:

…that guy who thought we were someone else and umm yeah held a knife and that, we went to the police then and when we came back he sat on, there's like a bit of grass outside my house and he shouted out and that, I can't remember what his name is now but like 'it's Dave from CID!' I went 'thanks now everyone knows' you know like I have got a group of flats you know like - I am like 'yeah I don't want to talk to you' and you know I basically had to tell him to get lost. (Adult female)

One participant was supported by his worker to report his exploitation but he felt that once the police had all the details, they did not consider him as a victim and that left him feeling more vulnerable:

It is like umm no one just don't want to know, they want you to deal all the information to start with 'you are doing the right thing' this that and the other, well I thought I was doing the right thing but now they have all just dropped me out. (Adult male)

He was not willing to return to his home where he had been exploited which resulted in him being homeless and living in a tent. He was wondering if he should have *'got other criminals to come and*

get them out' rather than gone to the police. Another option was to return to his home and face the consequences which he knew would be dire but may cause someone to act in his best interest:

> *I don't know, maybe after making a statement maybe if I do go back and something does happen to me then that would blow it all up wouldn't it?* (Adult male)

Participants were scared due to the potential serious consequences of reporting and being found out by their exploiters. They would, therefore, pretend that any injuries inflicted had happened accidentally and rarely sought medical attention:

> *I was scared, I didn't tell anyone like at all, I didn't tell any of the staff, I said I had been jumped one night, the night after as well I remember I was out with him again because I was scared he was literally making me do everything.* (Adult male)

One participant who had been raped had found the police extremely helpful on that occasion. She acknowledged that they behaved differently when she presented with her crisis compared to when she was on the wrong side of the police due to her lifestyle and drug use:

> *They 100% believed me and were so helpful and kind so they are actually great when you need them but obviously when you are up against them it's different.* (Adult female)

Whereas individuals who were experiencing exploitation were either not reporting it or when they did, were often unhappy with the responses, relatives who contacted the police spoke highly of their support. One parent of a vulnerable adult was impressed with their empathy and concern:

> *Brilliant, the police were absolutely fabulous, I mean because he could have been incredibly vulnerable and been arrested himself quite easily, you know this happened a lot and this was quite early on in that kind of county line cuckoo sort of situation.* (Adult male)

Unfortunately, the actions by adult social services was not seen as helpful by the same parent:

> *When the police are kinder than social services then you have got something to worry about really.* (Adult male)

The police continued to go and check on him even after the offenders had left and supported him by keeping in touch. In the case of a young person, the police gathered information from their parent and did not approach the young person:

> *They didn't want to put [young person] in any more danger than he was already in they said 'if we speak to [him] one of two things is going to happen: he is not going to stop doing it because he is so hooked in with this guy, this guy has got much more power than we have got over him' so he said 'if we, what we will do is we are just going to watch what happens and we will get, you can give us information if that is what you want to do'.* (Young person)

The parent accepted this route and was grateful that her son, despite his involvement in dealing, was, rightly, always considered a victim. The lack of engagement with the young person sadly meant that he was not supported by any agencies to end his involvement and he did not engage with therapy once the involvement ended.

3.6: Working together and sharing information

Having a good working relationship with the police, particularly a beat manager, was helpful for agencies supporting vulnerable adults and young people in the community. Sharing information helps to establish a fuller picture but often information is third hand or 'off the record':

> *'Off the record' doesn't mean a huge amount to us umm but there's other ways of dealing with things, we can work with the Council, you know about getting Community Protection Warnings, so we can approach people who we think are, and these tend to be the ones that are local who are higher up the food chain to the ones that are lower down there, and you can say 'listen the report to us comes from the Council', and we won't name anything more than that, 'suggested that you are involved in issues which is detrimental to this area, here's your warning' that lasts for six months, 'if you are seen in this area committing any kind of antisocial behaviour'.* (FG adult practitioners)

There was also a wish from the vulnerable participants we interviewed for support to be joined up and long term. They sensed division between services and at times felt that they were moved between services when they really wanted to stay with one service which could help them with all of their difficulties:

> *I think umm once you get to a certain point with all agencies it just stops point blank. I just don't think they all work together, they should all work together not separately as individuals.* (Adult male)

It was clear that participants were interested in a more holistic support service that did not distinguish between the various issues that result from drug use and exploitation:

> *You go to mental health, mental health say 'we can't help you until you sort out the addiction' but you can't sort out the addiction until you sort out the mental health and you are just caught in this constant Catch22 and you have got two separate things, you have got the Drug Agency and the Mental Health Agency and really they are the same problem and they are just clashing with each other and they are not actually fixing the problem.* (Adult male)

Practitioners can be innovative and good at sharing information in a way that will not put vulnerable individuals in more danger. Hence, third hand information and 'off the record' chats as well as reporting anonymously can be useful when police attempt to safeguard adults. The police strategies for gathering information and attending incidents were mostly seen as sensitive by practitioners:

> *We have seen some excellent examples where we have needed, or we once needed a Police Officer to attend umm and he waited over the road and rang and said 'do you want to let me know if you want me to use the side door so I don't intimidate your clients?' Which I was very impressed with.* (FG adult practitioners)

The creativity and flexibility with which the police worked was considered a consequence of the Chief Constable's role as National Chiefs' Council lead on child protection as well as his knowledge of Norfolk:

> *We are lucky to have him because he's Norwich all the way through so he's seen how the County's changed over the years and stuff like that and so he knows the kind of dynamic of the city and by knowing that, seeing how it's changing so we are lucky to have him.* (FG adult practitioners)

Summary

- There are particular difficulties with safeguarding adults who are deemed to have capacity. This often results in the police, rather than adult services, taking on a safeguarding role.
- Teachers expressed concern that at times the police approach of coming into school to pick up young people inadvertently increased status for those involved in County Lines or other drug dealing.
- The transition to adult services for young people was at times seen as unsafe and placing unrealistic expectations on young people's behaviour.
- Practitioners worked together, making the most of available resources, but there was a wish from service users to have more holistic services to avoid being passed from one service to another.

Chapter 4: Preventing, supporting and engaging young people and adults

The need to empower young people to do differently was strongly emphasised in the focus groups with practitioners. Preventing the exploitation of children and young people requires engagement at an earlier point. Practitioners felt frustrated at times that the idea of early help actually meant help once the child was at risk, rather than help prior to them being assessed as at risk. Schools appear to find it particularly difficult with referrals when there is a concern and they want to prevent the concern becoming a case of exploitation:

> *The threshold has changed and essentially with child in need we have moved from Tier Two Early Intervention to Tier Three so there is that gap between schools and us now and I think that is probably where we're missing it so we are having to wait until police are called out or there is significant concerns about who these children hang around with before anyone actually gets in.* (FG YP practitioners)

In one case, a school was aware that all was not well with a pupil and made numerous referrals to several agencies including police and children's social care but as nothing had actually happened the referrals never reached the thresholds. Eighteen months later the pupil stabbed someone and is now in a secure unit.

