

Child Grooming and Sexual Exploitation: A National Discussion



'As part of our ongoing battle to safeguard children, we at roshni held the first major conference in Scotland on the issue of Child Grooming and Sexual Exploitation. The feedback from over a hundred service providers and public officials who attended this event has directly informed this report. This report is intended to inform debate and suggest recommendations to ensure that Scotland is the safest place for children and young people to grow and develop. We want a safe Scotland, safe for all'. Ali Khan, Chairman

Our Projects



Foreword

For over a decade Roshni have been working tirelessly to ensure that children across Scotland are protected from abuse in all its many guises. In recent times the media has particularly seized upon Child Sexual Exploitation, more commonly referred to as 'Grooming', with emphasis on several high profile cases involving Pakistani abusers and young, white vulnerable victims. Debate began to grow around ethnicity, faith, culture and gender without any clear discussion on the matter developing.

On 25th June 2012 Roshni held an event to discuss these issues in a constructive, pro-active manner with individuals from the public, private and third sector. This was and remains the only significant conference in Scotland to tackle sensitive issues head-on with input from over a hundred high-ranking public officials and members of Scotland's diverse minority ethnic communities. The debate that ensued was certainly thought provoking. The keynote speaker, Nazir Afzal OBE, Chief Prosecutor for the North West of England, offered an insight into his own expertise in the field, before the



audience posed questions and offered their personal reflections.

One of the points consistently raised throughout the evening was that more research needed to be done on the subject of Sexual Grooming. Roshni welcomes and supports the Scottish Government's decision to commission the University of Bedfordshire to conduct research into child sexual exploitation in Scotland. Roshni also remains committed to working in partnership with other agencies to support safeguarding mechanisms for vulnerable young people.

Best wishes

Ali Khan

you can contact Ali on twitter @roshniscotland or by email ali@roshni.org.uk

1 Is there any connection between child sexual exploitation and race or culture?

Child Sexual Exploitation is often aligned in the media to issues of **race and culture**, particularly following the Rochdale case where nine Asian men were found guilty of sexual offences against children. The suggestion from some sides has been that child sexual exploitation is inherently linked to both race and culture.

The response we received to this question has been overwhelmingly, **'No.'** It was repeated on several occasions that the real problem is vulnerability of the young girls, rather than the race of their abusers. Often the girls themselves had become part of the 'night economy', alone on the street late at night. This increased vulnerability is what allows predators access to them, regardless of race or culture. It was said that every community has vulnerable children and every abuser will seek to use that vulnerability to satisfy the desire to abuse. We should not be surprised that abusers will act across communities to take advantage of vulnerability. This is why society as a whole must co-operate on this issue. **The issue is not race, but vulnerability and opportunity.**

Moreover, it was suggested that the media has been 'pushing' the stereotype of a Pakistani Asian abuser when in reality the most common abuser is a white man acting alone.

The overwhelming sentiment in terms of the feedback we received was summed up by one respondent who said 'Abusive persons and vulnerable children and young people unfortunately exist amidst all races, religions and cultures.'

Concerns were raised about wider generational attitudes towards women, however. It was suggested that our society as a whole, not simply the Asian community, tend to view women as objects. One respondent remarked that 'there's a question for all of us about what we do, what messages are we giving boys or what messages are they getting about the way to treat girls.'

Another argued that the objectification of women in the media contributes to the idea that young women are 'up' for anything, which in turns fuels vulnerability. It was also noted by one respondent that **'Child Sexual Exploitation happens across society and is not inherently an issue around race ...** Values and attitudes, many of which are held by wider society fuel some of the misogynistic behaviour seen in the recent high profile cases.

"It is a diversion to talk about race and culture', it is far more helpful to focus on how we can ensure that children are never allowed to be so vulnerable again"

2 Does the high proportion of Asian perpetrators involved in group on-street grooming indicate a wider racial trend?

The feedback here was very similar to the responses detailed above. One respondent commented that 'I don't think it is an ethnic problem, I think that in most communities the exploitation of children for sexual purposes is considered a vile practice, regardless of what community you belong to.' This was echoed in other comments which said 'the problem is not about race or community but about abusing adults.'

