

‘Home Takeover’ or ‘Cuckooing’ - Exploitation & Vulnerability

Home Takeover or Cuckooing is about exploitation and vulnerability whereby people take over a person's home and use the property to facilitate **exploitation**. It is about the abuse of a position of vulnerability or power to use an individual's property for criminal activities leading to financial gain. In Home Takeover or Cuckooing the property is often used as a base for the distribution of illegal drugs and weapons and often associated with high levels anti-social behaviour within a community (MSP, 2024).

Anyone can be the victim of this type of exploitation, but some individuals may be at greater risk of experiencing harm due to their situation and/or the social and environmental factors around them (MSP, 2024a). Adults who are perceived as being ‘vulnerable’ are targeted, in person or online initially, and their property used for drug-dealing, to store cash, weapons, valuables, for other criminal activities or as free accommodation. Victims of ‘Home Takeover’ or ‘cuckooing’ may be using substances, but others may be targeted including older people, those experiencing mental or physical health problems, sex workers, adults with a learning disability, single mothers and those living in poverty. Individuals may approach the victim offering free drugs to use their home for dealing.

The adult may experience multiple types of abuse in a Home Takeover situation. When individuals experience Home Takeover or Cuckooing and their property is used for criminal enterprises, they may be too afraid to tell professionals due to the fear of retaliation or being perceived as involved in criminal activity themselves and the potential consequences (Home Office, 2023).

Legislation: The Crime and Policing Act 2026 makes ‘cuckooing’ (home takeover) a **specific** offence (an offence to exercise control over another person's dwelling without their consent for the purpose of enabling the dwelling to be used in connection with the commission of specified criminal activity) (Home Office, Ministry of Justice, 2026). Find out more about the offence [here](#) (factsheet) and [here](#). The following may also be relevant - Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, Premises Closure Order: (Section 76 Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014). Section 45 Defence Modern Slavery Act 2015 provides a defence for people who commit a crime as a result of modern slavery or human trafficking (video [here](#)).

What you might see (not an exhaustive list) - the adult may:

- Stop engaging with support services
- Present with unexplained injuries
- Pay off debts (including housing debts) in full and in cash
- Appear withdrawn or fearful of disclosing information for fear of ‘betraying’ the criminals, abuse or eviction
- Start to associate with new unidentified people who are often present at the home, lots of people coming and going from the property
- Change their appearance either wearing expensive clothing or appearing unkempt
- Have parcels being delivered to their address for unknown persons
- Have unknown vehicles or bikes parked around the property
- Have lots of takeaway deliveries or take away boxes outside the property (can they afford lots of take aways or this other people at the property?) or unusually large amount of rubbish at the property
- Attend appointments with ‘friends’ who insist on coming with them and not leaving their side
- Request new keys (may be giving them to others in the property) or have unusually high key fob activity

- Not be able to access parts of their property with doors being locked
- Have increased noise from their property or have items in the address that look out of place (e.g. a scooter in the hallway)
- Avoid talking to you or refusing entry to family, friends, professionals, the police
- Not be visible to neighbours

(Telford and Wrekin Safeguarding Partnership 2024, Rannard 2025)

What to do?

Talk to the adult about your concerns where it is safe to do so, you can raise an adult safeguarding concern with the local authority if you are worried about an adult with care and support needs being exploited, ideally report with consent, you can raise concerns without consent if it is in the public interest (others are at risk, serious crime, coercion and control, high levels of risk, risk to life). Consider talking to partner agencies, call a multi-disciplinary meeting, involve the police (cuckooing (Home Takeover) is a criminal offence) in an emergency call 999 or call 101 to speak to the police.

Resources on YouTube (these were made pre-Crime and Policing Act 2026 Due to the subject some material may be distressing to watch)	
Title and Information	Web Link
County Lines and Cuckooing or Home Takeover Playlist on Partners in Care YouTube	Link
Home Takeover - Targeted and Trapped – Telford and Wrekin Safeguarding Partnership	Link
Cuckooing – Sandwell Council	Link
NCLCC - County Lines Awareness Video	Link
Cuckooing Informative V3 Surrey Police	Link
GMMH Cuckooing Safeguarding Training - Subtitled	Link
Mark, who was a victim of cuckooing, shares his story (Oxford)	Link
See Something, Say Something: Exploitation - Franks' Story Leicester	Link
County lines short stories – Cuckooing (Kent Police)	Link
Examples of Hate Crime – Cuckooing, Lewisham Speaking Up	Link
Section 45 Modern Slavery Act	Link
Other Resources	Web Link
Telford and Wrekin Safeguarding Partnership Home Takeover 7-minute briefing	link
Homeless Link - Cuckooing and homelessness	link
Article – Spicer et al (2019) The variable and evolving nature of ‘cuckooing’ as a form of criminal exploitation in street level drug markets. Trends in Organized Crime (2020) 23:301–323	link
Preventing and Disrupting Cuckooing Victimisation: Professional Toolkit University of Leeds	link
National Crime Agency - County Lines	link
Peel Solutions (2022) SPOT THE SIGNS OF CUCKOOING – COUNTY LINES.	link

References:

- Home Office and Ministry of Justice (2026) *Policy paper Crime and Policing Act 2026: child criminal exploitation, cuckooing (home takeover) and internal concealment factsheet*. London: Home Office, Ministry of Justice. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/crime-and-policing-act-2026-factsheets/crime-and-policing-act-2026-child-criminal-exploitation-cuckooing-home-takeover-and-internal-concealment-factsheet>
- Manchester Safeguarding Partnership (2024) *Tackling Exploitation and Complex Safeguarding in Manchester 2024 – 2027 Strategy*. Manchester: Manchester Safeguarding Partnership. https://www.manchestersafeguardingpartnership.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/MSP-Tackling-Exploitation-in-Manchester-24-27-Strategy_FINAL.pdf
- Manchester Safeguarding Partnership (2024a) *Tackling Exploitation & Complex Safeguarding*. Manchester: Manchester Safeguarding Partnership. <https://www.manchestersafeguardingpartnership.co.uk/complex-safeguarding/>
- Rannard, A. (2025) Cuckooing webinar, Met Police. National County Lines Coordination Centre
- Telford and Wrekin Safeguarding Partnership (2024) *Home Takeover 7-minute briefing*. [Here](#)