



EXPLOITATION ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE

Walsall Exploitation Team

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Exploitation Assessment Guidance

What is exploitation and how do people become exploited?

Exploitation is not a new concern; children and adults have been exploited in many forms for years. Professionals now have a much better understanding of what exploitation is and how it is a form of abuse. As our understanding of exploitation grows, so too does our ability to identify those most at risk within our communities, those who wish to exploit them and the disruption techniques we can use against this.

In a broader sense, exploitation has, over the last few years, been categorised as sexual exploitation or criminal exploitation, predominantly of *children*. However, we recognise that exploitation is not an issue that stops impacting victims at the age of 18. As we grow our collective understanding, we can see that adults are also victims of exploitation.

The other important issue to understand is how exploitation impacts upon families and communities, which is why the Walsall Exploitation Assessment asks a wide range of questions to understand the bigger picture around victims, perpetrators, and locations of concerns. This enables the Exploitation Team to have a better understanding in order to tackle this issue at a grass roots level.

Definition of Sexual Exploitation

Sexual exploitation is **not** defined in law. Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse. It occurs when an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a person into sexual activity in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or 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. Sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through using technology.

Definition Criminal Exploitation

Criminal Exploitation occurs when an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a person into any criminal activity, in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and through violence or the threat of violence.

The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact, it can also occur through the use of technology. The criminal exploitation of victims is not confined to county lines but can also include other forms of criminal activity such as theft, acquisitive crime, knife crimes and other forms of criminality.

What is 'County Lines'?

'County Lines' is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas [within the UK], using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of 'deal line'. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.

What is 'Cuckooing'?

This term is "named after the nest stealing practices of wild cuckoos. It describes the situation where a county lines dealer 'takes over' accommodation located in the provincial drugs market, using it as a local dealing base." (Coomber and Moyle: 2017)

An individual or group can do this by taking over the homes of local adults and families (including children and adults with care and support needs) through an abuse of power or vulnerability by coercion, control and/or force so that they can provide a base for the supply of drugs into the local community. This places the adult and/or families at an increased risk of eviction (if they are in social or privately-rented housing) and isolation from their communities due to the anti-social activity it can create. Cuckooing often forms part of wider 'county lines' activity and is also a form of criminal exploitation.

Common Characteristics of Exploitation

Violence, coercion, and intimidation are quite common. Involvement in exploitative relationships is characterised by the victim's limited availability of choice, as a result of their social, economic, or emotional vulnerability. A victim of exploitation does not often recognise the coercive nature of the relationship and does not see themselves as a victim of exploitation. This can be particularly challenging when trying to understand how a victim is being exploited. We must not expect victims to protect themselves from exploitative situations.

Many victims of exploitation also show signs of being involved in traumatic events which can be due to physical/sexual abuse, neglect, rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation and gang related violence. Trauma can manifest in different ways and should be considered throughout your assessment. If you feel a victim is displaying signs of trauma, please do include this within your assessment.

Consideration for Potential Victims of Trafficking

Traffickers force, coerce and manipulate victims into sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, slavery, criminal activities and forced marriage. There are additional processes that must be followed if a victim of exploitation has been trafficked. Almost all victims of exploitation have been moved against their will for the purposes of exploitation. It could be as simple as a young

person or adult being picked up in a taxi which is paid for by their exploiter, or when a victim is forced to travel on a train to an out of area town to supply drugs.

Trafficking is considered by the Exploitation Team throughout a victim's case being open, and you should not hesitate to raise concerns around trafficking when you are made aware of them. The Exploitation Team may ask you to complete an NRM or MS1 Trafficking referral. You will be supported through this process directly by the team. An NRM is a trafficking notice agreed by the Home Office. The MS1 form is so that you can report trafficking concerns about a potential victim. Both forms are regularly updated by the Home Office and links can be emailed to you if needed.

For more information about trafficking and modern-day slavery, please look at the home office website, it offers support to practitioners to report trafficking concerns for both children and adults.

