

EXCLUSIVE

Rotherham police chief: we ignored sex abuse of children

Race fears stopped us acting, victim's father told

**Andrew Norfolk, Chief Investigative Reporter**

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An inquiry found that between 1997 and 2013 more than 1,400 children in Rotherham were exposed to severe levels of sexual abuse and violence CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES

A senior police officer admitted that his force ignored the sexual abuse of girls by Pakistani grooming gangs for decades because it was afraid of increasing “racial tensions”, a watchdog has ruled.

After a five-year investigation, the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) [upheld a complaint](#) that the Rotherham officer told a missing child’s distraught father that the town “would erupt” if it was known that Asian men were routinely having sex with under-age white girls.

The chief inspector is said to have described the abuse as “P\*\*\* shagging” and to have said it had been “going on” for 30 years: “With it being Asians, we can’t afford for this to be coming out.”

His incendiary language features in a confidential report by the watchdog that upholds six complaints against South Yorkshire police by a former child victim of sexual exploitation.

Its 13-page document, seen by *The Times*, was issued two days after a critical review of multiple police failings during a botched inquiry into the organised sexual abuse of vulnerable young girls by men of Pakistani heritage [in Manchester](#).

The Rotherham complainant was repeatedly abused over several years from 2003. The IOPC said it was “very clear that you were sexually exploited by Asian men” and upheld a complaint that police “took insufficient action to prevent you from harm”.

Until now police forces across the north and the Midlands have consistently denied that concerns about upsetting community sensitivities or accusations of racism were a factor in their past failure to tackle grooming gangs.

Priti Patel, the home secretary, said last night that the Rotherham and Manchester scandals represented “a failure of the state to fulfil one of its fundamental roles, protecting our children”. “Institutionalised, corrosive behaviour that disregards victims has to end,” she said. “Tackling this abuse is a priority for the Home Office, which is why I have accelerated the delivery of the Tackling Child Sex Abuse strategy that will put victims first. There will be no no-go areas.”

An investigation by *The Times* into child grooming in towns across the north prompted an independent inquiry. Its 2014 report found that between 1997 and 2013 more than 1,400 Rotherham children were exposed to severe levels of sexual abuse and violence by groups of men who were “almost all” of Pakistani heritage. To date, 36 men have been convicted for crimes related to the scandal.

The watchdog has informed the young woman that its report has been shared with the South Yorkshire force, which “agreed with our findings”. She was told that the IOPC was unable to identify the chief inspector.

It interviewed 16 police officers known to have had dealings with the girl during her years of exploitation but the report said that “none of them could recall their involvement with you”. Operation Linden, its inquiry into complaints of alleged wrongdoing by South Yorkshire officers in connection to such crimes, was launched in late 2014.

Its scrutiny of the young woman’s allegations formed one strand of a larger operation that has featured 91 investigations. It has not been revealed whether misconduct charges have been brought. At the time, her parents’ fear that she was being abused by adults was magnified by a growing frustration that police did not take their concerns seriously and viewed the vulnerable girl as a “naughty kid, a teenager playing up”.

Her father told *The Times* that this impression was confirmed by his conversation with the senior officer. “She’d been missing for weeks and he was talking as though she was an adult doing it of her own free will. He said it had been going on for 30 years and that in his day they used to call them ‘P\*\*\* shaggers’. I told him she was a child and this was child abuse.”

The complainant and her family said they were pleased by the watchdog’s findings but did not believe that any officer would be held to account.

Its final report is yet to be published.

Steve Noonan, the IOPC’s director of major investigations, said that its Rotherham investigation was “continuing to make significant progress”.

“We have completed more than 90 per cent of the inquiries. Our priority has been, and always will be, the welfare of the many survivors of child abuse we have been engaging with,” he said. “As their individual cases conclude, we provide them with a personal update on our findings.”

South Yorkshire police said it recognised the failings of its past and accepted the watchdog’s findings. The chief inspector’s reported comments were “not something we tolerate in today’s force” and it was “unfortunate that no individual officer has been identified”.

“Since 2014 we have developed a far deeper understanding of child sexual exploitation,” it added.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/police-chief-we-ignored-sex-abuse-of-children-hgrhc358v?region=global>

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