

Child sexual exploitation is downplayed to avoid bad publicity, report says

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) has published its [latest report](#) today. Headline from the [Guardian](#).

Of their previous reports I posted in October 2020 Maggie Oliver's [concerns about a 'cover-up'](#) as they did not speak with any length to survivors of the gangs operating in Rotherham, Rochdale and Telford and the fear that the Inquiry had also succumbed to fear of [accusations of racism](#) if the 'M' word was mentioned about the perpetrators. The current report has taken note of those criticisms, although I don't believe that it has gone far enough.

To recap the inquiry has focused on six council areas: St Helens, Tower Hamlets, Swansea, Durham, Bristol and Warwickshire. The newspapers are starting to report on it this afternoon taking those bits of most relevance to their area or bent. The [report here](#) isn't so very long to read at source.

Professor Alexis Jay introduces the report on [Twitter here](#).



To explain why they didn't look closely at Rotherham:-

The sexual exploitation of children by networks is not a rare

problem confined to a small number of areas with high-profile criminal cases. It is a crime which involves the sexual abuse of children in the most degrading and destructive ways, by multiple perpetrators. The Inquiry therefore chose to base this investigation on areas which had not already been the subject of independent investigation (such as Rotherham, Rochdale and Oxford). The intention was to obtain an accurate picture of current practice at a strategic level and through examination of individual cases, as well as drawing on wider knowledge about child sexual exploitation in England and Wales.

Six case study areas were chosen: Durham, Swansea, Warwickshire, St Helens, Tower Hamlets and Bristol. . . In addition, the Inquiry undertook a detailed analysis of material held by the relevant local authority and police force in relation to 33 children from the six case study areas, in order to better understand the experiences of children who were currently being (or very recently had been) sexually exploited by networks.

Child sexual exploitation has been a designated strategic policing priority since 2015, giving it the same significance as terrorism and serious organised crime. Despite this, the Inquiry's findings indicate that less is now known and understood about the prevalence of this appalling crime than was the case prior to 2015.

An accurate picture of the prevalence of child sexual exploitation could not be gleaned from either criminal justice or children's social care data. This has arisen in part because of changes in the recording and tracking systems of police and local authorities, which are used to identify and count specific incidents of child sexual exploitation. Now many areas subsume the data within wider categories, such as child criminal exploitation or child abuse more generally.

The child criminal exploitation model covers all aspects of

child exploitation, such as trafficking or county lines, including those which are particularly related to drug offending. The rationale for adoption of this model appears to be that it discourages a 'silo' mentality in relation to all aspects of child exploitation. This comes at the cost of making child sexual exploitation even more of a hidden problem and increasingly underestimated. More significantly, there appears to be a flawed assumption that this form of child sexual abuse is on the wane. There is also a suspicion that some do not wish to be labelled as 'another Rochdale or Rotherham'.

It is hard to reconcile the idea that child sexual exploitation by networks is now less prevalent with the widely reported 'explosion' in online child sexual abuse, including exploitation.

There were significant difficulties in this investigation in identifying networks or groups of abusers. The case study material showed that there were cases of child sexual exploitation by networks in all six case study areas but the police forces in these areas were generally not able to provide any evidence about these networks, using either the Inquiry's definition or any other. The Inquiry was particularly struck by the reporting that there were no known or reported organised networks in two of the case study areas (Swansea and Tower Hamlets) . In relation to Swansea, we were told that there were "*no data*" to suggest that there was sexual exploitation by networks or gang-related child sexual abuse in the area. However, there were examples of child sexual exploitation by groups in the evidence seen by the Inquiry which should have been identified by the police.

There has been much academic and professional debate about definitions of child sexual exploitation, including the concept of 'exchange' and whether it is necessary to be present in an individual case of sexual abuse in order for it to meet the criteria for child sexual exploitation. 'Exchange'

involves the child receiving something that they need or want, which might suggest that children have a choice about their own exploitation.

A further concern is that a distinctive professional language around child sexual exploitation has developed over many years, which describes children being 'at risk' despite clear evidence of actual harm having occurred. Examples of this include children having contracted sexually transmitted diseases, children regularly going missing with adults who picked them up in cars late at night and children attending so-called 'house parties' organised by adults, where they were plied with alcohol and drugs before being sexually abused.

Efforts have been made to improve the identification of male victims of sexual exploitation. Social media and dating apps were regularly used by perpetrators to groom boys and young men. In some areas more tailored services were available for children from ethnic minority groups and LGBTQ+ children who experienced sexual exploitation.

Police forces have created problem profiles in order to develop comprehensive responses to child sexual exploitation. Despite support for these profiles by the Children's Commissioner and the Home Affairs Committee as long ago as 2013, the quality of these profiles in the case study areas was very mixed. Several profiles contained incomplete evidence about the prevalence of child sexual exploitation, there was often a lack of information about perpetrator groups and some were based on inadequate data.

None of the areas examined kept data on the ethnicity of victims and alleged perpetrators. The inclusion of ethnicity in problem profiles would enhance the effectiveness of prevention and detection by the police. Likewise, the local authorities and others would not automatically tailor their services to all victims in a culturally sensitive way. Many of the high-profile child sexual exploitation prosecutions

have involved groups of men from minority ethnic communities. This has led to polarised debate about whether there is any link between ethnicity and child sexual exploitation networks. Poor or non-existent data collection makes it impossible to know whether any particular ethnic group is over-represented as perpetrators of child sexual exploitation by networks.

Recommendations

We recommend the strengthening of the response of the criminal justice system by the government amending the Sentencing Act 2020 to provide a mandatory aggravating factor in sentencing those convicted of offences relating to the sexual exploitation of children.

We recommend that police forces and local authorities in England and Wales must collect specific data – disaggregated by sex, ethnicity and disability – on all cases of known or suspected child sexual exploitation, including by networks.

I am interpreting this to mean that the inquiry knows, or strongly suspects that there is a big ethnic element in the organisation of the big gangs, ie Muslim men, mostly but not exclusively of Pakistani background (as I know of cases involving Bangladeshi gangs, Somali, Kurdish, Turkish, Iranian and Albanian).

The authorities really would like to brush this industrial rape by Muslims under the carpet. Grouping it in with drug running is a neat way of appearing to be doing something while not really touching it.

I continue to be interested in what is going on in London (Tower Hamlets being just one of the boroughs covered by the Metropolitan Police). I think there are probably just as many victims but that the gangs will be found to be small but numerous. What I [wrote in 2019](#) is, I believe, still valid.

I understand that the final report from the IICSA is about

boarding schools, so for the time being this is their final word on what we call the 'grooming gangs' or in some circles 'Islamic rape gangs'. Still the authorities wonder why TR and others will not shut up.