Police disruption of child sexual abuse: Findings from a national survey of frontline personnel and strategic leads for safeguarding

December 2021

Nadia Wager, Alexandra Myers and Diana Parkinson

csacentre.org.uk

Acknowledgements

About the authors

Dr Nadia Wager is Director of the None in Three Research Centre for the Global Prevention of Gender-based Violence, and Reader in Forensic Psychology at the University of Huddersfield. She specialises in sexual victimisation, particularly child sexual abuse in terms of prevention, service evaluation and the implications for acquiring justice.

Alexandra Myers is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Psychology, University of Huddersfield. Alexandra's thesis explores the disruption of child sexual abuse and exploitation within a policing context.

Dr Diana Parkinson is a senior research and evaluation officer at the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse.

About the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse

The Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse wants children to be able to live free from the threat and harm of sexual abuse. Its aim is to reduce the impact of this abuse through improved prevention and better response.

We are a multi-disciplinary team, funded by the Home Office and hosted by Barnardo's, working closely with key partners from academic institutions, local authorities, health, education, police and the voluntary sector in Wales and England. However, we are independent and will challenge any barriers, assumptions, taboos and ways of working that prevent us from increasing our understanding and improving our approach to child sexual abuse.

To tackle child sexual abuse, we must understand its causes, scope, scale and impact. We know a lot about child sexual abuse and have made progress in dealing with it, but there are still many gaps in our knowledge and understanding which limit how effectively the issue is tackled.

This report is published alongside the linked research study, *Police Disruption of Child Sexual Abuse: A Scoping Review.*

Contents

Executive summary

This research study was commissioned by the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre) to explore the ways in which police forces across England and Wales seek to disrupt child sexual abuse.

Disruption, alongside enforcement and prevention, is one of the principal ways in which police respond to criminality and criminal activity. While enforcement focuses on the prosecution of past crimes, and prevention aims to stop whole groups of suspects or protect potential victims, disruption is a more flexible and dynamic approach which seeks to disrupt offenders' networks, lifestyles, and routines so that it is harder for them to commit crime.

Disrupting child sexual abuse is a vital activity because most incidents of such abuse are never reported to or discovered by the police – meaning that many individuals who sexually abuse children remain at liberty to commit further abuse. Disruption measures have the potential to swiftly interrupt contact between a suspect and a child or young person, and to help stop further abuse in the longer term. Increased disruption activity is key to the UK Government's strategy for tackling child sexual abuse.

This study considers there to be three fundamental approaches to disruption: **direct** measures which impose legal sanctions on offenders; **disruption-supportive** measures which disable or disrupt criminal activity taking place in the community; and **online** measures which disrupt criminal activity taking place or being facilitated online.

However, we know little about current practice in disrupting child sexual abuse, or the extent to which different measures are effective. The aim of this research was, therefore, to identify and better understand current practice, challenges and enablers in disrupting child sexual abuse, from both frontline and strategic perspectives within policing. The researchers focused on child sexual abuse in all its forms, and considered child sexual exploitation as a form of child sexual abuse.

The study involved the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data from two online surveys, of frontline police personnel (e.g. uniformed response officers, public enquiry desk staff) and strategic leads for safeguarding (primarily Chief Inspectors and Superintendents) in police force areas across England and Wales.

The survey of frontline police received 754 responses from police officers and staff across 32 different forces, although only around half of these provided information on the kinds of disruption activities they had been involved in. The survey of strategic leads received 38 responses from strategic leads across 20 different police forces.

> Disruption, alongside enforcement and prevention, is one of the principal ways in which police respond to criminal activity.

Key findings

Knowledge and understanding of child sexual abuse and activity to disrupt it

Nearly three-quarters of the surveyed frontline police officers and staff said they had received some training in relation to child sexual abuse, although none of this training had focused on disruption. More than a quarter said they had never received any such training, however, and some respondents in specialist roles expressed concern that their job titles implied they were specialists in child sexual abuse when they had received no training or only generic training.

While more than a third of frontline survey respondents felt that their training around child sexual abuse was sufficient to support them in their role, one in five said they would value training, or additional training, in this area. In addition, four-fifths of the strategic leads surveyed said they would like to see changes to the current training provision around child sexual abuse. Gaps in the knowledge of frontline personnel were identified in relation to recognising the signs and indicators of child sexual abuse, understanding the contexts of that abuse, and communicating with and supporting victims and their families.

Many frontline personnel felt they lacked knowledge, training and guidance to support the disruption of child sexual abuse. Respondents to both surveys expressed a range of views on the approach to take to disruption, and on the focus of disruption activities.

Use of measures to disrupt child sexual abuse

Among the 407 frontline personnel answering a question about their experience of disruption, two-thirds said they had been involved in disrupting child sexual abuse at some point in their policing career. Detective Inspectors and members of safeguarding teams were significantly more likely than others to report having been involved in disruption activities.

Frontline survey respondents indicated that they had used disruption measures principally against group- or gang-perpetrated child sexual abuse, online image-related offences, intra-familial child sexual abuse and abuse by other under-18s.

The table overleaf shows the measures most commonly said to be used by frontline respondents in relation to specific forms of child sexual abuse.

Direct measures perceived by survey respondents to be particularly effective in disrupting child sexual abuse included child abduction warning notices, sexual risk orders and sexual harm prevention orders, and police powers of protection.

Respondents also considered some disruption-supportive measures to be effective in relation to child sexual abuse. These included automatic number plate recognition, tags and markers; business-related disruption strategies, community interventions (including targeting of 'hotspots' and awareness-raising campaigns); and maintaining contact with victims.

Carrying out online searches, infiltrating online spaces, and seizing/scrutinising mobile phones and other devices were thought effective in disrupting child sexual abuse online.

> **Most strategic leads for safeguarding said they would like to see changes to the current training provision around child sexual abuse.**

Disruption measures most commonly said to be used by frontline personnel

Form of child sexual abuse	Disruption measure	Disruption approach
Group- or gang-perpetrated abuse	Child Abduction Warning Notices	Direct
	Automatic number plate recognition	Disruption-supportive
	CCTV	Disruption-supportive
	Police National Computer markers	Disruption-supportive
	Risk flagging (of vehicles, property or people	Disruption-supportive
Online image-related offences	Sexual harm prevention orders	Direct
	Absolute grounds for possession	Disruption-supportive
	Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme	Disruption-supportive
	Management of registered sex offenders	Disruption-supportive
	Device scrutiny (Child Abuse Images Database)	Online
	Mobile phone scrutiny (Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act/Investigatory Powers Act)	Online
Intra-familial abuse	Police powers of protection	Direct
	Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme	Disruption-supportive
Abuse by other under-18s	Child abduction warning notices	Direct

Actions at tactical level to support the disruption of child sexual abuse

Prioritisation of child sexual abuse in daily tasking

The effective disruption of child sexual abuse can be supported if such abuse is given priority in daily tasking of frontline officers and staff. Of the 468 frontline survey respondents expressing a view, nearly two-thirds reported that child sexual abuse was given high priority in daily tasking. However, only a quarter of strategic leads said that child sexual abuse disruption activities always featured in daily tasking, and one in 10 responded that it never featured.

Respondents explained that briefings for frontline personnel (such as Neighbourhood Policing Teams) might, for example, include details of premises and individuals identified for disruption as well as orders and notices served on specific individuals.

Problem profiling

Half of the strategic leads surveyed reported that their force produced problem profiles – police intelligence products providing detail on local patterns in crime or hotspots – around child sexual abuse, and several others stated that plans were in place to produce them in the near future. While the value of problem profiles was recognised by strategic leads, only a minority said they were updated at least annually, and they were typically used in relation to child sexual exploitation rather than other forms of child sexual abuse.

Consideration of child sexual abuse when officers attend other offences

Frontline survey respondents said they commonly considered whether child sexual abuse might be taking place when responding to situations involving human trafficking, children going missing from home, female genital mutilation, county lines and child neglect – but were far less likely to do so when responding to drink driving/road traffic offences, serious acquisitive crime and antisocial behaviour, despite research showing links between child sexual abuse and these other types of offence.

Within-force information sharing

Frontline personnel highlighted the importance of teams' sharing information about children at risk (in missing person investigations, for example) and suspected offenders, to support the disruption of child sexual abuse. Some suggested that access to information held by other teams could be improved, calling for an end to specialist departments' "silo-ed working practices" and easier access to information held in different geographical locations.

Management of criminal and civil orders and notices

For the use of criminal and civil orders and notices to be effective in disrupting child sexual abuse, they need to be monitored and enforced following a breach, and frontline personnel need to know about them. Of the 467 respondents to the frontline survey answering a question about the issuance of orders and notices, two-fifths said they did not know where this information was recorded. There was a wide divergence of opinion about who was responsible for monitoring adherence to civil and criminal orders and notices, with some respondents to both surveys expressing concern that issued orders were not always monitored.

While information on orders should be immediately accessible, frontline personnel indicated that they might learn of a breach of an order from various sources, including specialist departments (e.g. public protection), their line manager, the probation service, the youth offending team or the custody team. Many said they would hear about it from the victim.

Actions at strategic level to support the disruption of child sexual abuse

Establishing dedicated teams or individuals

Several strategic leads identified that their forces had specialist teams – e.g. a CSE Disruption Team, a Missing from Home team, a dedicated Police Protection Unit and Child Abuse team, or dedicated exploitation teams in local policing – or individual officers leading on identifying and responding to child sexual abuse.

Guidance and training for officers and staff

As noted above, the frontline survey highlighted many gaps in respondents' self-reported knowledge around child sexual abuse and its disruption. Respondents to both surveys called for more training and guidance around disruption; with many stressing the importance of keeping training regularly updated and offering officers refresher sessions.

Taking a strategic, proactive approach to disruption

Some frontline respondents felt that their forces took a reactive approach to child sexual abuse, driven by a risk-averse culture in relation to such abuse. Both strategic leads and frontline personnel felt that some forces needed to place more value on policing child sexual abuse, and recognise the overlaps between different types of child sexual abuse and other forms of abuse.

Examples of good practice were offered, such as efforts to develop an intelligence picture across an entire police region.

Allocating sufficient capacity for disruption activities

Respondents to both surveys stressed the need for officers to have sufficient time and resources to support the disruption of child sexual abuse, but many noted that their forces' capacity for this work had been reduced.

Some argued for general increases in staffing to improve forces' capacity to disrupt child sexual abuse, particularly in light of increases in offending.

Developing disruption-supportive resources

Strategic leads cited a range of resources that have been developed, including CSE disruption toolkits (setting out tactics to disrupt abusive activity) and a School Uniform Database (giving officers the opportunity to identify victims in child sexual abuse images where uniform is evident).

Multi-agency working and information-sharing

Several strategic leads explained that they had co-located teams or individuals to work within social care and health services, or that they worked with other agencies to review cases. Some mentioned being part of Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) groups which were identifying opportunities to disrupt offending.

While partnership working could present logistical challenges, it was felt to allow for effective engagement with victims and their families. Issues were raised around communication and information-sharing by some agencies.

Monitoring and evaluating disruption activities

More than half of the 38 strategic leads provided examples of information collected by their forces in order to monitor efforts to disrupt child sexual abuse. The data collected covered activities including the issuance of notices and orders, the use of disruption-supportive measures such as flags and trackers, and safeguarding referrals. However, nine strategic leads said they did not know whether their force collected any data in relation to disrupting child sexual abuse, or that no data was collected.

Fourteen strategic leads identified efforts by their forces to assess the effectiveness of their disruption activities; this typically involved audits or case reviews, but one described covert checks at hotels to see whether staff were using the training they had received from police to prevent child sexual exploitation.

Concerns about evaluating the effectiveness of disruption activities were raised, however. Some frontline respondents suggested that disruption measures often secured only short-term gains, with longer-term outcomes remaining largely unknown. Strategic leads argued that it was wrong to equate success with arrests, since disruption should be a proactive strategy intended to prevent further abuse.

Developing and sharing good practice within and across forces

Strategic leads identified some initiatives to develop and share good practice around the disruption of child sexual abuse; these included regular child protection supervision sessions across three divisions, use of an independent de-brief service, and informal peer reviews by teams from different forces.

Suggestions for wider change

A few respondents suggested improvements to the disruption of child sexual abuse which are beyond the scope of individual police forces to implement.

These included the development of joined-up problem profiles across forces to respond to cross-border child sexual abuse (which would require the involvement of regional organised crime units), a role for the College of Policing in driving improvement at a strategic level, changes to the way in which other agencies operate, and greater police powers in relation to disruption.

> "Respondents stressed that disruption activity requires time and resources, but many said their forces' capacity for this work had been reduced."

Implications

The research suggests that, while there is evidence of disruption measures being used by the police to tackle certain forms of child sexual abuse, broader knowledge of how all forms of child sexual abuse can be disrupted is often lacking. Addressing this will require improved and consistent training for all personnel, together with the development of a disruption strategy that:

‣ prioritises child sexual abuse – in all its contexts (e.g. including intra-familial abuse and abuse by under-18s) – and its disruption

‣ enables disruption measures (or a combination of them) to be matched to individual cases in different contexts, maximising the efficacy of disruption activity

‣ encourages cooperation between policing and other organisations, including voluntary-sector and community-based organisations – for example, by ensuring the confidentiality of shared information.

In addition to training, frontline personnel must have access to accessible materials offering clear definitions, rationale and case examples that demonstrate effective disruption practice.

Given the complexities of responding to child sexual abuse, there must be wider recognition – as this study suggests there already is within policing – that disruption is a multi-agency effort which relies on working together and sharing information. A consistent approach to disruption practice must be embedded across the multi-agency team, including the judiciary, through guidance and training. And improved systems are needed for cooperation on disruption activity across forces and other agencies.

Improving disruption will also require a focus at a strategic leadership level on supporting local forces to understand the importance of disruption and their role in implementing strategies that can support it. In addition, further research into other perspectives on disruption, including those of multi-agency partners and people with lived experience, would bring new insights and, no doubt, new thinking.

> There needs to be a focus at a strategic leadership level on supporting local forces to understand the importance of disruption.

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings from research commissioned by the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre) into the ways in which police forces across England and Wales seek to disrupt child sexual abuse.

1.1 What is child sexual abuse?

This research draws on the UK Government's definitions of child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation:[1]

"[Child sexual abuse] involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children." (Department for Education, 2018:107)

"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." (Department for Education, 2018:107)

In line with the above definitions, this report considers child sexual exploitation to fall within the broader category of child sexual abuse. It should be noted, however, that some consider all child sexual abuse to be exploitative, while others use the two terms interchangeably. In practice, it has been difficult to delineate the boundaries between child sexual exploitation and other forms of child sexual abuse, leading to inconsistencies in how definitions are applied (Karsna and Kelly, 2021); these intersections can also be difficult to disentangle operationally.

This research study focuses on child sexual abuse in all its forms, including child sexual exploitation; we use the term 'child sexual exploitation' only in contexts where participants in the study made specific reference to this form of child sexual abuse.

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1. These definitions are used in England; the definitions used in Wales are different, particularly in relation to child sexual exploitation (Welsh Government, 2019).

1.2 What is disruption?

Disruption, alongside enforcement and prevention, is one of the principal ways in which police respond to criminality and criminal activity (Tilley, 2009). Enforcement is reactive and focuses on the prosecution of past crimes, while prevention is future-oriented and aims to stop whole groups of suspects or protect potential victims. On the other hand, disruption is:

> "...a more flexible, transitory, and dynamic tactic, which can be used more generally to make the environment hostile… by disrupting the offender's networks, lifestyles, and routines." (Kirby and Penna, 2010:205)

In practice, categorisation is less precise, and some policing strategies contain elements that relate to more than one mode of responding. However, these three categories help to situate police disruption within the wider context of the societal response to child sexual abuse.

There are three fundamental approaches to disruption:

- The first approach involves **direct measures** to impose legal sanctions on suspects/offenders, which make it more difficult for them to commit or continue to commit child sexual abuse.

- The second involves **disruption-supportive measures** to disable or disrupt criminal activity taking place in the community.

- A third category involves **online measures** to disrupt criminal activity taking place or being facilitated over the internet.

Some measures may fit within more than one of these approaches. A list of disruption measures can be found in Appendix A.

1.3 Why is disruption important?

Most child sexual abuse remains hidden and is never reported to, or discovered by, the police or other statutory agencies. Prevalence studies in England and Wales suggest that some 15% of girls/young women and 5% of boys/young men experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 16; estimates vary according to the studies' methods, the number of questions they ask and the way in which they define child sexual abuse (Karsna and Kelly, 2021). Some groups in particular, including young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, are also thought to be underrepresented in this data.

Convictions for child sexual abuse are rare, however. Police-published outcome data indicates that, among child sexual abuse offences recorded in the year ending March 2020 and reaching an outcome by October that year, charges were laid in relation to just 10% of offences in England and 14% in Wales (Karsna and Kelly, 2021).[2]

> Disruption measures have the potential to swiftly interrupt contact between a suspect and a child, and to help stop further abuse.

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2. Crime outcome data continues to be updated and revised in future data releases by the Home Office, and the charge rate for this period may therefore change in subsequent data releases.

As a result, many individuals who sexually abuse children remain at liberty to commit further abuse. Efforts to disrupt their activities are therefore vital, particularly as disruption measures have the potential to swiftly interrupt contact between a suspect and a child or young person, and to help stop further abuse in the longer term (Jago et al, 2011).

The UK Government's recently published strategy for tackling child sexual abuse calls for "relentless disruption and targeted action against the highest harm serious and organised criminal networks" (Home Office, 2021:11) and lists the following among its 'measures for improvement'

> "There will be an increasing number of disruptions leading to a reduction in the overall threat of child sexual abuse, as evidenced by assessed intelligence reporting." (Home Office, 2021:36)

However, little is known about current practice or the extent to which different measures are effective. This study offers the first exploration of police perspectives on using disruption measures in response to child sexual abuse.

