

21 September 2023



# Invisible Children

Understanding the risk of the cost-of-living crisis and school holidays on child sexual and criminal exploitation

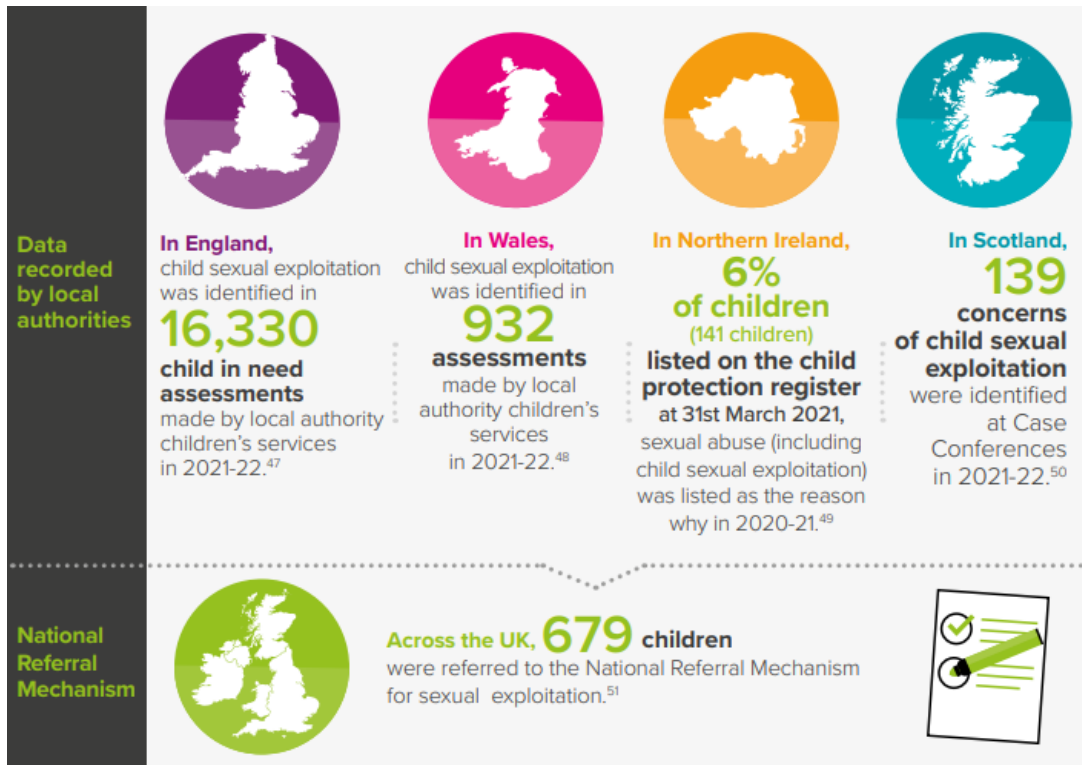
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# Evidence and Research

- FOI Request made to the police regarding child sexual exploitation figures
- FOI Request to local authorities and Police and Crime Commissioners regarding the commissioning of CSE and CCE services for child victims
- Statistics from YouGov polling commissioned by Barnardo's in May 2023
- Input from children and young people
- Interviews with Barnardo's practitioners
- Interviews with interns from Leaders Unlocked