Furthermore, it was suggested that **focusing on racial trends draws attention away from looking at the whole picture.**

It was argued that if we try to identify trends, focussing particularly on certain communities, we will find abuse there while missing cases elsewhere, resulting in a highly undesirable situation. However, some respondents did suggest that they would like to see improvements being made in terms of gathering statistics as they felt that the current incomplete information available from CEOP needed improvement so as to inform debate.

Several respondents wanted to emphasise that the girls who often congregate on the streets late at night tend to be white. Therefore whatever the race of the abuser it would seem that they are targeting members of the white community.

Therefore more needs to be done to protect these vulnerable children and identify why they are vulnerable, rather than heavily focussing on the race of their abusers.

One respondent, a social worker, commented that 'Wherever there is vulnerability there are some who see it as an opportunity. As a community we have a responsibility ... to change attitudes both in the perpetrators and in those in the wider community who may have a 'She was asking for it'

"Child Sexual Abuse happens across class and culture."

view.' This echoes what was said above in relation to changing societal attitude to women as a whole, which was a strong theme in all feedback.

It was also mentioned by many respondents **that support services find it difficult to engage on this issue for fear of being branded 'racist.'** One respondent suggested that 'We need to support agencies in how to deal with minority ethnic offenders with confidence through better training and more partnership and employment from minority communities themselves.' Another stated that 'there is a fear of being branded culturally insensitive and that the way forward is open dialogue making clear the issue is societal, not ethnic.'

3 Is the high proportion of young white female victims a product of racial and culture targeting?

The emphasis here was very much upon the vulnerability of all young people, whether they be minority ethnic or from the majority community.

A recurring theme was **vulnerability**, and it was noted that ‘victims are those least at home. If young people have more time outdoors and if discipline is weak in the home, they are greater at risk. This reflects on population not race.’ Almost all respondents mentioned their belief that the issue was one of vulnerability and not of race.

Many respondents were also keen to note that **abusers seize power wherever they can do so without detection**, and this can in part account for the victims being from outwith their own communities.

An interesting point was made in relation to abuse of power. Often the young girls

“I think the predators can spot vulnerable girls and target this group no matter their race”

who are targeted are targeted because the abusers are able to play the role of their ‘boyfriend’ before they go on to

abuse. In Asian communities, of differing origins, the practice of ‘having a boyfriend’ is not common among young girls. Therefore he abusers target young white girls, as they are open to the idea of

being their ‘girlfriend.’ This is yet another example of abusers **exploiting the trust** of young vulnerable women who have accepted them into their lives under false pretences. This is not ‘racially targeting’ as such but is another case of targeting the vulnerable.

Emphasis once more was placed upon society’s attitude in general to young women. It was suggested that ‘Young vulnerable white girls are not respected by white men or by society generally.’ While this is a controversial, and perhaps overly-generalised statement, several other respondents also flagged up concerns on the issue of respect which suggests this is something which urgently requires to be addressed.

Ultimately, the conclusion was that the issue of child sexual exploitation was about young people who **are identified in terms of their vulnerability rather than their race**.

“The issue is about vulnerability, not race. We need to think in terms of how to protect the vulnerable in our communities”

4 Should more focus be placed on open discussion on child sexual exploitation, especially within ME communities?

We received a very positive response on this question, with the majority of respondents suggesting that open dialogue is the most important element in a strategic approach to child sexual exploitation.

One respondent argued that **early intervention** was particularly important saying, 'I think there needs to be discussions within the community where we look within our communities to expose and educate.' This was echoed by another respondent who called for 'teaching whole communities healthy and balanced relationships and respect.'

