

How the grooming gangs scandal was covered up

The child victims of rape were denied justice and protection from the state to preserve the image of a successful multicultural society

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Safeguarding minister Jess Phillips' decision to block a public inquiry into the Oldham grooming gangs seems, from the outside, to be almost inexplicable. Children were raped and abused by gangs of men while the authorities failed to protect them.

A review of the abuse in Oldham was released in 2022, but its terms of reference only stretched from 2011-2014. Survivors from the town said that they wanted a government-led inquiry to cover a longer period, and catch what the previous review had missed. In Jess Phillips's letter to the council, revealed by GB News, she said she understood the strength of feeling in the town, but thought it best for another local review to take place.

This is a scandal that should be rooted out entirely, and investigated by the full might of the British state. Voices ranging from Elon Musk to Kemi Badenoch have joined the calls for an inquiry. Yet the Government seems curiously reluctant to dig into the failings of officials.

This reluctance is not new. Across the country, in towns and in cities, on our streets and in the state institutions designed to protect the most vulnerable members of our society, authorities deliberately turned a blind eye to horrific abuse of largely white children by gangs of men predominantly of Pakistani heritage.

Over time, details have come to light about abuse in Rotherham, in Telford, in Rochdale and in dozens of other places. But with the stories released in dribs and drabs, and the details so horrific as to be almost unreadable, the full scale of the scandal has still to reach the public.

Suffer the children

The following paragraph makes for difficult reading. But you should read it, if you can. It's drawn from Judge Peter Rook's 2013 sentencing of Mohammed Karrar in Oxford.

Mohammed prepared his victim "for gang anal rape by using a pump... You subjected her to a gang rape by five or six men. At one point she had four men inside her. A red ball was placed in her mouth to keep her quiet."

Her story is horrific. It is also far from unique.

Take “Anna”, from Bradford. Vulnerable and in residential care, at the age of 14 had made repeated reports of rape, abuse, and coercion. When she “married” her abuser in a traditional Islamic wedding, her social worker attended the ceremony. The authorities then arranged for her to be fostered by her “husband’s” parents.

In Telford, Lucy Lowe died at 16 alongside her mother and sister when her abuser set fire to her home in 2000. She had given birth to Azhar Ali Mahmood’s child when she was just 14, and was pregnant when she was killed.

Her death was subsequently used to threaten other children. The Telford Inquiry found particularly brutal threats. When one victim aged 12 told her mother, and the mother called the police, “there was about six or seven Asian men who came to my house. They threatened my mum saying they’ll petrol bomb my house if we don’t drop the charges.”

Yet in a pattern that would repeat itself, Telford’s authorities looked the other way. When an independent review was finally published in 2022, it found police officers described parts of the town as a “no-go area”, while witnesses set out multiple allegations of police corruption and favouritism towards the Pakistani community. Regardless of the reason, the inquiry found that “there was a nervousness about race... bordering on a reluctance to investigate crimes committed by what was described as the ‘Asian’ community”.

Similar concerns applied at the council, where anxieties over appearing racist saw safeguarding officers waving away concerns simply because the perpetrators were Asian. It was felt that some suspects were not investigated because it would have been “politically incorrect”.

This is not to say that the council did nothing. Aware that taxi drivers were offering children rides for sex, in 2006 it suspended licensing enforcement for drivers, allowing high risk drivers to continue practicing. As the Telford Inquiry found, this was “borne entirely out of fear of accusations of racism; it was craven”.



A review of the abuse in Oldham was released in 2022, but its terms of reference only stretched from 2011-2014 Credit: Getty

And above all, there was the concern over community relations: senior council staff were terrified that the abuse of children “had the potential to start a ‘race riot’”. The result was stasis, despite officials acknowledging in at least one case that abuse by Asian men had gone on for “years and years”.

It had: at least 1,000 girls were abused in the town between 1980 and 2009. Yet even this conservative estimate was disputed by authority figures, with West Mercia police superintendent Tom Harding insisting in 2018 the figure was “sensationalised”. The independent review later found it entirely plausible.

A culture of cover-ups

Denial about the extent of the problem is rooted deep in Britain’s political system. At times, it appears that the government’s approach to multiculturalism is not to uphold the law, but instead to minimise the risk of unrest between communities. Confronted with gangs of predominantly Pakistani men targeting predominantly white children, the state knew exactly what to do. For the good of community relations, **it had to bury the story**.

In Rotherham, a senior police officer told a distressed father that the town “would erupt” if the routine abuse of white children by Pakistani heritage men became public knowledge. One parent concerned about a missing daughter was told by the police that an “older Asian boyfriend” was a “fashion accessory” for girls in the town. The father of a 15-year-old rape victim was told the assault might mean she would “learn her lesson”.

