

Child abuse inquiry 'scared of racist tag'

It isn't just [Sarah Champion the MP for Rotherham](#) and [The Times](#)

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), which is seeking to establish "what went wrong and why" in relation to past "institutional failure to protect children" from abuse, is investigating child sexual exploitation by "organised networks".

Earlier parts of the inquiry, which have looked at institutions including the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church, focused on many of the worst-known scandals involving such organisations. It was anticipated that the organised networks strand of the inquiry would examine the most infamous examples of group grooming and exploitation.

Sammy Woodhouse, a Rotherham victim, claimed that those running the statutory inquiry, which began in 2015 and has cost £143 million so far, "have not placed survivors at the forefront" and are "selective in what they decide to look at". She added: "If you are going to get to the root of gang-related child sexual exploitation you need to go right to the heart of it. They are trying to bury what happened in places like Rotherham and Rochdale because they're scared of being called racist."

The article details the history of the grooming sex gang trials over this last 10 years, mentioning the most high profile; Rochdale, Rotherham, Oxford, Telford, Burnley, High Wycombe, Leicester, Dewsbury, Peterborough, Halifax and Newcastle upon Tyne.

The IICSA held two weeks of public hearings for its "organised networks" investigation from late September, and a final day

for closing submissions is due to take place on Thursday. It decided to hear no evidence from survivors or those with expert knowledge of the crime pattern.

The inquiry chose instead to select six areas of England and Wales: St Helens, Tower Hamlets in east London, Swansea, Durham, Bristol and Warwickshire “because they represent a range of sizes, demographics and institutional practices”. None of the six has witnessed a major prosecution of a south Asian sex-grooming gang. In all six areas, according to the 2011 national census, the proportion of the population that is of Pakistani origin is lower than the national average.

The Pakistani proportion of population in Tower Hamlets is pretty high if you were to define people of Bangladeshi origin as from East Pakistan, many arrived in London when the two countries were one, East and West Pakistan, the Muslim portion after the partition of India. The criminal activity in [West Yorkshire police make arrests of men](#) who have been abusing girls in Leeds and Cumbria, specifically Barrow in Furness. The trials are fixed for next year.

As chief crown prosecutor for northwest England, Mr Afzal led the groundbreaking 2012 prosecution of nine members of a sex-grooming network who took Rochdale girls across northern England to be sexually abused. He described the IICSA’s conduct of the investigation as “a nonsense”. “With the other strands of this inquiry it’s been about looking back at what went wrong to see what we can learn from those mistakes. This section decided it was going to look forward, but you can’t move forward without looking back at the failures.”

Ms Champion, who campaigns for the child victims of sexual exploitation, said the IICSA’s decision to exclude oral evidence of sex-grooming networks in northern England was extraordinary. “You have to question what they are trying to achieve. It’s more than a missed opportunity. So many survivors pinned their hopes on this inquiry getting to the

truth.”

The inquiry’s final public hearings will take place in December. Reports will be published throughout next year with a final report due to be published in 2022.