

29th August 2014

Muslim Women's Network UK Statement on the Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham

The report detailing the 16 years of **child sexual exploitation** that took place in **Rotherham** involving more than 1400 children is very disturbing. The ordeal of the young white girls closely mirrors the experiences of Asian girls who are sexually abused by groups of Asian men. Although the majority of the victims are white females, there are no doubt a number of male victims and Asian female victims who have not come to light in the media. Asian offenders in Rotherham also targeted girls from similar backgrounds to their own, however, the smaller number of Asian victims in Rotherham is also reflective of them disclosing and reporting their abuse at a lower rate because of cultural notions of shame and dishonour.

Muslim Women's Network UK (MWNUK) highlighted **35 case studies** of Asian female victims from across England last year in the report, [**Unheard Voices: Sexual Exploitation of Asian Girls and Young Women**](#). Although this report has been referenced in the Rotherham report (on page 94), we are disappointed that some sections of the media continue to portray child sexual exploitation as a race crime. The reality is that sexual predators regardless of ethno-cultural or religious backgrounds, are opportunists, and target the most vulnerable and the most accessible children and young people in society. We found evidence in our research that the perpetrators purposefully exploited vulnerabilities associated with the **Asian culture**. For example, using recordings of the rapes to blackmail victims was a common feature in our findings. MWNUK will now be holding **6 community events** in different towns and cities in the coming months in a concerted effort to raise awareness of issues relating to the sexual exploitation of Asian female victims.

Shaista Gohir, Chair of MWNUK said: *"There are a minority of people in every community who are willing to commit such abhorrent crimes. We must therefore be careful not to tarnish entire communities by providing a false perception that grooming is restricted to Asian communities. Although offenders and victims come from a range of backgrounds, in recent grooming cases, a substantial number have been from a Pakistani background and this cannot be disputed. This may be largely consistent with the representative population of Pakistanis in the different regions of the UK and should be investigated through academic research. Judgments should not be solely based on the cases featured in the media."*

Shaista Gohir added: *"I am not surprised by findings that front line professionals and agencies failed to protect young vulnerable children. This has been a common feature amongst other well known sexual exploitation cases that have already gone to court in Rochdale and Oxford. We found that services and authorities have also neglected Asian victims. While fears of racism may have played a part, it is clear from the Rotherham report, and findings in other local authorities that there has been a tendency not to believe the*

victims and view the incidents as consensual and lifestyle choices. It is alarming that some police officers do not know or understand that sex with an underage child is against the law even if it appears consensual. It is worrying that a number of police officers failed to recognise that adults were manipulating children."

MWNUK believes those in senior positions of power, who took decisions to down play the extent of child abuse and not allocate sufficient resources to investigate the crimes or support the victims, should be **held accountable**. However, we believe these failing are not unique to Rotherham. The likelihood is that similar problems exist in other local authorities and police forces. We now hope professionals and service providers across the UK **review** the way they handle child sexual exploitation cases and proactively start finding ways to reach victims, gaining their confidence and providing channels through which they are able to disclose and report.

Additional Information:

1. Contacts for Media interviews:

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2. The research report conducted by MWNUK, *Unheard Voices: Sexual Exploitation of Asian Girls and Young Women* can be found here: <http://www.mw nuk.co.uk/resourcesDetail.php?id=97> It has been downloaded more than 3000 times

3. **About Muslim Women's Network UK:** MWNUK is the only national Muslim women's organisation in Britain. It is an independent network of women across the UK that shares knowledge, connects the voices, and promotes the needs of diverse Muslim women. The website address for MWNUK is: www.mw nuk.co.uk

4. **Membership:** MWNUK has a membership of over 600 with an onward reach of 50000 women. Most members include academics and students; workers in voluntary sector support services; health professionals; experts in women's rights, diversity policy, disability, and refugees; businesswomen; local government and law enforcement officers; and artists etc