The ordeal had been so brutal that she required surgery.

As the 2014 Jay Inquiry into Rotherham found, children were “doused in petrol and threatened with being set alight”, “threatened with guns”, “witnessed brutally violent rapes and were threatened that they would be the next victim if they told anyone. Girls as young as 11 were raped by large numbers of male perpetrators, one after the other”.

In the same town, a senior police officer allegedly said the abuse had been “going on” for 30 years, adding “with it being Asians, we can’t afford for this to be coming out.

As Louise Casey’s 2015 report on Rotherham Council found, this attitude was widespread. The Pakistani community accounted for around 3 per cent of the town’s population, and the story emerging was clear: Pakistani men were grooming white girls. As a result, one witness said, the council was “terrified of [the impact on] community cohesion”.

Across the town, pressure was put on people to “suppress, keep quiet or cover up” issues around child abuse. A former senior officer told her review that “x didn’t want [the] town to become the child abuse capital of the north. They didn’t want riots.”

Politicians were terrified [of the impact on] community cohesion. This nervousness meant that there was “a sense that it was the Pakistani heritage Councillors who alone ‘dealt’ with that community”, with their having a “disproportionate influence” on the council: as one witness put it, “[my] experience of council as it was and is – Asian men very powerful, and the white British are very mindful of racism and frightened of racism allegations so there is no robust challenge”. Other concerns may have been even more sinister. In 2016, it was reported that a victim of grooming in Rotherham had alleged that she was raped by a town councillor.

As a result of this combination of factors, the council went to great lengths to “cover up information and silence whistle-blowers”. In the words of witnesses, “if you want to keep your job, you keep your head down and your mouth shut”.

Police failures

This resistance to an obvious truth repeated itself across the country. By 2010, a West Midlands Police report showed that authorities were aware that grooming gangs were approaching children at school gates.

But as the report stated, “the predominant offender profile of Pakistani Muslim males... combined with the predominant victim profile of white females has the potential to cause significant community tensions”. As a result, the report remained unpublished until released in response to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests five years later.

In Manchester, a 2019 report concluded gangs were left to roam the streets in part because officers were told to look elsewhere. One detective constable was quoted by a report as saying “the offending target group were predominantly Asian males and we were told to try and get other ethnicities”.

Central government took a similar view. In 2020, the Home Office refused to release its research into grooming gangs, claiming that it would not be in the “public interest” to do so. When it was finally released, it turned out to be a whitewash: a shoddy construction which appeared to deliberately downplay the clear role ethnicity had played in the phenomenon.

When people did try to raise the issue, they found themselves shouted down. In 2004, a Channel 4 documentary into abuse in Bradford was delayed after police forces warned the evidence of “Asian men targeting young white girls” could inflame racial tensions.

One of the bleakest cover-ups emerged in Rochdale. Fifteen-year-old Victoria Agolia, a vulnerable child in care, died in 2003 when 50-year-old Mohammed Yaqoob injected her with heroin. In the lead-up to her death, a review published last year found, she had given authorities information that she was “involved in sexual exploitation, alleged rape, and sexual assault requiring medical attention”. None resulted in her rescue. Across the town, girls as young as 12 were being raped by gangs.

When the first convictions in Rochdale were handed down in 2012, the police and Crown Prosecution Service apologised for failing to follow up on appeals for help. As former Labour MP for Keighley Ann Cryer put it, the authorities “were petrified of being called racist and so reverted to the default of political correctness”. As a result, despite a child telling the police she had been raped, and providing DNA evidence, no prosecution was brought.

The sense that authorities believed that a full investigation would be more trouble than it was worth is widespread. Simon Danczuk, the former MP for Rochdale has said “senior Labour politicians” warned him against discussing “the ethnicity of the perpetrators, for fear of losing votes”. Today, dozens of offenders are still believed to be at large in the community.

Attackers protected

While fears over racial tensions and political correctness have left the state frequently unwilling to protect victims, the same concerns have seen attackers protected.

As the Jay Inquiry into Rotherham found in 2014, in at least two cases fathers tracked down their daughters and attempted to remove them from the houses where they were being abused.

The police arrested the fathers.

In other cases, child victims were arrested for “drunk and disorderly” behaviour, rather than the adult men they were with. Small wonder that Jay found young people in the town believed police “dared not act against Asian youths for fear of allegations of racism”.

