

Can we lock modern slavery away? The role of prisons within a 'single whole system approach'.

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Modern slavery and human trafficking are grave crimes involving the severe exploitation of human beings, primarily for economic gain. The UK's 2015 Modern Slavery Act (MSA), considered by many as groundbreaking legislation, defines its scope as follows: An Act to make provision about slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour and about human trafficking, including provision for the protection of victims; to make provision for an Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner; and for connected purposes.¹

In her 2021-2022 annual report, the UK's former Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner encouraged a 'single whole system approach' (p. 24) to ensure that national, regional, and local resources work together.² Despite the (revised) legislative commitment to sentencing those convicted of modern slavery offences to prison terms of 18 years, the role of prisons in the UK's anti-slavery regime has received limited attention. This article aims to identify the potential contribution of prisons within a single whole system approach. Although design proposals for such an approach have yet to be articulated, seven potential underpinning principles are explored in this article. These are 1) consistent application of legal obligations; 2) professional standards; 3) a shared understanding of the diversity of MSHT offending; 4) embedding MSHT into organisational 'DNA'; 5) multi-agency and partnership working; 6) evidence-informed approaches; and 7) policy alignment. The role of prisons is examined within this framework which further challenges notions that prisons have a peripheral role in the UK Anti-Slavery Regime, as outlined by Jovanović and colleagues.³

Definitions and challenges in developing a single whole system response to MSHT

This article discusses how the application of a whole system approach may improve responses to MSHT across the wider criminal justice system, with a particular emphasis on the role of prisons. Whole systems theory recognises that there is no one solution to tackling complex issues. The concept of a 'whole system approach' has been applied by governments in responding to a wide range of complex problems from health inequalities such as obesity,⁴ to seeking to supporting young adults at risk of offending.⁵ It has also been a valuable approach used within industry in developing sustainable and innovative designs across diverse sectors. It is described as an integrated framework which requires cross-disciplinary skills across a flattened hierarchy, from local working through to strategic leadership, where relationships are identified between parts of the system which maximise opportunities across the whole system, underpinned by core values of empowerment, trust, and fostering long-term collaborative relationships.

Despite over 100 years of international and domestic legislation, conventions, and protocols attempting to eradicate slavery, not only does it persist but the prevalence, types, and methodologies appear to be multiplying. Global estimates of modern slavery in 2023 indicate that some 50 million children, women, and men experience modern slavery exploitation on any given day — a rise of 10 million since the previous Global Index report in 2017.⁶ It is estimated that the number of victims in the UK is at least 122,000,⁷ however, this is likely to be an underestimate because it is not clear how victims are counted. The National

1. Modern Slavery Act 2015.

2. Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (2022). *Annual Report 2021-22*. Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner.

3. Jovanović, M., Burland, P., Topp, V., & Fluhr, F. (2023). *Tackling the blind spot of the UK anti-slavery regime: The role and responsibility of prisons in securing the rights of modern slavery survivors*. Modern Slavery & Human Rights Policy & Evidence Centre.

4. Public Health England (2020). *Community-centred public health: Taking a whole-system approach*. Public Health England.

5. Dyer, F., & Carter, K. (2017). *Supporting young people involved in offending up to 21 years old: Extending the Whole System Approach*. Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice.

6. Walk Free Foundation (2023). *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery*.

7. See footnote 6: Walk Free Foundation. (2023).

Crime Agency (NCA) identify that the scale and threat of MSHT offending in the UK is increasing, estimating that between 6,000 to 8,000 individuals are involved in the exploitation of people who carry out a variety of roles linked to MSHT.⁸ Broad and Gadd,⁹ and Craig and colleagues,¹⁰ conclude that both international and UK efforts to effectively respond to the challenges of modern slavery are inadequate and weak. However, the UK Government insists that MSHT continues to be a priority, reflected in a £17.8m investment in the police force's Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime Unit (MSOIC), and a commitment for the NCA and police forces to build capability to tackle high harm threats linked to modern slavery, including county lines drug supply,¹¹ trafficking for sexual exploitation, and organised immigration crime.

Principle 1: Consistent application of legal obligations

Within the Modern Slavery Statutory Guidance,¹² prisons are neither a first responder (an organisation able to directly refer individuals into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) which is the UK's framework for protecting and supporting victims), nor a specified organisation able to fulfil the Duty to Notify role (alerting the NRM to suspected MSHT, where individuals do not seek to enter the NRM). This adds an additional layer of complexity for prisons in using first responders to refer and report suspected MSHT, and for tracking progress in individual cases.

