Investigation of Child Sexual Exploitation and How It Connects to Organised Crime

Data Analytics Lab

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2 Terminology

The following are used in this report:

• CSA: Child Sexual Abuse

• CSE: Child Sexual Exploitation

• SOC: Serious Organised Crime

• WMP: West Midlands Police

• Offender - any nominal identified as defendant/offender, suspect, person thought responsible, person probably responsible

These and further terms are shown later in the glossary.

Two tables are referred to in this paper:

• Full table - all of the crime-offender-victim combinations identified as CSA crimes with associated information

• Final table - all the crime-offender combinations which have a link to at least one other such combination, with associated information. This is the primary table of interest, but the full table is useful for comparisons and additional detail.

Each entry in the full table refers to a crime, offender and victim, as compared to the "final table" which links offenders together directly

For example, the full table might include:

crime ref	offender	victim
A	John Smith	Freda Bloggs
A	Ceorge Brown	Freda Bloggs
B	Joe Jones	Freda Bloggs

With the corresponding entries in the final table being

offender 1	offender 2	crime ref 1	crime ref 2
John Smith	Ceorge Brown	A	A
John Smith	Joe Jones	A	B
Ceorge Brown	Joe Jones	A	B

3   Introduction

The goal of this project is to build on the Serious Organised Crime Network project with emphasis on CSE. This will require identifying nominals involved with CSE, comparing this to the SOC Network as well as assessing the linkages between nominals who currently have not been identified within the SOC Network project. This is a priority as we currently have an as yet unknown level of threat posed by organised crime groups to exploit the most vulnerable in our community.

4 Summary of Findings/ Understanding of What is Present in the data

- The literature review shows that it is difficult to establish which CSA crimes are exploitative from the data available.

- Appropriate search terms were developed in consultation with a subject matter expert to identify CSA crimes and their associated offenders.

- In the 5 years 2016 to 2020, 30,969 such recorded crimes were identified where at least 1 identifiable victim and at least 1 identifiable offender were recorded.

- Of these, in the same period, 10,236 crimes were involved in links between offenders (via victims). These would be the potential CSE crimes.

- For all the offenders identified here, further links were established through the Intelligence and PINS (prison) systems. All these feed into a final CSE network.

- This network then feeds into the existing SOC network, and hence the Qlik dashboard where levels of harm and other information can be identified.

- In the majority of instances the ethnicity of the offender was not recorded (in the crimes system). For the 5 year period above, the distribution of offender ethnicity was:
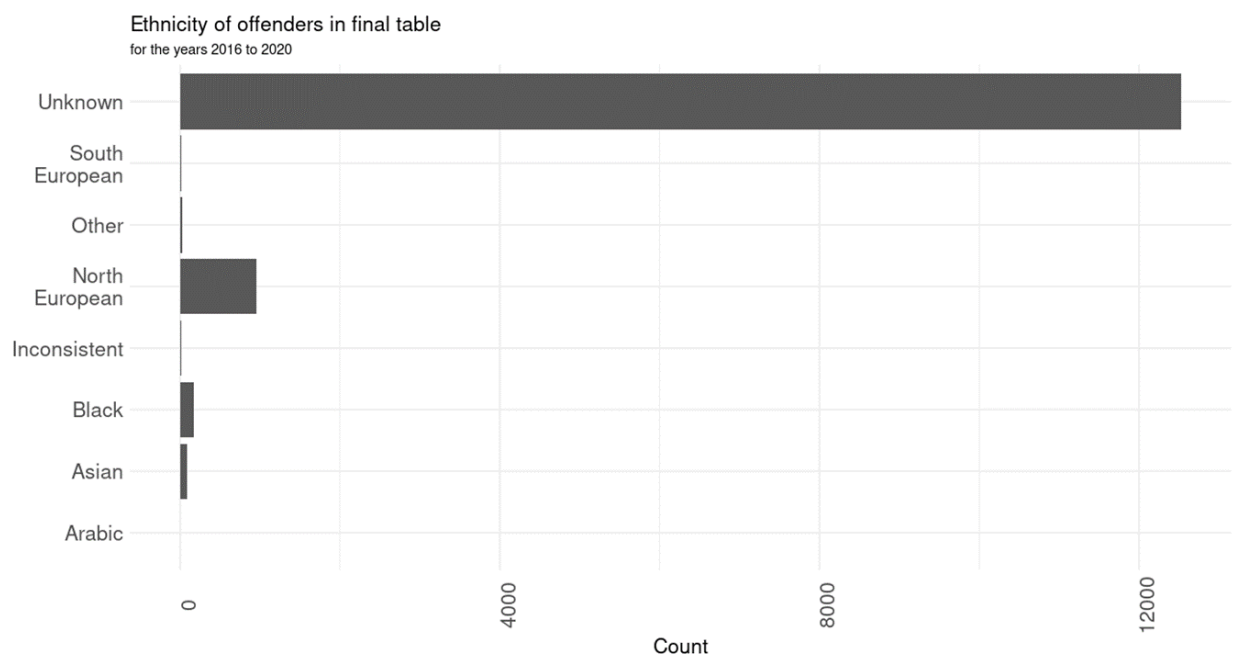

Figure 1: Distribution of offender ethnicities for the period 2016-2020, full table

5 Literature

There is not a single widely accepted definition of CSE; a brief review of the literature provides some clarification.

Laird et al. (2020) define CSE as *"coerced sexual acts between a child or a young person (aged <= 18 years) and an individual or a group in exchange for money, gifts, substances, or other commodities and associated factors"*, and hold that CSE is specifically different to CSA, is considered a sub-type of human trafficking, and can begin online. Although the ideas of coercion and exchange are common to most definitions, CSE is more generally held to be a type of CSA and would not include 18 year olds within the definition.

A check on the NSPCC website confirms the latter point, saying that CSE is a type of sexual abuse,

> *"When a child or young person is exploited they're given things, like gifts, drugs, money, status and affection, in exchange for performing sexual activities. Children and young people are often tricked into believing they're in a loving and consensual relationship. This is called grooming. They may trust their abuser and not understand that they're being abused."*

They go on to say that children can be trafficked in order to be sexually exploited. They further note that gangs use CSE to exert power and control, for initiation, to use as a weapon. This involvement with gangs, or organised crime in general, is the main focus of this project. (NSPCC, n.d.)

Kelly and Karsna (2017) reviewed the definitions provided by a number of bodies. From Education (2017) they note that CSE should not be separated from other forms of CSA, nor from trafficking. From the National Crime Agency (NCA) they note inconsistency in reviewing CSE and CSA; they found crossovers in definitions and multiple interpretations. In 2017 the Departmen for Education (DfE) referred to CSE&A in strategic reporting. Overall Kelly and Karsna (2017) conclude there are "so many overlapping elements that allocation is unlikely to be consistent between different agencies. Some agencies retain the perception that CSE consists solely of Rotherham type cases". This suggests a widespread lack of consistency and understanding.

Colley (2019) considers the nature of UK orgainised CSE and uses the terms CSEA and CSAE to cover all forms of CSA and other associated offences. The issues with data are discussed with Colley noting that aliases or nicknames might be given rather than accurate information from the victims. This, in conjunction with the belief that "significant amounts of organised CSE has not been reported" leads Colley to propose that there is a far greater number of abusers in circulation than those who are arrested and prosecuted. With the introduction of the Modern Slavery Act (2015), Colley suggests that this might be an effective tool for the police and the criminal justice system.