Significantly, one of our respondents, a leading Islamic cleric, argued that child sexual exploitation should be addressed within religious institutions. He said, 'As an Imam when I look at this case I ask myself, have I failed or have Imams in the UK failed in addressing this issue? There's a large number of Muslims who come to pray and it is the best way to educate people...It would be **a very good idea for mosques to introduce Islamic sex education** where we can teach the children to respond to sexual situations.'

This eagerness to talk about problems in a religious setting was voiced by many respondents. One remarked that 'we need to keep talking, otherwise it will go back underground. We need to target religious places of worship to address these issues.'

There was also a desire for education and discussion to be developed in schools. It

was noted that there is a lot of stigma around this subject which is often viewed as being 'taboo.' Moreover, there can be some ignorance surrounding child sexual exploitation and therefore education and discussion are vital.

One respondent also highlighted the important role women, particularly mothers, have to play in this

discussion. It was said that 'It is of real importance that we work with women's groups on these issues to inform them and empower them to act in cases where a swift response is essential.' It was suggested that through mothers and faith leaders, and also by educating young people themselves, we will be able to challenge abuse and abusive practices.

"Child sexual exploitation needs to be more openly discussed across all communities, utilising all relevant institutions to develop a better understanding of the issue"

5 How does the situation in Scotland regarding child sexual exploitation compare to the rest of the UK?

It was stated during discussion that there is an extensive problem in Scotland regarding Child Sexual Exploitation. A spokesperson for the police noted the creation of a dedicated unit and the extensive work they engage in:

“Every single day they are out, they are involved in the recovery of laptops, collecting phones for submission and really it is phenomenal what they are doing seven days a week. I think you could be doing this every single day for the next 365 and still recover computers and laptops. It’s absolutely massive”

The feedback after the event suggested a lack of awareness concerning the extent of the issue, with numerous respondents, including Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People, saying ‘There is such a dearth of reliable information that it is difficult to compare regions within the UK.’ Many argued that there is a lack of reliable evidence concerning the extent of CSE in Scotland and that we need to ‘harness the knowledge we have in Scotland and conduct more research.’ It is clear that more research is required as the issue is still very much ‘under the radar.’

Possible solutions in terms of tackling the problem included ‘a **more coordinated approach of all agencies** concerned, including third sector support organisations’ and an ‘improved multi agency response.’

It was also suggested that legislation needed to be improved in this field. One respondent commented that ‘the whole subject of sexual crimes and exploitation needs to be looked at and re-categorised’ while another suggested that ‘like forced marriage, we need better definitions and more detailed legislation.’ It is also important to note that several respondents suggested that the problem was not the legislation per se, but the implementation: ‘the legislation may be sufficient but we could potentially use it in a more focussed way.’

“There is more of an interest in the subject of Child Sexual Exploitation nowadays but we are not addressing the situation particularly well.”

6 Is the opinion of young people being considered by bodies working to address child sexual exploitation?

An overwhelming majority of the respondents wanted young people to be consulted on this issue but few felt that this was currently happening.

It was noted that there has been **no recent consultation** in relation to these issues, although it was also emphasised that Aileen Campbell MSP (Scotland's Minister for Children and Young People) is deeply committed to learning through the expertise of organisations that have a great deal of knowledge and experience as well as connections with children and young people.

Suggestions as to how to consult with young people included using **established access points** such as schools, religious organisations and youth clubs as well as more innovative methods such as online and text campaigns. One respondent stated that many young people want to express their opinions but do not feel empowered to do so.

One respondent in particular argued that Child Protection Committees must begin

“Talk to them, but much more importantly – listen to them!”

to engage more closely with voluntary sector projects in order to have more grassroots level interaction

with young people. Equally, a Child

Protection Coordinator also stated that s/he would like to see more multi-agency working so as to embed children's views in future

planning. The good work carried out by Rape Crisis Scotland, the Scottish Youth Parliament, Young Scot and roshni was commented upon but it was said that links needed to be built across the relevant sectors.