Likewise, work with much younger children, often the siblings of those already being exploited, was lacking as most prevention work is at high school level. With the new, mandatory personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme, due to be in place by September 2020[6], there is some optimism that work around exploitative relationships will reach a larger number of younger children:

> *We do have that opportunity now with the PSHE and then in Norfolk that's what we wanted to achieve*. (FG YP practitioners)

Educating *all* children from an early age was seen as helpful for prevention but as children got older they also need to be kept busy and interested in activities which can increase self-esteem:

> *Gyms and boxing clubs seem to be something that you know when I've heard about that kind of like thirteen to sixteen bracket that gyms and boxing clubs seems to be the thing that you can try and get them involved in.* (FG YP practitioners)

In a previous evaluation (Dodsworth & Sorensen, 2018) we also found that having a gym membership enabled young people to do something useful, increase their self-esteem and self-efficacy and raise aspirations. However, funding is a problem and gym memberships are expensive and one may question the ethics of giving such opportunities short term, only to take them away again when funding runs out:

> *We can have these great ideas but it comes down to people and resource.* (FG YP practitioners)

Focus group participants decided to think of the problem of exploitation differently and considered why some young people are not exploited:

[6] https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/content/countdown-statutory-status-september-2020

> *We have to look at what about the young people that are not getting involved in it? What have they got, what is happening differently in their lives and how can we then find a way to give that to the people who aren't getting it?' Young, you know get in right at the beginning.* (FG YP practitioners)

Practitioners' awareness of child development drew them to the preventative work possible if issues were identified in very early childhood, *'early education and early intervention'*:

> *That's where the key is isn't it, it is the nugget right in the middle because I mean we know about attachment theory and everything else from when children are first born, you know this is happening from when they are first born.* (FG YP practitioners)

For children and young people who want to feel a sense of belonging, the temptation of financial gain can overshadow the knowledge of risk and draw them into exploitation. According to a study by Harris and colleagues (2011, pi), one of four key motivating factors for gang involvement is 'the need and/or desire to make money'. Gangs can also provide a sense of belonging, in some cases even a surrogate family, so attention needs to be on both aspects if young people are to be encouraged to desist (Young, Fitzgibbon and Silverstone, 2013).

It is hard for services and parents to provide viable alternatives, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged where job opportunities are limited due to their educational experiences:

> *The thing is you aren't going to go out and jump into a job and earn thousands and thousands of pounds, it doesn't happen, it never happens.* (FG YP practitioners)

Practitioners were aware of the ways in which some young people could be prevented from becoming exploited. This was based on their knowledge of child development and awareness of a universal programme of education about the risks of exploitative relationships. They were also aware that resources are scarce and major changes in thinking about the problem takes time.

4.1: Supporting young people and adults

Moving on and away from exploitation was not possible without support and participants spoke highly of many organisations who supported them. When attending support sessions, some adults were reluctant to disclose their past history to others:

> *I have made a point of not telling the [support] group that I have got a drug problem well I am a recovering drug addict because there is a stigma involved in it.* (Adult female)

Attending support groups targeted at a specific group of people, all with similar problems, was at times difficult as it could further increase temptation and involvement with individuals who may seek to exploit:

> *My concern umm with also like going to group things with drug things and stuff like that umm is that I will always meet other potential users and we are all at different places and I think there is more risk of relapse*. (Adult female)

Some, therefore, tried to seek out activities with 'normal' people:

> *I don't think that's necessarily the best scenario for someone in recovery, that's sort of why I try, I, admittedly I have only been to the gym once but I think like I need to meet more, normal is a bit high on the spectrum, but I need to meet some 'normal' people that's what I think yeah.* (Adult female)

Services and practitioners are sometimes faced with the dilemma of trying to engage with vulnerable individuals without making things worse for those they try to support. Vulnerable adults who are being exploited will be reluctant to seek help and, as indicated above, will sometimes be worried about who they might meet at specialist services:

> *Things escalate to the point where they are reluctant to come to us, they are reluctant to use local services through fear.* (FG adult practitioners)

For new and younger drug users, attending specialist services may put them at increased risk as they are confronted with long-term users:

> *If we get a twenty-three year old walking through the door, maybe studying here heavy ketamine user 'don't come into entrenched services go to* Unity' [drug and alcohol service for young people and their families] *we are now being told by Unity that we can't, they've lost their funding, there is no funding for that cohort so now when we get a shiny new kind of nineteen year old coming through they have to come into really inappropriate services with us and yes where is that money for that group because they are so vulnerable, they are so vulnerable to being dragged in* (FG adult practitioners)

Practitioners were particularly concerned with organisations that provided food only. For example, a soup kitchen set up to feed homeless and other vulnerable individuals in isolation from other services was deemed a real safeguarding concern as it serves as a recruiting ground for those who seek to exploit:

> *I shudder when I see some of the people that are hanging round the Haymarket with women taking their small children there when people I recognise are Schedule One Offenders there and if you want to do something good I don't think you can do that in isolation… I have seen some young people from my area that I see around in the Haymarket and it is happening you know in front of our eyes and it is very difficult to respond to that because it is like 'well these people are trying to do good, so why are you trying to stop them from helping people?' Because they don't understand the harm that they are actually doing.* (FG adult practitioners)

The kindness and good intentions thus inadvertently put vulnerable people at increased risk of exploitation. Other services offered meals for those attending their sessions as well as clothing and toiletries which appears to be a better and safer way to offer a more holistic service. Even established services which operated holistically worried about becoming potential recruiting grounds as those intent on exploiting would loiter, trying to access their vulnerable client group:

> *We have got really good security and we still have to be so vigilant who is in our waiting area, who is loitering outside umm because you know people are trying to pick off clients as they come.* (FG adult practitioners)

This poses a dilemma for services when they want to be visible to attract specific clients who need their service but at the same time risk advertising their client group to exploiters.

A further difficulty was the lack of options available to support adults who sought to escape their exploitative situations. Some practitioners felt that the barriers to accessing support, also evidenced in the findings presented later in this section, made it harder to try and engage vulnerable adults. Accessing one service could also cut another service:

> *What are their options a lot of the time? You are sitting there going 'yeah okay we want to take you out of this situation, the police will do disruption and whatever else, you might lose your prescription four or five times and take ages to get back in'…you know there's all these kind of barriers for them at the same time, so as the service on the front line with them you are kind of like 'oh well' I am not really sure what your option is sometimes so you know it is quite a big difficulty I think, and while you are trying to safeguard if there is nothing there to react at the time you are kind of between a rock and a hard place.* (FG adult practitioners)

Monitoring and disrupting activity were strategies used by practitioners to various extents. Within a residential setting, staff would undertake frequent welfare checks when they were worried about their tenants:

> *We have had two guys where, so they have got their own tenancies but we still keep an eye and where we started to notice a lot of suspicious activities, like you say its disruption calls, it's like 'right let's just go up and see what's happening in* [*Greg's*] *flat, "*[*Greg*] *I'm coming in" "Well why?" "Let me in, what are you doing here, who's that, that's unusual what's he doing here?" "Oh he he's just been to the shop" "Well here you go* [*Greg*] *has actually got a visitors ban at the moment, shall we print that visitor's ban out for you again* [*Greg*]*?" "Yes please" so it's stuck on his door, yeah we've had two where we have kept having to do that.* (FG adult practitioners)

Other agencies relied on the police for monitoring when vulnerable adults were not able to identify their own vulnerability or recognise exploitation, as in the following example:

> *Our local police have been fantastic, they have been the only ones that have really got that proper engagement but because he's not complaining that he wants people removed from his flat because he is quite lonely and isolated as well, they can't get people to leave because he says 'I'm happy with them being here'.* (FG adult practitioners)

In Norwich, with funding from the Early Intervention Youth Fund[7], detached youth workers are working and engaging with children and young people in their own spaces which include parks and schools. Working collaboratively with the police, data regarding hot spots directs the youth workers' work:

> *You [police] have been able to tell us which parks are particularly where some people hang out so when we then get young people, when we do their eco-maps and have a conversation about who their friends are, who they are mentioning have been there we can then be like 'oh do you know this person?' So I think in the city we are getting very much better at having conversations. I appreciate it doesn't happen everywhere in the county though.* (FG YP practitioners)

Police presence and education in gyms is also attempting to educate businesses involved in spaces that young people frequent:

> *We became aware that some of our young people were potentially using gyms to conduct some of their business shall we say umm so we have been round to talk to them about what could particularly be happening in the gyms because they have got this pin code and they can swap it around so it's, it's perhaps umm you know sort of educating businesses as well umm about what might be going on.* (FG YP practitioners)

[7] Police and Crime Commissioner Norfolk https://www.norfolk-pcc.gov.uk/eiyf/

There was awareness of the importance of contextual safeguarding but also recognition of the time-consuming nature of such pieces of work:

> *Yeah and that's where the good contextual stuff comes in because we can do the peer assessments, their friends, their girlfriends, and they all need to, but again that's a massive piece of work.* (FG YP practitioners)

> *When you look at where the contextual stuff has been done properly it's had great results but it's been on many levels and needs a huge amount of resource.* (FG YP practitioners)

Contextual safeguarding is described by Firmin et al, 2019, p.2) as *'an approach for working with contexts and communities'*. The concept has been further expanded and relates to complex safeguarding, defined as:

> *Criminal activity (often organised), or behaviour associated to criminality, involving vulnerable children/young people, where there is exploitation and/or a clear or implied safeguarding concern.* (Firmin et al, 2019, p.3)

The support provided for young people in Norfolk recognises the complexity of safeguarding, as evidenced by the findings here. Police forces typically operate in public spaces where young people may experience abuse and exploitation (Firmin, 2018) but the recent employment of detached youth workers in Norwich will enhance the safeguarding in a community context. However, there is still an emphasis on the individual whereas there needs to be a collaborative effort by all relevant agencies, organisations and communities to make environments safer for young people. For contextual safeguarding to be effective it is crucial that it is properly resourced or expectations are raised only to be denied, a situation which those vulnerable to county lines activity and those living alongside it are all too familiar.

Children and young people vulnerable to exploitation outside Norwich appear to receive a different service. Rather than involvement with the child criminal exploitation team, young people in other areas of the county would be supported and worked with by their social worker. This presented problems when young people were not engaging with their social worker but also added substantially to the social worker work load:

> *They would do a contextual safeguarding assessment, a social work assessment, and then work out what they needed to do to support that young person to stay out of trouble, to keep them safe. So we might advise them 'well you might need to do a safety plan, you might need to talk to the parents about this and this. You might need to do a mapping exercise with them about where is safe and where's not' but they would be expected to do it as well as all their other stuff that they have to do as a social worker.* (FG YP practitioners)

Issues arose around support and who was entitled to it. In some cases support was provided on the understanding that drug use would cease and in other cases support was not available because drug use had ceased but the individual was still at risk of relapse:

> *And he was assigned a worker, she was brilliant, they got on really well and he got a really good education about drugs. It is like 'if you are going to take these this is the risk, this is what could happen, this is what you need to look out for' and I am all for that so that was really good but it kind of came to an end when she kind of said 'the trouble is I am getting questions from my superiors now saying well if [young person] is not going to come off, or stop taking weed then there is nowhere else we can really go with him' which actually is wrong I think because he had built up a really good relationship with [support worker] and he*

would talk to her about how he felt about lots of things umm – his face just dropped when I said 'you know they are not going to be able to see you anymore'. (Young person)

I said 'I'm in recovery but I am struggling' 'Well come back when you have relapsed' that's what it is like because their budgets are so small… the problem is so big they haven't got the resources to tackle it. (Adult male)

The daily lives of drug users also influenced the opportunities for adults to engage with support services as opening times did not fit in with their timings. Participants did not think that services considered the effect of drugs use despite serving a population of users:

Umm it's awkward and that because like our lifestyles aren't nine to five. You know probably more like dinner time you know, if you're lucky. Umm you know and like they offer support like when you know drug addicts and that aren't about. You know really unless you are not on a script you are not going to be about at like first thing in the morning, or if you are you are going to be worried about scoring not about – so it's like, I think that is the main problem. (Adult female)

It was a Catch 22 as while these adults were engaged with drugs and sex work they needed help and support but there was a poor match between the times when need presented and services being open. This included problem specific services as well as services such as housing. Some participants acknowledged that while they were using and being exploited, they rarely looked for support:

I was just a little reckless I didn't go out looking for any support obviously I was just wanting to get smashed all the time to be honest. (Adult male)

4.2: Engaging with young people

Practitioners discussed at length the engagement of young people with services and those who sought to support them. Engaging young people was seen as difficult for many of the practitioners. In order to overcome some of the barriers, meetings were sometimes arranged in coffee shops which could encourage young people to turn up. There was a prevailing view that in order to engage, there had to be something in it for the young person. Some felt that it could be interpreted as bribery:

It is almost like bribery trying to get youngsters to work with us at times, you know 'we need to do your Pathway Plans so if you come out with us we will buy you a lunch'. (FG YP practitioners)

Building a relationship and getting alongside the young people was important and often treating young people to lunch or coffee was a way of building up that relationship of trust. The youth offending service had a different relationship with young people and found that engagement was more straightforward *'they will comply, they will get two busses across the city to turn up because they know that means something will happen that will impact on their life and their freedom if they don't do that.'* (FG YP practitioners)

Engaging with young people was also of importance to the police. One beat manager was keen to informally engage young people living in a problematic area by arranging football matches and had suggested it to young people:

'If you want to have a go at the Police why don't you do it on five aside court?' 'Why don't you come and play five aside football with the Police, you want to lump into me you can come and do it, I'm not going to get hurt' but you have got a system, you expelled a bit of

energy and that half an hour, forty five minutes, an hour you aren't causing havoc, being on the streets and you aren't robbing people, you know you are actually putting more time to good use, we're putting our time to good use, I know there's a lot of people who would want to do that not because they want to go and hurt some children that's not the case at all but they are given that chance to 'oh we had a good laugh the other night, you are alright' it is something to talk about. (FG YP practitioners)