The analysis in this work will use the definition used in Education (2017) as cited in Kelly and Karsna (2017). It links CSE and CSA and highlights that there are difficulties associated not only with the definition but also with the nature of the child's consent and availability of choice.

> *"Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It 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."* (Education 2017, p5)

They go on to state:

> *"Child sexual exploitation is a complex form of abuse and it can be difficult for those working with children to identify and assess. The indicators for child sexual exploitation can sometimes be mistaken for 'normal adolescent behaviours'. It requires knowledge, skills, professional curiosity and an assessment which analyses the risk factors and personal circumstances of individual children to ensure that the signs and symptoms are interpreted correctly and appropriate support is given. Even where a young person is old enough to legally consent to sexual activity, the law states that consent is only valid where they make a choice and have the freedom and capacity to make that choice. If a child feels they have no other meaningful choice, are under the influence of harmful substances or fearful of what might happen if they don't comply (all of which are common features in cases of child sexual exploitation) consent cannot legally be given whatever the age of the child."* (Education 2017, p6)

The variety of definitions of both CSE and CSA demonstrates how difficult it can be to distinguish between CSE and other CSA, even for people working in the field.

In terms of WMP data, this difficulty remains and is compounded by the fact that there is no widely used flag for CSE within the data, although there is a flag within a less commonly used table in the form of an "if_code" which includes possible indicators of CSE. There is a more widely used flag for CSA, but even then some CSA cases are not flagged. A combination of search terms can identify the majority of cases, but still the issue of splitting out the CSE cases remains. By making links between individuals engaging in such activity, the more links that can be found the stronger the case for CSE. The intention in this case is to identify CSE, and in particular where it overlaps with organised crime.

6   Aim

In light of the definitional difficulties above and with a view to linking the networks associated with both CSE and other SOC activities, the network deals with a number of outcomes

- Identify nominals involved in CSE/CSA

- Establish links between the individuals to create networks

- Explore the overlap with previously developed SOC networks

- Establish the harm associated with each offender or grouping, hence identifying where most resources should be directed - the harm is calculated on each of the Cambridge Crime Harm Index (CCHI) and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Crime Severity Index[1]

7   Data

Searches were made in the Crimes, Intelligence and PINS databases. The data used in this report are based on records up to 15 March 2021. The data, and hence the network, will be updated regularly with new data.

7.1 Crime records

Connections deriving from all crimes identified as CSA or CSE (albeit it is difficult to differentiate between them as discussed in the literature review).

Where the offence title could be determined, the most commonly occurring offences were:

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## [1] "sexual assault on a female 13 or over"
## [2] "sexual assault on female child under 13"
## [3] "rape of female child under 13 by a male"
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Other less common offences included "distribute indec photo of child", "cause/incite child prositution or pornography 13-17", and "incite child commit gross indecency-girl"

7.2 Intelligence

To maintain compatibility with the SOC network, the same quality standards for source and intelligence were applied.

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[1] Both the Cambridge Crime Harm Index [Sherman, L.W. How to Count Crime: the Cambridge Harm Index Consensus. *Cambridge Journal of Evidence Based Policing* (2020). https://doi.org/10.1007/s41887-020-00043-2] and the Office for National Statistics (ONS)   Severity   Scores [https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/crimeseverityscoreexperimentalstatistics] are used within the analyses.

Once intelligence has been gathered an Intelligence Officer will standardise the text within the log and grade the source and the information contained within the log. The previous "5x5x5" intelligence grading system was replaced with the current "3x5x2" system in 2017. The table below can be used to convert between the old and new grading systems and highlights which gradings are included in the SOC and CSE/CSA identification processes.

	Old		New	
Included	**Source**	**Information**	**Source**	**Information**
Yes	A - Always reliable	1 - Known to be true without reservation	1 - Reliable	A - Known directly
Yes	B - Mostly reliable	2 - Known personally to the source but not to the officer	1 - Reliable	C - Known indirectly
Yes	C - Sometimes reliable	3 - Not known personally to source but corroborated	1 - Reliable	B - Known indirectly but corroborated
No	D - Unreliable	4 - Cannot be judged	3 - Not reliable	D - Not known
No	E - Untested	5 - Suspected to be false	2 - Untested	E - Suspected to be false

IMS new and old intelligence grading system

7.3 PINS

Connections where two offenders shared a cell for at least 30 days

8 Method

8.1 Crimes system

Search terms were discussed with a subject matter expert in the Intelligence team. It was clear there needed to be a trade-off between casting the net too wide, and missing possibly relevant crimes. In addition separate search terms were developed to reflect the wordings of relevant offence titles, and regular expressions used to select the relevant offences. These search terms are shown in the appendix. The search terms were used to identify potential CSA crimes, making sure that the victim was aged under 18 at the time of the crime.

The offenders (and victims) were identified by unique id codes.

The resulting table, denoted the full table, also provided a list of offenders to be used when searching other systems.

Connections were made by linking through common victims, with weighting based on time proximity (for the two crimes being linked, sometimes the same crime), and recency. Exponential decay was used to calculate these weights. Exact duplicates were removed. These connections are stored in the final table.

8.2 Intelligence

For every intelligence log linked to one of the offenders noted above, links were made between the offender and each other person linked to the log. Each link was weighted according to how many people were associated with the log (the fewer people the greater the weighting), as well as recency.

8.3 PINS

This follows the same procedure as used in the SOC network.

8.4 Other areas considered

The missing persons system (Compact) was investigated as it had the potential to be a good source, but was not helpful on the industrial scale required here[2].

A method for identifying proper names in logs was explored. Although the method looks promising it was not feasible here due to the size of the dataset involved.

The resulting tables were added to the data for the SOC network with the relevant algorithms being detailed there.

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[2] This is different to the County Lines project where these data were useful due to the nature of the question.

9   Brief table information

The following summaries are based on the data obtained covering crimes up to 15 March 2021.

9.1 Crimes

The full table contained 77,707 instances covering 55,323 offenders and 69,058 distinct crimes. This was after the removal of 2,375 records where the offender was under 10; these children were under the age of criminal responsibility as detailed in Section 9.1.1. Just over 98% of the crimes in this table involved only 1 offender.

The final table contains 28,758 one to one connections involving 20,432 of the above offenders and 19,995 distinct crimes. Just under 98% of these crimes involved only 1 offender. The maximum number of offenders in any one crime was 8.

Some offenders will only appear in the full table (and not the final table) if they have no links to other offenders. For those offenders appearing in the final table, there may be crime-offender combinations that don't appear if there were no links through the victim of that crime.

