

Media Release from National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) - January 2024

VKPP launch National Analysis of Police Recorded Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSAE) Crimes Report 2022

For the first time, a new report from the Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP) sets out publicly a clear, detailed picture of reported Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSAE) crimes across England and Wales.

Based on datasets collected from 42 police forces, this national snapshot gives insight and analysis into the scale and nature of CSAE, trends in offending, including crime types, where they were committed, and presents profiles of both victims and perpetrators.

The analysis sets out the consistent growth in CSAE reported to police with 107,000 crimes reported to policing a figure that has risen significantly in the last ten years ago. More than half of CSAE offences were committed by children, a significant increase from what was previously known. The report also shows that over a third of CSAE contact crimes take place within the family environment. Group-based CSAE accounts for 5% of all identified and reported CSAE.

It is known that there is significant under-reporting of these crimes, but policing recognises the value of presenting a known baseline of recorded abuse and harm taking place against children, to inform future understanding.

The report tells us:

- **There were around 107,000 offences reported in 2022 – a 7.6% increase compared to 2021, nearly quadruple what it is was 10 years ago.** Evidence continues to suggest many crimes remains unreported.
- **Around 75% of CSAE offences** related to sexual offences committed directly against children, and **around 25% relate to online offences of Indecent Images of Children.**
- **The crime types regarding CSAE are changing.** For example, historically **Child-on-Child abuse** accounted for around third of offences. The data in the report suggests that today this is **just over half.**
- **CSAE within the family environment** remains a **common form** of reported abuse, accounting for an estimated **33% of reported contact CSAE crime.** Parents and siblings were the two most common relationships featuring.
- **Group-based CSAE accounts for 5% of all identified and reported CSAE** ranging from unorganised peer group sharing of imagery, to more organised complex high harm cases with high community impact.
- **Reported CSAE is heavily gendered, as expected, with males (82% of all CSAE perpetrators) predominantly abusing females (79% of victims).** Sexual offending involving male victims are more common in offences involving indecent images and younger children.
- **The number of recorded incidents of Online Sexual Abuse continues to grow. It accounts for at least 32% of CSAE.**

- **52% of all CSAE cases involved reports of children (aged 10 to 17) offending against other children with 14 being the most common age. This is a growing and concerning trend** involving a wide range of offending. Whilst some include exploratory online sexual behaviours, some of the most prevalent forms include serious sexual assaults, including rape.

Ian Critchley QPM, NPCC lead Child Abuse Protection and Investigation said:

“Child abuse is an appalling crime, and this analysis helps us understand more widely the growing challenges we are all facing nationally not least young people growing up today. We also know that sadly reported crime remains significantly lower than the actual crimes of child abuse that take place with the Independent Inquiry reporting 1 in 6 girls and 1 in 20 boys will be abused in childhood, an appalling statistic and one we must all seek to change. This analysis will help police and our partners develop and improve our prevention, disruption, and investigation of these appalling crimes against children. Whilst policing has made significant developments in its approach to tackling child sexual abuse this analysis enables us to review current approaches, continually adapting and developing our service and ensuring that the voices of children and victims are at the heart of everything we do.

“Our collective offer must be to prioritise prevention - we must stop abuse happening, preventing the lifelong physical and mental harm it causes. We must give confidence to victims to come forward whether abused yesterday or many years ago, confident that they will receive a service that is of the utmost professionalism wrapped in care and compassion and we must relentlessly bring more offenders of these abhorrent crimes to justice, whilst taking due care not to criminalise young people when it is not warranted.

“Tackling CSAE is a collaborative effort and requires police, partners and the public to work together to prevent harm, pursue offenders and protect children in a changing world.”

Wendy Hart, Deputy Director for Child Sexual Abuse at the National Crime Agency, said:

“As this report shows, the scale of child sexual abuse continues to increase year on year. It highlights that this is a largely hidden crime, and the NCA estimates that there are up to 830,000 adults in the UK that pose some degree of sexual risk to children.

“We also know from our collective analysis that the severity of offending has increased, as have the complexities faced by law enforcement in tackling it. We are now seeing hyper-realistic images and videos of abuse being created using artificial intelligence, for example, while the rollout of end-to-end encryption by technology platforms makes it a lot more difficult for us to protect children.

“Alongside our policing partners and Ofcom, we are working closely with industry to ensure platforms have adequate safety measures designed in, and that our collective ability to tackle the threat keeps pace with technology.

