



Child Sexual Exploitation Problem Profile 2021

This report is the position of South Yorkshire Police as of 28 October 2022.



Executive summary

South Yorkshire Police continues to improve its response to the strategic priority area of Child Sexual Exploitation, which remains an unacceptable threat to those most vulnerable in the community.

As a subject of significant local and national interest, SYP remains committed to accurately representing its capability to reassure the public by adopting a culture of continuous development based on recognised national best practice.

CSE offending and risk has continued to evolve during the covid period, with online based child sexual exploitation now being recorded as the most prolific offending method within SYP. This is reflective of the national picture around a development from a traditional community-based risk of CSE predominantly, to that of a digital threat.

Further national analysis is being conducted to examine the cause for the increase, however the current hypothesis identifies the inaccessibility of children due to the impact of covid, greater awareness of contextual community-based risk (driving the offending elsewhere), more effective policing of traditional CSE risk environments and a generational knowledge gap with regard to digital safeguarding with parents/carers. This has been highlighted in the SYP strategic CSE intelligence profile.

As part of SYP's CSE prevent strategy, direct awareness work continues to be progressed via the Lifewise and Crucial Crew projects to educate children regarding both online and community based contextual risk. Additionally, SYP is jointly developing an education awareness campaign aimed at empowering parents and carers to correctly identify and mitigate risk associated with the child's online footprint.

In line with the Violence Against Women and Girls agenda, trauma-informed training will empower investigators and frontline practitioners within SYP to continue to provide a sensitive and empathetic approach to victims, identifying the barriers to reporting and victim engagement with support services. It is crucial that the force continues to prioritise both the victims needs without judgment and the holistic safeguarding of the child above all else.

Essential review work, currently being conducted by the PVP Performance and Governance team, will look to remove the disparity of CSE resources between districts, equipping SYP to provide a consistent bespoke response to CSE across all four commands.

Due to the complexities of child exploitation and the impact it has on its victims and the wider community, it is increasingly important for SYP to remain committed to existing multi-agency provision to provide a unified response. Through stronger partnership relationships it is possible to identify opportunities to prevent offending, protect victims and pursue those responsible.



Key findings

- It is recognised that Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) offending is under-reported by victims for various reasons. **The number of reported offences flagged as CSE decreased by 27 per cent in 2021** (compared to 2020). In the same period, CSE-flagged **child protection investigations increased by 72 per cent** and **CSE intelligence reports increased by 8 per cent**. This may be indicative of hidden, or future, demand on CSE teams and investigators.
- **The majority of offending continues to take place online**, with 57 per cent of all offences committed in 2021 being cyber-related. This figure is likely an under-representation, in part due to low levels of disclosure from victims, who may be fearful or unaware that they are a victim.
- Other than online offending, the most common model of offending seen in South Yorkshire is peer abuse, followed by inappropriate relationship. **There is little evidence of gang-related or organised offending, however, the complexity of such offending makes it harder to identify** and there is unlikely to be full disclosure from victims through fear or loyalty to their abusers.
- **Victims are predominantly white females and identification of CSE in male victims remains low**, with 18 per cent of victims recorded as male (where the information was available). National research suggests that although the prevalence of victimisation of young boys is lower than girls, they may be subject to more serious offending, which may drive disclosure rates down further. The overlap of indicators with Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) may also be a contributing factor in low identification rates.
- **Previous sexual abuse and going missing from home are key indicators of CSE**; analysis of a sample of CSE victims in 2021 found that 29 per cent had previously suffered Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) and 25 per cent had been missing at least once in 2021. Going missing may occur as a result of CSE offending, or as a precursor, but the figure above highlights the importance of working with the child, family and partners to understand and reduce missing episodes.
- **Offenders are predominantly white males**, as seen nationally, and in previous assessments. Although they had an average age of 25, nearly half of all suspects were under 18, which may be indicative of improved understanding of peer abuse and harmful sexual behaviour. However, the profile is influenced by incidents where children sharing indecent images are recorded as suspects (although are not criminalised). Work is currently ongoing in force to address this issue.



What is CSE?

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a form of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) that may be perpetrated in person or online either as an individual incident or series of incidents over time. The official definition is provided below:

“Child sexual exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.”

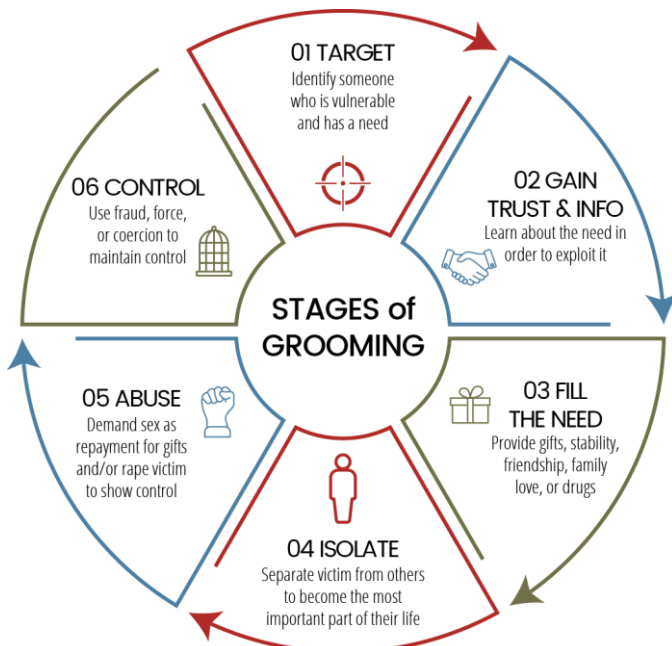
One of the defining aspects of CSE that separates it from CSA is the presence of some form of exchange between the victim and the perpetrator, whether tangible (e.g. drugs) or intangible (e.g. affection). However, it is important to recognise that this assumption may have the effect of placing the responsibility upon the victim by framing the abuse as reciprocal; it is vital to understand that regardless of any perceived or actual exchange, that the blame lies with the perpetrator and not the victim.

