The socio-economic impact of child exploitation in the UK

Executive Summary

TRILATERAL RESEARCH
Ethical AI

Child criminal exploitation (CCE) and child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSA/E) have reached alarming levels in the United Kingdom, with far-reaching socio-economic consequences. This white paper analyses the scale of the problem, challenges in safeguarding, and economic costs, proposing recommendations for tackling this crisis effectively.

Key Findings

Pervasive exploitation: Thousands of children at risk

In England alone, an estimated 16,000 children face sexual exploitation every year. Organised crime gangs put approximately 27,000 children at risk of exploitation and 34,000 children are involved in gang activity and experiencing violence. On average, there are 48 child sexual exploitation offences reported per day.

Safeguarding issues: Poor risk assessment and information sharing

Safeguarding children from exploitation has proven to be challenging. There has been a 15% increase in CSA/E offenses during 2021/22 reaching 103,055 cases, indicating a growing problem. Poor risk assessment and information sharing have been flagged in 41% of serious incidents, highlighting systemic issues in identifying and protecting vulnerable children. Furthermore, there has been a 42% increase in CCE reported as a factor during social care assessments.

Economic burden: Billions in lifetime costs and policing expenses

The lifetime cost of child sexual abuse is estimated at £10 billion, and the policing costs associated with CSA/E are projected to reach £84.9 million in 2024/2025. In addition, prison set up costs related to CSA offenses are estimated to be £3.7 million for the year 2024/25.

Recommendations

To effectively address the issue of child exploitation, we propose the following recommendations:

Prioritise a proactive response to CCE and CSA/E, focusing on early detection and intervention.

Facilitate multi-dimensional understanding and local preparedness.

Adopt automated tools to support decision-making and streamline processes.

Optimisation of law enforcement capacity to handle the increasing caseload.

Case Study: CESIUM

CESIUM, an AI-powered tool co-designed by Trilateral Research and Lincolnshire Police, demonstrates the potential of innovative solutions in tackling child exploitation. This tool enables the early identification of vulnerable children, leading to:

34% of cases being referred earlier to Multi-Agency Child Exploitation teams

80% reduction in pre-screening time

400% capacity uplift for law enforcement agencies

CESIUM showcases how technology can be leveraged to support safeguarding efforts and make a tangible difference in protecting children from exploitation.

Conclusion

Child criminal exploitation and child sexual abuse and exploitation are urgent issues that demand immediate attention and action. The socio-economic impact of these crimes is devastating, and the current safeguarding measures are falling short. It is imperative that we prioritise the adoption of innovative solutions, such as CESIUM, to enable positive change.

Access full details in **The socio-economic impact of child exploitation in the UK** white paper.