

YAHOO NEWS

THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN

RAPED AND ABUSED

[In UK]

by

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Sky News Reporter

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<http://uk.news.yahoo.com/report-thousands-children-raped-abused-024745334.html>

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At least 2,409 children were raped or abused by gangs or groups in England between August 2010 and October 2011, according to the Office of the Children's Commissioner.

Its interim report - the most in-depth investigation to date of child exploitation by gangs and groups in England - found a further 16,500 children were at "high risk" of abuse.

Deputy Children's Commissioner Sue Berelowitz told Sky News the figures were likely to be an "under-counting".

"Agencies across England are not sufficiently aware of the warning signs and they are not taking action to protect children," she said.

"There are, of course, some who are doing good work on this, but too many are not taking this seriously enough, which means some children are falling through the net.

"It's a very, very worrying situation. It's absolutely not good enough that there are children in need of protection and are not being protected."

Much of the evidence presented in the report is too harrowing and graphic to be reported here.

It comes just months after nine Asian men, who groomed white girls as young as 13 in Rochdale with drink and drugs, were jailed at Liverpool Crown Court.

But Ms Berelowitz insisted the scenario of Asian men targeting white girls was "just one of a number of models", and warned that if investigators concentrate on those patterns, victims could be missed.

White men form the largest group of perpetrators in gangs and groups, according to the report.

Some 28% of the victims brought to the attention of the inquiry were from black and ethnic minority backgrounds.

The report looks at the nature of sexual, physical and emotional abuse.

It also highlights the use of mobile phones, social networking sites and other forms of technology through which perpetrators groom, bully and pursue victims - and the impact of violent pornography.

The report authors say it is "clear that sexually exploited children are not always identified even when they show signs of being victims".

They are now calling for "urgent action" to make sure that all agencies are made explicitly aware of the warning signs of child exploitation, and act on them.

Those signs include children going missing, offending, drug and alcohol abuse, self-harming and mental health problems.

It is also encouraging agencies to share information and work together.

Councillor David Simmonds, chairman of the Local Government Association's children and young people board, said: "While these are uncomfortable lessons for the organisations tasked with looking after children, they will help to ensure improvements are put in place to better protect young people in future."

Andrew Flanagan, chief executive of the NSPCC, said: "This report quite clearly shows that the terrible problem of children being groomed for sexual abuse is widespread and needs urgent action to bring it to a halt.

"Sex offenders come from all backgrounds but, if there is a problem with one community in a particular area, we must be bold enough to address it and not just turn a blind eye."

Shadow home secretary Yvette Cooper said the evidence should act as "a wake-up call to the Government and other agencies that urgent action is needed".

If you are a child or young person affected by abuse or exploitation, you can call Childline for advice and support 24 hours a day on 0800 11 11.

If you are an adult who needs support or information, or are concerned about a child or young person, call the NSPCC helpline on 0808 800 5000.

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