The hidden nature of child sexual abuse and exploitation means that it is difficult to accurately assess prevalence and scale of offending, but it is widely acknowledged that CSE is likely taking place in every community and location across the country. It is therefore critical for police and partners to use their professional judgement and knowledge to safeguard vulnerable children and pursue offenders.

Although the definition is designed to assist in identifying and responding to CSE, in practice it is open to interpretation and can cause confusion, especially when trying to distinguish CSE as separate from CSA. There is no specific offence of Child Sexual Exploitation; instead, any sexual offences committed against children may be recognised as exploitation, which presents challenges in consistently identifying and monitoring this type of offending.

Any child can be subjected to sexual exploitation, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, social and economic status, and there are complex situational circumstances that may lead to any child becoming a victim. However, research indicates that there are also certain factors that increase a child's vulnerability, such as having a learning disability, being a looked after child (LAC) or going online to talk to strangers about gender identity and sexuality². Further, when a child experiences severe trauma (such as neglect or sexual abuse), sections of the brain appear to overdevelop, which can result in the child acting more impulsively as they overreact to safety and stress responses. It is therefore vital to consider a trauma-informed response and contextual safeguarding when engaging with children who may be vulnerable to exploitation.

Models of CSE & grooming



CSE is a complex and fluid form of offending, and every incident is different. There are generally four to six recognized stages involved in the grooming process, but it is not a linear process, and some stages may be longer, shorter or absent, depending on the MO of the perpetrator.

The key elements for an offender are to gain the trust of a child and maintain control, therefore it is vital to educate children and equip them with the tools to recognise abusive relationships.

In an effort to standardise the different ways that children can be sexually exploited, various models of CSE have been suggested. These models have expanded over time as our understanding of CSE develops, but can generally be recognised as those seen below.

It is important to note however, that offenders may fit into one or more of the models described below, either over time or during a single incident.

- **Inappropriate relationship** – The perpetrator has inappropriate power over a young person. The victim may believe they are in a loving relationship.
- **Organised / network** – Young people are passed through networks and forced / coerced into sex with multiple perpetrators. They may also be forced to recruit other young people.
- **Gang-associated** – A young person may be exploited within a gang context. For example, as part of an initiation ritual, punishment or as means of gaining status within the gang hierarchy.



- **Peer on peer** – Exploitation can occur between young people of similar ages. A young person may befriend another and then force or coerce them into sex with peers or associates.
- **Boyfriend model** – Involves an adult grooming a young person into what they believe is a relationship and then forcing or coercing them into sex with friends or associates.
- **Online grooming** - Adults or peers can deceive young people into engaging in sexual chat or producing sexual images. They can also be manipulated into meeting in person.



Local, national & regional overview

Child Sexual Exploitation affects children in every area of the country, and as such, is subject to scrutiny at local, regional and national levels. As previously mentioned, sexual offending remains largely unreported, and this allows offenders to maintain control over their victims and avoid criminal justice. However, there have been a number of high-profile incidents in recent years which are helping to encourage conversations around both CSEA and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG); it is hoped that this cultural shift will empower more victims to speak up about their own experiences.

In March 2021 the 'Everyone's Invited' website went viral, after asking for anonymous accounts of sexual abuse and harassment to highlight and eradicate rape culture. As the focus turned largely to schools and universities, Ofsted commissioned a rapid review and found that nearly 90% of girls, and nearly 50% of boys, said being sent explicit pictures or videos of things they did not want to see happens "a lot or sometimes" to them or their peers, and that sexual harassment occurs so frequently that it has become 'commonplace'. As a result of this review, numerous recommendations have been made for schools, government and other partners to address these issues.

In June 2021, the Centre of Expertise on CSA released research into the scale and nature of CSA. The data suggests that

- At least 15 per cent of girls/young women and 5 per cent of boys/young men experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 16
- Some children and young people appear much more likely to be sexually abused than the wider population: disabled participants were twice as likely as non-disabled participants to describe experiences of CSA; those who had lived in a care home were nearly four times as likely to have experienced CSA; and those who had experienced childhood neglect were five times as likely to have also experienced CSA.

Although this research was not CSE-specific, the data is likely to be largely similar when considering CSE offences. Most children do not disclose abuse to anyone at the time it is occurring through fear, shame, or not recognising themselves to be a victim. The figures above highlight the need for continuous professional curiosity, improved information sharing among partners, and an empathetic approach in order to identify and safeguard children who may be suffering abuse.

Historic offending continues to impact at both a local and national level, with the final Operation Linden report released in June 2022, eight years after the Alexis Jay Report. Despite the fact that the findings of the enquiry do not reflect current practices at SYP, they still have a negative effect on public confidence. A recent review by Rotherham's Safeguarding Children Partnership found the police and council response to CSE concerns were "effective and robust".

In March 2022, Home Secretary commissioned a national inspection into police response to group-based CSE, as part of which South Yorkshire Police were inspected in late 2022. This national inspection aimed to assess current policing practice across England and Wales, to ensure all police forces are employing the most effective approaches in protecting victims from group-based CSE and relentlessly pursuing offenders. The inspection assessed:

- The effectiveness of police assessments of the nature and scale of offending in their area, with particular attention paid to information sharing, problem profiling, and the collection of data, including on the characteristics of CSE offenders
- The attitudes of police towards victims
- The nature, adequacy and timeliness of responses, including the use of proactive prevention and disruption tools and the quality of criminal investigation.

