



**Child Sexual
Exploitation
Taskforce**

 **NPCC**
National Police Chiefs' Council

**HYDRANT
PROGRAMME**
Supporting child protection
and abuse investigation

Group-Based Offending Publication

November 2024

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Foreword

At the beginning of July this year (2024) I had the immense privilege of becoming the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) Lead for Child Protection and Abuse Investigation (CPAI).

I came to policing to help people and I can think of no greater difference than ensuring vulnerable children and young people are shielded from experiencing some of the most abhorrent offending our society sees.

Young people today are our society of tomorrow, and they must have confidence that those responsible for their safety and protection are working together effectively; whether that's by disrupting organised abuse and exploitation, mitigating impact or protecting victims from the effects of crime.

One of the biggest shifts in recent policing history is a renewed focus on the importance of data and how, with the careful analysis of police recorded crime we can review our approach in this area of investigation.

This is happening at a local, regional, and national level with the collective aim of improving outcomes for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and exploitation and increasing opportunities to bring perpetrators to justice.

The Complex Organised Child Abuse Dataset (COCAD) contributes to our understanding of the scale, nature and threat of reported child sexual abuse and exploitation. In 2023 we shared outcomes directly with forces in the form of bespoke reports delivered quarterly. This ensures insight drives investigative policy making, allows resources to be allocated in the most effective way and ensures forces are working collaboratively where possible and appropriate.

The COCAD data collection began in January 2023, and it is drawn from a wider data collection covering all aspects of child sexual abuse called the Child Protection and Abuse Investigation (CPAI) dataset. Now we have 12 complete months of data we feel there is real value in sharing this knowledge and



insight with our partners and stakeholders who work in the vulnerability sector. We also want to share with the wider public to support education and understanding.

Group based offending takes many forms and takes place in many different settings. Media coverage has tended to focus on specific communities and so-called grooming gangs. Whilst it is important that police and their partners respond robustly to offending of this type that shouldn't distract us from the wider threat that occurs in many settings.

Similarly, our data identifies offenders under the age of 18 as being an emerging risk, this needs to be understood in greater depth. Again, it is important that this issue doesn't become the focus of attention at the detriment of other threats. Policing must be balanced in its approach, whatever form that threat takes and in which ever setting or community it occurs. The response needs to take account of the different challenges each threat presents.

Whilst I have said that child protection and abuse investigation has come a long way, I have ambitious plans for the future. I want to further improve information sharing processes between partners. I also want to work towards enhancing our technological and digital capabilities. To improve our response to victims we need to be in a position to be able to predict harm as opposed to just being responsive to it. To get this right we need reliable data to drive decision making, and the COCAD takes us significantly closer to this.

ACC Becky Riggs

National Police Chiefs' Council Lead – Child Protection and Abuse Investigation

About the Hydrant Programme and the CSE Taskforce

The Hydrant Programme is a national policing programme supporting the work of the NPCC CPAI Working Group. Originally established in 2014 to coordinate the response to non-recent child sexual abuse, but now supporting forces across all child protection and abuse investigation issues.

Hydrant develops policy and strategy on behalf of the NPCC, delivers best practice advice including a learning, review and improvement function, provides a strategic analysis capability and engagement with key stakeholders and partners.

The Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Taskforce was established by then Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in March 2023 to enhance the policing response to group-based child sexual exploitation and abuse, and with partners aims to improve:

- How we prepare our response to threat
- How we protect children from exploitation and abuse
- How we prevent group-based child sexual exploitation
- How we pursue those that perpetrate crimes and bring more offenders to justice

In doing so we will increase the confidence of both victims and survivors, and the wider public in the policing approach to tackling child sexual exploitation and abuse.

The Hydrant Programme lead the CSE Taskforce and are supported by two other national policing programmes, the **Tackling Organised Exploitation (TOEX) Programme** and the **Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP)**, in partnership with:

- The College of Policing
- The NCA
- All police forces in England and Wales
- All Regional Organised Crime Units in England and Wales
- The CPS
- The National Association for People Abused in Childhood
- The Children's Society
- The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

All are uniquely placed to offer support, advice and guidance to police forces, partners and stakeholders working in child protection and abuse investigation.

Introduction

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) defined group based offending as a network of two or more individuals (whether identified or not) who are known to (or associated with) one another and are known to be involved in or to facilitate the sexual exploitation of children and young people.

Being involved in the sexual exploitation of children and young people includes introducing them to other individuals for the purpose of exploitation, trafficking a child for the purpose of sexual exploitation, taking payment for sexual activities with a child or young person or allowing their property to be used for sexual activities with a child or young person.

The analysis and commentary contained within the Group-Based Offending Publication is based on data from 2023 which has been submitted to the Hydrant Programme by 44 police forces across England and Wales.

Data is collected on a quarterly basis, this is then read and audited by a team of highly experienced and skilled research professionals before being analysed to produce a summary report.

This process was initiated as part of the policing response to recommendations made by the IICSA which concluded in October 2022. Now that 12 months of data analysis is available, this report has been produced to give insight into crimes recorded against four complex or organised criteria, along with an 'other' category and an 'unknown' category. All crimes included are being committed by two or more perpetrators.

Whilst it is recognised that the proportion of police recorded group-based offences analysed as part of the COCAD is a small proportion of overall reported crimes, the threat posed by these CSAE crimes is serious due to the nature of offending.



SPOTLIGHT

In addition to the four complex or organised child sexual abuse and exploitation related criteria, we pay close attention to CSAE committed by children which will be discussed in more detail in a later section. This area of offending was an emerging trend in data collected during 2023 and was identified as an area for further research.

More detail on the methodology applied to the data collection and criteria definitions can be found from page 8 onwards.

Why was the Child Protection and Abuse Investigation (CPAI) dataset established?

The CPAI dataset was established as part of the policing response to four key areas of work and developed the work of the VKPP who had collected similar data for a number of years.

- Recommendations made by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IISCA) in the [Child sexual exploitation by organised networks](#) report published in February 2022
- [The Independent Review of Children's Social Care in May 2022](#)
- [The final recommendations of the IISCA published in October 2022](#)
- [The work of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel](#)

The CPAI dataset consists of offences reported by members of the public which have been recorded using Home Office counting rules (to ensure crimes are recorded consistently and accurately). This data is then used to inform national, regional and local policy making across child protection and abuse investigation, and to produce quarterly and annual reports. These reports are shared with local forces, law enforcement agencies and government to inform decision making and resource allocation.

How is the data collected?

Data is collected each quarter across 44 police forces. Hydrant Programme analysts then process the data provided to populate the CPAI dataset.

