

Serious Organised Crime Groups (SOCGs) and children/young people in Scotland

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Serious organised crime (SOC) as defined by the Scottish Government is *crime which involves more than one person; is organised, meaning that it involves control, planning and use of specialist resources; causes, or has the potential to cause, significant harm; and involves benefit to the individuals concerned, particularly financial gain* (Scottish Government, 2015). There are 232 SOCGs operating in Scotland with approximately 3700 members in total; 70% of the groups are based in the West of Scotland, 18% in the East and 12% in the North. The groups are mainly involved in drug crime (heroin, cocaine, cannabis, amphetamine, tranquillisers), human trafficking, money laundering, fraud, cybercrime and violence; 65% of them are linked to legitimate businesses (Scottish Government, 2015).

The first Serious Organised Crime Strategy for Scotland ‘[Letting Our Communities Flourish](#)’ was published in 2009. It aimed to reduce the harm to the community caused by SOC and set out four objectives:

1. Divert: divert people, especially children/ young people from taking part in or using products of SOC activities
2. Disrupt: disrupt SOC activities
3. Deter: develop measures to protect the community, business and public sector from SOC activities
4. Detect: improve capacity and coordination of intelligence to combat SOC.

‘[Scotland’s Serious Organised Crime Strategy](#)’ was published in 2015, updating the previous one by focusing more on prevention and collaboration. New legislation was introduced and existing was amended to assist with the implementation of the strategy: Policing and Crime Act 2009, Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010, Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 Amendment (Scotland) Order 2011, Crime and Courts Act 2013, Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014, Serious Crime Act 2015, Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015, Psychoactive Substances Act 2016. [The Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#) was introduced, which along with the strategy (particularly the strand Divert) is contributing to the Scottish Government’s national outcome of improving life chances for children/young people and families at risk.

The purpose of Divert is to direct children/ young people away from SOC activities. It aims to provide positive alternatives by collaborating with public and third sector organisations, raise awareness about the products and activities of SOC and their impact on individuals and the community (especially drugs as young people are a specific target), and promote positive role models.

The age group of children/ young people mostly affected by SOCGs is 13 to 18, the majority of which are involved in drug crime as street dealers or runners; however they are also used for attacks on rival groups and fire-setting. There are various indicators of children/young people’s potential involvement in SOCGs practitioners should consider. Some of them are:

family history and links to SOCGs; substantial caring responsibilities towards family members & others; history of abuse/neglect/violence within the family and/or towards the young person; loss/bereavement; truancy and disengagement from education; early prolific offending; gang involvement, previous incarceration; substance misuse, mental health issues; isolation; need to belong; financial insecurity. Police Scotland have developed a mapping process to identify children/ young people in or at risk of being involved in SOCGs (a leaflet aimed for practitioners is currently being developed); however, there is limited capacity with regard to resources available for the diversion of young people from SOCGs.

Action for Children in collaboration with the Scottish Government, Police Scotland, Scottish Prison Service and Glasgow City Council Social Work Services have developed a service to direct children/young people away from SOCGs. The service works with peer mentors and service staff through a tailor-made action plan. Peer mentors with past involvement in organised crime approach young people to establish rapport and facilitate the work of service staff with the families of the young people. The purpose of the service is to present children/young people with an alternative way of living and provide opportunities to achieve this. Of the young people who engaged with the service, 100% were known to Police Scotland, 93% had been involved with Social Work in the past and 43% had been in secure care. 100% were involved or at risk of being involved in OCGs, 95% had a drug misuse issue, 81% were distributing/selling products of organised crime activities, 27% were at risk of custodial sentence/ secure care, 56% had addicted/ incarcerated/ deceased parents and 31% had siblings involved in SOC activities or with pro-criminal attitudes (Action for Children, 2015).

Practitioners can report concerns regarding children/ young people through Social Work, Named Person, Vulnerable Persons Database, etc. At present, there is limited research available on the links between SOC and young people. A gap that should primarily be addressed is how SOCGs select and approach children/ young people in Scotland to assist practitioners identify children/ young people in or at risk of being involved in SOCGs.

References (excluding those hyperlinked above)

- Action for Children (2015) *Side Step: Evidence and Impact [online]*. Glasgow: Action for Children
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- Tatidinova, T. G. (2001) Young People and Organized Crime. *Russian Social Science Review*. 42 (5), pp50-63
- The Scottish Government (2015) *Scotland's Serious Organised Crime Strategy*. Edinburgh: The Scottish Government
- The Scottish Government (2007) *National Performance Framework*. Edinburgh: The Scottish Government

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