The following plots show the distribution of crimes over the past 10 years. The years in question relate to the year in which the crime occurred. Full unannotated plots covering all years are shown in the appendix, the numbers for previous years all being much lower. The crimes included in the final table may be considered the putative CSE crimes.
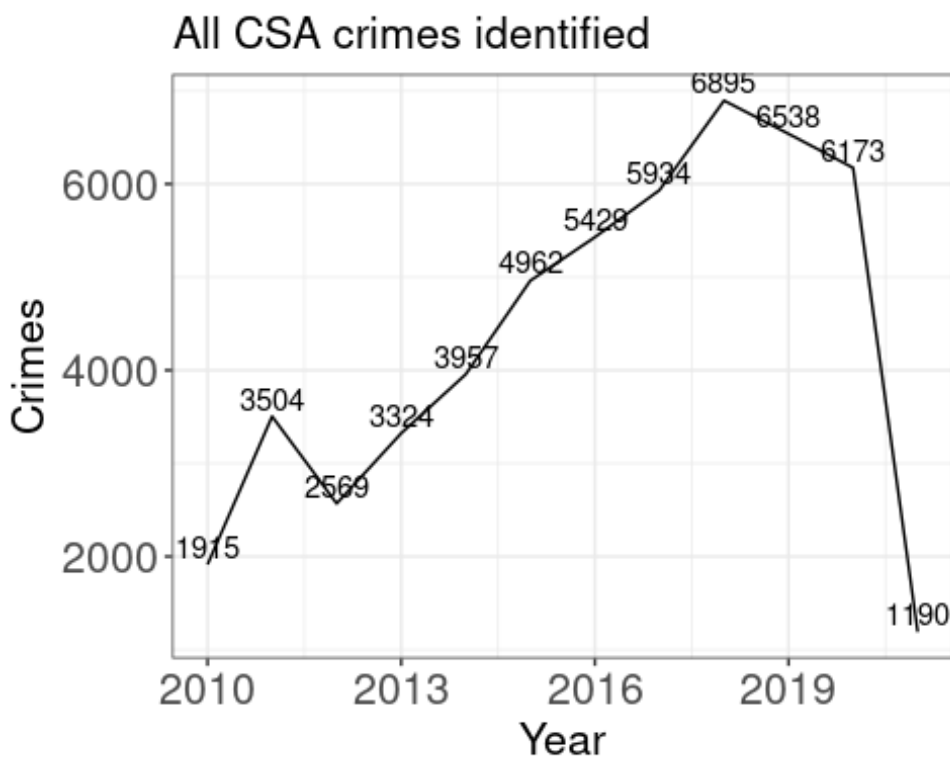

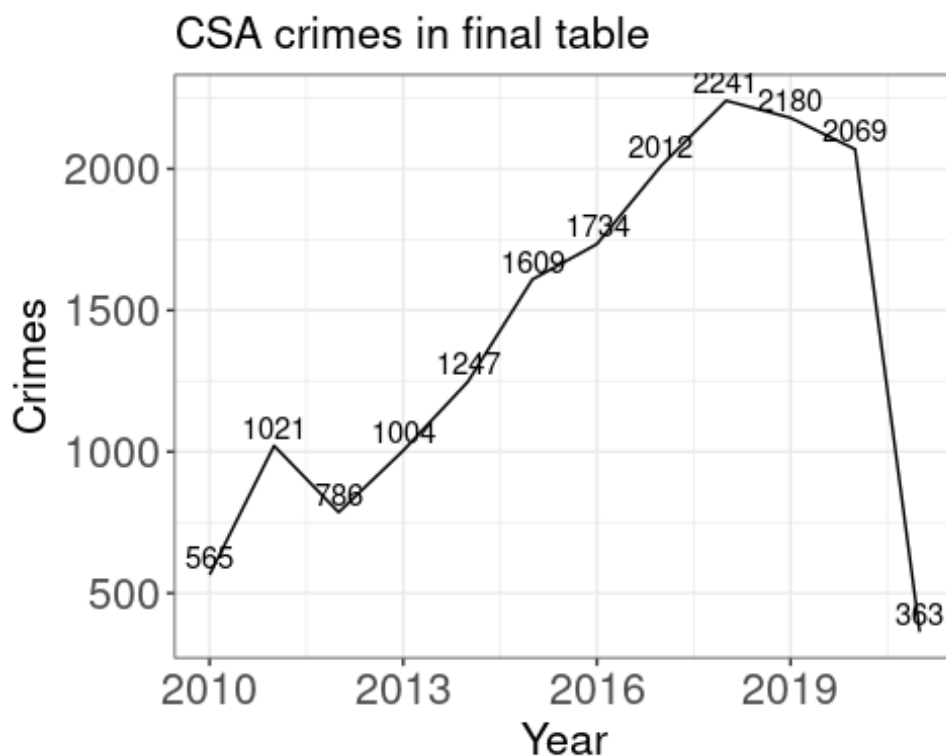*Figure 2: Frequency of CSA/CSE crimes since 2010 - full table*

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Figure 3: Frequency of CSA/CSE crimes since 2010 - final table

Although there is a considerable reduction in the number of crimes between the first and second tables, the same pattern emerges in both. Apart from a dip in 2012, the number of CSA crimes recorded rose until 2019 since when the numbers have been reducing although at a much slower rate. The figures for 2021 only represent a small part of the year.

9.1.1 Ages

In the UK, as well as internationally, there is a lower limit on the age at which a person can be considered to be criminally responsible[3] (Government 2017). In light of this, over 2,300 records were removed from the original data as the offender was aged under 10; these were not included in the full table.

The dates of birth recorded suggested that 306 of the original crimes occurred before the victim was born, most of these showed an age of -1. A random check confirmed the cases viewed were CSA crimes, so the dates of birth were assumed to be errors and the age of the victim for these cases was amended to 0.

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[3] There have been calls for changes to this since the Bulger case and indeed some legislation was put in place in 1969 that set the age at 14 though this appears not to have been passed due to a change in government meaning that the Children and Young Persons Act 1969 did not proceed to being made law. There was further protection for children between 10 and 14 via the principle of *doli incapax* which requires the prosecution to demonstrate and prove that the offender knew that they were doing a morally wrong and illegal act. However since the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 there appears to have been, in real terms, an abolition of this principle for minors and thus an accompanying enforcement of the age of 10 as the age of responsibility for criminal actions.
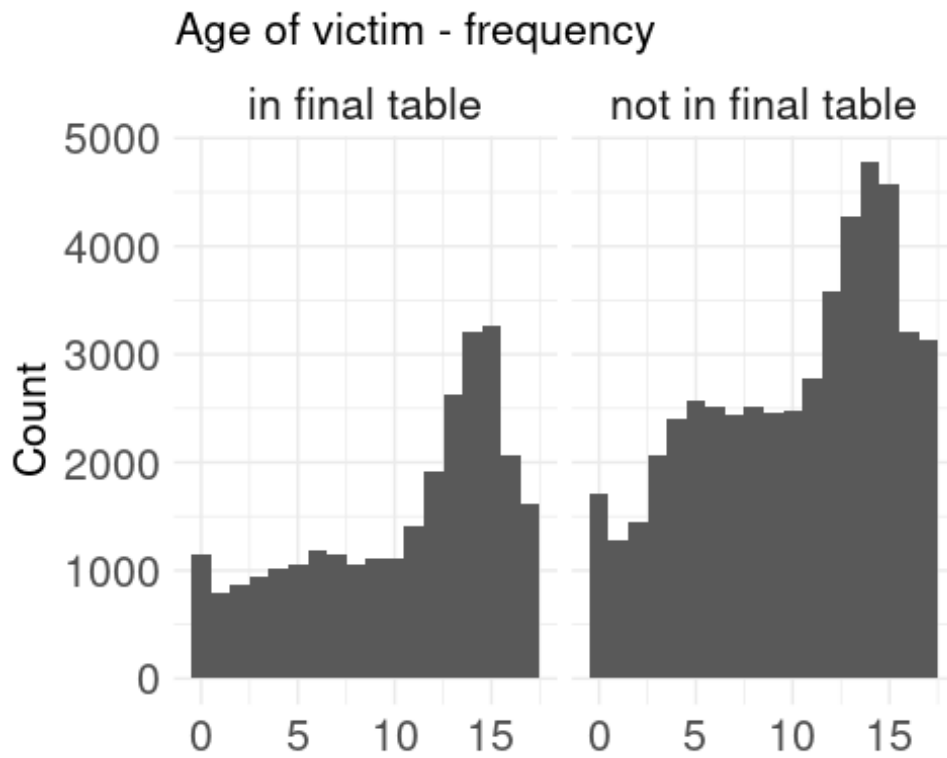
Age of victim - frequency