The CPAI dataset include category metrics covering:

- Demographic
- Geographic
- Offences reported in the previous quarter irrespective of when offences were committed
- Other relevant information

Benefits of the CPAI Dataset

- A single and consistent national policing dataset from which analysis and research can be undertaken
- An enhanced understanding of the scale of recorded crime and risk of offending
- Delivery of a data led and evidenced based approach
- Informed decision making and strategic planning for policing and government
- Contribution to regional and local strategic and tactical responses
- Allows for a shared understanding with partners
- Meets the requirement of the IICSA (CSE by Organised Networks Report Feb 2022) recommendation for policing
- Improved data quality and accuracy

How we use the data for the Child Sexual Exploitation Taskforce

- The CPAI dataset is police recorded crime data which has been collected and analysed consistently. This is driving data standards across policing
- Data collected feeds the National Analysis of Police-Recorded CSAE Crimes Report which is produced by the Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme
- The CPAI dataset is used by the National Crime Agency for the National Assessment of Serious & Organised Crime
- The Hydrant Programme use the CPAI dataset to look for complex and organised child abuse data which is placed into the COCAD. This informs national, regional and force reports which in turn inform policing strategy, investigative policy and resource allocation



How the COCAD complements the National Analysis of Police-Recorded CSAE Crimes Report 2022

This national snapshot gives insight and analysis into the scale of CSAE, trends in offending, including crime types, where they were committed, and presents profiles of both victims and perpetrators.

- The qualitative aspect of the COCAD data cleansing process allows for a richer picture to be created in relation to group based offending, expanding on trends identified by the National Analysis of Police-Recorded CSAE Crimes Report 2022
- Hydrant's Analysis & Research Team identify crimes with two or more offenders, and from these crimes are able to provide deeper context of who, what, where, when and how from both an offender and victim perspective
- The **scale** and **nature** of offending can be understood by the data supplied by forces to produce the National Analysis of Police-Recorded CSAE Crimes Report 2022. The **nature** of **group-based** offending is understood through the process of producing the COCAD

Methodology

What is the COCAD?

Insight, research and further data collation has been integral to populating the COCAD which includes a breakdown of four classifications of abuse along with 'other' and 'unknown'.



Definitions:

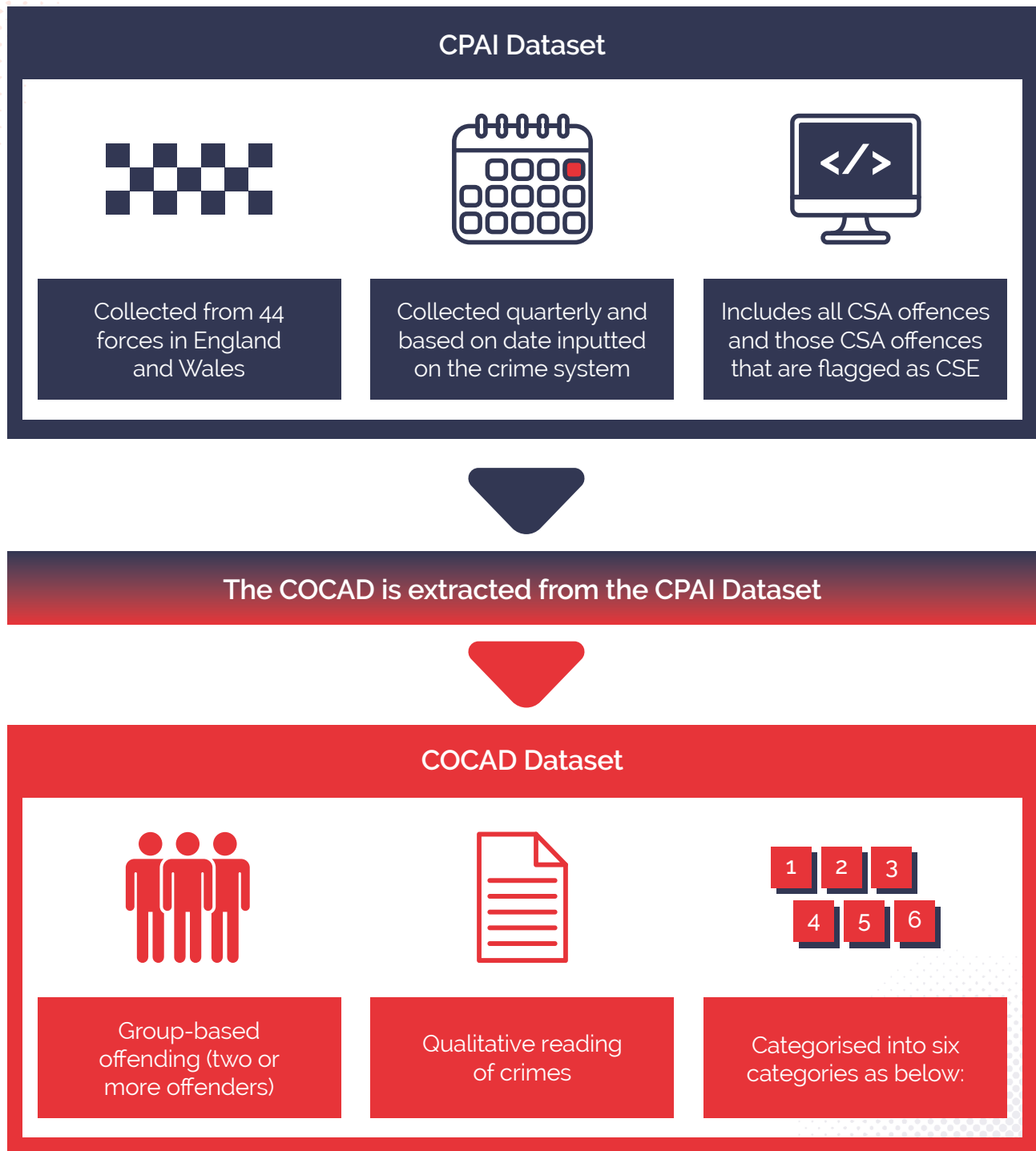
For the purposes of the COCAD criteria – the following has been agreed and applied.

