YOUNG PEOPLE'S INVOLVEMENT IN ORGANIZED DRUG CRIME:

- WHAT IS THE PROBLEM REPRESENTED TO BE IN DIFFERENT EUROPEAN SPACES?

Thomas Friis Søgaard

Associate Professor

Centre for Alcohol and Drug Research

Aarhus University

E-mail: tfs.crf@psy.au.dk

DEFINITION

- ‘Drug Market-related Criminal Exploitation’ (DMCE).....
  - *....the use of manipulation, debt bondage, intimidation, coercion or violence as means of involving or entrapping a person in supply-related drug crime*

UK CONTEXT

County Lines”

- The “County Lines” model - sparked massive public concern.

Policy and Policing Shifts

- UK policies increasingly link drug supply with modern slavery concerns.
- Policing has shifted from punitive approaches to safeguarding exploited individuals.

The Modern Slavery Act (2015)

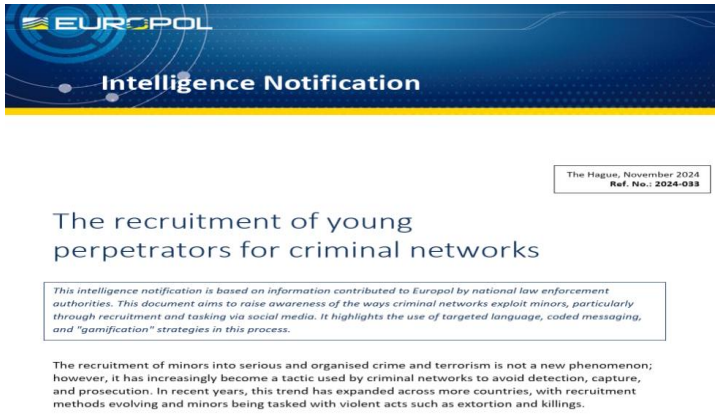
- Initially focused on cross-border trafficking, now also used to protect domestic youth in drug networks.

Debates and Impacts

- The Act reframes drug-involved youth as victims (in need of help), not criminals.
- The Modern Slavery Act is increasingly used as a defense to drug supply charges

GROWING EUROPEAN FOCUS ON DMCE

- UK research has raised growing awareness of crime-based exploitation across Europe.
- A shift in focus from traditional 'iconic trafficking victims' to exploitation of domestic citizens and residence permit holders.
- European agencies (EUDA, Europol) report increasing recruitment of minors and other vulnerable people for drug crime.


EUROPOL

Intelligence Notification

The Hague, November 2024
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The recruitment of young perpetrators for criminal networks

This intelligence notification is based on information contributed to Europol by national law enforcement authorities. This document aims to raise awareness of the ways criminal networks exploit minors, particularly through recruitment and tasking via social media. It highlights the use of targeted language, coded messaging, and "gamification" strategies in this process.

The recruitment of minors into serious and organised crime and terrorism is not a new phenomenon; however, it has increasingly become a tactic used by criminal networks to avoid detection, capture, and prosecution. In recent years, this trend has expanded across more countries, with recruitment methods evolving and minors being tasked with violent acts such as extortion and killings.

A NEW EUROPEAN CONSORTIUM

- ***European Research Consortium on Criminal Exploitation*** **(ERCCE)**

  - **England:** Paul Andell, Ross Coomber, Mike Seal
  - **Denmark:** Thomas Friis Søgaard
  - **Ireland:** James Windle
  - **Sweden:** Cecilia Hansen Löfstrand
  - **Norway:** Helene Oppen Ingebrigtsen Gundhus
  - **Poland:** Piotr Chomczyński, Przemysław Frąckowiak, Michał Szykut