“With over half of reported crimes involving child on child abuse, there has never been a greater need for education in this space. Children, parents, carers and professionals can find information, resources and advice produced by the NCA’s dedicated education programme at www.thinkuknow.co.uk.”

FAQs

What is the National Analysis of Police-Recorded Child Sexual Abuse Crimes Report?

The report provides a comprehensive picture of all police recorded Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation (CSAE) crime. By focussing on all aspects of CSAE, we can get an idea as to the scale and reach of the offences, offenders and threats facing children.

Why is it so important?

The **National Analysis of Police-Recorded Child Sexual Abuse Crimes Report** will play a vital role for the police, partners, professionals and the public. The report supports the right resources to be assigned to the right area to help prevent child abuse, and to pursue offenders. It also offers us a glimpse into how CSAE is changing in the modern world. For example, the increased role that digital and the internet plays.

What is it telling us?

The data tells us new and different things about the scale, nature and changing dynamics of recorded CSAE, the profile of those committing crimes, and the victims they target. The data also reframes some of the popular public narratives surrounding CSAE, helping people to understand where the most common contexts where reported abuse is taking place. For example, historically child-on-child abuse accounted for a third of offences. The report tells us that today this is more like a half.

What impact do you hope this has?

Our aim is that the report will help keep children safe and address the issue of CSAE by encouraging police, partners, and the public to work together. We hope that the report will also encourage wider data and information sharing to get a more complete picture of CSAE. This will help everyone better identify victims and prevent CSAE, while hopefully going some way in stopping perpetrators reoffending.

The findings supports policing and partners to consider whether the current responses reflect the changes in threat. Put simply, are we in the right spaces, and is there things we should be doing differently?

Has the methodology of adult offending changed?

Only in the increase of overarching reporting and wider trends regarding online offending. The family environment however remains one of the most common contexts which of abuse takes place in (a third of offences). A high proportion are historical reports, and it's likely that a large number of current offences are not identified or reported. This is likely due to the hidden nature afforded by abuse in this context, the related control the perpetrator may have over the victim and their own ability and confidence to recognise and report abuse.

It's important to note that although the analysis gives us some clearer insights, due to the known under-reporting of abuse, further research is needed to complement and underpin the findings and continue to enrich our understanding on how offenders operate.

How will it support/aid change to policing?

We believe it will help police forces be more proactive when it comes to identifying and dealing with CSAE. CSAE is a national priority area for the police, so knowing where the main trends lie in reports will help police forces tailor their resources more accurately. And because the report is national rather than local, each police force can now get a wider picture, offering them valuable insights into adapting their approach to CSAE in an operational and strategic level and ask important questions such as;

- Are current CSAE strategies up to date?
- Are victims and perpetrators profiling correct?
- Are victims being supported in the right way?

- What are the rising threats to be aware of?
- What can be done to encourage crime reporting from seldom heard groups, such as LGBTQ groups, children with learning difficulties etc?

How can people use the report?

Partners, professionals and stakeholders can get a heads-up on what the key trends are in reported CSAE.

Indeed, one or two of the findings in the report may be different to what these groups may have been expecting, particularly in the data uncovered for child-on-child crime type. The fact that such a high proportion of offences are actually committed by children might prove surprising. Parents, meanwhile, can get some insight into the extent of rising crime types.

Is there more to do?

Yes. This is an ongoing story. We plan to continue the journey by improving the quality and depth of our analysis, year-on-year.

Who are the VKPP?

The Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP) is a national policing programme formed to improve and coordinate policing's collective response to the protection of individuals experiencing vulnerability from abuse, neglect, and exploitation as well as improved partnership responses.

Working with the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and College of Policing, and funded predominantly by the Home Office, the VKPP undertake a wide range of activities to reduce threat and harm, bring more offenders to justice, and improve outcomes for victims. The VKPP uses research, analysis and peer review to identify promising practice, practice gaps, and share wider knowledge to shape future responses, with an emphasis on the vulnerability strands of public protection. It also undertakes work across partnerships including an exciting partnership with the national Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel which has led to the creation of a new data insight function.

The VKPP are currently hosted by Norfolk Constabulary but will be moving to the College of Policing from April 2024. This will strengthen the collective offer to policing and wider partnerships and help build the capabilities needed to meet future demand.

To find out more about the VKPP's work and to see our other publications and resources visit www.vkpp.org.uk