

Cuckooing

What is Cuckooing

Cuckooing is when criminals take over the home of a vulnerable person, and use it for criminal purpose such as dealing drugs.

A criminal will often befriend a vulnerable person, as comfort levels rise more criminals are brought to the home, adding to the activity and taking over the property entirely.

Who are the victims of cuckooing?

Victims are vulnerable individuals, often drug users but can include people who are...

- older
- living with a mental or physical health condition
- living with a learning disability
- involved in prostitution
- single parents
- experiencing poverty
- isolated
- living with forms of addiction, such as alcoholism

Controlling the victim: Once residency is established drug dealers then have a discreet location out of sight of police from which to conduct their criminal activity.

An example of controlling activity could be pacifying victims using drugs. Once the high wears off and the victim wants the criminals to leave, intimidation levels can escalate to the use of threats and violence.

"They've already bought their way in, they've come in with a smile, they've said they're going to do you a favour, you bought the line. You know it's your fault, you know you've let them in, it's not like they've kicked the door in. They come in as friends, they're going to look after you, as friends, they're going to make life a bit better, you ain't going to wake up sick every morning. This is how they get in. They're your friends. And you know they're not but they have all the power." - Victim of Cuckooing (Research in Practice for Adults)



Spotting the Signs of Cuckooing



Increase of vehicles stopping at the property, often for short periods



Increase of anti-social behaviour around the property



Open drug dealing near the property



Not seeing the resident of the property as often



Increase of the number of people coming and going at various times of the day or night

The Vulnerable Person ...

Has stopped engaging with support services

Is presenting with unexplained injuries

Has paid off debts (including housing debts) in full and in cash

Has begun to misuse substances or this use has increased

Is appearing withdrawn and fearful of disclosing information for fear of 'betraying' the criminals, abuse or eviction

Is associating with new unidentified people who are often present at the home

Has changed appearance either wearing expensive clothing or appearing unkempt



CUCKOOING IS HAPPENING NOW.

Criminal gangs are targeting the homes of vulnerable people to be used for drug dealing - a process known as "cuckooing" (like the bird that invades other bird's nests) and victims are often left with little choice but to cooperate.

Dealers often approach the vulnerable person offering free drugs to use their home for dealing or in some instances after providing 'free' drugs, will then force the person to deal for them in order to 're-pay' their drug debts.

These criminals are selective about who they target, a lot of the time victims are lonely, isolated, frequently drug users themselves and are already known to the police.

"Cuckooing" means the criminals can operate from a property rather than the street, which is out of sight from the police

making it an attractive option. They can then use the premises to deal drugs from, which is difficult for the police to monitor and they often will only stay for a short period of time.

A property that is showing a change in usage could be a sign of cuckooing. These changes can include; more people going in and out, an increase in bikes and cars outside, signs of drug use nearby or secure doors wedged open.



What is Cuckooing?

Cuckooing is a form of criminal exploitation, termed by the police, in which drug dealers take over the home of a vulnerable person in order to use it as a base for county lines drug trafficking. The crime is named for the Cuckoo's practice of taking over other birds' nests for its young.

Cuckooing

#KnowTheSigns – cuckooing



Cuckooing

‘**Cuckooing**’ is when professional criminals target the homes of vulnerable adults so they can use the property for drug-dealing and other criminal activities.

These criminals are very selective about who they target as ‘cuckoo’ victims and are often entrepreneurial.

Victims of ‘cuckooing’ are often drug users but can include older people, those suffering from mental or physical health problems, female sex workers, single mums and those living in poverty. Victims may suffer from other forms of addiction, such as alcoholism, and are often already known to the police. Dealers often approach the victim offering free drugs to use their home for dealing.

Once they gain control, gangs move in with the risk of domestic abuse, sexual exploitation and violence. Children as well as adults are used as drug runners.

It is common for gangs to have access to several addresses. They move quickly between vulnerable people’s homes for just a few hours, a couple of days or sometimes longer. This helps gangs evade

detection. By 'cuckooing' the criminals can operate from a discreet property, which is out of sight, making it an attractive option. They can then use the premises to deal and manufacture drugs in an environment under the police radar.

