



## **Circles of Analysis: A Systemic Model of Child Criminal Exploitation**

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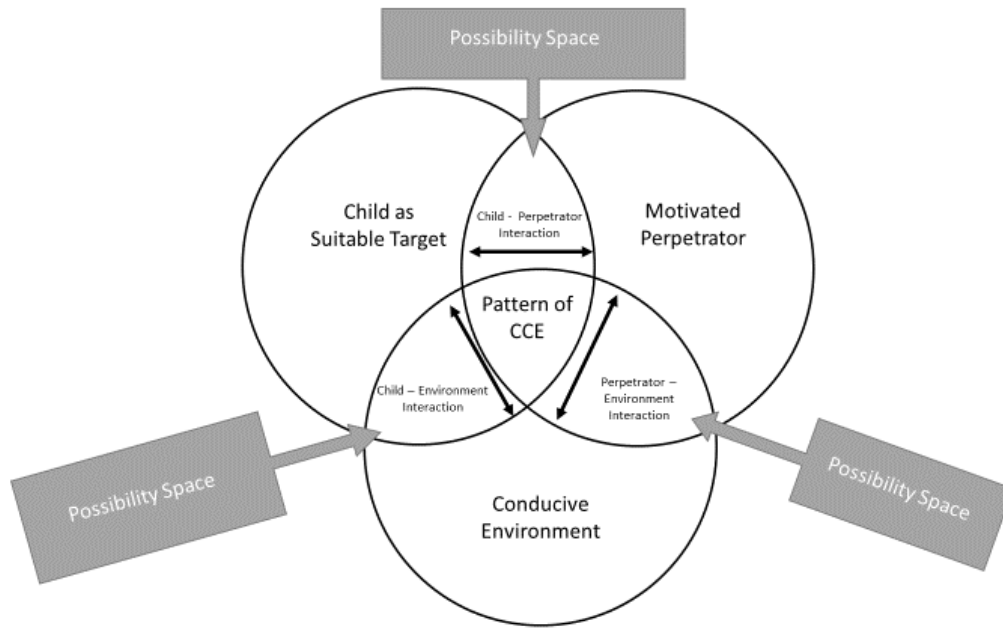
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Table i - Number of Potential Victims

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of potential victims</b>	<b>Number of potential victims who were children</b>
2013 (NCA, 2014)	1,746	450
2014 (NCA, 2015)	2,340	671
2015 (NCA, 2016)	3,266	982
2016 (NCA, 2017)	3,805	1,278
2017 (NCA, 2018)	5,145	2,118
2018 (NCA, 2019)	6,993	3,137
2019 (Home Office, 2020)	10,627	4,550
2020 (Gov.uk, 2021)	10,613 <sup>[i]</sup>	4,946

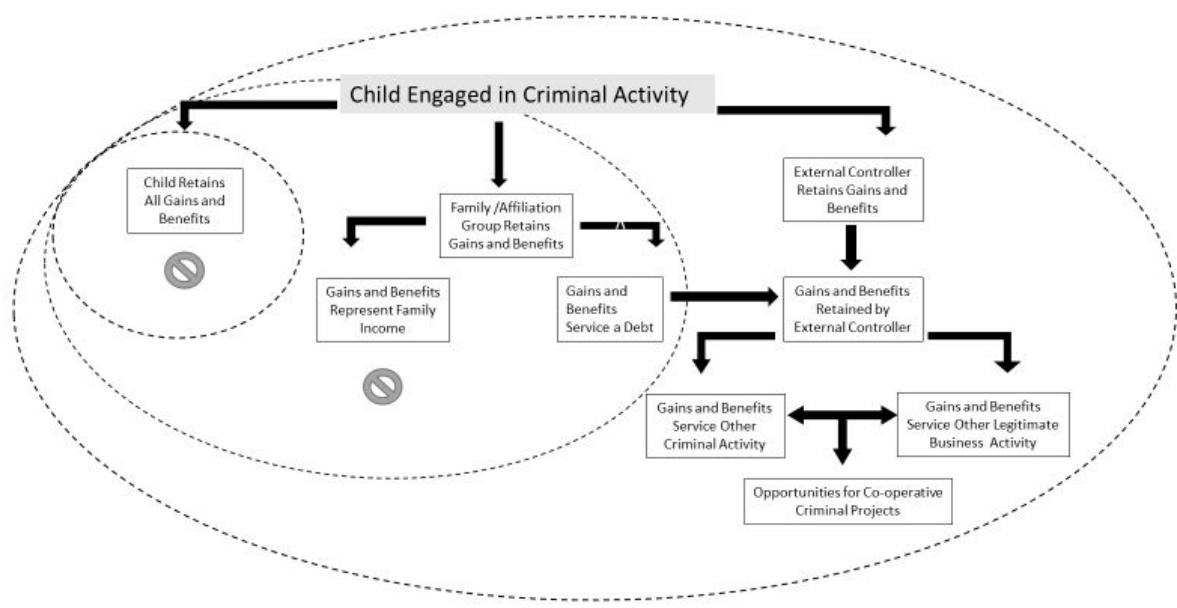
<sup>i</sup> A potential reason for the slight decrease in numbers of potential victims in 2020 would relate to the Covid-19 pandemic in which lockdown meant a reduced likelihood of people being identified, rather than a reduction in people being victimised.



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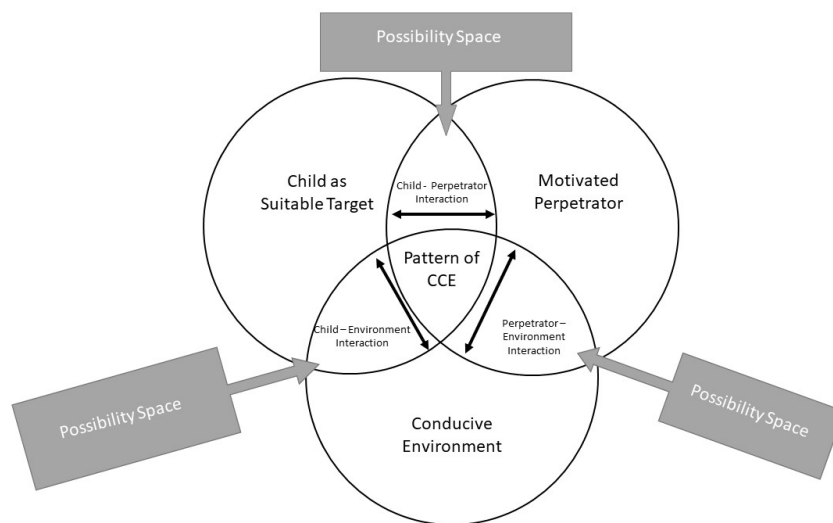