Unfortunately, informal engagement was not easy to do as health and safety regulations got in the way. Yet it was a type of engagement much needed as many of those vulnerable to exploitation did not 'fit' with traditional youth clubs and services due to expectations of those services but also, for some young people, the potential damage to their reputation:

I think that's a huge barrier because mostly there are youth clubs around but for a lot of the young people that are going to be at risk of exploitation they don't fit in this kind of environment and they are told even the loveliest clubs that are run by, you know they are really lovely volunteers, there is still an expectation of behaviour, there's a role of conduct in here, so some young people just aren't going to do very well in that kind of environment. (FG YP practitioners)

They won't associate themselves with any Youth Group, they won't associate themselves with the Church because that would just hit their reputation. (FG YP practitioners)

Funding for services and interventions was also an issue with an expectation that any service should be 'new and innovative' which left out some voluntary agencies who had a good record of engaging and working with young people in the same way over many years. One young person told us they had been engaging with the same voluntary youth organisation for ten years. They were not looking for' new and innovative' but for consistency of caring relationships.

Summary

- Young adults may not be safe when attending specialist services designed for adults.
- Services struggle with the dilemma of being visible to service users without attracting potential exploiters.
- There is a poor fit between service opening times and the lifestyle of service users, particularly those who are entrenched in drug use.

Chapter 5: Moving beyond exploitation

One way to reduce vulnerability to further exploitation was to stop using drugs. Many of the adults had battled with addiction over many years which made it a hard task. For all of the young people and adults, the excitement and temptations of drug use, the promise of earning good money and the sense of belonging meant that they remained vulnerable to exploitation. Interrupted education experiences and lack of qualifications meant that there were limited options open to participants to earn money or engage in education and training. Training was available for some young people but required certain behaviours which made it difficult for young people, who still felt vulnerable or threatened, to attend. One participant was enjoying training for a skill at a specialist college until a knife was found in his bag:

> *They searched my bag they found a knife right at the bottom which I didn't really know about and then they were just like called the police and stuff.* (Young person)

The young person was no longer being exploited but an attack on him had left him very anxious and moving on from carrying a knife was difficult. He explained that he was carrying a knife for several years which was the norm in his peer group but it was for protection rather than for causing deliberate harm. Practitioners also experienced more young people carrying knives:

> *It seems to be that even if you are running say a bit of cannabis around it is fairly, compared to Class A it's very low level but you have still got a knife in your pocket just in case someone tries to do you for a ten bag of weed.* (FG YP practitioners)

> *It is the norm from a Secondary perspective I've got young people who I know are carrying knives and they are not involved in any of this but they carry knives because everybody carries knives, that's why they are doing it.* (FG YP practitioners)

Exclusion from school or college can leave young people without a plan for the future and relying on pocket money, increasing the temptation to sell drugs again if approached:

> *…it is sort of like every week I get about ten quid from my mum but if someone came and offered me like three hundred quid straight up it is sort of like, that is more tempting than the ten pounds a week.* (Young person)

Moving on and away from drugs therefore became difficult but despite this, there was a wish to achieve if there were opportunities available to do so:

> *At some point I want to get out of Norwich because it seems like everything that's like ever happened to me, happens in Norwich so eventually I want to get out of here and actually make something with my life.* (Young person)

Other participants were trying to get back into the workplace, some through volunteering and others already had skills they could put to use:

> *I volunteer, I do all the work here, cleaning, gardening, whatever they want me to go and do…I am scheduled to do a couple of days a week but to keep me busy I am usually there most of the time.* (Adult male)

> *I had a little bit of a relapse around April time umm and then from there, yeah I just kind of keep going, got back into employment, things are going really well, flying really.* (Adult male)

Work, paid or unpaid, had the benefit of interaction with others and also kept participants busy, reducing opportunities for relapse and exploitation:

> *I like the phrase dirty hands clean money, I could earn in a day what I earn in a week yeah but I ain't got to look over my shoulder, I don't have to sleep with knives and guns under the pillow*. (Adult male)

However, for some, work could keep them in the exploitative environment, for example, sex work. One participant felt that there was no other option available to her when her benefits were cut and for nine months she did sex work:

> *I have sort of umm went for a brief stint in working umm when they cut my benefits so umm I went sort of, having done it a long time I went for about a year of working when they cut my ESA* [employment and support allowance] *and I was doing umm a mandatory reconsideration and I really could not survive on the money that it gave me so it really, really was like a last option for me to go out and work [as sex worker].* (Adult female)

Another participant was disappointed to find that when he did secure a job, the cut in his housing benefits meant that he could not keep doing it:

> *I really didn't take into account all the issues it was going to cause me like housing benefit, like obviously that wasn't going to be covered here, rent is £260 a week without housing benefit here and that was pretty much all my pay so it just landed me in more debt than anything*. (Adult male)

Not all participants were interested in moving on and getting clean. They accepted that they enjoyed using drugs but had plans to regulate their use in the future:

> *I still want to do what I'm doing, I mean I am like trying to go back to just like getting stoned and that on the weed in the house again like what I used to*. (Adult female)

It was sometimes too difficult to stay clean when still living in an area where there was obvious drug dealing and drug use:

> *Like now I am trying to stay clean you can still see the people who you need to avoid and stuff like that.* (Adult female)

Another difficulty with giving up drugs was the need to give up the lifestyle and social networks which were part of the drug scene:

> *It's not just the drugs, it's the whole lifestyle you are addicted to, it becomes your social life. Everyone knows each other. When I was clean I started again because I didn't know what to do with myself*. (Adult female)

Whereas there are specialist services to support addicts, there seems to be little support once clean when ex-users are in real need of developing a network of healthier social connections. For one young person, the use of cannabis and ketamine got them out of a chaotic, overcrowded household where they experienced abuse and neglect and the idea of moving on was hard to face:

> *When I am out with [older] friends I am not sat at home doing nothing but out with people who are nice and funny*. (Young person)

Even when they were keen to move on it could be problematic for participants to end their connections with dealers. Dealers may still have their phone numbers as lines are bought and sold and may also know their whereabouts which gave vulnerable adults a sense of being objects to be bought and sold:

I get text messages off people I don't even know who they are from, someone else has given them my number or they buy the phone line and change the number so they are like buying you. (Adult female)

5.1: 'Lifelines'

After experiencing exploitation, some participants had been well supported to start again and one talked about being offered *'a bit of a lifeline'* by others:

The boss here found out that I was a dealer…she offered me umm a bit of a lifeline really she said 'look you quit or I'll tell the police or you can come and move into your flat here, up here so we can keep an eye on you and get clean' and that was two and a half year, three year ago. (Adult male)

He found the support from other residents in a hostel helpful and valued chats with support staff who had been through similar experiences of drug use and exploitation. Another participant was lucky that the boss where he worked did not report him to the police when he was stealing for the people who were exploiting him:

He said 'look I can't have you working here, I am not going to call the Police but if you're going to be doing that sort of thing I can't have you here' and since then we have spoken like about four years after that happened and we are absolutely fine, he is just glad to see that I'm on the, well I was on the way up so yeah. (Adult male)

Since then he had sought help and was receiving support for his addiction. Having a person reaching out and caring about them was a turning point for one participant who said that it *'meant more to me than making some money you know'.* (Adult male)

It is likely that for all of the participants, support was not necessarily required from specialist agencies or individuals rather having just one person who believed in them and provided consistent care and interest made a lot of difference to them.