Many respondents **wanted Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People to be more engaged on the issue** while most respondents argued that schools needed to be more proactive in this area.

Significantly, it was suggested by several respondents that the lack of sex education, particularly in South Asian families, was a real hindrance in this field. Therefore any consultation must be handled with **particular sensitivity** when dealing with members of this community. It was suggested that 'To get South Asian young people to engage you will need to get their parents on board.' Another remarked that 'We have to adopt an intergenerational approach on this issue.'

“We need to learn from our children and young people as well as concern ourselves with educating them.”

7 Are organisations effectively working together to tackle child sexual exploitation?

Unfortunately, most respondents felt that **organisations are not working well together in this field**. Firstly, this was said to be because all the organisations that should be involved are not involved: 'The Child Protection Committees and the strategic lead in Scotland know of all these issues and yet a lot of the things that are happening concerning child abuse in Scotland are coming nowhere near the Committees – We're not somehow joining up a lot of this to make sense and to work well.' Another respondent commented that 'I think organisations have different perspectives and a great deal of energy goes into small initiatives, which are not joined up... I would like to see more joined up working.'

A barrier to joined-up working which was mentioned

several times was **a lack of knowledge and training**: 'Organisations need to work collectively but they can only do this if they have the knowledge and confidence to work in this area as child sexual exploitation needs to be dealt with sensitively, taking into consideration cultural barriers.' Another respondent also wanted to see more training but noted fears around the expense

"A multi-agency response is what is required. We need to work together if we want to tackle this problem."

associated with training on culturally sensitive issues.

Another key issue was a lack of information sharing, with the comment being made by one attendee that 'Pretty much every authority I have spoken to tells me that they are not given enough information...so they're really trying to start from scratch with these young girls.' Many noted that social media such as twitter, blogs and facebook can be a good means of sharing general, non-sensitive information which can be used as a learning tool. Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People called on **more effective use of information** sharing protocols for vulnerable young people, which have been developed in some areas including Glasgow.

Respondents also noted specific challenges in tackling child sexual exploitation which faced their own organisations. These ranged from cultural barriers, such as honour and shame, to a lack of education. One respondent summed up general consensus in saying that 'we have difficulties as there is a sense of denial in some communities and a real reluctance to report sexual abuse to the authorities.'

8 What should the priorities be for organisations tackling child sexual exploitation?

Respondents suggested that **early intervention** ought to be the highest priority in terms of tackling child sexual exploitation: 'I think early intervention is the most significant issue as we are currently experiencing huge cuts, with still further and deeper cuts to come...identifying issues at an earlier stage will lead to less problems in the

"We need earlier intervention aimed at preventing vulnerability."

future but it is going to be ten, fifteen years before you see a significant benefit and it is all about having the courage to fund these services and stick with them for long enough to see the benefit.'

Another difficulty in terms of early intervention is a lack of resources, with one respondent commenting that 'Often services know who vulnerable children are but don't have the resources for early intervention.'

Moreover, it was said that priorities for parents ought to **include open, frank discussion** with their children as 'We need to equip parents with the resources that allow them to know what to say and how to say it.' It was also said to be important for parents to teach children respect for themselves and others, as well as familiarising themselves with

organisations who work in this field and taking on board their parenting advice.

It was said that communities should also prioritise open discussion. Suggestions included equipping communities with the resources they need to generate discussion and encouraging community leaders such as teachers, MSPs, councillors and religious leaders to discuss these issues freely. Communities were said to be the eyes and ears of society, and we must thus utilise their knowledge and influence.

Finally, Scotland **needs to prioritise awareness raising** according to our respondents. One respondent noted that child sexual exploitation is the ultimate taboo across society and therefore is rarely addressed well in terms of awareness raising. They continued by noting the 'disconnect between the importance of the issue and the response it receives. We must seek to give this issue a higher place on the agenda of society as a whole.'