1.4 This research

The overall aim of this research was to identify and better understand current practice, challenges and enablers in disrupting child sexual abuse, from the perspectives of both frontline police and strategic leads for safeguarding.[3] The specific objectives were to:

‣ identify what disruption measures have been used by police forces

‣ explore the perceived effectiveness of disruptive interventions in protecting children and/or preventing or making it more difficult for suspects to commit child sexual abuse

‣ identify good practice in implementing disruption measures, and potential barriers to that implementation

‣ highlight gaps in current practice and policy.

The research consisted of discussion groups with 98 police personnel (frontline officers and staff), and two online surveys informed by those discussion groups: one of frontline personnel, and the other of strategic leads for safeguarding. Chapter 2 sets out how the discussion groups and surveys were conducted.

Prior to the discussion groups and surveys, a scoping review of the published literature on disruption of child sexual abuse was carried out; a report summarising this literature has been published separately (Wager and Parkinson, 2021).

1.5 This report

This report focuses on the findings of the surveys, supplemented by additional data from the discussion groups. It discusses the use of different disruption measures, their perceived effectiveness, and strategic and tactical actions that police forces can take to support their use.

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3. Strategic leads for safeguarding manage forces' day-to-day performance and responsibilities for Public Protection and Safeguarding. These responsibilities include (but are not limited to) making decisions around staffing levels on duty at any one time, as well as local decisions around complex investigations.

2. Method

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, involving the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data through:

- a series of discussion groups with 98 police personnel (officers and staff) from four police regions in England and Wales

- two anonymous, online surveys distributed to frontline police personnel and strategic leads for safeguarding.

2.1 Data collection

2.1.1 The discussion groups

To inform the development of the surveys and increase the researchers' understanding of police practice in relation to the disruption of child sexual abuse, the CSA Centre's practice improvement advisor for policing held a series of discussion groups with 98 frontline police officers and staff from four police regions in England and Wales.

In response to a request from the practice improvement advisor, the discussion groups were set up by the Detective Superintendents managing the public protection/safeguarding portfolios within the relevant force areas. This included asking for volunteers to participate in the groups. Table 1 shows the police forces and regions in which the discussion groups took place.

The discussions, which were unstructured to allow participants' views to surface freely, lasted between 90 minutes and two hours. They were not audio-recorded, but the practice improvement advisor made notes during the sessions.

> "The discussions informed the development of the surveys and increased the researchers' understanding of police practice."

Table 1. Discussion group participants

Police region	Force/team	No. of participants
Eastern region	Cambridgeshire	29
North East, Yorkshire and Humber	Yorkshire & Humber Regional Organised Crime Unit	15
North West	Lancashire	9
	Cumbria	17
	NCA/CEOP North West	2
South West and Wales	Gwent	15
	South Wales	11
Total		**98**

2.1.2 The surveys

Designing the survey questionnaires was an iterative process conducted by the researchers in consultation with staff from the CSA Centre; it also involved a pre-pilot with policing experts in the area of child sexual abuse, and a piloting stage with one police force.

It was clear from the discussion groups that some police personnel would have a lot to say about child sexual abuse and its disruption. The questionnaires used in both surveys therefore consisted of a mixture of free-text and fixed-choice response options, enabling both qualitative and quantitative data to be captured. They were hosted on an online platform, Qualtrics, which conforms to the requirements of the Data Protection Act and the General Data Protection Regulation.

Stratified sampling was not used, because of the resource demands this would have placed on police forces. Instead, it was decided to distribute the surveys to the whole population, i.e. all frontline police officers/staff and strategic leads for safeguarding across the 43 police forces in England and Wales. To promote recruitment, a named contact in each force was asked to send email invitations to all their frontline officers/staff and strategic leads for safeguarding. The surveys were open for a period of three months, to allow participation from as many people as possible.

2.1.2.1 Response to the survey of frontline police personnel

More than 1,000 people accessed the survey for frontline officers and staff. After blank responses were removed, there were 757 responses. Three of these were subsequently found to be from strategic leads and were moved to the strategic leads survey, leaving an initial total of 754 respondents from 32 forces across all eight police regions in England and Wales (see Table 2 and Appendix B).

Table 3 shows the job roles/titles of the survey respondents.

Table 2. Frontline survey respondents by police region

Police region	No. of respondents	No. of forces represented
Eastern	137 (18%)	5 (of 6)
London	99 (13%)	1 (of 2)
North East and Yorkshire	125 (17%)	4 (of 7)
North West	136 (18%)	5 (of 6)
South East	139 (18%)	4 (of 5)
South West and Wales	74 (10%)	6 (of 8)
West and East Midlands	38 (5%)	7 (of 9)
Not known	6 (1%)	
Total	**754**	**98**

Table 3. Frontline survey respondents by job role/title

Police region	No. of forces represented
Safeguarding team	241 (32%)
Uniformed response	156 (21%)
Plain clothed response	113 (15%)
Neighbourhood policing	80 (11%)
Police staff	55 (7%)
Intelligence/research	48 (6%)
Detective Inspector	29 (4%)
Community support	27 (4%)
Other	5 (1%)
Total	**754**

> "The surveys were distributed to all frontline police officers/staff and strategic leads for safeguarding across the 43 forces in England and Wales."

Many of these respondents did not complete the full survey, however. As Figure 1 shows, while all 754 respondents answered an initial question about training on child sexual abuse, only 468 responded when asked about the priority given to child sexual abuse in daily tasking, a slightly smaller number (n=407) went on to say whether they had any experience of disruption activities, and three-fifths of these (n=238) provided information on the kinds of disruption activities they had been involved in.

2.1.2.2 Response to the survey of strategic leads

The survey of strategic leads for safeguarding was accessed by 117 personnel. Following the removal of responses that were blank or from people clearly not in a strategic lead role, analysis was carried out of 38 completed or partially completed surveys (including the three responses to the frontline survey), representing 20 forces across seven police regions in England and Wales (see Table 4 and Appendix B). Most of these respondents held the rank of Chief Inspector or Superintendent (see Table 5), and all had responsibility for providing strategic leadership in their force's response to child sexual abuse.

Table 4. Strategic lead survey respondents by police region

Police region	No. of respondents	No. of forces represented
Eastern	2	2 (of 6)
London	1	1 (of 2)
North East and Yorkshire	5	3 (of 7)
North West	14	4 (of 6)
South East	2	2 (of 5)
South West and Wales	5	3 (of 8)
West and East Midlands	9	5 (of 9)
Total	**38**	**20 (of 43)**

Table 5. Strategic lead survey respondents by rank/role

Rank/role	No. of respondents
Chief Inspector	20
Superintendent	14
Chief Superintendent	2
Assistant Chief Constable or Assistant Commissioner	1
Force lead for vulnerability and safeguarding	1
Total	**38**

Figure 1. Points of attrition

754 responses ▸ Have you ever received training around child sexual abuse?

468 responses ▸ What priority is given to child sexual abuse in daily tasking?

407 responses ▸ Have you been involved in disruption activities?

238 responses ▸ What kinds of disruption activities have you been involved in?

2.2 Analysis

Quantitative data from the surveys was downloaded from Qualtrics and imported into SPSS, a software package that supports statistical analysis. This enabled frequency tests and chi-square tests to be carried out on the data.

Qualitative data from the discussion groups and the questionnaires was imported into NVivo, a software programme that facilitates the coding of text. Thematic analysis was then used to code the qualitative data into common themes, i.e. topics and ideas that came up repeatedly, and to structure and organise those themes.

The results from both analyses were then integrated so that the evaluation would report on both the qualitative and the quantitative data.

2.3 Ethics

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the University of Huddersfield.

All discussion group participants and survey respondents participated voluntarily and maintained their right to withdraw their data. They were informed that, if they decided to withdraw, any notes about or information supplied by them would be destroyed and would not appear in the final report. They also had the right to request their data from the research team under data protection laws.

In the report, all quotations have been anonymised and identified solely by source:

- FL for responses to the survey of frontline officers/staff
- SL for responses to the survey of strategic leads.
- DG for discussion group comments.

2.4 Limitations of the research

The limitations of this study include the following:

- Key contacts in each police force were relied on to send all frontline personnel the invitation to complete the frontline survey; instead, it appears that the invitation was often sent to selective teams. As a result, some individuals may never have received the invitation to take part in the research, and their views and experiences are therefore not necessarily reflected in the study findings.

- In some instances, an invitation to complete the survey for strategic leads was distributed to frontline personnel, meaning that some respondents inadvertently completed the wrong survey and their responses had to be excluded from the analysis.

- Using self-selecting samples for both the discussion groups and the surveys meant that the individuals who took part in this research were more likely to have strong views about the research topic.

- The design of this research study focused solely on exploring police perspectives of disruption; other perspectives, such as those of multi-agency partners who could provide an external perspective on police-led disruption activities, were not within the scope of this research.

- Diminishing numbers of respondents completed the later sections of the frontline survey, meaning that the data provided in relation to some key aspects of the survey was limited.

It should therefore be understood that the findings reported here cannot be viewed as representing the views and experiences of all police officers and police forces.

3. Police knowledge and understanding around child sexual abuse

This chapter explores the survey findings in relation to the training received by frontline police personnel and strategic leads for safeguarding in relation to child sexual abuse, the knowledge they have derived from that training, and gaps in their knowledge.

3.1 Training received by frontline police

Figure 2 shows that, of the 754 frontline survey respondents, nearly three-quarters (71%, n=533) said they had received training around child sexual abuse in their current role and/or a previous role – but more than a quarter (29%, n=221) said that they had never received any training on the subject.

There was a statistically significant difference in experiences between respondents in different job roles, with uniformed personnel least likely to report having received training in relation to child sexual abuse.

Among the 403 respondents who had received training related to child sexual abuse and who provided information about it, the vast majority said they had attended multiple training courses on the subject (see Figure 3). However, none of the courses described was focused specifically on disruption.

The topics most commonly covered in the training attended by those 403 frontline respondents were:

▸ child sexual exploitation (76%, n=308)

▸ sexual offences (68%, n=273)

▸ modern slavery (63%, n=253)

▸ public protection initial response (53%, n=213).

3.2 Training received by strategic leads

Almost three-quarters of the 38 strategic leads (n=29) reported that they had received some training in relation to child sexual abuse, although two of these said the training had been very limited. The other nine strategic leads said they had not received any specific training around child sexual abuse, although some made it clear that they had gained expertise through their work:

> "No formal training but I have completed a lot of development work as member of combined adult child safeguarding board and executive." (SL)

Of those who had received training, eight had completed the Specialist Child Abuse Investigation Development Programme (SCAIDP), a five-day course aimed at developing investigators working within the child abuse investigation arena; one had undertaken a Master's Degree specifically related to child sexual exploitation; and others described training in a variety of formats and on a range of topics. One summarised their training as follows:

> "Numerous CPD events, including training on CSE, [child criminal exploitation], County Lines, online offending, grooming, contextual safeguarding, transitions, CSE & [Missing From Home], trauma and sexualized trauma, [National Referral Mechanism] Training, language and culture, cyber and digital investigation, human trafficking - modern slavery, CEOP [Child Exploitation and Online Protection]." (SL)

Figure 2. Frontline survey respondents' experience of training on child sexual abuse

- 221 — Training in previous role(s) only
- 347 — Not had any training
- 126 — Training on current role only
- 60 — Training in both current and previous roles

Legend:
- Training on current role only
- Training in both current and previous roles
- Training in previous role(s) only
- Not had any training
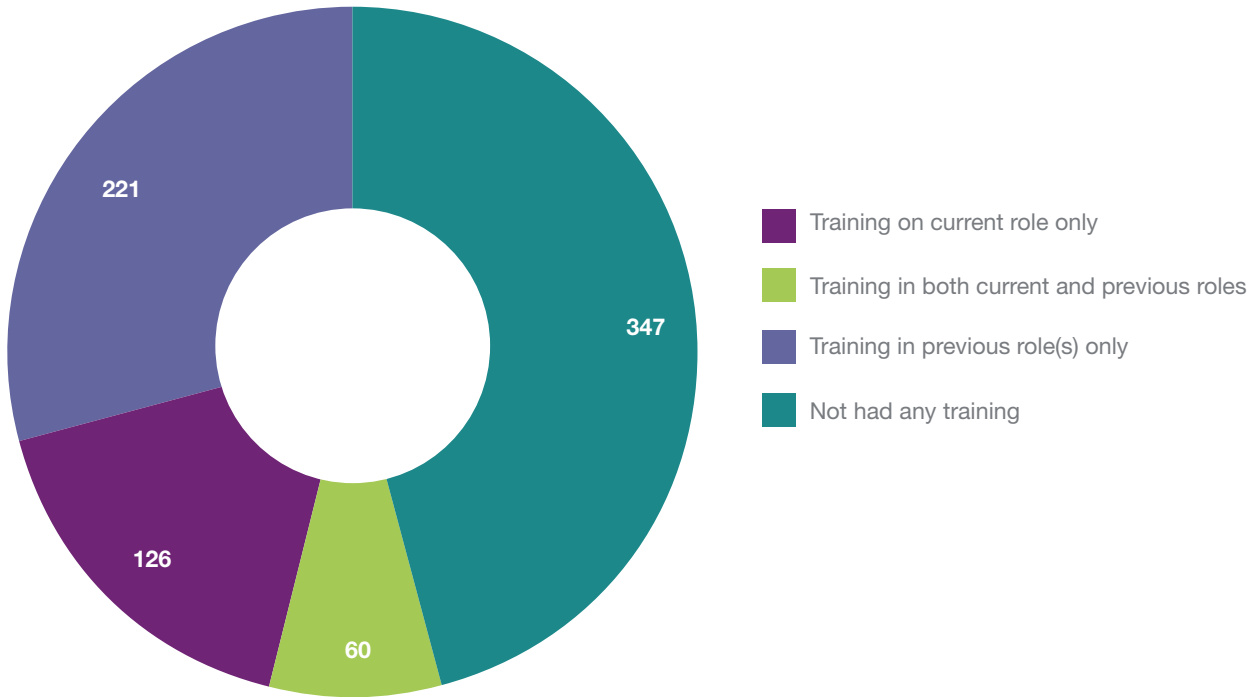
Source: Survey of frontline police; n=754 respondents answering this question.

Figure 3. Amount of training on child sexual abuse received by frontline survey respondents

Number of fronmtline respondents (y-axis)
Number of training courses attended (x-axis)

Courses	Respondents
1	25
2	46
3	39
4	62
5	47
6	36
7	32
8	34
9	22
10	20
11	11
12	8
13+	21
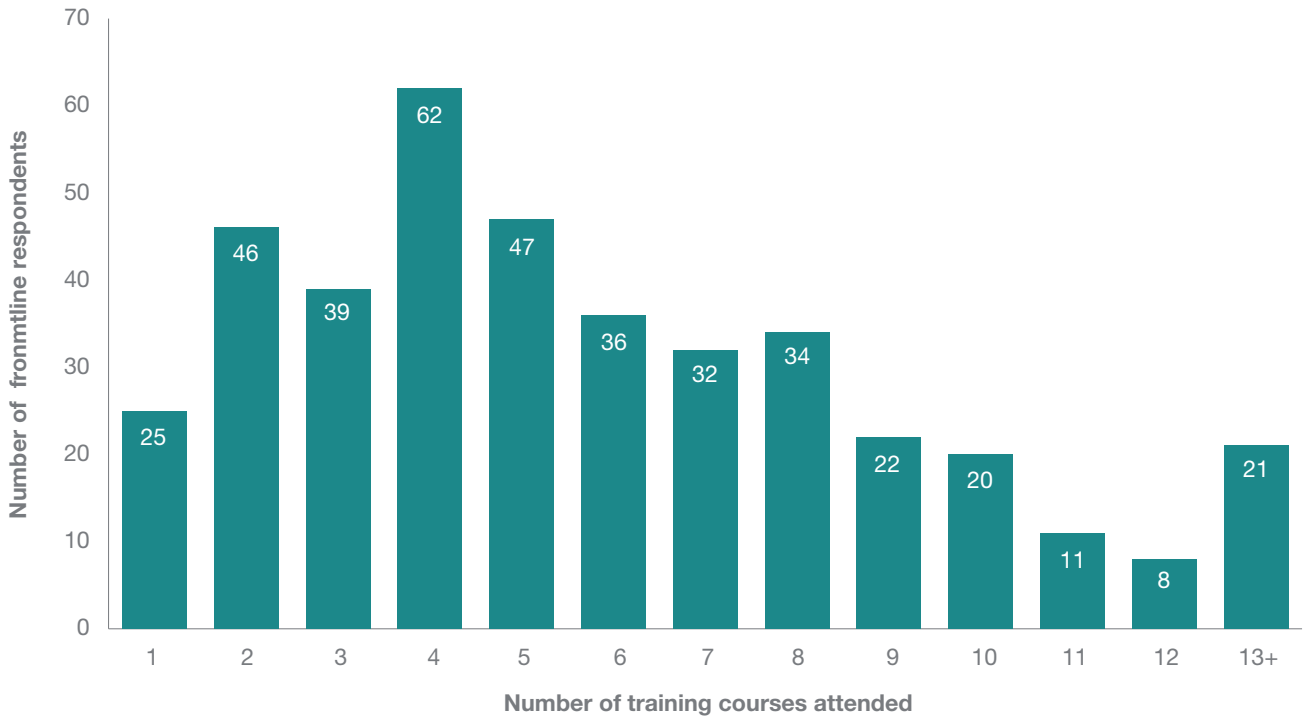
Source: Survey of frontline police; n=403 respondents answering this question. A further 130 respondents indicated that they had received training but did not provide any details.

3.3 Perceived gaps in knowledge

Overall, more than a third (35%, n=261) of the 754 frontline survey respondents felt that they had undertaken sufficient training around child sexual abuse to support them in their role – but one in five (n=157) indicated that they would value receiving training, or additional training, in this area.