South Yorkshire summary – 2021 overview

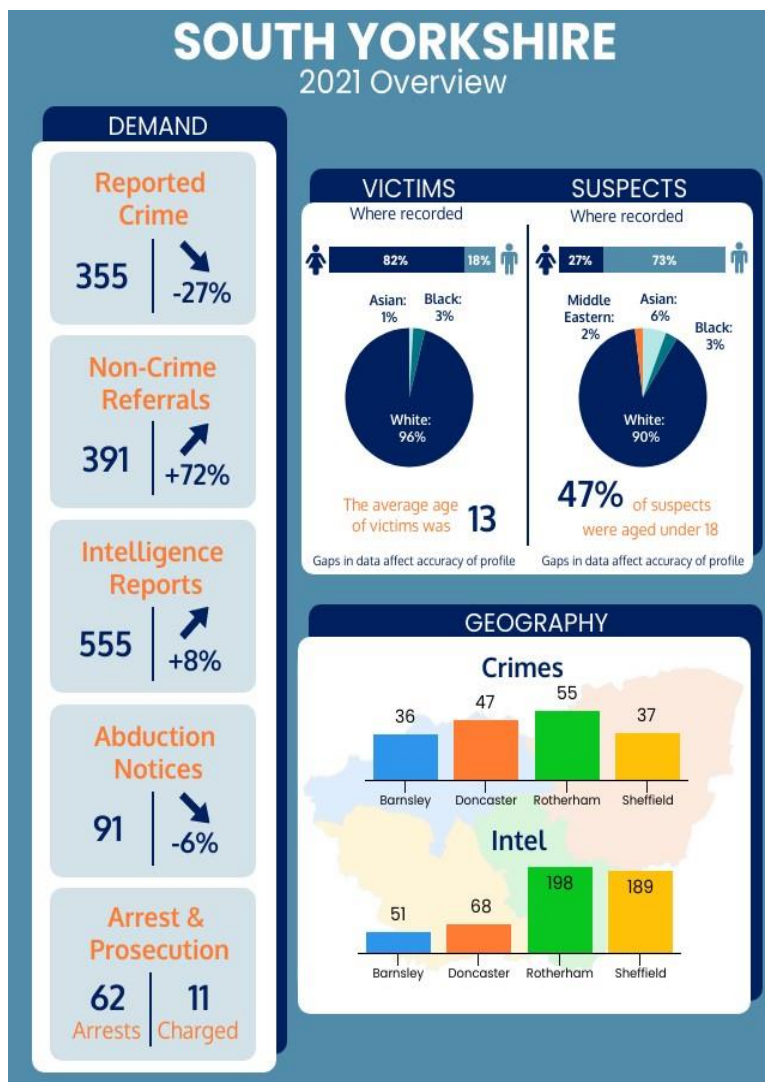
- Reported crimes – 355 (down 27 per cent)
- Non-crime referrals – 391 (up 72 per cent)
- Intelligence reports – 555 (up 8 per cent)
- Abduction notices – 91 (down 6 per cent)
- 62 arrests
- 11 people charged
- Victims (where information is recorded) – 82 per cent female, 18 per cent male. 96 per cent white, three per cent Black and 1 per cent Asian.
- Suspects (where information is recorded) – 73 per cent male, 27 per cent female. 90 per cent white, 3 per cent Black, 6 per cent Asian, 2 per cent Middle Eastern. 47 per cent of suspects were aged under 18.

Crimes recorded:

- Barnsley – 36%
- Doncaster – 47%
- Rotherham – 55%
- Sheffield – 37%

Intelligence received:

- Barnsley – 51
- Doncaster – 68
- Rotherham 198
- Sheffield 189





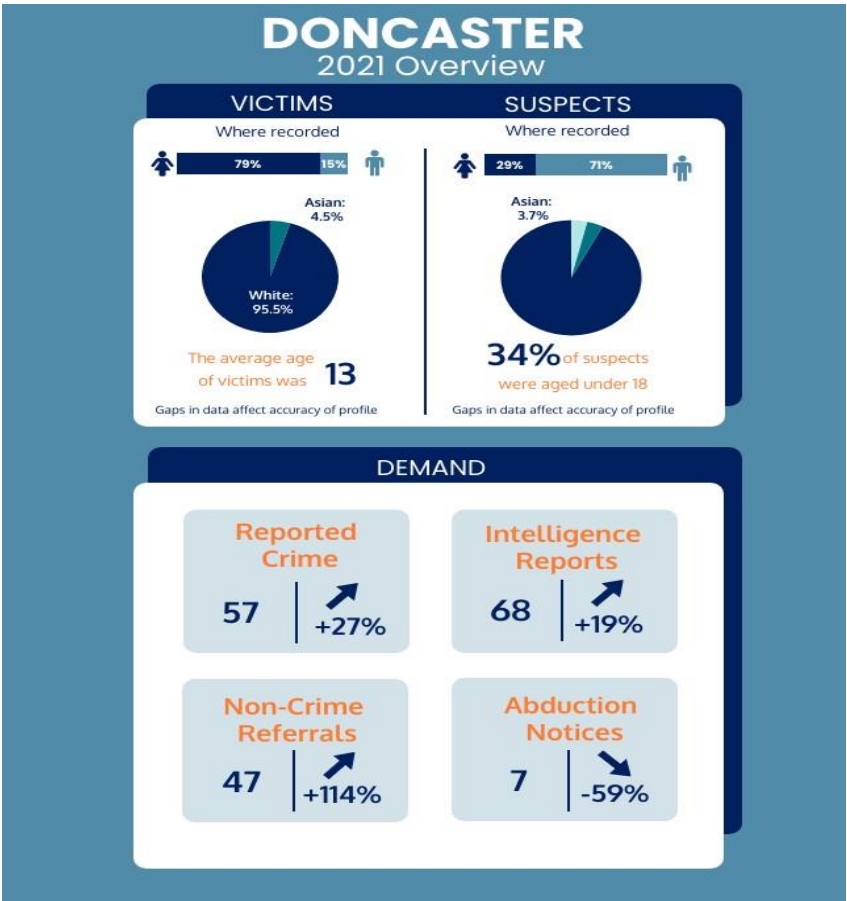
Barnsley district summary – 2021 overview

- Reported crimes – 44 (down 17 per cent)
- Non-crime referrals – 97 (up 162 per cent)
- Intelligence reports – 51 (down 14 per cent)
- Abduction reports – 24 (down by 8 per cent)
- Victims (where information is recorded) – 85 per cent female, 15 per cent male. 100 per cent white. The average age of a victim is 13.
- Suspects (where information is recorded) – 36 per cent female, 64 per cent male, and 100 per cent white. 61 per cent of suspects were under the age of 18.