"We need to be willing to engage in honest dialogue and take ownership within our communities of this issue"

Moreover, we need to fund research in this field and discuss the issue at the highest governmental level, with the full backing of senior ministers.

9 How should priorities for addressing child sexual exploitation be different for ME communities?

On this point, what was made most clear was that Child Sexual Exploitation **needs to be addressed without pointing fingers**. One respondent stated that, 'One of the issues for me is that none of this ever happens without people knowing and to me that doesn't make any difference whether we're talking about the Muslim community or the Pakistani community or a White community ... I think there is an issue about getting the message across that actually this is about protecting our children, not about particular communities.'

There was also a clear desire for **culturally sensitive sex education** 'particularly amongst those communities who don't often talk about it' with one respondent stating that 'while some are not keen on

"We need to take into account the cultural aspects of each minority ethnic community."

the new sex education system being rolled out in education it is an important intervention for their children.'

Others noted that we need to work

more directly with faith leaders and minority ethnic community leaders who can use their influence for good.

There were also concerns raised that organisations do not understand how to

engage with minority ethnic communities: 'There is a fear of getting it wrong in some organisations and there is still an ideology of them and us.' There can also be a 'reticence on the part of services who do not want to be

"We need to embed the idea of OUR community, not 'them' and 'us.'"

culturally insensitive and therefore avoid tackling big issues. It is important for services to engage in dialogue with minority ethnic communities so that services are culturally relevant and communities are empowered.' Significant numbers of respondents also noted that **the situation is improving but must continue to do so if we are to tackle the problem effectively**.

Finally, we received a unanimous response on whether further links with minority ethnic communities should be developed with one respondent commenting that, 'The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child applies to EVERY child in Scotland... We need to be committed to developing and strengthening existing links with all communities in Scotland, including minority ethnic communities.'

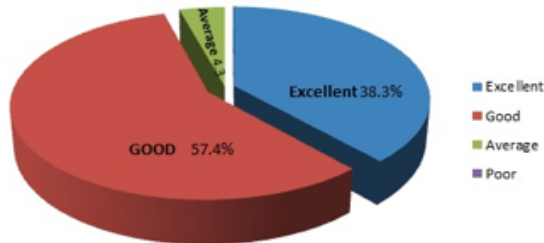
10 Recommendations

Based on the feedback we received from our respondents, we have developed a series of recommendations as follows:

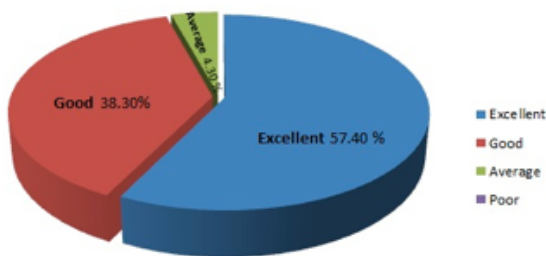
1. More significant research needs to be carried out in this field. It is clear that there is a real lack of Scottish specific information and the Government ought to initiate a consultation and research paper into Child Sexual Exploitation.
2. The issue is not one of race and ought not to be addressed in this way. More is needed to be done via the media to make the public aware of the variety of ethnicities involved in Child Sexual Exploitation.
3. Support services ought to be offered supporting and training so that they are able to engage on the issue without fear of being branded 'racist.' Focus must be placed on the victims, not the perpetrators. We need to refocus on the vulnerability of the child a task that could be taken on by engaging with young people themselves to ensure they are not placed in vulnerable positions. Social services and services for looked after children need more training in this field.
4. Sex education should be introduced in faith institutions and the wider issues surrounding Child Sexual Exploitation should also be discussed in this forum. A more co-ordinated approach in terms of multi-agency working is essential. It may be helpful to have a follow up conference where legislation is discussed and clarified and a best practice response is discussed. Again, the Scottish Government must play an active role here.
5. Young people must be engaged on the topic through established access points such as schools and faith institutions. Information sharing and training must be improved for support organisations. Information must be 'joined up' and networks should be built between the relevant agencies. All relevant agencies must receive appropriate, culturally sensitive training.
6. Parents must be better educated and engaged. Parenting classes should be developed to educate parents about Child Sexual Exploitation and should be delivered in a culturally sensitive manner.
7. The Scottish Government must enter into a dialogue with ME communities on this issue. It would be helpful to discuss the matter with leading community members who can then take the Government message back to a grassroots level.

