

# Revealed: conspiracy of silence on UK sex gangs

● Most convicted offenders of Pakistani heritage ● Young girls abused across North and Midlands

Andrew Norfolk

A culture of silence that has facilitated the sexual exploitation of hundreds of young British girls by criminal pimping gangs is exposed by *The Times* today.

For more than a decade, child protection experts have identified a repeated pattern of sex offending in towns and cities across northern England and the Midlands involving groups of older men who groom and abuse vulnerable girls aged 11 to 16 after befriending them on the street.

Most of the victims are white and most of the convicted offenders are of Pakistani heritage, unlike other known models of child-sex offending in Britain, including child abuse initiated by online grooming, in which the vast majority of perpetrators are white.

Northern police forces have investigated gangs of on-street predators for at least 14 years. In the most serious cases, children have been moved around the country in cars and used for sex by older men. This has led to abortions for girls as young as 12. In November, a court heard that when a South Yorkshire victim, aged 13, was examined by a nurse she appeared to have been raped more than 50 times.

Most forces, in common with charities and agencies working to help girls who have endured weeks and sometimes months and years of repeated sexual abuse, have denied publicly that ethnicity has any relevance to this pattern of on-street grooming.

*The Times* has identified 17 court prosecutions since 1997, 14 of them during the past three years, involving the on-street grooming of girls aged 11 to 16 by groups of men. The victims came from 13 towns and cities and in each case two or more men were convicted of offences.

In total, 56 people, with an average age of 28, were found guilty of crimes including rape, child abduction, indecent assault and sex with a child. Three of the 56 were white, 53 were



CCTV Images from Operation Retriever in Derbyshire. Girls were fed alcohol and drugs then used by older men for sex

Asian. Of those, 50 were Muslim and a majority were members of the British Pakistani community.

Several police sources have told *The Times* that those convicted represent only a small proportion of what one detective described as a "tidal wave" of offending that has been uncovered in Yorkshire, Lancashire, Greater Manchester and some Midlands counties.

A senior West Mercia detective has now called for an end to the "damaging taboo" surrounding gang-led on-street grooming, which he blames on a fear among police and child protection workers of being branded racist. Detective Chief Inspector Alan Edwards said: "These girls are being passed around and used as meat. To stop this type of crime you need to start talking about it, but everyone's been too scared to address the ethnicity factor. No one

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Leading article, page 2  
News special, pages 6-9

wants to stand up and say that Pakistani guys in some parts of the country are recruiting young white girls and passing them around their relatives for sex, but we need to stop being worried about the racial complication."

Writing in *The Times* today, Mohammed Shafiq, chief executive of the Ramadhan Foundation, a national Muslim youth organisation, says: "These people think that white girls have fewer morals and are less valuable than our girls. This is a form of racism that is abhorrent and totally unacceptable in a society that prides itself on equality and justice."

No research has been carried out into why such a high proportion of the offenders belong to one minority ethnicity and with the exception of one

Continued on page 7, col 4

# Revealed: the conspiracy of silence over UK sex gangs

Continued from page 1

town there is scant evidence of work being undertaken in British Pakistani communities to confront the problem.

*The Times* has seen a briefing document by researchers at the UCL Jill Dando Institute of Security and Crime Science, which notes that victims are typically white girls aged 13 to 16 and that “most central offenders are Pakistani”, warning that “race is a delicate issue” that needs to be “handled sensitively but not brushed under the carpet”. The briefing document suggests that the offenders are not paedophiles; they target the girls “because of their malleability”.

In the Netherlands many groomers are of Moroccan heritage and a Dutch Muslim organisation has led a project seeking to challenge a cultural mindset that leads some young men to view non-Muslim girls with contempt.

Mr Edwards’ belief that similar work is needed in Britain is backed by another senior detective, who led a grooming investigation in West Yorkshire. Lack of public acknowledgement of the race factor in such cases has left a void exploited in some communities by the British National Party and other far-right groups.

In reality, such crimes are abhorred by the vast majority of Muslims. Though most of the girls targeted have been white, among the victims of a

Pakistani gang in one city were several Bangladeshi Muslim girls.

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre said in 2009 that networks of “white British, British Asians and Kurdish asylum-seekers” had been “prominently identified” as internal sex traffickers of British girls.

“Kurds are identified as being dominant in the North East of England, but Anglo-Asian groups appear to be in control in the Midlands. There are ... suggestions that in London, West Indian (Caribbean) and Bangladeshi networks are similarly exploiting ... females for sex.” With the exception of one case involving two white men in Blackburn, *The Times* has been unable to identify any court case in which two or more white British, Kurdish, African-Caribbean or Bangladeshi men have been convicted of child-sex offences linked to on-street grooming.

The Home Office said last night that although child protection was “an absolute priority”, it had no plans to commission research into the ethnic and cultural background of on-street groomers.

**Overleaf**



17 cases, 13 towns: a pattern of exploitation

News, pages 8, 9

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