

# Standard investigation: London's grooming gang shame

## exclusive Inside

*Following the reports of the investigations by the [Express and My London](#) over the weekend in the last 20 minutes (10.30am British Summer Time) this has broken by the main London newspaper the [London Evening Standard](#). At last some journalism and attention!*

Police failure. Institutional cover-up. Establishment silence:  
The real story of London's harrowing grooming gang epidemic

In 2017, only a few years after the national scandal of [grooming gangs in Rotherham](#) dominated the news, another [investigation was launched in east London: Operation Grandbye](#). It was sparked by allegations from four girls, aged between 13 and 15, who alleged that they had been raped by men based around the Stratford Centre. Officers went on to identify 18 girls as victims, most aged 14 and 15.



BARONESS LOUISE CASEY, RIGHT, FOUND THERE IS "MISMATCH" IN THE WAY THE MET AND LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES RECORD CHILD ABUSE

The last public update on Operation Grandbye came in a written answer at Mayor's Question Time in August 2018: "Operation Grandbye has been successful in disrupting perpetrators through a number of arrests and civil orders... The Met Police will continue to monitor the impact of the operation [and the] Sexual Exploitation Team (SET) maintain a working relationship with the local borough police in Newham."

The teens targeted in this area of east London are far from London's only victims. Yet there has seemingly been a catastrophic failing of the [Met Police](#) to connect the dots from borough to borough, meaning grooming gangs in the capital can operate unbothered.

The Standard has spoken to social workers, charities, experts and survivors who all say sexual abuse by gangs is ubiquitous across the capital. Cases outlined in independent reports published by local authorities in London over the past two years suggest young girls are being groomed by groups of men.

As part of the Standard's investigation, we sent a Freedom of

Information request to the force asking about the results of the police action – how many people were charged and convicted of crime and whether any other victims were identified. Six months later, no answers have been received. *That's about normal.*

For years [Britain's grooming gang scandal](#) has been defined by a handful of northern towns where groups of men abused vulnerable girls with near impunity while police and local councils seemingly turned a blind eye and, in some cases, even criminalised the victims.

London was barely mentioned, with authorities suggesting that child exploitation in the capital was centred predominantly around county lines drug dealing gangs. Is this wilful ignorance, or an institutional cover up? When Sir Sadiq Khan was questioned about it earlier this year, he said the focus in the city was primarily on county lines drug dealing. When pushed by the Conservative's leader on the London Assembly, Susan Hall, [he denied knowing what she meant by a grooming gang](#). *It was his shifty body language that convinced me that my suspicions had substance.*

Met Commissioner Sir [Mark Rowley](#) last week told Assembly Members in City Hall that Scotland Yard had a “steady flow” of ongoing multi-offender child sexual exploitation investigations, and a “very significant” number of allegations would need to be reopened because of the Home Office's grooming gangs review.

But he added that he would be “loath” to take child protection specialists away from dealing with current caseloads “to look back in history” and it might cost “millions of pounds” to re-investigate the alleged crimes.

Retired Chief Superintendent Simon Ovens, a former Met borough commander, told the Standard: “More should have been done at the time.

“But as I recall, it wasn’t high on the list of priorities for any mayor or commissioner because other things were. There was a focus on 12 key crime types – including robbery, burglary and even bicycle theft. Child sexual grooming wasn’t one of those we were measured on or had to put resources into.”

Susan Hall said she had been contacted privately by victims of grooming gangs after making numerous attempts to force Sir Sadiq to respond in public to her concerns.

She told the Standard: “It beggars belief that we are being told London is the only place in the country where there are no grooming gangs. It’s absolutely outrageous that Sadiq Khan fails to take this seriously. I have been asking for months – then lo and behold last Thursday Mark Rowley suddenly said there were grooming gangs. It’s hugely concerning.”

A government-ordered audit into the grooming gangs scandal this year found there is “mismatch” in the way the Met and local authorities record child abuse.

There also appears to be a significant overlap between child sexual abuse and county lines drug trafficking gangs.

Social workers, lawyers, safeguarding professionals and victims have revealed that it is an epidemic, and tethered to organised crime. But why have the authorities failed to act effectively?

Amy Clowrey is a solicitor who has worked closely with the victims of child sexual exploitation across the UK and was central in representing Rotherham survivors as well as the victims of the Lambeth care home scandal,

“I know it’s a prevalent issue in London,” Clowrey tells the Standard. “It is being brushed under the carpet. There’s absolutely no doubt it’s happening. A number of my clients have said that they’ve been trafficked to London [from other areas of the UK].”

Kate Elysia, 36, is a survivor of a Telford grooming gang, and says she was abused in London after moving to Essex.

Olivia\* was 17 years old and missing from care when she was discovered in a hotel room with six adult men in March 2022. She had been plied with class-A drugs and alcohol. Two men had raped her while others filmed parts of the attack. . . Despite early signs of exploitation, Olivia was at times blamed for her situation, the report found. It stated that there were occasions where she was accused of “placing herself at risk”. “The police adopted a position of criminalisation of Olivia, before moving to a position which recognised Olivia was a victim of exploitation,” the review found.

### **Who are the gangs targeting London’s girls?**

In the aftermath of convictions in Rotherham, debates around the ethnicity of perpetrators consumed much of the public conversation. It seemingly explained a reticence to get involved, for fear of appearing racist. For the grooming gangs there were predominantly made up of British Pakistani men, while the victims were white. Subsequent enquiries in towns like Rochdale and Bradford revealed similar patterns.

Baroness Casey, in [her report](#), said a culture of “blindness, ignorance and prejudice” had led to repeated failures to properly investigate child rape cases.

She found evidence of “over-representation” of Asian and Pakistani heritage men among suspects in data collected in Greater Manchester, West and South Yorkshire and said for too long authorities had shied away from the ethnicity of the people involved. It is “not racist to examine the ethnicity of the offenders”, Baroness Casey said in her findings.

But experts say the situation in London is more complex. Clowrey is cautious also about drawing broad racial conclusions about the perpetrators. “In areas such as Rotherham or Bradford, there was a higher number of Asian men

that would be abusing young girls. That does not appear to be the case in London. I do know from speaking to my clients that there are concerns about other nationalities." *I mentioned this [yesterday](#) – copycat gangs originating in the Balkans. Other ethnicities with a common ideology/belief.*

Despite the evidence, a series of questions about grooming gangs in the city have gone unanswered. Sir Sadiq has been accused by political rivals of dodging the subject and earlier this year rejected a Tory amendment to his budget, [which included £4.49m for an "Independent Inquiry into the Exploitation of Children in London"](#).

A Met Police spokesman said: "We understand the very real concern the public have around so-called grooming gangs and treat all allegations of sexual offences and exploitation extremely seriously. Our data shows the group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation picture in London is more varied than in other parts of the country and does not neatly align with patterns of methodology, ethnicity or nationality seen elsewhere and reported on extensively."