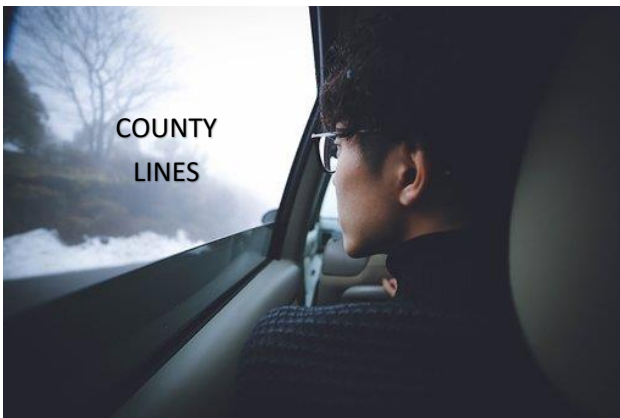


Practice Log; Critically reflect on one health/well-being/Children's rights issue that you have been introduced to during this module. 5000 Words

ECCH7002, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN FOCUS
REBECCA WILLIAMS

Throughout this log I shall introduce the reader into what county line is, the model in which it operates and how it's exploiting children and young people. It shall identify and discuss reasons why young people are being targeted and the contributions of what makes someone vulnerable. As well as how to look out for signs and symptoms of someone being exploited, and how this has a negative effect on the health and wellbeing of children and young people.



The terminology of a gang has historically been hard to define (Issacs et al, 2015 p161-166). While also the term 'gang' has been hard to define so has the term 'organised crime', regardless there has been many attempts (Isaacs et al, 2015, p142). Bedfordshire police consider that gangs are a noticeable group that engage in a range of criminal activity (No date, Online). As previously identified the term gang culture is often used, it's often discussed that there is a 'gang culture' within the media perception. Culture is a widely accepted group of ideas, customs and social behaviour and often is related to arts and human behaviour (Oxford dictionaries, no date). So what really is gang culture? In a study undertaken by Fraser, he found that a member of a 'gang' identified themselves with a specific

geographical area, their community and ensuring that others knew whom belonged and who didn't as well as engaging in common activities (2010, p188-1910). These activities don't necessarily have to be a 'hard criminal activity'; however we have built the social construction of it this behaviour and in turn having a negative perception of gangs rather than just a social group (McCorkle and Miethe, 2002).

Cohen (1967) argues that gangs are formatted and driven by frustration. Historically there has always been gangs such as the Mods and the rockers in the 1960's which created moral panic. With the media being the stem of such moral panic (Cohen, cited in Wright, 2017; Bennett, 2007, p26). Are there some elements of moral panic being currently sparked by the media and governmental policies in regards to county lines?

The idea that the term gang has been social constructed as a deficit within society has caused panic and the criminalisation of those whom are seen as members of gangs (Isaacs et al, 2015, p162). However throughout this piece of work I will question this view. Challenging the perspective of who are the

victims with a specific focus which is currently in the eyes of the media, county lines.

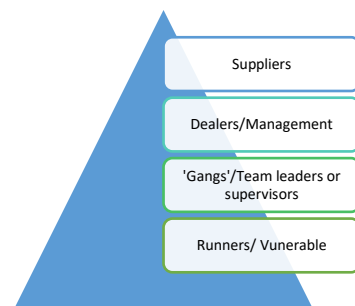
There has much media coverage and attention being given to county lines and how children and young people are being exploited into this type of lifestyle. However to define whom is a child, whom is a young person and who is an adult is ambiguous and hard to define as the social construction of the terms is consistently forming and changing (Nayak and Kehily, 2013 p8). For the purpose of this log I will use my own professional guidelines of youth work to define the age categories of these social constructs, with a young person distinctly defined as one whom is aged between 11 -25 (Youth Work in Wales review group, 2018). Therefore categorising anyone below the age of 10 as a child and those aged over 25 as an adult.

Young people are often groomed into county lines behaviour and other acts (Fearless, No date, Online; Gov.uk, 2018). Building a connection and trust with the child or young person, offering resources such as food, material goods and opportunities they wouldn't have access to otherwise (NSPCC, No date, Online).

County Lines as a Business Model

Like all profiteering projects there needs to be a model a plan of action to ensure the ultimate gain and minimal risk is effective. County lines isn't illusive of this, and has its own structure and model to anticipate the maximum return. The success of county lines is down to two

intrinsic factors. Moving away from the already established inner city markets and expanding the target audience, while remaining anonymous in expanding the business and profiting from vulnerable individuals. County lines can almost be comparable to that of pyramid schemes



Those who are at the top are the ultimate profiteers, the ones whom have continually access to the product and organise the continuous supply to smaller groups of dealers. The dealers then have their own workforce whom have their own management system in place, providing product, targets and enforcement. These gangs are then attributed with rewards of monetary value and seen as the 'local dealers' in the area. However to move their product out to the wider market and to avoid detection, they recruit and use runners whom are also vulnerable and often attracted to a better lifestyle (Coomber and Moyle, 2017).

National Crime Agency (NCA) state 'the exploitation of young and vulnerable is a common feature of facilitation of county lines

drug supply' (2017). What kind of exploitation of our young people is taking place? And what makes someone vulnerable to be led into these situations?

What kind of Exploitation is Involved ?

Cuckooing:

A term in which was originally used within nature of the stealing practices of cuckoo birds stealing nests (Coomber and Moyle, 2017).

The main aim of county line business model is to maximise profits and expand territory. A key aspect of this as mentioned above is to avoid being detectable. Therefore often in the nature of county lines, these gangs will use associated safe addresses to undertake their business. Properties which have had no association with criminal activity previously which often belong to those deemed vulnerable. Those who reside in these addresses are manipulated and controlled through intimidation and violence or even relationships (National Crime Agency, 2016) to gain control of the property.

In 2017, 77% of police forces documented incidents of cuckooing that were associated to county lines activity (NCA, 2016).

Cuckooed addresses are often rotated again to avoid being detectable. Gang operations may run out of these homes for hours, days, weeks or some cases months (Crime Stoppers, No Date).

With county lines gangs wishing to expand their territory and increase profits they often aim for new areas/ 'markets' such as rural towns and coastlines (National Crime Agency, 2016; Coomber and Moyle, 2017). When they arrive in these areas they need somewhere to set up base to sleep and run their 'business' from. Rural communities often are good opportunities for these 'gangs' to target due to isolated properties and smaller police forces (Coomber and Moyle, 2017). Holiday homes, caravan parks and budget hotels are also prolific along coastal areas with reasonable transport links (Coomber and Moyle 2017), which is an ideal situation to develop a successful business model of county lines.

What are the signs of cuckooing?

- An increase in people entering and leaving
- An increase in cars or bikes outside
- Possible increase in anti-social behaviour
- Increasing litter outside
- Signs of drugs use
- Lack of healthcare visitors
- Lack of visual of original or 'normal' inhabitants of the property

(Crime stoppers, no date)

If you suspect or have information regarding cuckooing contact crime stoppers on 0800 555 111

Trafficked

Trafficking of children and young people is another crucial element to the gang/county lines success model for business by targeting and recruiting vulnerable children and young people to be at the bottom of the model, on the front line of distribution which reduces the risk of detection again. They are used as they are easy to manipulate and reward (The Children's Society, 2018). They are also perceived as disposable and replaceable. They often get moved from the home area to travel distances to make deliveries to other communities, often using public transport. Young people are seen perfect in the role as they are less likely to build suspicion or attract attention to themselves individually (Lusher, 2017).

Children and young people are being exploited to benefit someone else's criminal activity and therefore are not the criminals. They often do not have the capacity of choice in their behaviour (The children's society, Victim support and the National Police Chiefs Council, 2018). Children and young people should always be treated mainly as victims in these scenarios and therefore the use of language when speaking about these topics with young people should address as such. Therefore instead of the use of drug runners which can be used as a suggestion that their participation is voluntary, we should consider other terms such as the person that is being exploited to distribute drugs.