Consistency in applying the legal framework when managing individuals convicted under the MSA is hampered by a lack of universally agreed definitions and terminology relating to MSHT.¹³ Following an independent review of the MSA in 2019, the UK Government defended a flexible definition of the term 'exploitation' in anticipation of emerging new forms of

modern slavery. However, the legal obligations for prisons in relation to victims of MSHT are clear. Obligations include raising awareness of MSHT, ensuring reasonable measures are in place to identify victims, protect them from re-trafficking, and support their recovery (irrespective of whether the person seeks to enter the NRM or not). However, opportunities to protect individuals from re-trafficking who are incarcerated prior to deportation are severely limited. As NRM support measures do not commence until release from custody, prisons are required to provide healthcare, access to legal services, and other relevant support during the custodial term. The Care Act (2014) remains highly relevant to prisons who must fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities for all adults and children in custody who are deemed vulnerable to any form of exploitation, including severe forms which constitute MSHT.¹⁴

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Within the UK, low conviction rates compare starkly with high numbers of victims referred into the NRM.¹⁵ The use of alternative or 'flagged' offences disguises both the nature and extent of offending which directly impacts upon prisons when completing assessments and sentence plans. Common examples include the pursuit of convictions for drug trafficking or immigration crime

where people trafficking was a core component but is not evidenced at court. This is specifically problematic for prisons when assessing future risk of reoffending when involvement in human trafficking is not documented and/or only becomes apparent through disclosure during the prison sentence.

Heys and Jovanović both point to the narrow use of the 'non-punishment principle' enshrined in section 45 of the MSA, where individuals have an opportunity to evidence that they have been compelled into illegal activities.^{16 17} As of 31 March 2024, 16,458 individuals (representing 19 per cent of the prison population in

8. National Crime Agency (2020). *National Strategic Assessment*. NCA.
9. Broad, R., & Gadd, D. (2023). *Demystifying Modern Slavery*. Routledge.
10. Craig, G., Balch, A., Lewis H., & Waite, L. (2019). *The Modern Slavery Agenda: Policy, Politics and Practice*. Policy Press.
11. County Lines is where illegal drugs are transported from one area to another, often across police and local authority boundaries, usually by children or vulnerable people who are coerced into it by gangs. The 'County Line' is the mobile phone line used to take the orders of drugs.
12. Home Office (2024). *Modern Slavery Statutory Guidance for England and Wales (under s49 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015) and Non-Statutory Guidance for Scotland and Northern Ireland*. HM Government.
13. See footnote 10: Craig, G., Balch, A., Lewis H., & Waite, L. (2019).
14. Care Act 2014
15. Home Office (2024). *Modern Slavery: NRM and DtN statistics, end of year summary 2023*. HMP Government.
16. Heys, A. (2023). The UK's Statutory Defence for Victims of Modern Slavery and its Narrow Understanding of Victimhood. *The Journal of Criminal Law*, 87(4), 237-251.
17. Jovanović, M. (2023). *State Responsibility for 'Modern Slavery' in Human Rights Law – A Right Not to Be Trafficked*. Oxford University Press.

England and Wales) were remanded into custody awaiting trial, conviction, and/or sentence.¹⁸ It may be incumbent upon prisons to ensure that where MSHT is suspected, unconvicted people are informed of this legal provision and have timely access to the legal representation needed to question whether the CPS are abiding by the non-punishment principle. However, individuals may fear using this defence, or disclosing their experiences when remanded, as they may be accommodated with their exploiters as co-defendants due to the need to appear before the local court.

As of 31 March 2024, the foreign national prison population comprised 10,422 people (representing 12 per cent of the total prison population in England and Wales).¹⁹ In responding to MSHT, prisons are required to engage with both parts of the NRM competent authority (the Single Competent Authority for British citizens and the Immigration Enforcement Competent Authority for foreign nationals). However, it is the introduction of the Public Order Disqualification in 2024 which presents a significant operational challenge for prisons, and more broadly, to the Ministry of Justice given its duties towards victims.²⁰ Although safeguards were introduced to assess risks of re-exploitation, this excluded those in prison environments where these risks are not considered to be immediate. The impact has yet

to be determined but it may disincentivise adults in custody in applying to the NRM, requiring prisons, probation, and partnership agencies to implement safeguarding measures to comply with legal duties to provide protection and support. Concerns have been raised that the Public Order Disqualification is incompatible with the UK's obligations under Article 4 of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) and the Council of Europe's Convention on Action

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Against Trafficking in Human Beings (ECAT) and raises questions if a review of current legislation is urgently needed.

