

Cybercrime such as grooming, child sexual exploitation, fraud, data theft, phishing, trolling, malware, online scams, revenge pornography, stalking, and harassment are on the rise. Much of this criminality is unreported, unrecorded and as a result not fully understood.

The majority of adults in Thames Valley use the internet but, as my 2016 public survey revealed, relatively few have concerns about the safety of themselves or their children online. Similarly, almost one in five young people knew of someone who had been subject to online bullying or 'sexting' (intimate photos being sent) yet few young people were concerned about online crime.

The UK Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) estimates that 80% of cybercrimes are preventable by implementing simple safety measures and suggest more focus on raising awareness among young people, their parents and other vulnerable adults on the potential dangers of cybercrime.

“...we need more awareness around cybercrime for parents especially.”

Public Survey 2016

Young people at risk

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) has dominated the headlines in recent years. The cases of Rotherham, Rochdale and Oxford highlighted failures to protect children at risk and, together with media coverage of high profile cases involving well-known celebrities, have contributed to an unprecedented rise in reporting. In Thames Valley a 67% rise in crime recorded as CSE took place in 2015/16, and many of the victims were already known to authorities as frequently missing young persons. Disturbingly, a report produced by the Children's Commissioner estimated that just 1 in 8 victims of sexual abuse ever come to the attention of statutory agencies.

Most sexual abuse of children is not organised. The National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) has recognised an emerging trend known as 'peer on peer abuse', noted also within Thames Valley, where abuse is perpetrated by lone offenders just slightly older than the victim. This trend is concerning and I would like to see increased professional curiosity across all statutory agencies in relation to 'peer on peer' abuse.

FGM has been an offence in this country since 1985 yet at the time of writing, there had been no successful prosecutions in Thames Valley. Due to increased migration from practising countries, estimates of women and girls in the UK at risk of, or living with, FGM have risen dramatically. Areas in Thames Valley expected to experience a higher prevalence include Oxford, Slough, Reading and Milton Keynes and it is a key priority to understand and address reasons for under-reporting of FGM to the police.