Warning Indicators

There are a number of warning indicators that could alert professionals/parents and community members that a child or young person is being criminally exploited: *See below , If anyone has concerns in regards to a child or young person a referral can be made to social services :*

-  Frequently missing/unexplained absences from school, college or training
-  Unexplained material goods or expenditure of money
-  Being found out of area when missing
-  Change in behaviour, withdrawn, secretive, isolated from peers or not mixing with usual friends
-  New relationships and peer group
-  Multiple mobile phones or strange behaviour when receiving notifications on mobile
-  Possession of keys to unknown premises.
-  Self-harm or significant changes in emotional wellbeing
-  Increasingly disruptive, hostile or physically aggressive
-  Increasing use of drugs or alcohol

(This list is not an exhaustive one and others signs may also be apparent)

Vulnerability & Exploitation

Maslow in 1943 developed a model identifying the needs of which every human requires in the need to have a fulfilling life (McLeod, 2007). The five tier model is split into three categories, firstly basic needs such as food, water, warmth, rest security and safety. Secondly the Psychological needs; relationships, friends, accomplishment. The third being self-fulfilment needs, achieving ones full achievement, and being satisfied. Maslow argued that an individuals needs have to be fully fulfilled at the first tier before achieving the higher levels (McLeod, 2017).

Throughout this log I'm using Maslow's model to help define reasoning and reflect on why we as a society need to rethink the idea of gang culture and county lines and whom is ultimately the victims and the ones at fault for young people participating in county lines.

Poverty

As previously stated county lines gang's target young people whom are deemed as vulnerable. One aspect of this vulnerability is living in poverty.

A report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2018) has found that child poverty has been rising since 2011/12 with 4.1 Million children living in poverty with a rise of half a million in the last five years.

Within my own practice I have seen the effect of poverty with young people aged 11 -25 walking into our youth centres asking 'Are you cooking food tonight? As a service we try and provide a meal at each of our provisions to support these young people. I have heard stories of young people whom haven't eaten over the course of the day or even the weekend. They are tired, they seem irritable and restless, often due to the lack of nutrition (British Dietitians Association, No date). The resources they have available at home are below the minimum needs.

Poverty historically has been seen as the problem of the individual and seen as a strain on governmental resources. (Thatcher, 1987 cited in Issacs et al, 2015, p48-49). This historic perception is still evident in today's society, regardless that 7.4 million people are in poverty despite being in a working family (JRF, 2016).

With resources being inadequate to meet the basic needs of an individual, poverty is a huge obvious influential factor of vulnerability including for children and young people. From a children's right perspective, are we upholding all their rights? are they having good food? Are children and young people having a good standard of living? Children from birth to the age of 18 are entitled to these rights with no responsibility to uphold them, apart from not infringing on other children and their rights. As adults and as a society we are the duty bearers of these rights and have a

responsibility to uphold them for children and young people.

Although we speak of children's rights, education cannot be exclusive on its own as is included within the UNCRC. As part of the theme tying in education and poverty, there is much emphasis on making our children and young people more resilient to improve happiness, health and wellbeing (Welsh Government, 2015; Eckersley, 2017).

One aspect of being resilient can be that of being resourceful and innovative to being able to recover from difficulties and challenges. Throughout practice we know young people can be resourceful and is something we often encourage in practice (Cameron and Moss, 2011, p48), to help build resilience. In doing this are we pushing the old fashioned values of Thatcherism of, people must look to provide for themselves. This may ultimately be pushing people to other means such as criminal activity and county lines as they feel that it's a quick fix rather than thinking through the consequences which also relates to adolescent brain development (Dahl, 2006).

With these high expectations we put onto young people such as being resilient, aiming for the future and being able to achieve, it's no wonder young people are seeking alternative support revenues.

