

'Hull grooming gang targeted primary school girls'

Humberside Police arrested 34 men under Operation marksman earlier this year. All 34 have been released without charge as the police say "they did not reach the evidence threshold to go to court." Sky News has presented the evidence submitted by the abused girls to to one of the UK's leading child exploitation experts, former chief police officer Jim Gamble. This story will be on Sky News today hourly, on the hour. H/T DF and TB

[Sky News](#) has spoken to three young women who have made serious allegations, naming their attackers, and providing documents to back up their stories. Two others have given supporting testimony.

Operation Marksman was wound down after a two-year investigation, with police telling the alleged victims they had exhausted all lines of inquiry.

But in their first TV interviews, the women at the centre of the case say they believe there was enough evidence to take it to court. Sky News has been examining evidence provided by one young woman called Sarah (not her real name). It includes photographs of texts from a man threatening to kill her if she does not come immediately and have sex with a number of men.

Sarah says at the age of 13 she was groomed by two men, and after two months one of them raped her. She told Sky News: "He tried to kiss me, and I was like 'no get off', and he was like 'no, it's time for you to pay now for all the things we've given you'.

"He'd obviously decided that I was a good enough candidate to

take to the next level," she said. "He introduced me to this other guy and exchanged some money with this other guy, which I've later found out I was sold into the sex trade. . . "

Experts say junior members of gangs are sometimes paid to groom girls in this way.

In a spider graph Sarah later made for the police, she identifies 11 key players who came to the flat – the two groomers, the buyer and some of the regular gang members and clients.

She even numbers them and provides photos to help identify some of the men.

She said: "I was blonde. I had no boobs. I was underdeveloped. I looked young – and that's what they liked – the younger, the better. There were girls as young as primary school (age). I'll never forget that girl that I saw sat there, in her primary school uniform, probably eight or nine years old. She was there with her sister, who was a little bit older. I remember her screaming in that bedroom."

Sarah also drew pictures of items in the flat used to intimidate and control, including a Taser, hammer and handcuffs. She said she was once handcuffed to the radiator and the abuse was sometimes filmed.

"There's videos out there of me as a 13, 14, 15-year-old little girl being raped by men," she said. "I've seen them. They've shown me them. One of the videos is captioned English girl gets f***** against her own will... I was just profit to them."

The Sky report does not mention the 'M' word about the men. There are plenty more references to come about the girls being 'white' or 'English'. This doesn't rule out that the gang are Tibetan or from the Amazon hinterlands or elsewhere, but honestly, have you ever heard of a systematic rape abuse sex gang from those ethnic heritages?

Now aged 19, Sarah was one of several young women who told Sky News they are disappointed the police investigation has stalled.

Sky News has seen a text exchange in 2018 involving one of the men – we are referring to as “Man A” – that Sarah photographed on her phone.



Sarah and other victims said the beauty spot Hessle Foreshore was one of the places the men took them to sexually abuse them, but it mostly happened in flats or hotels.

Throughout this investigation, Sky News will be showing the evidence to one of the UK’s leading child exploitation experts. Speaking about the threatening text, former chief police officer Jim Gamble said: “Number one is he’s committed a criminal offence because that’s a threat to murder, and the Offences Against the Person Act makes that a crime. But what you do see there is the coercive control. You see the fact that the predator is so confident in their ability, their level of competence at controlling these young people, that they don’t even try and hide it or mask it.”

After looking at a thousand pages of evidence seen by Sky News, Mr Gamble added: “I’d be surprised if they’re not able to pass the evidential threshold... because what you do have is significant levels of corroboration.” By corroboration, he is referring to testimony and evidence of the other young women in this case.

However, Humberside Police say they did not reach the evidence threshold to go to court. The police arrested 34 suspects and say they did digital searches on 150 devices seized, and that phone records did not provide supporting evidence. They could find no provenance for the threatening text.

Two other women have told Sky News about allegations against

Man A, including one who claims she was also raped by him. Anna (not her real name) met Sarah because they lived in the same village outside of Hull. One day, Anna contacted Sarah after seeing her number on Man A's phone. In a series of texts, the girls admit to each other that they were groomed and raped by him.

"If they need additional evidence, then go out and get it," Mr Gamble said of Humberside Police. "We need to declare war on this type of behaviour, we need to say it is a priority. It's not just about exploitation, it is about rape by appointment."

["I think it's time to double down.](#) It's time to say 'look, we've had a bit of a brick wall, we are now going to bring some additional resources to bear'.

"I think if we're looking at how do we really make a difference from a criminal justice point of view, that is that we do treat this as seriously as we treat terrorism. "That we use technical surveillance, so that we can monitor where they are, and who they're talking to. This is organised, you know, industrial level rape."

Sky News will be revealing evidence from the different alleged victims over the course of this week.

Detective Chief Inspector Rebecca Dickinson told Sky News: "We haven't identified evidence that supports there is wide scale organised criminality grooming within the Humberside, particularly the Hull area. In relation to this investigation, we can say we have got no organised criminality within Humberside Police, the whole area, for CSE." *Exactly the same denial as that issued earlier this year by Cumbria Police, in the face of allegations by numerous women and girls to the contrary.*

But there is plenty of reported child abuse in the area. In the two years to March 2020, Humberside Police recorded 458 reported rapes of a female aged 15 or under. A fraction of

those cases resulted in charges.

The women who spoke to Sky News provided evidence including diaries with accounts of grooming, photos of the bruising and strangulation marks that they say were caused by the men. There are also school welfare reports which flag numerous warnings of child exploitation including recorded threats from alleged abusers.

In a series of reports this week, Sky News will meet the alleged victims and examine some of the evidence provided.