

Institution: University of Suffolk		
Unit of Assessment: 20 Social Work and Social Policy		
Title of case study: Addressing Criminal and Sexual Exploitation of Young and Vulnerable People involved in "County Lines" Drug Distribution Networks		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2016 - 2017		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Paul Andell John Pitts	Role(s): Senior Lecturer Visiting Professor	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: February 2014 - present Consultant on project 2016; visiting professor 2018 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The emergence of UK gangs and their involvement in drug distribution presents the need for policies and practices which recognise and address new national threats. Research produced by UoS has clarified presenting problems and has served as a significant catalyst for change, preventing the violent and sexual victimisation of vulnerable gang-involved and gang-affected young people in Suffolk. Highlighting the criminal exploitation of vulnerable children and young people involved with "county line" drug networks, this influential work has shaped policy and practices at local and national levels. The research underpins new approaches in professional practices, training and strategies in child and adolescent safeguarding, as it relates to those groomed into criminal and sexual exploitation in drug markets.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Building on previous work on UK street gangs, Andell's and Pitts' work on county lines at Suffolk was one of the earliest studies conducted on county lines in the UK [3.1]. It builds on previous work undertaken on UK street gangs to provide empirical analysis, regional comparisons, as well as a critical examination of policy and official responses to this growing phenomenon. The recent research underpins current multi-agency safeguarding and gang strategies in Suffolk and is designed to minimise the violence experienced by vulnerable young people on the front lines of gang conflict. Commissioned by Suffolk County Council in 2016, Andell and Pitts conducted the research. They confirmed that a significant number of children were being violently and sexually exploited in the county and provided both history and context to these issues to improve understanding [3.1].</p> <p>The study found that the supply of Class A Drugs to Ipswich and other Suffolk towns was dominated by street gangs from London. Children and young people from both London and Suffolk were involved in 'running' the drugs to end-users and their risk of coming to significant harm was high [3.1]. Young people, frequently recorded as 'missing' by safeguarding authorities, were suspected to be working for London-based drug dealing networks. The research also found that there was a lack of clarity in relation to the roles and responsibilities within community safety teams and safeguarding partnerships. This meant that there were no obvious mechanisms to effectively identify, address and communicate a way of dealing with gang offending. Partners also disagreed on whether or not there actually was a 'gang problem' in a predominantly rural county like Suffolk. Through action research, the need to formulate a less partisan analysis of gangs and to recapture the debate with analyses which did not understate or overstate the gang problem became apparent. The research effectively captured the perspectives of different voluntary groups and statutory professionals, offering unique insights into the views and experiences of those working to address serious youth violence. Its findings also highlighted the significant changes in crack and heroin distribution methods, to challenge previous understandings of local, social supply. The research importantly drove the debate from previous policy classifications towards an analysis addressing a new form of local, organised crime [3.2 and 3.5].</p>		

In providing a robust evidence base for a more comprehensive approach to gang policy [3.1 and 3.3] the research made five clear recommendations [3.1, pg. 5]:

1. Clear leadership
2. Effective strategic governance
3. A multi-agency operational response
4. Community engagement
5. Systematic 'real time' evaluation.

The action research processes revealed a need to formulate a less partisan analysis of gangs and to recapture the debate with analyses which did not understate or overstate the gang problem. In order to do so, the research argued that a realist approach was needed which defined what constitutes social reality, while overcoming theoretical and methodological difficulties in order to critique present formulations of gangs [3.4].

3. References to the research

[3.1] Andell, P. and Pitts, J. (2017). *Preventing the violent and sexual victimisation of vulnerable-gang involved and gang-affected children and young people in Ipswich*. A Report for Suffolk's Public Health and Community Safety Team.

<https://www.uos.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Final%20Amended%20Report%20-FINAL%20VERSION%20PDF.pdf> ISBN 978-1-913160-04-3

[3.2] Andell, P. and Pitts, J. (2018). The End of the Line? The Impact of County Lines Drug Distribution on Youth Crime in a Target Destination. *Youth and Policy*.

<https://www.youthandpolicy.org/articles/the-end-of-the-line/>

[3.3] Andell, P. (2019). *Addressing County Lines: Praxis for Community Safety Practitioners*. *Safer Communities*: London, Emerald. ISSN: 1757-8043

[3.4] Andell, P. (2019). *Thinking Seriously About Gangs*. London, Sydney Palgrave (Monograph). <https://www.palgrave.com/gb/book/9783030128906> (Nominated for British Society of Criminology Book Award 2020)

[3.5] Andell, P. (2020). 'Gangs Violence and County lines' in Lane et al (Eds): *International Handbook on Collective Violence: Current Issues and Perspectives*, Routledge. Pp. 198-208

4. Details of the impact

Andell's work has made a new and significant contribution to academic debate on UK gangs. It addresses the harms to children and young people arising from changes to drug markets and criminal exploitation through county lines and makes a substantial impact on both policy and safeguarding practices.

