

Police warn: Middle-class cocaine users are fuelling sex abuse of county lines teenagers

By Nick Craven

FOR a growing number of people in middle-class suburbs, taking cocaine is considered an innocent way to unwind.

But officers on the front line of the battle against county lines drug trafficking allege that users are complicit in the sexual exploitation of children.

Police say thousands of youngsters dragged into the evil trade are forced to ferry drugs that have been inserted inside their bodies – a practice experts say is sexual abuse. In Britain's Child Drug Runners, a Channel 4 Dispatches documentary to be broadcast this week, Katy Harris, of the South East Regional Crime

Unit, says: 'If a person is putting drug wraps into a child's anal cavity, that's child sexual abuse.'

'I think a lot of people just don't want to think about that.'

In another blunt message, she adds: 'It's something that we would encourage users to think about – over 90 per cent of the drugs that people are consuming have got faecal matter on them.'

Those tasked with combating county lines – now estimated to hold up to 50,000 children in its grip – hope the stark warning will shock drug users who have

proved immune to pleas that they are fuelling soaring violent crime.

In March, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick agreed with the suggestion that middle-class recreational drug users had 'blood on their hands'.

A month later, Sajid Javid, the then Home Secretary and now Chancellor, said of middle-class users: 'They may never see an act

of serious violence, but their illicit habits are adding fuel to the fire that is engulfing our communities.'

According to the latest official figures, a record 1.3 million people took Class A drugs in 2018-19.

Statistics from last year revealed that 3.4 per cent of people in

households with an income of £50,000 had used cocaine in the previous year, and 5.8 per cent of those in areas described by the Office for National Statistics as 'cosmopolitan' took the drug.

With cocaine use doubling in the past five years, drug barons have expanded far beyond big-city squalor to the grooming of middle-class children from rural market towns and public schools.

Sergeant Steve Clark, of Thames Valley Police, retrieves the drugs from youngsters after they have been detained. He says: 'If the drugs burst, they've got very little time to live. It's really high-risk, really dangerous.' He recalls a

young girl who was in his custody suite: 'Her first words were, "There's a Kinder Egg inside me that's burst."' "

Thames Valley Deputy Chief Constable Jason Hogg said: 'Purchasing and taking drugs is not a victimless crime.'

'There are a string of victims who are being exploited by criminal gangs, who have been sexually abused, who are being stabbed or being murdered – all directly because good people with jobs are buying drugs and taking them at the weekend. That is the reality.'

● *Britain's Child Drug Runners* will be screened on Channel 4 on Wednesday at 10pm

