

Priti Patel publishes paper on group-based child sexual exploitation

The Home Secretary has today published a paper on the characteristics of group-based child sexual exploitation offending making clear that more will be done by government, law enforcement and partners to better safeguard children and tackle perpetrators.

The findings provide safeguarding partners with an overview of the current evidence in relation to group-based offending.

The paper sets out the limited available evidence on the characteristics of offenders including how they operate, ethnicity, age, offender networks, as well as the context in which these crimes are often committed, along with implications for frontline responses and for policy development.

An External Reference Group, consisting of independent experts on child sexual exploitation, reviewed and informed this work. Members included Labour MP for Rotherham Sarah Champion, Conservative MP for Wakefield Imran Ahmad Khan, survivor and campaigner Sammy Woodhouse, and Simon Bailey, National Police Chiefs Council lead on child protection.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

Victims and survivors of group-based child sexual exploitation have told me how they were let down by the state in the name of political correctness. What happened to these children remains one of the biggest stains on our country's conscience.

This paper demonstrates how difficult it has been to draw conclusions about the characteristics of offenders. That is why the government's forthcoming Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy will commit to improving our understanding of child sexual abuse – including around ethnicity.

This will enable us to better understand any community and cultural factors relevant to tackling offending – helping us to safeguard children from abuse, deliver justice for victims and survivors, and restore the public's confidence in the criminal justice system's ability to confront this issue.

Sammy Woodhouse said:

It was extremely important for me to be a part of the External Reference Group as I was subjected to exploitation and abuse as a child and failed by authorities. Unfortunately this is something that is still happening today and will continue to happen in the

future.

As a country we still do not understand abuse and exploitation, and the government is not doing enough to prevent and tackle it, so I welcome the publication of this paper. I want perpetrators to be held to account for their criminal activity regardless of race or religion because unfortunately they haven't, and it still remains a subject that we cannot openly discuss. No one should be exempt.

Simon Bailey, National Police Chiefs Council lead on child protection, said:

Since 2014 the police service's response to group-based child sexual exploitation has significantly improved and I remain committed to continue this work, to strengthen it, to build on the investments and to improve it further. All victims of child sexual exploitation have a right to expect the best possible response from the police service.

The research commissioned by the Home Secretary into group based child sexual exploitation has highlighted just how complex and challenging this particular form of child sexual abuse is and acknowledges there are significant gaps in our knowledge and understanding.

As a member of the External Reference Group I welcome the commitment to improve data collection and the proposal to commission further research on behaviour including pathways of offenders, the effectiveness of disruption and preventative measures. I look forward to the next steps in relation to this crucial area of work.

The paper summarises studies which suggest individuals committing group-based child sexual exploitation are predominantly, but not exclusively, male and often under the age of 30.

Some studies have indicated an over-representation of Asian and Black offenders. However, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the ethnicity of offenders as existing research is limited and data collection is poor.

The lack of robust data on ethnicity and other factors is disappointing, however community and cultural factors are clearly relevant to understanding and tackling offending, and an approach to deterring, disrupting, and preventing offending tailored to the communities in which it occurs is needed.

Therefore, a commitment to improve the collection and analysis of data on child sexual abuse, including in relation to characteristics of offenders such as ethnicity and other factors, will be included in the forthcoming Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy to ensure the factors and context of offending are understood and confronted.

Studies indicate that motivations differ between offenders, but that a sexual interest in children is not always the predominant motive. Financial gain and a desire for sexual gratification are common motives, and misogyny and disregard for women and girls may further enable the abuse.

Offenders can come from a range of social backgrounds – some have been stable middle-class professionals, some of whom were married, whilst others have had more chaotic lifestyles.

Materials used in the paper included published academic research, official statistics and published work by organisations working in the child sexual exploitation area, as well as a series of interviews with police officers and safeguarding officers involved in investigating this type of offending.

Insight gained from this paper will be used to improve guidance to local agencies in identifying and disrupting this form of offending, and work with police to tackle organised exploitation by using improved analysis and sharing of data.

The government will soon publish the Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy, which will outline a whole system response to tackling all forms of child sexual abuse, including group-based offending.

This paper will play an important role in the Strategy and its implementation, informing current and future work the government will undertake to tackle, prevent and disrupt this crime.

The full paper is available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).