

EVENT REPORT

**VICTIM-CENTRED  
APPROACHES TO  
MODERN SLAVERY**

**South West Anti-Slavery  
Partnership**

In November 2021 the South West Anti-Slavery Partnership invited speakers from range of organisation to provide an input to the webinar 'victim-centred approaches to Modern Slavery'. The objective of the event was to inform partner agency colleagues about the importance of victim-centred approaches and how to employ victim-centred practice.

This document provides an overview of key insights from event.

**Rachel Harper, Manager of the Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline** discussed how the Helpline employs trauma-informed support and implements victim-led interventions.

**Ben Hickling and Beth Evans, NRM Decision Makers for the Single Competent Authority** outlined how first responders can effectively complete referrals for survivors to get support through the NRM.

**Hollie Hampson, Justice & Care Victim Navigator Programme** spoke about the importance of survivor support through the criminal justice system.

**Gemma Kirby, Investigator for Gangmasters & Labour Abuse Authority** provided insight into the challenges that frontline staff encounter day to day in supporting survivors they identify in situations of exploitation.

**Rachel Collins-White, Head of Frontline Services for Unseen UK** explored best practice in providing support to survivors of Modern Slavery in the NRM.

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**'Modern Slavery'** – an umbrella term that encompasses the offences of human trafficking and slavery, servitude, forced or compulsory labour.

**'Human Trafficking'** – the movement of a person for the purposes of exploitation.

**'National Referral Mechanism/NRM'** – The National Referral Mechanism is the UK system of support for survivors of Modern Slavery and means of recording the prevalence of Modern Slavery.

**'Survivor'** – a person who has lived experienced of Modern Slavery and/or Human Trafficking.

**'Victim'** – a person who is currently in a situation of Modern Slavery and/or Human Trafficking.

**'First Responder'** – First Responders are designated organisations that have a duty to refer potential victims and survivors into the National Referral Mechanism.

**'Single Competent Authority'** – the Home Office decision making body that determines whether individuals (not subject to immigration controls) are victims of Modern Slavery.

**'Immigration Competent Authority'** – the UK decision making body that determines whether potential victims subject to immigration controls are victims of Modern Slavery.

**'Act', 'Means', 'Purpose'** of Modern Slavery – the UK definition of Modern Slavery is broken down into three parts. All three parts must be evident for an adult to be deemed a victim.

## **The Act:**

- recruitment
- transfer
- transport
- harbouring
- receipt of a victim

## **The Means:**

- the threat or use of force
- abduction
- fraud
- deception
- the abuse of position of vulnerability
- the giving or receiving of payments or benefits

## **The purpose:**

- sexual exploitation
- forced labour or services
- slavery or practices similar to slavery
- servitude
- forced criminality
- removal of organs

# TRAUMA INFORMED

Being aware of the impact that trauma may have on a survivor is central to providing victim-centred responses to Modern Slavery.

It can take 7 years to process traumatic experiences. Recounting their exploitation within that timeframe may retraumatise the individual. Survivors of Modern Slavery are often asked to explain their experience of exploitation immediately, leading to reduced trust and engagement with services and poorer outcomes for the survivor.

## Survivor presentation

Traumatic reactions are normal responses to abnormal situations. Trauma can have emotional, mental, and physical symptoms that may lead professionals to misunderstand a survivor or their circumstances.

A survivor might:

- struggle to follow what you are saying
- be unable to remember your question
- be unable to remember events in chronological order
- be unable to recall events or facts such as names, places, timeframes
- change their account as they remember things differently at different points

## Be aware that

Trauma is not linear. Survivors can have setbacks in their recovery at any time or present as coping immediately after their exploitation. Services must flex around each survivor to support their individual needs.

## Practical considerations

- Consider who is engaging with a survivor, e.g.: should a male professional interview female survivors of exploitation?
- Consider wearing plain clothes rather than uniform as survivors may have fear of/ negative experience of authorities – but always explain your role and who you work for.
- Consider the circumstances in which transport is arranged for survivors. Putting them in a taxi alone and not communicating effectively about where they are going may cause anxiety.
- Consider the circumstances in which emergency accommodation is arranged for survivors. Whilst arranging a hotel may be received well by some survivors, leaving others alone in the hotel may cause them to panic.