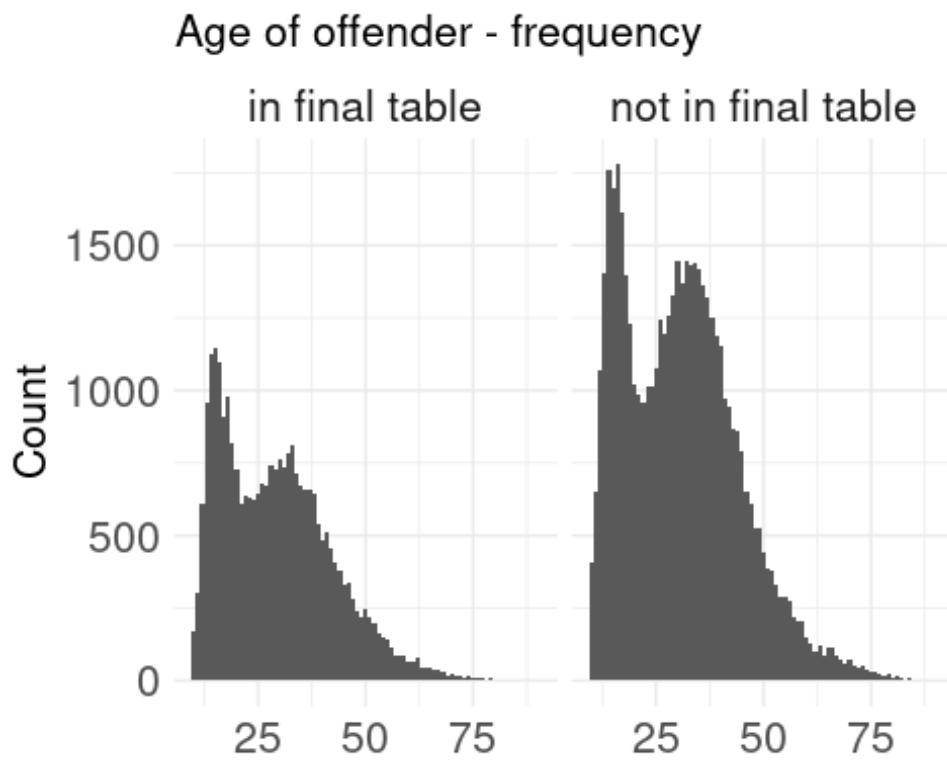*Figure 4: Age of victim - distribution*

Age of offender - frequency

Figure 5: Age of offender - distribution

The distribution of victim ages looks similar between the two plots, with a peak around the age of 14, although the final table seems to have proportionally fewer victims aged 16-17.

The distribution of offender ages is bimodal in both cases, peaking around the ages of 14 to 16, and again in the mid-30s.

Taken together the distribution of the final dataset in terms of victim and offender ages would appear to reflect the distribution of the full initial dataset.

9.1.2 Difference in age between offender and victim

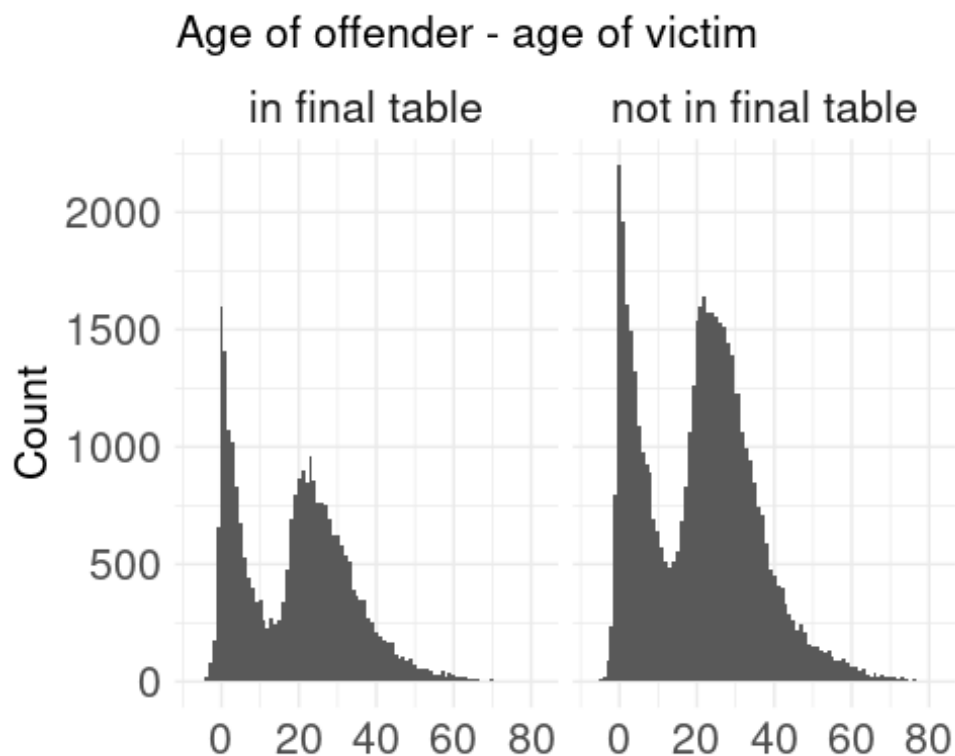Specifically offender age - victim age

Figure 6: Distribution of age difference between offender and victim (offender - victim)

It can be seen that in some cases the offender was younger than the victim; there were just over two thousand of these cases, the majority of these involving an offender one year younger than the victim. A sample of these were checked and were found to be genuine CSA cases.

The overall patterns are broadly similar. The main peak occurs where the victim and offender are of a similar age, with a second peak where there is an age difference of just over 20 years. There is a significant gap between the two peaks, which is more pronounced with the data from the final table.

The header "WMP" at top right.

9.1.3 Sex of offender and victim

Note that in some cases the sex was not known or recorded (693 victims, 371 offenders), and in other cases there was inconsistency between records (131 victims), based on the full table of 77,707 records. These cases were excluded from the plots below.