Barnardo's offer a service of support to children who have been trafficked. They have a large range of resources and information on their website <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/protecting-children/trafficked-children>

The Home Office website has resources and information for child and adult victims of trafficking <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-trafficking-victims-referral-and-assessment-forms>

When should I complete the Exploitation Assessment?

The Exploitation Assessment should be completed as soon as you have concerns around exploitation. Timely information sharing is especially important. It allows multi-agency professionals to offer victims and families support as soon as is appropriate. It also allows agencies to collectively look at disrupting exploitation activity.

Please note that this assessment does not negate the need to speak to police colleagues if you know a crime **has** been committed or **is** being committed. You should contact 999 if there is an emergency service required, or 101 to speak to police colleagues directly. If you are unsure what to do, please seek advice from your line manager.

If you require any support before completing the form, please contact a duty Exploitation Coordinator on 01922 650 395.

Key elements to consider

The Exploitation Assessment has been developed to highlight specific concerns around exploitation. The completed assessment should be sent to the Walsall Council Exploitation team via email: missingexploitedchildren@walsall.gov.uk (This email is to be used for both adults and children).



Please note that this assessment is not a direct referral into social care services. If any non-exploitation concerns are raised, we may ask you to complete a Multi-Agency Referral Form (MARF) to share with the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). We might ask you to complete a referral to Adult Social Care if the victim identified is 18 years old or older.

The Exploitation Assessment is designed to be victim focused, with contextual safeguarding and evidence-based information sharing at base level. Please ensure that any information you share within this assessment is based upon knowledge you know to be true. The Exploitation Assessment asks you to consider three different themes: – victims, persons of concern and locations where you believe that exploitation is taking place. We would request that you gather as much information as you can whilst completing the assessment to ensure that all information is considered when being triaged with our multi-agency team.

Each text box within the Exploitation Assessment has a small piece of guidance; please review this before completing. This allows the form to focus your information and ensure you have covered all elements of the form.

1. Who is this assessment about?

Please give as much information as you can, remembering to include the person's current address and date of birth. This will ensure that partners can find as much information as possible for triage checks to be completed in a timely manner.

It is important you use this section to tell us of any diagnosed additional needs, or needs where a diagnosis has not been formally identified. This will ensure that any additional needs are considered by all partners when making decisions. There is research completed by the National Working Group that shows victims with additional needs are often identified, targeted and groomed by perpetrators as they are seen as exceptionally vulnerable and easier to manipulate. It is important that practitioners identify those victims that do have additional needs and may need specialised support to disclose abuse.

Identifying where a victim is educated, receiving training or employment is also vital in supporting the team to build an accurate picture contextually for a victim. If you are unsure, please do make enquiries to find out before submitting the assessment. However, do not let this delay your referral.

There is space within this section to identify how this person is being supported currently. If the person is already open to an adult or children's social worker, early help practitioner or other professional, please use this space to tell us what their 'plan' currently looks like. Include any information you have about professionals already involved with the person you are referring. This allows the team to make broader connections with other professionals if needed.

2. Referrer's Information and Consent

The referral you are completing is the start of multi-agency work with a number of practitioners. Having your contact details is exceptionally important, please ensure this part of the assessment is complete prior to submission.

Consent is especially important. We would expect that any referral made has the consent from the victim before sending into the team, however we recognise that this might not always be possible. We also note that by gaining consent it can put the victim at further risk. Please do outline in this section if consent has been freely given by the victim or reasons for why consent was not to be obtained, or hasn't been and for what reason.

If you have completed this assessment following consultation with another practitioner, please let us know who that practitioner is. This can be really helpful when initial discussions around safety planning take place.

3. How is this person being exploited?

The first question of the assessment asks you to consider 'how' the victim is being exploited. This is your opportunity to share with multi-agency professionals concerns about the person being criminally or sexually exploited. This question is about how you have come to know this information and what evidence you currently have that we can build on. As with all other questions within this assessment, professional judgement is important, but try to base your judgement on factual information. Please ensure your professionals judgement and opinion is recorded as such.

