

Faces of men who groomed and raped vulnerable Plymouth girls

From the [Plymouth Herald](#) and [Plymouth Live](#)

Three predatory men have been told to expect long jail sentences after a jury found them guilty of raping vulnerable young girls in Plymouth.



Anthony Anantharajah, Saif Kahya & Abalzaq Salih - all three have been found guilty of rape (Image: Devon and Cornwall Police)

[During a five week trial](#), the jury at Plymouth Crown Court heard how the older men deliberately targeted four teenage girls, debilitating them with drink or drugs at house parties for the purpose of serious sexual assault.

The jury also heard a statement from the mother of one of the

girls who revealed how she had repeatedly contacted the authorities, raising her concerns for the welfare of her daughter, saying "it felt like I was fighting the whole world and no-one was listening to me".

The abuse came to light after another girl came forward and gave key evidence to police having watched the BBC drama *Three Girls* which depicted the high-profile Child Sexual Exploitation investigation in Rochdale.

Devon and Cornwall Police launched the investigation – codenamed Operation Garcia – in 2017, a complex and lengthy child sexual exploitation investigation which resulted in a total of four men being charged.

The trial saw the jury watch a series of video interviews by specially trained police officers with the girls, saw them give evidence and cross-examined in witness stand as well as a series of police witnesses, statements and the men themselves give evidence. After being sent out to consider their verdict on Friday afternoon, they returned this morning (August 20) to offer unanimous and majority verdicts upon the four men. *The local newspaper only reported the once, but the stages of trial could be followed from the court lists.*

Mr Ahmadou was discharged from the court having been found not guilty of sexual assault and was escorted out of the court. Moments later a young woman in the public gallery court broke down sobbing.

Abalzaq Salih, 31, from Plymouth, was convicted of two counts of rape of a female aged 15 or under, while 32-year-old Saif Kahya from Liverpool was found guilty of one count of rape of a female aged 16 or over.

Anthony Anantharajah, aged 35, from London, was convicted of one count of rape of a female aged 16 or over. He was found not guilty of engaging in non-penetrative sexual activity with a girl aged 15 or under.

A fourth man, 45-year-old Moussa Ahmadou, from Plymouth, was found not guilty of sexual assault on a female.

The convicted trio were remanded in custody and are due to be sentenced in late September. Judge Peter Johnson said Salih, Kahya and Anantharajah – all found guilty of rape – would have to be remanded into custody, adding that they would be sentenced at a later date, adding that only one sentence which would be a custodial one “measured in some years” and as such it would be “inappropriate” to grant them bail.

A specialist prosecutor has said (the) three men ... led a “vicious and vile campaign of sexual abuse, in some instances multiple times against these victims, which must have caused life changing harm and trauma.”

Claire Brinton, Specialist Prosecutor for the CPS, said: “These three men exploited four young girls through drugs, alcohol and money. Their victims were groomed and subjected to rape. These defendants conducted a vicious and vile campaign of sexual abuse, in some instances multiple times against these victims, which must have caused life changing harm and trauma...”

During the trial, a statement was read out from the mother of one of the girls who said she was convinced something was being done to her daughter at the parties she was going to involving the men she and other girls were meeting and she had called the authorities telling them they needed to take action.

Her statement explained she “felt like I was fighting the whole world and no-one was listening to me”.

She wrote that situation finally “came to a head” when the short BBC TV drama Three Girls was broadcast which depicted the high-profile Child Sexual Exploitation investigation in Rochdale. The mother said she made her daughter sit and watch it. She wrote how her daughter “got really upset and started

crying” before turning to her mother and saying ‘mum’s that’s exactly what was happening to us”. She said that with her daughter’s consent she called police saying the young girl was prepared to make a complaint “and immediately they cared”.

All of the rapes took place at the homes of the defendants which were at a number of locations around Plymouth. At the time of the offences the victims were aged between 14 and 16 at the time.

Judge Peter Johnson told the jury – some of whom clearly showed distress and were dabbing at their eyes – that they had discharged their duty over the last five and a half weeks. He said the trial and evidence had been “emotionally challenging and factually demanding” adding that it had been “heavy work, well formed by you”.

He said they had shown “good humour and patience at every turn”, adding “we are all extremely grateful for the work you have put in on this trial”. Noting the distressing content they had absorbed over the last five weeks and evidently recognising the distress some of the jury were enduring, he urged them “don’t ever worry about your verdicts – juries always reach the correct verdicts. You’ve clearly paid careful attention to the evidence and you’ve applied the law diligently”.