

COPS PROBE 54 CHILD GROOMING GANGS

70 girls missing EVERY NIGHT

By ALEX WELLMAN

HUNDREDS of vulnerable young girls are going missing from care across the country every year.

Every night across England, at least 70 girls are estimated to be missing from council-controlled care homes, a Sunday Mirror investigation has found.

Nearly 800 girls were reported missing overall in a year, with councils admitting children were lost for a total of 9,275 days.

The shock news comes after as seven men were convicted of using vulnerable girls for sex in Oxford, and just weeks after the Sunday Mirror revealed one of Britain's largest child-sex rings in Peterborough. Both gangs were reported to have targeted young girls in care.

Delma Hughes was in care in her youth and has since set up the Siblings Together charity to help brothers and sisters in care continue their relationships.

She told the Sunday Mirror young girls in care were often lured to predators through a false feeling of security as frequently they had no one else taking an interest in them.

She said: "I have worked in local authorities and staff in some homes have said things like "once they are out of the front door they are nothing to do with us".

Delma added: "People in a position to protect these children - the people in the top jobs at councils - they are supposed to be making sure their teams are protecting these children.

"They need to be taking responsibility. They obviously have not done

SUNDAY Mirror INVESTIGATES

shocking scale of underage sex rings



NO INVESTIGATIONS
Derbyshire, Warwickshire, dgg dg-gdggdg ggdg gdgd ggd dg gdg police forces

REFUSED TO GIVE INFO
Staffordshire, dgg dggdggdg ggdg gdgd ggd dg gdg police forces

By JUSTIN PENROSE
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DETECTIVES are investigating at least 54 evil child sex grooming gangs in the UK.

And the true number of paedophile networks is likely to be much higher as many forces failed or refused to respond to requests for information in a Sunday Mirror investigation.

We can also disclose that police in the north of England are prepare to smash the biggest child sex gang ever seen in the UK.

The Sunday Mirror has agreed not to publish the details of the operation but a significant number of arrests are due to take place in the next few days.

Our shocking revelations about the number of grooming gangs in operation come after reporters contacted every police force in England and Wales.

We launched our investigation this week as the issue of child exploitation came into focus when seven paedophiles were convicted of sexually torturing girls as young as 11 in Oxford this week.

Thames Valley Police missed several opportunities to rescue the girls from a life of sexual abuse for the past six years but failed to take action.

The same force has now revealed to us that it is probing 14 MORE child sex rings. Some of the networks even use WOMEN who help to groom youngsters for sex.

XHEAD

The chief constable of Thames Valley Police, Sara Thornton, said: "We are looking at double figures for the number of suspects.

"I think the vast majority are men but there are a couple of women who might have been facilitating exploitation."

Steve Heywood, assistant chief constable of Greater Manchester Police, has now admitted that child exploitation was the force's "No 1 priority at the moment" - above gun

crime. Our investigation reveals the horrific extent of paedophile gangs working to rape children across the UK and why police are taking the problem so seriously.

As a result of our inquiries, a total of 54 investigations were admitted to by police forces.

Of the 43 forces in England and Wales, 31 responded to the Sunday Mirror's request for information.

Seventeen said that they had ongoing probes including Merseyside which would only say they had a "number" of child sex grooming rings being investigated.

Three refused to tell us how many investigations they had - and 12 did not get back to us with a figure.

The largest number of investigations being carried out is in Thames Valley with 14, followed by six in Lancashire - where one of the worst child sex rings was smashed in Rochdale last year.

Greater Manchester and Nottinghamshire Police said they were looking into five separate alleged paedo gangs each while Scotland Yard in London said officers were

By Tazeen Ahmad



Investigative reporter for Channel 4's current affairs show Dispatches

AFTER the convictions in Oxford this week, I've been asked repeatedly: "How widespread is this sickening crime?"

As a reporter investigating child sexual exploitation, I have only uncomfortable answers. People want what happened to be a one-off. If only that were true.

Two years ago, for Dispatches, I spoke to victims and men connected to sex gangs. It was more widespread than anyone admitted.

Since then, the courts have been flooded with grooming cases. The Children's

Commissioner estimates that at least 10,000 children may have been victims.

Fast-forward two years and I meet Sarah, a sweet young woman who giggles nervously. She's uncertain around me because 72 men, some friends she trusted, abused her over a period of four years in Telford, Shrops.

"It was at least once a week, sometimes it was two in one day. I felt like my mind had been shattered like a glass," she says.

Hilary Wilmer from PACE, an organisation that supports families, says it's a myth that

this crime only affects troubled children. "Anyone can be a victim," she tells me, "right across the social spectrum."

I know that's frightening. These crimes are so unpalatable, we look away, hoping they don't touch us. But what if they did?

I'd want people putting pressure on the authorities. I'd want my child to be believed on reporting it. What would you want?

Names have been changed. Dispatches: The Hunt for Britain's Sex Gangs will be on Channel 4 at 9pm on Thursday.

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