



‘Exploitation; the scale of it and the impact on our responses’

For

Somerset Council

June 2025

Facilitator: Lin Sands (Police & Justice Lead/Trainer)

NWG Network

Thank you for joining the session. All the information below was included.

Session Aims;

By the end of the session, attendees will;

- Know who the NWG is & what they have/are achieving
- Have gained an overview of Exploitation ‘the bigger picture’
- Understand how perpetrators manipulate and coerce children for exploitation
- Recognise the importance of working together as partner agencies to tackle child exploitation

Who is the NWG Network

- NWG is a ‘National Working Group’, non-profit charitable organization
- Supports a UK network of over 14,500 statutory/non statutory practitioners
- Disseminating information to support professionals working on the issue of Child Exploitation (CE) and trafficking within the UK
- Offering specialist support & guidance
- Raising the profile of CE in childhood/young adults
- Resources, training & a platform to share practice
- Influence the development of national & local policy, legislation & protocols

More Specifically....

- National campaigns – Say Something if you See Something informed ‘Make safe’.
- National Child Exploitation Awareness Day
- First Exploitation Disruption Toolkit – this week relaunch of a Modernised resource.
- Informing/educating specific groups (Faith/Sport/Entertainment) after change in sexual offences Act
- Platform for IICSA change makers, Internet Watch Foundation and Dept of Education
- Charing Exploitation Meetings – Sharing learning

- Working groups in collaboration with other agencies/groups

Modern Slavery (Modern Slavery Act 2015);

- Human Trafficking
- Slavery & Servitude
- Forced or Compulsory Labour
- Organ Harvesting

“Slavery & Servitude” includes all forms of exploitation; Sexual, Criminal, Financial, Forced Marriage, Radicalisation, FGM, illegal adoption & Domestic Servitude

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/30/contents>

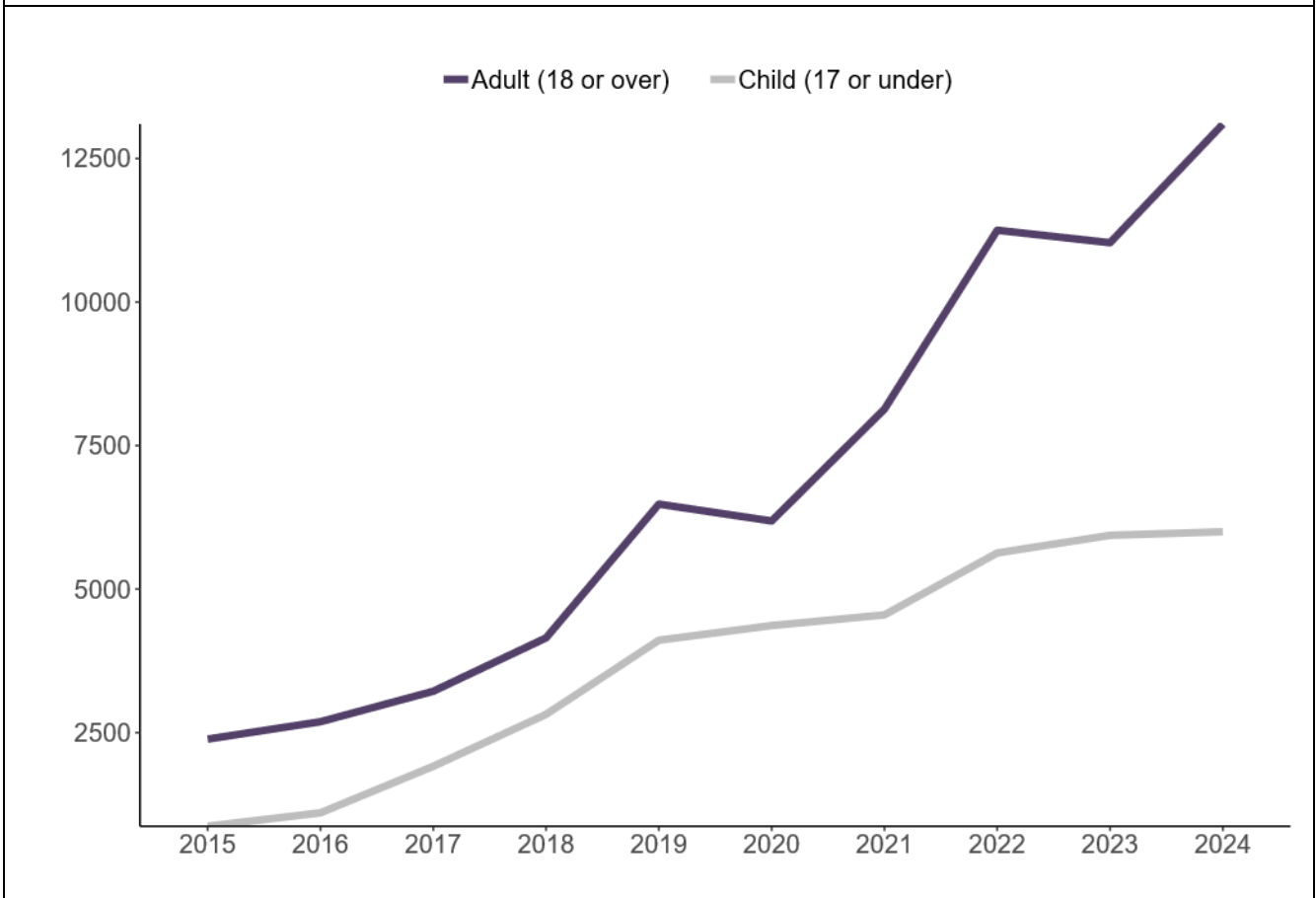
The NRM (National Referral Mechanism):

