

Police failings left girls 'at mercy' of Rochdale grooming gangs, report finds

From [ITV News](#) and the [Telegraph](#)

Girls were “left at the mercy” of paedophile grooming gangs for years in Rochdale because of failings by senior police and council bosses, a report has said.

The damning 173-page review covers the period 2004 to 2013 and sets out multiple failed investigations by Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and apparent local authority indifference to the plight of hundreds of youngsters, mainly white girls from poor backgrounds, all identified as potential victims of abuse in Rochdale by Asian men.

Malcolm Newsam CBE, co-author of the report, said: “Successive police operations were launched over this period, but these were insufficiently resourced to match the scale of the widespread organised exploitation within the area. **Consequently, children were left at risk and many of their abusers to this day have not been apprehended.**”

The report identifies 96 men still deemed a potential risk to children, but states this is “only a proportion” of the numbers involved in the abuse.

The Rochdale findings follow reports by the same authors on grooming in Manchester and Oldham, which found authorities had again failed children by leaving them in the clutches of paedophile gangs. Mr Newsam, a renowned childcare expert, authored the report with Gary Ridgeway, a former detective superintendent, following allegations by whistleblowers Sara Rowbotham and Maggie Oliver in the BBC TV documentary *The Betrayed Girls*, which aired in 2017.

Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, commissioned the authors to look at the issues highlighted by the women in the documentary.

The report said Ms Rowbotham, co-ordinator of the Crisis Intervention Team set up to support young people in Rochdale, and former GMP detective Maggie Oliver, who resigned from the force in disgust, were “lone voices” who had flagged the evidence of “prolific serial rape of countless children in Rochdale”.

The report states there was “compelling evidence” of widespread, organised sexual abuse of children in Rochdale from as early as 2004 onwards, citing multiple reports of the involvement of [groups of Asian men](#).

But children’s unwillingness to make a formal complaint was repeatedly used as an excuse for not investigating.

GMP identified the ringleaders, described as “prolific career criminals”, but did not investigate further because children were too frightened to assist. The report said this was a “serious failure” to protect the children, ignoring the coercion and control the groomers had over their victims and families, who were sometimes threatened or subjected to violence or had their homes attacked.

Another police investigation into two takeaway shops in Rochdale, involving 30 adult male suspects, was also aborted prematurely because police bosses failed to resource the operation and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) deemed the main child victim an unreliable witness.

One police report said: “What is clearly emerging is an organised industry where vulnerable young children are being targeted for sexual abuse...” The detective inspector asked for more staff to investigate but police bosses denied the request.

In December 2010, more than two years after first being informed of abuse at the two takeaway restaurants, GMP finally acted, launching Operation Span, which led to the conviction of nine men in May 2012 and sparked a high-profile court case which attracted far-Right demonstrators. (*not 'far-right', just not far wrong!*)

The trial heard how girls as young as 12 were plied with alcohol and drugs and gang raped in rooms above takeaway shops. Some were ferried to different flats in taxis where cash was paid to use the girls.

But while the force hailed Operation Span as “a fantastic result for British justice”, the report states the police operation failed to address numerous other crimes and ignored children’s allegations, leaving their abusers off the hook, as alleged by both Ms Oliver and Ms Rowbotham.



GMP and Rochdale Council had presented [the court convictions](#) as having “resolved” grooming in the town when in reality it had “only scraped the surface”, the report said.

While the “public face of GMP” reassured the public it was a police priority to pursue further child groomers, this was “far from the case on the ground”, according to the report.

The report ... revealed that police took an aborted foetus from a survivor without permission, to test it for DNA. . . police examined the foetus, searching for a DNA match with a possible suspect. However, no match was found and no immediate action was taken.

The 13-year-old has previously had a termination at Rochdale Hospital in March 2009. Neither her or her mother were told by investigators that police would be keeping the foetus.

It was kept in storage in a freezer at a police station, before being found later during a ‘routine property review’.

The report authors said: “We regard it as highly unacceptable that Child 44 and/or her parents were not informed of the retention and why GMP required it. Child 44 did not become aware of this information until 2011 when she was told by Detective Constable Oliver during Operation Span.”

Child 44, as she’s known in the report was spoken to as part of the review. She said: “After the trial [a GMP officer] came to ask if I wanted a funeral for the baby. It was an abortion, I didn’t want it so I told them to get rid of it, and they robbed it. They should never have robbed it, they should’ve asked permission, even though I was a minor they should’ve gone through my mum they shouldn’t have gone in and took it either way.”

The Human Tissue Authority codes of practice came into force in July 2006, and stipulate that it is not an offence to retain human tissue for a DNA examination if it is for a criminal investigation.