Figure 1: The Circles of Analysis

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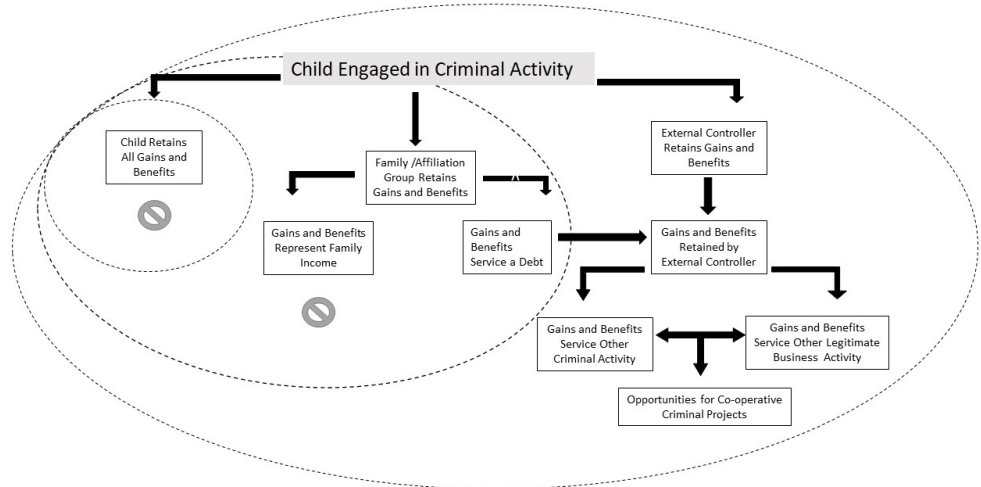


Figure 2 The Degrees of Organisation

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## Circles of Analysis: A Systemic Model of Child Criminal Exploitation

### **Abstract**

#### *Purpose*

Child criminal exploitation (CCE) emerges from the complex interplay between potential targets, motivated perpetrators and conducive environments. Drawing on Contextual Safeguarding and rational choice theory we seek to explain the relational dynamics that lead to CCE in terms of complex systems.

#### *Approach and Findings*

To achieve this, we review the existing criminological and public health perspectives on CCE and compare against current assessment protocols used to identify child victims of exploitation. Findings demonstrate a conceptual and empirical flaw in existing practice. This flaw can be understood in terms of a failure to include both environmental conditions and the perpetrator's motivation when trying to prevent child criminal exploitation.

#### *Originality and Practical Implications*

To correct this, we develop an original systemic model called Circles of Analysis. This model builds on Contextual Safeguarding to overcome this identified flaw by also including perpetrator motivation to develop a Systemic Investigation, Protection and Prosecution Strategy (SIPPS).

This strategy is uniquely designed to improve how police and social workers identify and investigate child criminal exploitation and safeguard potential victims and survivors. By providing a holistic framework, the model is intended to improve disruption and prosecution of perpetrators by better explaining how children are recruited and controlled over time.

#### *Keywords*

Child criminal exploitation, contextual safeguarding, rational choice theory, criminology, public health, complexity theory

## Introduction: A New Model for Understanding CCE

In this article, we argue that despite the UK's robust and world-leading set of child-safeguarding systems, along with knowledge and expertise supported by strong and sophisticated civil and criminal legislation, efforts to protect children and prevent exploitation are undermined by false assumptions and reductive responses (Broad, 2018). Contextual Safeguarding has enabled both policy and practice to recognise the vulnerabilities and threats to health, welfare and development that are faced and experienced by older children and adolescents to include extra familial relationships and social networks within different domains. This has been a major contribution to improving child safeguarding. We build on this by addressing the motivation and characteristics of those who perpetrate and participate in the recruitment, control and criminal exploitation of children in various contexts (Longfield, 2019).

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) refers to the selection, recruitment and control of a child in order for the child to commit crimes for, and on the behalf of another. The exploitation of the child is dependent upon an imbalance of power in favour of the perpetrator (Beckett, *et al.*, 2017) who controls the child in order that they commit crimes 'by proxy'.

Whilst not a new phenomenon, CCE has proliferated in recent years, becoming a major cause for concern in relation to children's safety and welfare. Although more recent, CCE mirrors the rise in concern about child sexual exploitation (CSE) that followed several high-profile controversies (e.g. Rotherham 1997-2013; Oxfordshire 2004-2012), however, to date, responses to CCE have been inconsistent and often contradictory (Field, *et al.*, 2019; Children's Society, 2019). Despite domestic legislation designed to protect the welfare of children; international conventions to prevent trafficking, slavery, servitude, forced labour and exploitation of children; and internationally agreed non-prosecution principles concerning victims of trafficking that have been forced to engage in criminality, children and vulnerable adults are continuing to be arrested, charged and prosecuted rather than protected and supported towards safety and recovery (Burland, 2017b). Consequently, those that are motivated to exploit children by using and controlling them to commit crime remain undetected and free to continue their poly-criminal enterprises with impunity.

CCE is not a single event crime with a simple linear causal pathway by which victims can be identified by fixed lists of indicators and "risk factors". CCE must be understood as a pattern of behaviour or events that emerge from the relational dynamics between children, motivated perpetrators and the environment that they both share over time (Desai, *et al.*, 2002; Hart *et al.*,



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3 2003; Finkelhor, 2008; Douglas, *et al.*, 2013; Beckett & Warrington, 2014). By understanding  
4 this in terms of complexity, we propose an innovative new approach: The Systemic  
5 Investigation Protection and Prosecution Strategy (SIPPS) for CCE. This approach was  
6 originally developed by the lead author, along with Caroline Haughey QC in 2014 as an  
7 approach to organising and testing evidence in cases of modern slavery. This was an extremely  
8 complex trafficking case concerning a 48-count indictment with offences ranging from  
9 trafficking to rape to misconduct in public office and blackmail. One of the victims was a  
10 particularly vulnerable 21-year-old female who had been locked in a room for a period of about  
11 4 months and repeatedly raped by the main defendant.

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19 The evolution of SIPPS began with a review of the accounts of the complainant and main  
20 defendant. Advice was provided to the prosecuting Counsel on the means by which she could  
21 most effectively cross-examine both. This advice addressed each issue that gave Counsel  
22 cause for concern and the subsequent conviction of the defendant led to him receiving a 38-  
23 year sentence. This case pre-dated the current vulnerable witness guidelines and the SIPPS  
24 approach is credited by Caroline Haughey QC with ensuring the victim's engagement across  
25 two trials.

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35 SIPPS was refined and formalised for use in assessing risk for CSE (Barlow, 2017) and is  
36 primarily deployed to map the aetiology and complexity of CCE as an emergent pattern of  
37 behaviour and its potential harmful impact on children. This strategy is grounded in complex  
38 systems theory which advances traditional systems theory by explaining that there are agents  
39 of the system who behave in ways that affect one another. According to complexity theory, a  
40 system builds upon structures that self-organise by interacting with their environments. They  
41 are flexible and adaptive in changing circumstances and can transform small scale (micro-state)  
42 irregularities into large-scale (macro-state) patterns. This makes them robust and resilient over  
43 time (Hassett & Stevens, 2014).

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51 The Circles of Analysis model represents the pattern of criminal exploitation that emerges from  
52 the interactions between the child target for exploitation and their environment, the motivated  
53 exploiter and the environment, and the interactions (relationship) between the targeted child  
54 and the motivated exploiter (Jennings, 2014). The model integrates criminological theories of  
55 victimology and criminogenesis, offering these as a theoretical support for Contextual  
56 Safeguarding, public health, and situational crime prevention approaches to the protection of  
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3 children; disruption of organised crime; and the pursuit, prosecution and punishment of the  
4 perpetrators. We have found that suitable statutory tools and professional knowledge exists but  
5 existing policies and protocols lack a clear theoretical foundation and provide ineffective and  
6 unreliable frameworks for practice. The Circles of Analysis provides the theoretical model for  
7 describing and explaining the phenomenon of Child criminal Exploitation. The SIPPS provides  
8 a theory and evidence-based approach to structured professional judgement and decision  
9 making in the investigation of cases of CCE. This includes disruption, arrest and prosecution  
10 of perpetrators; the safeguarding of children at risk – or who have been – victims of  
11 exploitation.

### 20 **CCE and Modern Slavery: The Emergence of County Lines**

21  
22 The Modern Slavery Act was introduced into UK legislation in 2015 with the purpose of  
23 consolidating existing offences, improving support for victims and ensuring that perpetrators  
24 receive suitable punishment. The Act incorporates different aspects of exploitation under the  
25 umbrella term “modern slavery”, including human trafficking, slavery, servitude, forced and  
26 compulsory labour. While the Act provides parameters as to what constitutes an offence, there  
27 continues to be significant academic debate over the terminological choices regarding the use  
28 of the word “slavery” to refer to contemporary issues incorporating some degree of  
29 exploitation.

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31 One key concern is that the connotations associated with the term “slavery” relate to some of  
32 the most serious human rights violations ever experienced throughout history, and that  
33 assigning this word to contemporary situations, especially those where the exploitation is less  
34 severe, serves to diminish the experiences of those who were enslaved in the past (Beutin,  
35 2017). It is also challenged that there is no clear segregation between the term modern slavery  
36 and other forms of exploitation, and thus that it fails to determine a specific category of persons  
37 (O’Connell Davidson, 2015).

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39 This is not the space to try and tackle this terminological debate, nor can it adequately examine  
40 the potential harms of an Act whose definitional boundaries are not fixed, but one key positive  
41 of the broad definitions used within the Modern Slavery Act is the support it affords to those  
42 victims who sit on the cusp of so many different forms of exploitation. Where previously they  
43 may not have met the criteria to receive statutory support, or their perpetrators’ crimes may not  
44 have fit neatly into any specific prosecutorial legislation, the wide remit of the Modern Slavery  
45 Act gives them a place where their experiences can be acknowledged.

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3 While modern slavery, like any crime involving exploitation, is notoriously difficult to  
4 quantify, statistics are collected through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) – the UK’s  
5 system for identifying and supporting potential victims<sup>[1]</sup> of modern slavery. Although the data  
6 collected by the NRM is flawed in many ways – for example, it only counts those who have  
7 been identified, and adults must consent to referral into the NRM, therefore it is not clear how  
8 representative the figures are (Cockbain & Bowers, 2019) – it provides the most reliable non-  
9 estimated set of statistics relating to modern slavery in the UK. The NRM statistics indicate a  
10 significant increase in the numbers of individuals identified as potential victims of modern  
11 slavery in the UK over time, as illustrated in Table i below.

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19 *Table i - Number of Potential Victims*

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25 These statistics might initially raise concern with the habitual annual increase in the numbers,  
26 however, this is perhaps less likely to be representative of an increase in potential victims each  
27 year, and more likely indicative of an increased awareness of modern slavery and  
28 understanding of how it should be recognised and responded to. Modern slavery training has  
29 increasingly been included in the training requirements of front-line practitioners from police  
30 and social workers to health staff and safeguarding teams. Increased modern slavery training,  
31 and the resulting improved understanding of the forms of exploitation it can take, could also  
32 explain the increase in figures of children identified as caught in situations of criminal  
33 exploitation, though it should be acknowledged that an expansion of organised crime gangs  
34 (OCGs) operating in certain forms of CCE has been recognised in recent years.

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43 Despite the overall slight reduction in the total number of potential victims referred into the  
44 NRM in 2020 (illustrated in Table i above), the number of referrals for child potential victims  
45 actually increased from 2019 to 2020. 51% of those children identified in 2020 were victims  
46 of criminal exploitation, and 93% of those were male (Gov.uk, 2021).

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51 CCE fits the Modern Slavery Act’s definition of modern slavery, however, this is not to say  
52 that any child embroiled in criminal activity is a victim, as there are instances in which children  
53 commit criminal acts of their own volition (Robinson *et al.*, 2018). CCE can take many forms,  
54 including forced begging, shoplifting, cannabis cultivation, and “county lines”. County lines is  
55 a form of drug dealing used by OCGs, where gangs “typically use children and young people  
56 as runners to move drugs and money to and from the urban area and this often involves them  
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3 being exploited through deception, intimidation, violence, debt bondage, grooming and/or  
4 trafficking by the gang.” (Whittaker *et al.*, 2018: 96) Of children identified as potential victims  
5 of modern slavery in the UK in 2020, criminal exploitation was the most common form of  
6 exploitation suffered (Gov.uk, 2021). The statistical breakdown of these potential victims  
7 shows that 40% of children (1,544) identified as potential victims of criminal exploitation in  
8 2020 had been exploited in situations of county lines; 81% of whom were male.  
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11 While CCE is not new, the ways in which it transpires evolve in response to the opportunities  
12 and environments at play. Children and vulnerable adults are often targeted because they are  
13 easy to manipulate and control, less likely to be detected and are cheap to employ (Williams &  
14 Finlay, 2018). CCE often involves grooming through which the perpetrator gains the trust and  
15 complicity of the victim; this might be through providing affection, gifts or money, and the  
16 perpetrator maintains complicity by withdrawing those rewards, threatening, or committing  
17 violence should the child indicate a reluctance to commit, or continue committing, the criminal  
18 acts (Densley, 2012; Stone, 2018). In such a situation the child is both entirely reliant on, and  
19 terrified of, their perpetrator which leads to a paradoxical attachment to the person controlling  
20 them (Cantor & Price, 2007). When a child is so completely attached to their perpetrator,  
21 successful safeguarding interventions can be incredibly difficult.  
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### 34 **Child Poverty: CCE, Drugs and Public Health**

