

Gang Activity – ‘County Lines’



TEA-BREAK GUIDE



What are County Lines?

‘County lines’ is the term used to describe the approach taken by gangs originating from large urban areas, who travel to locations elsewhere such as county or coastal towns to sell Class A drugs. Gangs typically recruit and exploit children and vulnerable young people to courier drugs and cash. Typically, users ask for drugs via a mobile phone line used by the gang. Couriers travel between the gang’s urban base and the county or coastal locations on a regular basis to collect cash and deliver drugs.

Involvement in County Lines

Gangs recruit children and young people through deception, intimidation, violence, debt bondage and/or grooming. This could be in the form of a ‘runner’ in the county location to make cash deposits into bank accounts registered to associates or family members of members in the urban location. This poses a particular risk as the ‘runners’ although lower in the hierarchy, historically are those who have been targeted, shot or stabbed which places them at greater risk than the leaders of the gang.

Despite gangs often consisting of larger groups, only a small number of members will be present in each county location at any given time, usually 2-4 individuals. Gang members could be rotated between county locations to try and evade detection. The presence of larger groups would usually be in response to conflict, as a show of strength. County Line gang members are often associated to an urban street gang linked to their home borough. This additional affiliation can cause enhanced tensions amongst rival gangs in county locations and include violent incidents generated by feuds in the home borough. Gangs must establish a base in the county location to develop a market. Gangs take over addresses of local vulnerable adults by force or coercion. In some cases social housing accommodation has been targeted by the gangs who have identified vulnerable children and adults who reside in these properties.

Gangs are also known to utilise consenting adult females to assist criminal activity. The common form of assistance provided by females is allowing the use of their home address to running and holding drugs. It is important to think about the child who may reside in the property who will be affected and possibly involved as a runner. In addition females are reported to be used to book hotels, hire cars and identify addresses for cuckooing. ‘Cuckooing’ is the term used to describe the practice where professional drug dealers take over the property of a vulnerable person and use it as a place from which to run their drugs business.

Females who have entered into relationships with gangs members are often controlled and subject to domestic abuse. In some cases females can be sexually assaulted or threatened with sexual assault and can be exploited for sex in payment for drugs. Violence is used regularly in order to establish and maintain county lines, generally it is directed towards drug users who fail to pay their debts or individuals who are accused of stealing from the gang, such as runners.

Cars and rail networks are generally used by county line gangs. This makes Northamptonshire particularly vulnerable being 1 hour from London by train and located on major road network of the M1 and A14. Gangs also continue to use taxis within county boundaries. Car rentals can also be used to avoid detection from law enforcement agencies.

A list of potential indicators of children being in gangs can be found on the link below, many professionals see the signs but don’t recognise and link them to gang activity.

Further Information:

http://northamptonshirescb.proceduresonline.com/p_ch_affected_gang_act.html

Referral Process

If you believe that a child has been the victim, or is at risk of Child abuse and/or exploitation including being involved in gang activity then you should refer the child to the MASH on 0300 126 7000.