REF2021

Institution: University College London
Unit of Assessment: 20 Social Work and Social Policy
Title of case study: Towards a more evidence-informed approach to tackling trafficking and exploitation
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013-2019
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:

Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Ella Cockbain	Associate Professor	2013- present
Kate Bowers	Professor	2004- present
Gloria Laycock	Professor	2001-present

Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014- present
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Research from UCL Security and Crime Sciences (SCS), led by Dr Ella Cockbain, has directly contributed towards more rigorous and nuanced understanding of, and responses to, human trafficking and exploitation (aka 'modern slavery'). Through a combination of extended collaborations (e.g. with the National Crime Agency and major national working groups) and frequent *ad hoc* contributions to major inquiries (e.g. the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse; Home Office reports), strategic and tactical developments and coverage in mainstream media outlets, this work has debunked pernicious myths, challenged misinformation and poor practice, and addressed fundamental knowledge gaps. SCS research has influenced national policy and strategy, helped to improve data collection and analysis, informed training and, overall, led to more evidence-informed policy, practice, media coverage and public debate. Key beneficiaries include police, government, civil society, victims and survivors of abuse, stigmatised communities, and the wider publics.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

UCL Security and Crime Science (SCS) has a world-class reputation for high-quality, innovative research into human trafficking and various forms of exploitation and abuse: issues often referred to collectively as 'modern slavery'. Robust empirical research on trafficking and exploitation is notoriously scant. SCS research excellence stands out in this field for its rigorous quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods approaches, close collaborations with end-users and innovative use of hard-to-access datasets. As interest and investment grows in tackling these complex and often poorly understood phenomena, SCS research and expertise have been in considerable demand from policing, governmental and non-governmental agencies internationally. The SCS researchers responsible for the six specific studies featured here are Dr Ella Cockbain (Associate Professor), Professor Kate Bowers and Professor Gloria Laycock. Other SCS colleagues have also made important contributions to the department's broader programme of research on trafficking and exploitation over the past decade.

Human trafficking
Different forms of trafficking have long been conflated in research, policy and practice. With the support of the National Crime Agency (NCA), Cockbain and Bowers produced an unprecedented in-depth analysis of the UK's official database of identified human trafficking victims, the 'National Referral Mechanism' (NRM) (*n*=2,630) **[R1]**. This study was the first internationally to use multivariate analytical techniques to examine differences between, and determinants of, people trafficked for sexual exploitation, domestic servitude and other labour exploitation (the three main trafficking 'types' worldwide). The findings showed the need for a disaggregated approach to policy-making, analysis and interventions, as well as highlighting important areas for improvement in the NRM itself. Traditionally, anti-trafficking has focused overwhelming on sex trafficking, to the neglect of other issues. Cockbain and Bowers (with student Dimitrova) conducted a rigorous systematic review of the European evidence-base on labour trafficking, examining its coverage and characteristics and synthesising key scientific evidence **[R2]**. The findings demonstrated how

limited and fragmented the literature was, with knowledge gaps around even the most fundamental aspects of the issue, few publications meeting basic scientific standards and a particular lack of quantitative research and evaluations of interventions.

Child sexual exploitation (CSE): CSE is a complex and poorly defined subset of child sexual abuse. It is vast in scale and involves diverse victims, offenders, contexts and enabling factors. In a significant monograph **[R3],** Cockbain presented a mixed-methods, case-study-based analysis of six of the largest and earliest cases of British children trafficked within the UK for sexual exploitation (including now infamous cases in Rochdale, Derby and Telford). Using investigative case files, court data and interviews with police, prosecutors and offenders, Cockbain unravelled some of the complexities of this hitherto poorly understood issue. The findings revealed the importance of opportunity factors, social network structures, and group dynamics and processes in facilitating, spreading and sustaining abuse. The results also identified barriers to effective responses and challenged emergent myths and stereotypes. This work built on an earlier study **[R4]**, conducted together with Laycock and Brayley, which focused on analysing two of these cases using crime scripting: a process by which a complex crime is broken down into its constituent elements so as to improve understanding and identify 'pinchpoints' for intervention. Elsewhere, Cockbain (with Ashby and Brayley) collaborated with Barnardo's and NatCen Social Research **[R5]** on a major exploratory study into the sexual exploitation of boys and young men in the UK. To date, CSE policy and responses had been overwhelmingly centred on (white) female victims. This large-scale comparative analysis of CSE service-users (n=9,042) showed that nearly 1 in 3 were male and 1 in 5 from ethnic minorities. Statistical analyses showed significant and substantial differences between male and female service-users, highlighting the need for more nuanced and inclusive responses. Finally, over the past decade, CSE became a high profile and heavily racialised issue. Cockbain and Dr Waqas Tufail (Leeds Beckett) – who has expertise in Islamophobia and policing of minorities – co-produced an in-depth critical analysis **[R6]** that examined the emergence, proliferation and entrenchment of the racial stereotype around 'Muslim grooming gangs'. The team interrogated the history and dynamics of this pernicious narrative, identified pivotal contributions, exposed the fallacies and pseudoscience on which it rests and articulated its dangers in detracting from failings, undermining effective child protection and promoting racism.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1. Cockbain, E., & Bowers, K. (2019). Human trafficking for sex, labour and domestic servitude: how do key trafficking types compare and what are their predictors? *Crime, Law and Social Change*, *72*, 9-34. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-019-09836-7.