For the complete dataset, around 66% of the victims were female and around 75% of the offenders were male. Over half the crimes were male-on-female with another 20% male on male.
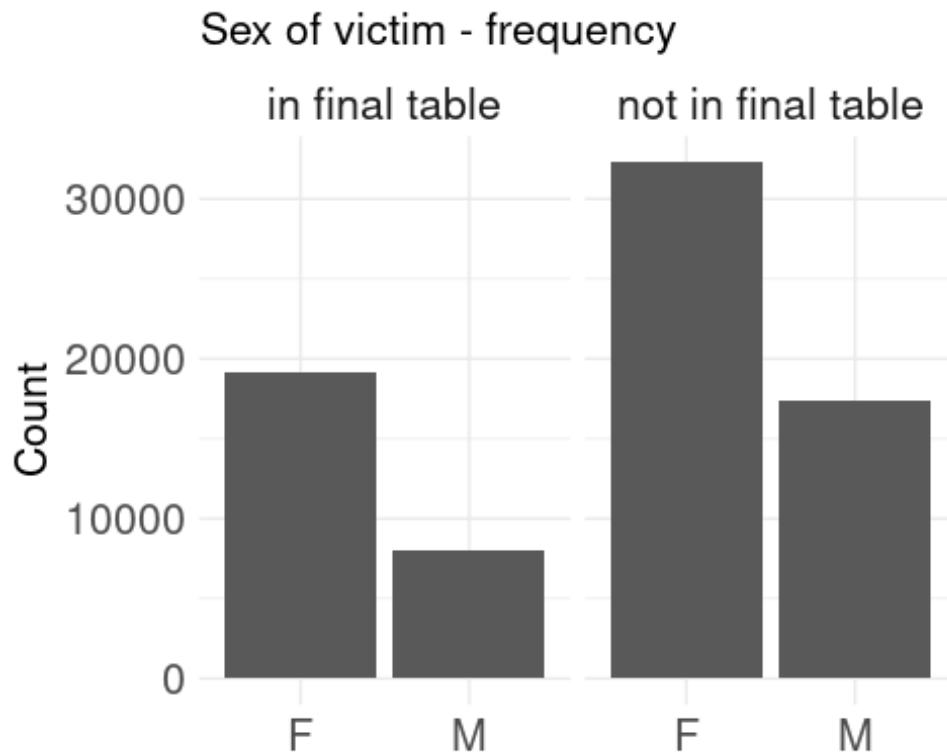

Figure 7: Distribution of victim's sex
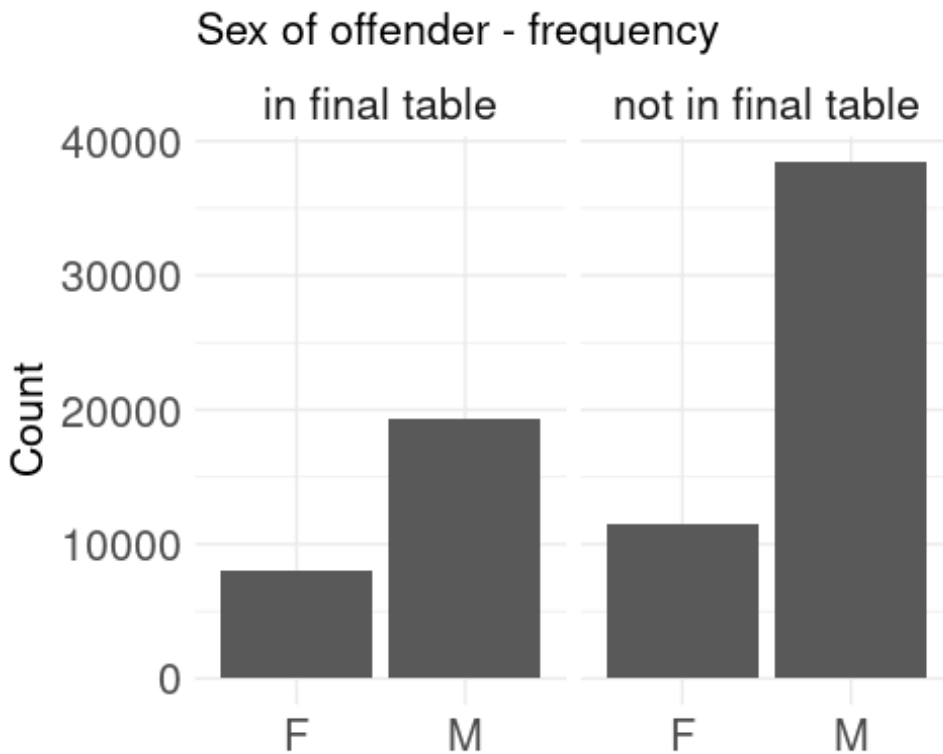
Figure 8: Distribution of offender's sex

In terms of victims, in the final table around 70% were female, with a slightly lower but still significant proportion of the remainder. For offenders this is reversed, with around 70% being male in the final table, slightly more in the remainder.

9.1.3.1 Combination of sex of offender and victim

Original table

Sex of offender	Sex of victim	Frequency
M	F	41,237
M	M	16,055
F	F	10,084
F	M	9,214

Table 1: Combinations of offender and victim sex - full table

Final table

Sex of offender	Sex of victim	Frequency
M	F	14,566
M	M	4,628
F	F	4,569
F	M	3,374

Table 2: Combination of offender and victim sex - final table

The above tables are ordered by frequency. In both cases over half the offender/victim combinations were male-on-female, followed by male-on-male.

This shows that although males dominate, there are still a large number of crimes involving female offenders. These numbers don't tell us the exact role played in each case. Additionally, although most victims are female, a large number are male. An avenue for further analysis is to consider the age split in addition to the gender/sex of the victims and offenders.