The question is whom is ultimately at fault for poverty? Recent changes to the benefit system such as universal credit and the Personal independence payment (PIP) review

scheme have been seen as ineffective with it being confusing, subjective and hard to engage with (JRF, No date). The rising costs of living has also been a contributor to this (Oxfam, 2012). If young people have consistent limited access to basic resources such as food, water and warmth and there is someone offering this open handed then they are likely to accept leading them into a false sense of security. It's part of the grooming and intimidation process, building the trust and relationship with the child or young person to later ask for 'favours' back as repayment (Stone, 2018).

Although society is changing its historical views on poverty with charity and community projects such as the increase in food banks (Channel 4, 2014). There is still a strain on the family finances with parents finding it difficult to provide causing stress and strain on family dynamics (JRF, 2018).

'Over a quarter of people in the poorest fifth of the population experience depression or anxiety' (JRF, 2018, p6).

Families and ACE's

Home is another key part of youth culture with society expectations outlining that young people don't belong to hang around in the park when they appear to be 'too old' for this type

of behaviour. Restrictions in public spaces isn't uncommon, with young people feeling pushed out and unwelcome (Deer, Ruppi and Wagner, 2016; Van Hecke et al, 2018). Home is their safe place, but what happens when home isn't this safe, where they don't feel comfortable to be in this supposedly safe place.

As previously outlined poverty is an influential factor for young people vulnerability. There has been much reporting on the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACE's), which also has influence on young people's vulnerability (Esaki, 2018). ACEs are stressful experiences occurring during childhood in which directly harm a child. This can be sexual abuse, physical abuse or effect the environment in which they live in (Bellis et al 2016, cited in Francis, No date).

There has been a number of reports identifying that those whom have been exposed to ACE's have been found to have characteristics such as impulsivity (Shin, McDonald and Conley, 2018). Such a trait like impulsivity has also been linked to the vulnerability (Beauchaine and Neuhaus, 2008). The contribution of ACE's and impulsivity and adolescent brain development is like a perfect storm for criminals to target these individuals. Those whom have been exposed to ACE's are less likely to be able to create and maintain relationships (Ashton et al , 2016). Therefore they may be identified as those whom are alone away from social groups, who don't

engage with others which are perfect opportunities for gangs to manipulate with befriending and friendship to engage into the county line activity.

Those who have also been exposed to ACE's are also more likely to have behavioural problems (Hunt, Slack and Berger, 2017). Due to behavioural problems the likely hood of them also being removed from mainstream school is also high (Visser and Stokes).

A report commissioned by the Home Office (cited in TES, 2018) found that many children groomed by drug gangs were recruited after they were excluded from school and sent to pupil referral units (PRU). PRU's are seen as

"fertile ground" for gang recruitment, where youngsters may only attend for a few hours a week' (TES, 2018).

There has also been evidence that not attending mainstream education is a factor but their behavioural problems can also be a factor in which in getting involved in county lines. A review undertaken by van Goozen, Fairchild, Snoek and Harold (2007) states that children whom have disruptive behaviour disorder are likely to engage with anti-social behaviour as they have less fear of punishment and seek out stimulation and or take risks. Kendall-Tacket (2002) also states that's those whom

have already been exposed to ACE's are also vulnerable to revictimization.

The current response to these links has been slow but developing with an external led review being undertaken to explore why groups of children are more likely to be excluded than others (TES, No date), in the hope that early intervention can prevent less students attending PRU's and being targeted for such activity.

Within my own practice I have heard young people aged as young as thirteen actively engaged in illicit drug use and whom have voluntarily been tested for substances in which they have come back positive for. Though as a youth worker there are limitations in what I feel I'm competent to deliver, I can offer voluntary engagement in youth work services, so the individual can benefit from mutually respected and positive environment (Sapin, 2013, p120) as well as signposting to other services. Although working and living in a rural communities there is limitations of what is available to these individuals. Professionally I have a duty of care to these individuals and can complete a multi-agency referral form. I can educate the individual around exploitation and the repercussion of being involved and that they will not be seen as the criminal but more of the victim and empower them to speak out about their current experiences.

