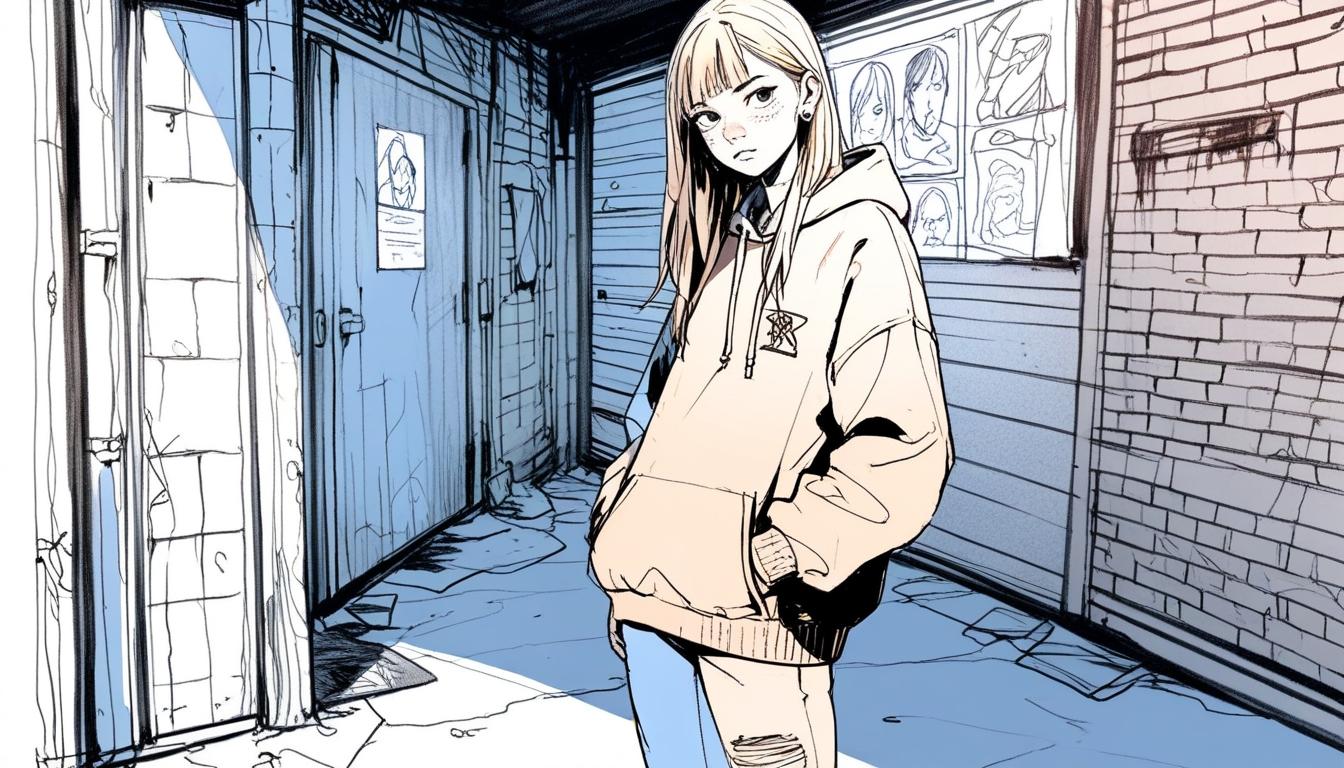
# Concerns rise over increasing involvement of girls in gang violence across the UK



Concerns are rising across the UK as reports emerge of increasing involvement of young girls and women in gang-related violence and criminal activities, targeting vulnerable groups including elderly people, children, and emergency service workers. Recent incidents reveal a disturbing trend that spans various regions, prompting police and experts to call for greater recognition of this issue.

Several high-profile incidents have sparked heightened attention. The British Transport Police (BTP) recently released images of teenage girls suspected of carrying out unprovoked attacks on elderly passengers aboard Southeastern rail services in South London on 18 March. One elderly man was assaulted around 9.30 pm on a train from London Bridge to Woolwich Arsenal, described by officers as a "vicious and cowardly" attack. Shortly after, at approximately 11 pm, an elderly woman was attacked on a different train heading from London Bridge to Erith, with a female passenger who intervened also facing aggression. The suspects were seen wearing casual streetwear, and a BTP spokesperson emphasised the force's intolerance for such behaviour on the rail network.

In West Sussex, a village named Barnham has been described as being "held hostage" by gangs of girls involved in violence and theft, particularly after a fierce brawl at the local rail station. Footage circulated online showing teenage girls assaulting an emergency services worker, with further clips revealing shoplifting incidents at a local Co-op store. In response, Sussex Police imposed dispersal orders on Barnham. The five girls responsible for a major disturbance at the rail station were spared custodial sentences after being charged with affray and assaults on train staff, police, and members of the public. The judge described the disorder as "chaos, mayhem, bedlam", remarking that the girls would have faced jail had they been older. Despite their criminal behaviour, the girls were also characterised by their youth and contrasting previous conduct, including one who had been head girl at school.

The Old Bailey in London recently saw the appearance of three girls aged 14, 16 and 17 charged with manslaughter following the death of 75-year-old Fredi Rivero, who was fatally attacked near a bus stop in Islington in February. Superintendent Annmarie Cowley described the incident as causing "shock and very real concern" in the local community, emphasising an ongoing thorough police investigation.

Further north, a 13-year-old girl named Olivia Allan suffered serious injuries after being attacked by a gang of girls in Morecambe, Lancashire, last month. Olivia was assaulted as she walked home from school, receiving blows to her face, legs, back and neck, and was hospitalised for three nights. Lancashire Police have arrested a 12-year-old girl on suspicion of assault in connection with the incident. Olivia's mother described the attack as "every parent's worst nightmare," highlighting the severity of her daughter's injuries and the traumatic nature of the event.

Experts in policing and criminology note a significant rise in girls' involvement in gang culture and violence, which often goes under-recognised. Damian Allain, a former Metropolitan Police detective with 31 years' experience, specialising in homicide and organised crime, stated to MailOnline, "We're seeing an increase, definitely." Research indicates that 35 percent of gang affiliations involve females. Girls are frequently groomed by male gang members and targeted due to vulnerabilities such as mental health issues or deprived backgrounds but are implicated in criminal activities themselves. Mr Allain pointed out, "Young women will often be used to stash drugs or weapons because it is the men who are more likely to be targeted by the police."

He added that gang culture is often tied to a desire for quick financial gain, making it an appealing prospect for young people from disadvantaged areas, especially in parts of South London. Mr Allain also highlighted the growing role of girls in organised shoplifting and pickpocketing operations, particularly in places like London's West End, activities that historically received less police attention.

A recent report by the Local Government Association (LGA) confirmed rising violence involving girls and young women, including increased assaults on frontline workers such as police officers, ambulance teams, and social workers. The LGA attributed this to girls’ feelings of being "let down and re-traumatised" by these services. Additionally, the LGA noted that girls involved in gang activities, including county lines drug trafficking, often go undetected due to gender stereotypes. The report identified underlying causes such as childhood trauma, poverty, negative authority experiences, and challenges within the school and care systems.

The complex phenomenon of county lines—a drug supply method involving the use of mobile phones and young people as runners—is increasingly recruiting girls and young women through sophisticated grooming tactics. Jade Hibbert of the St Giles Trust, an educational charity, warned that girls are being enticed with offers of cosmetic treatments like lip fillers and Botox to lure them into participation. "We have seen a massive shift...what they're being manipulated with is Botox, fake eyelashes and fillers," said Ms Hibbert. She explained that these tactics have overtaken previous ones like designer handbags and clothes. The St Giles Trust has expanded its support services to address this rising issue.

Campaigners also highlight the exploitation model known as the "boyfriend model," where the female partners of gang members are used as covers for drug dealings or have their homes "cuckooed" (taken over) for criminal purposes.

Statistics underline the scale: as many as 60,000 girls in England may be vulnerable to gang-related violence, according to the Commission on Young Lives and Manchester Metropolitan University. A report by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) suggests unconscious gender biases lead to less police intervention with girls, potentially increasing their risk.

Police forces involved in the reported incidents have confirmed ongoing investigations. The British Transport Police declined to comment on further updates after withdrawing their initial public appeal regarding the rail attacks. The Metropolitan Police noted that the three suspects connected to the Islington case appeared at the Old Bailey on 31 March. Lancashire Police have been approached regarding the Morecambe attack.

The emergence of these distressing episodes and the increasing visibility of girls in gang-related violence underscore a complex and evolving challenge faced by communities and law enforcement across the UK.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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