

PREMIUM REPORTS

The Grooming Gangs of the United Kingdom: An Explainer

Critics accuse politicians of enabling abuse by ignoring or downplaying gangs of Pakistani men who groomed, assaulted, and raped white girls across England.

 107

 43

 Pause

 Save



Illustration by The Epoch Times, Getty Images, Greater Manchester Police, National Crime Agency

By Owen Evans | January 08, 2025 Updated: January 09, 2025

A graphic court [transcript](#) of a rape victim from a notorious Pakistani-heritage grooming gang operating in the north of England caught the eye of U.S. readers on social media platform X recently.

Billionaire Elon Musk quickly jumped onto the subject, attacking Prime Minister Keir Starmer's Labour government, and rekindling a long-smoldering debate in the United Kingdom on what is often called the "Grooming Gangs" scandal.

But what exactly is the scandal? Why did it take so long for the systematic exploitation and rape of thousands of girls to be exposed?

Why are Musk and others taking aim at the current prime minister, given the scandal emerged more than a decade ago? And what have

investigations revealed?

For decades, children, specifically poor white girls in various towns in northern England, were targeted and groomed by Pakistani-heritage men, while—as later investigations, court cases, and reporters revealed—local officials turned a blind eye to the abuse due to fears of being labeled racist or destabilizing community relations.

But it took decades to come to light.

In the 1990s, rumors began to emerge that men of Pakistani descent living in northern England towns were involved in raping children.

For example, the parents involved in the Coalition for the Removal of Pimping (CROP), later renamed Parents Against Child Exploitation (PACE), participated in a 2004 documentary that claimed white schoolgirls were being groomed for sex by Asian men in Bradford.

The result was “Edge of the City,” which was due to be [screened](#) on Channel 4.

However, it was pulled hours before airing, after claims the British National Party wanted to exploit the situation and the Chief Constable of West Yorkshire Police saying it might trigger race riots.

Groups such as The National Assembly Against Racism also [lobbied](#) against the documentary.

Member of Parliament Ann Cryer, representing Keighley, publicly raised concerns about the abuse of two girls in her constituency in 2002.

In doing so, she became the first public figure in Britain to speak out about allegations of “young Asian lads” grooming underage white girls in West Yorkshire.

She was shunned by her party, which ran the country from 1997 to 2010, and she said no one wanted to know, despite holding “constant” meetings with West Yorkshire Police and social services.



Children walk along a street in the Eastwood area of Rotherham, England, on Oct. 6, 2014. An inquiry revealed on Aug. 26, 2014, that some 1,400 minors were sexually abused in Rotherham over a 16-year period. The inquiry followed the 2010 conviction of five men who were found guilty of grooming teenage girls for sex. Oli Scarff/AFP via Getty Images

In 2014, Cryer [said](#) in The Guardian that she believed other politicians had heard similar stories but chose to ignore them.

Cryer added that she asked a Muslim councillor of Pakistani heritage to approach mosque elders with a list of 35 alleged perpetrators.

The imams reportedly dismissed the matter, saying: “It’s nothing to do with us.”

In 2007, the women and children’s rights campaigner and journalist Julie Bindel was one of the first to [report](#) in The Times of London that many northern towns in Lancashire and Yorkshire were experiencing a significant rise in “pimping” within the Asian community.

“It was a very uncomfortable scenario, not least because many of these crimes had an identifiable racial element: the gangs were Asian and the girls were white,” Bindel wrote.

“The authorities, in the shape of politicians and the police, seemed reluctant to acknowledge this aspect of the crimes; it has been left to the mothers of the victims to speak out.”

Andrew Norfolk 2012: The Times Investigates

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Although there were prosecutions the patterns didn’t come to light until a journalist joined the dots further.

Andrew Norfolk, a The Times of London journalist, was instrumental in [breaking](#) the Rotherham grooming scandal.

At least 1,400 children, girls as young as 11, had been raped by multiple attackers and sexually exploited in the South Yorkshire market town.

Norfolk's series of investigations on grooming gangs resulted in many articles from 2011 onwards.