METHODS & DATA

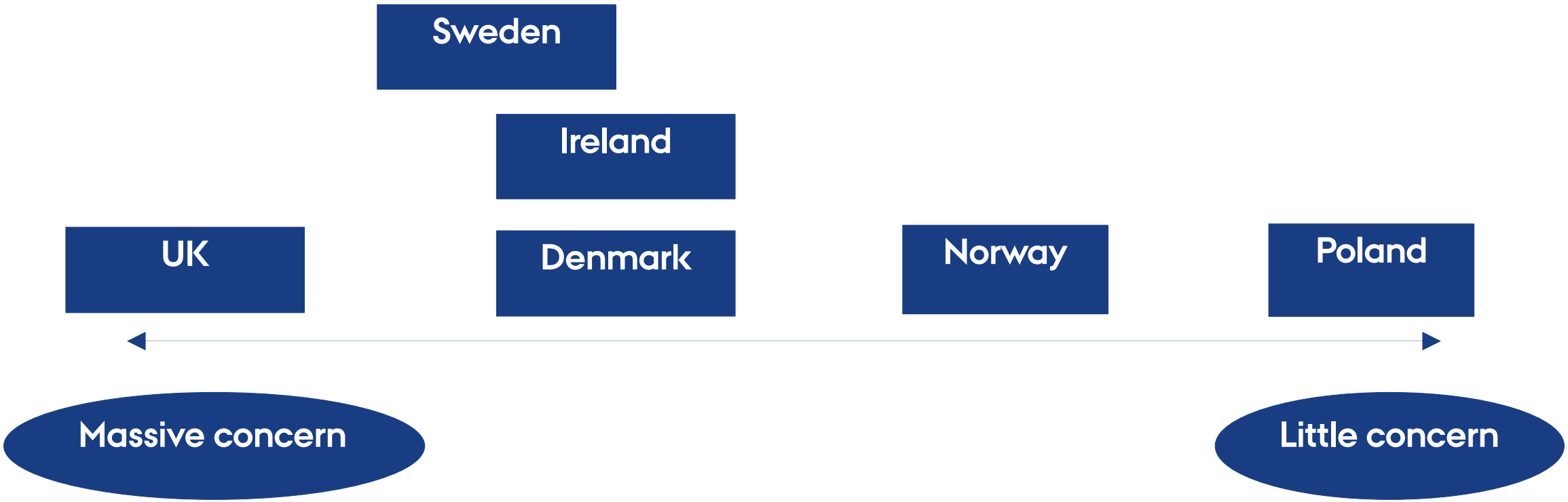
- **Researchers asked to respond to a set of questions regarding DMCE in their contexts:**

  - 1) provide an overview of country-specific research on DMCE
  - 2) to what extent is DMCE identified as a problem of public concern?
  - 3) how is DMCE discursively framed as a policy problem?
  - 4) what laws are used to prosecute DMCE offenders?
  - 5) to what extent is DMCE victimhood acknowledged in legal frameworks and sentencing practices?
  - 6) how is DMCE is sought dealt with through multiagency collaboration and social diversion schemes?

- **<u>Data</u>: Policy document, existing research, media reporting; criminal justice frameworks**

RECOGNITION OF DMCE AS ISSUE OF PUBLIC CONCERN

- Variation in the extent to which DMCE is recognized as a problem of public concern.



YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN SERIOUS DRUG CRIME: FRAMING MATTERS

- **Four dominant framings exist across different countries, often overlapping or competing.**

- ***1) Punishment-Centred Framing***

- ***2) Welfare-Oriented Framing***

- ***3) Victim-of-Recruitment Framing***

- ***4) Victim-of-Human-Trafficking-and-Harm Framing***

PUNISHMENT-CENTRED FRAMING

- **Crime-involved youth are understood as rational actors who ‘deserves’ punishment**
- **Crime-involved youth only have themselves to blame for harm experienced**
- **Rooted in binary understanding of ‘victims’ and ‘offenders’**
- **Fuelled by tough-on-crime politics**
  - Has long dominated the UK, Poland & Ireland
  - In recent decades also pronounced in Denmark, Sweden & Norway.

VICTIMS-OF-RECRUITMENT FRAMING

- **Youth involved in crime is seen as a result of the recruitment efforts by others.**
- **Young people constructed as….Naive, easily seducible, as lacking agency and as being forced by others**
- **Young people constructed as in need of 'preventive protection'.**
  - Dominant in Denmark & Sweden
  - Prevalent in Norway, Ireland & UK

DANISH GOVERNMENT'S NEW ANTI-GANG POLICY (2023)

- **Recognition of exploitation:**
  - "The gangs recruit intensively among our **children** and young people, with **very young** people being **lured** into criminal environments" (P. 5.).
  - "Once young people are part of a criminal environment, they may be **pressured** into criminal activities and perform risky tasks such as selling drugs. Adult gang members should not be able to **exploit** young people to commit crime" (P. 11).
- **Unrecognition / partial recognition of victimhood:**
  - "Young people who **commit crime** must feel a clear **consequence**, but if they are **motivated** to say goodbye to a life with crime, they should meet a helping hand" (P. 11)
  - "We, as a society, must show a path into the community for young people who are at risk of **choosing** a criminal career" (p. 8.)..