R2. Cockbain, E., Bowers, K., & Dimitrova, G. (2018). Human trafficking for labour exploitation: the results of a two-phase systematic review mapping the European evidence base and synthesising key scientific research evidence. *Journal of Experimental Criminology, 14*(3), 319-360. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-017-9321-3.

R3. Cockbain, E. (2018). *Offender and Victim Networks in Human Trafficking*, Abingdon: Routledge [Available on Request]

R4. Brayley, H., Cockbain, E., & Laycock, G. (2011). The value of crime scripting: Deconstructing internal child sex trafficking. *Policing, 5*(2), 132-143. https://doi.org/10.1093/police/par024.

R5. Cockbain, E., Ashby, M., & Brayley, H. (2015). Immaterial boys? A large-scale exploration of gender-based differences in child sexual exploitation service users. *Sexual abuse: a journal of research and treatment, 29*(7), 658-684. https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063215616817.

R6. Cockbain, E and Tufail, W. (2020). Failing victims, fuelling hate: challenging the harms of the 'Muslim grooming gangs' narrative. *Race and Class*, *61*(3), 3-32. https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396819895727.

The competitive grant income underpinning the above studies exceeds GBP300,000: an ESRC Future Research Leaders Fellowship worth GBP203,498, with Cockbain as PI and Bowers as

Mentor; and a Nuffield Foundation grant worth GBP97,346, with Cockbain as Co-I (PI McNaughton-Nicholls from NatCen Social Research).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The former programme director of the National Police Chiefs Council Portfolio on Modern Slavery describes SCS researcher Dr Ella Cockbain as "*one of the greatest influencers*" in this space, providing a "*consistently high level of advice*" and helping "*to generate a strong appetite for developing and improving the evidence base at a time where political influences may well have influenced more knee-jerk reactions*" **(S1)**. SCS work has been the 'go-to' source for a broad range of inquiries and official reports into various forms of trafficking and exploitation in the UK.

Informing policy and strategy across government, policing and civil society:
Throughout 2019, Cockbain co-chaired the UK's Modern Slavery Strategy and Implementation Group (MSSIG) on Prevention, a national working group that reports to the Parliamentary Under Secretary for Safeguarding and Vulnerability, Victoria Atkins MP. The group involves Government, devolved administrations, key NGOs, policing, labour market inspectorates and other statutory agencies and NGOs. The group works through collaboration and engagement with the Home Office to co-determine strategic priorities, provide criticism and challenge, and identify opportunities for improving responses to 'modern slavery'. According to her MSSIG co-chair and former Senior Policy Lead to the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Cockbain drew on SCS research **[R1, R2]** to "*build understanding in government and statutory agencies about how modern slavery occurs and the wider factors that drive it*", whilst helping to "*amplify calls for change by NGOs who may lack academic rigour*" **(S2)**. In an example of enabling and amplifying marginalised voices, Cockbain's co-chair praised her for, "*taking an evidence-based stand to ensure sex workers are invited into policy making spaces*" such the MSSIG, challenging the deployment of anti-trafficking interventions that harm marginalised groups, and contributing to a greater appreciation of the need for rigorous empirical research and proper evaluation evidence **(S2)**. In addition to the MSSIG, Cockbain made important contributions through other strategic pathways. For example, as the "*sole academic representative invited onto the Modern Slavery Law Enforcement Threat Group*" Cockbain provided important "*challenge and support*" **(S1)**. She also consulted on the UK's Serious and Organised Crime Research Strategy and the UK Modern Slavery Research Priorities, which "*directly informed government priorities and policy*" **(S3)**. A former Senior Policy Advisor in the Home Office's Modern Slavery Unit stated that SCS research **[R1, R3]** was used to identify "*important gaps in the evidence base on geospatial analysis, risk and resilience factors, nuanced and carefully-targeted interventions (rather than a 'one size fits all' approach) and evaluation evidence*". These were all subsequently included as research priorities' by the UK Government **(S3).**