## Trauma informed practice

- Reduce the number of times someone is asked to explain their situation.
- Do not pressure them to disclose elements of their exploitation or journey
- Look beyond the obvious
- Consider physical surroundings – e.g. closed doors or isolation may be retraumatizing for survivors
- Normalise behaviours around high-risk incidents. E.g. if a survivor is being aggressive, consider that this is normal given their experience and give them time.

# THE 'PERFECT VICTIM' MYTH

Professionals may believe that all survivors will be grateful for intervention and behave in a supplicant way. They may mistakenly assess that someone is not being exploited as they do not appear fearful or submissive. It is the responsibility of professionals to look beyond the obvious and consider how a person may be exploited. However they present, survivors are entitled to support.

There are many reasons why a survivor may not immediately welcome intervention from services, be sympathetic or cooperative.

- Trauma may lead a survivor to be angry or aggressive.
- They may hold views or opinions that are not in line with your own.
- They may have complex needs such as drug and alcohol misuse, mental health, learning difficulties.
- They may have committed crimes.
- They may not accept help to exit a situation of exploitation and reject offers of support.
- They may express that their life in exploitation is preferable to previous circumstances.
- They may show loyalty to their exploiter.

# SURVIVOR-LED PRACTICE

Survivors of Modern Slavery are experts of their own experience. All survivors are individuals with unique experiences and vulnerabilities. Their experience of exploitation will likely have removed their sense of control and it is important that professionals seek to instil for survivors ownership and control over their interaction with agencies in order to foster trust and prevent re-traumatisation.

- They do not have to tell you about their experience. Do not project what we as professionals need to achieve on to them. Meet the needs that they prescribe.
- If they are not able to engage with you immediately, leave them with materials that explain your concerns and support options:
  - **only** leave materials if it is safe to do so
  - make sure the materials are in the right language and that the survivor is able to read them.

## When considering an intervention

- As experts of their own situation, adult survivors should lead the pace and form of intervention.
- A survivor will be more aware of any risks involved in intervening than frontline professionals.
- Wherever possible, consent should be gained from survivors before any action is taken.
- Interventions should be discreet where possible, facilitating incremental disclosures if a survivor is not comfortable asking for assistance immediately.
- If safe and sensible to do so, attempt to talk to a survivor alone and away from the location of exploitation. Never ask a survivor to disclose to you whilst the exploiter is present.
- Consider the environment – neutral places of safety are preferable to e.g. a police station where a survivor may feel intimidated.
- Co-produce exit strategies and safety planning with survivors where possible. Listen to their specific needs to create bespoke plans.

## When exploring their situation with them

- Be patient:
  - Take breaks and encourage them to slow down and take their time to disclose.
  - Let them disclose in their own timeframe, not yours.
- Offer emotional support and employ de-escalation techniques.
- Do not tell them how they should feel.
- Do not ask leading questions about their experiences. Use open ended questions.

## **Referral into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM)**

- Adult survivors must give their consent to enter into the NRM.
- Their consent must be informed – they must understand what they are consenting to, how their data will be shared, limitations of support.
- Recommendation: ask a survivor to explain to you what they believe they are consenting to.
- Consider: just because someone has given consent to enter into the NRM, they may still not engage with services.

## **When developing guidance and protocols**

- Value survivor voice and experience and seek out guidance to inform your organisation's activity and training for staff.
- Use the term 'survivor' rather than 'victim' – people with lived experience have expressed preference for this.

## **General recommendation for survivor-led practice**

- Be responsive to the immediate needs of each survivor – ask them what they need in that moment.  
E.g. it might be that the most important thing for them is sleep.

# COMMUNICATION

Communicating effectively with survivors was a recurring component highlighted by our speakers as essential to victim-centred practice.

## Do

- Use translation services.
- Explain who you are and why the interaction is occurring.
- When safety planning use the language of safety rather than risk i.e. 'how can we ensure this is safe for you' rather than 'how do we remove risk?'
- Provide them with a roadmap of each interaction, what the next steps might be.
- Be transparent.
- Continually engage with a survivor and ensure they are kept up to date with their case. As an NRM first responder this may mean establishing who their case worker is so you can relay information.
- Provide survivors with a single point of contact so they do not have to relay their situation multiple times. This point of contact should liaise with other services and make sure survivors are kept up to date.
- Update them on their cases or progress through support, Criminal Justice System etc.
- Inform them of their rights and entitlements – e.g. survivors may not know that they might be able to work whilst in the NRM.