5.2: Looking forward

Despite their devastating experiences and, for some, a long road ahead of them to recovery, participants would express wishes for the future and personal aspirations. One man had been influenced by the support that he had received and hoped to be able to support others in the future:

I want to go to college next year because I want to become a support worker. (Adult male)

Some wanted to leave the county to start afresh but others felt that their support networks were local and they would struggle without them. They all had interests that they would like to pursue, if possible, such as playing football, boxing, doing crossword puzzles, going to the gym, cooking, horse riding, learning languages and travel. After one interview, the participant carefully opened the envelope with a remuneration voucher so that it could be re-used to send off a completed crossword puzzle that they hoped might win them some money.

In addition, reflecting on their own experiences, they had advice for others. One participant, with hindsight, could see that the money that seemed tempting at the time of exploitation had not been worth it:

It ain't worth it. You are a runner yeah, what are you running for? You are running to score, yeah so you can just smoke your money, so you ain't having it, you ain't getting no bloody money and that crack it isn't costing you a tenner a shot. (Adult male)

Summary

- Carrying knives is the ‘norm’ for young people to feel safe.
- Lack of education and future plans can draw individuals back to exploitation by others.
- Many of the young people and vulnerable adults had aspirations and visions for a future which were realistic with the right support.

Chapter 6: Experiences of residents living in affected communities

Communities were seen as vital in sharing information to ultimately protect young people and disrupt exploitation:

> *It is about also linking in with the communities, with the Police and the Beat Managers so they build up their knowledge of their areas so we can, we can share information targeting certain areas and that is child protection.* (FG YP practitioners)

6.1: County Lines activity within the community

'You can't just sit back and let things like this happen on your own doorstep can you?' (Resident)

Interviews with residents in areas where there was known county lines activity (from data provided by Norfolk Constabulary) revealed a good understanding of the processes of dealing in the community. Participants described in detail how drug users and sellers interacted:

> *How we knew that there was dealing is you would get umm, sometimes there would just be one or two people would turn up on the street and you always tended to know because why would people just turn up and they would be sort of hanging around waiting…I remember once there was about twenty to twenty-five people turning up from all over, from all directions who congregated on [street] waiting for a dealer to turn up.* (Resident)

> *You can see they are all waiting and then suddenly they will get a group of about ten people all just walking around using mobile phones.* (Resident)

Transactions were taking place outside their homes but also within the wider community and many residents had observed similar patterns of dealing in other areas nearby. Dealing was therefore seen as fluid with movement around a larger area, aided by the use of cars and bicycles. Residents were aware that rather than ending dealing through interruption, dealers moved across to other areas:

> *The problem is if we are reclaiming our space and then pushing it into somebody else's area and then eventually usually they will come back.* (Resident)

Certain spaces were preferred by dealers and included those with many exits, making it easier for dealers to get away and harder for police to enter by car:

> *It was an area which was a good area for dealers to use because in [street] there is an area where there is kind of an alleyway and there is four different ways out of that alleyway so it made it harder for the police to kind of catch people if they turned up.* (Resident)

> *You know it's obvious what's happening and then suddenly you'll see about ten of them there, wherever this person comes from luckily they've got lots of ways to get there so you know it is very easy to do dealings there and then suddenly they all disappear.* (Resident)

Other studies have identified spaces used by gangs and dealers which include street corners, parks and alleys where they feel protected (see Valasik & Tita, 2018 for a review). Residents become so familiar with those areas and strategically navigate their neighbourhood to avoid them. Using pedestrianised areas for dealing meant that dealers could not be followed by police cars but some of those areas were overlooked by flats with windows facing which allowed residents a good view of what was happening in the street. Some residents would approach drug users who had gathered, waiting for a delivery:

I would go out, sometimes, in the end you get so angry so you start off positively but in the end you are so furious, so like on a couple of occasions I have seen people hanging around and I would go round to theirs's and I would go outside and I would just say to them you know 'just piss off' and they would say 'we are not doing anything'. (Resident)

However, they were less willing to approach drug dealers as they feared for their own safety:

As far as the dealers we tried not to get too involved with dealing with the dealers because we thought that was a dangerous thing to do, we left that to the police if I am honest. (Resident)

Dealers were a mixture of ages, some white British and others from minority ethnic groups. One resident very rarely saw females dealing but another saw *'a lot of girls that used to deal'.* (Resident)

6.2: Vulnerability of residents in communities

Although all residents expressed feelings of vulnerability, they recognised that some members of their community were more vulnerable than others to cuckooing. One older person living alone, and whose frailty was evidenced by handrails outside his front door, lived opposite a popular place for dealing and was considered particularly vulnerable:

And they have been seen, the druggies, under the trees in the churchyard dealing. I mean they have only got to look across the road, he has got handles on the door, it proves that he's old. (Resident)

His medical condition meant that he sometimes forgot to close his door and his spouse worried that

…one of these days I just think I am going to come home and he is going to be stabbed or something. (Resident)

Younger people were also seen as vulnerable, especially those living alone with young children:

The neighbour two doors away she was supposed to come to the meeting but she's vulnerable because she is a young mum with a little girl and she said 'I have seen the men that go in that [friend's] house' she said 'I don't want anyone coming banging on my door in the middle of the night threatening me or something'. (Resident)

Residents had witnessed the exploitation of young people who were selling drugs for older dealers based in a local house:

I was very concerned when the house was dealing, they were very young children then and we reported that hundreds and hundreds of times…they were very young and they were obviously collecting the drugs and then going off on their bikes and what have you but these people I would have thought they were sort of in their twenties the majority of them. (Resident)

The term cuckooing was familiar to most residents from the media and they were vigilant when they suspected that flats or houses were being used for dealing. For example, one resident knew a flat was empty but saw a person enter the empty flat with large pieces of wood. Other residents witnessed increased activity in the home of a woman living alone and the home of a man who had an intellectual disability:

We did have one particular house on the ground floor where you could see all the dealings, hundreds of people coming to the house and finally the lady moved out. (Resident)

You have got a guy on the opposite end who has suffered a brain injury and now he seems to be involved in drugs and we think that he lets in the people who are dealing and so that they have got free access. (Resident)

6.3: Taking community action

There was evidence of community action in an area affected by county lines activity. Residents collaborated to assist authorities in gaining a better picture of events and activities related to drug dealing in the area. The collaboration initially started due to fear and frustration when local residents experienced an increase in the number of users and dealers in their location:

They were having issues with dealings out there and sometimes people would actually go out of the café and shout at people to move on and things like that. (Resident)

She has actually gone out in the middle of them all and taken photographs and what have you and I am absolutely amazed, absolutely amazed. (Resident)

There appeared to be a process where first the residents felt brave and prepared to confront dealers and users but then they became more concerned and frightened and for some even involvement in the community action was too much of a worry. One resident explained the anxiety felt by the community:

People were frightened to approach them and I am not saying you should approach them because it is not a good idea, people were afraid at first to get involved umm but I think eventually the whole community came together. (Resident)

Residents, therefore, set up a reporting app which allowed anyone who saw activity to record it and the information was collated and passed to the police. They were able to put any kind of evidence on the app including photos, video and written accounts of activity:

That was one of the dealers there, I am just showing some photos…but, it is not a very good picture of him. This one, he used to turn up a lot, so he is quite a young one…but these two out here they were the ones, he was horrible, he was vile to this one. (Resident)

We all worked together so when they turned up we would make sure that where we couldn't get photographs, videos that we could use and send to the police, we would report it and we would just support each other because it was just a really, just a really uncomfortable horrible time really. (Resident)

The app also served to provide mutual support, particularly when witnessing a deal and feeling particularly vulnerable. It was possible to contact others on the app and then talk on the phone *'while it all went away'* (Resident). Sometimes people would come out into the street in the hope that dealers and users may move on but also to offer support:

I suppose you feel very isolated when there is things like this happening in your area and you know the one thing that you do want to happen if I am honest is you feel safer in numbers. (Resident)

Community action has to be organised and requires someone to take the lead. The area was lucky to have support from their local county councillor and other residents also took a lead in organising the community action, including the app:

I didn't want to be that person, I never wanted to be that person, but unless you have got somebody that really tries to get involved with it and own it if you are not careful it would be,

you know if we hadn't worked so hard with the Police just how would they know and then the problem is that it just would escalate and escalate and escalate. (Resident)

However, there is a mix of residents and housing in the area and some residents felt threatened by the activity and police involvement which caused concern for a more active community members when confronted by an ex-dealer who was not keen on collaborating with the police:

That frightened me a bit because I don't want people to know that I am involved in this [community action]. (Resident)

6.4: Impact on everyday lives

'It is hard to sometimes get across you know the genuine feeling of, just how scared you feel when you are living amongst it.' Resident

The drug activity within the area studied clearly impacted negatively on the lives of the residents. Some residents were worried about walking around their area, visiting the local park or even sitting outside. In some cases family members did not want to visit:

I feel sorry for my family, they don't want to come. My, especially my little niece she doesn't want to come, that's the sad part about it, she doesn't even feel safe walking along [street]. (Resident)

Residents were also concerned that their area had got a bad name and that others may associate the area with drugs:

One will say something about you know 'the druggies are coming' that is all I hear about, I don't want to hear it but they are all very aware of it all needless to say but I think I don't really want to hear it. (Resident)

The area has a number of elderly residents and it was clear that their lives and social interactions were affected by the drug activity:

I just put my head in the sand and hope it will all go away and lead my life hopefully the way I want to but it does affect me because umm I think twice about going out and walking in certain areas and a lot of the time I think if I bike somewhere I feel safer than walking. But to be honest umm though I do find in the summer in the evenings I tend not quite so much to go out in the evenings, it is quite frightening you know. (Resident)

Everyday lives were affected as people, mostly young people, would hang out in stairwells at all times of day which was seen as intimidating for some residents:

I can hear them as I go up the stairs as they always go in the middle, not the top or bottom, and I think 'well I live here'… (Resident)

Some participants had considered moving, indeed one had moved out of the area at the time of interview, and often family and friends would suggest a move to a safer area:

You know people say 'why don't you move?' and I say 'you could move next to worse' you know I mean we shut the door, shut the door, turn the lights out and go to bed and err you know hope for the best but I mean you know everywhere you go now is, it's just local isn't it? (Resident)

Families with younger children also had concerns and would worry about the children playing outside or in certain areas, partly because parents were concerned that they would witness drug taking but also because there were syringes in gardens and other areas:

> *The kids used to play so [street] is pedestrianised but people who had got, who had young kids got to the stage because often deals would take place in that pedestrianised bit, so people got to the stage where they wouldn't even let their kids out to play.* (Resident)

Even inside their homes, residents felt vulnerable and the activities outside had a real impact on their behaviour inside. One resident, who had experienced some abusive behaviour and drug dealing next to their house, was too frightened to sit in the living room during the evening:

> *I would never sit in the lounge of my house because I felt vulnerable so I would make dinner and because [partner] was not around in the week I would go and get in bed and eat dinner in bed and you know watch telly in bed because I just wanted to be…feel safe.* (Resident)

Since moving to another area life had become very different and the participant was able to reflect on the change:

> *Now we have moved into our new house, you know I will come in and I will just be normal, I will make dinner and I will sit in the lounge, I will watch telly, have a glass of wine and feel like a different person to what I felt like when I lived there.* (Resident)

Not everyone felt unsafe or worried about the area and one resident, despite experiencing a lot of drug activity in her immediate vicinity, felt that the area was particularly safe due to the police awareness of issues and also because her experience was that if you contacted the police, they would arrive in minutes:

> *I feel safe, I am on my own, I walk about on my own.* (Resident)

6.5: Working closely with police

'It's just to see a uniform' (Resident)

Residents worked closely with the police. The app aided the collation of information including photos and videos. A local councillor often acted as the go-between the residents and police and it appeared that some residents were more comfortable telling the councillor rather than talking directly to the police:

> *It's quite frightening you know when you have never dealt with the police, I have never had anything to do with them.* (Resident)

> *For me, reporting it was a bit scary because if they [dealers] knew…they wouldn't be very nice probably and it made me realise that you could be vulnerable.* (Resident)

Participants expressed some frustration at the lack of resources which meant that police always appeared to be reacting to incidents rather than being proactive:

> *It got really bad but again the police were always on the back foot because they are always waiting for somebody to report it and then if they have got enough umm resources only then can they turn up and hope that they get there in time.* (Resident)

> *I mean once there was a guy taking drugs down the side of [street], I actually saw him injecting heroin, or injecting whatever he was injecting, rang the police and they did turn up quite quickly eventually because, only because I had to really push for it.* (Resident)

There was a police presence in the city but mostly for emergencies and the residents said that they frequently heard sirens with *'police racing off to emergencies'* (Resident). However, they felt that there was too little presence on the ground within their area. There was recognition that the police were under-resourced but residents questioned if the resources were used in a way that worked to solve their problem of criminal activity:

> *So the police are frustrated, you know the police don't want it to be happening in their areas either umm so I feel for the police if I am honest, I think they have a really, really hard job you know.* (Resident)

> *I know they are going to say that they don't have the resources but you should use what's going to work*. (Resident)

The loss of community support officers had made a difference to feelings of safety for the residents:

> *The Community Support Officers used to be good because they used to walk around the park and they would have come in but they have gone. They would come and see you, make sure you were alright and you know they were just a help to everybody. And it was just seeing them, knowing that you know, yeah if there was anything going on in the park with the kids they were always there just to check that everything was okay*. (Resident)

The lack of police presence was seen to allow those committing offences to feel safe:

> *But it just seems funny that when police cuts were made you know and I am no politician and I don't know an awful lot about it but it just seems, well it doesn't seem strange, it is obvious isn't it, if there isn't the amount of people that can patrol areas and deal with things and respond to things then of course you know if you want to do something wrong then why wouldn't you?* (Resident)

Participants spoke highly of beat officers who sometimes patrolled the area on foot. They encouraged community cohesion and were active participants within the community:

> *Both were city beat officers I think you call them and they were amazing, I mean absolutely amazing. They held local, they worked with us starting up and we held local kind of community get-togethers, they would talk about what we could do, they talked to us about what was safe and what wasn't safe to do and how we could help them you know.* (Resident)

When the police presence involved police sitting in cars, it was viewed as less useful:

> *The only thing I do get upset with, I mean the police do drive round in the* [street] *occasionally but they never get out of their cars, never. Wouldn't you think that they would just park up and just walk round [area]?* (Resident)

> *I have actually phoned, as I said, only that once and fair enough the police did come they were in the* [street] *but they didn't actually get out of the car so they didn't actually see all these people under there you know and I thought 'what a waste of time, a complete waste of time'.* (Resident)

The relief at seeing a police officer on foot made one participant exclaim: *'oh my God I feel like shaking their hand!'* (Resident)

All participants were clear that they wanted to work with the police and they did not want to waste police time or resources. It was therefore helpful to have the app and one or two people who were

links between the community and the police and reporting in that way essentially 'triaged' reports and avoided reports of *'somebody looks suspicious'.* (Resident)

Participants mostly felt that they could rely on the police to do what is required. They understood that although it was not always clear that any action was taken, work was often happening behind the scenes:

> *They are doing what they should be doing because I have seen raids in [street], not necessarily people who live in [street], obviously they have followed a car into [street] and suddenly you will see hundreds of policemen and people being arrested*. (Resident)

> *I realise that they are gathering information as they don't just want to get the young kids, they want to get the further up of course…so I understand that.* (Resident)

They felt grateful for any support and some had already expressed that to the police:

> *I have sent emails, I have sent emails to the police that I would like to say you have done a great job in supporting us.* (Resident)

In some cases there was disappointment expressed by participants. They did not feel listened to and when police acted, actions were not always adequate. One participant had tried to contact local police officers to no avail and another wanted an urgent response as there was a deal going on with at least 12 people:

> *I never got a reply, I didn't get a reply and now this one I've emailed to the one that I was just given and it said 'this isn't monitored on a daily basis' and I can imagine they must have a horrendous amount.* (Resident)

> *I phoned the other day and I said to the young lady on the phone, umm 'when I actually see these people dealing drugs is there a special number that I can ring and that they'll come you know more or less straightaway?' She said 'no there's nothing' she said 'all you do is 101 and she said if they are free they'll come.* (Resident)

Residents expressed a wish to receive feedback when they reported incidents or when there had been increased police activity such as a raid in the area:

> *I have never had any come back from them personally, the only information I have ever had is from the two ladies from the Labour Council, they have been brilliant and they have always given me that little bit more information to give me more confidence, they have always been able to just tell me a little bit, not too much, and I am then thinking 'oh well perhaps I shouldn't be thinking that way, things are being done' I think they are behind the scenes which I know nothing about, obviously they all say they can't discuss it and what have you, you know, so I have to think and hope.* (Resident)

Case study: the community and the police working together

Jenny lived in an area close to a park where there was known drug dealing. She noticed that, over time, the dealers started to move into the area and street where she lived. The street was safe for dealers as it was pedestrianised and had many alleyways where police cars could not go. She started to notice people hanging around near her house. Sometimes large groups would arrive *'you could tell from the way that they looked that they were drug users…but sometimes they didn't, sometimes they looked like normal people umm that sounds awful to use the word 'normal' but sometimes they looked like somebody's mum or even somebody's grandma'*. The dealers' sense of safety in the area meant that dealing escalated until Jenny set up a Drug App for the street, in collaboration with the police and local counsellors.

Initially people in the area were frightened to get involved but eventually the community came together. Meetings were set up with the police and everyone worked together to record evidence which was passed on to the police. Often people would be in tears at the meetings as they were so worried about the situation. Some arrests were made but mostly the residents felt that the police had few powers to intervene *'they can't just 'stop and search' unless somebody has actively seen something, so it is so frustrating for them as well because their hands are kind of tied in terms of what they can do'*.

Residents were clear that when the police did have a presence in the area, the dealing would reduce and their neighbourhood would become quiet again. The police *'ramped up their operation in terms of turning up in an area, patrolling an area, umm it would go quiet for two, three sometimes four months you know but then of course it would start up again'*. It never lasted and the perception of the residents was that there were not enough resources available so *'the police were always on the back foot because they are always waiting for somebody to report it and then if they have got enough resources only then can they turn up and hope that they get there in time'*.

Through their work with two local police constables, residents were able to understand how they could support the police and the police constables were able to explore how they could support the residents to understand what they (residents) could and couldn't do to keep themselves safe.

6.6: Solutions

'You know there's nothing to do for the youngsters' (Resident)

Participants acknowledged that young people will always spend time outside the home without supervision. The changes identified by participants were the lack of places to go and things to do for young people:

> *I don't blame the children because they live in a block of flats and they have got nowhere to play in their houses.* (Resident)
>
> *I mean they have twice a week they have err football […] there's a group of people there, they take them all over there but they only, up to a certain age, not really the, the vulnerable age*. (Resident)

One problem was that the young people who were exploited often did not live in the area so local activities were unlikely to have an impact on their vulnerabilities. The problem was therefore

broader than the issues in their particular neighbourhood and participants discussed youth clubs, scouts and the importance of education in giving all children help and direction:

> *Somebody who hasn't had education and doesn't come from a good family and they see a way of either earning money from being a dealer or hiding their pain from being a user that's I think where it comes from.* (Resident)

Summary

- Residents living in an area affected by County Lines and drug dealing recognised the vulnerability and disadvantage experienced by the young people and adults being exploited.
- Active drug dealing and the visibility of drug users had a profound impact on the daily lives of residents and at times restricted their movement within the area.
- Taking community action was a positive experience aided to a large extent by a committed local county counsellor.
- The residents had a good relationship with the police but were concerned that activity was mostly reactive.
- Residents realised that police resources are limited but felt there could be increased communication from the police about what they are doing or have done.
- There was a desire to have more police presence in the area to act as a deterrent for dealers and to prevent young people and adults from being exploited through positive engagement.
- Residents expressed sadness at the limited opportunities for meaningful activities for young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

The experiences of young people, vulnerable adults, practitioners who support them and the residents who live in areas affected by county lines activity are, as expected, diverse but there are also many common features which we summarise and discuss here.