Principle 2: Professional standards

Major concerns remain about the extent and quality of training available to all those tasked with addressing modern slavery, from High Court judges through to hotel receptionists... (p. 18).²¹

It is vital that baseline training in responding to MSHT is identified within a single whole system approach, and for individual organisations to provide role-appropriate training for their staff. The Modern Slavery Care Standards published in 2018 (and due to be updated) set out a comprehensive guide and benchmark for organisations involved in supporting survivors of MSHT which includes trauma-informed approaches, confidentiality, and empowerment.²²

Professional standards within HMPPS emphasise equal and fair treatment.²³ Prison Governors have a pivotal role in prioritising the well-being of their staff. This includes encouraging a culture where staff are supported by informed line-managers in learning about the diversity of the prison cohort. In response to

MSHT, this may include how prison staff are equipped and supported to recognise exploitative behaviours; how they can engage people with pathways into and out of exploitation; understand how trauma impacts those who are exploited and then become incarcerated; and understand other systemic factors that make prisoners vulnerable. HMPPS guidance provides a starting point for signposting individuals to legal advice and support.²⁴ However, there are opportunities to

18. Ministry of Justice (2024). *Offender Management Statistical Bulletin, England and Wales: Quarterly: October to December 2023* (inc. annual calendar year 2023). Ministry of Justice

19. See footnote 18: Ministry of Justice. (2024).

20. Public Order Disqualifications (POD) were introduced in the National and Borders Act 2023. Individuals who have previously served or are currently serving a custodial sentence of 12 months or more may be ejected from the NRM following a Reasonable Grounds decision and receive a POD.

21. See footnote 10: Craig, G., Balch, A., Lewis H., & Waite, L. (2019).

22. Human Trafficking Foundation (2018). *The Slavery and Trafficking Survivor Care Standards*. Human Trafficking Foundation

23. HMPPS (2023). *HMPPS Annual Report and Accounts 2022-2023*. HMPPS.

24. HMPPS (2023). *Modern Slavery Guidance for Prison Staff*. HMPPS.

update and develop this guidance further, including clarifying the important roles of security and healthcare within prisons, and in co-producing guidance with those who have been exploited.

The theory of procedural justice is based on the premise that if people feel they are treated in a procedurally fair and just way, starting from the very first contact with authorities, this will build trust, respect, engagement, and compliance, even when the outcomes of decisions or processes are unfavourable.²⁵ HMPPS is striving to embed the principles of procedural justice across all operational policies. It is particularly relevant to those subjected to MSHT who are considering disclosing their experiences to prison staff where confidentiality and safety are paramount. In responding to individuals who do not seek recognition

of their experiences, prison staff can draw upon parallel approaches used in domestic abuse cases to form a trusted relationship and create an environment where they are supported to disclose if they choose to.

Principle 3: A shared understanding of the diversity of MSHT offending

A transparent, single whole system approach is reliant upon a shared and evidence-informed understanding of MSHT offending and how it works, without conflating modern slavery with immigration issues or serving other political agendas. In 2017, the Home Office identified the following four typologies of modern slavery offences in the UK:²⁶

Labour Exploitation	Victims exploited for multiple purposes in isolated environments
	Victims work for perpetrators
	Victims work for someone other than perpetrators
Domestic Servitude	Exploited by partner
	Exploited by relatives
	Exploiters not related to victims
Sexual Exploitation	Child sexual exploitation — group exploitation
	Child sexual exploitation — single exploiter
	Forced sex work in fixed location
	Forced sex work in changing location
	Trafficking for personal gratification
Criminal Exploitation	Forced gang related criminality
	Forced Labour in illegal activities
	Forced acquisitive crime
	Forced begging
	Trafficking for forced sham marriage
	Financial fraud (including benefit fraud)

Of these four types of exploitation, claims of criminal exploitation are most common.²⁷ It is also important that prison staff recognise that some individuals may have experienced multiple types of exploitation and that new types of MSHT have been formally recognised in the UK since 2017, including the first conviction for conspiracy to harvest human organs in 2023.