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36 Public health is rooted in the philosophy of providing the maximum benefit for the most people.  
37 A public health approach to reducing levels of criminal exploitation requires developing  
38 insights into the “causes of the causes” of criminality, offending and victimisation. This goes  
39 beyond situating the problem with the child and their family, to investigating the opportunities  
40 that allow for such criminality and identifying where organised abuse is occurring. A way to  
41 achieve this is through examining and aligning key data on the social determinants of health  
42 alongside characteristics of criminally exploited young people to establish correlative patterns  
43 which (if identified) enable early intervention to break the cycles that lead to crime. CCE, by  
44 nature, is covert and its victims are often hidden. Children and young people that have been  
45 exploited do not necessarily recognise themselves as victims, and if they do, may feel ashamed  
46 of their predicament with little trust in statutory agencies to report their situation. Indeed, CCE  
47 victims have often been arrested numerous times for other offences such as public order  
48 offences and petty crime.  
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3 As one form of CCE, county lines is a growing social issue in the United Kingdom that, in  
4 recent years, has dominated the discourse on CCE. The availability of drugs is at an all-time  
5 high (Black, 2020) which only exacerbates further the threat of criminal exploitation for  
6 children and vulnerable adults through the county lines model of drug trafficking. Described  
7 as an epidemic (Pitts, 2020), county lines has been heralded as the next big grooming scandal  
8 (Calouri, 2017), with children and young people forced into involvement through  
9 manipulation, coercion, fear, and violence (Children's Society, 2019).

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16 The level of violent coercion used by those that traffic and exploit children and young people  
17 is often underestimated. Fear of retribution from perpetrators prevents disclosure and often  
18 causes victims to deny that they have been exploited. The hidden nature of trafficking and  
19 criminal exploitation means that victims are kept in isolation and are often trapped by, or  
20 dependent upon the perpetrators. Those trafficked from outside the country may be transported  
21 illegally and find themselves treated as illegal immigrants by police and border agencies before  
22 their real situation is realised. Other vulnerabilities, such as physical, cognitive, psychiatric and  
23 emotional impairment, as well as language barriers can preclude trafficked people seeking help  
24 (Haughey, *et al.*, 2020).

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33 There are no fixed variables that increase a child's vulnerability to exploitation, making it  
34 difficult to identify *which* children are at increased risk and *why*, which requires analysis of the  
35 effects of socioeconomic inequality in the UK, the criminogenic effects of public policy and  
36 legislation and the far-reaching consequences these have on outcomes for young people  
37 (Marmot *et al.*, 2020). Recent data indicates a deterioration in child health in England as social  
38 conditions worsen. Increasing inequalities lead to higher levels of need and deprivation,  
39 resulting in the lives of those "towards the bottom of the social hierarchy" becoming more  
40 difficult (Marmot *et al.*, 2020:149). Children and young people within these social strata are at  
41 increased vulnerability to gang involvement and CCE (Children's Society, 2019).

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49 The significant impact that poverty has on children and young people is well established,  
50 altering their life course and setting in motion a disadvantaged path of socioeconomic and  
51 health outcomes (The Children's Society, 2017; Ayre, 2016). The 10 million children living in  
52 poverty in England (Department for Work and Pensions, 2019) are significantly more likely to  
53 experience other ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) than their peers higher on the social  
54 gradient (Felitti *et al.*, 1998; Social Mobility Commission, 2017). ACEs include exposure to  
55 domestic abuse, child abuse and neglect, substance misuse, criminality, mental health issues  
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3 and becoming a looked after child, characteristics which are also considered factors of  
4 vulnerability to criminal exploitation (Children's Society, 2019; Longfield, 2019). The  
5 relationship between poverty and CCE is unsurprising when considering how perpetrators  
6 identify a child's needs or aspirations, and recruit and ensnare the child by tapping those needs.  
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11 CCE is contingent on the purposeful targeting of vulnerable groups considered as "easier" to  
12 manipulate and coerce, therefore for children with Special Educational Needs and Disability  
13 (SEND) who (generally) have a reduced capacity to process factual and contextual information  
14 to make informed decisions, rendering them especially vulnerable. Children with SEND  
15 constitute 40% of criminally exploited children, with reports that perpetrators are known to  
16 specifically target local special educational facilities (Longfield, 2019; Children's Society,  
17 2019:34). Evidence also suggests that criminally exploited children and gang-associated  
18 children are more likely to have undiagnosed learning needs.  
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26 There have been well-documented links between absences from mainstream education and  
27 safeguarding concerns, and data from recent years show a rapid increase of permanent  
28 exclusions (71% since 2012/13). Excluded children face increased risk of exploitation in  
29 comparison to their non-excluded peers (even those with ACEs) (Black, 2020). Young people  
30 out of mainstream education are at particular risk of exploitation, both due to the ACEs leading  
31 to the exclusion and because, practically, they are more accessible to groups striving to exploit  
32 them, with Pupil Referral Units often being targeted by perpetrators (The Children's Society,  
33 2019). Children who self-identify as gang members are over five times more likely to be  
34 excluded from mainstream education compared to their equivalent non-gang affiliated peers  
35 (16% vs 3%) (Office for National Statistics, 2019). At an already increased risk of exploitation,  
36 excluded children are 10 times more likely to suffer from a mental health condition, making  
37 them prime targets for grooming (Gill *et al.*, 2017), alongside being twice as likely to self-  
38 harm, possibly illustrating the extent of their trauma (Longfield, 2019). Mental health issues  
39 are consistently overrepresented amongst gang-associated young people, proffered as a result  
40 of living in a violent environment and exposure to the criminal justice system (World Health  
41 Organisation, 2019).  
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55 CCE requires a comprehensive safeguarding response rooted in the public health ethos of early  
56 intervention and prevention that duly incorporates and acknowledges the systemic predisposing  
57 preconditions for both victims and perpetrators, and the duality of these roles. This approach  
58 highlights the nuances of victimisation, however, the identification of characteristics of  
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3 children vulnerable to exploitation is not enough in isolation to equip us to protect them. The  
4 Contextual Safeguarding approach enables us to have a wider perspective and insight of the  
5 situations and relationships in which CCE is likely to manifest. Public health and social care  
6 responses to CCE does not converge with the criminal justice response which runs in parallel,  
7 to a different agenda: linear criminal justice approaches reduce youth offending to  
8 identification of the offence and the perpetrator, but fail to explore the offence as symptomatic  
9 of other causes including social pressures or coercive control by organised crime (Shaw &  
10 Greenhow, 2020; Sturrock & Holmes, 2015).  
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### 18 **Closing the CCE Circle: Introducing the Perpetrator to Contextual Safeguarding**