In addition, four-fifths (n=31) of the 38 strategic leads said they would like to see changes to the current training provision around child sexual abuse.

3.3.1 Recognising the signs of child sexual abuse

Strategic leads emphasised the importance of training frontline personnel in investigating concerns of child sexual abuse, as they were often the first responders:

> "Training provision should be provided to all staff to recognise the signs of sexual abuse and the impact on the victims." (SL)

Some frontline officers agreed that they needed such training:

> "Regular training [on child sexual abuse] to ensure that it is at the forefront of officers' minds when dealing with any situation." (FL)

> "Frontline officers do not always have enough knowledge or training in identifying the ranges of child abuse – and if they do identify it, they do not always have the tools needed to deal with it." (FL)

One strategic lead highlighted the value of training for all officers in "early identification of the signs of potential child sexual abuse and the confidence of officers in talking with children" (see section 3.3.3). Others felt that training on online offending and on understanding perpetrator behaviour would be particularly useful.

A number of frontline survey respondents in specialist roles expressed concern that their job titles implied an expertise in child sexual abuse when, in reality, they had received only generic training or no training at all. For example, some had only 'on the job' experience rather than specialist training despite working on sensitive and complex cases, particularly when taking on roles in Child Protection Units.

> "I am a 'Specialist Safeguarding Investigator' in CID [Criminal Investigation Department] but have only completed the SCAIDP course in addition to the initial CID course, so not much 'specialist' training." (FL)

> "I was a Child Protection Officer and when I joined the team it was very much 'learn on the job'. When the Child Protection Department was merged with other specialisms and became SIU [Sensitive Intelligence Unit], I was never offered any training and was refused training … I supposedly didn't need the training because of 'grandfather' rights."[4] (FL)

> ❝ One in five frontline personnel in the survey said they would value receiving training, or additional training, around child sexual abuse. ❞

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4. "Grandfather rights" is a term used in the police service to refer to someone who has been doing the job for long enough that they do not need to complete recently introduced training in order to show qualification.

3.3.2 Understanding the contexts of child sexual abuse

The need for training on the contexts of child sexual abuse was highlighted by a number of frontline survey respondents who referred to a lack of compassion for victims of child sexual abuse among some officers, and a tendency towards victim-blaming:

> "There is a clear lack of education on CSE, and when it is flagged up, experienced detectives … show no real compassion or open mind to consider that such a subject would possibly be incorporated or be at the point of their investigation. In some cases, I have witnessed extreme laziness and for officers to take an easy way out of a subject that they are not confident in and, in other cases, … that the officers literally cannot be bothered due to presumption that victims must have brought circumstances upon themselves. I am sorry to say this is the case but it is the truth." (FL)

Indeed, some responses to questions in the surveys indicated that the respondents themselves would benefit from training in this regard; a number appeared to feel that children might be complicit in the commission of child sexual abuse or have agency in protecting themselves, making reference to needing to educate children and young people to 'recognise risks', 'avoid risk-taking' and 'keep themselves safe'.

Additionally, a few respondents problematised children who were at risk of sexual abuse:

> "I feel as a community we guard against it as best we can, however just like bullying, you are never going to totally prevent it. It would be good if we could have greater powers to deal with children who are clearly on a downward spiral." (FL)

> "A child should rightly be treated as a victim and given the full support they need, but when they reach the point of committing more crime without disclosing why or seeking help, then this is where support must turn to enforcement." (FL)

Another issue, raised by participants in one of the discussion groups, was that officers tended to see sexual abuse by other under-18s as low-level offending – even though, as one participant noted, "some offenders may be linked to sharing of images, and they might also be abusing in other more serious ways" (DG).

3.3.3 Communicating with and supporting victims and their families

Some frontline respondents suggested that the training provided did not sufficiently equip officers to communicate with children and support victims and families:

> "I have worked in Domestic Abuse, and had some training for this, but it was limited as far as dealing with children as victims was concerned. I have also worked in child protection, but did not receive any specific training in relation to this." (FL)

> "I think we should be properly taught how to speak with the children, to use the most effective way of obtaining a disclosure. Right from the off, we may have been on one joint visit to a child with an experienced officer. We are then left to wing it and hope for the best!" (FL)

> "We have no training on how to speak to children who may be hiding this sort of crime and hiding the fact that they are victim to it. It is very difficult for a child to open up about this sort of thing so training on how to approach the subject and allow the child to feel comfortable enough to disclose information to us would be beneficial to disrupting it and preventing it." (FL)

This was echoed by one of the strategic leads:

> "As officers become more and more exposed to child sexual abuse, they need to have the right skills and knowledge to support the victims and families from the initial disclosure." (SL)

4. Police understanding of disruption in relation to child sexual abuse

In the surveys of frontline police and strategic leads, respondents were asked to explain what the term 'disruption' meant to them in relation to child sexual abuse, and what activities it might involve. Their answers revealed how the term appears to embrace different aspects of policing.

4.1 The focus of disruption activity

For some respondents, disruption involved a focus on individuals suspected to be sexually abusing children:

> "Contacting suspects and engaging with them, showing a presence to distract them away from committing further offences." (FL)

> "Causing disruption to the daily activity of the perpetrator by daily visits, gathering intel etc." (FL)

> "Identifying potential suspects and putting in place measures to limit their opportunities to offend." (SL)

Such activities might involve using alternative measures, such as carrying out a 'stop and check' for a minor traffic offence, to ensure that they were prevented from committing further sexual offences against children.

Another view was that disruption could involve a focus on potential victims:

> "Preventing children being groomed or exploited in licensed premises and hotels." (FL)

> "Trying to engage with children to encourage them to disclose any abuse." (FL)

> "Removing the child from the abusive situation." (FL)

Child sexual exploitation was often explicitly referenced or implied in respondents' definitions of disruption:

> "Disruption refers almost wholly to street/ out-of-home sexual abuse/exploitation." (FL)

> "[Disruption] has focused around the [child sexual exploitation] agenda rather than intra-familial abuse. This has focused on tackling offenders and locations through disruption tactics, which have ranged from civil orders/ prosecution for alternative offences/ working to use partners' powers to disrupt perpetrator activity." (SL)

Disruption was only occasionally perceived as relevant to intra-familial child sexual abuse:

> "In the home, [disruption] could mean appropriate intervention and safeguarding measures." (FL)

There was also evidence of a lack of awareness and understanding of disruption among some frontline personnel:

> "Just googled it. Not sure I've heard of it before." (FL)

> "Not heard of this term in relation to child sexual abuse." (FL)

> The survey responses indicated a lack of awareness and understanding of disruption among some frontline personnel.

4.2 Approaches to disruption

Disruption was perceived by different survey respondents to be either reactive or proactive:

> "Proactive action by police to prevent child sexual abuse by taking positive action against offenders and suspects." (FL)

> "Disruption would be a tactic of possibly intervening with suspects. It is a reactive approach to a problem." (FL)

Some considered that it might involve applying a questioning approach to situations where child sexual abuse was not immediately apparent:

> "Keeping in mind the potential for exploitation or abuse and taking positive action in any circumstances in which it may be apparent there is an element of exploitation/abuse. Asking questions and not accepting things that are 'wrong' but not criminal." (FL)

> "Looking further than the individual and considering the broader factors around family and domestic circumstances that could influence harm." (SL)

Others recognised that multi-agency working is an important component of disruption:

> "Sharing information with partners to disrupt any potential behaviour and seeking remedy through the courts for matters that can be proven." (FL)

> "[Disruption] does not just relate to police force activity … multi-agency approaches as well are required to 'disrupt' effectively." (SL)

Several strategic leads suggested that disruption should be understood as a multi-faceted, flexible approach which could be adapted to respond to the type and context of the abuse:

> "Disruption can take many forms, depending on the type of abuse but primarily looking at victim, offender and location." (SL)

> "Focusing on victim/offender/location and much wider, with engagement with families/peers and schools, education providers and all professionals involved in child protection." (SL)

> Strategic leads suggested seeing disruption as a flexible approach which could be adapted to the type and context of the abuse.

4.3 Perceived gaps in knowledge around disruption

A theme emerging strongly in the survey responses of frontline police personnel was a reported lack of knowledge, training and guidance to support disruption activities:

> "I have never come across these tactics before or heard anybody discussing them and I have worked in this MASH [multi-agency safeguarding hub] for the last four years. I have never received any kind of training in relation to child abuse and have no experience of investigating it. Everything I know I have either learned from colleagues or found myself. It concerns me that I only became aware of the Working Together document[5] about eight weeks ago. However, I have never read it, nor have any of my colleagues also working in the MASH." (FL)

As a result, some frontline personnel appeared to feel ill-equipped to disrupt child sexual abuse:

> "I thought I knew about CSE but have not heard of a lot of the methods listed in the previous questions." (FL)

> "I am unsure what we do as a force or what I should be doing as an individual officer." (FL)

> "I feel officers need more support in understanding the local disruption tactics available." (FL)

They identified specific training and resources that would be beneficial:

> "Needs to be more awareness given to frontline officers from the specialist teams about what these terms mean and what actions can be completed to assist them." (FL)

> "A lot more training around specific orders that can be applied for, as many of those are unknown to me." (FL)

> "A simple guide for investigating officers to follow, to ensure we don't miss anything." (FL)

Strategic leads agreed that training and resources in the use of specific tools would be helpful:

> "Education of officers on a tactical menu of options." (SL)

> "Improved safeguarding training for senior officers in new and emerging threats and themes." (SL)

> "A greater understanding across the organisation of the orders available to us and other partner agencies, and a review of the effectiveness of these." (SL)

> "More awareness about the various orders that can be obtained – so that officers are alert to them and obtain them." (SL)

> "I wish I could download key information for frontline practitioners." (SL)

Some highlighted the effects of a lack of such training:

> "Lack of staff knowledge of focus on these. Policing is focused on safeguarding of the victims and disruptions are a second thought." (SL)

> "I don't think the notices are used enough or the investigation teams know exactly how to obtain one." (SL)

> **Some frontline personnel felt ill-equipped to disrupt child sexual abuse, and identified training and resources that would be beneficial.**

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5. Department for Education (2018).

5. Police use of measures to disrupt child sexual abuse

This chapter presents the findings from the surveys of frontline police and strategic leads in relation to their experience of using various disruption measures in relation to different forms of child sexual abuse.

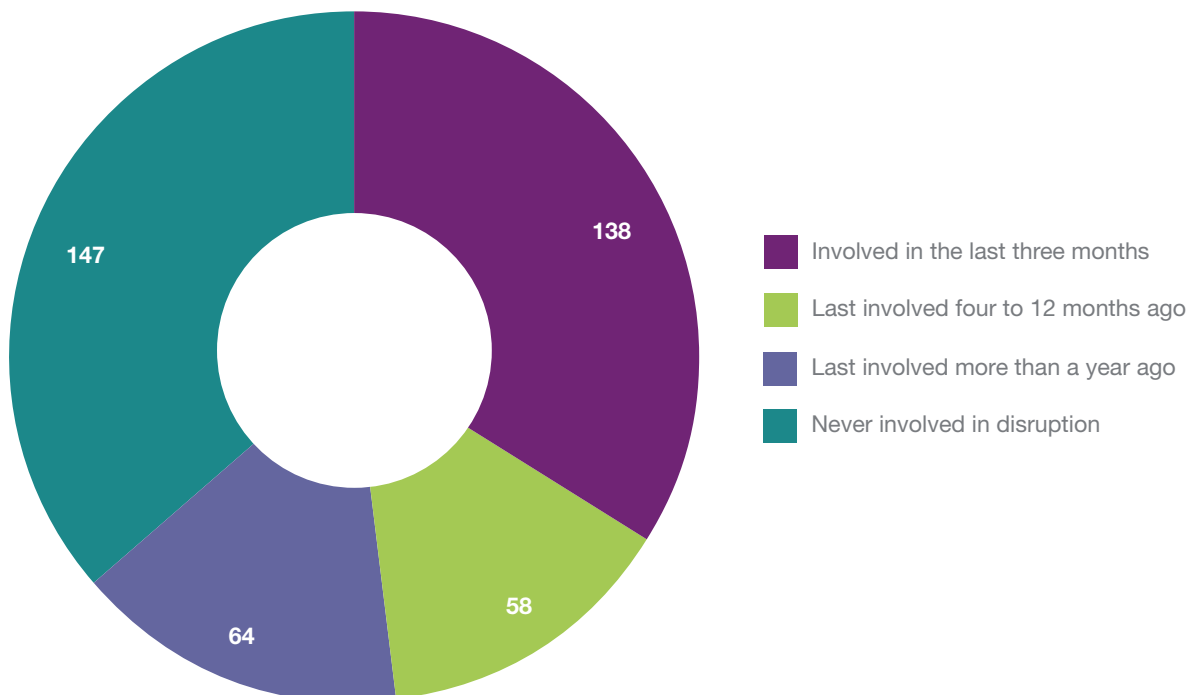## 5.1 Experience of disrupting child sexual abuse

As Figure 4 shows, nearly two-thirds (64%) of the 407 frontline survey respondents who answered a question about their experience of disruption reported that they had been involved in disrupting child sexual abuse at some point in their policing career.

Figure 5 shows that respondents in the North West region were significantly more likely than those in other regions to have been involved in disruption activities, while those in London were significantly less likely.

In terms of roles, Detective Inspectors and members of safeguarding teams were significantly more likely than others to have been involved in disruption activities (see Figure 6).

The correlation between job role and experience of disrupting child sexual abuse is self-explanatory, as senior officers and those in safeguarding teams are clearly more likely to have been involved in this area of work. However, the reason for the regional variation is less obvious, and may be explained by the fact that significantly more respondents in the North West were members of safeguarding teams than those in other regions.

Figure 4. Involvement of frontline survey respondents in disrupting child sexual abuse

- Involved in the last three months
- Last involved four to 12 months ago
- Last involved more than a year ago
- Never involved in disruption

Source: Survey of frontline police; n=407 respondents answering this question.

Figure 5. Regional variation in frontline survey respondents' involvement in disrupting child sexual abuse
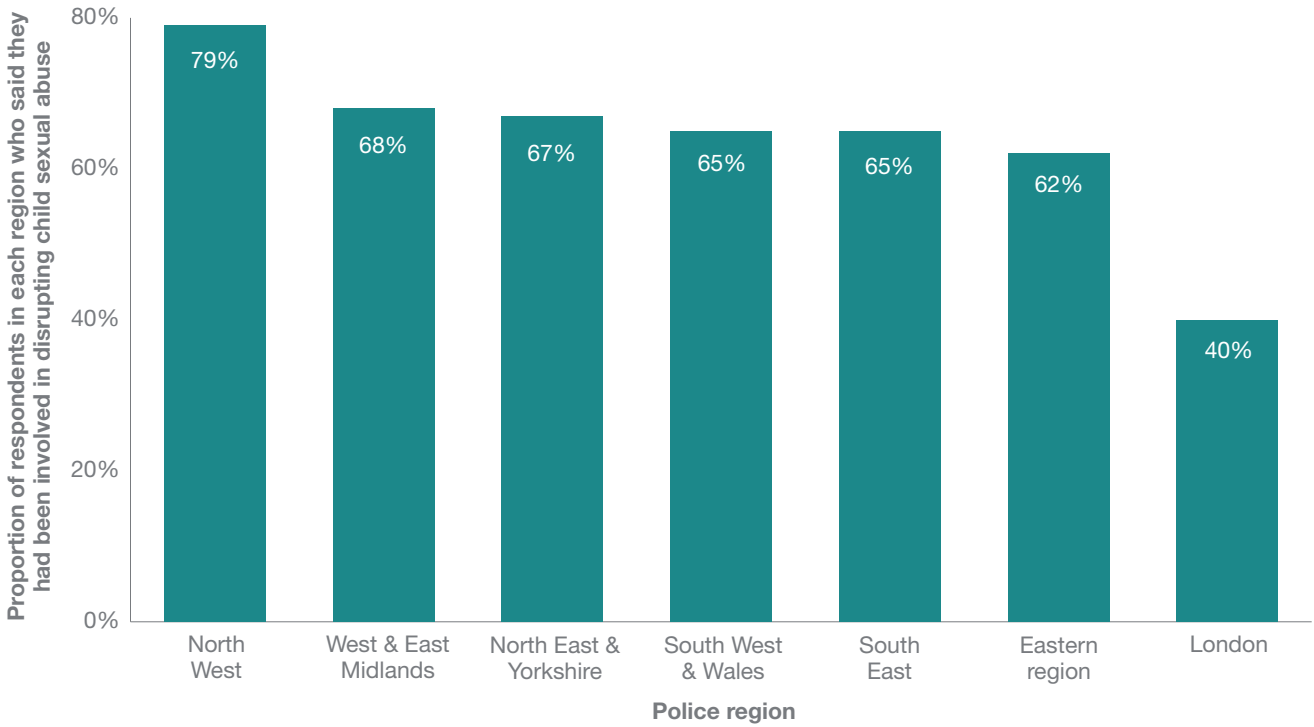
Source: Survey of frontline police; n=410 respondents answering this question.