Investigation	Means any crime which has been considered against the National Crime Recording Standards and formally recorded onto a force crime system.
Group Based/ Network	Is defined as two or more individuals (whether identified or not) who are known to (or associated with) one another and are known to be involved in or to facilitate the sexual exploitation of children and young people. Being involved in the sexual exploitation of children and young people includes introducing them to other individuals for the purpose of exploitation, trafficking a child for the purpose of sexual exploitation, taking payment for sexual activities with a child or young person or allowing their property to be used for sexual activities with a child or young person.
Child	Means someone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday.
Suspect	Is anyone named as a suspect on a crime record, including those who are now deceased, and those who are, or have become a facilitator.
Familial environment	Is defined as sexual abuse perpetrated or facilitated in or out of the home, against a child under the age of 18, by a family member, or someone otherwise linked to the family context or environment, whether or not they are a family member. Within this definition, perpetrators may be close to the victim (for example, father, uncle, stepfather, sibling) or less familiar (family friend, neighbour, babysitter). Less commonly, perpetrators can also be female, such as mother, aunt, cousin or stepmother, which is often overlooked.
Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)	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.
Institutional or organisational	Includes, schools, councils, hospitals, prisons, churches (and other religious institutions), Cubs, Scouts, Brownies, Guides, Sea Cadets, children's homes, community centres, leisure centres, youth clubs.
Ritualistic abuse	Is the organised sexual, physical and psychological abuse of children (and often adults) by a group of individuals who use rituals as a form of prolonged and repeated torture (often alongside other forms) with the aim of controlling, silencing and terrorising their victims. As part of this control, perpetrators train children into a supernatural belief system, which they may or may not believe themselves. Ritualistic abuse typically involves family members (for example, parents and their associates abusing their children) and starts when children are young.
CSAE committed by children	A child who has not yet reached their 18th birthday who commits an offence upon another child who likewise has not yet reached their 18th birthday. To note - In 2023 CSAE committed by children wasn't broken out into a standalone category, the crime would be identified as either familial, CSE, institutional, ritualistic, other or unknown and then additionally recorded to say if it had been committed by one child against another child. It's important to note that the % includes where CSAE committed by children features across all criteria – the process of identifying CSAE committed by children was not introduced until quarter 2 of the year so all figures quoted are based on Apr-Dec 2023.
Other	Where the offending doesn't fit a particular category.
Unknown	Where it has been identified as group-based, but the information is not sufficient enough for us to assess the criteria.

About the COCAD

How the data is collected

The following report is based on data that is held on the Complex and Organised Child Abuse Dataset. The COCAD is extracted from the Child Protection and Abuse Investigation dataset on a quarterly basis – please see further explanations below:



1. Child Sexual Exploitation | 2. Familial | 3. Institutional | 4. Ritualistic | 5. Other | 6. Unknown

What are the caveats?

- The data received represents a moment in time of the investigation
- Data is obtained from multiple local crime systems. It must be noted that each crime system has its own nuances in terms of how data is collected and recorded, however the principal methodologies used are the same
- There have been a small number of instances when not all forces have been able to provide data
- This analysis is based on police recorded data and is not a prevalence study
- Analysis in this report is based on cases that come to the attention of, and are recorded by police as child sexual abuse and exploitation. Data is typically incomplete. Where findings are presented they should be seen in this light – for example, when looking at the data on CSAE committed by children, these cases are more likely to be identified and reported by adults such as teachers, and therefore more likely to have complete data, meaning they're easier to identify.

What time frame does it span?

The data includes all crimes relating to child sexual abuse and exploitation (fitting previously specified criteria) that were recorded on force crime systems between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2023.



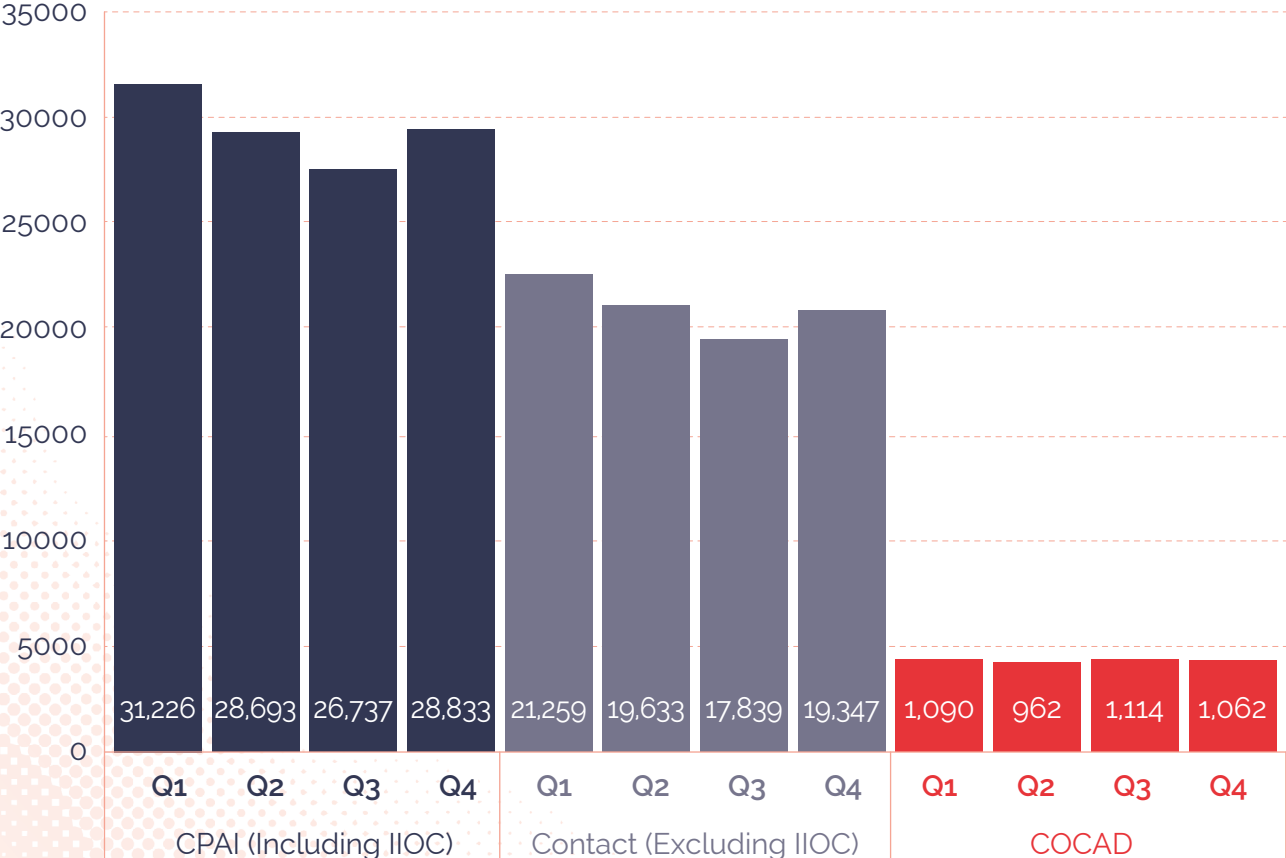
Overview of all CSAE crimes and all group-based crimes within the COCAD

Throughout this report you will see percentage values followed by the number this percentage represents out of the total value e.g., 3.7% (n.4228/115,489 equates to 4228 group-based crimes being 3.7% of 115,489 total CSAE crimes).

The graph below identifies the scale of all CSAE offences and is explained as follows:

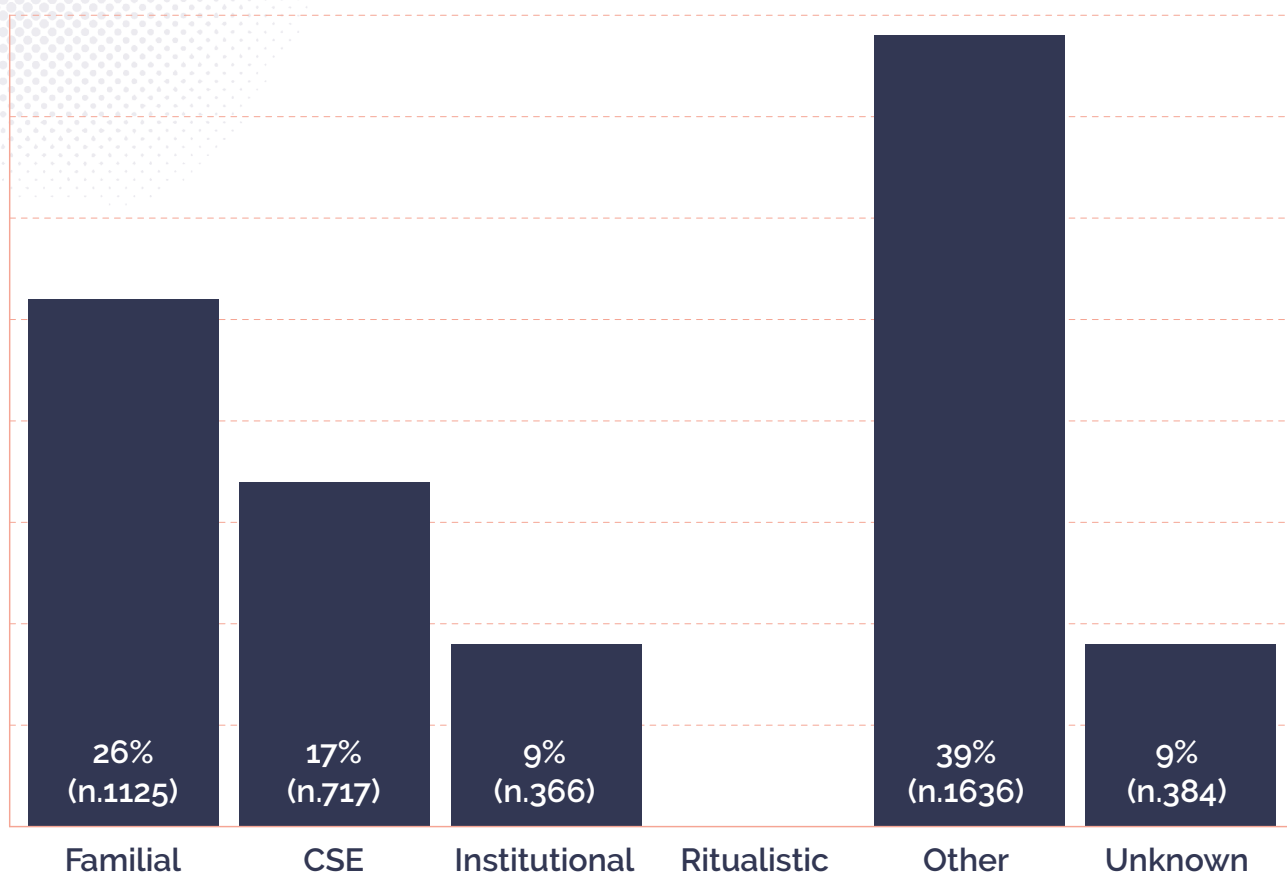
- "CPAI" dataset (blue bars) refers to all reported CSA crimes and those CSA crimes flagged as CSE including Indecent Images of Children (IIOC).
- "Contact" (light blue bars) represents the number of contact only crimes within the CPAI dataset
- "COCAD" (red bars) shows the total number of group-based crimes within the total number that were contact
- In 2023 group-based offending (across all criteria) accounted for 3.7% (n.4228/115,489) of total CSAE crimes and 5.4% (n.4228/78,078) of all contact crime

Overall Crime Totals



The below graph illustrates the breakdown of criteria within the COCAD.

% Breakdown of COCAD criteria (based on 4228 crimes) - 2023



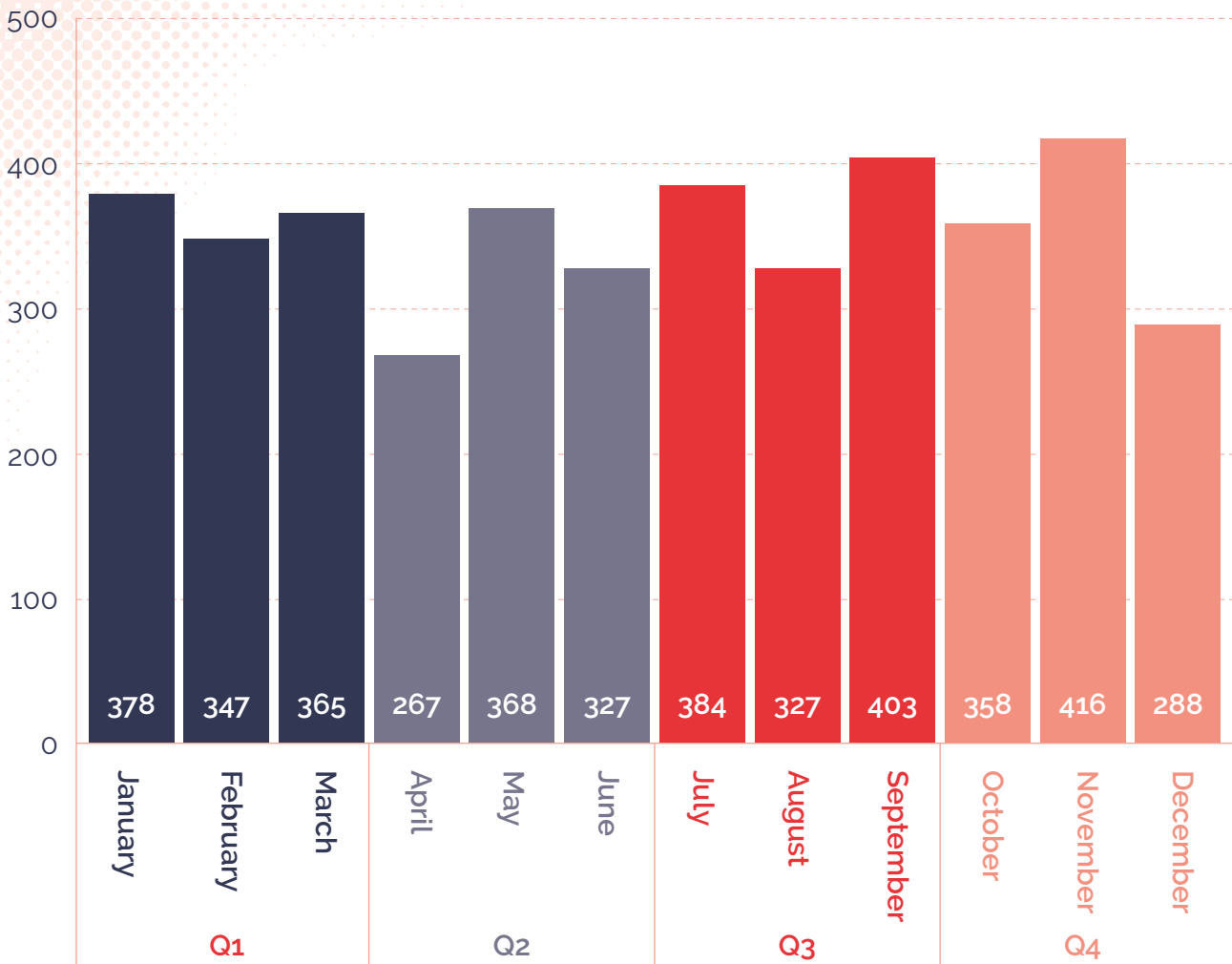
Qualitative assessment of each crime record is undertaken to determine which category a crime is assigned to. On occasions characteristics of more than one category may feature, and where this is the case the predominant nature of the offending is taken into account.

