

Understanding and preventing 'cuckooing' victimisation

Investigating the mechanics of 'cuckoo' targeting and identifying potential preventive measures for practical application.

Key details

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Police region	North East
Collaboration and partnership	West Yorkshire Police, West Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit, Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Organised Crime Unit, Durham Constabulary, North Yorkshire Police, Humberside Police, Merseyside Police and South Yorkshire Police
Level of research	Professional/work based
Project start date	May 2022
Date due for completion	July 2024

Research context

'Cuckooing' is an inherently exploitative and predatory practice. Existing evidence indicates that victims are typically vulnerable and in some instances, socially excluded. Victims include drug and alcohol users, sex workers, the elderly, single parents, and those with learning difficulties,

disabilities and/or mental health issues. Some victims may receive 'benefits' for their cooperation (for example, drugs), yet are likely to be subjected to serious threats, physical and psychological violence, coercion and intimidation.

Cuckooing undoubtedly presents a 'wicked' problem for operational policing. Yet, while political and professional concern about the proliferation of cuckooing in the UK has increased in recent years, academic research dedicated to exploring, understanding and scrutinising this evolving phenomenon remains in its infancy.

Indeed, to our best knowledge, no studies have been conducted to date focusing specifically on northern force areas, and no studies have obtained high-quality empirical data providing an insight into the decision making of cuckooing perpetrators themselves. This study will close these knowledge gaps, providing research and evidence to craft solutions to this contemporary policing and safeguarding issue. Notably, the study also holds the potential to inform work being piloted nationally around targeted organised exploitation, and a health-based approach to the early recognition of individuals vulnerable to exploitation.

The three overarching aims of the study are to:

- investigate the mechanics of cuckoo targeting (including risk factors, such as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs))
- gain an insight into the lived experience of cuckoo victims and perpetrators
- identify potential preventative measures for practical application

To meet these aims, the study has three inter-related research questions:

1. How, when and why are cuckoo victims targeted?
2. How is cuckooing experienced by victims and perpetrators?
3. How can cuckooing be prevented (or terminated once instigated)?

Research methodology

- Scoping review of over 600 relevant documents.
- 50 semi-structured interviews with cuckooing experts (at national, regional and local level).
- 16 graphic elicitation interviews with victims and perpetrators of cuckooing.
- Analysis – framework analysis.

Tags

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