

## Comment

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# History has proved Gillick right

**S**aturday, October 17 will mark the 30th anniversary of the famous Gillick Ruling in the House of Lords. On that date, in 1985, five Law Lords voted by three votes to two that young girls under the age of consent of 16 could have access to the Pill, and other forms of birth control, without parental knowledge.

It was called the Gillick Ruling because the stalwart crusader Victoria Gillick had challenged the Department of Health on this issue. In the end, the case had gone to the House of Lords. Mrs Gillick lost her case, and government departments and the wider family-planning industry – which had been unremittingly hostile – felt triumphant.

But events unfold in their own way, and a major focus now is on the sexual abuse of young people, and most notably, the widespread gang abuse of vulnerable young girls – recently uncovered in Rochdale, Oxford and elsewhere.

The police have been accused of turning a blind eye to these occurrences and the social services seemed remarkably complacent. When 370 young girls in Oxford – some as young as 11 – were found to have been groomed, trafficked and raped by gangs of older men, *The Guardian* reported: “One police officer recorded that a 13-year-old having sex with an older Asian man was in an ‘age-appropriate relationship’. Another sergeant described how a 14-year-old girl had initiated sexual intercourse with two men. Social workers ... appeared to tolerate the underage sex the girls were having with much older men.”

Commentators in the mainstream media such as Melanie Phillips and Libby Purves have called for the reinstatement of the age of consent, but the Gillick Ruling effectively dissolved this principle. Victoria Gillick – who has a full archive of how government departments and public authorities “virtually engineered the dissolution of the age of consent” – also claims that Lord Falconer’s legal guidance to the courts under the Sexual Offences Act of 2003 itself “discreetly abolished the age of consent”.



**Victoria Gillick a year before the Law Lords’ under-age sex ruling**

Regarding the scandals involving the horrible sexual exploitation of under-age girls – some in local authority care – surely the lesson is “Victoria Gillick was right”? Who will stand up and say so?

*When Victoria Gillick lost her case the family-planning industry felt triumphant*