It is important for all agencies within a single whole system approach, including prisons, to better understand how MSHT is organised and how

it operates. The United National Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) undertook research relating to organised crime involvement in trafficking of people in 2010.²⁸ They found very little reliable pre-existing research, but recognised that the global arena of organised crime, including trafficking of human beings (THB), drugs, weapons, or other goods was constantly changing with enormous diversity both in the landscape of organised crime and those involved. They provide a list of concepts, as follows:

28. UNODC (2010). *Organized crime involvement in trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants*. United Nations.
25. HM Inspectorate of Probation (2020). *Procedural Justice*. HMI Probation.
26. Cooper C., Hesketh O., Ellis N., & Fair, A. (2017). *A typology of modern slavery offences in the UK*. Home Office.
27. Home Office (2024). *Official Statistics: National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify statistics UK, quarter 1 2024 January to March*. Home Office.

Un-organised criminal involvement	Involvement in MSHT but not as part of an organised criminal group.
Individual traffickers	Where one exploiter is responsible for all different stages of the trafficking process.
Social networks	Including friends, relatives, acquaintances, or indirect acquaintances.
Criminal (loosely connected)	Consisting of loosely connected specialized criminals, all playing their own specific part in the criminal operation.
Vertically related crimes	Where all crimes could be vertically listed under the main offence of trafficking in THB.
Horizontally related crimes	Offences that are not directly related to or are committed in preparation for THB but are still committed in relation to THB.
Hierarchical/ 'mafia-like' organised crime groups	An organised criminal group, structured in a pyramid with a rigid hierarchy.

In the UK, the National Crime Agency (NCA) assess that whilst individuals involved in MSHT offending are likely to operate in organised groups or networks, these are often loosely connected and of low sophistication.²⁹ One of the very few empirical studies within prisons found that 'Mr Bigs', who substantially profit from organised MSHT crime, are only a small minority of those convicted.³⁰ Rather, many are substitutable actors, and some are destitute, themselves victims of exploitation. In developing a response to the risks and needs of those involved in MSHT offending, greater insights are needed to avoid adopting an approach where all those convicted of MSHT are treated as 'Mr Bigs'.

Gadd and Broad highlight that the wide diversity of offending amongst those convicted under the MSA presents challenges, including for prisons, in that they cannot be categorised as a homogenous cohort.³¹ Whereas categorisation and cohort approaches are important tools for prisons in managing a population of almost 90,000 people on any given day, assessments and sentence plans are enhanced by

clear, unbiased information relating to the risks and needs pertaining to that individual. This applies to individuals involved in MSHT offending who have a history of poly-offending and where MSHT is neither an index offence nor a previous conviction.

Individuals subjected and/or vulnerable to MSHT re-exploitation may also have diverse offending histories. Risks associated with reoffending appear to mirror many of the risks associated with re-exploitation (including relationships, accommodation, employment etc).^{32 33} Specific, culturally informed responses to those who share protected characteristics will enhance understandings of the impact for children, young adults, women, foreign nationals (particularly those who are undocumented), care leavers, sex workers, and people with neurodiversity challenges or other physical or mental disabilities.

A single whole system approach requires a shared understanding of MSHT methods and the following examples of methods from the Home Office could be a way to develop this.³⁴

29. See footnote 2: Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner. (2022).

30. Gadd, D., & Broad, R. (2022). *The truth about modern slavery offenders*. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/the-truth-about-modern-slavery-offenders/>

31. Gadd, D., & Broad, R. (2022). Facing the Folk Devils of Modern Slavery Policy. *Critical Social Policy*, 43(4), 581-601.

32. Bonta, J., & Andrews, D. (2017). *The psychology of criminal conduct*. Anderson.

33. Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner and University of Nottingham (2021). *Retrafficking: the current state of play*. Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner and University of Nottingham.

34. Home Office (2023). *Modern slavery and human trafficking: identifying and reporting perpetrators*. HM Government.

Abuse	Abduction or kidnap of victims or their family; verbal, physical, sexual, and/or psychological, imposing charges/debts, threats, withholding basic provisions, increasing workload.
Creating dependency	On food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, restricting movement or access to services.
Deception	False promises for improved lifestyles, jobs, and income, offering refuge with intent to exploit.
Emotional control	Threats of harm, making victims believe they are responsible for their part in an offence; instilling fears, making victim feel that they are part of a supportive network, removal of freedom to choose, creating dependency.
Exploiting cultural beliefs	Imposing debts, coercing victims via threats of exposure or shame, spiritual practices.
Financial control	Managing victims into debt, control of bank accounts, debt bondage, not allowing victims to control own finances.
Grooming	Inappropriate relationships, intimate relationships, offering gifts, praise, and reassurance of future payments/lifestyle.
Isolation	Physical and/or psychological isolation — separation from family, denying or controlling access to mobile phones, internet, or passports.