One investigation revealed a confidential 2010 police [report](#) that warned thousands of such crimes were being committed in South Yorkshire each year by networks of Pakistani-heritage men.

Offenders were identified to police but not prosecuted.

One of the alleged crimes—for which no one was prosecuted— included a 13-year-old girl who was found at 3 a.m. with disrupted clothing in a house with a large group of Asian men who had fed her vodka.



A teenage girl, who claims to be a victim of sexual abuse and alleged grooming, poses in Rotherham in Rotherham, England, on Sept. 3, 2014. Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Despite a neighbor reporting the girl's screams to police, authorities arrested the child for being drunk and disorderly and did not question the men.

Norfolk's reporting won him prestigious journalistic accolades, [including](#) such as the Paul Foot Award in 2012, the Orwell Prize in 2013, and the Journalist of the Year at the British Journalism Awards in 2014.

Speaking to the BBC in 2024, Norfolk [said](#) that even he "massively underestimated" the scale of the abuse.

"They were treated like sub-human species for the pleasure of these men," he said.

Norfolk said he came up against a "conspiracy of silence" when he tried to elicit responses from police forces and councils.

A 2012 Office of Children's Commissioner [study](#) under a Conservative government was the first to set out the scale of the sexual exploitation of children and young people in Britain.

It identified 16,500 children who were at "high risk of sexual exploitation" between 2010 and 2011.

However, Norfolk [criticized](#) the report on the BBC at the time as a "missed opportunity," saying it generalized the issue to all men and failed to address the racial and cultural factors central to the crimes.

"In a country which has a 7 percent Asian population, 35 percent of the identified abusers were Asian. And if you break that down further, less than 2 percent of the population of this country is Pakistani, and

16,500
CHILDREN

A 2012 government study identified 16,500 children who were at 'high risk of sexual exploitation' between 2010 and 2011.

overwhelmingly, the men doing this are of Pakistani origin,” he said.

“And there was a chance to venture into sensitive areas here to try to begin the process of understanding why this crime model has put down such deep roots, and it’s been missed, and that’s a great shame,” he said.

There have been reports of grooming gangs in towns and cities, including Rochdale, Telford, Oxford, Huddersfield, Newcastle, Bradford, Keighley, and more.

GB News said that it [identified](#) 50 towns and cities where child exploitation gangs have operated or are operating.

The gangs often operate through takeaway restaurants and taxi drivers, using these locations to groom and abuse children, according to a government [report](#).



Reports and Investigations

Numerous reports and investigations have been conducted into the grooming gangs scandal, including those in Rochdale, Oxford, and Huddersfield, among others.

Professor Alexis Jay released a 2013 [report](#) that was commissioned by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council into the scale of abuse of 1,400 children, in Rotherham, from 1997 to 2013.

“In just over a third of cases, children affected by sexual exploitation were previously known to services because of child protection and neglect,” Jay said in the report.

“It is hard to describe the appalling nature of the abuse that child victims suffered,” she said, adding that children had been doused in petrol and threatened with being set alight, threatened with guns, made to witness violent rapes, and threatened they would be next if they told anyone.

Jay said agencies relied too heavily on traditional community leaders such as elected members and imams as the “primary conduit of communication with the Pakistani-heritage community.”

In 2022, she chaired a national [inquiry](#) into various forms of child sexual abuse, which did not extensively address the racial elements of grooming gangs.

Some of her recommendations included setting up a national child protection authority and making not reporting abuse a criminal offense.

Political Correctness and Fear of Racist Label

Several investigations said that political correctness influenced authorities' inaction and failure to make decisive interventions.

Commenting on Jay's Rotherham report, former Conservative leader Theresa May [said](#) there was "inadequate scrutiny by councillors, institutionalised political correctness, the covering up of information, and the failure to take action against gross misconduct."



British Prime Minister Theresa May attends a Serious Youth Violence Summit in Downing Street, London on April 1, 2019. Adrian Dennis/Pool via Reuters

A government [review](#) covering 2004 to 2013 found that Greater Manchester Police and children's social care failed to protect vulnerable children in Rochdale and said that they were "left at the mercy of their abusers."