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20 Having established the relationship between health inequalities, child deprivation and child  
21 exploitation, we now explore the safeguarding landscape to demonstrate an important  
22 conceptual and empirical gap in current theory and practice. Although Contextual Safeguarding  
23 goes a long way towards filling this gap, we argue that to develop a full ecosystem for  
24 understanding CCE and child protection, the perpetrator must also be included. Contextual  
25 Safeguarding is fully discussed and justified by Firmin (2020) and other articles in this special  
26 edition, so we shall not engage in a full exposition again, but instead opt for a rudimentary  
27 distillation of safeguarding policy and practice. At its most simplistic level, standard child  
28 safeguarding focuses on the child's home, family and close acquaintances. Risks are  
29 understood at this level and the response is usually via social work intervention with the family  
30 or, as an ultimate intervention, legal proceedings leading to removal of the child from the home.  
31 Contextual Safeguarding brings something else to the table when thinking about child  
32 protection, which is the role of the wider community of peers, neighbourhoods, social media  
33 and schools. Contextual Safeguarding therefore provides a more comprehensive approach to  
34 understanding the risks to child safety that exist beyond the home. This also includes the  
35 capacity of this wider network to provide meaningful safeguarding that focuses not only on the  
36 child's immediate home setting, but also the wider environment (or context) in which the child  
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52 Contextual Safeguarding extends the locus of child protection thinking from the "home" to  
53 include the "environment". The effect of this strategy is to draw crime prevention and  
54 community safety approaches into safeguarding thinking and practice. Crime prevention and  
55 community safety approaches rely heavily on rational choice (Becker 1968, Clarke & Felson  
56 1993, Cornish & Clarke 1986) and routine activity theories (Cohen & Felson 1979, Felson  
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3 1998) to explain the mechanisms by which reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour can  
4 be achieved. Rational choice theory explains perpetrator behaviour using a broadly economic  
5 “costs-benefits” analysis, arguing that if the benefits outweigh the costs, an offence will be  
6 committed. Similarly, routine activity theory identifies the pre-requisites necessary for a crime  
7 to occur. These revolve around the intersection of a motivated perpetrator, suitable target, and  
8 absence of capable guardians (e.g. police, parents, neighbours, park wardens). Routine activity  
9 contains an element of lifestyle theory (Hindelang *et al.*, 1978) insofar as it explains changes  
10 in the crime rate in relation to changes in where people spend their time (e.g. more women in  
11 paid employment leads to fewer capable guardians in residential neighbourhoods during office  
12 hours, leading to a corresponding rise in burglary) (Cohen & Felson 1979). These elements of  
13 lifestyle theory speak directly to the principles of Contextual Safeguarding and our model, as  
14 both rely heavily upon the relational and interactional context in which risks to children emerge  
15 and are managed. However, rational choice and routine activity theories essentially presume  
16 the existence of perpetrators and provide no causal explanation for why some people turn to  
17 criminality. Instead, they proffer the underpinning change mechanism for crime prevention and  
18 community safety interventions that seek to “target harden”<sup>[ii]</sup> buildings and people, thereby  
19 increasing the effort and risk and reducing the reward involved in committing an offence,  
20 deterring perpetrators as costs begin to outweigh benefits.  
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35 The significance of this is that it locates Contextual Safeguarding strategies within a theoretical  
36 framework that foregrounds situational and social crime prevention strategies that say nothing  
37 about *why* people offend. This is not a criticism of Contextual Safeguarding (though is a well-  
38 established critique of rational choice and routine activity theories), which we have already  
39 stated adds considerably to the concept and practice of child protection by developing a  
40 systemic model that moves beyond the child to include their wider environment. However, our  
41 model goes a step further, adding the perpetrator alongside the child and the environment. The  
42 purpose of this is to provide an innovative theoretical model to address this missing component  
43 in understanding and responding to CCE. We do not propose a causal explanation for child  
44 exploitation (though there are clearly financial motives) in the manner of most criminological  
45 and victimological theories that locate the reasons for criminal behaviour as biologically,  
46 psychologically or socially determined. Instead, our model focuses on the relational dynamics  
47 between suitable target (child), motivated offender (perpetrator) and conducive environment  
48 (context). Consequently, the model does not replace any existing causal theory of offending  
49 but sits alongside them with an explicit emphasis on the spaces where child, perpetrator and  
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3 context converge. The model is therefore conceived in systemic, interactional and relational  
4 terms, designed to provide child services, criminal justice agencies, public health organisations  
5 and legal professionals with a common tool for understanding why perpetrators target certain  
6 children in certain spaces. In doing so, our model fills a conceptual and empirical void in  
7 current child safeguarding approaches, namely a framework for understanding perpetrator  
8 behaviour and decision-making in relation to the grooming and recruitment of children for the  
9 purposes of criminal exploitation.

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11 Our model is primarily concerned with understanding the interactional and relational dynamics  
12 that lead some children to be targeted by perpetrators some of the time, in some places. It is  
13 therefore not a general safeguarding tool as contextual safeguarding is, but specific to a subset  
14 of child abuse that we have framed in the context of exploitative, modern slavery practices and  
15 organised crime networks. Yet it shares a common antecedent with Contextual Safeguarding:  
16 providing a way to understand child protection systemically. Our model therefore takes  
17 inspiration and instruction from Contextual Safeguarding with regards to the inclusion of the  
18 wider environment, but expands it by adding the perpetrator and contains elements that are  
19 specific to providing an integrated multiagency approach for investigating, protecting and  
20 prosecuting cases of CCE.

### 21 22 23 **A Systemic Perspective on CCE**

24  
25 The UK Civil and Criminal justice systems provide a statutory framework that has potential to  
26 support systemic, multi-model responses to CCE, particularly the safeguarding of older  
27 children and adolescents. The Contextual Safeguarding approach and its underpinning  
28 theoretical principles has made important headway addressing this. The rest of this article  
29 outlines our new theory and highlights how this expands upon Contextual Safeguarding to  
30 understand all aspects at play in situations of CCE: the victim(s), the environment and the  
31 perpetrator(s).

32  
33 CCE occurs in the context of a sophisticated system comprising many people, including  
34 protective agencies, with different roles and functions. Tackling CCE therefore requires  
35 understanding of the nature of the problem from a systemic perspective; actions in any part of  
36 that system or network will have an effect throughout the whole of the network. Existing  
37 procedures are reactive, relying upon the identification or disclosure of exploitation, an  
38 identifiable victim and perpetrator. Investigation and intervention then follows a “top down”  
39 process to explain what happened, how it happened and how it will be remedied.