9.1.4 Ethnicity

Given some misconceptions around ethnicity arising from a few high profile cases (for example Rotherham) it seems appropriate to view the relevant data. It should be borne in mind that the data are based on a subjective impression of a person's appearance and in many cases this information is not provided:
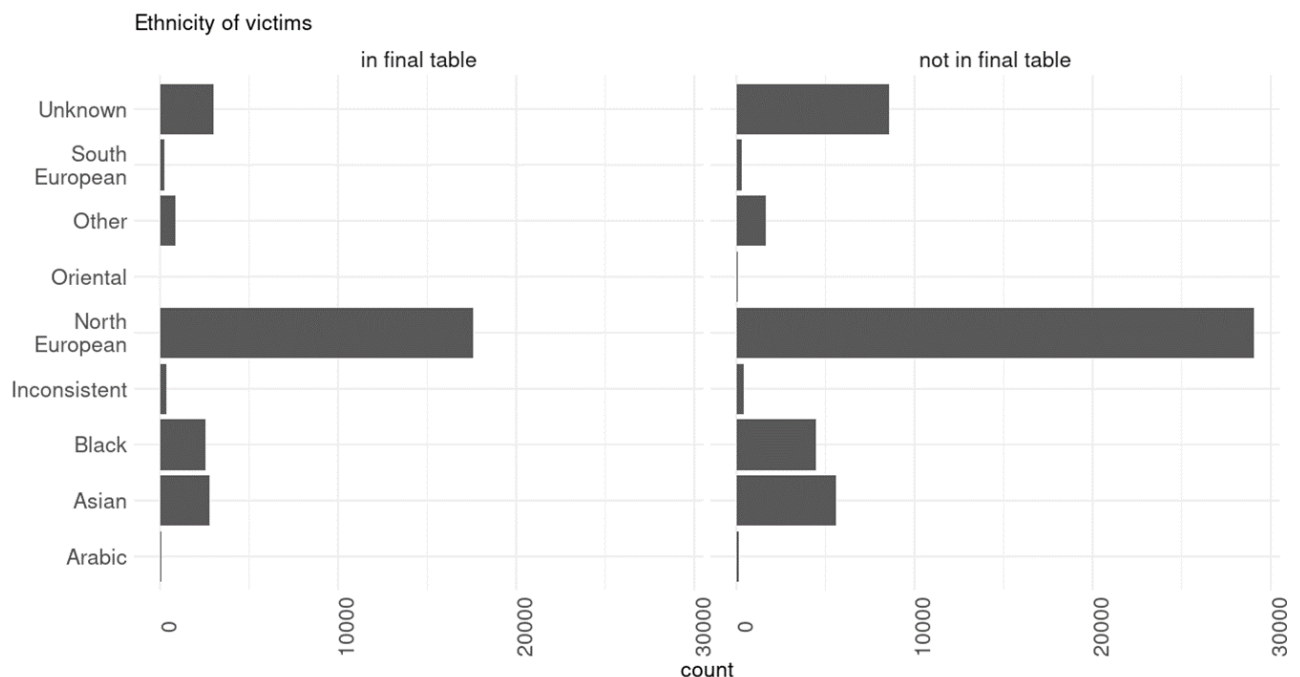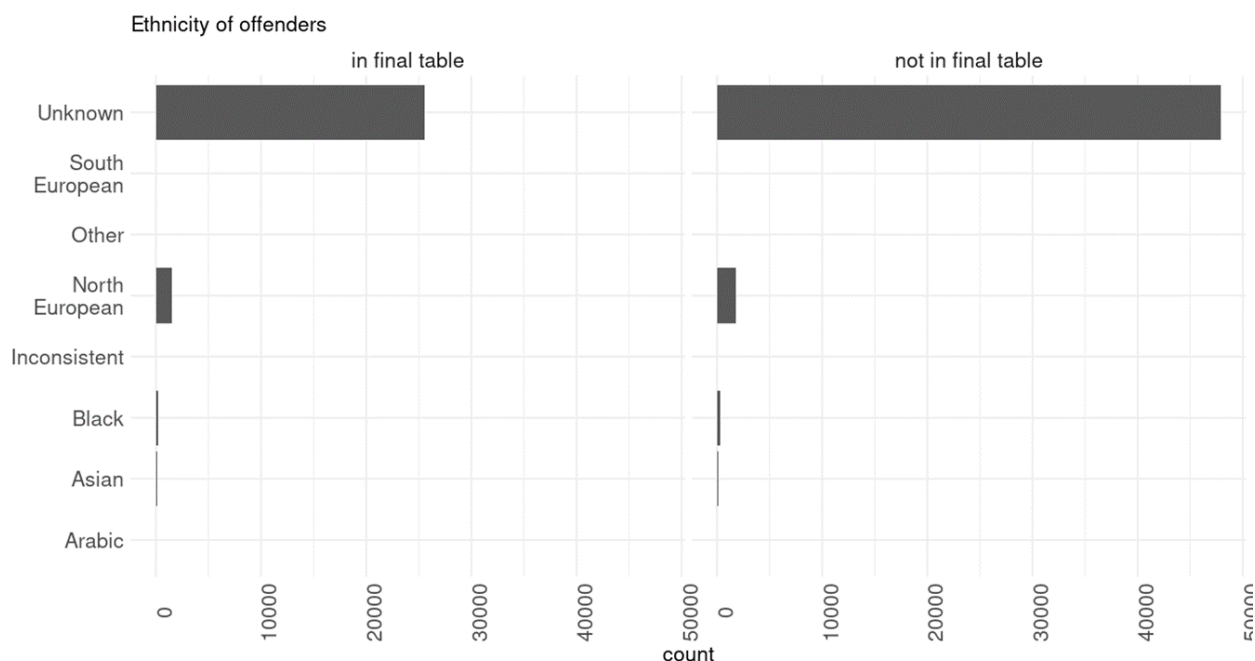

Figure 9: Ethnicity of victims

Figure 10: Ethnicity of offenders

This shows that most victims are North European, followed by Unknown (no details completed). In contrast no ethnicity details are known for over 90% of offenders.

For the vast majority of offenders (nearly 95%), their ethnicity is not known. Where it is known, most offenders are identified as North European.

For combinations of victim and offender ethnicities, this is best represented as a heat map:

Frequency of ethnicity combinations between offenders and victims

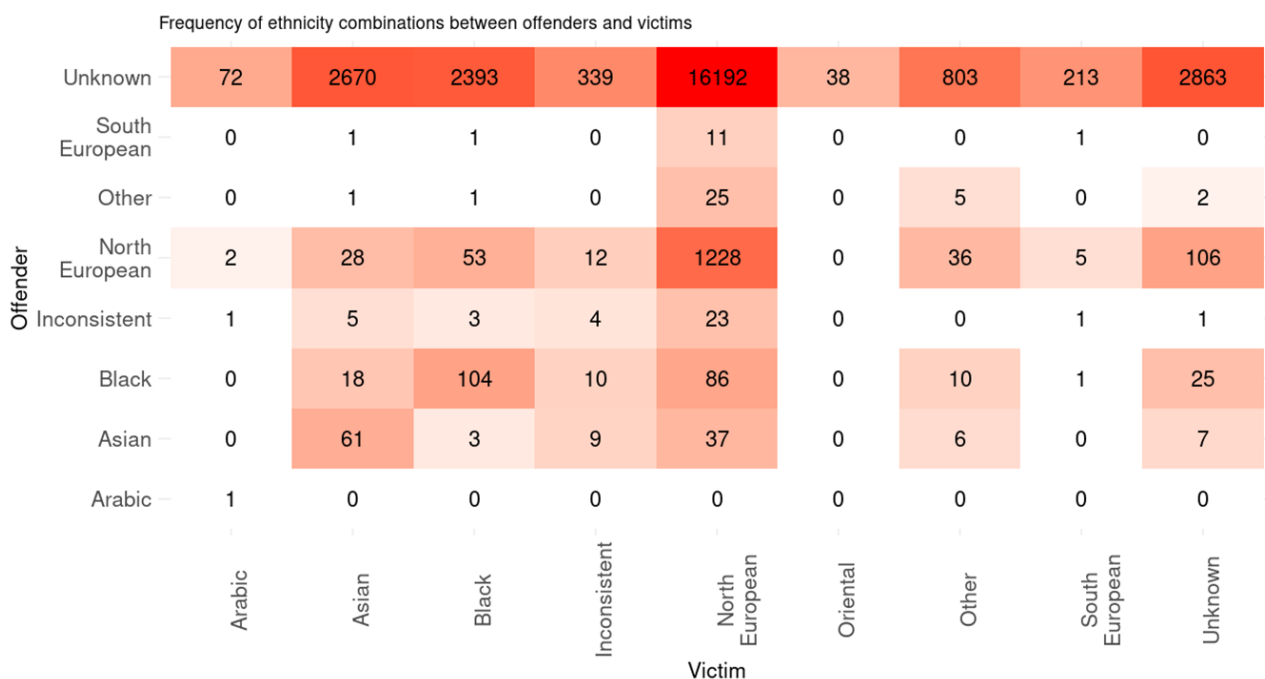| Offender	Arabic	Asian	Black	Inconsistent	North European	Oriental	Other	South European	Unknown
Unknown	72	2670	2393	339	16192	38	803	213	2863
South European	0	1	1	0	11	0	0	1	0
Other	0	1	1	0	25	0	5	0	2
North European	2	28	53	12	1228	0	36	5	106
Inconsistent	1	5	3	4	23	0	0	1	1
Black	0	18	104	10	86	0	10	1	25
Asian	0	61	3	9	37	0	6	0	7
Arabic	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Victim

Figure 11: Heatmap of offender and victim ethnicity combinations

This chart is dominated by offenders of unknown ethnicity on North European victims.

9.1.5 Identifying the most prolific offenders

A check was made to discover the features of the most prolific offenders from the final table. 11 offenders were each involved in 17 CSA/CSE crimes; all were males of unknown ethnicity. Age is not included here as it could vary according to the date of the individual crime.

10.5 Project Output

The network tables for CSE are fed into the previously developed SOC network (see the paper associated with that network), which itself feeds into a Qlik dashboard (to be used within Intelligence only, please see the associated operating principles).