Figure 6. Variation by role in frontline survey respondents' involvement in disrupting child sexual abuse
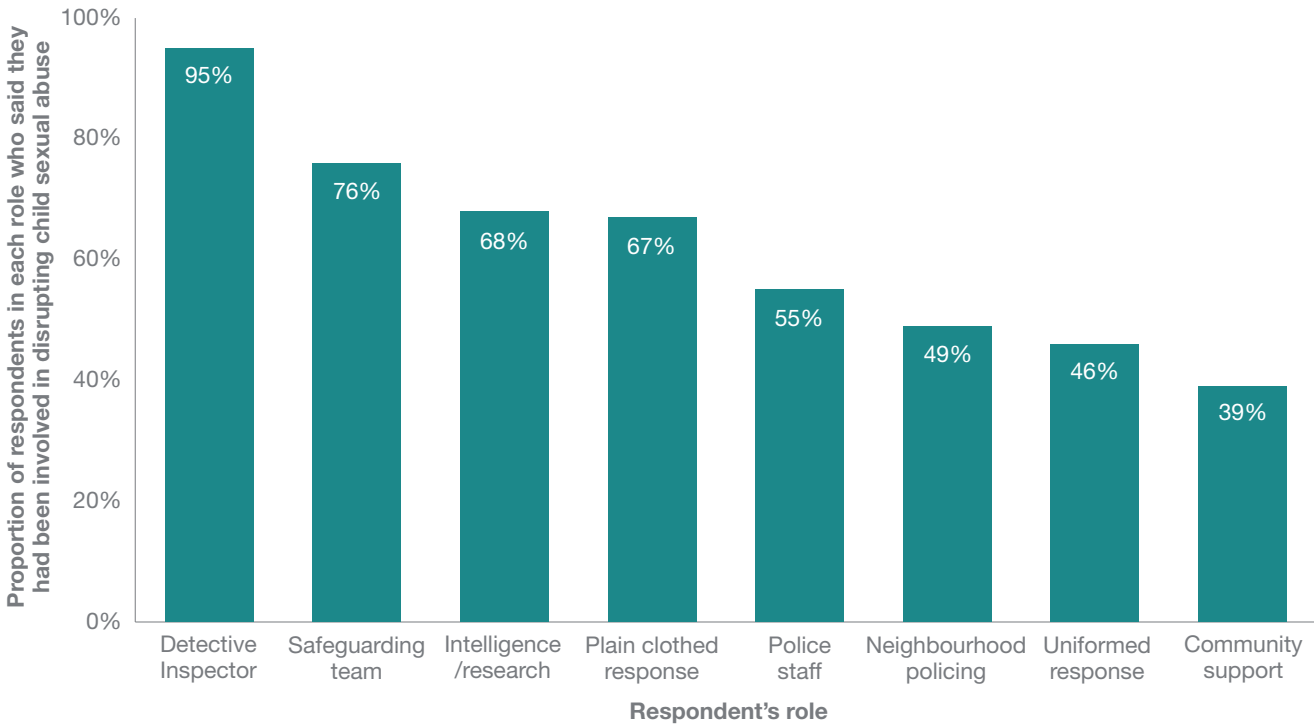
Source: Survey of frontline police; n=405 respondents answering this question. A further two respondents indicated that they worked in roles outside these categories.

5.2 Types of disruption measures used

Respondents to both the frontline survey and the survey of strategic leads were asked about their use of different disruption measures in response to suspected child sexual abuse. A glossary of these measures can be found in Appendix A.

Figures 7 and 8 show the measures most commonly cited by respondents to the frontline survey and the strategic leads survey.

Figure 7. Disruption measures most commonly cited by frontline survey respondents
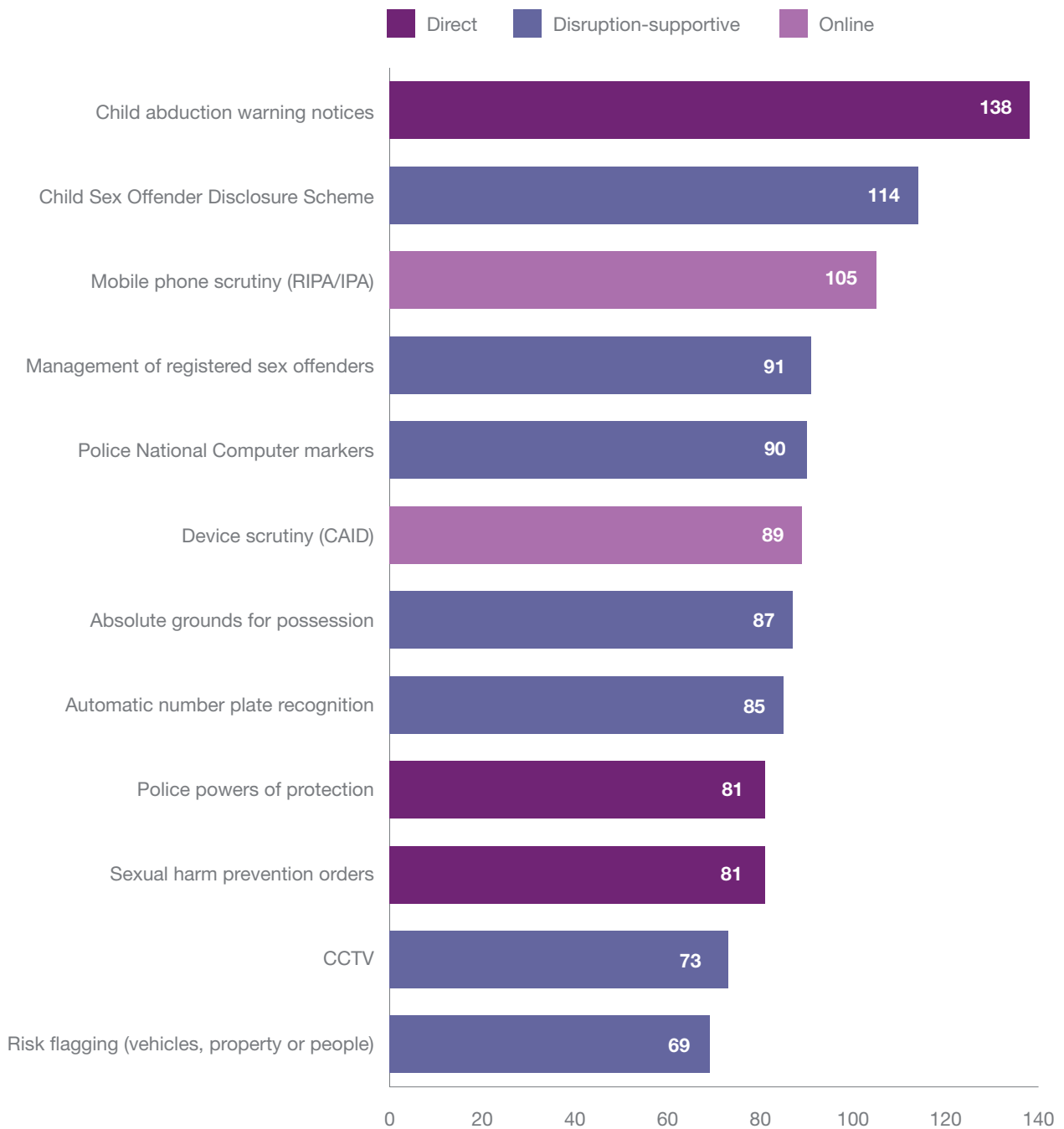
Source: Survey of frontline police; n=238 respondents answering this question; measures shown were cited by at least one-quarter of these respondents. Respondents could cite multiple measures.

Figure 8. Disruption measures most commonly cited by strategic leads

Legend: Direct — Disruption-supportive — Online

Measure	Value
Sexual harm prevention orders	34
Sexual risk orders	32
Child abduction warning notices	32
High-visibility policing of 'hotspots'	31
Automatic number plate recognition	30
Police National Computer markers	29
Non-molestation orders	29
Police powers of protection	29
Forced marriage protection orders	28
Device scrutiny (CAID)	27
Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme	26
Mobile phone scrutiny (RIPA/IPA)	26
CCTV	26
Criminal behaviour orders	26

Source: Survey of strategic leads for safeguarding. n=38 respondents; measures shown were cited by at least two-thirds of these respondents. Respondents could cite multiple measures.

5.3 Use of disruption measures against specific forms of child sexual abuse

Respondents to the frontline survey were invited to name the disruption measures they had used, and the forms of child sexual abuse that they had been used against. Where the form of abuse was specified, frontline personnel indicated that disruption activities were most commonly focused on group- or gang-perpetrated child sexual abuse and online image-related offences (see Figure 9).
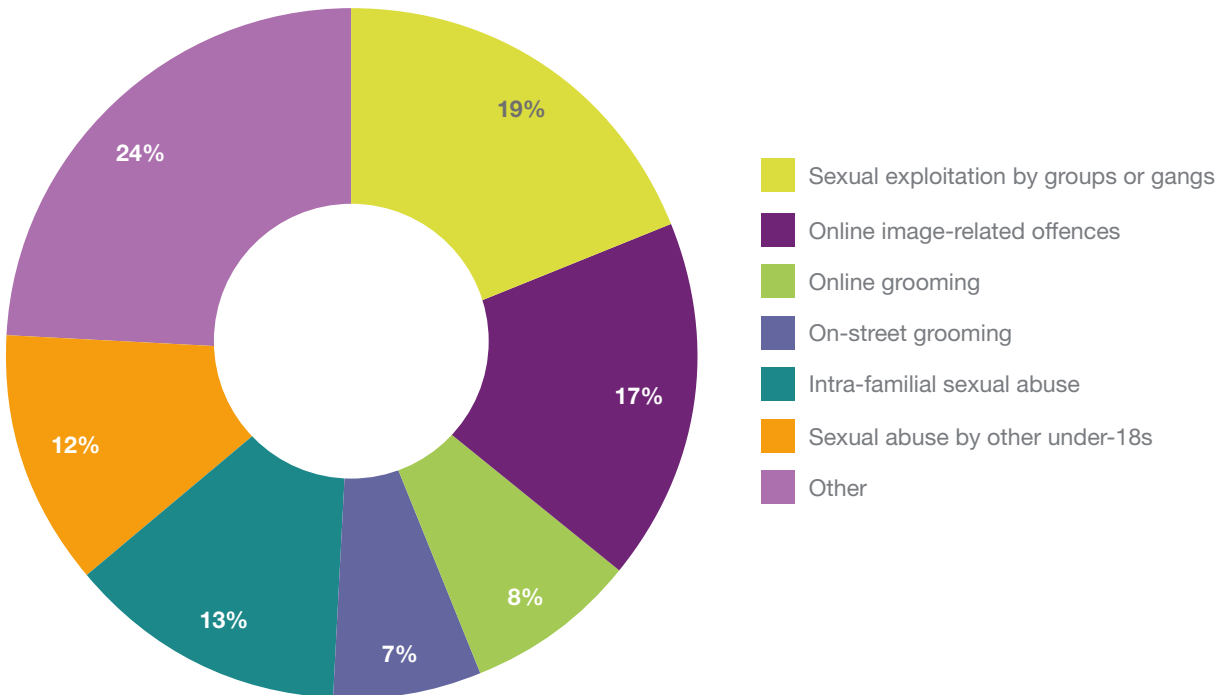
Some survey respondents explained how different approaches might be used in relation to different forms of child sexual abuse. For example, one felt that group-based child sexual abuse would require "the proactive targeting of suspected offenders to disrupt their criminal activities" whereas intra-familial child sexual abuse was more likely to require "appropriate intervention and safeguarding measures" (FL).

Table 6 shows the disruption measures most commonly cited by frontline survey respondents in relation to specific forms of child sexual abuse.

A range of disruption measures – largely disruption-supportive rather than direct measures – had reportedly been used to disrupt group- or gang-perpetrated abuse and online image-related abuse. Only two measures, both direct, were identified with any frequency as being used in relation to intra-familial child sexual abuse (police powers of protection) or abuse by other under-18s (child abduction warning notices).

> A range of mainly disruption-supportive measures were said to be used against abuse by groups or gangs and online image-related offences.

Figure 9. Use by frontline survey respondents of disruption measures against different forms of child sexual abuse

Legend:
- Sexual exploitation by groups or gangs — 19%
- Online image-related offences — 17%
- Online grooming — 8%
- On-street grooming — 7%
- Intra-familial sexual abuse — 13%
- Sexual abuse by other under-18s — 12%
- Other — 24%

Source: Survey of frontline police; n= 2,090 uses of disruption measures, as reported by 238 respondents.

Table 6. Disruption measures used by frontline police in relation to different forms of child sexual abuse

Disruption approach	Disruption measure	Number of respondents indicating that they had used this disruption measure against this form of abuse			
		Group- or gang-perpetrated child sexual abuse	Online image-related child sexual abuse	Intra-familial child sexual abuse	Child sexual abuse by other under-18s
Direct measures	Child abduction warning notices	**39**	3	7	**35**
	Police powers of protection	14	6	**29**	11
	Sexual harm prevention orders	4	**35**	14	3
Disruption-supportive measures	Absolute grounds for possession	6	**43**	8	5
	Automatic number plate recognition	**28**	4	6	9
	Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme	2	**32**	**28**	10
	CCTV	**24**	5	4	8
	Management of registered sex offenders	9	**25**	15	7
	Police National Computer markers	**26**	11	8	13
	Risk flagging (of vehicles, property or people)	**26**	1	4	12
Online measures	Devices scrutiny (Child Abuse Images Database)	5	**48**	10	4
	Mobile phone scrutiny (Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act/ Investigatory Powers Act)	16	**31**	13	9

Source: Survey of frontline police; n= 238 respondents answering this question. Respondents could select multiple measures/forms of abuse. The table shows the disruption measures cited by at least 10% of these 238 respondents in relation to at least one form of child sexual abuse; combinations of disruption measure and form of abuse cited by at least 10% are shown in bold.

6. Perceived effectiveness of measures to disrupt child sexual abuse

Discussion group participants and respondents to the frontline and strategic leads surveys were asked open questions to find out which approaches they felt were particularly effective in helping to disrupt child sexual abuse.

A brief description of all the disruption measures cited by the survey respondents is provided in Appendix A.

6.1 Direct disruption measures

6.1.1 Child abduction warning notices

Frontline survey respondents considered child abduction warning notices (CAWNs) – also known as harbouring notices – to be particularly useful in deterring and preventing the perpetration of child sexual abuse, by making suspects more aware of the risks of making contact with a child – and in some cases, making them aware that the person they are contacting is a child:

> "I find that CAWNs are generally adhered to and taken seriously by offenders." (FL)

> "I often use CAWNs in my role which I have found useful as some perpetrators have then been deterred away from the child and/or never knew their age and learned through this order." (FL)

One pointed out that CAWNs could be used discreetly:

> "CAWNs are an effective tool for disrupting child sexual abuse, especially for people who don't want it to affect their personal life by being arrested, e.g. if the perpetrator is looking for work [unrelated to children]." (FL)

It was considered important that CAWNs could be issued without a disclosure from, or even the support of, a victim:

> "CAWNs are really useful as we don't get a complainant that normally supports a prosecution. We therefore make the relationship between the suspect and child 'toxic'." (FL)

It was also noted that CAWNs could be used to support prosecutions if breached:

> "Child Abduction Warning Notice issued to a female led to her being arrested with the child leaving her property. She was sentenced to 16 weeks in prison." (FL)

> "Child abduction notices [are effective] as there is a power of arrest." (FL)

In some cases, CAWNs had been used not only against the person suspected of child sexual abuse, but also against the suspect's parents/guardians to ensure that they were not complicit in the abuse:

> "I served a notice on a family who were harbouring a regular missing person who was sleeping with their older son. This made the family realise they were not just 'helping a runaway'. It put the responsibility of her safety on them and they decided to stop allowing her in their house, thus keeping the older son away from her." (FL)

> Frontline personnel valued the fact that CAWNs can be used discreetly, and can be issued without a disclosure from a victim.

Two respondents noted that CAWNs tended to be more effective in relation to younger children and those in local authority care:

> "CAWNS are also an effective disruption tool but they are less so for over-16s." (FL)

> "CAWNs for [looked-after children] are effective. [They are] not as effective for young persons not cared for by the local authority." (FL)

CAWNs were referred to both as a standalone measure and one that could be used in conjunction with other strategies such as Police National Computer (PNC) markers (see section 6.2.1):

> "CAWN are usually effective and are a regular tool used by my CSE Team. All potential victims and perpetrators of CSE are marked with a PNC and local marker. [This] enables the team to closely monitor their activities, associations, locations, etc. which enables early intervention when necessary and better intelligence gathering." (FL)

However, one respondent said there was a lack of common understanding of CAWNs across their force:

> "I feel their use is sometimes not fully understood by the rest of [name of force] and they are considered a temporary, low-level intervention … I also know there have been occasions where suspects have not been arrested for failing to follow a CAWN, which disempowers the process and the police." (FL)

Another suggested that CAWNs were not acted upon:

> "CAWN notices … are never acted upon, only used as evidence should the person commit the offence under Section 2 child abduction." (FL)

6.1.2 Sexual harm prevention orders and sexual risk orders

The value of sexual harm prevention orders (SHPOs) and sexual risk orders (SROs) – along with their predecessors, sexual harm orders – was highlighted by frontline personnel:

> "They are clear and the suspect is made aware of the consequences of breaching such orders." (FL)

> "Our department utilises court orders like Sexual Harm Prevention Orders to give us the power to arrest and prosecute anyone who breaches these. This can be disruptive and preventative to detect further offending or highlight safeguarding issues and further offending/grooming/indecent images of children." (FL)

> "SHPOs are very effective for the future prevention of abuse, and a useful tool." (FL)

It seemed that combining these orders with other measures was particularly effective:

> "The imposition of appropriate orders, supported by intrusive police activity to monitor adherence, were successful in reducing opportunities for offending." (FL)

Respondents provided examples of the effects of using these orders:

> "Over the past three years in the [Digital and Media Investigations Unit], I have convicted more than 50 sex offenders, had them placed on the sex offenders register and had SHPOs put on them. This helps and mostly stops re-offending." (FL)

> "If they breach them, as one did, he ended up in prison for a further period of time, thus keeping children safe whilst he was not out in public." (FL)

6.1.3 Police powers of protection

One respondent to the frontline survey explained how using police powers of protection (PPO) under the Children Act 2004 could be used, repeatedly if necessary, to support other safeguarding measures:

> "Police protection ensures other agencies have sufficient space to apply for more robust safeguarding orders. However, a child may be taken into police protection a number of times before the risk is effectively managed (abuse/exploitation risk whilst on missing episodes)." (FL)

Others highlighted the value of these powers in simply keeping children safe:

> "They give further powers for the police to act and make the victim feel safer." (FL)

> "Taking a PPO out for a child removes them from immediate harm." (FL)

While these powers gave space for other agencies to act, however, it was noted that their effectiveness was dependent on those agencies taking appropriate action:

> "Police powers of protection are always effective if supported by social care. If social care do not support and facilitate the move, then the child remains in the same conditions." (FL)

6.1.4 Other direct measures

Respondents to the frontline survey also highlighted the effective use of dispersal/closure orders and secure accommodation orders:

> "[A] group of young men in one particular town … were grooming young girls of between 13/15 years of age. Dispersal orders/closure orders and harbouring notices were extremely effective and resulted in four males arrested and convicted." (FL)

> "On one particular instance, I was tasked with locating a high-risk missing child who was also being managed by a Public Protection Unit, specialising in sexual exploitation. I located the female where she was removed into secure accommodation for her own safety." (FL)

6.2 Disruption-supportive measures

6.2.1 Automatic number plate recognition, tags and markers

The use of automatic number plate recognition (ANPR), tags and markers was considered by one frontline survey respondent to be particularly effective when it was done overtly:

> "Markers on vehicles are brilliant – especially when the perpetrator is aware of the marker." (FL)

Respondents also described how ANPR could be used to support other disruption measures, such as tracking the vehicles of people issued with CAWNs or SHPOs or combining monitoring data with mobile phone scrutiny:

> "We would also use the ANPR to monitor movements and ensure if stopped and had a SHPO they weren't in breach." (FL)

> "ANPR monitoring has also been useful when used alongside RIPA [the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act] for phone information, meaning we could look at crimes in those specific areas to match with our sex offender." (FL)

> Markers and tags on the Police National Computer (PNC) helped officers to identity patterns and trends, "giving us a wider perspective of persons of concerns and locations of concern" (FL).

