

Youth Toolkit

Research findings



November 2021

Earlier this year we asked young people, parents and professionals about child criminal exploitation in Wales. This newsletter summarises the main findings.

Young people told us...

Young people are moving or selling drugs for their friends or new people they meet. Young people are told this can earn them a lot of money. Professionals call this 'exploitation' because young people are asked or forced into committing crime and are not told about the risks.

"they told me how much I need to give them. They'd say, you fuck up and you pay for it. If you're dealing weed locally and fuck up you might get a slap. But this is different. You fuck up with them and I think you're dead" (Young Person)



Photo by [Maria Teneva](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Parents told us they were angry that these people had used their child to commit crime. Parents felt that this left their child feeling alone and scared. They told us they noticed a change in their child's behaviour but didn't know what was happening at first. Parents wanted to help their children but didn't always understand what was happening or what to do.

"So he was really the foot soldier, without a doubt, generally just doing all of the dirty work and literally getting nothing for it" (Mum)

Who took part?

Eighteen young people.

They were aged from 12 to 18. Most were boys. Most were white but some were not. They all lived in Wales.

Fifteen parents took part.

They were mostly mums who lived in Wales, but some lived in England.

Fifty-six professionals.

They were doctors, nurses, teachers, police officers, social workers, youth workers, substance misuse workers and probation workers. All but two worked in Wales.

This can happen to any young person including those that:

- are having problems at home
- do not like or are struggling at school
- want or need money
- are looking for new friends
- have been excluded from school
- have other things going on such as their parents are separating
- are moving from primary to secondary school
- are living independently in hostels or care homes

Young people told us that...

Exploiters may drive expensive cars, wear branded clothes and have money to spend. They try to make friends with young people.

Exploiters may give young people money, take them out for food or give them things like mobile phones or branded clothing. They may also give young people cannabis.

Exploiters make young people feel like part of their family. This means that young people do not see that they are being used to commit crimes for these people.

Not all young people are given money or nice things. Some young people are threatened with **violence** or just **made to work**.

Young people are used as runners taking the drugs to buyers. They do this by plugging, where they are forced to hide drugs inside their bodies. exploiters. Young people may be forced to stay in trap houses. These houses are shared with drug users. They are dirty and young people have no money for food or anyway to get home.



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Parents told us that...

Young people have to plug drugs. This was seen as a form of sexual abuse. Parents wanted more help from services and tougher responses to exploiters.

What stops young people from asking for help?

Snitching

Young people told us that as they could get hurt if they snitched. This could mean their parents, brothers or sisters could get hurt.

Debts

Exploiters may pay for the young persons drugs or steal drugs from them. This means the young person owes the exploiter money. If the police take drugs or money from a young person they have to pay this back to the exploiter.



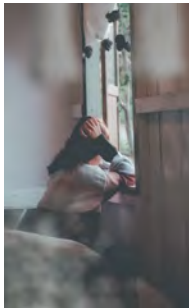
Young people have to pay off this debt plus the exploiters high interest rates. This leaves them **trapped**.

Exploiters

Young people may see exploiters as role models and friends. They may feel part of this bigger family and may not want to lose this.

Parents

Young people won't talk to parents if they stop them from going out or go through their things,



"Because if that happened to me [mum checking my phone], if I was still 14 and my mum did that to me I would literally, I'm not going to lie to you, I would run away because I would be scared. I'd be like oh man, if she finds out, man if she calls the police, and I get in trouble, I don't want to get in trouble" (Young person).

Some young people said they'd be angry if their parents went to the police. Some young people said they stopped after this parents went to the police. because their parents went to the police.

Being removed or arrested

Professionals told us that young people are afraid of being taken into care or getting into trouble with the police. They said that they may feel bullied or singled out by teachers.

Young people told us that some adults **do not listen** or just talk at them rather than trying to help them.

Parents told us they are often blamed when their children get into trouble. This can prevent them from getting help.

Parents told us they worried when their child went missing because they did not know where they were or if they were safe. Some parents had been sent videos of their child being harmed. Sometimes the only contact a parent had with their child was through phone calls from the exploiter.



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What support do young people and families want?

Young people wanted emotional help:

- To feel loved and cared for.
- Services that help their family.

Young people wanted practical help:

- To pay for food and clothing.
- From youth workers/people who understand their lives.
- Help finding work and filling out application forms.
- Support to develop their skills, such as learning to drive.

Young people wanted more information in schools:

- To learn about exploiters and exploitation.
- Adults they can trust and who they can speak to without being judged.
- More help in school with jobs and training.

Parents wanted:

- Services to listen to their concerns and offer early help.
- More support when children go missing.
- Safe spaces in the community for their children.
- To stay connected to their child so they could help them escape from crime and exploitation.
- Help from services when their children are over the age of 18 years.

Professionals told us that changes are needed...

COMMUNITY CHANGES

Creating **safe spaces** for young people in the community. This means working with local people so they accept that young people need places to go.

"I was just approached. No apps or nothing. I was on my own and they offered me a phone, a burner. I didn't know them" (Young person)

Training adults in the community to help keep young people safe.



Photo by [Simitta Leunen](#) on [Unsplash](#)

PROFESSIONAL CHANGES

Professionals should not judge young people and spend time getting to know them.

Professionals should understand that young people may get hurt if they snitch on their friends or exploiters.

There are differences in how young people get involved in crime. This means that the men and women who use children to commit crimes — the exploiters — can be people they know or strangers.

Professionals should look beyond what they can see. This is because **young people may be scared** that they will get hurt or their family may get hurt if they talk.

Professionals need to work with parents to help them protect and care for their children.

What do you think?

The aim of the research is to develop a toolkit to help professionals and parents to keep young people safe and to keep them away from crime.

What would you like us to put into the toolkit for parents, schools or other services? We'd really like your feedback of what to put in or what not to put into the toolkit!

"We don't like tattle telling and telling our stories and we don't like people, for example – well they call it "snitching" – so that's a big factor there. Anyone who snitches – no matter who it is – again, you know that phrase, "Snitches get stitches." That's still going on. So talking to police is a no" (Young person)

SERVICE CHANGES

More needs to be done to arrest the people who use young people to commit crime.

More needs to be done to **tackle drug use** across Wales.

Schools need to do more to support young people to stay in school. This means giving them more career advice and support to get a job when they leave school.

Services should be open when young people and parents need them.

Services should offer the young person and parents support for as long as they need it.

Services should keep these young people safe rather than arresting them.

GIRLS may be asked to carry or sell drugs, weapons or cash by family members, boyfriends or friends.

BOYS may be asked to carry or sell drugs, weapons or cash by family members, friends or strangers.



Photo by [Warren Wong](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Send your suggestions or comments to:

Nina Maxwell
MaxwellN2@Cardiff.ac.uk
CASCADE
Cardiff University
Museum Place
CF10 3WT