Doncaster 2021 Overview

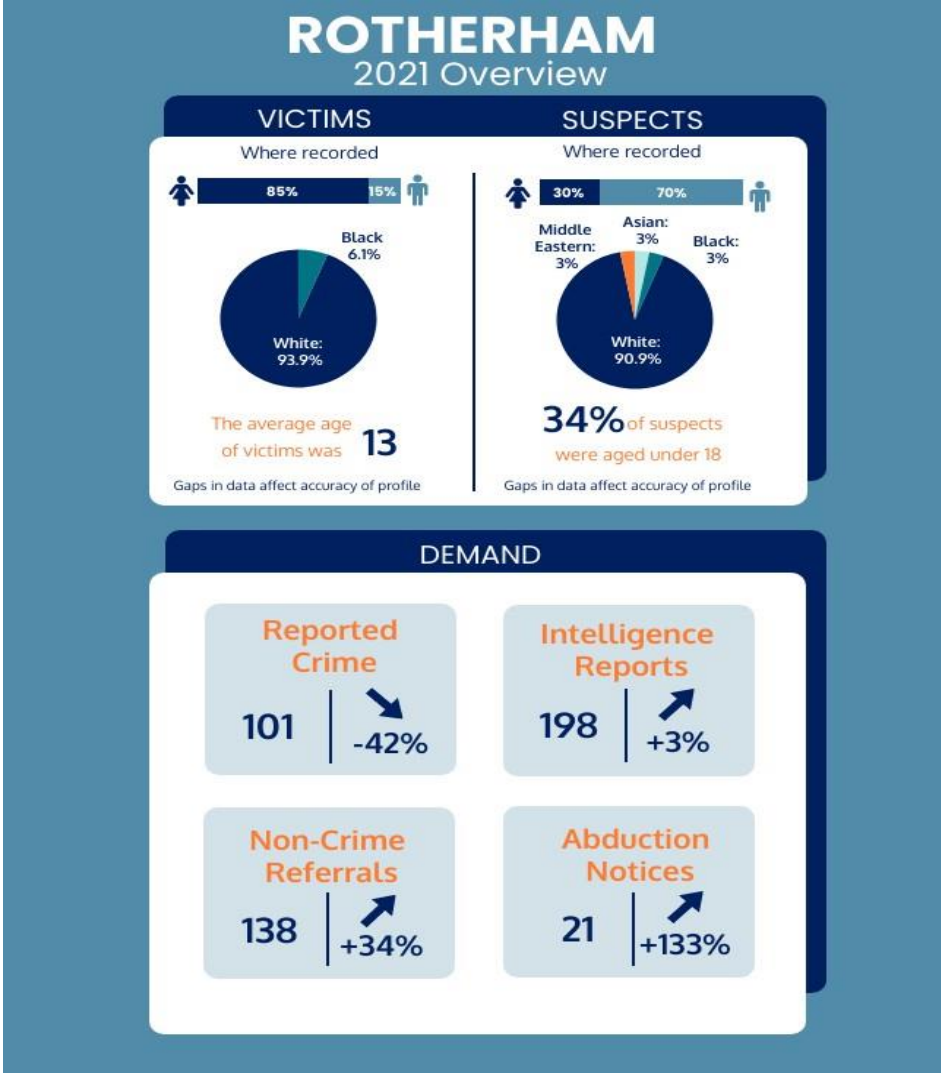
- Reported crimes – 57 (up by 27 per cent)
 - Intelligence reports – 68 (up by 19 per cent)
 - Non-crime referrals – 47 (up by 114 per cent)
 - Abduction notices – 7 (down by 59 per cent)
-
- Victims – 79 per cent female, 15 per cent male. 95.5 per cent white and 4.5 per cent Asian. The average age of a victim was 13.
-
- Suspects – 29 per cent female, 71 per cent male. 34 per cent of suspects were under 18.





Rotherham 2021 Overview

- Reported crimes – 101 (down by 42 per cent)
 - Intelligence reports – 198 (up by 3 per cent)
 - Non-crime referrals – 138 (up by 24 per cent)
 - Abduction notices – 21 (up by 133 per cent)
-
- Victims – 85 per cent female, 15 per cent male. 93.9 per cent white and 6.1 per cent Black. The average age of a victim was 13.
 - Suspects – 30 per cent female, 70 per cent male. 90.9 per cent of suspects were white, 3 per cent Black, Asian 3 per cent, Middle Eastern 3 per cent. 34 per cent of suspects were aged under 18.



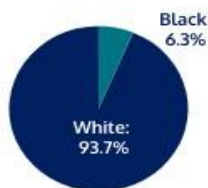
Sheffield 2021 overview

- Reported crime – 70 (29 per cent drop)
- Intelligence reports – 223 (up by 18 per cent)
- Non-crime referrals – 87 (up by 71 per cent)
- Abduction notices – 33 (down by 25 per cent)
- Victims – 71 per cent female, 29 per cent male. 93.7 per cent white, 6.3 per cent Black. The average age of a victim was 13.
- Suspects – 17 per cent female, 83 per cent male. 73.7 per cent white, 15.8 per cent Asian, 5.3 per cent Black, 5 per cent Middle Eastern. 30 per cent of all suspects were under 18.