Risk flagging was seen as important in ensuring "that the most vulnerable are responded to as quickly as possible" (FL). One respondent described how the use of a PNC marker had led to the discovery of a victim in the perpetrator's vehicle:

> "PNC – vehicle marker … female under 16 years found in vehicle of perpetrator who had CAWN served in relation to the female – subsequent arrest." (FL)

6.2.2 Business-related disruption strategies

Respondents to the frontline survey shared some examples of how strategically targeting businesses and locations linked to child sexual abuse could be effective, particularly when used in conjunction with other strategies:

> "Multi-agency disruption of businesses including liquor/taxi licensing, utilising trading standards, [HM Revenue & Customs], fire, etc powers to access premises used for CSE, and closing down those business if breaches were found." (FL)

> "We gained a closure order for three months on a local shop suspected to be grooming young females … We conducted trading standards visits regularly … We executed warrants and we put high-visibility patrols and several visits per day … It quickly averted any escalation and they moved out of the area." (FL)

The latter example highlights the risk that such measures may merely displace, rather than eliminate, the abuse:

6.2.3 Community interventions

In both the surveys and the discussion groups, police personnel described using community interventions to support the disruption of child sexual abuse. Strategic leads identified interventions carried out with those working in the night-time economy and local businesses:

> "Initiatives with local hotels around awareness of children using hotel rooms, undertaking test purchase operations." (SL)

> "Awareness-raising events with local businesses – educating them about risks, what to look for and seeking their assistance in reporting suspicious incidents." (SL)

> "Various local policing areas have in partnership carried out training [around child sexual abuse] to taxi drivers, hotel staff and licensed premises, which has resulted in greater awareness in these high-risk areas with improved and increased intelligence/information being shared with the police." (SL)

> "Stop it Spot it Campaign, Operation Makesafe[6] and other blueprint operations." (SL)

> "They have linked in with the Security Industry Authority to educate the door staff and provided them with 'z cards' which outline some of the key risk signals of CSE – the industry stated these door staff don't have time to be calling 101 every time, so wanted a visual prompt to make them more confident in what they're looking for." (DG)

One frontline police officer explained how this had proved effective:

> "We linked in with many hotels and provided training for front-of-house staff on how they can spot the signs of CSE … They have called in and reported several incidents which have been acted on." (FL)

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6. These are local initiatives implemented by the Metropolitan Police. The Spot It Stop IT campaign was launched in 2017 to help police officers and staff spot signs of children who are at risk of coming to harm. Operation Makesafe was developed in partnership with London's boroughs to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation in the business community (e.g. hotel groups, taxi companies and licensed premises).

Another described how their force had used a combination of activities to disrupt the perpetration of child sexual abuse in a hotel:

> "Police incidents identified a hotel in the city centre … with a high number of CSE-related offences. After service of a notice and weekly visits and PNC checks of all guests, a number of arrests for various offences/wanted persons and good intel submitted. Incidents at hotel dropped to zero as hotel required to obtain ID from every guest, including children." (FL)

Two frontline survey respondents described how simply maintaining an active public presence at 'hotspots' could disrupt child sexual abuse by deterring perpetrators from some forms of activity:

> "We identified potential suspects and then distributed leaflets allowing them to know they are being monitored and what offences that they have potentially committed or will commit." (FL)

> "Offenders were aware police were observing and investigating. [This] resulted in contact between the offenders and children reducing." (FL)

A strategic lead described how they had promoted their community interventions on social media:

> Proactive live CSE Patrols – covered on social media gain a lot of public interest." (SL)

The same strategic lead also highlighted the use of campaigns to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation among professionals and the general public, including children and young people:

> "High-profile events have taken place across the force including weeks of action, parent-focused awareness days, online learning events, social media webchats, media interviews involving victims and parents, and CSE conferences. All events have been aimed at raising awareness of CSE, and educating children, parents, professionals and the wider public of the dangers of child sexual exploitation." (SL)

6.2.4 Maintaining contact with victims

Three respondents to the frontline survey noted the value of identifying a specific officer to maintain contact with victims:

> "An allocated police staff member to the young person has had positive approaches." (FL)

It seemed that this ongoing contact allowed frontline personnel to establish a relationship with victims and identify patterns in their abuse:

> "Repeat victim – working to find out what is the root cause of the issue." (FL)

> "Victim was sofa surfing and not in contact with parents. Messages varied between 'responsible adults' where she was staying, so message was not consistent. Remote rural location so transport difficult to monitor. Most effective was building relationship with victim so she was able to talk and update on events." (FL)

6.2.5 Other disruption-supportive measures

Respondents to the frontline survey also referred to the effectiveness of other measures in disrupting child sexual abuse:

- ‣ The Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme (CSOD)

  > "Disclosure of Child Abuse Scheme for risk management [is] particularly useful so that parents and carers can put measures in place to protect their children whilst cases or investigation progress." (FL)

- ‣ Disrupting drugs activity

  > "Short-term measures included proactive drugs work which helped disrupt CSE linked to supply of drugs to vulnerable persons." (FL)

- ‣ Enforcing minor offences

  > "I have been involved in numerous CSE investigations in the past. Enforcing minor offences was very effective. This allowed approaches to be made to victims, whilst the suspects were imprisoned." (FL)

6.3 Online measures

6.3.1 Online searches, infiltration, mobile phone scrutiny and seizing devices

Locating suspects and monitoring their activities by way of online investigations, infiltration, mobile phone scrutiny, and seizing and examining devices was considered to be effective in disrupting child sexual abuse and supporting successful prosecutions:

"Obtaining [indecent images of children] on any electronic devices is the best way of assisting in child sexual abuse cases where it is one word against another." (FL)

"This is usually very effective and offenders usually plead guilty at court to these online image offences." (FL)

Mobile phone scrutiny was perceived as helpful in providing evidence to support prosecution as well as monitoring ongoing activity:

"Mobile phone scrutiny has assisted in identifying other suspects and assisted me in obtaining additional charges of conspiracy for a CSE investigation that I was the officer in command for." (FL)

"Mobile phone scrutiny [is] particularly helpful as [it] gives good overview on who is contacting child – this has led to disruption of sex parties, arrest of individuals and disruption of persistent missing episodes/preventing further offences." (FL)

Online infiltration was reported to be valuable in targeting high-risk offenders and identifying victims:

"Social media enquiries recently allowed us to identify a potential victim. Concerns were raised via a taxi driver who had completed a drop-off he was unhappy with. We only had a name and mobile number. Mobile number checked against social media and matched against an account in the correct name. This allowed us to identify a child victim much quicker than normal telecoms enquiries, which relies on a mobile phone being registered." (FL)

In addition, seizing and scrutinising devices could also enable the discovery of further child sexual abuse:

"Additional sexual offences disclosed by remote monitoring and subsequent device seizures." (FL)

"We have established the 'On Your Side' initiative that is triggered when forensic digital examinations are conducted on offender's or victim's devices that indicate other children may be at risk of [child sexual abuse or exploitation]. If the username of these potential child victims cannot lead to an identification of the potential victim, it is referred to NSPCC for them to contact the username offering support." (FL)

> "
> Online infiltration and scrutiny of devices were considered valuable in targeting high-risk offenders and enabling the discovery of further abuse.
> "

7. Supporting the disruption of child sexual abuse: tactical actions

Police forces can take a number of actions at tactical level which have the potential to support the effective disruption of child sexual abuse. These include:

- ‣ prioritising child sexual abuse in daily tasking

- ‣ maintaining current and relevant problem profiles

- ‣ encouraging frontline officers to consider child sexual abuse as a potential issue when attending other offences

- ‣ ensuring that information is accessible and shared efficiently between teams

- ‣ managing civil and criminal orders and notices – and ensuring that frontline officers know where these are stored, who should be informed about them, who is responsible for monitoring adherence to them, and how breaches of them are communicated.

This chapter presents the findings from the surveys and discussion groups in relation to these issues.

7.1 Prioritisation of child sexual abuse in daily tasking

The effective disruption of child sexual abuse can be supported if such abuse is prioritised in daily tasking: for example, by emphasising the importance of intelligence officers sharing soft intelligence with frontline personnel to ensure that early identification of potential risk is acted on. This risk could relate to both suspects and potential victims. Equally, the appropriate dissemination of information relating to both ongoing child sexual abuse operations and identified locations is critical to ensuring that frontline personnel are effectively tasked and aware.

Figure 10 shows that, of the 468 frontline survey respondents who expressed a view on this issue, nearly two-thirds (62%, n=289) reported that child sexual abuse was given high priority in daily tasking.

Figure 10. Frontline survey respondents' perceptions of the priority given to child sexual abuse in daily tasking
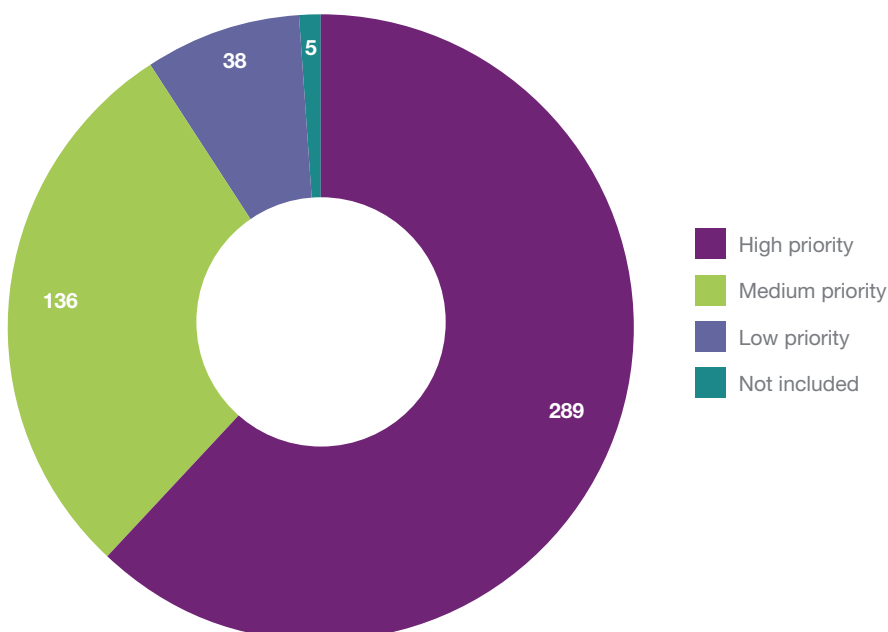
Source: Survey of frontline police; n=468 respondents answering this question.

When asked how often child sexual abuse disruption activities featured in daily tasking, nearly a quarter (n=9) of the 38 strategic leads said that such activities always featured in daily tasking – but, as Figure 11 shows, more than half (n=21) said they featured only sometimes or occasionally, and one in 10 (n=4) responded that child sexual abuse disruption activities never featured in daily tasking. The other four strategic leads did not answer the question.

Strategic leads provided some examples of how disruption activities featured in daily tasking. One explained:

> "When a need is identified for frontline officer intervention through the Tasking and Tactical Coordination Group meeting, it is briefed to frontline officers. For example, if a particular premises/group/individual is identified for disruption, it might be included in the [Neighbourhood Policing Team] briefing for that area, with a task created specifying the activity requested and providing a means for activity to be recorded." (SL)

Another described how their force carried out regular briefings about individuals who were on sex offender registers or had been released from prison after conviction for child sexual abuse offences, to encourage active disruption of their activities:

> "If they have been released with conditions not to be in the company of anyone under 16, then actively ensure that this is monitored and any breaches dealt with accordingly. It encourages officers to be aware of such individuals and be aware of what that person is doing in the area if they are seen." (SL)

Other ways in which disruption-supportive information was said to be shared included:

‣ daily management meetings chaired by the Base Command Unit (BCU) Superintendent of Operations

‣ weekly FAST Tac [tactical advice] meetings [to discuss recent intelligence and decide action to be taken]

‣ monthly contextual safeguarding meetings

‣ updates following the weekly Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meetings

‣ Tasking and Coordination Group meetings

‣ briefing sheets on the tasking system

‣ cascading knowledge to staff by a designated child sexual exploitation/child criminal exploitation problem solver.

Nonetheless, some respondents noted that the priority level varied – in terms of the resources allocated to problems or cases and how police performance is monitored – and suggested that a more consistent approach would be helpful (see section 8.3).

Figure 11. Strategic leads' perceptions of how often child sexual abuse features in daily tasking
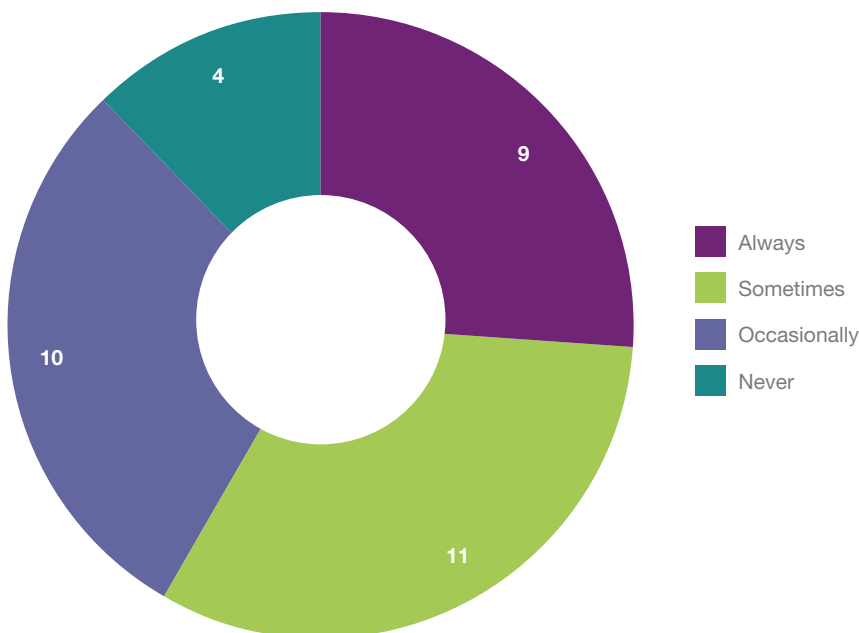
Source: Survey of strategic leads for safeguarding; n=34 respondents answering this question.

7.2 Problem profiling

A problem profile is defined as:

"… a police intelligence product created to provide detail on crime trends or hot spots, provide a focus for analytic assessment, assist in victim and perpetrator identification, assist in prioritising operational work, identify intelligence gaps, highlight opportunities for prevention and enforcement and provide justification for actions." (Allnock et al, 2017:5)

Problem profiles are, therefore, another way to support the disruption of child sexual abuse. Their value was highlighted by one strategic lead:

"Understanding the nature and scale of the abuse for either an individual or problem area/group is essential in enabling the police to consider what disruption amounts to." (SL)

In the survey of strategic leads, respondents were asked whether they currently had any problem profiles in relation to child sexual abuse. Nearly two-thirds (n=19) of the 30 strategic leads who answered the question reported that their forces produced problem profiles around child sexual abuse, and several others said that plans were in place to begin producing these profiles in the near future.

Many strategic leads related their use of problem profiles specifically to child sexual exploitation rather than other forms of child sexual abuse, with some describing how their forces used problem profiles to focus attention on online and contact offences:

"CSE profile is lone [perpetrators] making contact via social media and committing communication offences, indecent images. On occasions this develops into contact offences." (SL)

"All BCUs [Base Command Units] now have a bespoke CSE profile – this identifies victim/offender, location characteristic – any linked series and emerging trends. IIOC [Indecent Images of Children] and online CSE profiles have also been created." (SL)

"We have a number of historic trials, with grooming gangs operating and offences committed from the 1990s and predominately involving British Pakistani males. More recent offences are internet-enabled grooming offences and tend to be individual targeting of victims by single [perpetrators] from diverse ethnic backgrounds." (SL)

According to the College of Policing (2015), a problem profile must be "current and relevant" if it is to achieve its intended aims. Strategic leads were therefore asked how often their problem profiles were updated. Of the 19 respondents who answered this question, seven said that their forces' problem profiles were updated at least annually, but four respondents said they were only updated every two or three years; eight stated that profiles were not routinely produced but were produced on an ad hoc or bespoke basis.

