

Jurors told not to speculate over absence of defendant in Rochdale sex abuse trial

From the [Manchester Evening News](#)

Jurors in the trial of seven men accused of historic sexual offences in Rochdale have been told not to speculate why one of them is not in the dock.

The prosecution allege the complainants were groomed from the age of 13 to have sex with the men “whenever and wherever they wanted”. The defendants all deny various sexual offences, including rape and indecent assault, said to have been committed between 2001 and 2006.

One of the accused, Kasir Bashir, 50, has not attended the trial at Minshull Street Crown Court. It is alleged the former stallholder on Rochdale Market raped one of the complainants, Girl B, on multiple occasions at a house in Oldham.

Bashir, of Napier Street East, Oldham, has pleaded not guilty to two counts of rape and two counts of indecency with a child. In his closing speech to the jury on Monday, his barrister Shahnawaz Khan said it was his client’s case that Bashir had consensual sex with Girl B on a sole occasion but was not involved with any sexual activity at the address in Oldham.

Mr Khan reminded the jury of the “very comprehensive” directions previously given to them by Judge Jonathan Seely. Mr Khan said: “You are not to speculate why Mr Bashir is not here. His absence does not count against him. He is still entitled to a fair trial. You must consider the case on the evidence and on the evidence alone.”

Closing speeches will continue into next week before the judge sums up the evidence heard.