SHEFFIELD 2021 Overview

VICTIMS

Where recorded



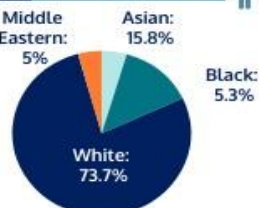
The average age
of victims was

13

Gaps in data affect accuracy of profile

SUSPECTS

Where recorded



30% of suspects
were aged under 18

Gaps in data affect accuracy of profile

DEMAND

Reported Crime

70 | -29%

Intelligence Reports

223 | +18%

Non-Crime Referrals

87 | +71%

Abduction Notices

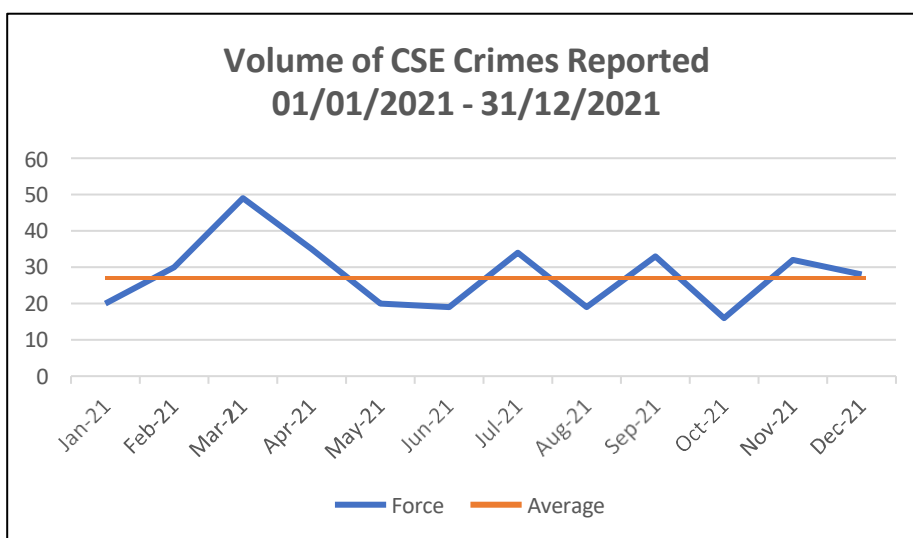
33 | -25%

CSE demand

CSE requires a multi-agency response from many partners, and the demand is much more than just reported crimes. This section considers the volumes of crimes, non-crimes, intelligence and missing incidents to provide an overview of the demand faced by South Yorkshire Police.

Crimes

Due to the serious harm caused by CSE offending, a significant proportion of offences reported to police each year will have been committed months, or even years previously. The below analysis considers the volume of all reported offences, including those relating to historic crimes; analysis on offences **committed** in 2021 are discussed at a later stage.



In 2021, there were 335 CSE-related crimes reported to South Yorkshire Police (although reported in 2021, these crimes may not have occurred in this year). This represents a **decrease of 27 per cent (-126) compared to 2020**, but also of note is that this figure is lower than 2019 volumes. It was reported in the previous profile that a contributing factor to increases seen in 2020 was the reporting of historic offences, attributed to the national lockdowns, which is unlikely to have been repeated to the same extent in 2021. However, the 2021 volumes may be influenced by various factors:

- It's likely that the COVID-19 pandemic continued to affect the identification and reporting of CSE offences (especially during school closures between 6 January and 8 March 2021) but there has been no significant increase in reports in the second half of the year, which would be expected if the coronavirus measures were the only factor.
- It has also been highlighted previously that demands on PVP and CSE teams has increased to deal with the growing awareness and response to Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and County Lines (CL).
- Operation Stovewood has now been running for eight years and although it is expected to continue as far as 2028, it would be reasonable to expect that there are fewer new reported instances being made as lines of enquiry are completed. This is evidenced in the crime data, which saw a 48% decrease in offences tagged as Op Stovewood in 2021.

As highlighted previously, it is widely understood that many victims do not report CSE at the time (if at all) and therefore, historic reports remain a significant source of demand for PVP and CSE officers. Despite decreases as above, Operation Stovewood offences are still being reported; there were 76 offences in 2021, representing 23 per cent of all reported offences.

Non-crimes

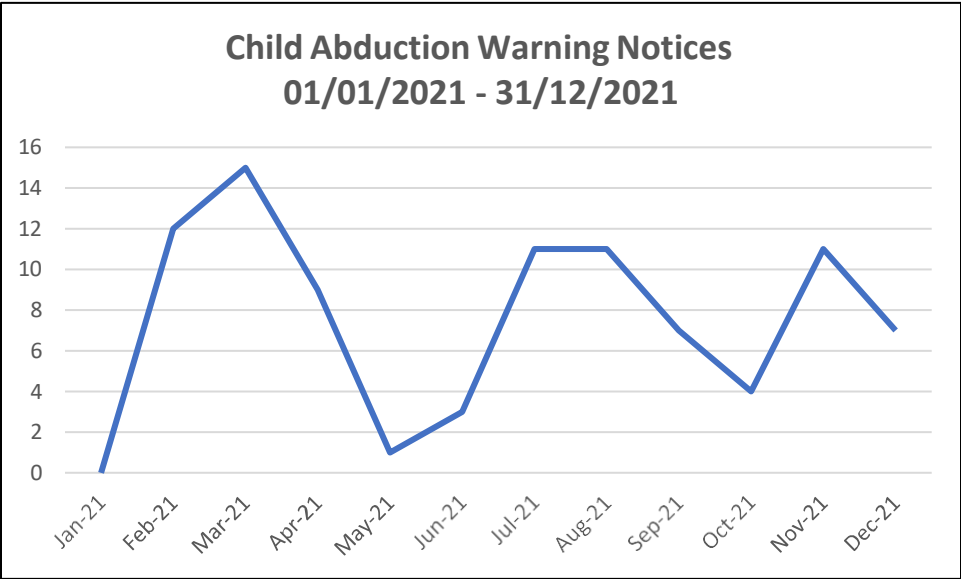




When responding to CSE, a large proportion of the demand comes from child protection investigations and safeguarding concerns. Therefore, it is necessary to consider these alongside crime volumes to assess the overall picture.

2020 saw decreases in the number of child protection referrals recorded on SYP systems, largely attributed to the reduction in services during this time. 2021 has seen a return to pre-pandemic volumes, with a **72 per cent (+166) increase compared to 2020**. Referrals have increased across all areas of the Force, with the **biggest increases seen in Barnsley (+162 per cent) and Doncaster (+114 per cent)**. When considered alongside crimes, it is evident that child protection investigations make up a considerable proportion of demand for CSE and PVP teams.

