

Child Exploitation

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

The National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People introduced the following definition in 2008:

The sexual exploitation of children and young people under the age of 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of performing, and/ or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition, for example the persuasion to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones with no immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. In one of its reports on the subject, the NSPCC says that "prevalence of CSE is notoriously difficult to estimate".

Indeed, it is often described as a 'hidden issue'; official records will not capture the majority of incidents, as many remain undisclosed and unreported. It is likely that prevalence figures are significant underestimates.

Another charity Barnardo's say that nationally in 2014 they worked with 1,940 children and young people who had been sexually exploited yet concede that "*the true number of children who are victims of sexual exploitation is likely to be much higher. For victims, the pain of their ordeal and fear that they will not be believed means they are too often scared to come forward*".

The [NSPCC](#) reports that sexual exploitation can be very difficult to identify. Warning signs can easily be mistaken for 'normal' teenage behaviour. Child sexual exploitation has long-term effects on young people's social integration and economic well-being and may adversely affect their life chances.

Some of the difficulties faced by victims include:

- isolation from family and friends
- teenage parenthood
- dropping out of education
- unemployment
- mental health problems
- self-harm and suicide attempts
- substance misuse
- aggressive behaviour
- criminal activity

Child sexual exploitation affects boys as well as girls. Learnings arising from the police investigation of historic abuse at the Medomsley detention centre in County Durham have shown that whereas the profile of specialist sexual abuse counselling available to women is high, the same degree of access and capability for supporting males is not at the same level.

Prevalence in Somerset

Please see the [Somerset Child Exploitation Needs Assessment 2021](#) for details of the situation within the county.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is not a "crime type" so in November 2012 a CSE Force Crime Tag was introduced which, in addition to providing safeguarding and investigation benefits, allows the monitoring of crimes that fall within the national definition of CSE. Victims of CSE rarely see themselves as victims or recognise that they are being abused. They are unlikely to report abuse to the police. A key challenge therefore is to ensure that all police officers and staff, staff from partner agencies, and the public recognise the signs of abuse and know what action to take. All frontline officers, PCSOs and investigating officers have therefore received CSE training in the warning signs, vulnerabilities and the action to take.

Recorded CSE tagged crimes in Somerset increased to 76 in the year to August 2015, compared to 50 in the previous 12 months. The rise is similar to the increase (+53%) in the number of recorded CSE tagged crimes across the Avon & Somerset force as a whole. In 2020, there was a total of 323 children who were flagged as having an exploitation risk and 326 children flagged as a child victim of sex offences. The work of the Safer Somerset Partnership has seen a reduction of these recorded child exploitation offences between 2019 and 2020. The likelihood is that officers, police staff and partner agencies are getting better at recognising the warning signs that a child might be at risk of, or being, sexually exploited and have an improved understanding of the action to take.

Needs Assessment

The latest [Somerset Child Exploitation Needs Assessment](#) was published in August 2021.

Prevention of CSE in Somerset

The [Somerset Local Safeguarding Children Board](#) (LSCB) has adopted a strategy setting out its commitment to prevent CSE and tackling it when it occurs. Under the auspices of the LSCB, a Child Sexual Exploitation Strategic Group (CSE) has responsibility to ensure a robust multi-agency response to CSE in Somerset. A victim centred supportive approach will be an overriding principle.

This strategy is aimed at anyone who engages with children and young people. It builds on work already undertaken in the County since 2008 and is informed by lessons learnt. The overriding aim is to safeguard and protect children in Somerset. The LSCB recognises that only a proactive, co-ordinated, multi agency approach will be effective in preventing and disrupting CSE and in pursuing, disrupting and prosecuting perpetrators.

The [strategy \(2017-10\)](#) can be downloaded here:



SOMERSET SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD
CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION STRATEGY 2017 - 2019

See also our sections on:

- [Safeguarding](#)
- [Domestic violence affecting children and young people](#)

Further Information:

- Swindon Borough Council have conducted in 2014-15 an extensive [literature review](#) into CSE. It reviews available evidence on prevalence, risk, best practice and 'what works' in responding to CSE, as well as six in-depth interviews with practitioners in the UK, exploring individual local approaches. The report also includes links to a range of relevant research documents and factsheets relevant to organisations such as schools, local authorities, health workers and the voluntary and charity sector.
- [Barnado's](#) website
- [NSPCC](#) website

Radicalisation

Young people often explore new ideas as they grow up, and for a small number that may lead them into extreme groups who are strongly at odds with wider society.

Most prominent are animal rights, far right wing and Islamic extremism. The internet has enabled isolated individuals to become aware of others with similar views far more easily than in the past, and such contact can be mutually reinforcing; the web and social media give existing extremists new means to promulgate their views to vulnerable young people.

The Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Assessment 2015 (consultation draft) has said:

'Individuals from the South West region are known to have travelled or expressed a desire to travel to support ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) in Syria. Some of these individuals are highly vulnerable or socially isolated and early identification is vital to ensure safeguarding and investigative opportunities are realised.'

'While the threat remains considerable, most of those identified as being at risk are deemed to either not have the intent or the capability of carrying out attacks and often have safeguarding and/or mental health issues.'

The numbers of young people referred to [Channel](#) (part of the Prevent programme) for multi-agency investigation are small; this and the sensitivity of the subject means that little detail can be given here. That said, radicalisation does exist in Somerset and agencies need to be aware. The mental health issues referred to in the Assessment are frequently linked to low self-esteem, making the young people easily drawn in by movements that seem to give them worth and purpose, reinforcing the importance of personal resilience in keeping vulnerable young people safe.