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## Online Predators Who Targeted Children Brought to Justice

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Fourteen men from across the North East and North Yorkshire have been sentenced for sickening online offences targeting children, with some causing real-life harm while undercover operations caught others.

In a grim catalogue of abuse, predators from towns including Hartlepool, Darlington, Middlesbrough, Stockton, and parts of North Yorkshire were exposed for attempting to groom or exploit children through the internet. While some traumatised real victims, others

were intercepted before they could strike their intended targets, revealed to be undercover police officers or paedophile hunter groups posing as minors.

Several of the convicted men were found to have sent vile and sexually explicit messages, images, and videos to what they believed were young girls or boys. In reality, some were engaging in sickening exchanges with real victims, leaving lasting psychological damage. In other cases, the “children” they thought they were messaging were actually adults operating decoy accounts to trap would-be offenders.

The investigations and subsequent court proceedings revealed patterns of grooming, sexual exploitation, and, in some cases, explicit attempts to meet minors for sex. The evidence presented was often extensive for those caught in sting operations, including chat logs, videos, and recorded confrontations.

## Convicted Individuals

Among those brought to justice was Paul Barron, who received a 30-month prison sentence after attempting to meet a 14-year-old boy for sex, unaware he was communicating with an undercover police officer.

Shabaz Hussain was handed a nine-year imprisonment for extensively grooming a girl online for years using a fake profile before abusing her in person.

Danny Ritchy was jailed for three and a half years for sending indecent images and making inappropriate comments to a 13-year-old girl.

Ratnakar Singh, a computer science student, received a significant sentence of 13 years and nine months after thousands of child sexual abuse videos and images, some showing him abusing a 14-year-old girl, were found on his devices.

Other convicted individuals included John Gibson, sentenced to 36 months for attempting to engage in sexual communication with a child he believed was a schoolgirl, and Kevin Clark, jailed for 32 months for distributing and making indecent images, including extreme animal pornography, to what he thought was a teenage girl.

Adrian Augustyniak received 48 months’ imprisonment for messaging a supposed 12-year-old girl and possessing indecent images and a “paedophile manual.” Oliver James Anglesmith was jailed for four years and four months for targeting children’s chatrooms and

Snapchat. Benjamin Taylor, a Navy veteran, received a suspended sentence for sending indecent pictures to an undercover officer posing as a 12-year-old.

Further cases included Tony O'Neill, a disgraced pharmacist given a suspended sentence for attempting to meet a 14-year-old boy he thought he was messaging. Andrew Ford was jailed for 45 months for luring a “schoolgirl” into a sexually explicit online chat with an undercover officer.

Nathaniel Morley was locked up for three years after being snared by online paedophile hunters, pretending to be a 14-year-old girl. Brian Doddsworth was jailed for two years for attempting to incite sexual activity with a child, communicating with an adult volunteer from a child protection group. Finally, Daniel Pinkney received a 10-month jail sentence for engaging in sexual communications with an underage girl despite being aware of her age.

These convictions underscore the ongoing efforts by law enforcement and online safety groups to protect children from predators in the digital world. The varying sentences reflect the severity and nature of the offenses, from direct grooming of real victims to attempts caught by vigilant decoy operations. This continuous vigilance serves as a critical deterrent, aiming to make the internet a safer place for children.