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3 Patterns of CCE change and adapt to new pressures and opportunities but simultaneously  
4 maintain a cohesion: the various elements adjust to fit together to meet the needs and goals of  
5 the group perpetrating the exploitation with implications for all agencies working to identify,  
6 prevent, investigate and prosecute cases of CCE.  
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11 An effective response therefore promotes movements or perturbations in the entire system,  
12 identifies the effects and reveals the next relevant step in the enquiry (Dallos, 1992) requiring  
13 an approach that is more exploratory, looking for connections, themes and dependencies.  
14 Gradually, as the reality of the case becomes clear, key members and mechanisms of the  
15 network are identified (be they perpetrators or victims), relationships and dependencies are  
16 understood, and motivations and modus operandi emerge. Thus, we can simultaneously protect  
17 actual and potential victims; identify, disrupt and remove perpetrators; improve safeguarding  
18 and prosecutorial outcomes; and reduce the risk of re-victimisation.  
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### 26 **Motivated Perpetrators**

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28 Modern slavery is often described as existing at the nexus of supply and demand, and criminals  
29 dealing in illicit goods and services, are not seen to be any great threat to the stability and well-  
30 being of society. Organised crime, however, is perilous due to vast profits acquired from the  
31 sale of illicit goods and services, or forced begging, then being reinvested in further activities  
32 and enterprises that are both licit and illicit, benefitting from the corruption of economic and  
33 political domains (Cressey, 1969).  
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39 Research relating to youth violence and gang involvement (Bennett & Holloway, 2004; Pitts,  
40 2007; Cottrell-Boyce, 2013); recruitment to county lines (Harding, 2020); and CSE (Child  
41 Exploitation and Online Protection Centre, 2011; Beckett & Warrington, 2014; Hallet, 2016)  
42 indicates that similar patterns of recruitment and victimology exist across these crime types in  
43 England and Wales. In these contexts, there is an emerging chain of perpetrators who gain  
44 different results and opportunities through their use of child victims. There is therefore no  
45 single, typical perpetrator of CCE. Instead, there are diverse individuals (in terms of age,  
46 gender, ethnicity, social and economic backgrounds), with a range of motivations who may be  
47 connected to each other through complex social networks. These individuals may in turn gain  
48 directly or indirectly through the exploitation of child and may be willing or unwitting  
49 facilitators of the exploitation. Individual perpetrators and facilitators may not know others  
50 within the network but will be aware of the connection. Thus, motivated perpetrators may have  
51 specific or multiple roles (e.g. recruitment, enforcement, transport, accommodation, direction  
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3 and control etc.) and these may include the child's peers, relatives, older youths and adults and  
4 patterns of child criminal exploitation may exhibit varying degrees of organisation and  
5 complexity.  
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9 The perpetrator(s) with control of the child(ren) may in some instances be considered the first-  
10 order beneficiary or user of the victim but there may be a system of second order beneficiaries  
11 who act as facilitators, suppliers of the children or the suppliers of licit and illicit goods and  
12 services. They all profit from the criminal activities. Indeed, criminal exploitation may be the  
13 lucrative tip of a criminal iceberg, its earnings funding both criminal and legal activities and  
14 creating the opportunity for co-operative activities between criminals. There are different  
15 degrees of organisation of CCE and therefore potentially different opportunities for  
16 intervention to stop or disrupt it by integrating criminal and family law.  
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24 CCE incorporates acts of violence and intimidation, varying in respect to such things as  
25 relationship to the victim(s), severity of physical or psychological harm, use of weapons and  
26 implements, motivations etc. This can include implicit threats. The focus should then be on  
27 decision making about what the perpetrators were trying to achieve in their intention to exploit  
28 the child (even if this objective was not achieved) and not simply what happened. The  
29 professionals' task is to understand how and why a child has come to be exploited or how  
30 someone has come to exploit them, map emergent patterns and contexts of criminal  
31 exploitation, and identify victims and perpetrators.  
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39 CCE victims may initially be dealt with as suspects of crime who, following arrest, are taken  
40 to a police station, presenting an important opportunity for early identification which is,  
41 unfortunately, all too often missed (Bird, *et al.*, 2020). Patterns of behaviour, circumstances of  
42 the arrest, characteristics of the child, their demeanour, cognitive functioning, and emotional  
43 state may all be consistent with known patterns of victimology, victim accessing and  
44 recruitment, control and exploitation.  
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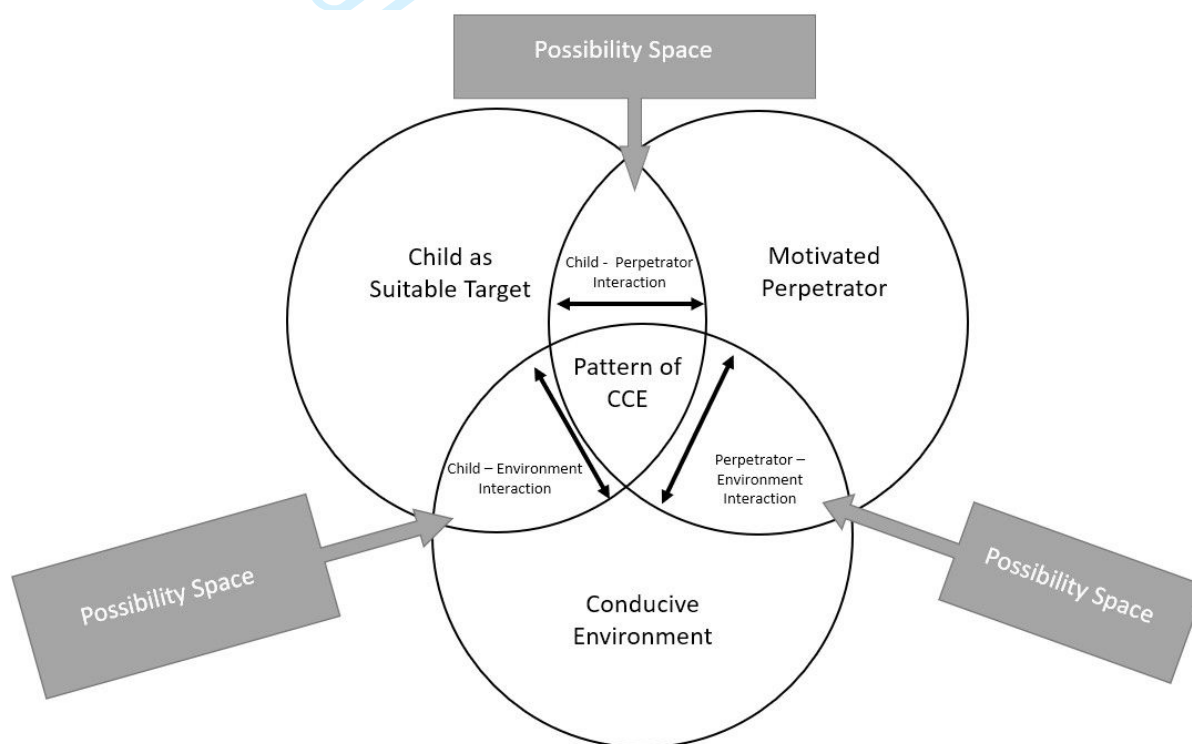
### 50 **The Circles of Analysis: A New Systemic Model of CCE**

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52 CCE is a pattern of events and behaviours that emerge from, and are maintained by, interactions  
53 between a complex of systems. Each of these individual systems act as elements of the  
54 exploitation system and can be defined and described separately as the child system, perpetrator  
55 system and environment system, each with their own attributes. The exploitation system can  
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exist only at the intersection of the other three but will vary depending upon the configuration of the attributes of the other elements and their relationships with each other.