It is important that prison staff understand known methods of MSHT offending in order to recognise ‘offence-paralleling behaviours’ in custodial environments. Examples of offence-paralleling behaviours in custody may include extreme and/or prolonged coercive control of vulnerable individuals that reflect the types and methods of exploitation as set out above. This could include forced cleaning of cells, controlling personal items, forced storage of prohibited items, sexual exploitation, debt bondage, and grooming of individuals prior to release with false promises of accommodation or employment with the aim to engineer the individual’s recall to custody with secreted drugs or mobile phones. Further risks may also involve prison visitors, who seek to ensure that individuals are aware of expectations to return to exploitative situations and collecting them from the prison gate on their release. Alternatively, individuals may be forced to visit numerous prisons to deliver drugs and other items.

Principle 4: Embedding MSHT into organisational ‘DNA’

The technique of ‘business event analysis’ may be useful for individual organisations to fully embed responses to MSHT which can then, in turn, contribute to an integrated single whole system approach. Cadle

and colleagues approach this technique by identifying three types of events in which organisations can examine any type of system or activity: (i) external events — usually prompted by external stakeholders; (ii) internal events — usually prompted by management within the business area; and (iii) time-based events — regular activities that occur at predefined times, and which are usually prompted by legal duties or organisational policies.³⁵

This technique presents an opportunity for prisons to apply business event analysis in responding to MSHT as follows: (i) external events relating to new legislation and updates to the Modern Slavery Statutory Guidance; the Council of Europe’s monitoring of UK prisons from 2024; and data and sector reports from key stakeholders and experts, including civil society. (ii) Internal events such as internal policy frameworks and guidance; recording systems to identify victim/survivors; and training for prison staff. (iii) Time-based events including audits of policy frameworks and guidance; data collation; and contributions to annual sector reports. This technique enables organisations such as prisons to identify the external landscape across the anti-slavery sector more precisely to inform its own response. This includes identifying its own events, and understanding the time based requirements from partner organisations. If such an approach were to be adopted, opportunities for cross-organisational

35. Cadle, J., Paul, D., & Turner, P. (2014). *Business Analysis Techniques – 99 essential tools for success*. BCS.

learning, creation of new knowledge, and more effective responses may be significant.

Principle 5: Multi-agency and partnership working

Prisons contribute to multi-agency and partnership working at national, regional, and local levels. Arrangements can present challenges to prisons where centrally resourced operational policies and guidance are developed, but each prison region or individual establishment is expected to forge engagement with local partners within an array of competing priorities. Given that prisons operate on the edge of local markets for stolen goods, drugs, and sex, which is often the focus of prison security departments, keeping the illicit market dynamics of modern slavery out of prisons — beyond the wall — is a big task.

Gardner considers national, regional, and local implementation of the MSA and highlights ‘implementation gaps’ between national and local level responses.³⁶ Whilst some responses aligned with existing multi-agency arrangements, such as local safeguarding boards and multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASH), risks of duplication and lack of ownership were identified, except in cases where local ‘policy entrepreneurs’ had pioneered co-ordinated action.

Gardner also points to a ‘patchwork’ of non-statutory, multi-agency anti-slavery partnership networks which exist across England and Wales, at both local and regional levels. A single whole system approach potentially presents opportunities for prisons to join anti-slavery partnerships to share knowledge and resources and build collaborative responses with a wide range of statutory and non-statutory partners. GRETA emphasise the valuable contribution and expertise of non-governmental organisations and civil society within anti-slavery regimes.³⁷ In designing a single whole system approach to MSHT, attention to consistency in multi-agency work is vital, alongside direct involvement of those who have experience of severe exploitation.

However, anti-slavery partnerships emerged, without central guidance or funding, and continue to exist informally with wide variations in structure and practice.

Multi-agency statutory obligations which incorporate MSHT include safeguarding vulnerable adults and children, child protection, and wider public protection. Individuals involved in MSHT offending may be eligible for management under the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements depending on their index offence and/or sentence length. Within a single whole system approach to MSHT, there are opportunities for prisons to adopt a significant role in supporting the statutory duties of other organisations. One clear example is in supporting the monitoring of Slavery and Trafficking Prevention Orders (STPO) and Slavery and Trafficking Risk Orders (STRO) during the custodial term.³⁸ These ancillary orders represent important but underutilised tools in proportionately restricting and monitoring those who present an ongoing risk of MSHT offending. Applications to the courts for a STPO or STRO are restricted to the police, NCA, and Gangmasters Labour Abuse Authority.³⁹ However, prison staff may be able to provide evidence to support the breach of an order via adjudications or intelligence sharing processes and to support the Probation Service in developing post-release licence plans.