During 2023 it was recognised that a significant number of crimes within the 'other' category related to CSAE committed by children. In quarter two of the data collection recording was refined to identify crimes of this nature and from April to December 2023 they accounted for 55% (n.704/1271) of the total crimes within the category of 'other' (this figure only includes crimes within other between April and December 2023) . In 2024, CSAE committed by children will be counted as its own category which will impact directly on reducing the number of crimes placed within 'other'.

SPOTLIGHT

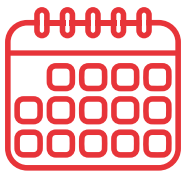
In 2023 no crimes were identified in the COCAD under the category of ritualistic. However, we know from third sector organisations that this form of abuse exists within their data. Research into this type of offending is ongoing between the Hydrant Programme, police forces and stakeholders to enhance our understanding of this area

Monthly breakdown of group-based crime



Total % of Non-Recent & Recent Offences

Non-recent abuse and exploitation are offences reported over one year of the offence(s) taking place.



Recent
58%
(n.2440/4228)



Non-Recent
35%
(n.1500/4228)



Unknown
7%
(n.288/4228)

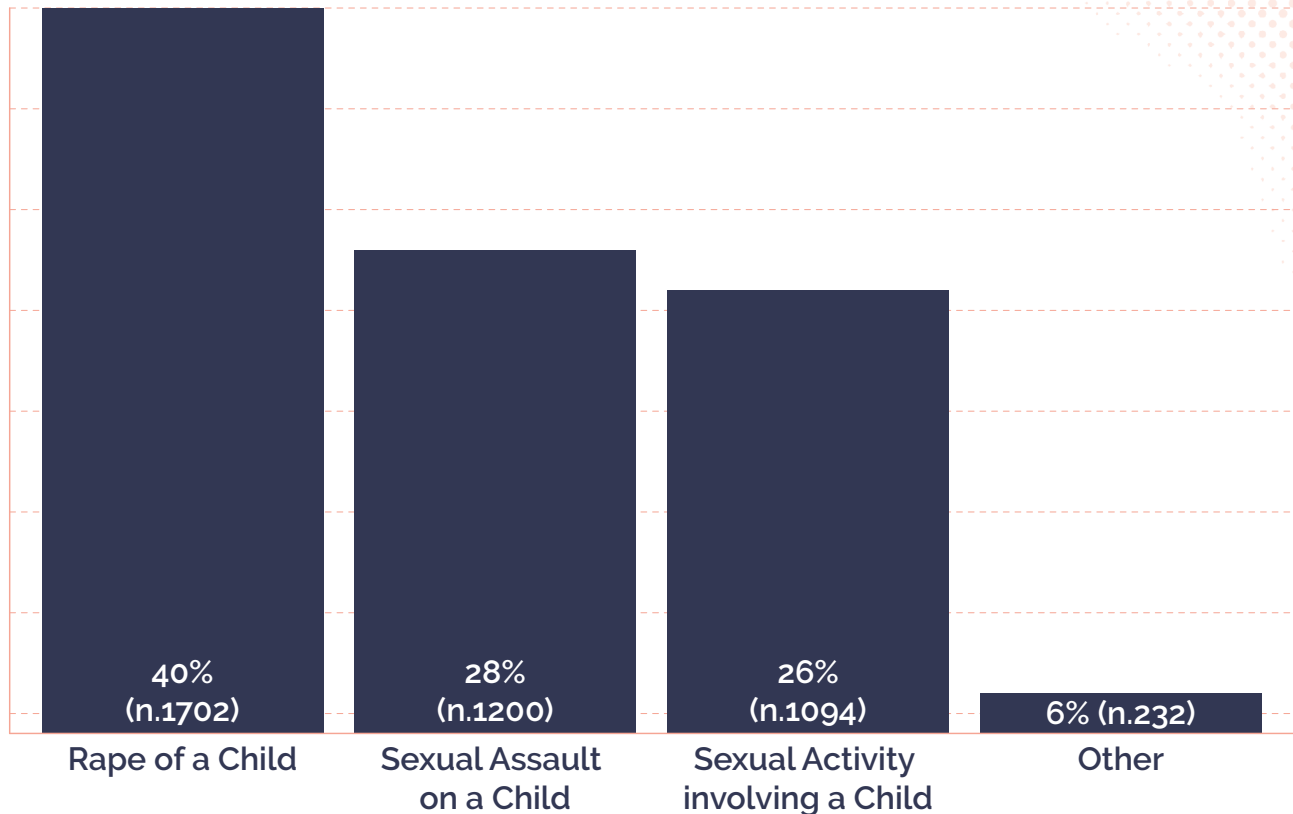
SPOTLIGHT

It is noted that crimes reduced in February, April, June, August, October and December. This data is in its infancy, and it's too early to identify if reductions can be attributed to seasonal trends. It is inferred (excluding June) that this is likely due to school holidays which reduces opportunities for children to report through usual mechanisms available

What the COCAD data tells us

Offence Types

% Breakdown of COCAD Offences – (based on 4228 crimes) 2023



Gender Breakdown of Victims

(For 88% of victims a gender was recorded – n.3877/4422)



Female

78%

(n.3012/3877)



Male

22%

(n.865/3877)

Gender Breakdown of Suspects

(For 72% of suspects a gender was recorded – n.4790/6670)



Female

24%

(n.1170/4790)



Male

76%

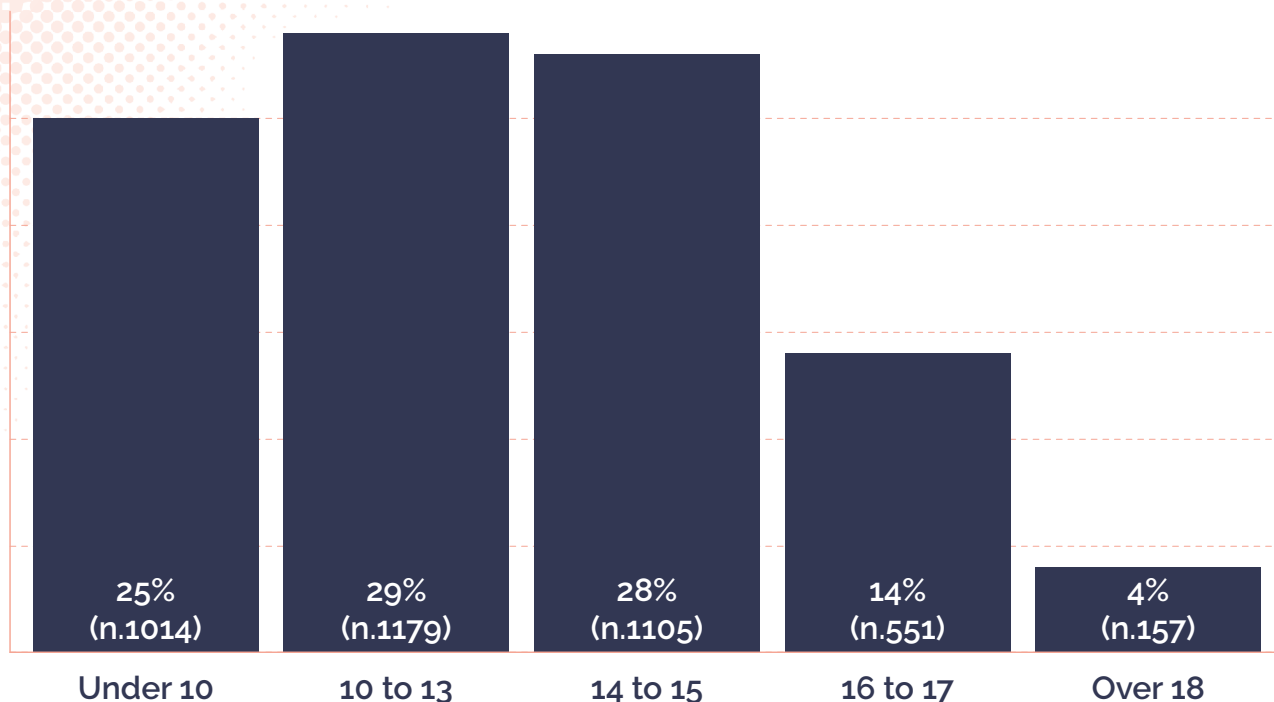
(n.3620/4790)

SPOTLIGHT

Group-based child sexual abuse recorded by police is predominantly committed by males who target female victims

Age breakdown of Victims and Suspects

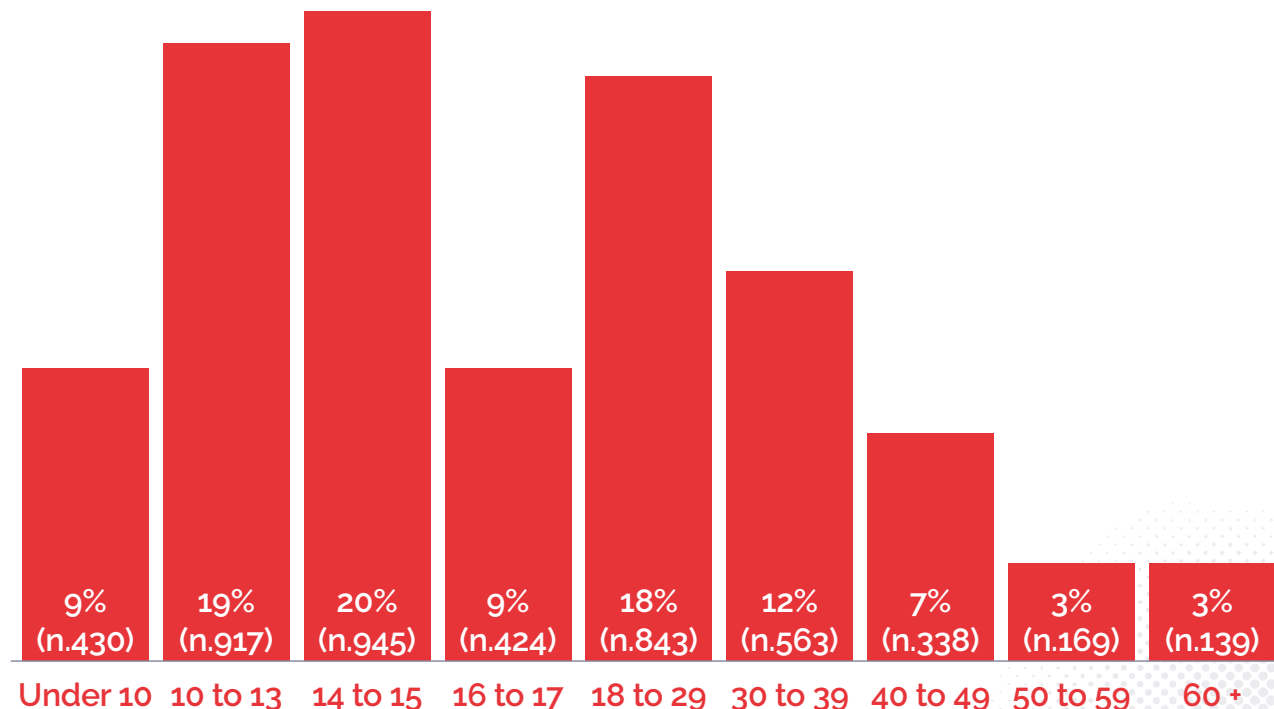
(For 91% of victims an age could be identified n.4006/4422)



■ 25% (n.1014/4006) of victims were under 10 at the time an offence took place

■ 57% (n. 2284/4006) of victims were between the ages of 10 and 15 at the time an offence took place

(For 71% of suspects an age could be identified n.4768/6670)