"
Most strategic leads reported that their forces produced problem profiles around child sexual abuse, but few said these were updated often.
"

7.3 Consideration given to child sexual abuse when officers attend other offences

Disruption of child sexual abuse can also be supported if police officers are encouraged to consider whether child sexual abuse might be taking place when they respond to other crimes, particularly as there are established links between child sexual abuse and other types of offence such as drink driving and antisocial behaviour (Cole et al, 2016; Shaw et al, 2017).

As Table 7 shows, respondents to the frontline survey said they commonly did so when responding to situations involving human trafficking, children going missing from home, female genital mutilation, county lines and child neglect.

Child sexual abuse was said to be far less commonly considered when officers responded to road traffic offences, serious acquisitive crime and antisocial behaviour. There were exceptions, however, as one frontline officer in a discussion group explained:

> "We might see a car driving through the city centre – they might have a tail light out or have no insurance, but actually there are two girls in the back seat … it's about seeing the wood for the trees." (DG)

There are established links between child sexual abuse and other types of offence such as drink driving and antisocial behaviour.

Table 7. Frequency with which frontline survey respondents consider child sexual abuse when attending other types of offence

Type of offence (n=number who answered this question)	Always	Sometimes	Never
Human trafficking (n=440)	81%	17%	2%
Missing from home (n=444)	80%	19%	2%
Female genital mutilation (n=439)	75%	21%	5%
County lines (n=444)	75%	23%	2%
Child neglect (n=445)	74%	24%	2%
Organised crime (n=432)	54%	42%	4%
Serious acquisitive crime (n=426)	25%	55%	20%
Antisocial behaviour (n=436)	24%	60%	16%
Drink driving or other road traffic offences (n=427)	11%	40%	49%

Source: Survey of frontline police.

7.4 Within-force information sharing

A number of frontline survey respondents suggested that the sharing of information within their force should be improved:

> "Better information sharing from the CSE team, especially in relation to live missing person investigations involving those at risk of CSE." (FL)

> "Better dissemination of info, particularly around victims and offenders. [An end to] silo-ed working practices by specialist departments." (FL)

> "Having information shared with us from other departments such as Child Abuse or Public Protection, to make us aware of any potential risks to children on our area." (FL)

> "Information sharing of risk regarding offenders and type of offending." (FL)

> "Further intelligence and information provided to frontline officers regarding victims and suspects of the offence." (FL)

Another identified geographical challenges in accessing information that was held by another team:

> "[Challenges are] purely [due to the] location of specific units where we as officers have to travel to review information that is part of child abuse investigations." (FL)

One discussion group participant indicated that information-sharing could extend to telling more officers and staff how to access the Missing Persons database:

> "Everyone's got access to it but no-one's been shown how to use it, and many don't. I was shocked with the amount of the information on this, the amount of links with other intelligence that wasn't being picked up … a lot of work being done in the background that no-one's aware of, that could potentially be quite vital." (DG)

7.5 Management of criminal and civil orders and notices

Prohibitive criminal and civil orders and notices that restrict certain behaviours can be highly effective in disrupting child sexual abuse (see section 6.1). However, they can only have a meaningful effect if their existence is known to or easily identified by frontline police, and if recipients' compliance with them is monitored and enforced. In the frontline survey, respondents were asked whether they knew where the issuance of an order or notice was recorded, with whom this information was shared, and how they would know if an order had been breached.

Table 8. Locations where orders and notices are recorded

Recording location	No. of respondents
Police National Computer	93
Niche (police records management system)	63
Athena (police intelligence and case management system)	33
Force computer	20
Custody office	16
PACE inspector's office	11
Divisional sergeant's office	11
Hub	11
Crimint (database used by the Metropolitan Police)	8
Other	35

Source: Survey of frontline police; n=271 respondents answering this question, excluding "don't knows". Respondents could identify multiple locations.

> A number of respondents to the frontline survey suggested that the sharing of information within their force should be improved.

7.5.1 Recording of orders and notices

Of the 467 respondents who answered questions about where the issuance of orders and notices was recorded, two-fifths (42%, n=196) said they did not know where this information was recorded. Table 8 shows other locations commonly identified by respondents.

Sixteen respondents indicated that the information was recorded in more than one location.

One frontline respondent highlighted difficulties accessing information about orders:

> "Not clear to find the abduction notices on the computer that have been issued." (FL)

7.5.2 Sharing information on orders and notices

A total of 452 respondents answered questions about the sharing of information on the issuance of orders and notices with other agencies. More than two-thirds (69%, n=311) reported that information was shared with different agencies.

Table 9 shows the agencies most frequently cited. Additionally, 14 respondents said that information was shared with other agencies, such as schools, or through the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) or multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA).

Several respondents also commented that this information was recorded on police intelligence systems (as discussed above) or shared verbally with colleagues.

Nearly a third (31%, n=141) of the respondents answering this question said they did not know who such information was shared with.

Table 9. Agencies with which information on orders and notices is shared

Agency	No. of respondents
Children's social care	283
Youth offending team	139
Probation service	113
Housing	49
Drug and alcohol services	33
Licensing	15

Source: Survey of frontline police; n=311 respondents answering this question, excluding "don't knows". Respondents could select multiple agencies.

7.5.3 Responsibility for monitoring adherence to civil and criminal orders and notices

Table 10 shows where frontline survey respondents thought responsibility lay for monitoring adherence to civil and criminal orders and notices.

In addition, some suggested that responsibility lay with sexual offender management units, social care, neighbourhood officers, and even with victims and their families.

More than a third of respondents (37%, n=163) suggested that monitoring adherence to orders should be a shared responsibility:

> "It may be owned by a specific unit, however it is everyone's responsibility to act and be professionally curious." (FL)

However, another third of respondents (32%, n=139) said they did not know who held responsibility for monitoring adherence to orders.

> "One-third of frontline personnel said they did not know who held responsibility for monitoring adherence to civil and criminal orders.

Furthermore, some respondents expressed concern that orders were not always monitored once issued, meaning that the suspect's compliance and the overall effectiveness of the orders could not be assessed:

> "The offenders for these types of offences are not monitored, and nobody ensures that they are complying with SRO [Sexual Risk Orders] or SHPO [Sexual Harm Prevention Orders] properly." (FL)

> "I don't think that anyone takes responsibility for this duty, and they are only really looked at when a breach is reported." (FL)

This concern was echoed by respondents to the survey of strategic leads:

> "Once issued, the enforcement of orders isn't robust or managed appropriately to ensure the effectiveness of them to maintain and enforce the disruption/ prevention that were intended for." (SL)

They also expressed differing opinions around responsibility for monitoring adherence to orders. While many felt that this responsibility lay with Public Protection Units, some suggested that it might sit with a particular individual:

> "We have a new civilian role called a 'Safeguarding Support Officer' and this will form part of their role when the new software system goes live." (SL)

> "Whoever is deemed Local Responsible Officer for that individual." (SL)

Others felt it rested with a whole team, such as an Offender Management Unit, Special Constabulary CSE Disruption Team or CSE team, while two felt that it depended on circumstances:

> "It depends on what disruption method has been obtained and against whom. ViSOR [Violent and Sex Offender Register] teams should be heavily involved, so should IOM [Integrated Offender Management]." (SL)

Table 10. Agencies believed to be responsible for monitoring adherence to orders and notices

Responsible agency	No. of respondents
Public Protection Units	246
Probation service	112
Frontline officers	109
Youth offending team	74
Courts	54

Source: Survey of frontline police; n=301 respondents answering this question, excluding "don't knows". Respondents could select multiple agencies.

However, the same respondent went on to express concerns:

> "Neighbourhood officers should know who on their neighbourhoods have restrictions in place, but I doubt they do." (SL)

Another reflected on a lack of individual responsibility:

> "It should be a collective ownership. In practice, there are so many offenders and staff are so busy, that unless it's a specialist ViSOR officer or IOM officer I doubt any monitoring takes place. In such circumstances, breaches are likely to be discovered by responding to an incident and doing a PNC check where the restriction should be held, identified and any breach acted upon." (SL)

One strategic lead noted the need for further action in this area:

> "On answering this question I have reflected this probably needs more governance." (SL)

> "There was concern that issued orders were not always monitored, meaning that the suspect's compliance could not be assessed.

7.5.4 How frontline police would know if an order had been breached

Asked how they would know if there had been a breach of an order, 437 respondents to the frontline survey identified various ways they would learn of a breach (see Table 11).

More than two-thirds of these respondents (69%, n=291) identified more than one way in which they would learn of a breach. In addition, respondents also suggested other sources of this information, such as children's social care or their forces' intelligence systems.

Only 14 respondents said they did not know how they would learn of a breach (although, unlike the previous questions, this was not presented to them as a response option).

Strategic leads, too, generally felt that local police briefings, information from specialist departments and team briefings were the most likely ways in which frontline police would learn of a breach. It was also suggested that the Police National Computer (PNC) could be used to check whether someone was in breach of an order:

> "Civil orders are on the PNC so an officer stopping someone should be able to ascertain whether at that time they are in breach of an order." (SL)

However, one strategic lead was doubtful that frontline police would be aware of breaches:

> "I suspect they're not informed – although in theory all the above could apply, I just doubt that any do." (SL)

Nonetheless, one frontline participant in a discussion group provided an example of an officer proactively checking the PNC:

> "A man was seen asking young girls to do handstands in front of this building. The police officer ran a check and the man transpired to be on the ViSOR system." (DG)

Table 11. How frontline survey respondents would learn of a breach

Source of information on breaches	No. of respondents
Specialist department, e.g. public protection	228
Victims	205
Local police briefing	195
Team briefings	181
Line manager	115
Probation	101
Youth offending team	75
Custody	65

Source: Survey of frontline police; n=423 respondents answering this question, excluding "don't knows". Respondents could select multiple options.

> **More than two-thirds of the frontline respondents identified multiple ways in which they would learn that an order had been breached.**

8. Supporting the disruption of child sexual abuse: strategic actions

Respondents to the surveys were invited to identify actions and approaches at a more strategic level which police forces have taken or could take to support the effective disruption of child sexual abuse, and to identify challenges facing forces in this regard. This chapter presents their responses, which included:

‣ having a dedicated team or individual leading on the response to child sexual abuse

‣ training officers to understand and respond to concerns of child sexual abuse

‣ taking a strategic/proactive approach to disruption

‣ allocating sufficient time and resources to disruption activities

‣ developing specific resources to support disruption

‣ working and sharing information with other agencies

‣ monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of disruption efforts

‣ sharing good practice within/between forces.

8.1 Establishing dedicated teams or individuals

Strategic leads stressed that the effective disruption of child sexual abuse involved maintaining a strong focus on child sexual abuse throughout their force. Some reported that their forces had established a dedicated team or appointed an individual officer to lead on their response to child sexual abuse:

"CSE Disruption Team – Overt team comprising solely of special constables set up to respond to soft intelligence." (SL)

"We have a dedicated Locate MFH [Missing From Home] team that support episodes of missing children and share data in daily local authority triage meetings to reduce harm and repeat episodes." (SL)

"Dedicated PPU [Police Protection Unit] and CA [Child Abuse] team with strategic lead to monitor TRH [Threat, Risk and Harm] and response to child sexual abuse." (SL)

"Creation of dedicated exploitation teams in local policing." (SL)

"Team focused on perpetrator risks and interventions, this has driven victim disclosures." (SL)

One of these strategic leads added that their force had also appointed an officer to carry out prevention work:

"[We have an] engaged and passionate prevention officer who has a wide reach of contacts/communication strategy." (SL)

8.2 Training officers and staff to respond to concerns of child sexual abuse

The survey findings summarised in sections 3.1 and 3.2 indicate that, although many frontline personnel and strategic leads had received training in relation to child sexual abuse, a substantial proportion of both groups had never received any such training, and others wanted more training. Sections 3.3 and 4.3 highlight a number of areas in which police officers and staff need greater knowledge and understanding of child sexual abuse, its impact and how to disrupt it, while section 7.5 suggests that some would benefit from training on forces' management of direct disruption measures: where information about issued orders and notices is recorded, who is responsible for monitoring adherence to them, and how information about breaches of orders is disseminated.

Furthermore, both strategic leads and frontline survey respondents stressed the need for training around child sexual abuse to be regularly updated, and for refresher sessions to be offered so that officers and staff stay up to date with current trends and knowledge:

> "Frequency is the biggest issue. Training to spot, prevent and detect sexual abuse of children should be a regular programme of development rather than an initial input. This is particularly important to help officers keep abreast of developments in the online grooming of children." (SL)

> "Last training was 16 years ago when I joined. I can't remember the last time I had training in this area. The way children are abused is changing and as a force we don't upskill our officers." (FL)

The frequency with which frontline officers give consideration to child sexual abuse when investigating other offences (see section 7.2) is just one demonstration of the value of training in relation to child sexual abuse – but, as with other aspects of policing (see section 8.4), limited resources appeared to be jeopardising its delivery in at least one force:

> "[There is a] lack of ability to train frontline staff due to austerity measures and the capacity of training department." (SL)

8.3 Taking a strategic, proactive approach to disruption

One strategic lead noted the positive effect of having a strong focus on the disruption of child sexual abuse:

> "A real focus on problem solving and victim/offender/location mapping and targeting/supporting has reduced CSE offending." (SL)

Other strategic leads provided examples of ways that forces were demonstrating this focus, such as by holding daily risk management meetings and making efforts to develop a regional approach:

> "We have a regional meeting that is looking at developing the North West intelligence picture, which would definitely be of benefit." (SL)

However, some strategic leads felt that disruption would be improved if forces took a more joined-up, consistent strategic approach:

> "Beyond the complex safeguarding approaches, single strand cases of CSE sometimes do not have the combined approach that is deemed best practice." (SL)

> "Strategies are very inconsistent and are not effectively evaluated. There are too many children with identified risks, and not enough focus on threats posed by suspects." (SL)

> "[I am] concerned that [disruption measures] are not being routinely deployed during/at the close of investigations/operations. Very much down to the knowledge of each SIO [senior investigating officer] to deliver. Consistency must be delivered." (SL)

Another explained how their force's approach to disruption had resulted in a lack of coordination on the ground:

> "The safeguarding ('Protect') sits separate to the 'Pursue' element in the strategic plan. A lot of officers working within safeguarding are not aware of the information and intel around the targeting of the offenders." (SL)

Some frontline respondents said their forces tended to be reactive in their response to child sexual abuse:

> "The force is reactive and not proactive in terms of children's safety. Officers need to be in primary schools/secondary/colleges working with them, dealing with bad behaviour and collecting intel." (FL)

> "I do not think we use [disruption measures] enough and are not as robust as we could be with using partnership agencies, powers and legislation." (FL)

> "ANPR markers for CSE are not always acted on immediately if the vehicle travels into the force area." (FL)

> "[It] can be difficult to convince some authorisers that the risk is high enough to warrant [use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act]." (FL)

This reactive response was felt to be driven by a risk-averse culture in relation to child sexual abuse:

> "There is such risk aversion in law enforcement that every unit and department will merely move along the protocols rather than take a decision over what should and what should not be undertaken re search warrants. This means that too many [search warrants] are executed for no good reason other than staff not wanting to make a decision." (FL)

> "Action is only taken when clear issues arise, to prevent bad press. Continual intelligence is fed in but there does not seem to be much development of intel unless it is done by the inputting officer. The demands of other non-related issues usually mean there is little time to really get a good picture of what is happening." (FL)

> "Limited use of proactive capabilities. Intel-led rather than risk-led. Still focuses on 'easy wins' of drugs warrants." (FL)

One strategic lead suggested that the move towards a more holistic approach in safeguarding presented challenges to specialist knowledge and response. Others felt that their forces did not place enough value on disrupting child sexual abuse, or on the policing of child abuse in general:

> "More emphasis should be put on recording disruptions – preventing a CSE party and teenage girls getting raped is unlikely to result in judicial disposal. Arrest[ing] a burglar, [who] receives a three-week prison sentence, is seen as a good result and a positive outcome." (SL)

> "I still don't feel that crimes against children have the importance given to them as some other priorities, despite the force strategy having strong elements of this." (SL)

"Some forces tended to be reactive in their response to child sexual abuse, frontline personnel said, because of a risk-averse culture.