- From 30.01.23, the ‘test’ of whether a person was a victim of Modern Slavery or not, was amended.
- The decision maker/s must agree that based on ‘*objective factors*’, there are ‘*reasonable grounds to believe that a person is a victim of modern slavery*’.
- From 10.07.23, the test was further amended; the test remains an objective one.
- The decision maker must agree with the statement that there are “*reasonable grounds to believe that a person is a victim of modern slavery*”.
- This takes the victim’s account into consideration and any other relevant information to consider whether, in the circumstances of the case, it is reasonable to expect supporting information to be available.

The Scale of the problem:

	2023	2022	2021
Number of children known as victims	7432	7019	5468
Number of male child victims	5918	5607	4314
Most prevalent form of abuse through MSHT	Criminal Exploitation	Criminal exploitation	Criminal exploitation

Most represented nationality	UK	UK	UK	
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The NRM (National Referral Mechanism):

- A total of 8,156 referrals were made to the National Referral Mechanism reporting exploitation entirely within the UK between October 2023 and September 2024.
- A total of 4,415 referrals (54%) were for UK nationals
- 58% (4,697 of 8,156) of referrals, the potential victim reported exploitation as a child.

Source: NCA

Technology Assisted Child Sexual Abuse (TACSA):

- Social media & gaming platforms encompass a wide range of communication & file sharing features
- Lack of safety measures (robust age verification, effective moderation processes &/or reporting mechanisms)
- The deployment of end-to-end encryption without appropriate mitigations on social media platforms can undermine Safety by Design and impairs industry ability to identify child

sexual abuse content.

- Identification of indecent/abusive images of children continues to increase

Source: NCA

Internet Watch Foundation (IWF):

- In 2024 the identification of 291,273 webpages confirmed as containing indecent images of children
- A 6% increase since 2023
- 91% were classified as 'self-generated indecent imagery' (shared consensually/ via manipulation)
- Most common age 13 to 14
- Continued upward trend in reports of under 10's (ages 7-10)
- Financially motivated sexual extortion of children predominantly affects young males
- 90% victims were 14 to 17 yr old male

Human Trafficking

"The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation"

**ACT
MEANS
PURPOSE**

Modern Slavery/ abuse through exploitation occurs when someone controls or manipulates you into doing what they want using a process called grooming.

