

County lines, policing & vulnerability study

National study of the policing of county lines.

Key details

Lead institution	Vulnerability & Policing Futures Research Centre
Principal researcher(s)	Professor Ross Coomber, Professor Charlie Lloyd and Dr Kate Brown n.capstick@leeds.ac.uk
Police region	North East
Level of research	Professional/work based
Project start date	May 2022

Research context

This is the first national study of the policing of county lines drug markets and the multi-sectorial partnerships that this high-profile area of policing involves.

Contested understandings of the vulnerability of those caught up in (or indeed choosing to take part in) county lines markets forms a central issue in this field, with the potential to influence criminal justice and other outcomes for those involved.

These tensions will form a central focus for this study which, among other things, will compare police officers, the criminal justice system and partnership stakeholder interpretations and experiences with those of people involved in county lines drug supply.

Furthermore, by studying policing, policing partner and adjunct stakeholder responses, this research will offer insights into extant and burgeoning approaches from around the country that evidence or show the most promise. The ultimate aim is to develop effective and workable understandings of vulnerability and influencing when and how the police, its partners, and the criminal justice system optimally respond in this complex area.

Research methodology

Three phases of research are proposed:

Phase one

Remote (video/telephone) structured interviews will be undertaken with key persons from all forces, with the aim of establishing:

- perceptions of the extent and nature of county lines operating in each police force area
- information on local structures and resources, for example, specific partnerships with other local agencies and engagement with national structures
- the nature of links between police and other agencies in 'import/export' force areas and any issues concerning coordination and partnership
- information on policing responses, including recent targeted operations/'crackdowns', partnership working to identify vulnerable people involved in county lines networks and preventive work

The picture obtained from this survey will be supplemented with arrest data on intention to supply Class A drugs in the past 10 years in each force area.

Phase two

Utilising data obtained from phase one, the researchers will focus on three to four police forces and undertake interviews with officers involved in policing county lines. This will include staff in partner agencies such as British Transport Police, Youth Offending Teams and crime prevention, as well as relevant local authority and local NGO partners.

Interviews will also be undertaken with people actively or previously engaged in working for county lines networks. This element will focus both on police responses as described above, but also the potentially contrasting interpretations of the experiences and situations faced by individuals involved in county lines labour.

Phase three

The longer timescale will allow for a final phase of evaluative research. The aim here will be to work with a range of agencies operating along or across one of the county line axes. The research findings from phases one and two will be used in work with agencies towards the delivery of a 'best

practice' case study.

Summary of findings

This project was completed in May 2024.

Kammersgaard T and others. 2026. 'Policing and drug market-related violence: competitive, internal and enforcement-related violence in UK County Lines'. International Journal of Drug Policy, 149, 105155.

[Read open access article](#)