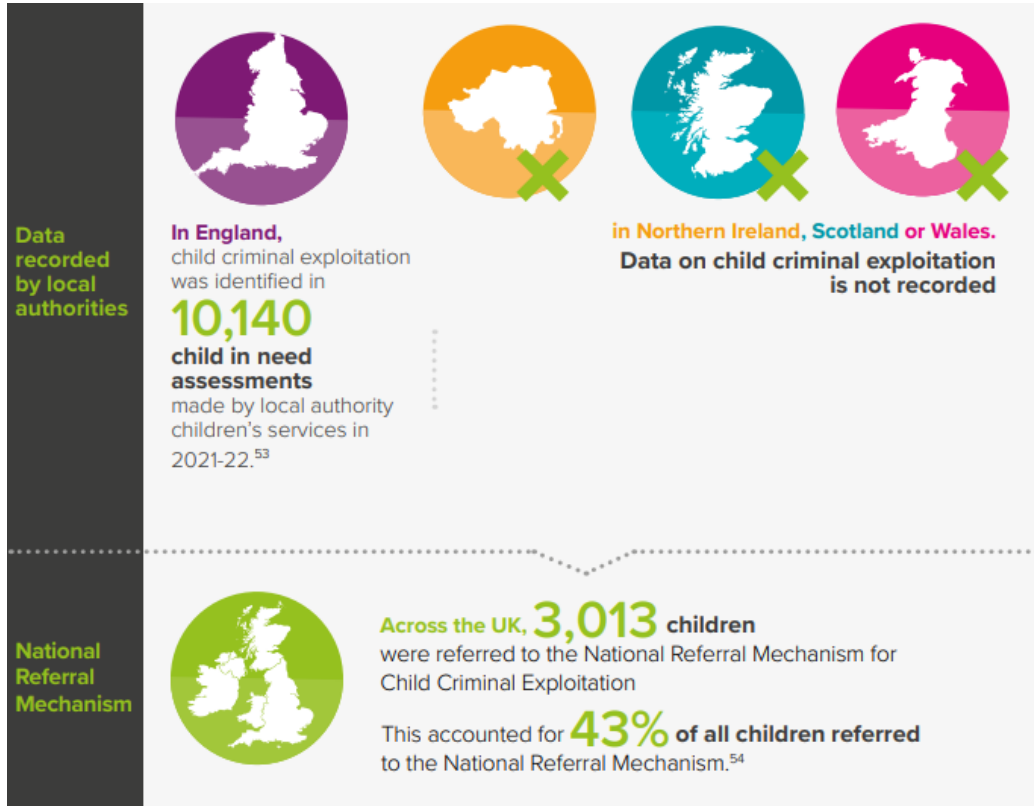
# Scale of child sexual exploitation



## Challenges in data on CSE

- No specific offence for CSE
- Data on forms of child sexual abuse not being disaggregated
- Victim-blaming attitudes
- Gendered response to CSE and CCE

# Scale of child criminal exploitation



## Challenges in data on CCE

- No statutory definition of CCE
- Victim-blaming and criminalisation of victims
- Gendered response to CSE and CCE



# Cost-of-living crisis and exploitation

# Financial pressures and exploitation

**“They’re [organised criminal gangs] very good at coercing and manipulating people and playing off their vulnerabilities. And then it can become quite easy – especially if the whole family is struggling, it can be harm to see the wood from the trees.”**

**Georgia,**

Intern at Leaders Unlocked

- Smaller ‘debts’ being used to groom and exploit children. Examples given by Barnardo’s practitioners included a Subway Sandwich, vapes and Prime energy drinks.
- The context of living in poverty and deprivation acting as a grooming process for children and young people
- The pressure to ‘step up’ and support their household income.
- Whole families being groomed and exploited – including cuckooing.

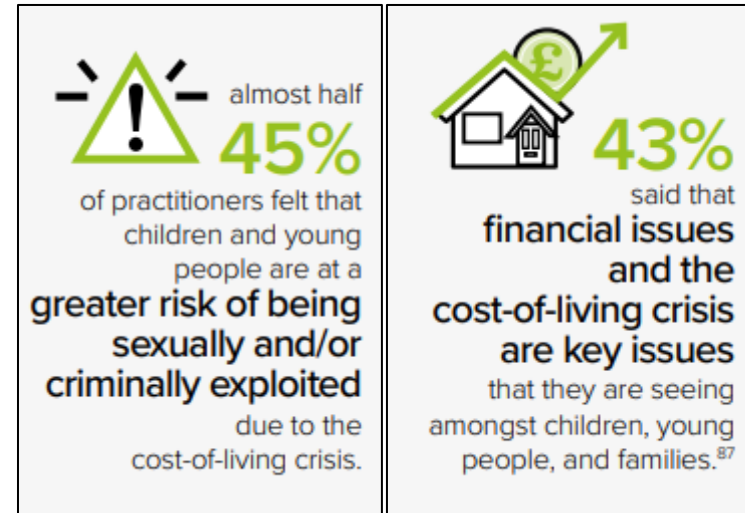
# Other pressures and exploitation

- Increasing domestic abuse meaning that children spend less time at home, and having unmet needs around a sense of belonging or family
- Parents needing to work longer, meaning that children can be left unsupervised
- Impacting how parents are able to supervise their children once they are at home

“I think the problem is a lot of parents don’t have the understanding of online, and it can be easier for them in some respects for their child to be quiet in their room. And then they don’t have any oversight over them but they’re able to sit and have their time because they’re knackered – they’ve had a busy day and are stressed, so it’s easy just to let them sit.”  
- Barnardo’s CSE practitioner

# “Professional poverty”

- Cuts and lower budgets to statutory and other services are meaning that crucial early interventions and support for victims can be missing.
- Schools are a key safeguarding partner in protecting children from exploitation, but they are at capacity and resources are limited.
- Mental health services are also struggling, and demand frequently exceeds capacity.
- Reduced funding from commissioners and rising costs are also impacting how services are able to support children at risk of exploitation, or who have experienced it.
  - Rising food, fuel and energy prices
  - Less money to spend on preventative activities
  - Services being capped at high thresholds