Appendix 1: Event Feedback

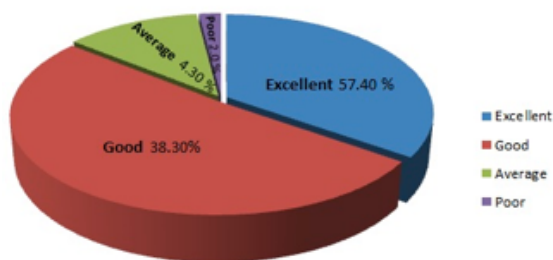
How would you rate the initial presentation at the event?



How would you rate the speakers at the event?



How would you rate the discussion throughout the evening?



Do you think the evening was a helpful discussion of Child Sexual Exploitation?



'I enjoyed the high profile turn out and the expertise of these respected people.'

'It was refreshing to see a genuinely challenging agenda presented head on.'

'Found it to be very interesting with a high standard of attendees all ready to share their experiences, expertise and views.'

'Well done to roshni for bringing together such a diverse group of individuals.'

Appendix 2: Event Attendees

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all attendees:

Barnardo's

NSPCC

Childline

Beyond the Veil

Shelter

Say Women

Minhaj – Ul- Quran UK

The Big Lottery

Ekta Group

Madrasa Taleem Ul Islam

Rape Crisis Scotland

Rape Crisis Argyll & Bute

Quarriers

Health in Mind

Open Secret

Cornerstone

Shakti Women's Aid

Scottish Women's Aid

SAMH

Scottish Catholic Safeguarding

Circle Scotland

Summerston Childcare

Deaf Connections

Big Lottery Fund

CEMVO Scotland

CRER

Inverclyde Council

Edinburgh City Council

Glasgow City Council

Glasgow Child Protection Committee

Glasgow Life

East Ayrshire Council

East Ayrshire Child and Adult Protection Committees

Argyle and Bute Child Protection Committee

South Lanarkshire Council

North Lanarkshire Council

Renfrewshire Council

Renfrewshire Child Protection Committee

NHS

Glasgow Life

Scottish Parliament

Scottish Government Children and Families' Directorate

Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People

SurvivorScotland

Scottish Youth Parliament

Strathclyde Police

Tayside Police

Scottish Police Muslim Association

University of the West of Scotland

Appendix 2: Event Attendees

University of Stirling	Adrian McNeill
University of Dundee	Imran Azim
Lothian and Borders Police	Eilidh Brown
With Scotland	Baillie Fariha Thomas
Stirling & Clackmannanshire Council	Ghulam Nabi
Church of Scotland	Hanzala Malik MSP
Afro Caribbean Women's Association	Humza Yousaf MSP
Women's Support Project	Ifaf Asghar
Scottish Catholic Safeguarding Service	Cllr Jahangir Hanif
SCCYP	Cllr Shabbar Jaffri
Crown Office	Cllr Austin Sheridan
Prince & Princess of Wales Hospice	Rani Bilkhu
Circle Scotland	Satinder Panesar
Deaf Connections	Abdul Khan
SCRA	Mohammed Imran
East Renfrewshire Child Protection Committee	Shaykh Hassan Rabbani
Violence Against Women Network	Shoaib Bhatti
Glasgow Children's Panel	Yvonne Ridley
Dundee Child Care and Protection Committee	
The Scotland Institute	
Glasgow Community Safety Services	
Zia Ul Quran	

Thank you also to all other agencies and individuals who attended the event and/or participated in the online survey.