Any single intervention will trigger responses throughout the systems that will resist the intervention or accommodate it. In this way the system maintains stability so that the abuse and exploitation continue and evolve. All interventions must therefore target all three intersections simultaneously and must take account of how the system has responded in the past to anticipate how it will respond in the present and the immediate future. The targets for intervention are the three relationships, the points of interaction which may be referred to as the possibility spaces:

*Figure 1: The Circles of Analysis*



Crimes in which children are working on the behalf of criminals are an output of the exploitation process. The nature of these crimes is immaterial to understanding the criminal exploitation of children; it is the process and mechanisms that are important. The mechanisms of exploitation are all forms of child maltreatment (physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect) without which exploitation cannot occur. Understanding the phenomenon of criminal exploitation of children is therefore a “bottom up” approach that starts from recognising patterns of child maltreatment.

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3 Child maltreatment occurs in the context of a relationship in which there is a substantial  
4 imbalance of power that is misused by the stronger person (usually the adult but may also  
5 include peers or older youths) to control and harm the weaker (usually the child) for some form  
6 of gain. The nature and extent of the abuse together with the degree of harm will vary according  
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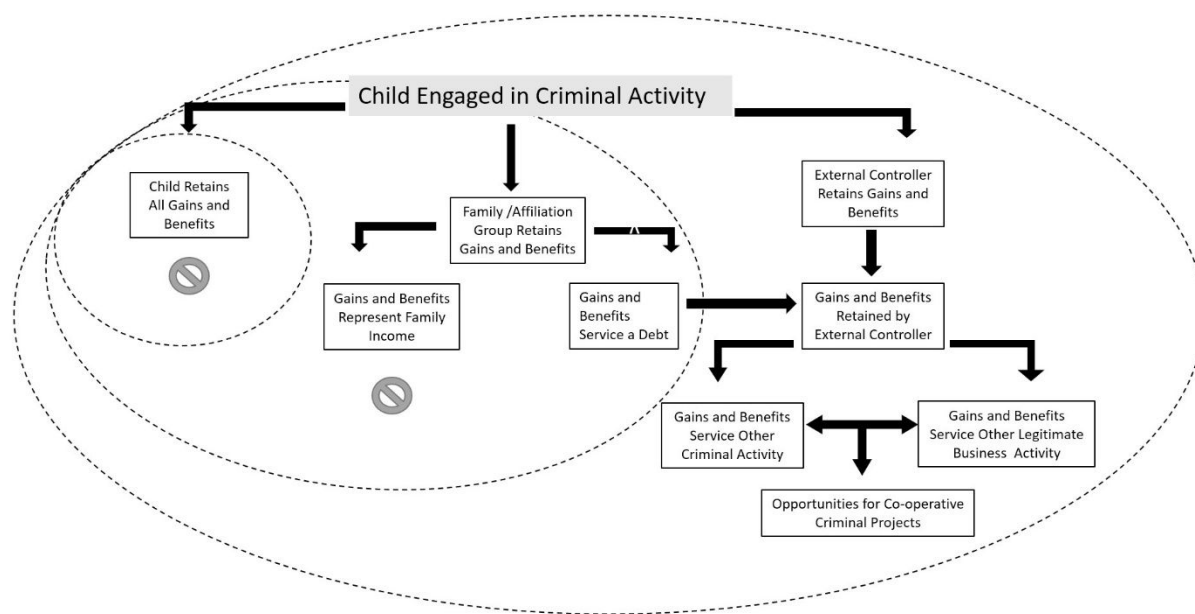
- 11 • the needs, objectives and aims of the perpetrator(s)
- 12 • the characteristics of the child and what these represent to the perpetrator(s)
- 13 • the environments from which the child and perpetrators emerge and in which the abuse  
14 occurs  
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19 Each intersection between the child, motivated perpetrators, and the shared environment, is an  
20 emergent micro-state that can be understood in terms of the biographical histories of each of  
21 the agents within the system. In addition, the nature and characteristics of geographical  
22 locations either promote or inhibit, the patterns of behaviour that occur during the interactions.  
23 These intersections are therefore described as “possibility spaces” in which the  
24 target/environment microstate generates the needs or goals of the target (i.e. the child).  
25 Similarly, the perpetrator/environment microstate generates the needs or goals of the motivated  
26 exploiter(s). The target/perpetrator micro-state indicates a congruity of goals or needs between  
27 both agents. It is the congruence of these goals that causes the interaction in the space in which  
28 both agents exist together over time.  
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38 The pattern of criminal exploitation is a maintained as a stable relationship between the  
39 perpetrator and victim within a shared, conducive environment in which the perpetrator’s needs  
40 are gratified. This will likely destabilise as disturbances occur in any of the possibility spaces.  
41 The pattern of behaviour will then cease (as no longer functional to goal achievement) in  
42 response to the new stimulant. These micro-states or relationships, represent the possibility of  
43 child abuse and exploitation, as well as the possibility to prevent or disrupt exploitation and  
44 support children towards safety and recovery.  
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51 The different degrees of organisation of CCE indicate that different levels of intervention are  
52 required depending on the needs of the child, their relationship to the perpetrator(s), and the  
53 context in which they both exist as the pattern of criminal exploitation emerges.  
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Figure 2 The Degrees of Organisation



Different levels of intervention require contiguous, coextensive, cooperative multi-agency working. The Circles of Analysis is a theoretical framework that takes account of the different professional disciplines and theoretical traditions that have informed praxis (Schneider, 1992) and accounts for the relational dynamics of CCE.

### From Theoretical Model to a Systemic Approach - SIPPS

The Systemic Investigation, Protections and Prosecution Strategy (SIPPS) was originally developed by the lead author, along with Caroline Haughey QC in 2014 as an approach to organising and testing evidence in cases of modern slavery. It was refined and formalised for use in assessing risk for CSE and offered here to map the aetiology and complexity of CCE as an emergent pattern of behaviour and its potential harmful impact on children.

The SIPPS Framework is a method of operationalising the Circles of Analysis theory, where the attributes of child(ren), perpetrator(s) and conducive environments are empirically derived correlates for various modalities of CCE, expanding on Contextual Safeguarding by incorporating the perpetrator. However, correlation does not equal causation and their presence, absence or configuration may fluctuate over time and in response to changes within the environmental context. Therefore, these empirically derived attributes are organised into sets:

- Home/Environment

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- 3 • Behaviour
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- 6 • Education/Training/Employment
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- 8 • Psychological Health
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- 11 • Physical Health
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13 To capture the other important controlling factor, time, these sets are subdivided:

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- 16 • Historical Conditional Factors: these are unchangeable in that they cannot be influenced
- 17 by new circumstances or interventions. They are mostly historic e.g. history of violence,
- 18 prior convictions and poly-criminality, previous experiences of victimisation, age, etc.
- 19
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- 22 • Current Conditional Factors: these are dynamic, i.e. they change over time and can be
- 23 aspects of the individual or their environment and social context. Because they are
- 24 changeable, these factors are more amenable to intervention and management.
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- 28 • Current Consequential Factors: associated terms include *Acute Dynamic Risk Factors*
- 29 or “*Triggers*” (Department of Health, 2007). Because these factors change rapidly,
- 30 their influence on risk may be short lived but require a rapid response (Hart, *et al.*, 2003)
- 31 and may indicate criminal exploitation (victim accessing behaviour, criminal
- 32 associates, presence or use of weapons).
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37 The framework facilitates gathering information from a wide range of sources in order to make

38 decisions regarding the likelihood of any agent in the system being victimised, re-victimised

39 or being perpetrators or facilitators of the exploitation. (Hart, *et al.*, 2003). The presence or

40 absence of these factors is established through careful review of qualitative and quantitative

41 data such as witness statements, forensic evidence, collateral sources (e.g. health and social

42 care records, previous assessment reports, etc.), forensic history, records of interview, direct

43 interview and observation.

