



## Here We Go Again..... (content note)

[\(Cross-posted with permission from Opinionated Planet\)](#)

We wake up this morning to yet another headline about child sexual exploitation. I'm not actually sure how many more reports I can read without exploding.

Let me say this loud and clear to all news agencies, academics, researchers, reporters, journalists, broadcasters and politicians; **THIS IS NOT NEWS.**

The reason it's not news is because **WE KNOW.**

Anyone who works in social care, youth work or any professions related to children and young people **KNOWS.** We've been telling you about it for years and years but you haven't been listening. The tagline for child sexual exploitation is; it's not hidden, we're just not looking. Well, actually it should be; we're telling you, you're just not listening.

Over and over, the reports talk about how children (predominantly girls) are not listened to, not believed, perceived to be making a choice, unable to be kept safe. All this does is reinforce the idea that young people (predominantly girls) are difficult, out of control, overly sexualised and enticing men into having sex with them.

Over and over, we tell anyone who will listen, that you need a political and structural analysis, that child sexual exploitation is a gendered crime, that these young people (**PREDOMINANTLY GIRLS**) are being exploited and trafficked and abused **BECAUSE THEY ARE GIRLS.** They are viewed as commodities to be exchange for goods, or to pay off debts. They are play things, toys, to be used and abused because it's fun. This is about the drives, urges, power, coercion and control of **GIRLS by MEN.** Adult men.

The media like to pretend that this is about Muslim men, Pakistani men, those 'other' men. It's not. It's not **AT ALL.** Do you believe that white men don't abuse? If you do, you're wrong. And not only are you wrong, you are a dangerous racist. By focusing solely on race and ethnicity, you allow white men, those men **JUST LIKE YOU,** to carry on with their abuse.

Child sexual exploitation happens in every city, every town, everywhere. It's not confined to the areas we have heard about. It's entrenched, endemic patterns of behaviour that are allowed, encouraged and ignored by (predominantly) the police and those in positions of authority.

I want to share a story with you. This is Claire's\* story.

Claire was 16 when we met her. She has been charged with common assault against the staff of her residential home. She was considered to be 'difficult' 'out of control' and 'violent.' The staff were pressing charges against her because that was their policy, and they also felt that Claire needed teaching a lesson.



Claire had been sexually abused from a very young age by her father. By the time we found out about it, she was four years old. Her mother was unable to keep Claire safe so she was sent to live with her grandmother and uncle in Scotland. There, she was repeatedly sexually abused by her uncle over a period of several years. Her trauma response to this abuse meant that her behaviour became more and more difficult to manage and her grandmother could no longer care for her. Claire was returned to her mother's care at the age of 13. Her mother had since separated from her father by that point and had a new partner. Claire's stepfather raped her and, when she disclosed, she was taken into residential care because her behaviour was considered too problematic for foster care.

Claire's life now revolved around using substances to numb the pain of her trauma. She was vulnerable and distressed most of the time and she was almost immediately targeted by older men who spent their time near the residential unit for a reason. They supported her drug habit, fed her alcohol, told her she was beautiful and sexy and that they loved her. Claire didn't believe that anyone had ever loved her like this. She began to disappear for two or three days at a time, refusing to tell staff where she had been. She later disclosed that she had been taken to a variety of parties in hotel and houses all over the Midlands where she had been repeatedly raped by up to twenty men a day. Some of it had been photographed and filmed and used as a way of keeping Claire silent. The staff decided to try and prevent Claire was leaving the home. She had been placed in a unit which operated a physical restraint policy, so whenever Claire attempted to leave she was held down by up to six members of staff. As a victim of significant sexual abuse and assault can you imagine how she reacted? She fought back. She was hugely triggered continually and her only response was to fight her way free. Hence the common assaults. She was criminalised and served a custodial sentence. No one has attempted to help Claire deal with her trauma.

\*not her real name

I have heard Claire's story a thousand times. It might even be your story. The story is repeated in various forms, all over the UK by different girls. Nothing changes for them. They are left to try and survive in a society that doesn't value or believe them when they tell us what's happening to them. They are repeatedly abused. They are victims of sexual and domestic violence. They enter the system and rarely leave it, unless they are very lucky.

Today's report has a number of recommendations. Any professional in the field could have written those. We've heard them all before and I am telling you that nothing will change. Nothing will change because the people who are there to protect, don't. Until training and development of understanding of the gendered nature of child sexual exploitation is mandatory, until professionals in positions of authority understand the patriarchal system that they operate within, we will continue to read these headlines, reports and articles and **NOTHING WILL CHANGE.**