Impact on Regional Strategy

Andell's research served as a significant catalyst for change, preventing the violent and sexual victimisation of vulnerable gang-involved and gang-affected young people in Suffolk (estimated to be in excess of 100 gang members when the research was commissioned). As a direct result of Andell's work commissioned by Suffolk County Council [3.1], an additional £2 million was committed to safeguard children and to disrupt illicit drug distribution networks in the county [5.1]. Based on the study's findings and recommendations, Suffolk County Council reconfigured Community Safety structures to improve information exchanges, with agreed definitions and undertaking a full programme of work [5.1; 5.2 and 5.3]. This responds to Andell's recommendations for:

1. Clear Leadership and 2. Effective Strategic Governance

A new strategic leadership group was formed, the *Suffolk Gang Strategy Steering Group* [5.3]. The resulting strategy (with clear action plans) was implemented through structure and delivery mechanisms that are more streamlined [5.1]. The County introduced a new safeguarding policy for all agencies, *Safeguarding Children and Young People in Suffolk at Risk of County Lines or Gang Involvement* (2018) – embedding Andell's research evidence and recommendations from [3.1], including a commitment towards treating young people more as victims of exploitation rather than processing them through the criminal justice system [5.4]. Before Andell's research was used

to change working practices, police enforcement and child protection were not well aligned. After reconfiguration, enforcement was aimed at a higher level of the drug supply network and safeguarding focused on the children involved [5.4]. The Chief Executive of Suffolk's Young People's Health Project confirmed the importance of Andell's research in these changes [5.2]:

"Dr Andell's research demonstrated that county lines networks targeted and exploited children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money involved in drug deals. It highlighted the use of coercion, intimidation and violence (including sexual violence) to force these vulnerable people to continue to carry out criminal acts".

3. A Multi-Agency Operational Response and 4. Community Engagement

Andell provided further expertise to the Suffolk Gang Strategy Steering Group, to establish a dedicated multi-agency gang intervention team, the Suffolk Again Gangs Exploitation (SAGE) in 2018 [5.2, 5.3 and 5.4]. The strategic partnership created new information sharing protocols and action plans for new streams of work [5.2 and 5.3], and the practitioner team SAGE undertook face-to-face work with gang-affected children and communities. This has had a palpable impact on the young people involved as their needs are addressed rather than their actions criminalised, and the significance of this for safeguarding vulnerable children is summarised by the County Lines Pathfinder Lead [5.4]:

"The Suffolk Again Gangs Exploitation... took a persistent, community-based approach to engage a cohort of children with links to Urban Street Gangs in Ipswich. Inspired by your work, the team recognised the cohort of children had experienced complex trauma and would therefore benefit from interventions that have their foundations in formulating and developing relationships with young people before more traditional interventions could be introduced.

An interim evaluation of the SAGE team suggests that young people we worked with had less police contact (investigations, missing reports etc.) following our intervention".

Additionally, the housing teams set up new support services to counter the occupation of vulnerable tenancies – "Cuckooing" [3.1]. The Suffolk Drugs and Alcohol Team implemented training and support among its staff to prevent vulnerable takeover and exploitation of drug users. The Department for Education set up new pupil inclusion teams and training for governors to reduce school exclusions, which often affects young people vulnerable to gang exploitation, therefore presenting an additional risk factor. Suffolk Police developed new methods of policing and communication with regional teams to address the challenge of gangs operating across boundaries [5.2 and 5.6].

Impact on Professional Practice

Nationally, the work has significantly shifted official 'best practice' guidance and training for front-line professionals, now emphasising how young people affected by gangs – rather than being simple binary subjects (victims or perpetrators) – may be simultaneously victims and perpetrators [5.5]. This change is significant in that it has meant that issues of violence, sexual victimisation and child trafficking are now better recognised as a children's services/child protection issue, rather than an issue for criminal justice [5.6 and 5.10]. According to the Children's Society, there are 46,000 gang-involved young people nationally, with many more affected. Andell's research has been used nationally by charities and organisations with professional safeguarding and investigation training (such as The Children's Society's toolkits [5.5] as part of the Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme). The Programme works with a number of local agencies across all police forces in England and Wales, while the toolkits are used in training to raise awareness of child abuse and exploitation issues and support local safeguarding responses to children at risk of abuse and exploitation. The conceptual framework for the training, based on Andell's research, has at the time of writing been delivered to 13,363 professionals in London, Manchester and the West Midlands, with 93% saying they are better able to support young people as a result [5.5].