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50 The presence or absence of historical conditional factors, current conditional factors and

51 current consequential factors in each of the five domains, enables the evaluator to identify

52 emergent patterns that are, or are not, consistent with definitions of slavery, servitude, forced

53 or compulsory labour and human trafficking and formulate collaborative strategies for

54 intervention by safeguarding agencies, law enforcement agencies and the civil and criminal

55 justice systems.

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3 The SIPPS provides a framework for not only gathering and organising evidence but for  
4 analysing emergent patterns of relationships and behaviour over time and in different contexts  
5 (home, social environment, education/employment). This analysis is informed by empirical  
6 CCE insights whilst also allowing professionals to add unique, case specific factors. This  
7 process of evidence gathering and organisation highlights information gaps and areas of  
8 uncertainty. The final stage draws upon the identified Historic Conditional Factors, Current  
9 Conditional Factors and Current Consequential Factors to formulate plausible scenarios in  
10 which the exploitation is occurring or likely to occur. This enables professionals to work  
11 collaboratively and strategically to develop multi-agency responses to address each of the  
12 possibility spaces simultaneously. This approach means that child safeguarding, law  
13 enforcement, civil and criminal justice interventions can be implemented contiguously to not  
14 only identify potential exploitation (and investigate other possible causes for patterns of  
15 behaviour) but also prevent exploitation, protect victims, reduce the risk of re-victimisation,  
16 disrupt, arrest and prosecute perpetrators, and dismantle organised crime groups and networks.

#### 27 28 Applications of the SIPPS Approach

29  
30 In R-v-PA (2019) the SIPPS approach was used to assist in the raising of the statutory defence  
31 (s45 Modern Slavery Act 2015) for a child that had had been recruited for the sale of Class A  
32 Drugs. HHJ Evans QC ruled that the evidence which related to the background to the offences  
33 and the specific relevant characteristics of PA were admissible. The case formulation was put  
34 before the jury and tested under cross examination which Defence Counsel said greatly  
35 assisted PA's case.

36  
37 The Adapted SIPPS for CSE was rolled out in a South London Borough. One senior manager  
38 wrote

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46 *“The SIPPS has been invaluable in the complex area of Child Sexual*  
47 *Exploitation...The SIPPS has the multi-faceted dimension of drawing the*  
48 *practitioners' attention to issues of trafficking, exploitation, modern slavery*  
49 *in addition to risk of or actual sexual exploitation.*

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57 *The SIPPS enables the objective analysis of behaviour and information to*  
58 *create multiple hypotheses for a young person. The SIPPS training provides*  
59 *an advanced level of knowledge regarding the legal options that the Police*  
60 *might use to disrupt the behaviour and encourages Social Work staff to make*  
*suggestions using this knowledge to their Police colleagues.”*



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3 A social Worker in the same borough commented:  
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6 “Exploring the different possible risk factors for CSE enabled me to identify which areas of  
7 my intervention with the young person should be prioritised. The tool also helped in working  
8 with other professionals on the case, I used the tool the tool to structure a strategy meeting and  
9 I think that this eased the anxiety of some of the other professionals because it enabled them to  
10 understand what Children’s Services were doing and why, it also helped in being clear about  
11 the level of current risk to the young person rather than speculation which had previously led  
12 to professionals anxiously seemingly over-estimating the current level of risk to the young  
13 person.” (Barlow, 2017)  
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### 23 **Conclusion: Protecting Children, Combatting CCE**

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25 We have presented an innovative new model for understanding and investigating CCE. SIPPS  
26 is the practical framework for the theoretical Circles of Analysis and provides a tool for  
27 investigators, child protectors and prosecutors. Our model is intended to be used by  
28 practitioners working at the coalface of child protection. Its development has been ‘road tested’  
29 with police officers, social workers and legal professionals and refined in line with their  
30 feedback. The innovativeness of the model is that it provides a common frame of reference for  
31 understanding CCE, bridging the divide between investigation, child protection and  
32 prosecution responsibilities. By providing a theoretically robust systemic model for identifying  
33 and responding to CCE, this model is designed to act as the lynchpin between agencies and  
34 deliver genuine multiagency cooperation that improves the safeguarding of children and the  
35 prosecution of perpetrators.  
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45 Our model is uniquely situated between three distinct bodies of knowledge: modern slavery,  
46 public health and criminological theory. These provide the bedrock of knowledge and theory  
47 from which we have developed the triumvirate of child, perpetrator, environment that are the  
48 constituent elements in which CCE occurs. Conceptually, our model owes much to Contextual  
49 Safeguarding which provides a fundamental expansion of our understanding about how to  
50 protect children. Contextual Safeguarding highlights the importance of environmental and  
51 crime prevention strategies and provides a new lens for practitioners to enhance and mobilise  
52 how the wider community engages with child protection. Our model takes a similar step  
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3 forward and weaves the perpetrator into the picture to develop the first truly holistic approach  
4 to combatting CCE.  
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8 It is worth consideration as to whether our model can be scaled up to look at trafficking of  
9 children and adults for modern slavery, servitude, forced and compulsory labour in different  
10 contexts and jurisdictions. Alongside this, we ask if there is capacity to build perpetrator  
11 behaviors into the Contextual Safeguarding model. The potential for further development and  
12 alignment with the principles of Contextual Safeguarding is tantalising and we hope that our  
13 contribution to this important special edition will open up new avenues for collaboration with  
14 both academics and practitioners who are concerned with protecting children and combatting  
15 CCE.  
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<sup>i</sup> The term ‘potential victim’ is applied as individuals believed to be victims are referred into the National Referral Mechanism, but then go through a two-tier decision-making process before confirmation of victim status. The numbers referenced within NRM most commonly relate to those referred into the system (i.e. potential victims) rather than those who have been through the decision-making process. For more insight into this issue, see Burland (2017a).

<sup>ii</sup> “Target-Hardening”: Refers to measures that protect a person or property and build resilience against criminals that might otherwise consider the person or property a suitable target for damage, abuse, crime or exploitation.

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