Frontline respondents expressed the same concerns:

> "Child sexual abuse is not seen as a priority within our force. This is clearly evidenced by staffing levels and the Chief Constable's lack of understanding around what the role of a PPU officer involves." (FL)

> "[Child sexual abuse] needs to be given more priority. Due to large volume of violence/gang related and firearms jobs in the force, it is often not prioritised or given appropriate resources." (FL)

> "I believe [child sexual abuse] should be held as a much higher priority within each police force, as it is normally the root cause of so many police incidents that we attend in relation to SAC [serious acquisitive crime], Violence, Missing, Exploitation, Mental Health incidents, sexual abuse. Sadly, it is not driven as a priority in the same way as dwelling burglary within [my force], and so it is not resourced in the same way nor monitored in terms of performance." (FL)

> "There needs to be continuous improved communication. There tend to be operations that periodically take place. These raise the profile of the issue for a brief period of time but this then falls away once the operation has passed." (FL)

It was also felt that the overlaps between different forms of child sexual abuse and other types of abuse needed to be recognised, to enable a more strategic approach to disruption:

> "Recognise and operationalise the child sexual abuse links to gangs, OCGs [organised crime groups], drugs, knives and violence." (SL)

> "[There needs to be a] realisation that child sexual exploitation is one facet of abuse, whereby a child could be victim of child criminal exploitation etc at the same time so [we] cannot have a silo approach." (SL)

> "More focus on other areas of sexual abuse than child sexual exploitation." (SL)

8.4 Allocating sufficient capacity for disruption activities

A theme that emerged strongly in the survey responses from both frontline personnel and strategic leads was the need for officers to have sufficient time and capacity to support the disruption of child sexual abuse. Many respondents noted that their forces' capacity for this work had been reduced:

> "Capacity to action – shrinking resource, very inexperienced officer base and lack of intelligence and information." (SL)

Several frontline respondents reported that dedicated teams to support disruption activities had been disbanded or altered, and described the impact of these changes:

> "There is a weakening of the MOSOVO [Managing Sexual Offenders and Violent Offenders Unit] in our area. It used to be a self-sufficient and highly proactive unit. However, it is now heavily staffed by civilians and in my opinion is much less effective. Part of this is due to the very high number of RSOs [registered sex offenders] to monitor. Our neighbouring force is very poor as they have completely civilianised their PPU [Public Protection Unit] and invite RSOs to the station for their visits!" (FL)

> "I am concerned that the PPIU [Public Protection Investigation Unit], which was essentially a team of police safeguarding 'experts' on each division of potentially 30 officers, has been disbanded and the work shared out in CID [Criminal Investigation Department], uniform staff or a small group of the new district MASH [multi-agency safeguarding hub] teams which consist of a few officers. The experience of these officers has been lost. The relationships cultured between social services, other professionals and police have been lost/damaged. No one seems to know where the work the PPIU teams (which was overwhelming in volume and intensity) has gone to. In this day and age, where 'safeguarding' is the buzz word, to disband such units is an insane decision." (FL)

"Disruption of CSE in our force area is left to a small number of special constables who work part-time. I am the manager of that team. We have vast amounts of work that we cannot possibly all deal with." (FL)

"[Without] our specialist units [we are under] one 'Safeguarding' umbrella where officers do not always have the experience to deal with these serious cases. They also have to deal with so many other cases that things are missed and stress levels are high." (FL)

A strategic lead described a similar experience, but noted that the decision to disband a region's Public Protection Investigation Units was being reviewed:

"[Name of police region] disbanded PPIUs. It was their worst decision ever. They took away child protection teams (except CSE) and merged with the CID. This left detectives who have no interest in child protection work investigating serious child protection crimes. They were not trained and ultimately they didn't want to do it. [Name of police region] is reviewing this as partners quite rightly had a lot to complain about. Undoubtedly, in my view, we should return to PPIUs as they had great relationships with partners and dealt with all child protection work." (SL)

Other respondents argued for general increases in staffing to improve forces' capacity to disrupt child sexual abuse, particularly in the light of increases in offending:

"Staffing levels will need to increase in order to carry out disruption and prevention methods." (FL)

"More officers/resources available to assist frontline officers once it has been identified that prevention and disruption activities are appropriate, as completing the process takes a significant length of time." (FL)

"More officers, as we need to be free of paperwork in order to spend time doing disruption prior to the offences being committed." (FL)

"Improved capability/capacity for online monitoring/securing digital evidence." (SL)

"Additional detective and specialist resources to deal with the increasing offending picture." (SL)

"Review of staffing against rise in demand – especially online activities." (SL)

A lack of capacity was felt to be affecting forces' ability to tackle child sexual abuse strategically:

"Lack of resources to enable time investment in individuals, to work on building strategy to separate from group-grooming and gang-related CSE." (FL)

"The difficulties are a lack of resources which means we cannot carry out any activities over and above the admin functions that we carry out." (FL)

One frontline respondent provided an example of how disruption-supportive activities were not always carried out:

"I arrested a suspect for historical child abuse offences. He worked in a notifiable occupation. As I understand it, this should automatically trigger a referral. It wasn't until a year after the investigation started, when the suspect was charged, that I discovered that the local licensing agency for his occupation hadn't received a referral." (FL)

Several strategic leads suggested that greater technical capacity (through use of a better computer database, for example) would increase their ability to disrupt child sexual abuse:

"There is a significant amount of information, … too vast for an analyst to review in a preventative manner, that would allow tactical-level information between partner agencies to be gathered, reviewed and analysed to an operational level." (SL)

8.5 Developing disruption-supportive resources

Four strategic leads highlighted the benefits of having specific resources to support disruption:

> "We have a CSE tactical directory for consideration – useful guide for managers/supervisors at all levels and roles." (SL)

> "School Uniform Database – a database within which school uniform is uploading which affords the officers the opportunity to identify victims in IIOC [indecent images of children] cases where uniform is evident." (SL)

> "We use a Force CSE disruption toolkit as well as the Home Office Child Exploitation Disruption Toolkit.[7] Within the toolkit are tactics used to disrupt child abuse activity; these include CAWNs [child abduction warning notices], FMPO [forced marriage protection orders], PPO [public protection orders] NRM [National Referral Mechanism], SRO/SHPO [sexual risk orders/sexual harm prevention orders], STRO [slavery and trafficking risk orders], closure notices, gang injunctions." (SL)

> "A technical solution has been developed on a new piece of software called Briefing and Tasking to have a place to store nominals who have relevant 'orders' in an easily accessible way. Those who are in breach or at risk of breaching can then be moved to the front page and discussed/targeted in daily management meetings. This software is due to go live soon." (SL)

8.6 Multi-agency working and information-sharing

Strategic leads highlighted the importance of multi-agency working and sharing information with partner agencies in supporting the disruption of child sexual abuse. Some explained that they had co-located teams or individuals to work within social care and health services:

> "Case management teams are also co-located, ensuring child protection conferences are conducted and updated within the multi-agency team." (SL)

Several mentioned being part of Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) groups:

> "MACE processes are identifying opportunities to disrupt offending. This is a good platform with committed individuals." (SL)

Others talked about working with other agencies to review cases:

> "Partnership review at case closure to assure children are safeguarded and all disruption measure identified and implemented." (SL)

> "We have commissioned a charity to conduct return interviews following missing episodes that explore [child sexual abuse and exploitation] issues and report for support if identified." (SL)

One described making joint visits with partner agencies in response to received intelligence about 'hotspot' areas.

Some frontline police also highlighted the importance of multi-agency working in disrupting child sexual abuse:

> "Working with schools and other organisations really help to combat this situation and get social services to take action once we obtain the evidence required." (FL)

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7. The Child Exploitation Disruption toolkit (Home Office, 2019) is primarily aimed at frontline staff working to safeguard children and young people under the age of 18 from sexual and criminal exploitation. It is intended to help all safeguarding partners understand and access existing legislative opportunities at their disposal and to target specific risks.

In particular, it was suggested that working with other agencies allowed for effective engagement with victims and their families:

> "Dealing with the offenders and children allows us to engage with partnership agencies, so that the relevant agency can be involved with the victim and family, as it is not always something for the police." (FL)

Although partnership working could present logistical challenges, respondents indicated that they were working to overcome these:

> "Within our force we have four local authority areas, which presents challenges in terms of our partnership processes specific to CSE. Whilst there is provision everywhere, we are currently reviewing our investigative and vulnerability structure to bring about greater consistency." (SL)

8.6.1 Support and information-sharing from other agencies

Frontline survey respondents highlighted the need for all agencies to work together in order for disruption to be effective:

> "A multi-agency approach does not always work if everyone is not on the same page." (FL)

> "We don't always get the support from other agencies we need before we get vital evidence of the situation at times." (FL)

Some indicated a need for improved communication and cooperation from children's social care in particular:

> "Other agencies are not taking the lead when they should. This is especially true of social services, who often seem to send concerns to us about child sexual exploitation on a Friday afternoon at about 4pm because they are clearly about to go home for the weekend and don't have anywhere near enough resources to deal with things themselves out of hours or at weekend." (FL)

> "Children's services failing to take a lead where appropriate." (FL)

> "Better collaboration needed with much improved buy-in from children's social care." (FL)

Strategic leads also highlighted issues with information-sharing by other agencies:

> "Local authorities not happy sharing with police re data sharing requirements." (SL)

> "Health are reluctant to share information, particularly on medium- and low-risk cases, which makes early intervention and proper assessment of risk challenging." (SL)

> "The movement of children between local authority areas. There is little intelligence about this and often the first the police will know is when the young person starts to be reported as missing or vulnerable." (SL)

In some cases, however, efforts were being made to improve this:

> "Issues around confidentiality of sharing intelligence – specifically when this is to frontline council staff/partners. An Intelligence e-portal has been created to facilitate this flow to police from partners." (SL)

> "Multi-agency working was thought necessary for disruption to be effective, but issues with communication and cooperation were raised.

8.7 Monitoring and evaluating disruption activities

Strategic leads were asked whether their force sought to monitor and assess the effectiveness of their efforts to disrupt child sexual abuse.

8.7.1 Data collection

More than half of the 38 strategic leads (n=21) provided examples of information collected by their force in relation to the disruption of child sexual abuse. In 15 cases, this information related specifically to disruption activity, including the collection of data related to the use of:

‣ child abduction warning notices (CAWNs)

‣ protection from harassment orders

‣ police powers of protection

‣ overt visits

‣ the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme

‣ National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referrals and re-referrals

‣ Safeguarding referrals made via Protecting Vulnerable People (PVP) performance meeting structure

‣ victim/perpetrator and location data.

Others referred to recording the use of flags and trackers or feeding into police databases, such as:

‣ Indecent Images of Children (IIOC) trackers

‣ a serious crime tracker for child criminal exploitation/child sexual exploitation investigations

‣ a tracker for use of disruption notices and orders

‣ children flagged at risk of child sexual exploitation

‣ perpetrators flagged for child sexual exploitation

‣ Threat to Life (TTL) trackers

‣ flags for child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation

‣ pam (a cloud-based solution) to record and share information on strategic activities

‣ reporting to the Challenger and Titan disruption database[8]

‣ data from the Violent and Sexual Offender Register (ViSOR) regarding the management of registered sex offenders.

Five strategic leads referred to monitoring arrests, crime and incident data:

> "We monitor outcomes/success of operations/arrests and court outcomes. Updates are provided regularly." (SL)

Others referred to collecting data on referrals, intelligence and reports, such as:

‣ safeguarding referrals

‣ intelligence

‣ crime data, e.g. number of reported child sexual abuse offences and outcomes

‣ referrals to the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meeting

‣ number of children at risk heard about at MACE meetings

‣ number of suspects heard about at MACE meetings

‣ Data Inspection team audits

‣ Quarterly Basic Command Unit (BCU) audits

‣ Tactical Tasking and Coordinating Group (TTCG) and scanning by analysts

‣ Annual force level problem profile

‣ Quarterly BCU problem profile

‣ Public Protection daily management meetings.

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8. Titan is an operation that sits within most regional organised crime units (ROCUs). Its primary focus is on proactively targeting organised crime group activity. Although each of the nine ROCUs works slightly differently, all will utilise their Titan databases to capture intelligence to disrupt offenders.

Five strategic leads said that data was collected and monitored at a local level only. One explained that their Complex Safeguarding Hub collated some bespoke data, but that this was not routine. Another commented:

> "Case examples of disruption may be given at force tasking but data is limited." (SL)

Another highlighted the difference between the collection of information and actual analysis of this data in their force:

> "Obviously arrests, caution and charge figures will be able to be found out. However, I doubt there is any regular harvesting and analysis of these figures." (SL)

Others talked about work that was needed or already under way to review the monitoring of disruption activities in their force:

> "[Monitoring of] disruption activities in terms of CSE is being reviewed at this time." (SL)

> "[Data on] general disruption activity is available but not routinely reviewed as part of performance at this time – but there are plans to include this [in our monthly review of data on crime and outcomes] moving forward." (SL)

> "We have various markers on our Athena system which are designed to equip us better in collating data. However, work is ongoing to improve these markers to improve how we can better understand the nature and scale of child sexual abuse. With specific regard to disruption activities, these are managed by our 'risk management plans' where disruptive activity is recorded." (SL)

Six of the 21 strategic leads said that they did not know whether any data was being collected in relation to the disruption of child sexual abuse, and three said that no data was collected in their force.

8.7.2 Evaluation

Fourteen strategic leads said that their force sought to assess the effectiveness of their disruption activities. Nine of them described management processes and audits, including:

- reviewing numbers managed, e.g. at MACE meetings, Tactical Tasking and Coordination group meetings and multi-agency meetings

- audits carried out by Dedicated Inspection Teams, Business Improvement Units and Base Command Units

- operational performance reviews, e.g. of the CSE Operations teams and Organised Crime Group (OCG) management

- Reviewing individual risk management plans to assess ongoing effectiveness in protecting young people from harm.

Three strategic leads described the use of peer review processes and joint agency case reviews to assess the effectiveness of disruption activities:

> "The Multi-Agency Peer Review Process assesses performance in every borough across Greater Manchester. This includes the quality of prevention and disruption work, quality of information sharing, investigation, management of suspects, early help for victims, support for victims and outcomes." (SL)

Five provided information on specific efforts to evaluate their disruption activities, such as:

- conducting covert checks at hotels to see whether staff use their training to prevent CSE

- examining re-referral rates, repeat victims, success of operations/arrests and court outcomes

- analysis of the use of CAWNs and letters of concern

- Local Safeguarding Children Partnership meetings and annual police strategic assessment of the number of cases of child sexual abuse and children/young people reported missing.

One described how effectiveness was "reviewed as part of daily processes and, if exceptional, disseminated as [continuing professional development]" (SL).

Some strategic leads suggested it was wrong to equate success with arrests, however, as they saw disruption as a proactive strategy to prevent further child sexual abuse. A subsequent arrest would, they argued, mean that a crime had been committed and child(ren) harmed. Consequently, they said, efforts to disrupt child sexual abuse should be recorded and celebrated in their own right:

> "[There should be] a change in culture to celebrate child safety as a successful outcome above arrests and media-grabbing headlines." (SL)

> "To understand and tackle child sexual abuse effectively requires a proactive response. More emphasis should be put on recording disruptions [even if they are] unlikely to result in judicial disposal." (SL)

Concerns about evaluating the effectiveness of disruption activities were also raised by three frontline respondents, who suggested that disruption measures often secured only short-term gains and longer-term outcomes remained largely unknown. Without saying so explicitly, one also appeared to suggest that disruption might simply move the offending to another area:

> "At times, disruptions stopped the abuse temporarily, due to offenders having to find another location." (FL)

However, as discussed in section 6.1.3, frontline respondents acknowledged that even short-term disruption could offer victims protection and allow time to engage the support of other agencies or develop intelligence.

8.8 Developing and sharing good practice within and across forces

Several strategic leads described ways in which good practice was developed and shared, either within individual forces or across different forces:

> "Regular supervision meetings about child protection across three divisions to share good practice." (SL)

> "Missing Children's Team using missing incidents to attempt to identify early symptoms and support with independent de-brief service." (SL)

One referred to the use of informal peer reviews, whereby specialist CSE and OCG (Organised Crime Group) teams from one force would carry out an informal peer review of another force area to identify good/poor practice and enable mutual learning. Section 8.7.2 contains an example of peer review to assess the effectiveness of disruption activities.

Another strategic lead described how orces could learn from and be supported by one another:

> "North Yorkshire Police have been adopting West Yorkshire Police approach and have been supported with improving their response [to child sexual abuse]." (SL)

"Some strategic leads felt it was wrong to equate success with arrests, seeing disruption as a proactive strategy to prevent further abuse.

9. Suggestions for wider change

A few respondents to the surveys of frontline personnel and strategic leads suggested improvements to the disruption of child sexual abuse which are beyond the scope of individual police forces to implement. These are summarised briefly in this chapter.

9.1 Regional organised crime units

One strategic lead indicated a need to improve the use of problem profiles, and indicated the importance of regional organised crime units (ROCUs) in this:

> "Need joined-up problem profiles. This would need funding, as I believe ROCUs are best placed to give an overview of the cross-border issues and to complete a regional problem profile that could then feed into the national problem profile." (SL)

A participant in one of the discussion groups highlighted another vital role of ROCUs, noting that local forces did not always have sufficient powers to disrupt online child sexual abuse:

> "When three local children were being groomed on TikTok, the ROCU did an account take-over of one of the children and quickly resolved who was behind suspect account. Local forces wouldn't have been able to do this." (DG)

9.2 National policing bodies

One strategic lead felt that there was a potential role for the College of Policing in driving improvement at a strategic level:

> "Better coordination of what works and push by College of Policing to help deliver this." (SL)

A frontline respondent indicated that information from the National Crime Agency on child sexual abuse cases could be improved:

> "The intelligence from the NCA around abusive images can often be poor, from my own experience … and from talking to colleagues." (FL)

"

It was noted that some disruption activity could only be carried out by regional organised crime units, rather than by local forces.

"

9.3 Other agencies

As noted in section 8.6.1, some survey respondents reported that multi-agency working had been hampered by a perceived lack of understanding and cooperation from partner agencies. Strategic leads suggested that disruption could be improved through changes to other agencies' operations in relation to:

‣ reducing the use of school exclusions

‣ increased support for children with drug, alcohol or mental health concerns

‣ joint strategy and safety plans with young people and partner agencies.

Frontline respondents also highlighted a need for better information sharing and risk assessments by other agencies, and for partner agencies to be better resourced:

"[I would like] child and safeguarding teams to work past 1600 hours and on weekends." (FL)

"We had a joint investigation team, with a social worker working in the station with officers. The city council disbanded it and the work with social workers is now very difficult [with regard to achieving] the right results and agreements." (FL)

One strategic lead explained that they were currently working to develop a "shared portal for partners to share information and risk levels regarding exploitation and missing". Another felt that partners would benefit from national guidance on tactics and interventions.

9.4 Legislation to increase police powers

A number of respondents said they had experiences of courts not granting sexual risk orders (SROs), or of receiving an inadequate response from social media companies. Some strategic leads proposed that direct measures to disrupt child sexual abuse should be strengthened:

"[We need] nationally approved offender schemes that can be enforced without conviction, as is being progressed with the domestic abuse agenda." (SL)

"Greater regulatory powers to place restrictions on social networks." (SL)

"Better access to social media of victims and suspects." (SL)

> Respondents described their experience of courts not granting sexual risk orders, or social media companies giving inadequate responses.

10. Conclusions

This study aimed to develop an understanding of current police practice in England and Wales around the disruption of child sexual abuse, and to identify challenges and enablers in relation to that disruption activity. Through online surveys and discussion groups with frontline police officers and staff as well as strategic leads, it explored the disruption measures in use, their perceived effectiveness, good practice and barriers to implementation, and gaps in current practice and policy.

The research identified a number of gaps in respondents' self-reported knowledge of child sexual abuse and how to disrupt it. For example, there were indications that children at risk could sometimes be problematised by police, and some frontline respondents felt they lacked skills in communicating with children and families. Uncertainty was expressed about the role and responsibilities of individual officers in disrupting child sexual abuse – and there were widely differing views of what disruption activity is, how relevant it is to child sexual abuse in different contexts, whether it should be focused on the child or on those suspected of abusing them, and how disruption measures should be applied.

While almost three-quarters of frontline personnel reported having attended some training in relation to child sexual abuse, some in specialist roles said they had received no such training; furthermore, no respondents had received any training in disrupting child sexual abuse. Both strategic leads and frontline personnel indicated that they would welcome improvements to police training around child sexual abuse and its disruption.

Many frontline personnel said they had been involved in disrupting child sexual abuse at some point, although there was some regional variation in this (possibly reflecting the roles of the survey respondents in different regions). Almost three-fifths of respondents to the frontline survey had used child abduction warning notices (CAWNs) for this purpose, with other measures including mobile phone scrutiny, sexual harm prevention orders (SHPOs), Police National Computer markers and police powers of protection each used by at least one-third. These measures were typically employed in cases of child sexual abuse perpetrated by groups or gangs or involving online images; to disrupt intra-familial abuse or abuse by under-18s, only police powers of protection and CAWNs respectively were widely used. It was recognised that certain measures may be more effective for specific types of child sexual abuse, but strategic leads typically felt that their forces were not taking a joined-up strategic approach to disruption.

The effectiveness of disruption activity was considered difficult to evaluate, with only short-term impacts typically being visible while longer-term outcomes – such as whether disrupting offenders' activities causes them to cease offending or merely to relocate – remain unknown. Strategic leads described a variety of evaluation processes, with some suggesting that arrest figures should not be used to measure success since the point of disruption is to keep children safe and prevent offences from occurring. Because of the police resources required to disrupt child sexual abuse, and the lack of 'results' in terms of arrests and prosecutions, concerns were expressed that police forces did not place enough value on disruption and did not prioritise child sexual abuse sufficiently.

Direct disruption measures – particularly CAWNs, SHPOs and Sexual Risk Orders – were widely considered to be effective because the consequences of breaching them were clear to the suspect, but there was considerably less clarity around how they were enforced and by whom, or how personnel would know if they had been breached.

Participants in the study identified several tactical actions which they considered to facilitate the disruption of child sexual abuse, and suggested improvements to current practice. For example, child sexual abuse was felt to be prioritised in daily tasking, albeit not on a regular basis in many police forces; problem profiles were valued, although most forces were not yet using them or were updating them infrequently; and there were calls for improved within-force information sharing. At a strategic level, it was felt that some forces were reactive in their response to child sexual abuse, and that resources for disruption activities had decreased across many forces. Challenges in working with other agencies on disruption activity were highlighted, particularly around those agencies' willingness to share information and the timing of communications.

Overall, while there is evidence of disruption measures being used to tackle certain forms of child sexual abuse, the research suggests that there is often a lack of broader knowledge of how child sexual abuse can be disrupted effectively. Addressing this will require improved and consistent training for all personnel, together with the development of a disruption strategy that:

- prioritises child sexual abuse – in all its contexts (e.g. including intra-familial abuse and abuse by under-18s) – and its disruption

- enables disruption measures (or a combination of them) to be matched to individual cases in different contexts, maximising the efficacy of disruption activity

- encourages cooperation between policing and other organisations – for example, by ensuring the confidentiality of shared information to support a multi-agency approach to disruption.

The findings also highlight the role that strategic leaders can play in improving the police approach to disruption. As well as addressing how forces can improve their systems and processes in order to better share information, use daily tasking more effectively and work more closely with multi-agency partners, strategic leaders can employ a system-wide lens and challenge the existing culture.

"
A disruption strategy should be developed which enables disruption measures to be matched to individual cases in different contexts.
"

10.1 Implications for policing and beyond

Increased disruption activity is key to the UK Government's strategy for tackling child sexual abuse, which sets out a vision for responding to such abuse in which:

"Law enforcement and intelligence services have the capability to disrupt offending at scale, leaving no safe spaces for offenders." (Home Office, 2021:9)

To achieve this vision, the measurement of success in policing needs to develop further beyond arrest and prosecution statistics, so that disruption activity reducing the harm of child sexual abuse (and other offences) is valued appropriately. At a national level, there needs to be:

- strategic oversight of and support for disruption activity

- a simplified process for applying for civil and criminal orders and notices

- standardised expectations of how civil and criminal notices and orders are enforced.

At a local level, there needs to be:

- active management oversight of and support for disruption activity

- prioritisation of child sexual abuse disruption in daily tasking

- better understanding by all frontline personnel of the thresholds and tests for civil and criminal notices and orders

- clarity for frontline personnel in how they can tell when an order is in place

- a change of culture within forces, through training on problem-solving and action learning sets

- specific and proactive focus on forces collecting data on child sexual abuse disruption activities

- no disbanding or weakening of specialist teams, which require routine specialist training

- improved monitoring and evaluation of disruption's effectiveness, in terms of both specific measures and broader approaches taken.

Systematic delivery of training on the disruption of child sexual abuse is therefore required, both to strategic leads and to frontline police officers and staff across policing. This should be embedded within existing courses, and be the focus of dedicated courses.

Similarly, frontline personnel must have access to accessible materials offering clear definitions, rationale and case examples demonstrating effective disruption practice.

Given the complexities of responding to child sexual abuse, there must be wider recognition – as this study suggests there already is within policing – that disruption is a multi-agency effort which relies on working together and sharing information. A consistent approach to disruption practice must be embedded across the multi-agency team, including the judiciary, through guidance and training. And systems for cooperation on disruption activity across forces and agencies (such as children's social care, schools, licensing authorities and voluntary organisations) need to be improved – for example, by:

- clarifying appropriate levels of information-sharing

- improving links, and addressing issues around trust, between agencies (including voluntary sector and community-based organisations) that can contribute towards disruption of child sexual abuse

- ensuring that opportunities to disrupt abuse are not lost when perpetrators or children move between force areas, including through the sharing of information on disruption measures in place.

At a strategic leadership level, this will require a focus on supporting local forces to understand the importance of disruption and their role in implementing strategies that can support it. In addition, further research into other perspectives of disruption, including those of multi-agency partners and people with lived experience, would bring new insights and, no doubt, new thinking to support the effective disruption of child sexual abuse.

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Appendix A: Disruption measures

The following table lists the disruption measures referred to in the surveys of frontline police and strategic leads for safeguarding. The list is not exhaustive; a more detailed exploration of the range of measures used to disrupt child sexual abuse can be found in our scoping review report (Wager and Parkinson, 2021).

Measures have been categorised as:

▸ **direct measures**, which impose legal sanctions on offenders, making it more difficult for them to commit (or continue to commit) child sexual abuse

▸ **disruption-supportive measures**, which serve to disable or disrupt criminal activity taking place in the community

▸ **online measures**, which disrupt criminal activity taking place or being facilitated over the internet.

Some measures may fit within more than one of these approaches, but have been allocated to the category that most closely reflects their focus.

Disruption measure	Type	Description
Absolute grounds for possession	Disruption-supportive	This allows landlords to reclaim possession of secure and assured tenancies in cases where antisocial or criminal behaviour has occurred.
Automatic number plate recognition (ANPR)	Disruption-supportive	A technology which reads vehicle registration marks when a vehicle passes an ANPR camera. ANPR 'hotlists' can be used to instigate an immediate safeguarding response and trigger a specific action if an ANPR camera is activated.
Business-related disruption strategies	Disruption-supportive	Strategies used to disrupt the function of, or gain access to, businesses that are linked to the facilitation of child sexual abuse.
CCTV	Disruption-supportive	Briefing CCTV operators can be used to dissuade illegal activity in hotspots identified as being used for activity relating to child sexual exploitation.
Child abduction warning notices (CAWNs)	Direct	An official notice served by police which aims to break contact between a suspect and a child. A CAWN identifies the child or young person at risk and confirms to the suspect that they are not allowed to have any contact with them.
Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme	Disruption-supportive	This scheme allows concerned parents, guardians, or third parties to enquire whether a person who has access to a child is a registered sex offender, or poses a risk to that child.

Disruption measure	Type	Description
Civil injunctions and restrictions	Direct	These can be used against individuals who are engaged in, are threatening to engage in, or can be prevented from engaging in antisocial behaviour. Depending on the circumstances, civil injunctions can be used to disrupt individuals involved directly or indirectly in child sexual abuse, e.g. by prohibiting them from entering specific locations such as schools, children's homes, businesses or identified 'hotspots'). Restrictions can also be imposed in relation to hiring vehicles or owning multiple phones.
Closure notices (commercial premises)	Direct	These can be issued by police officers to owners or occupiers of commercial premises when there is a reasonable belief that a sexual offence against a child has occurred there or is likely to occur there.
Community protection notices	Direct	These may be served to stop someone from committing antisocial behaviour which harms the quality of life of the community.
Criminal behaviour orders (formerly ASBOs)	Direct	These orders can be issued when someone is convicted of a criminal offence in a criminal court. They may include prohibitions aimed at stopping antisocial behaviour, as well as requirements that target the causes of the antisocial behaviour.
Device scrutiny – Child Abuse Image Database (CAID)	Online	A secure database storing images captured by the police and the National Crime Agency. Hashes (mathematical algorithms that identify computer files) linked to specific images can be used in the forensic review of suspects' devices. If images of child sexual abuse are found, they can be married up to existing images on CAID to support the disruption of abuse.
Enforcing minor offences	Direct	Enforcing and prosecuting minor crimes, such as trespassing or being drunk and disorderly, committed by individuals suspected of child sexual abuse can disrupt such abuse.
Exclusion orders	Direct	Court orders that prohibit a person from entering a specific place or area.
Financial investigations/ forfeiture	Disruption-supportive	Financial investigations typically operate within the legal framework of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, which introduced a number of asset recovery powers such as the use of restraint orders and post-conviction confiscation orders, cash seizure and civil forfeiture/recovery.
Forced marriage protection orders	Direct	These consist of legally binding conditions and directions, aimed at changing the behaviour of individuals trying to force someone into marriage.

Disruption measure	Type	Description
High-visibility policing of 'hotspots'	Disruption-supportive	Increasing police visibility, introducing and/or briefing CCTV operators, and carrying out outreach visits from voluntary agencies can all dissuade illegal activity in hotspots identified as being used for activity relating to child sexual abuse.
High-Harm Scheme	Disruption-supportive	Opportunities to identify improved offender management, through the development of offender managers who manage the risks of high-harm suspects/offenders.
Hotel guest information notices	Disruption-supportive	These can be used when hotels are believed to be used for the commission of child sexual abuse offences. They require the owners/managers to provide information about their guests.
Inherent jurisdiction of a High Court	Direct	This encompasses a range of prohibitive injunctions that can be made by the court to restrict an individual's actions when a child is believed likely to suffer significant harm, and safeguarding cannot be achieved by taking the child into care or using other statutory powers.
Injunctions for gang-related and or drug-related activity	Disruption-supportive	These allow the court to dictate positive requirements and prohibitions on an individual's behaviour to prevent them from engaging in drug- or gang-related activity, or to protect them from becoming involved in such activity.
Letters of concern	Disruption-supportive	Also known as 'C5s' or 'suspect warning letters', these were developed for instances where perpetration of child sexual abuse is suspected but there is no evidence and no option to develop intelligence about the case. The letters remind recipients of the laws around child sexual abuse, notify them that they are being monitored by police, and encourage them to seek support if they are concerned about their behaviour.
Management of registered sex offenders	Disruption-supportive	The Violent and Sex Offender Register is a non-public register where all convicted sex offenders must be registered within three days of their conviction or release from prison.
Mobile phone scrutiny (Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act/ Investigatory Powers Act)	Online	A RIPA notice requires an individual to give the police access to a mobile phone, with the aim of detecting or preventing crime.

Disruption measure	Type	Description
Non-molestation orders	Direct	These can be applied for when an individual believed to pose a risk is considered to be an 'associated person' with the potential victim – often a family member. The order restricts contact with and or harassment of the victim.
Online infiltration	Online	Police can engage in undercover ('sting') operations to apprehend perpetrators of image-related child sexual abuse offences and online grooming offences. Police may pose as children in online chatrooms, or join networks of perpetrators who share images of child sexual abuse. While police cannot incite the commission of a crime, they are permitted, with specific authorisation, to engage in some criminal activity (e.g. sharing images of abuse) if this is likely to lead to the apprehension of perpetrators.
Overt attrition visits	Disruption-supportive	Lone offenders/would-be offenders, as well as organised crime groups, live in local communities and expect some police activity against them. Their offending can be curtailed or disrupted if they are made aware of overt law enforcement activity against them.
Police National Computer (PNC) markers	Disruption-supportive	A form of intelligence marker, often referred to as a 'flag', used to tag vehicles, suspects, locations, vulnerable people and incidents related to child sexual exploitation in England and Wales on both the PNC and regional intelligence systems.
Police powers of dispersal	Disruption-supportive	These powers allow the police to require someone who has committed or is likely to commit anti-social behaviour to leave a specified area for a period of up to 48 hours.
Police powers of protection	Direct	These powers allow police officers to remove a child to suitable and safe accommodation for 72 hours, if they have reasonable cause to believe that the child is likely to suffer significant harm without intervention. ('Suitable accommodation' might be a relative's home or a local authority care placement.) This gives other agencies time to make applications to court or find longer-term suitable and safe accommodation.
Public space protection orders	Disruption-supportive	These identify a specific area and prescribe activities that are not allowed to be undertaken in this area for a period of up to three years.
Recovery orders	Direct	Court orders that require a child to be returned to their responsible person.
Repeat Vulnerable Victim Strategy	Disruption-supportive	A strategy adopted by local police forces to protect and support vulnerable repeat victims of crime. This includes identifying such victims and reducing the risk of threat and harm.

Disruption measure	Type	Description
Restraining orders	Disruption-supportive	Court orders that prohibit someone from contacting another individual, or attending that individual's place of work or home. Breach of a restraining order is a criminal offence.
Reviews of licenced premises	Disruption-supportive	If there is a belief that a licenced premise is undermining their licencing objectives, a 28-day review period may be called.
Risk flagging (of vehicles, property or people)	Disruption-supportive	As well as placing markers on the Police National Computer, forces can identify risk through their own intelligence systems by placing appropriate flags on both potential offenders and potential victims.
Sexual harm prevention orders (SHPOs)	Direct	These can be requested by the police or a court against individuals who are believed likely to cause sexual harm, or who have already been convicted of doing so and are believed to constitute an ongoing serious risk of harm. The orders aim to prevent individuals from engaging in a particular activity.
Sexual risk orders (SROs)	Direct	Civil orders that can be sought by the police when an individual has not been convicted or cautioned but is believed to be likely to cause sexual harm. These orders aim to prevent individuals from engaging in a particular activity.
Slavery and trafficking prevention orders (STPOs)	Direct	An STPO can be made against an individual who has a conviction or caution for an offence related to slavery or trafficking. It can place restrictions or notification requirements on the individual – for example, restricting the contact they may have with a child or young person, or requiring them to provide their name and address and update any changes (e.g. moving to a new area or planning to travel overseas) while the STPO is in place.
Social media scrutiny (RIPA) including face recognition	Online	A RIPA notice requires an individual to give the police access to a social media account, with the aim of detecting or preventing crime.
Taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) licensing	Disruption-supportive	This requires taxi and PHV licence-holders and applicants to undergo an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.
Vehicle and property searches	Disruption-supportive	These involve searching a vehicle or property upon suspicion of a crime having been committed.

Appendix B: Survey respondents by police force

Strategic leads for safeguarding

Police force	No. of respondents
Avon and Somerset	1
Cheshire	1
Cleveland	1
Cumbria	1
Essex	1
Greater Manchester	11
Gwent	3
Hampshire	1
Lincolnshire	3
Merseyside	1
Metropolitan Police	1
North Yorkshire	1
Northamptonshire	1
Nottinghamshire	1
South Wales	1
Suffolk	1
Sussex	1
West Mercia	2
West Midlands	2
West Yorkshire	3
Total	**38**

Frontline officers and staff

Police force	No. of respondents
Avon and Somerset	8
Bedfordshire	2
Cambridgeshire	26
Cheshire	12
Cleveland	2
Cumbria	29
Dyfed-Powys	6
Essex	61
Gloucestershire	2
Greater Manchester	45
Gwent	16
Humberside	13
Kent	87
Lancashire	19
Leicestershire	3
Lincolnshire	3
Merseyside	31
Metropolitan Police	99
Norfolk	38
North Yorkshire	75
Northamptonshire	6
Nottinghamshire	2
South Wales	28
Suffolk	10
Surrey	7
Sussex	24
Thames Valley	21
Warwickshire	9
West Mercia	10
West Midlands	5
West Yorkshire	35
Wiltshire	14
Not known	6
Total	**754**

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