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Principle 6: Evidence-based approaches

Any credible single whole system approach to MSHT must be informed by evidence. Craig and colleagues describe the UK Government’s approach as a bungling together of activities, policies, and practice and point to the need for a more precise approach in the descriptive narrative surrounding the increasing profile surrounding the modern slavery phenomena.⁴⁰ The National Audit Office (NAO) concluded in 2020 that all data relating to MSHT was unreliable and urged

36. Gardner, A. (2018). An Idea Whose Time Has Come? Modern Slavery, Multiple Streams Approach and Multilayer Policy Implementation. *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 10(3), 461–481.

37. Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA).

38. Home Office (2017). *Slavery and Trafficking Prevention and Risk Orders*. HM Government.

39. The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority works in partnership to protect vulnerable and exploited workers.

40. See footnote 10: Craig, G., Balch, A., Lewis H., & Waite, L. (2019).

for a greater understanding of both victims and perpetrators.⁴¹

A single whole system approach may present opportunities to develop theory of change models - how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context.⁴² and examine how data collation and sharing could be improved. Empirical studies into justice-involved individuals who have been subjected to MSHT exploitation and/or involved in MSHT offending could be supported across a range of agencies where learning is enhanced by sharing the complexities of the lives of people in prison involved in MSHT. This would include developing an evidence-informed understanding and narrative in respect of those who are both victims/survivors of MSHT, and those who become involved in perpetrating MSHT offences,⁴³ potentially shifting notions that modern slavery can simply be locked away or deported.

Principle 7: Policy alignment

The UK Government's current MSHT strategy centres around four priority areas: Pursue (prosecuting and disrupting those responsible for modern slavery); Prevent (preventing people from engaging in MSHT crime); Protect (strengthening safeguards by protecting vulnerable people from exploitation); and Prepare (reducing the harm caused by improved victim identification).⁴⁴ The 4 P's approach is widely established, with an emphasis on organised MSHT offending.⁴⁵ Limited attention is given to evidence-informed opportunities to further develop these priorities for non-organised opportunistic and individual offending, which may be as prevalent as organised forms of MSHT exploitation.⁴⁶ The 4 P's approach appears to be quite linear and lacks an explicit acknowledgement of the cyclical nature of MSHT. This

is particularly relevant to prisons where severe exploitation continues beyond prosecution and disruption, where prevention and safeguards have failed, and where victims are lured back to exploiters. Future strategy and whole systems working would benefit from considering the cyclical nature of MSHT and in developing joined up strategies. This was highlighted by the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre who recommended that a whole system approach is taken towards the Prevention priority.⁴⁷ This proposal highlighted the need for a more precise approach of how prevention is defined and delivered across Government, based on an articulated Theory of Change model. From this, pathways to prevention may be more effectively designed and funded, allowing scope for MSHT concerns to be integrated into wider legislation and policies.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that the contribution of prisons to the UK anti-slavery regime within a single whole system approach is both integral and significant. It is timely for prisons to define their role and develop a strengthened sense of purpose in providing a comprehensive response to MSHT more clearly. By attempting to lock away the problem of slavery and trafficking, prisons also become enmeshed in global economic dynamics that link staff and prisoners to sharply exploitative processes that cannot be kept beyond the prison gates. Prisons require the support and expertise of a range of statutory organisations and civil society, including most importantly those who have experienced MSHT exploitation, in ways that are underpinned by core values of empowerment, trust, and fostering long-term collaborative relationships.

41. National Audit Office (2017). *Reducing modern slavery*. NAO.

42. Theory of Change is a method to describe and illustrate how a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context.

43. Berg, M. T., & Schreck, C.J. (2022). The meaning of the victim-offender overlap for criminal theory and crime control policy. *Annual Review of Criminology*, 5, 277-297.

44. Home Office (2014). *Modern Slavery Strategy*. HM Government.

45. HMPPS (2019). *Serious and Organised Crime Policy Framework*. Ministry of Justice.

46. See footnote 33: Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner and University of Nottingham (2021).

47. Modern Slavery Policy and Evidence Centre (2022). *Prevention of adult sexual and labour exploitation in the UK - Research considering what does or could work to prevent modern slavery*. University of Oxford.