This dashboard enables the user to:

• review nominal details

• show overlaps between the CSE network and SOC network

• Show the harm related to CSE nominals and groupings using both the Cambridge Crime Harm Index (CCHI) and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Crime Severity Index

• Show a measure of centrality for nominals

• Show a prioritisation scheme suitable for the use of Intelligence in assessing the extent of networks and the degree of harm produced by them.

• Display a dismantling prioritisation scheme for individual nominals.

Dismantling groups means that if some of the members of the network ceased their criminal activities, the network would cease to operate as effectively and so lead to the reduction of harm created by criminal activity within society. Ceasing their activities could be by way of sentencing through the criminal justice system, by way of offender management processes or, potentially, of their own volition, etc. The algorithm used allows for the identification of those nominals who, if they were to cease their activities, would lead to the breaking up of the network most efficiently.

This means that, based on harm generated, the various groups can be prioritised in terms of the tasking of relevant WMP activities and within those groups, the nominals identified via the algorithm could also be prioritised.

10 Appendix

10.1 Glossary of terms used

CSA - Child Sexual Abuse

CSE - Child Sexual Exploitation

Offender - includes anyone identified as defendant/offender, suspect, person thought responsible, person probably responsible

DfE - Department for Education

NCA - National Crime Agency

SOC - Serious Organised Crime

WMP - West Midlands Police

NSPCC - National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

if_code - a flag denoting certain types of crime, including those that would suggest CSE

10.2 Search terms

some groupings of words were defined:

child words: child, girl, boy, u13, under13, u16, under16, 13+, 13-17, 13-15, 16 or 17, 16-20, 16 or over, 16 years and over, 16+, under18

sex words: sex, rape, buggery, indec, pornog, exploit, prostit, photo, penetration

mo search words: cse, child sexual, exploit, misper, sex, groom, mase, mace, mash, rape, raping, pregnan, older, concern, penetrat

if_codes: CAO, PPC, CSE

The search selects cases where: (the offence title includes a child word AND a sex word, OR the if_code is one noted above, OR the modus operandi includes an mo search word) AND the offence type is NOT DA (domestic abuse) AND the victim is aged under 18
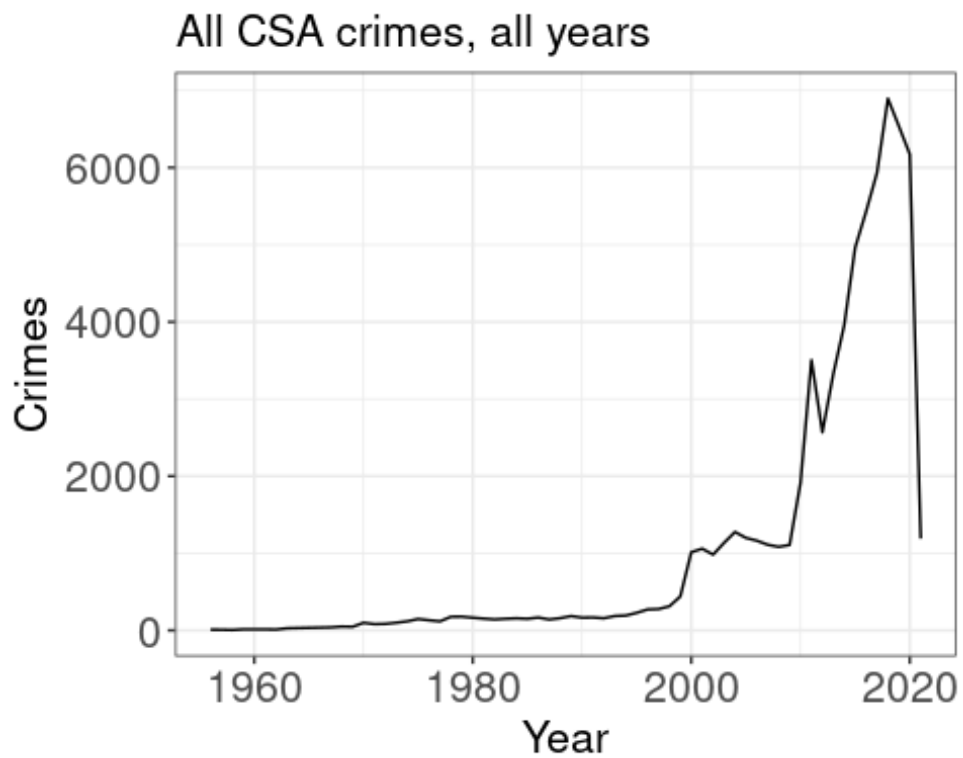
10.3 Full timelines

All CSA crimes, all years

Figure 12: Full timeline for crimes in full table
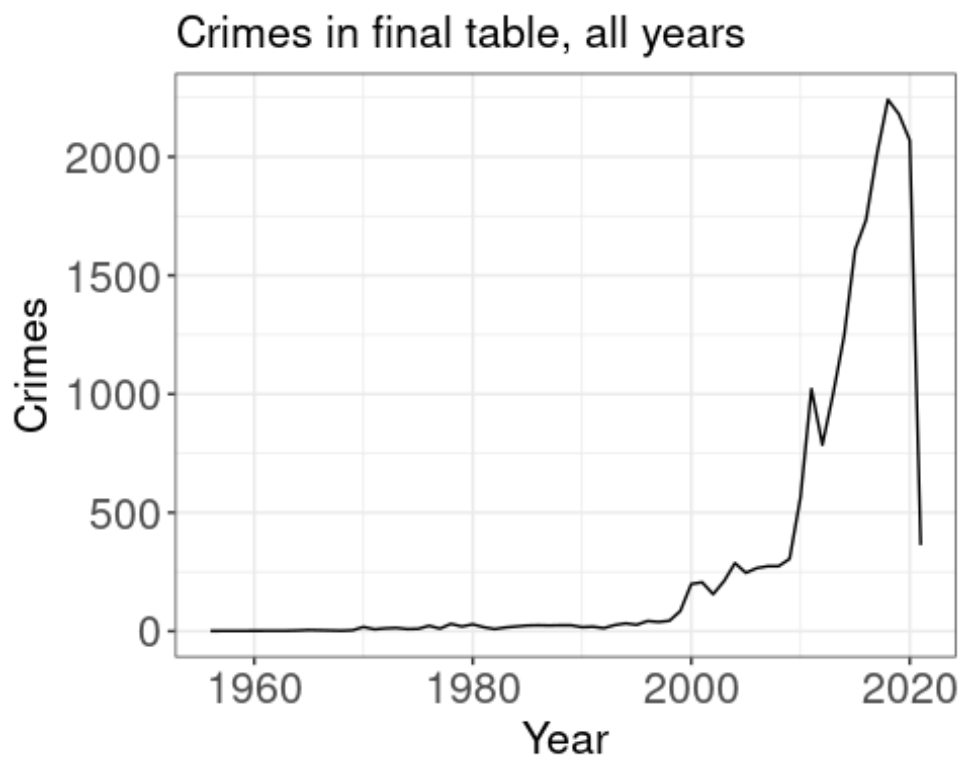
Crimes in final table, all years

Figure 13: Full timeline for crimes in final table

11 References

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Kelly, Liz, and Kairika Karsna. 2017. "Measuring the Scale and Changing Nature of Child Sexual Abuse and Child Sexual Exploitation. Scoping Report." Project Report. London: London Metropolitan University; Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA)/London Metropolitan University. http://repository.londonmet.ac.uk/1525/.