In addition to helping shape UK policy and strategy, Cockbain has contributed to a variety of Inquiries into trafficking, labour abuse and child sexual exploitation. For example, in 2014 and 2015, Cockbain was cited in two Barnardo's reports **(S4; [R3, R5])**: the 'Report of the Parliamentary Inquiry into the effectiveness of legislation for tackling child sexual exploitation and trafficking within the UK' and 'It's Not On The Radar', which documented the hidden diversity of CSE**,** highlighting SCS research into the unmet needs of male victims **(R5)**. In 2020, Cockbain was one of only a handful of academics invited to submit evidence to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse's (IICSA) investigation into 'organised networks' **(S5; [R3, R5]**). IICSA was set up in 2015 after high profile instances of non-recent child sex abuse to uncover institutional failings in child protection. Cockbain's evidence, based on SCS research **[R3, R5, R6]**, was discussed in oral hearings and key participants' submissions. For example, the Centre for Women's Justice described her submission as "*powerful academic evidence of systematic failing*". Previously, Cockbain's work **[R3]** was also used to inform exploratory research commissioned by IICSA into perpetrators of child sexual exploitation in groups, published in May 2020 **(S5).**

In parallel to IICSA, and prompted by a series of high profile trials involving so-called 'grooming gangs', the former Home Secretary had instructed the UK Home Office to investigate patterns in offending and perpetrators' characteristics. The Home Office released a much anticipated report, 'Group-based child sexual exploitation: Characteristics of offending' in December 2020, together

with an associated in-depth literature review. The publications were designed to synthesise evidence on CSE involving groups of offenders operating offline and outside of schools and other such institutions, and to assess the evidence for widespread claims of ethnic disproportionality in this supposedly 'specific' crime type. Research from SCS **[R3-R6]** played a crucial role in underpinning officials' understanding of these issues, with 129 citations across the two publications **(S6)**. SCS research influenced key findings about the importance of social networks and social dynamics in facilitating abuse, the role of criminal opportunism, diversity of children abused through CSE, biases and limitations in existing datasets and the dangers of racialising abuse. Such findings translated into specific recommendations designed to help local agencies "*fully understand the local context and facilitate strategic engagement between communities, agencies, businesses and charities to understand the profile of offending and identify opportunities to disrupt it*" **(S6, p.9)**.

Informing practice around trafficking and exploitation ('modern slavery'):
Due to SCS researchers' considerable expertise on the UK's official database of identified human trafficking victims, the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), and the strengths and limitations of its data **[R1]**, Cockbain was invited to advise on reforms to the NRM. The system was being reformed by the Home Office following substantial criticism, and her recommendations included modifications to the format and contents of NRM referral forms, to better assure quality and collect more nuanced and useful data. Some of these recommendations have since been implemented, such as quality assurance measures, with others (e.g. recording of recruitment location, improved capture of multiple exploitation types) recommended for the next review stage **(S2, S3)**. Cockbain also provided extensive research-based advice **[R1- R4]** around reforms to national policing strategy and data collection on modern slavery based**,** which informed the design and contents of the system. This input was credited with helping the Modern Slavery Police Transformation Unit (MSPTU) move from having "*one of the weakest datasets in policing to being recognised as the strongest, bar counter terrorism incidents, in just under two years*" **(S1)**. The data are now "*reported monthly to the Prime Ministers meeting and provides the foundation for international and national information exchange and policy decisions*" **(S1)**.

SCS work on networking and group dynamics **[**started in an earlier paper and developed and extended in **R3]** also helped local and national policing better understand connectivity in offending and victimisation, using social network analysis techniques to strengthen both strategic and tactical responses **(S1)**. It inspired pilot network analysis-based risk assessments and early intervention in two police forces (Devon & Cornwall and Thames Valley Police), through which "*early interventions… became much more targeted*" **(S1)**, thus supporting harm reduction. SCS research on crime scripting **[R4]** led to the adoption of the technique first in Devon & Cornwall and then across the UK. SCS work is credited as inspiring "*an excellent and accessible way for agencies to opt into the part of the problem they could take action to prevent, leading directly to the development of local and peninsular strategic and tactical action plans and strategies*" **(S1)**. The police approach went on to win national and international police analytical awards and the programme lead reports that she is still contacted for advice about replicating the approach, and that she signposts interested parties to the SCS publication **(S1; [R4])**.