One senior investigating officer told the review investigators that at one point the issue was so widespread that they wanted “any Pakistani-looking taxi driver” carrying a female child passenger to be “stopped by division from tomorrow until further notice.”

“If the driver can’t account for the fare ... snatch them, arrest the driver, impound the car, let’s go into it big style and disrupt it,” the officer said. However, the officer said that none of these drivers were ever stopped.

The officer explained that there are “huge Pakistani, Indian communities up there, and a large proportion of the taxi drivers are from that background.”

“I can only guess that [Greater Manchester Police] patrols were frightened of being tarnished with a race brush for doing it,” the officer said.

The Telford Inquiry [found](#) that more than 1,000 children who had been groomed with child sexual exploitation were ignored because of “nervousness about race.”



The six men convicted of sexually abusing under age girls, (Top L–R) Salah Ahmed El-Hakam, Mohammed Imran Ali Akhtar, and Asif Ali and (Bottom L–R) Nabeel Kurshid, Iqlak Yousaf, and Tanweer Ali. The men were sentenced in November 2018. National Crime Agency

In one case, the Inquiry heard about a school where attempts to raise concerns about the involvement of a Pakistani heritage grooming gang led to overt allegations of racism on the part of school staff from council personnel.

“It is difficult to conceive of a more wrong-headed response or one more designed to discourage complaint,” the report found.

In 2023, former Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak [set up](#) a Grooming Gangs Task Force comprised of specialist officers.



The safety of women and girls is paramount. For too long, political correctness has stopped us from weeding out vile criminals who prey on children and young women.

Former UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak

The plans also included police recording ethnicity data to make sure suspects “cannot evade justice because of cultural sensitivities.”

“The safety of women and girls is paramount. For too long, political correctness has stopped us from weeding out vile criminals who prey on children and young women. We will stop at nothing to stamp out these dangerous gangs,” Sunak said.

Several men have been jailed over their roles in grooming gangs since 2011, according to a government [report](#).



British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (C) and Home Secretary Suella Braverman (R) attend a meeting with the local community and police leaders, following the announcement of a new police task force to help officers tackle grooming gangs, in Rochdale, England, on April 3, 2023. Phil Noble - Pool/Getty Images

Keir Starmer and CPS

In December 2023, GB News [reported](#) that Jess Phillips, Parliamentary under-secretary of state for safeguarding and violence against women and girls, rejected calls for a government inquiry into historic child abuse in Oldham.

Phillips said it was the council's responsibility to commission such an inquiry, citing successful local investigations in Rotherham and Telford.

In his recent social posts, Musk criticized both Phillips and Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer.

Musk suggested Phillips should face legal consequences for her stance on the Oldham inquiry.

And he accused Starmer of failing to prosecute grooming gangs during his tenure as Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) between 2008 and 2013.



Maggie Oliver, the former Greater Manchester Police detective-turned-whistleblower.
Maggie Oliver Foundation/PA

Maggie Oliver, the former Greater Manchester Police detective, who helped uncover widespread abuse in Rochdale, also had strong words against Starmer.

“Conservatives and Labour are all equally to blame [in my opinion], and Keir Starmer as former DPP is perhaps as guilty as anyone I know in where we find ourselves today,” she wrote in a [post](#) on X.

“We all know what’s going on, but I don’t trust a single one of those who to date have been entrusted with keeping our children safe and prosecuting serial rapists. They’ve failed. Repeatedly. Knowingly. **Criminally.**”

On Jan. 6, Starmer defended his [record](#) in a press conference.

“Child sexual exploitation is utterly sickening. For many years, victims were let down by perverse ideas about community relations or protecting institutions above all else,” Starmer said.

“As DPP, I reopened cases, challenged myths, and secured the first major prosecution of an Asian grooming gang in Rochdale.

“This case set a precedent, and many followed its format. We changed the entire prosecution approach to ensure victims were heard.”