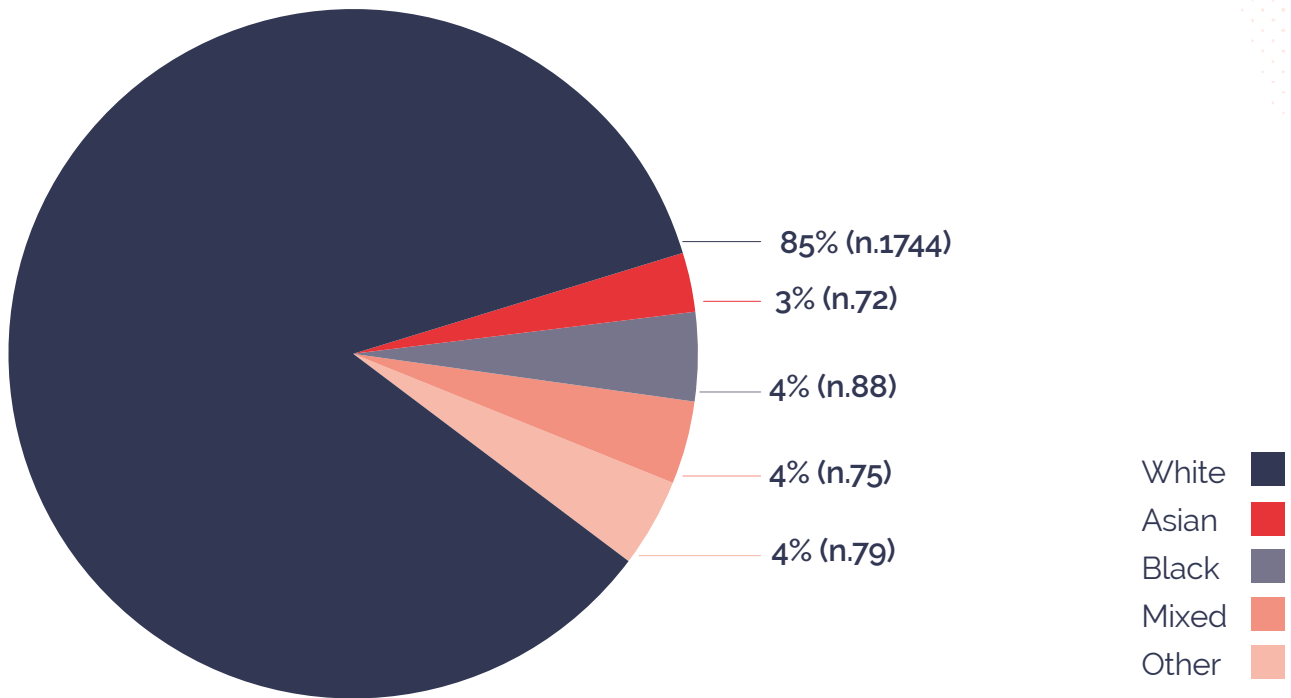
■ 39% (n.1862/4768) of suspects were between the ages of 10 and 15 at the time an offence took place

■ 18% (n.843/4768) of suspects were between the ages of 18 and 29 at the time an offence took place

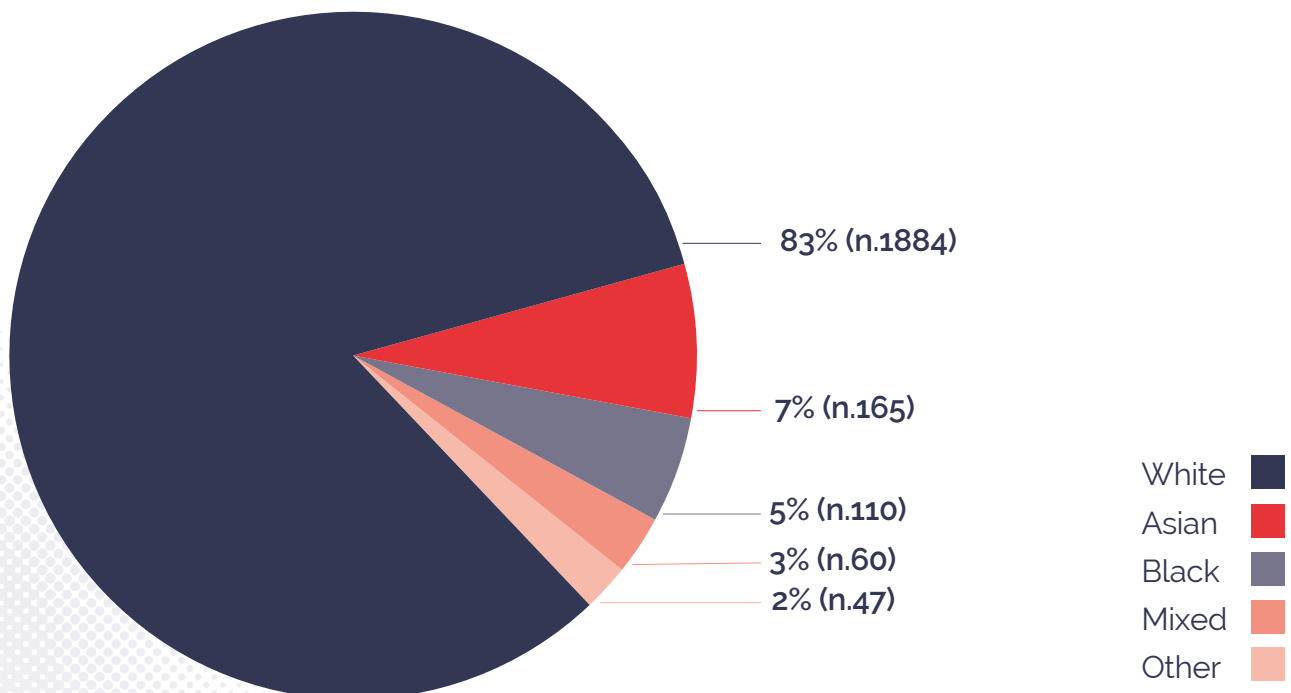
Ethnicity

- Of those victims with a recorded self-defined ethnicity, 85% (n.1744/2058) were White
- Of those suspects with a recorded self-defined ethnicity, 83% (n.1884/2266) were White
- It's important to note that ethnicity data is limited and should be treated with caution, in 2023 only 34% (n.2266/6670) of suspects had a recorded self-defined ethnicity (SDE) and for victims this was 47% (n.2058/4422)

% Breakdown of Victim Self-Defined Ethnicity



% Breakdown of Suspect Self-Defined Ethnicity



Criteria Reporting

As stated earlier within the report, the COCAD is broken down into criterion types. Each criterion has been analysed against all group-based offending and the differences are highlighted below:

Familial

32%
(n.402/1273)



of suspects are female, compared to overall group-based offending, where female suspects account for 24% (n.1170/4790)

57%
(n.628/1097)



of victims are aged 10 and under, which is a greater proportion than overall group-based offending at 25% (n.1014/4006)

59%
(n.660/1125)



of crimes reported are non-recent, compared to 35% (n.1500/4228) non-recent for overall group-based offending