Youth Culture, Spaces and Knife Crime

Youth Culture has always been a prominent feature when speaking about young people

and the correlation between youth culture and expectations has in somewhat been a clash of views and opinions between young people and adults (Feldman and Quatman, 1988). The invention of childhood, youth and adulthood has been socially constructed over time (Nayak and Kehily, 2013 p8).

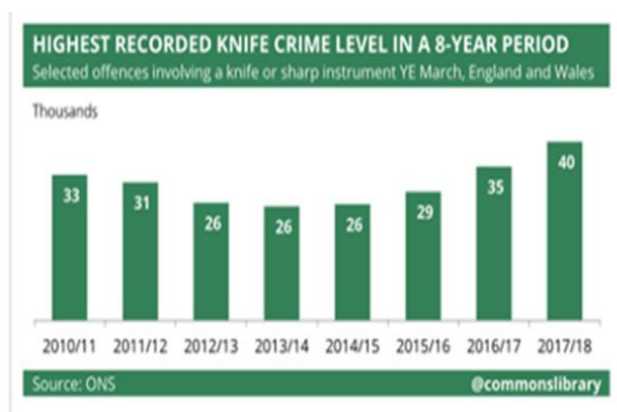
Youth culture is subjective and individualised and has given young people the sense of belonging, being able to connect, build relationships, inclusion, acceptance and identity (Henderson, et al, 2007, p112). During adolescence young people are trying to discover who they are and what makes them individual (Bennett, 2007, p23-24).

In this time of uncertainty and discovery, young people battle with who they are, whom they want to become and what's society expects from them (Eichas, Montgomery, Meca and Kurtines, 2017).

The understanding for space for young people is complex and almost misunderstood. Young people are generally clumped together as a group, a generation and dictated by the year they were born in (Henderson et al, 2007, p18).

Youth Work practice traditionally is unique in its approach with voluntary engagement and active participation (Smith, 2013) and the outcomes can be benefit individuals as well as the communities (Batsleer and Davies, 2011). However the provision of youth work has also changed with budget cuts continuously ongoing since 2011 (YMCA, 2018), there is

increase of pressure for youth services to change their approach to become more targeted with their provision and meet the criteria of the funding (Batsleer and Davies, 2011, p14). With such budget cuts youth provision is rapidly decreasing (National Youth Agency, 2014). However it has taken drastic cuts to really demonstrate the value of youth clubs and other young people spaces. Offord (2016) estimates that £387 million has been cut from youth service spending by local authorities in the last six years. There has been identification that the cuts in youth services is coinciding with the rise of knife crime (Booth, 2019).



When young people have been questioned in research about carrying knives and weapons, 3 main themes can appear in the study undertaken by Bondy, Ogilvie and Astbury (2005, cited in Bartels, L. 2011)

1. Problem susceptibility such as drug use and sales, aggressive attitudes and mental health problems
2. Fear and Vulnerability

3. Social Influence

Although an Australian study, these themes are also reoccurring in the UK literature such as Bannister et al (2010).

Bondy, Ogilvie & Astbury (2005 cited in Bartels, L. 2011) has called for 'continued efforts to engage young people in pro-social activities and reduce the perceived and actual level of risk in the environment'.

Community is another key part of youth culture as previously stated and that restrictions in public places is not an uncommon phenomena, regardless that the UN convention on the rights of the child, state that children...

'have the right to rest, leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts' (United Nations, 1989).

Every person under the age of 18 has this right and we as adults, society and community are duty bearers and must ensure that these rights aren't being infringed. A paper written by Hecke et al (2018) states the importance for open spaces in regards to the health and wellbeing of adolescents.



(Hiveminer, 2018)

There has much discourse in regards to young people and drug use with media sensationalising the facts with such headline as 'KIDS ON DRUGS HIGH' (Hawkes,2018). When in fact the Home Office crime survey for England and Wales 17/18 (2018), actually records that those whom use drugs has actually stayed at a relatively flat rate since 2009/10 (Home Office, 2018).