Starmer told reporters that he won’t tolerate “politicians jumping on the bandwagon, simply to get attention” when they failed to take

action while in government.

Commenting on Musk's support for jailed activist Tommy Robinson, Starmer said those who support Robinson are "supporting a man who went to prison for nearly collapsing a grooming case, a gang grooming case."



British Metropolitan Police officers arrest activist Tommy Robinson during a demonstration to protest against anti-Semitism, in London on Nov. 26, 2023. Justin Tallis/AFP via Getty Images

Robinson, whose real name is Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, is an anti-Islam activist and a divisive figure. He is serving an 18-month prison sentence for contempt of court after he admitted to repeating false allegations against a Syrian refugee.

He has made investigations and documentaries about child grooming gangs in Telford, where he alleged police corruption and bribery between senior officers and local businessmen.

A Typical Example: Rochdale Town

The Greater Manchester town of Rochdale has seen better days.

Once a booming mill town and textile manufacturing hub during the Industrial Revolution, it has faced years of decline.

Today, 32.8 percent of its population lives in areas ranked among the most deprived 10 percent in the country, according to government [data](#).

The town has also experienced significant demographic changes, with immigration from Pakistan increasing steadily since the mid-20th century, which is now the second most represented country of birth there, according to Census [data](#).

Former Labour MP Simon Danczuk said he was warned by senior party figures not to mention the ethnicity or religion of grooming gang members when he was the MP for Rochdale from 2010 to 2017.

Under Operation Span, Abdul Aziz, Adil Khan, and Qari Abdul Rauf were among nine men convicted in 2012 over the rape and trafficking of teenage girls.

The story was made into a BBC [drama](#) in 2017, where it shows the victims having to endure the trauma of living in the same town as their rapists.

Rauf and Khan are still living at their homes in Rochdale, despite repeated efforts to deport them to Pakistan.

According to The Sun, Khan and Rauf will only be deported if Pakistan agrees to take them back, which it is allegedly refusing to do so.



Mugshots of grooming gang members Adil Khan (L) and Qari Abdul Rauf (R) after their arrest in Rochdale, England, in 2010. The men were convicted in May 2012. Greater Manchester Police

Former Labour Member of Parliament Simon Danczuk told The Epoch Times that he was warned by senior party figures not to mention the ethnicity or religion of grooming gang members when he was the MP for Rochdale from 2010 to 2017.

He named the now-deceased Tony Lloyd, then chair of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

“He was hoping to run for Greater Manchester Police Commissioner and was worried that linking ethnicity and Islam to the scandal would hurt his electoral chances,” Danczuk said.

Danczuk said that he worked with Sara Rowbotham, a National Health Service (NHS) sexual health worker and whistleblower, who gathered evidence that helped lead to the imprisonment of the nine men.

“She worked for the NHS as a community worker and was trying to get the girls referred into social services for care. She knew they were being abused, but social services were rejecting her referrals,” Danczuk said.

“In November 2012, there was a debate on child abuse in Parliament. I made a speech that had two parts: one was about the grooming gangs and their attempted cover-up, and the other was about Cyril Smith. I named Cyril Smith, my predecessor as MP for Rochdale, as a pedophile,” he said.



Simon Danczuk, the Reform UK candidate in the Rochdale by-election, campaigns for votes on an open top bus in Rochdale, England, on Feb. 27, 2024. Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

Smith, who died in 2010, was unmasked as a serial pedophile who had raped and abused scores of boys in Rochdale for decades.

“That was the first time Smith had been named publicly,” said Danczuk.

“I connected the two stories, pointing out that the girls in the grooming scandal were abused because they were poor, working-class girls, and Smith’s victims were poor, working-class boys. Vulnerable young people had been failed again and again.”

Campaigner Sammy Woodhouse, who was a victim of a Rotherham child grooming gang, welcomed Musk’s intervention.

“Elon Musk has raised more awareness around the world in regards to children in the U.K. being groomed, abused, raped, tortured, trafficked, and murdered than anyone else in British history, and yet people are sat here moaning about it and picking him apart,” she [wrote](#) on X on Jan. 6.

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