What is Grooming:

Grooming is when a person (the perpetrator or abuser) builds a connection with a child, young person or adult, or someone close to them so they can abuse them.

Often this is done using threats, coercion, trickery or gifts. This means that abuse by exploitation can occur even when it appears consensual or if the victim doesn't recognise what's happening as abuse.

What makes a child vulnerable?:

- Being a child
- Prior experience of neglect or abuse
- Permanent or temporary exclusion from education
- Lack of positive role models
- Environmental vulnerability
- Economic vulnerability
- A want to be accepted
- Family member or friends who are exploited
- Having additional needs (physical and learning)
- Having mental health or substance misuse challenges
- Approaching 18 years of age
- Low school attendance
- Low educational attainment
- Being accommodated by social care
- Not being known to the Services

** Please note this is NOT an exhaustive list

'Grooming is subtle and is different for everyone':

- On-line, face to face or a combination
- Not time specific
- Flexible and adaptable to the perpetrators needs
- Focused on abusing the child and benefitting the perpetrator
- Can be perpetrated by males or females against male or female victims
- Can be perpetrated by groups or individuals
- Testing
- Giving gifts/ gaming credits/ vouchers
- Money – cost of living crisis
- Providing 'Friendship' – safety, belonging, inclusion, a home
- Making promises/threats
- Witnessing or experiencing violence
- Abusing a position of power/trust
- Using someone's aspirations/ faith/ sexual orientation
- Threatening to share recordings or self-generated images
- Telling lies

Why don't children just tell us what's happening?:

- Feeling of responsibility to earn money for their family

- Wanting to have the same clothes and possessions as their peers to 'fit in'
- Perceived lack of future options
- Fear of violence towards them, their family or people they care about
- Embarrassed of what they've done
- Fear of not being believed
- Unable to speak English
- Debt bondage
- 'All my friends are doing it so it can't be that bad'
- Fear of being taken into care or sent to prison
- Not knowing any different - grooming
- Who would they tell?
- 'I have told them and they didn't listen'
- Not wanting to lose their friends

** Please note this is NOT an exhaustive list

Some of the potential signs of modern slavery and human trafficking ;

- Going missing
- Not attending education
- Being late
- A change in presentation (appearance/ engagement)
- A change in behaviour
- Giving a rehearsed story when asked questions
- Accompanied or collected by someone for appointments and education
- Someone else speaking for them
- A change in friendship group
- Treated differently to siblings
- Not being registered for education or health services
- Limited freedom of movement
- Indications of trauma; self harm; nightmares etc
- Unexplained money or items
- Unable/ unwilling to provide details of where they've been or who they're seeing
- Substance misuse
- Not sleeping well
- Injuries that could be work related
- Pregnancy/STIs

** Please note this is NOT an exhaustive list

Things to remember;



- Nothing about us without us - hear what's not said
- A child cannot be expected to protect themselves from abuse
- Be vigilant, any child can be a victim
- Recognising and responding to modern slavery and human trafficking is all our responsibility
- Be kind
- Don't make assumptions
- Signs are enough, don't wait to report!
- The importance of multi-agency working – trust your instincts
- Map what we know
- Every situation is different
- Professional curiosity

**** Please note this is NOT an exhaustive list**

It's EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY to recognise and respond to the signs of Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking.

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking IS CHILD ABUSE.

Child Abuse ALWAYS needs a safeguarding response – do not be afraid to say this.

Follow your local Safeguarding Procedure & DON'T be afraid to escalate your concerns if you feel unheard.

Thank you for taking part in our training session. Your feedback benefits other practitioners by influencing our training content which in turn supports the protection and safeguarding of vulnerable children.

<https://nwgnetwork.org/>

www.facebook.com/TheNWGNetwork

www.instagram.com/nwgnetwork

Any comments, queries, questions or feedback please contact:

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Thank you!