# Summer, school holidays and exploitation



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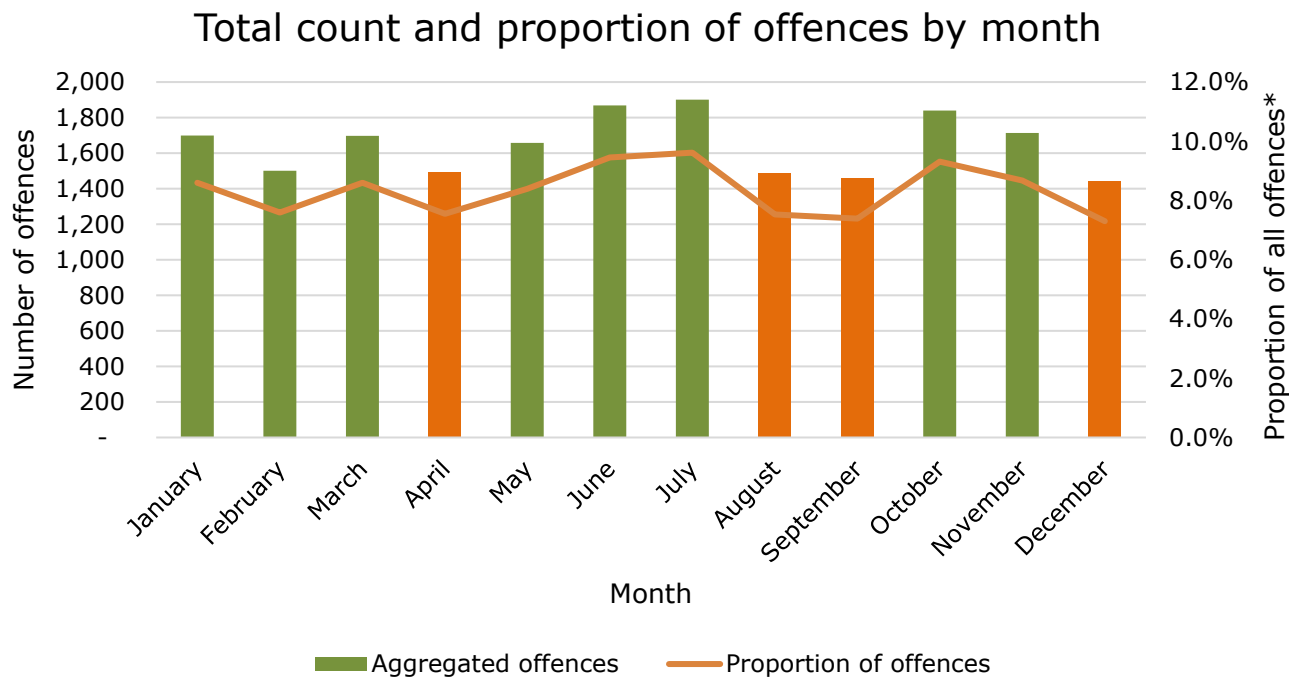
# Cost-of-living crisis and school holidays

**“If an adult is there it makes it safe. We just want a space where we can hang out and do our thing but you know there’s someone there who’s got your back.”**

**Young person supported by Barnardo’s**

- More than **1 in 3** children said they were worried about not having money for activities during the summer.
- Almost **half (46%)** said that they will struggle to afford family holidays and days out
- **1 in 4** parents said that they would struggle to afford activities such as childcare and holiday clubs
- **1 in 5** parents said that they will struggle to afford time off work to spend with their children.

# Invisible Children: Monthly breakdown of CSE offences



# Commissioning services for victims of CSE/ CCE in the past 12 months

**Two thirds (67%)** of local authorities had not commissioned any child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation, or combined CSE/ CCE services in the past 12 months.

**Nearly 4 in 10 (39%)** Police and Crime Commissioners had not commissioned any child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation, or combined CSE/ CCE services in the past 12 months.

# Next Steps



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# Summary of Recommendations

- The UK Government should use the Victims and Prisoners Bill to place a funded duty on the relevant authorities to commission sufficient and specific support for children who are victims of crime, including abuse and exploitation.
- The UK Government should introduce a statutory definition of child criminal exploitation.
- The UK Government should strengthen protections from online child criminal exploitation within the Online Safety Bill.
- All governments should invest in and expand the provision of support for children and young people to help protect them and prevent exploitation.
- All governments should provide enhanced training and support for all professionals working with children regarding child exploitation and abuse.
- All governments should invest in and commission research on the scale, nature and prevalence of child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation

# Thank you

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