Child Abduction Warning Notices (CAWN)





The number of CAWNs served decreased across the Force in 2021 compared to 2020 (-6 per cent), although there was variation across BCUs. Rotherham was the only district to record an increase in their use of CAWNs but still remains behind Sheffield and Barnsley overall.

CAWNs are intended as a disruption tool to prevent inappropriate contact by adults with children who might be at risk of harm as a result of their relationship. Abduction notices are seen as a very effective disruption tool for child exploitation, supported by:

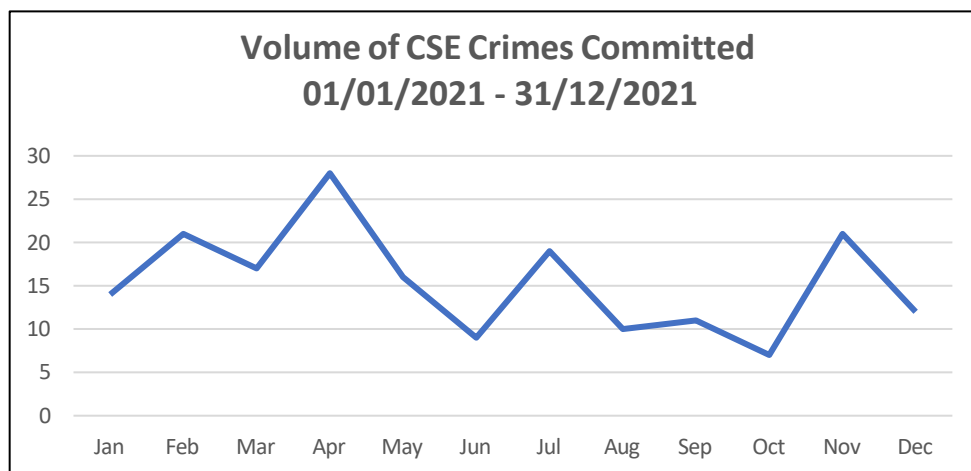
- There were no true repeat suspects in 2021, and further, none of the suspects in 2021 had been served with a CAWN in 2020;
- Analysis of child abduction investigations revealed that of 17 such investigations in 2021, only one of these related to a suspect breaching a CAWN.

It is not possible to identify those notices served specifically in relation to CSE concerns, therefore the above figures capture all notices served.



The nature and MO of CSE

The picture of CSE has changed considerably as offenders respond to both law enforcement and changes in technology. A significant proportion of CSE offending now takes place online, and even contact offending is highly likely to involve some form of digital communication. This section considers the nature of offences committed in 2021 (note that any offences committed in 2021 but reported in 2022 are not included below).



There were 185 offences committed in 2021 flagged as CSE, **representing a decrease of 16 per cent (-34)** compared to 2020. CSE offences varied throughout the year, with peaks seen in February, April and November. The peaks early in the year are possibly indicative of ongoing risk to children online during lockdowns – in February 81 per cent of offences were committed online, whereas in November this figure was 43 per cent.

The majority (57 per cent) of CSE offences in 2021 took place online, which is similar to the figures reported in 2020; this figure varied across the Force, with some areas seeing higher proportions of online offending; Doncaster saw the highest proportion with 70 per cent of offences taking place online.

As previously mentioned, there is no specific offence for CSE, instead the term encompasses various Home Office offence groups including sexual offences, Violence Against the Person (VAP) and Miscellaneous Crimes. As would be expected, the majority of CSE crimes are sexual offences but the below graphic shows the breakdown of offences committed in 2021, based on HO sub sub group.



VAP

- Three offences recorded under modern slavery relate to arranging or facilitating the trafficking of a child for sexual exploitation.
- Four offences recorded under malicious communications relate to sharing of indecent images.

Miscellaneous crimes

- All offences relate to take/make/distribute indecent images of children and predominantly relate to the sharing of self-generated images by children, either to unknown persons online who have groomed them, or to peers (commonly known as “sexting”).

Sexual offences

It is not possible to outline all sexual offences by their full title due to the large number of offences within the HO groups and sub groups. However, some of the key offences and themes are as follows:

- There were 21 rapes committed in 2021; this is highly unlikely to accurately reflect the extent of such offending. The numbers are likely to be low due in part to low disclosure rates as it can be very difficult to determine whether offences are part of a wider pattern of exploitation.
 - There remain particular difficulties around recognising sexual exploitation of young males. Although less common than female victims, research suggests that males may be victims of more serious offences. There were just three rape offences in 2021 against boys; all victims were under 13. The low volumes are possibly linked to the overlap with CCE, as well as less disclosure from males.



- Sexual activity with a child (either under 13 or under 16) make up the majority of sexual offences. This includes penetrative activity (11 offences) but is predominantly offences of inciting sexual activity (43 offences), usually through online grooming. Offences of inciting sexual activity can take place in person or through technology, which makes accurate use of the online indicator even more important in understanding the nature of offending.

Through regular crime scanning a number of themes can be seen, as detailed below:



**Threats or
blackmail
noted in 14%
crimes**

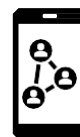


**Excluding online offences,
most common locations
were houses (12%) but
other locations include
park, school, car, hospital,
children's home and
restaurant.**



**Most
common
models:**

- Online (50%)
- Peer (17%)
- Inappropriate relationship (12%)