The media is quick to respond to the rise in crime with the justification of drop in police figures (Travis,2017). Rather than seeing other influences and sources of this rise, such as the cuts in youth spaces and the need for young people to feel belonging. If we refer back to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, warmth, relationships and friends are all aspects in which a young person may feel that they are benefiting from being in a 'gang'/ county line culture.

Within my own current practice we are fortunate in regards to be minimally effected by such cuts. Community members, policy makers and counsellors are seeing the real value and benefit of youth work practice (Borseden, Griffiths and Lloyd,2019). Although we are fortunate in having much of our open access provision still open and available.

Governmental and Police Response to Gangs and County Lines

The home office released a document in 2016 to set out a 'refreshed approach to tackling gang related violence and exploitation' (Home

Office, 2016). Which outlines 6 priorities including promoting alternatives to gangs. This plan includes changes to the youth benefit system in which setting young people to undertake youth obligations to support them back into the labour market. The whole part of the plan is to support young people whom are currently accessing a service such as job centre and schools. I think the home office is missing the point, the young people whom are getting involved into 'gangs' and county line behaviour are the ones whom are social disengaged. They are probably less likely to be claiming benefits and their 'employment' via the gangs is more beneficial to them in a variety of ways.

£3.6 million has been the UK's response to county lines for a team of 38 experts to target the threat (Home Office and Atkins, 2018). With their aim to identify and map out the extent of the problem and take action on the market. However with these county lines, my concern is that it will be a whack a mole game as soon as one line is closed another will open or even an existing one an opportunity to expand. This is just one example of the current governmental response with others in existence such as the £13 million Trusted Relationships Fund, which is based on building relationships, early intervention and counselling services (Home Office, 2018b). However this funding is only open to local authorities in England, although there is huge

evidence of exploitation within other areas of the UK.

The Perfect Storm and Moving on

With all the issues and perceptions raised above, as a society we have built the perfect storm in alienating children and young people in today's modern society. County lines is exploitation and abuse. We know from reports and research the exposure to adverse childhood experiences are closely correlated with the negative outcomes regarding the health and wellbeing in later life (NHS,2016). County lines should be considered as a major ACE, however the prevention of this needs to take a broader perspective.

Society expectations and the current perspective of the government show that ultimately we are failing our young people and that there isn't enough education and awareness of the issue. Although there is some implications of this having some effect, it's also about protecting our young people and giving them other choices. Currently there is limited finances and support when someone is living in poverty. Within my own practice I am working with an individual who's benefit payments have been stopped and with a long process ahead of them to resume payments. During this period there is limited resources he has available to him to support him live independently, the effect on his health and wellbeing has been detrimental. This is only one case I have worked with and media covers much more examples where we as a society

with systems and controls are leaving people feel hopeless (Butler,2018; BBC News ,2019).

Safe spaces for young people seem to be a crucial element running throughout the discourse with young people stating the main reason they carry knives is for protection (Trusted2know, No date). Young people don't feel safe, ultimately that is what we as duty bearers of children's rights should be upholding. Safety comes in a variety of forms, feeling safe at home and belonging to something whether it's family, a peer group or a social group referring back to the earlier model of Malsows. It's an essential need. The NSPCC state;

There are lots of reasons why young people feel the pressure to join gangs. They might be bored and looking for excitement or feel attracted to the status and power it can give them. They might join due to peer pressure, money or family problems. Gang membership can also make a child feel protected and that they belong. (NSPCC , No date)

The question we should be asking ourselves are why should any young person feel bored, lonely or unbelonging. We as a society should be making our young people feel like they have a voice, that they are respected, cared for, protected and belong. This ultimately may help them feel stronger to walk away and avoid the involvement in such behaviour.

As previously stated youth services, youth work and spaces for young people has a

unique approach. Its values, ethics and standards are upheld for the best interests of the young person. The key purpose of youth work is to;

‘Enable young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential’ (LLUK,2008)

With the current austerity measures, it's unlikely that we are going to restore the £387 million pounds cuts over night. However what we can do is make young people feel welcome, respected and safe in their own communities.

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