# Fears rise over violent girl gangs targeting vulnerable groups across the UK



Fears are escalating across the United Kingdom about the rise of violent gangs composed of young girls and women, who have been linked to a series of attacks targeting vulnerable groups including elderly people, children, and emergency service workers. Experts and former law enforcement officials have pointed to a growing trend of female involvement in gang activity that has often been overlooked by authorities.

The British Transport Police (BTP) issued a public appeal last week featuring images of teenage female suspects believed to be responsible for a string of unprovoked assaults on elderly passengers travelling on Southeastern rail services through south London. These incidents, which happened within an hour of each other on routes running from London Bridge to Woolwich Arsenal and Erith, involved vicious attacks on pensioners and bystanders who tried to intervene. While the BTP has since indicated they are no longer seeking to identify the suspects, this exposure highlights heightened concerns over such offences.

This situation echoes reports from a West Sussex village, Barnham, reportedly “held hostage” by gangs of girls, where violent brawls and theft have disrupted local life. Videos circulating on social media showed groups of teenage girls assaulting an emergency services worker at the village’s rail station and looting a local Co-op store. Although the five girls involved, aged between 13 and 16, were convicted of affray and assault, magistrates opted for referral orders rather than custodial sentences, citing their youth and potential for rehabilitation. District Judge Teresa Szagun described the incident as “chaos, mayhem, bedlam,” with victims including train staff, police officers, and passengers physically attacked during the hour-long riotous clash.

In London’s Islington area, three girls aged 14, 16 and 17 face manslaughter charges following the death of 75-year-old Fredi Rivero in February after an alleged assault near a bus stop on Seven Sisters Road. Police investigations remain ongoing. Superintendent Annmarie Cowley expressed concern for the community in Holloway and Islington, pledging a thorough inquiry into the fatal attack.

Another recent case in Morecambe, Lancashire, involved the brutal assault of 13-year-old schoolgirl Olivia Allan, who suffered chipped teeth, bruising, and serious injuries after being attacked by a gang of girls. Police arrested a 12-year-old suspect, and Olivia's mother described the ordeal as “every parent’s worst nightmare,” emphasising the severity of the violence and the lasting impact on her daughter’s health.

A report commissioned by the Local Government Association (LGA) highlighted an increase in girls and young women participating in offences including shoplifting, assaults - especially against frontline workers like police officers and ambulance staff - and involvement in gang-related criminal exploitation. Researchers emphasised that girls involved in gangs often remain under the radar due to gender stereotypes, despite their participation in drug transportation and violent acts.

Damian Allain, a former Metropolitan Police detective with over 30 years’ experience and now a lecturer at Brunel University London, told MailOnline: “We’re seeing an increase, definitely.” He explained that girls are often groomed by male gang members, targeted due to vulnerabilities such as mental health issues or deprived backgrounds, but they also share criminal responsibility. He highlighted a disturbing pattern in parts of south London where male gang initiation involves the sexual assault of females. Young women may be used to conceal drugs or weapons, as they are less likely to be stopped by police. Mr Allain also noted a rise in organised shoplifting and pickpocketing rings involving girls, crimes that historically had not been viewed as part of organised crime.

Campaigners also warn of the growing utilisation of young girls and women by county lines drug gangs, criminal networks that use mobile phones to transport drugs across different areas. Girls are increasingly groomed with promises of cosmetic treatments such as lip fillers and Botox, rather than traditional items like designer clothes. Vulnerable young mothers are sometimes persuaded to carry narcotics and weapons hidden in prams to evade detection. Jade Hibbert from the St Giles Trust highlighted this trend across the Midlands, acknowledging the shift in recruitment tactics by gang ringleaders.

Social media footage and community reports have painted a vivid picture of the impact of these female gang activities on local communities. In Barnham, residents have described the gang members as acting “like a feral pack of dogs,” emboldened by their numbers and exploiting the regional train network to travel and cause disruption across villages along the South Coast. Businesses have reported theft and attacks, while some elderly residents have witnessed abuse and violence, prompting police to issue dispersal orders and emergency meetings to address the disorder.

The LGA's report suggests several factors may contribute to increased gang involvement among girls, including childhood trauma, poverty, negative experiences with authorities, and unstable care systems. It advocates for more government funding to support youth-centred activities and trauma-informed care.

Police forces involved in the various investigations have stated they will provide updates if arrests or new developments occur. The Metropolitan Police confirmed that the girls charged in connection with Mr Rivero’s death appeared before the Old Bailey on 31 March, while Lancashire Police and BTP are continuing their enquiries.

This emerging pattern of youth violence involving female perpetrators is gaining attention from law enforcement and social agencies as they seek to understand and respond to the complexities of gang culture among young women and girls across the UK.

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

## References

* <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9rv9y6qw4do> - This article reports a 37% increase in shoplifting across England and Wales in 2023, highlighting a significant rise in retail crime.
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cp82jvd3g54o> - The piece discusses the escalating violence and abuse faced by shop workers, with incidents rising by 50% in the past year.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/oct/24/shoplifting-offences-in-england-and-wales-at-highest-level-on-record-ons-figures-show> - This report details that shoplifting offences in England and Wales have reached a 20-year high, with over 469,000 incidents recorded.
* <https://www.itv.com/news/2024-11-11/shoplifting-driving-abuse-of-retail-workers-as-69-report-threats-at-work> - The article highlights that 69% of retail workers report threats at work, with many incidents triggered by shoplifting.
* <https://www2.local.gov.uk/publications/girls-involved-youth-violence-key-findings-and-recommendations> - This publication discusses the increase in assaults by girls on frontline workers, including police and ambulance staff, attributing it to pent-up anger and feelings of being let down by professionals.
* <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/17488958211051513> - The study examines the gendered exploitation of young women and girls in county lines, highlighting their roles and vulnerabilities within gang structures.
* <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14642951/Britain-vicious-girl-gangs-female-youths-wreaking-havoc.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data