The protection of offenders may have gone further still. In at least one case, when a victim found the courage to go to the police, their abuser appears to have been tipped off. While still in the police station, one child received a text from her abuser informing her that he had her 11-year-old sister, and that it was now “your choice...”. The child chose not to go through with the complaint.

These stories cover only a small number of towns. The broader picture, however, is clear. The consequences are clear, too: no police officer or government employee has ever been imprisoned for their misconduct. Indeed, in Rotherham, the harshest sanctions faced by the police were written warnings.

Even offenders have managed to dodge some of the consequences for their actions. Despite being stripped of British citizenship, the leader of a Rochdale grooming gang still lives among his victims despite being ordered to be deported.

The price of multiculturalism

If Britain is to redeem itself for the grooming gang scandal, it needs to understand how it got things so terribly wrong. This begins with the attitude that protecting the image of a successful multicultural society matters more than the actual truth of that multicultural society.

It isn't hard to see why councils panicked when confronted with the sheer scale of the abuse. As a recent study calculated, one in 73 Muslim men living in Rotherham were prosecuted for their involvement in these gangs from 1997 to 2016. This was an almost unsolvable problem for a society built on liberal principles.

Even now, discussing primarily Pakistani-heritage grooming gangs as primarily Pakistani-heritage grooming gangs causes problems; IPSO waded in to censure Home Secretary Suella Braverman for this claim last year, citing deeply flawed Home Office research in its ruling. Yet if we can't be honest about the problems we're facing, we won't be able to address them.

In the words of Guy Dampier, a researcher at The Legatum Institute think tank: "The rape gangs scandal was a product of multiculturalism, which in practice meant the authorities turning a blind eye because victims were mostly white and their abusers largely ethnically Pakistani."

Anti-racism charities, pressure groups and left-wing academics all conspired to stifle discussion or lie that it was only a "moral panic". The result is thousands of abused girls and a scandal which has scarred British politics."

Policy fixes

Fixing this mess starts by uncovering everything. As research by one of us, Charlie Peters, has shown, these gangs have been active in over 50 towns and villages across the UK — and there are no doubt more that we have yet to hear about.

Even as recently as 2021, it emerged that South Yorkshire Police was still failing to record the ethnicity of offenders, with 67 per cent of cases lacking details in Rotherham.

The state must leave no stone unturned in its efforts to root out this evil. As one victim told GB News, "a government inquiry is the only way to hold Oldham Council and Greater Manchester Police accountable for their huge failures that led to hundreds of survivors being mistreated and not listened to. A Telford-style inquiry will give answers to survivors but it won't give justice to those who deserve it."

As shadow justice minister Robert Jenrick recently wrote in these pages, "a national inquiry is just the start: we need justice for the victims". In his words, "this appalling scandal continues today because perpetrators still walk free and the officials who covered it up have been let off. The individuals who turned a blind eye to these crimes — and fed the most vulnerable women to the wolves — should be in jail."

Reform UK's Rupert Lowe has called a "full, free and fair public inquiry" that will "show the British people the facts, and let them decide".

"No stone must be left unturned" in holding the guilty to account, "including those who acted to cover up these atrocities". For the guilty, Lowe's prescription is simple: "deportations and prosecutions, lots of them".

"Any man or woman found to be complicit in these crimes should be deported, including dual nationals who should have their citizenship stripped away. That includes family members who were aware of what their husbands, fathers, sons and brothers were participating in. Swift and brutal justice is required".

And above all, concerns over multiculturalism must no longer be allowed to outweigh the need to keep the public safe. As Dampier points out, we "need an end to two-tier community relations and the application of the law equally to all".

Robert Jenrick agrees: "to sustain order in multicultural Britain, the state considered it necessary to apply the law selectively. For decades the most appalling crimes from diaspora groups were legalised and actively covered up to prevent disorder. The rule of law was abandoned to sustain the myth that diversity is our strength, destroying the lives of thousands of

working class white girls in the process. This scandal starts with the onset of mass migration. This appalling affair is the final nail in the coffin for liberals who cling to the argument that Britain is an integration success story. Mass migration must end immediately and the foreign nationals prosecuted for their monstrous crimes must be deported - no ifs, no buts”.

It may sound strong. But strong measures are required. The British state’s soft touch approach left this problem to fester and rot.

Children were abandoned to suffer in the name of community relations, an unforgivable price. And it was a price that brought nothing: harmony based on lies doesn’t last. Public fury is swelling, and there is more to be angry about than if the cases had been dealt with swiftly at the time. Indeed, abuse may still be taking place because the state failed to act properly before. It’s time for a new approach. The truth must be brought to the light.

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