## Don't

- Launch into questions without providing context for the interaction.
- Use judgemental language when interacting with a survivor. E.g. do not inadvertently place blame by asking 'did you pay them to find you this job?' instead use 'did they charge you to arrange this job for you?'
- Use jargon. Use plain language and explain what agencies and organisations are responsible for, laws, services etc.
- Use written communication where possible, especially relating to policy and processes. E.g. a letter of eviction may cause acute stress to a survivor. Consider meeting in person and review positive steps to resolution that can be taken instead.

# BUILDING TRUST

Survivors of Modern Slavery often mistrust authorities and may find it challenging to trust that someone offering to assist will act in their best interests.

Survivors will often have placed their trust in their exploiters before being betrayed.

Professionals may inadvertently mirror exploiter behaviour by identifying their vulnerabilities, understanding their needs, and providing a solution. It is important to be transparent and involve the survivor in planning their route out of exploitation.

## Do

- Be expressive of the support that can be offered to them – do not assume a survivor is aware that authorities are able to help.
- Follow through on offers of support or stated actions you will take.
- Explain support options effectively and transparently.
- Offer safety planning.
- Review plans with survivors.
- Provide a roadmap of support.
- Be transparent about what support is available, what is involved, and manage expectations.
- Talk directly to a survivor, even if using a translator.
- Consider your body language:
  - Make eye contact with survivors
  - Position yourself at same level as a survivor e.g. sitting
  - Find other ways to support survivors if they do not wish to enter NRM e.g. adult social care, NGOs, foodbanks etc.

## Do not

- Over promise.
- Reinforce exploiter narratives by leaving survivors in the location of exploitation without effectively offering support.
- Talk about a survivor unprofessionally or insensitively with your colleagues – especially if the survivor is present.
- Stop at offering them entry into the NRM – they are still vulnerable, likely with support needs. Consider other routes for longer term support and immediate needs.
- Reinforce perpetrator narratives by leading multi-agency visits with Immigration Enforcement. Exploiters may tell victims that they will be deported if they engage with services.

# NATIONAL REFERRAL MECHANISM

Whilst the NRM can be an effective way for a survivor to access support in the UK, some elements of the process may cause stress to the survivor.

If a survivor wishes to enter into the NRM, it is important that a first responder performs their duty well so that a survivor is not subject to additional stress through the system.

## **A First Responder must effectively complete NRM referrals**

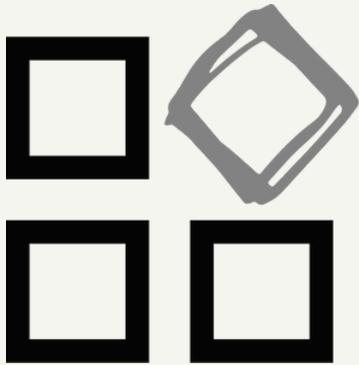
- Include evidence of the 'act', 'means', and 'purpose' of Modern Slavery in the referral.
- Include safeguarding concerns such as medical needs, mental health needs.
- Include information about the agencies involved, actions taken so far and support plans in place.
- Include the address of the survivor and any safety concerns about the address.
- Consider how the referral may include unconscious bias that may have an impact on the victim and/or the SCA assessor reading it. I.e. it should not be evident in the referral that a first responder does not believe the survivor's account.

## **Common mistakes in inadequate NRM referrals**

- Use of abbreviations.
- Incorrect biodata.
- Insufficient data.
- Confusing statements.
- No timeframes indicated.
- Concerns not clearly set out.
- Locations not included.
- Information not given about how the survivor became exploited and how their exploitation ended.
- Insufficient information about the situation of exploitation.

## **A First Responder must**

- Remain in contact with the Single Competent Authority (SCA)/ Immigration Enforcement Competent Authority (IECA) during the decision-making process.
- Update the SCA/IECA with any new information.
- Ensure a nominated representative is available and connected with the SCA/IECA should they take leave/ leave their role.
- Provide additional information within two weeks of request by the Single Competent Authority – a decision will be made on existing information if additional information is not provided in this timeframe.



**modern slavery &  
exploitation helpline**

**08000 121 700**

[www.aspartnership.org.uk](http://www.aspartnership.org.uk)

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