

The behaviour involved in community-based child sexual exploitation (CSE) has in all likelihood been around for generations. The major change in recent years has been in the responses to the crime. In the past, CSE was often seen as a victimless crime, with the focus on the victim. However, it is now recognised as a crime against the child, and the focus is on the child's welfare. Consequently, public agencies are under growing pressure to deal with the issues involved. Police forces are increasingly initiating proactive investigations into community-based CSE. At a time of resource constraints it is important to act in a targeted and effective manner.

NATIONAL SCOPING STUDY: Faced with mounting concern around community-based CSE, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) launched a major nationwide investigation in 2011. While this study went a long way to redress the major knowledge gaps around the prevalence and nature of the crime, the data it drew upon were patchy and inconsistent. Based on the study, almost as many victims were identified. Many of the offenders have never been formally identified, let alone charged or prosecuted. Almost one in three was operating as part of a group. While this is currently the best national picture available, a clear definition of the crime needs to be agreed across agencies to improve the consistency of data collection for future studies.

NEW APPROACHES: Government guidance on CSE is yet to be sufficiently implemented across the UK. Nonetheless, a number of innovative and effective initiatives have been implemented in individual areas. Examples include:

- Creation of new units to deal with complex sex crimes;
- Co-located multi-agency teams, including police, health, education and social care;
- Better dissemination of information between forces and across agencies;
- Successful use of covert strategies to improve evidence collection;
- Increased attention to situational crime prevention, such as hotspot mapping;
- Improved training for police, especially child protection officers and front-line officers dealing