Challenging myths in media and public debate:
SCS' well-publicised finding **[R3]** that nearly 1 in 3 CSE service-users were male **(S7)** helped challenge misconceptions that boys are not also widely sexually exploited. Cockbain is also described by a former Senior Policy Advisor to the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner as "*an invaluable voice in challenging the dangerous tendency to conflate trafficking with all sex work*" **(S2)**. SCS' most prominent intervention concerns, however, the harmful narrative around 'Muslim sex gangs', **[R6]**. SCS research has shown how racial sterotyping around CSE is inaccurate and corrosive, decentering victims, detracting from widespread failings and empowering racism and violence, and the team have taken on stereotypes and misinformation through both traditional news and social media **(S7)**. A leading journalist, former editor and campaigner for higher media standards, testifies to the "*significant public impact of the research of Dr Ella Cockbain in the field of child sexual exploitation*" **(S8)**. "*Most notably*", he writes, "*Dr Cockbain challenged and largely discredited the so-called 'Quilliam Report', a publication that purported to present evidence*

supporting the 'Asian grooming gangs' stereotype" **(S8)**. That report had been widely publicised and rarely criticised in the mainstream media but Cockbain "*demonstrated its methodological flaws, misuse of language and incompatibility with serious research findings*" **(S8)**. Her Twitter commentary on the report led to 1,900,000 impressions in a month on her account **(S7)** and much engagement, including coverage in the Observer, and an article in leading policing publication Policing Insight, which had nearly 28,000 views **(S7)**. The Home Office later validated her criticisms of Quilliam's report and declared it unreliable, citing SCS research **([R6]; S6, p.22)**. Cockbain (with Leeds Beckett colleague Tufail) then wrote a commentary for The Guardian emphasising the urgency of moving away from the racialisation of CSE and re-centering victims and their needs. This article was in the top 5 most-read opinion pieces and attracted >52,000 views within four days**.** Prominent journalists, politicians, campaigners and other public figures have emphasised the importance of SCS research **[R6]** as a corrective to the dominant discourse **(S7, S8)**. For example, **(S8)** notes that there appears to have been a "*very determined effort....by the press and others, to induce government to accept as fact that Pakistani-heritage males in the UK were especially prone to participating in the gang-rape of white girls. This would have formally installed racism in relevant policy-making without evidence and without providing any benefit for CSE victims. Dr Cockbain's research has made it possible for her and others to prevent this from happening, and to challenge the narrative generally in the public sphere. Given the power of the relevant newspapers and of many who embraced the narrative, this is a remarkable achievement*" **(S8)**. The journalist also praises not only Cockbain's "*judgement in deploying that research to challenge the press narrative*" but "*also her courage in doing so*" and standing up to "*vicious counter-attacks*" **(S8)**. Indeed, SCS work **[R3, R6]** has attracted controversy from far-right figures and groups including former EDL leader Tommy Robinson, ex-BNP leader Nick Griffin, UKIP and the white supremacist group Patriotic Alternative **(S9)**, for whom the 'Muslim grooming gangs' narrative is a powerful recruitment and mobilisation tool. Their disgruntlement with SCS research indicates its efficacy in challenging pernicious myths.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

S1. Letter from former National Police Chief's Council (NPCC), Modern Slavery Police Transformation Programme.

S2. Letter from former Senior Policy Lead to the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner.

S3. Letter from former Senior Policy Advisory Modern Slavery Unit.

S4. Barnardo's Reports: https://www.sericc.org.uk/pdfs/3339_cseparliamentaryinquiryreport.pdf; https://www.basw.co.uk/system/files/resources/it_s_not_on_the_radar_report_0.pdf

S5. Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse https://www.iicsa.org.uk/key-documents/18727/view/explorative-study-perpetrators-child-sexual-exploitation-convicted-alongside-others-executive-summary-may-2020.pdf.

S6. UK Home Office Publications on 'Group Based Child Sexual Exploitation': https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/944206/Group-based_CSE_Paper.pdf https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/943955/Characteristics_of_group-based_child_sexual_exploitation_in_the_community__Literature_review.pdf

S7. Media pack including national newspaper coverage and social media engagement and UKIP response to Quilliam renouncement.

S8. Letter from journalist, former editor, campaigner for media standards and co-founder of Hacked Off.

S9. Far right engagement with Cockbain research (Available of request).