DISRUPTING THE GANG “FOOD CHAIN”

- **Understanding "youth involvement in drug market-crime" as primarily a recruitment- and prevention problem.**
- **Exploitation of young people – a sub-aspect of efforts to combat gang and organized crime.**
- **The “food chain" – as a guiding metaphor:**
  - Young people as "at risk."
  - Young people as a "source of risk."
    - *Picture: Unsplash: Michael Jerrard*

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VICTIMS-OF-HUMAN-TRAFFICKING-AND-HARM FRAMING

- **Also concerned with recruitment**
- **A focus on physical & psychological harms experienced by youth while being exploited**
- **Draws on key concepts from psychology and public health such as……**
  - **….. ‘vulnerability’, ‘harms’ ‘trauma’**
- **Youth in need of psychological support & safeguarding**
  - Prevalent in UK, and to smaller extent in Ireland and Norway
  - Largely absent in Denmark, Sweden & Poland

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORKS AND PRACTICES

- **All countries - signed the UN Palermo Protocol of 2000 agaish Human Trafficking**
  - In most contries selected & restricted use of Human Trafficking Legislation
- **Public concerns with DMCE have led to recent changes in legislative changes.**
- **Two models:**
  - 1) Applying existing (human trafficking) legislation to new domains (UK)
  - 2) Implementing new anti-recruitment legal statutes (SE, DK, IR and Norway).

CRIMINALIZING RECRUITMENT ACTIONS

- **Use of Human Trafficking Laws in DMCE-cases - often not an option for prosecutors**

- **Broader international trend – implementation of "Anti-recruitment statutes".**
  - Underpinned by "prevention logic" (prevention through deterrence of perpetrators)

- **Legal acknowledgement of 'DMCE-victimhood:**
  - UK Modern Slavery Act – include statutory defenses
  - Anti-recruitment Statutes – no statutory defenses

- **Recruitment activities – legally defined as....**
  - An offence against the State
  - NOT an offence against the individual - (hence no 'victims')

"CRIME-AS-A-SERVICE" FRAMING

- **Concept emerged from studies of 'organized' cybercrime:**
  - Used to describe professional hackers who sell highly specialized 'services' to third parties.
- **Popularized by Europol, EUDA, the DK police, DK media, and DK researchers.**
- **At its core, the 'crime-as-a-service' discourse centers on 'recruitment'.**
  - Posits that 'recruitment' is largely a matter of choice, opportunism, and 'self-recruitment'.
- **The 'crime-as-a-service' discourse constructs children and youth as...**
  - ... entrepreneurial criminal "service providers" (for organized criminal groups)
  - ... hyper-agents within a 'gigified' & digitalized criminal service culture.
  - ... part of a new "criminal youth culture".

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

- **Across Europe, growing concerns with drug market-related exploitation**
- **The UK – progressive, but currently also an anomaly**
- **To understand the spread of DMCE-agenda across Europe, we need country comparative studies of…**
  - Entanglement of 'exploitation agenda' and traditional punitive & preventive logics
  - Ideal vs. complex victims + constructed as **"victims *of* what**….."?

CO-AUTHORS

- **Thomas Friis Søgaard**, Aarhus University
- **Paul Andell**, University of Suffolk
- **Ross Coomber**, University of Liverpool
- **Piotr Chomczyński**, University of Lodz
- **Matt Bowden**, University of Dublin
- **Helene Oppen Ingebrigtsen Gundhus**, Oslo University
- **Przemysław Frąckowiak**, Stanisław Staszic State University of Applied Sciences
- **Michał Szykut**, Stanisław Staszic, State University of Applied Sciences
- **Katharina Tollin**, Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention
- **James Windle**, University College Cork
- **Cecilia Hansen Löfstrand**, University of Gothenburg
- **Mike Seal**, Birmingham City University

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Thomas Friis Søgaard[1], Paul Andell[2], Ross Coomber[3], Piotr Chomczyński[4], Matt Bowden[5], Helene Oppen Ingebrigtsen Gundhus[6], Przemysław Frąckowiak[7], Michał Szykut[7], Katharina Tollin[8], James Windle[9], Cecilia Hansen Löfstrand[10], and Mike Seal[11]

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CENTRE FOR ALCOHOL AND DRUG RESEARCH
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
AND BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES
AARHUS UNIVERSITY