The Policy and Research Director of the Children's Society [5.5] stated that:

"Nationally, his work has advocated for a new social policy and practice responses to children who are affected by gangs by demonstrating that rather than being simple binary subjects (victims or perpetrators) these young people experience a complex set of issues in their lives and may be simultaneously victims and perpetrators. His research contributed to changes in practice, and as a result issues of violent and sexual victimisation and child trafficking are now more recognised as a children's services/child protection issue rather than an issue for criminal justice".

Using his research findings, Andell assisted in the delivery of national CPD training to 120 investigators [5.7]. As a result of Andell's input, the mechanisms of county lines networks are more distinguishable, enabling a clearer separation of interventions between enforcement and safeguarding in practice [5.6]. The Regional County Lines Coordinator from the Eastern Region Special Operations Unit stated [5.6]:

"Dr Andell's research informs my current practices in the Eastern region. The dismantling of drug supply networks increasingly involve the criminal exploitation of vulnerable and young people. By reflecting on his research, I am better able to plan support work with local forces and partnerships which distinguishes between trafficked, exploited young people and those who exploit them.

My current practice in the Eastern region currently involves 130 investigations involving hundreds of law enforcement and partners across seven forces, resulting in continual arrests and a significant rise in NRM submissions of vulnerable people referred for safeguarding. There are currently 556 prisoners serving custodial sentences within HMPPS due to enforcement on county lines within the seven forces. Additional figures for enforcement and safeguarding will occur in most regions as the county line drug distribution model is a national threat".

Impact on National Guidance and National Safeguarding and Drugs Reviews

The first National Child Safeguarding Practice Review (2020) identified approaches to protecting children who find themselves threatened with violence and serious harm by criminal gangs. This review included evidence from a systematic literature review by Cardiff University, to identify best practice and give key messages for effective service responses. It also includes three of Andell's publications which are cited 33 times throughout the review [5.10]. Andell's work is additionally included in the evidence pack of Dame Carol Black's Review of Drugs (pg. 144) which when concluded will be influential on future drugs policy [5.9].

As part of the 2020 National Threat Assessment, Andell provided information on new configurations of drugs markets, especially on the nature and pivotal role of the new middle market of county lines. The interim assessment was published in July 2020 for use by the Home Office Task and Finish group for County Lines in support of county lines government strategy, and Andell's input has contextualised information from front line officers disrupting this criminality [5.8]. The Senior Manager National Assessments Centre – Commodities explained the importance of the research in informing the interim intelligence assessment [5.8]:

"Dr. Andell's input has informed analysis to support balanced assessment of drugs supply into County Lines. This has served to provide the latest intelligence picture from an external supply perspective, enhancing related understanding and helping to identify knowledge gaps. Whilst drugs supplied within County Lines are sourced upstream, often involving complex international supply chains, key judgements indicate the pivotal role of middle market criminals and the need for impact at this level. This in turn has supported strategic decision making and tactical intelligence development around the middle market in order to support operational response to further disrupt County Line networks, reduce community harm and protect the vulnerable".

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- [5.1] Testimonial from Clair Harvey, Community Safety Lead, Suffolk County Council
- [5.2] Testimonial from Tibbs Pinter, Chief Executive of Suffolk Children's Health Project - 4YP
- [5.3] Testimonial from Jen Meade, Joint Head of Suffolk Youth Justice Service, Children and Young Peoples Services, Suffolk County Council
- [5.4] Testimonial from Catherine Bennet, County Lines Pathfinder Lead (previously Gangs and County Lines Manager) and Manager of SAGE Team, Suffolk County Council
- [5.5] Testimonial from Dr. Sam Royston, Policy and Research Director of the Children's Society
- [5.6] Testimonial from Kelly Gray, Regional County Lines Coordinator, Eastern Region Special Operations Unit
- [5.7] Testimonial from Carol Jenkins, The Investigator Conferences and Publishing Ltd.
- [5.8] Testimonial from David Penney, Senior Manager – Commodities, National Assessments Centre, National Crime Agency
- [5.9] Dame Carol Black (2020) *Review of Drugs – evidence relating to drug use, supply and effects, including current trends and future risks* available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/882953/Review_of_Drugs_Evidence_Pack.pdf.
See page114
- [5.10] *Systematic Review for Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel County Lines* available at <https://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/cascade/files/2020/03/A-systematic-map-and-synthesis-review-of-Child-Criminal-Exploitation-October-2019-1.pdf>