4. What does the exploitation look like?

The assessment is asking for you to share details that are evidence based.

Factual information such as dates, telephone numbers and names, be they of exploiters or peers, are very useful when building the initial picture about how a victim is being exploited. They can also be the first part of any criminal investigation that police can progress. Please ensure you include all of the information you have. Use a separate piece of paper if you need to.

Within this section, please outline any days or dates of significance. Perhaps you have been made aware of a car collecting the victim or of a person being moved around for the purpose of exploitation (trafficking), or someone who has care and support needs has been coerced into allowing another person(s) to be in their property and is being financially exploited.

5. Are you concerned about any locations?

Understanding locations is key to disrupting exploitation. It could be a local flat you have been made aware of that has been 'cuckooed' by drug dealers, or a park where young people are meeting adults. Having precise information about locations allows the team to look at different ways of gathering intelligence. Local neighbourhood officers could patrol the area more regularly, or that local housing officers can visit a property to find more information. Locations that are out of borough are also very useful. If a person tells you they have been visiting places out of area, it could be that they have been trafficked there by their exploiter.

6. Historical information you wish to share with the team

Having historical information to hand supports initial assessment. Information that should be included here is any historically important information you have as a practitioner. If you are

aware that the victim has been known to services previously, or has made historical disclosures linked to exploitation, this is the section to write about this. Are you aware of the victim or victim's family being victims of abuse previously? Has sexual assault taken place? Do we know if the victim has previously been arrested for potential offences? The idea is to understand a victim's history that is relevant and build a broader picture as to how the victim has been groomed or exploited.

7. What is working well? What protective factors are you currently aware of?

Does the victim or victim's family have a good relationship with a certain worker? Is the victim well engaged at school, college or university? Do we know of any youth services or voluntary sector agencies working to support the victim this stage? Is the victim currently safeguarded by their family or friends? What is their support network, do they have carers, or an advocate etc.? Please use this space to tell us of what is working well for the victim at this stage.

8. Voice of the Victim

It is important that you have spoken to the person you are completing this form for. You may wish to outline concerns with them first before you complete this form. It might be that you have spoken to a relative or carer about this person too. This section is for the victim to outline their thoughts and feelings around exploitation concerns. The Exploitation Team works to ensure that a victim has an opportunity to tell workers directly about what works well or doesn't work well for them. This section also enables you to identify where you have been unable to seek the views of the person and the reasons why.

9. Voice of Family, Parent or Carer

Working with a victim's family or support network is really important. The Exploitation Team recognise that parent's, carers and supportive family members are key to offering support and protection for victims. Family members can often be under significant stress when a victim living in the house hold is exploited. In many cases parents and carers can often hold more information as to who the victim is connected with and evidence of exploitation.

Please use this part of the assessment to explain how the family/carer is being supported, or what support the family/carer think they need at this point in time. As a first point of access, the PACE website (Parents against child exploitation) can be very helpful. There are a number of forums that parents can access offering direct support from other parents in a similar situation. www.pace.info

10. Peers, Groups or Gang Affiliation.

If you are aware that the victim has connections with peers of note; links to groups of people or confirmed gang affiliation, please use this space to tell us of these connections. Include any names or street names you have, or any ways in which you know this person is gang-affiliated.

Do they have any recognised tattoos or clothing that has been attributed to a local gang? For more information on local gangs or locations where gangs are present, please call an Exploitation Coordinator on the duty line number.

Exploitation Assessment – Risk Assessment

The Exploitation Assessment asks you to assess what level of risk you think a victim is currently at. Please note this is changeable and is based upon professional judgement.

The assessment we are currently using is designed so that everyone can initially assess based upon professional judgement and evidence of risk. It also combines Sexual Exploitation, Criminal Exploitation and those people who may go missing. Please select the option you think is most appropriate to you at this time. Please note, the assessment of risk is subjective and may change as information is progressed. There is no right or wrong answer to these questions.