Institutional

57%
(n.207/366)



of offences recorded were Sexual assault on a child within an institution, this is compared to 28% (n.1200/4228) for overall group-based offending

17%
(n.77/453)



of institutional offending was committed by female suspects. Within overall group-based offending, 24% of suspects are female (n. 1170/4790)



Child Sexual Exploitation

66%
(n.472/717)



of offences recorded for CSE crimes were rape of a child, whereas in overall group-based this is 40% (n.1702/4228)

89%
(n.630/709)



of female victims within CSE offending account for 89% (n.630/709) of the total victims, where gender is recorded. In comparison within overall group-based offending this is 78% (3012/3877)

88%
(n.479/541)



of CSE suspects are male, compared to 76% (n.3620/4790) for overall group-based offending. In the case of CSE, 39% (n.201/521) of suspects were aged between 18 to 29 years

70%
(n.224/319)



of CSE suspects have a self-defined ethnicity of White, for overall group-based offending 83% (n.1884/2266) are White



Ritualistic

See Spotlight on p13 for further information

The data below relates to the beginning of April to end of December 2023. Offending of this nature spans across all criteria.

CSAE committed by children

51%
(n.359/704)



sexual activity involving a child was the highest offence type

15%
(n.83/565)



CSE group-based crime has an element of CSAE committed by children

15%
(n.128/828)



of familial group-based crime has an element of CSAE committed by children

57%
(n.146/258)



of institutional group-based crime has an element of CSAE committed by children

92%
(n.566/614)



of suspects have a self-defined ethnicity of White, for overall group-based offending this is 83% (n. 1884/2266)

42%
(n.355/853)



of suspects are recorded as an 'acquaintance' of the victim

71%
(n.350/492)



of victims are aged 10 to 15, compared to 57% (n.2284/4006) for overall group-based offending

Victim Demographic



The victim profile saw little overall change throughout 2023

78%



Victims are predominantly female (n.3012/3877)

85%



Victims are predominantly White (n.1744/2058)

25%



Under 10

of child victims were under 10 at the time an offence took place (n.1014/4006)

57%



10-15

aged 10-15 (n.2284/4006)

Suspect demographic



The suspect profile saw little overall change throughout 2023

76%



Suspects are predominantly male (n.3620/4790)

83%



Suspects are predominantly White (n.1884/2266)

39%



10-15

The most prevalent age group of suspects is 10-15 (n.1862/4768)

38%



18-29

Analysis of CSE data shows a change to the overall age trend of suspects – the predominant aged being 18-29 (n.201/521)

Identified themes and trends

SPOTLIGHT

55%



Within group-based offending 'other' criteria, 55% involved CSAE committed by children

26%



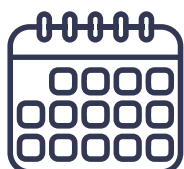
Group-based offending predominantly takes place within the family environment (26%)

48%



48% of suspects were aged between 10-17

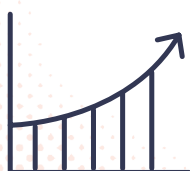
Key findings



Reports of child sexual abuse decreased during school holidays and peaked in November. It is inferred that this is likely due to school holidays which reduces opportunities for children to report through usual mechanisms available



Data indicates that offending is at highest risk within the family environment - **26%** of all group-based offending

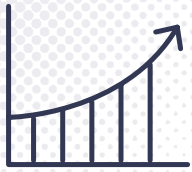


Crimes committed by 10 – 17-year-olds are prevalent across all criteria within the COCAD. This indication of developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour displayed by children and young people, which is harmful or abusive will be the subject of deeper and detailed analysis in 2024 to enable further understanding



Within familial offending the true nature of the relationship between the perpetrator and the suspect needs to be understood. We know that the majority are parents/siblings however the highest category is 'familial including family friends'. This incorporates a variety of relationships such as cousin, boyfriend of sister and many more

Highlighted Risks



The true nature of CSAE committed by children requires further analysis to identify risk i.e., is it in the family home, in institutions such as schools or other environments. Additionally – what is the relationship between the suspect and the victim?



The highest reported offences are rape of a child and sexual activity involving a child, there has been no deviation from this – The highest reported offences are rape of a child, there has been no deviation from this

58%

The majority of offences are classed as 'recent' however this indicates that crimes of a non-recent nature continue to be reported



Conclusion

The introduction of the COCAD dataset in January 2023, has for the first time allowed us to understand the nature and scale of group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation as represented through police recorded crime. It will not be the true picture, as we know from previous research that most victims of child sexual abuse and exploitation don't report what happened to them at the time. So, this report does not speak to prevalence. The findings are helpful in shaping the response of policing and its partners by using enhanced insight to advise both tactical and strategic activity. The findings also point towards threats that were previously unknown and require further research to determine how they can be tackled effectively.

Whilst group-based offending only forms a small part of child sexual abuse and exploitation crimes reported to the police, it is without doubt deserving of particular focus given the high harm that is caused to victims and survivors as a consequence of the nature of the offences committed. The pursuit of perpetrators will always be a priority for the police. Bringing offenders to justice is important, but for every offender brought to justice a child has been failed. For this reason, multi-agency prevention and disruption strategies are paramount. The findings of this analysis and other research will help the police and their partners to focus prevention and disruption activity in a way that maximises its impact.

It is also important that the public understands the facts about group-based child sexual exploitation and abuse and recognises that this takes place in many settings and in many communities. Policing and its partners are committed to tackling all forms of abuse, wherever it occurs and by whoever commits it. Victims and survivors will be at the centre of all we do. Visit www.whenyouareready.co.uk to find out more.



Predictions for the next 12 months



Work will continue to understand all threat areas identified by the COCAD - both existing and emerging



We will see a continuing rise in overall crime reporting rates in relation to CSAE as in previous years, and based on continuous data collation



There will be an increase in reports of CSAE committed by children



There is the potential for an increase in non-recent reporting following a number of high-profile cases emerging (these have been a catalyst in the past) combined with improvements in data quality



Glossary

CSA - Child Sexual Abuse

CSE - Child Sexual Exploitation

CSAE - Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

CPAI - Child Protection and Abuse Investigation

COCAD - Complex and Organised Child Abuse Database

NPCC - National Police Chiefs Council

TOEX - Tackling Organised Exploitation Programme

VKPP - Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme

NCA - National Crime Agency

CPS - Crown Prosecution Service

IICSA - Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

IIOC - Indecent Images of Children

SDE - Self Defined Ethnicity

Notes:



For more information on the work of the CSE
Taskforce and Hydrant Programme

Contact:

HydrantEnquiries@southyorkshire.police.uk

or visit

www.hydrantprogramme.co.uk

**Child Sexual
Exploitation
Taskforce**