7.1: The community

Understanding

Residents in an affected community had a good awareness of county lines and cuckooing. Community action was organised which allowed collation of incidents and provided intelligence to the police in an ordered manner. Residents were concerned for young people and worried about the lack of opportunities for them to engage in meaningful activities. They were at times frustrated by the drug users and their visible presence in the area but also demonstrated an understanding of their vulnerabilities.

Impact on lives

The residents felt the impact of county lines activity keenly. Some were very concerned about their own safety and the safety of others. The lack of police presence was seen as perpetuating the issue as dealers felt increasingly safe but residents felt less safe. There was restriction of movement as residents navigated their spaces to avoid witnessing drug deals. Some had family members who would not visit due to the perceived dangers.

7.2: Practitioners

Safeguarding

There are difficulties when attempting to safeguard adults who are deemed to have capacity but yet are extremely vulnerable to exploitation, particularly cuckooing. Police are often left supporting those individuals and undertaking disruption work within the communities. Teachers who had concerns about pupils expressed anxiety that their referrals to children's services rarely reached the threshold for intervention. Again, there was frustration at the lack of early help and support rather than the reactive approach once something serious had happened. Contextual safeguarding was recognised as a helpful lens when working with adolescents at risk outside the home but there was a view that it was resource intense and it appeared to remain focused on the individual without resources to make changes in the environment.

Services

Having a visible presence whilst at the same time protecting their service users was a dilemma for some specialist services. Predatory individuals would loiter to prey on those vulnerable to exploitation due to substance misuse or mental health problems, for example. Limited resources and influx of vulnerable individuals from out of county stretched some services. Services worked better to support people if they worked together and there were serious concerns about those who provided a limited service, such as a meal, in areas where vulnerable individuals were picked up for exploitation. Like the young people and adults, those running support services were keen to see a more holistic service. Voluntary agencies struggled to access funding and were having to re-invent their remit to look 'new and innovative'.

7.3: Young people and vulnerable adults

Education

The educational experiences of young people and vulnerable adults who are exploited are poor and overwhelmingly involve exclusions from mainstream education as well as alternative provisions. School exclusion is not an issue specific to Norfolk (e.g. DfE, 2019) and much has been written about the links between exclusion and vulnerability to exploitation. The participants in this study all had a number of adverse childhood experiences and some had experienced extreme trauma and abuse at home and in the community. Difficult home circumstances are likely to affect behaviour in school (Nicholson & Putwain, 2018). Behaviour seen as unacceptable in school can lead to exclusion which impairs the ability to sustain peer friendships and relationships with teachers (Levinson, 2016). Graham et al (2019, p.24) describe this as a 'chain reaction'. Concerted efforts are required to break that chain or avoid it forming in the first place.

Support

Findings suggest that excluded and socially isolated young people can feel attracted to the excitement and sense of belonging that exploitation appears to offer, albeit short-term for some. Likewise, vulnerable adults become easy targets if they are dependent on drugs or have other vulnerabilities such as mental health issues which excludes them from active engagement in training or employment. Support is crucial for those exploited but for many that support comes too late, is not enduring, is inappropriate or simply not available. There is little evidence of access to early help and support before issues have escalated. The focus is on interventions for those who have had exploitative experiences, are entrenched in substance misuse or have severe mental health problems. All young people and adults wanted enduring relationships with agencies, committed support and kindness, for as long as needed.

An important point mentioned by a parent of a young person who had been exploited over a period of time, trafficked and abused, is that of a whole systems approach to protecting vulnerable children from exploitation. If young people do not feel valued by society or feel that they do not belong, then they will seek those essential emotions elsewhere. It was fortuitous that we spoke to parents of a young person and a vulnerable adult as part of this project as their voices are rarely heard and yet they are often the first to notice subtle changes, particularly when children are excluded from school (Hunter, Dickson & Allan, 2019). It therefore seems pertinent to end with a quote from the mother of a young person:

> *I think it is about stopping young people feeling like they don't belong to society. That's what it is and it doesn't matter what level it is, whether it is at* [young person's] *level, whether its big county lines level, whether it is at London gangs level, Manchester gangs, it doesn't matter which level you are at they are all in it for the same reason because they don't feel part of society and that's everybody's fault that they feel like that.* (Young person's parent)

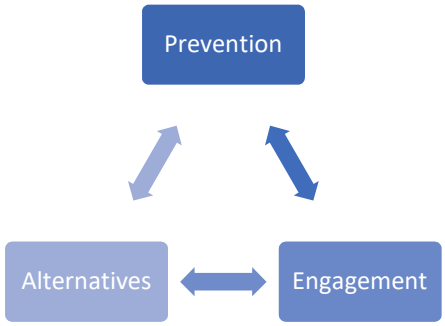
7.4: Key messages

- Interventions and support for young people to reduce their risk of exploitation requires an ecological view of behaviour. This entails targeting the individual young person, the family, peer group, school, neighbourhood and wider social policy and legal frameworks (Hemphill & Smith, 2010). The principle of contextual safeguarding is based on such a concept but has a focus on peer groups and local environments and not the wider social context (Firmin, 2018). Real change will require a much more encompassing way of protecting children. In Norfolk, a start has been made to expand work within the community but it is still focused on specific areas and not a universal service. The new PSHE curriculum may be the first step

in educating all children about exploitative relationships but will of course only reach those attending school.

- In addition to prevention, we have to provide services that young people want to engage with and viable alternatives to drug dealing/exploitation (Figure 1). Many activities are costly and offered for a short period only (e.g. gym membership). Young people want long term, consistent and relationship based support and we found that when that is available, from an early age, there is a support network in place when things start to go wrong for young people. There is clear evidence that all children and young people are vulnerable to exploitation and therefore we need to focus on all young children to ensure that if, or when, something happens, we are prepared and able to notice at the first signs. That allows for real prevention if services and support step up provision at that point.

Figure 1: The inter-linked issues of prevention, engagement and alternatives



- Young people and vulnerable adults who are victims of criminal exploitation do not necessarily require specialist support. It is evident that having just one person who believes in them and stays alongside them for as long as required makes a real difference. Kindness and consistency appear to trump 'new and innovative'.

- There is increased interest in adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) which is a welcome recognition of the way that early experiences travel with young people into adulthood. However, often the interest is there once practitioners are faced with a young person (or adult) with extreme difficulties at which point the alleged predictive element of ACEs is irrelevant other than for research purposes.

- Community policing is key to making communities feel valued and to deter county lines activity. Community policing must involve the building of relationships with all members of a community. Although residents indicated a wish to see increased police presence, it may be that the role of community reassurance can be undertaken by volunteer police support.

- In order to have continued engagement and cooperation from local communities, Norfolk Constabulary must find a way to communicate with residents to keep them updated when there is news about issues relevant to their areas for example, successful operations undertaken by the police. This may mitigate the view that the police is only reactive to serious incidents.

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