**Most
common
platforms:**

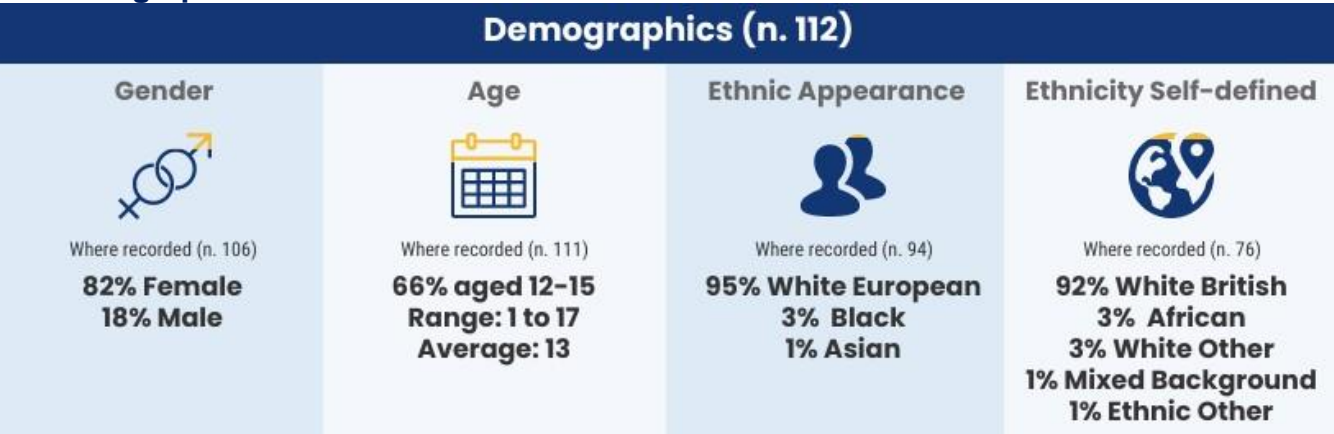
- Snapchat (50)
- Facebook (23)
- Instagram (18)

Analysis of models is conducted based on the initial investigation summary, therefore should be considered with caution. Many children will not disclose the full extent of offending (either initially, or ever), making it difficult to fully understand the models in use across South Yorkshire.



Victim profile

Demographics



Victims of CSE crimes committed in 2021 (n. 112) were primarily white females with an average age of 13; this is similar to what has been seen in previous profiles, and in line with the demographics of South Yorkshire. The profile of victims indicates that education and awareness should be targeted to children as they begin secondary school to equip them with the tools to recognise potential abusers and give them confidence to report concerns to a trusted adult.

Victims are 82% female and 18% male, 66% aged between 12 – 15 and 95% are white European, 3% black and 1% Asian under ethnic appearance. In self-defined ethnicity, 92% are white British, 3% are African, 3% are white other, 1% mixed background and 1% ethnic other.

Vulnerability

Any child can become a victim of CSE but research indicates that there are a number of factors that may increase a child’s vulnerability. It would be difficult to assess all of these, therefore a dip sample analysis has been completed to assess the prevalence of some key measurable indicators of vulnerability in CSE victims in 2021.

The below graphic demonstrates an overview of the identified vulnerability, however, these figures should be used with extreme caution as they are based on a small sample.



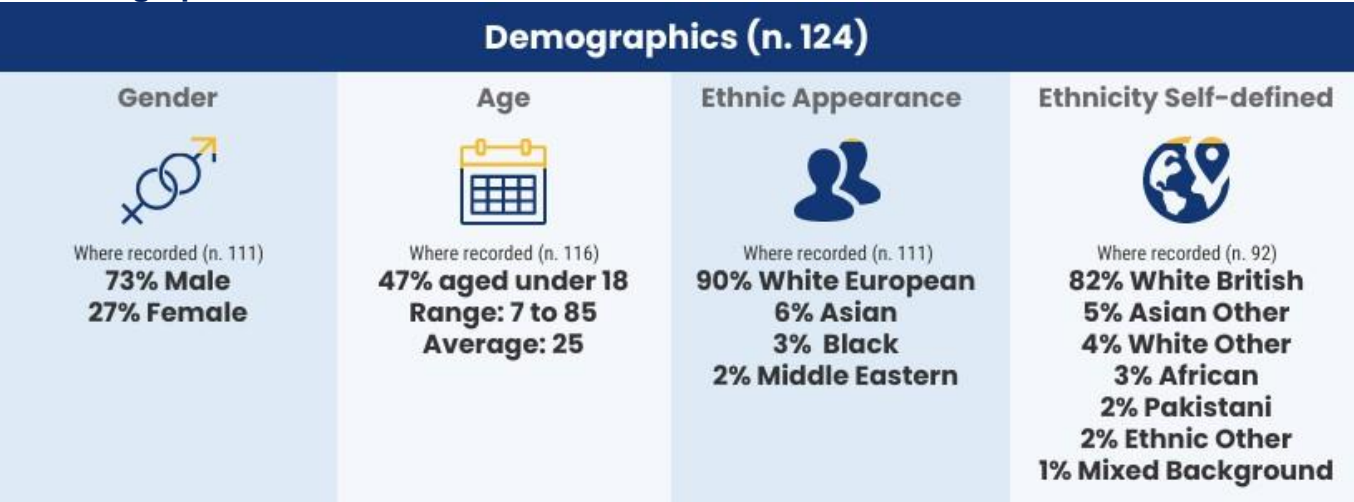
*Based on dip sample of 52 victims





Suspect Profile

Demographics



Suspects of CSE crimes committed in 2021 (n. 124) were primarily white males with an average age of 25; this is similar to what has been seen in previous profiles, and in line with the demographics of South Yorkshire.

Almost 50 per cent of suspects were under 18; although there has been increased awareness (and subsequently reporting) of peer abuse, the suspect profile is influenced by flagging of take/make indecent images as CSE. In these instances the “suspect” is in fact a child that has been pressured or manipulated into sharing self-generated images and is not a CSE offender. There is currently work ongoing around how to address this issue.

Vulnerability

The below graphic demonstrates an overview of the identified vulnerability, however, these figures should be used with extreme caution as they are based on a small sample.



*Based on dip sample of 54 suspects





Media campaigns

It is important to maintain public awareness of the signs of CSE and encourage reporting of their concerns on a regular basis.

An SYP Child Exploitation campaign covering both CSE and CCE is set to launch in March 2023, to raise awareness of the warning signs of exploitation and encourage bystanders to take action and report their concerns to the police and partners, to ultimately protect children from exploitation and abuse. The aim is to encourage people to look beyond any misconceptions they may have, and to recognise when a child is in need of help. As part of the campaign, focus groups have been held with both survivors of CSE and specialists within South Yorkshire Police.