Laird, Jessica J., Bianca Klettke, Kate Hall, Elizabeth Clancy, and David Hallford. 2020. "Demographic and Psychosocial Factors Associated With Child Sexual Exploitation: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis." *JAMA Network Open* 3 (9): e2017682–e2017682.

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12 Overview of Referrals and Safeguarding

The purpose of this section is to address the concerns raised by the Data Ethics Committee about operationalising the network analyses produced by the Data Analytics Lab (DAL). These concerns are about how we respond to children and other vulnerable people who are identified as being involved in Serious Organised Crime (SOC), Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and County Lines (CL) as a result of the analyses. The key areas of concern raised by the Committee include:

- That there is a risk of inadvertently or unfairly criminalising children.
- Being assured that there is a comprehensive and credible plan for how victims of exploitation are safeguarded and supported.
- A recognition that the victim/perpetrator overlap can be complex.
- How data about individuals is shared with partners for safeguarding purposes.
- Better understanding of prevention strategies.

Children and other vulnerable people are likely to be identified as a result of analyses undertaken by the DAL. This includes the various network analyses identifying people linked to SOC, CL and CSE. Please see the '*Operating Principles for Network Analyses'* for an explanation of how the DAL's output feeds into existing Intelligence Department processes.

These analyses use data science techniques which are new to law enforcement, to understand the criminal environment. However, any children, or other individuals identified as vulnerable to exploitation, will be safeguarded using West Midlands Police (WMP) standard operating procedures in partnership with other local statutory bodies. These procedures operate regardless of the vulnerable individual's status within our recording systems as a 'victim', 'suspect' or 'defendant'.

12.1 Statutory Guidance: Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)[4]

WMP and other partners across the region are bound by legislation which is summarised in the 2018 statutory guidance, '*Working together to safeguard children*'.

> *This guidance focuses on the core legal requirements, making it clear what individuals, organisations and agencies must and should do to keep children safe. In doing so, it seeks to emphasise that effective safeguarding is achieved by putting children at the centre of the system and by every individual and agency playing their full part. This child centred approach is fundamental to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of every child. A child centred approach means keeping the child in focus when making decisions about their lives and working in partnership with them and their families.*

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[4] HM Government, (2018) *Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/942454/Working_together_to_safeguard_children_inter_agency_guidance.pdf

In particular, the Children Act 2004, as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017, strengthened the relationship between the police, clinical commissioning groups (CCG) and the local authority (LA) who are duty-bound to work together, and with other partners locally, to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area.

WMP works with seven LAs (Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton) and their associated CCGs.

12.2 Modern Slavery Act 2015

Section 45 of the Modern Slavery Act (MSA) 2015 created a defence for victims who commit certain offences when they are compelled to do so (in the case of adults) or when they commit them as a direct consequence of being a victim of slavery / exploitation, if a reasonable person, in the same situation with the same 'relevant characteristics' would do the relevant act (in the case of children). [5] The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) adopts a four-stage assessment when deciding whether to prosecute a suspect who might be such a victim, in order to establish whether investigators have used the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) in the case of trafficking or slavery; or have considered whether a child has committed crimes arising directly from Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE). A person who is shown to have been exploited will rarely be considered for prosecution.

12.3 Safeguarding arrangements in the West Midlands

WMP's increased focus on tackling Serious Organised Crime and Exploitation (SOCEx) is underpinned by the newly formed SOCEx Hubs in Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton which include an uplift in the numbers of officers and staff dedicated to this issue. The Hubs provide a single interface for partners to engage with, rather than navigating different WMP teams which deal with missing people, gangs or CSE. Equally, officers become the WMP experts in the prevention strategies available in each local area. This offers improved opportunities for child centred safeguarding conversations and a consistent approach to safeguarding from WMP.

Each LA works differently with their unique structures, terminology and range of interventions. Birmingham has a well-developed multi-agency contextual safeguarding[6] hub (MASH), which includes WMP officers from several departments including the Public Protection Unit (PPU), Force Criminal Investigations Department (FCID), Force Intelligence and Neighbourhood teams. They are co-located with partner agencies including Birmingham Children's Trust, health, education, Barnardo's, Youth Offending Services and the Children's Society. Wolverhampton is building a similar partnership hub, although WMP officers are not yet embedded. Other LAs are at different points in their development but all are moving in the direction of building a safeguarding hub similar to that established in Birmingham. Regardless of current progress, each has a MASH for referrals and some have local daily briefings which are attended by WMP officers.

The strengthening relationship between the WMP SOCEx Hubs and LA MASH arrangements ensures WMP investigations go beyond simply investigating specific offences (such as

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[5] https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/human-trafficking-smuggling-and-slavery

[6] Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships. https://contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/

possession with intent to supply drugs or 'PWITS'). Instead, they take a contextual safeguarding approach and consider that a child is being exploited, even if the child has made no such disclosures. A key aspect of the investigators' role in the SOCEx Hubs is to identify opportunities NOT to criminalise children. Indeed, the Force's Investigation Policy [7] states that the core mission of West Midlands Police is to prevent crime, protect the public and help those in need. The overwhelming principle is that, '*staff should treat every investigation as an opportunity to intervene and prevent future offending*' and that WMP, '*will seek every opportunity to work collaboratively with partners to prevent offending*'. To this end, the Force uses the new Home Office Counting Rule (HOCR) Outcome 22 for investigations where no further action is taken but diversionary, educational or intervention activity has been undertaken to address offending behaviour or prevent further offending.[8] This is recognised as a 'positive' outcome to increase the use of 'behaviour change' early interventions.[9]

The Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) funds partners who can assist WMP in identifying these opportunities to prevent future offending and to support those being exploited. It has funded Trauma Informed training, delivered by Barnardo's, for many of WMP's partners across social services, education, family hubs and the voluntary sector. For example, trauma informed volunteers from the charity St. Giles[10] take referrals from custody staff in Coventry to provide peer mentors with lived experience to support vulnerable young people. The ambition is to provide bespoke Trauma Informed training for WMP as an organisation and for specific roles such as custody staff.[11]

In Birmingham, where there is cause for concern about a child, for example if they have been arrested, a referral will be made to the MASH. If appropriate, the Exploitation Screening Tool will be completed and if they are assessed as being at high risk a Strategy discussion will be convened and initial safeguarding considered. If the child is assessed as medium or low risk, their case is reviewed the following day at the daily Contextual Safeguarding meeting. Cases assessed as medium risk go to a Disruption Panel; whilst low risk cases are monitored. These procedures are all governed by tight timescales to ensure prompt action is taken. Where opportunities for disruption are identified the Disruption Panel will explore the Home Office 'Child Exploitation Disruption Toolkit'.[12]

It should be noted that information for vulnerable adults is not automatically shared with partner agencies, since their consent is required. This means the ability to identify offenders involved in criminal exploitation of vulnerable adults is the first step towards gathering evidence to build a case which does not require victim support to progress the investigation.

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[7] West Midlands Police Investigation Policy Ref CRIME/08; approved 23/02/2021
[8] Home Office Counting Rules for Recorded Crime (HOCR): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/977232/count-general-apr-2021.pdf Outcome 22 came into use in April 2020.
[9] West Midlands Police Outcome 22 Policy Ref CRIME/07; approved 26/01/2021.
[10] https://www.stgilestrust.org.uk/what-we-do/child-criminal-exploitation/hospital-custody-suites/
[11] Conversation with Ben Curtis, Barnardo's. Ambition is dependent on funding decisions from Home Office.
[12] HM Government (2019) '*Child exploitation disruption toolkit*' https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-exploitation-disruption-toolkit