



URGENT

WHAT IS THE AUDIT?

Commissioned by the Prime Minister and Home Secretary in January 2025, this independent audit was led by Baroness Casey of Blackstock to examine the scale, nature, and response to group-based child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) — often referred to as “grooming gangs.”

The audit draws on survivor testimony, police data, and input from professionals across sectors. It aims to identify systemic failings and recommend improvements to better protect children from organised sexual exploitation.

NATIONAL AUDIT ON GROUP-BASED CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (2025)



7 min read
July 2025



KEY LEARNING FOR PRACTICE

- **Group-based CSEA is organised, persistent, and devastating** — it demands a coordinated, courageous response.
- **Frontline workers are critical** in identifying, disrupting, and preventing abuse.
- **Children must be believed, protected, and supported** — not blamed or ignored.
- **Systemic change** begins with everyday practice: listening, sharing, acting.

KEY FINDINGS



01. Scale and Nature of Abuse

- Group-based CSEA is **widespread and underreported**.
- Victims are often **girls aged 11-17**, though boys are also affected.
- Abuse is typically **coordinated**, involving multiple perpetrators over time.
- Offenders often exploit **power imbalances**, using coercion, threats, and manipulation.

03. Systemic Failures

- Agencies often **failed to join the dots**—missing patterns of abuse across cases and locations.
- There was **denial and minimisation** of group-based exploitation, especially where ethnicity or culture were involved.
- **Licensing failures** (e.g. in taxi services) contributed to enabling abuse.

02. Victim Vulnerability

- Victims frequently have **prior contact with services** due to neglect, family breakdown, or mental health issues.
- Many children were **not believed** or were blamed for their exploitation.
- Survivors described feeling **abandoned by the system**, with delayed or inadequate responses.

04. Data and Intelligence Gaps

- Police and local authorities **lacked consistent data collection** and shared intelligence.
- The new **Complex and Organised Child Abuse Dataset (COCAD)** is a step forward but remains incomplete

Believe and Support Victims

Prioritise believing and supporting children who disclose or show signs of sexual exploitation. Many victims have experienced disbelief or blame when seeking help, which compounds their trauma. Listen actively, validate their experiences, and communicate clearly that they are not responsible for the abuse they have suffered.

Spot the Signs

Be vigilant for behavioural changes, unexplained possessions, or associations with older individuals who may pose a risk. Children who go missing or are found in unfamiliar areas may be experiencing exploitation. These signs should prompt immediate safeguarding action and multi-agency collaboration to assess risk and provide protection.

Multi-Agency Collaboration

Effective safeguarding relies on strong collaboration between agencies. Sharing information and intelligence is vital to identifying patterns of abuse and preventing further harm. Multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASH) and strategy meetings should be used proactively to coordinate responses. Agencies must work together with a shared commitment to child safety, placing the needs of the child above concerns about reputation or organisational boundaries.

Cultural Competence and Courage

Frontline workers must be equipped to address abuse regardless of the cultural, ethnic, or social background of victims or perpetrators. The audit highlighted instances where cultural sensitivities led to denial or minimisation of abuse. Cultural competence involves understanding diverse experiences while maintaining a clear focus on safeguarding and justice.

Trauma-Informed Practice

Children affected by group-based sexual exploitation often carry deep psychological wounds. A trauma-informed approach recognises the long-term impact of abuse and prioritises emotional safety, consistency, and access to therapeutic support. Avoid practices that may re-traumatise victims, such as fragmented service delivery or insensitive questioning.

Read the full report:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-audit-on-group-based-child-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse>