

# PRACTITIONERS GUIDE - COUNTY LINES AND CUCKOOING

## What is 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.

## Establishing a Base and Exploiting Vulnerable Adults

Gangs must establish a base in the county to develop a market. Groups take over addresses of local vulnerable adults by force or coercion. Typically, this involves the home of a Class A drug user, who is supplied with drugs to initiate a relationship. The gang quickly establishes control as users fall into debt, being told they must continue to make their property available and/or work to pay back the debt. This is often referred to as debt bondage.

Debt bondage is a common widespread theme, as is the use of force and coercion to exploit vulnerable adults. In some instances, victims have become homeless, being forced to leave their address in fear of violence from gang members. Gangs typically also move to and/or between different addresses in an effort to evade detection. Vulnerable adults with premises are often exploited repeatedly by different gangs, sometimes within a short period of time.

Gangs often utilise alternative addresses when required; primarily hotels, but some use hostels, associates' homes, and addresses of females, including those of girlfriends. The targeting of adults with mental health problems is a new trend, however not one that is unsurprising considering the link between drug use and poor mental health. Other vulnerable groups include adults with physical health problems, those recently released from custody and the elderly.

## What is 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.

## Exploitation and the role of adult females

The most common form of assistance by females is allowing the use of their address, followed by holding and running drugs. Females are also employed to book hotels and hire cars, identify local addresses for cuckooing, act as drives and, on occasion, act as an enforcer.

The issue of consent is questionable as many females involved have been targeted because they are vulnerable and are often Class A drug users. Females may initially appear to be consenting, but quickly progresses to being coerced and controlled through threats and intimidation. Females who have entered into relationships with gang members are often controlled and subject to domestic abuse.

In some instances, where females have allowed gangs to use their property, it was unclear if this was due to a genuine relationship or through gang members having set out to exploit them for their home. Some females have also been supplied with discount price drugs, affording gangs greater control over them. In some areas, females have been sexually assaulted or threatened with sexual assault. Instances of females being prostituted for sexual favours in payment for drugs has also been reported.

## Transport

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 by girlfriends or friends to avoid detection.

## Referral Process

Make an online referral to [North Northamptonshire Council](#) or call 0300 126 3000.

Make an online referral to [West Northamptonshire Council](#) or call 0300 126 7000.