Operation Makesafe

Operation Makesafe is a national initiative focused on ensuring that people working within the business, hospitality or passenger transport sectors are aware of the early warning signs of child exploitation, and where necessary take action to alert police so to intervene and stop any young person coming to harm. Makesafe activity was paused during the coronavirus pandemic, but a new national initiative has been launched in 2022.

SYP are participating in the national effort to implement Op Makesafe across the force. It is the intention to use the national package in the Autumn to then deliver in house training to identified establishments in each district. As well as hotels, there are plans to engage with taxi firms, fast food / dessert restaurants and other locally identified hotspots. Once the training has been delivered, visits will take place to test understanding and build relationships to increase reporting.

A flag has now been created on Connect specifically for Makesafe investigations in order for appropriate monitoring and governance to take place within SYP.

It is likely that as a result of this initiative, the force will see an increase in reports and concerns relating to CSE, which will influence volumes of crimes, non-crimes and intelligence.





Forward Look: Emerging threats

Much of the emerging risk around child sexual exploitation is likely to relate to cyber-offending, as both adults and children spend more of their time online. The internet provides high levels of anonymity and an ever-changing landscape for offenders to evade law enforcement. Private browsers such as Tor, as well as end to end encryption, are now commonplace; they provide easy access to anonymous browsing and the dark web where networks of offenders can operate nationally and even internationally. The following issues have been identified as potential future threats:

Long-term impacts of Coronavirus pandemic: Much of the long-term impact relating to the pandemic is unknown, however, it is clear that there has been an escalation in online offending (SGII, livestreaming abuse, viewing of indecent images) associated with national lockdowns and periods of isolation. It is highly likely that both children and adults will continue to spend large amounts of time online; the rapid changes are causing gaps in education provision (safe use of the internet by children, as well as appropriate platforms and privacy setting for caregivers) which make children increasingly vulnerable to being targeted online. This is exacerbated by the normalisation of video chat and livestreaming, which offenders can use to quickly gain control of a child.

Virtual Reality and the Metaverse: Technology relating to VR and the Metaverse is still relatively new but there have already been reports of sexual assaults of avatars, and that children under 10 have been approached by adults, exposed to pornographic and violent content, and to abusive /explicit comments. There are concerns around a lack of safeguarding measures to prevent young children witnessing sexual behaviour or being approached directly. Further, the creation of child avatars for the purpose of simulated sexual abuse is likely to normalize the abuse for adults exploring a sexual interest in children.

Cost of living crisis: There is already evidence of children becoming involved in criminal exploitation and County Lines as a way of providing money for their families due to the increase in the cost of living seen in 2022. Although there has been no direct impact on sexual exploitation as yet, it is possible that children will be more vulnerable to grooming by older males who can offer them material goods they wouldn't otherwise be able to access. Further, there have been reports of increases in "sex-for-rent" schemes and women turning to sex work to make ends meet; although this will generally affect adult women, there are certainly risks to some children, particularly those aged 16-18.

Ukraine conflict: Since the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022, millions of people have been displaced, many of them women and children. As of June 2022, over 85,000 Ukrainian refugees have arrived in the UK via the visa scheme and it's likely that others have also been trafficked into the country illegally for the purpose of exploitation. The UK Homes for Ukraine scheme enables the public to act as hosts for refugees, and whilst this has largely been positive, there have been concerns raised around the scheme being abused by predatory males, and refugees being made homeless due to issues with their hosts. It's also likely that UK nationals will target women and girls in European countries, as seen recently when ten British sex offenders travelled to Poland and were stopped at the border.





Use of unregulated properties for sexual abuse: As Operation Makesafe is rolled out in 2022, it's likely that CSE offenders will move away from traditional locations such as chain hotels, where there is consistent training and increased regulation. Instead, it is possible they will make use of more private establishments, such as Airbnb (or similar), where there is less oversight and fewer regulations. Airbnb recently banned parties and events at its properties, but it is unclear how effective this will be long-term.

Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG): In response to high profile issues such as the murder of Sarah Everard in 2021, there has been a public call for action to tackle VAWG. A national strategy is in place and South Yorkshire Police launched their 'No More' campaign in June 2022, as well as an Independent Advisory Group to shape the force response. As the conversation develops, it is hoped that women and girls will be empowered to recognise that they have been abused or exploited and speak to the Police. Although this is likely to be a long-term cultural change, it is possible that there will be an increase in CSE crime reports in response to the national dialogue around VAWG.

Court backlogs and barrister strikes: The coronavirus pandemic caused closures of Magistrates and Crown Courts, which has caused a considerable backlog of cases and increased stress on the justice system. Planned strikes by Barristers over legal aid rates has exacerbated these issues further. Prosecution rates for sexual offences are already low and are likely to be heavily impacted by delays, with victims withdrawing support, or testimony being affected by the length of time between the offence and a trial.





How SYP use the Strategic Profile to respond to CSE

The profile will be used to provide greater partnership understanding of established and emerging risk relating to the sexual exploitation of children across South Yorkshire. It will assist South Yorkshire Police and safeguarding partners highlight prevention, intelligence, enforcement and reassurance opportunities to safeguard the vulnerable and target those who look to exploit them. By providing a vehicle for the application of analytical techniques to the problem, we have been able to identify gaps in intelligence that have been addressed by the development of dedicated intelligence collection plans, with a clear focus on providing child centred approach to our response.

How can you help

You can help us put a stop to CSE. There are a number of signs that a child is being exploited. Often, the behavioural signs appear before the physical ones do. Early signs to look for are:

- Becoming isolated or withdrawn from social networks and not mixing with their usual friends
- Regularly coming home late or going missing from home
- Exclusion or repeated unexplained absences from school
- Becoming involved in crime or repeat offending
- Being defensive and aggressive when asked where they have been and what they have been doing
- Becoming secretive or withdrawn
- Being in possession of unexplained money or receiving expensive gifts such as designer clothes or a new mobile phone.

If you have any concerns that a child is at risk of exploitation, please contact police on 101 or through Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111. If it's an emergency, always call 999.