These gangs may use accommodation in rural areas, including serviced apartments, holiday lets, budget hotels and caravan parks.

When the criminals use the victim's property for criminal enterprises, the inhabitants become terrified of going to the police for fear of being suspected of involvement in drug dealing or being identified as a member of the group, which would result in their eviction from the property. Some vulnerable adults may be forced to leave their homes, making themselves homeless and leaving the gangs free to sell drugs in their absence.

Reporting any suspicious drug-related behaviour may assist in making your neighbourhood a safer place as professional criminals are using the homes of victims to manufacture and sell drugs.

Stay aware and spot potential signs of drug dealers near you.

Signs to look out for if you think someone is a victim of Cuckooing, or if you are living within or near a property used to deal drugs; or if you are concerned about your property as a landlord or property manager include:

- usually takes place in a multi-occupancy or social housing property
- increase in the number of coming and goings /people entering and leaving
- increase in cars or bikes outside
 - offenders will often have new vehicles outside the property
 - frequently use taxis or hire cars
- possible increase in anti-social activity in and around the property
- increase in litter outside
- disengagement with support services
 - lack of healthcare visitors
- professionals visiting may be aware of new unidentified persons in the property
- the property may become to appear almost sparse of valuable possessions inside and go into a state of disrepair

Case study 1

Sheila, mid 60's, with historic substance misuse. Diagnosed with mental health issues. Socially isolated. Befriended local homeless female called Sarah, a class A drug user and let her stay at her home. This female then introduced County Line Dealers into her property. Sheila was threatened at knife point and forced to deal drugs by the dealer. Police raid led to the arrest and conviction of Sarah for Possession with Intent to Supply (PWITS). The main dealer was not arrested and still operating in the area.

Case study 2

Carmen, late 40's, no drug issues but has considerable physical health issues, and difficulty communicating. Carmen has also possibly been the victim of sexual exploitation. Carmen owns her property which is in state of disrepair. She was targeted by local class A users, who moved into her home. Soon there was clear evidence of drug use with discarded paraphernalia inside and outside of her home. Care staff who provided Carmen with support stopped visits due to risks associated with the dealers and drug users at the

property. A Multi agency meeting was held due to Carmen's vulnerability and lack of capacity to protect herself from exploitation. An appropriate care package was put in place and the drug dealers moved on.

Key messages:

Rarely do people like to think of themselves as vulnerable or being taken advantage of and so may not admit to being cuckooed. It is sometimes easier to broach the subject by warning them that by continuing such activities, even if carried out by others, as it is in their property it may lead to eviction/loss of tenancy.

Capacity is a main question when looking at someone's behaviour and the choices they make. It is often seen that the client has the capacity to make the choice, albeit an unwise one. We would question, why are they making that choice?

Cuckooing can also be carried out by family members, local dealers/users and not just County Lines.

Reporting concerns

If you think you have spotted a drugs 'cuckoo' or if you're concerned about a drug related crime where you live, call the police on 101 or call 999 in an emergency.

If you don't want to speak to the police directly, you can call the anonymous **Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111**

Crimestoppers is an independent charity that works with police forces throughout the UK that people can use to pass on information about a crime anonymously.

- call **0800 555 111** (24 hours a day and 7 days a week)
- anonymous online reporting form
- you don't have to give them your name or any personal information; calls are not recorded and cannot be traced.

Crimestoppers has launched a campaign to try to stop these gangs which use violence and abuse to target the homes of vulnerable people and use them as bases for drug dealing – find out more on their website at crimestoppers-uk.org/let-s-stop-cuckooing

Under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, landlords or property managers can receive up to 14 years imprisonment or a substantial fine for having drugs residing at their property.

The property may be seized or forfeited as well as prosecuted for money laundering.

The premises may be 'closed down' and boarded up under the terms of a Premises Closure Order: (Section 76 Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014).