11. Assessment of risk based on rationale:

Based on information you have and any information you have been given by other sources, please provide a professional opinion of risk by selecting one of the following:

- Evidence of vulnerability to exploitation (Low)
- Evidence of being groomed or targeted for the purposes of exploitation (Medium)
- Evidence that the person is being exploited. (High)

Information to consider when completing the Risk Assessment

Is the person you are completing this assessment about showing any of these signs of vulnerability?

- Physical injuries: risk of serious violence and death
- Emotional and psychological trauma
- Sexual violence: sexual assault, rape, indecent images being taken and shared as part of initiation/revenge/punishment, internally inserting drugs (plugging)
- Debt bondage – a victim and/or their families being ‘in debt’ to the exploiters which is used to control the victim
- Neglect and basic needs not being met
- Living in unclean, dangerous and/or unhygienic environments

- Tiredness and sleep deprivation: victim is expected to carry out criminal activities over long periods and through the night
- Poor attendance and/or attainment at school/college or not attending employment
- Living in a property which is being used by others for the sale of drugs, or for

Victims rarely self-report exploitation so it is important that practitioners are aware of potential indicators of risk, including:

- Acquisition of money, clothes, mobile phones etc. without plausible explanation
- Gang-association and/or isolation from peers/social networks, being visible in gang related videos.
- Leaving home/care without explanation
- Persistently going missing or returning late, and/or being found in areas away from home
- Suspicion of physical assault/unexplained injuries
- Excessive receipt of texts/phone calls or having multiple handsets
- Returning home under the influence of drugs/alcohol, increasing drug use or being found to have large amounts of drugs on them
- Using sexual, drug-related or violent language you wouldn't expect them to know
- Relationships with controlling or significantly older individuals or groups
- Being arrested with older individuals
- Multiple callers (unknown adults or peers)

Please remember that being vulnerable to exploitation as identified above, doesn't mean the person is being exploited. It is important that you note any context as to why you feel a victim is being exploited within the Exploitation Assessment.

Anyone could be a victim of exploitation; it is important that we base our understanding and knowledge on evidence and information that is factual. If you wish to share third party information (information from another source), it is important that you note the information is from a third party and reference the source as best you can.

There is the West Midlands Police Partnership Intelligence Form you can complete should you wish to share intelligence directly with police. This form can be found here ([Link to be added](#)).

12. Rationale for Risk Assessment

Please use this box to tell us more about why you have assessed the victim at this level of risk. This part of the assessment will be reviewed regularly as services are put into place to support victims. Please note that victim blaming language is not useful. Risk is based upon the

rationale that a victim has been exploited and or groomed by another person – it is not the victim’s fault. Your rationale should include why you think and or feel the victim is being exploited.

Assessment free of bias

Before submitting your assessment, please review it before sending on. Please look at the language you have used and ensure the information you have completed is accurate and timely. Please ensure that the victim is considered and any potential perpetrators are written about with as much detail as you have. Please note, any assessments that have victim-blaming language will be returned to you for correction. For more information about victim-blaming language and the impact it can have on assessment and the victim, please see Dr Jessica Eaton’s website <https://www.victimfocus.org.uk/>

Always ensure that victims are aware of your concern and that you are making this referral, unless to do so would put the victim at further risk.

Key contacts and information

If you are unsure or need to discuss how to complete the Exploitation Assessment, please call our duty **Exploitation Coordinator** for additional guidance. They can be contacted on 01922 650395, between the hours of 8.15am and 5.15pm, Monday to Friday.

West Midlands Police can be contacted by calling 101 from your telephone, or by visiting <https://west-midlands.police.uk/>

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership’s website has several links with additional guidance and support should you need it:

<https://go.walsall.gov.uk/walsall-safeguarding-partnership>

Thank you for your support.