

Case studies of victims and survivors of modern slavery and human trafficking

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The following case studies illustrate the four main types of modern slavery and human trafficking (MSHT): criminal exploitation, labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, and domestic servitude, identified by the Home Office.¹ Two additions, 'cuckooing' and 'organ trafficking', have also been included.²

The majority of case studies have been developed specifically for the purpose of this article. Whilst they are illustrative, some of them incorporate aspects of real cases which have been anonymised and may also reflect where victims have suffered multiple forms of exploitation. Where case studies are reproduced from published sources, references are provided.

Trigger warning: The following case studies contain information that may be upsetting and triggering to survivors of abuse. Please report if you suspect or know of any intelligence to the Modern Slavery Helpline, 08000 121 700, or to Crimestoppers anonymously, 0800 555 111.

Criminal Exploitation

Criminal exploitation incorporates a wide range of illegal activities where individuals are exploited in order to commit offences.

Case 1: Forced gang-related criminality.

Name of victim/survivor: Liam

Age: 17

Nationality: British

Type of MSHT: Child criminal exploitation.

Liam lived in London and his walkway to school was regularly blocked by a group of older boys. On one occasion when Liam was 14 years old, the older boys asked him to take a parcel to an address near the school. He was told that he would be paid £50. Liam refused but the boys persisted and said they wanted him to do it as he wasn't well known. After several weeks he reluctantly agreed but on the way to the address he was robbed. The boys said that he now

owed £800 to the people controlling the drugs and would need to do many more drug drops to pay off the debt. At first the drops were local, but over a two-year period he was forced to travel out of London. Liam became increasingly scared, felt very alone, and witnessed several violent attacks. He started smoking cannabis to ease his fear. Liam was arrested in Manchester with wraps of drugs. Out of fear of repercussions from those he owed money to, he would not disclose any information to the police and chose to provide 'no comment' answers. However, the police took the data from his mobile phone and were able to trace the exploiters who were controlling the drug supply. Liam was not charged with any offence. He was referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and received a positive conclusive grounds decision as a victim of modern slavery for criminal exploitation. Liam learned that the 'robbery' which occurred the first time he took the parcel was set up to ensnare him into working for the gang for the next two years.

Two men and a woman were convicted of trafficking and given custodial sentences. The men both received 4 years and the woman received 3 years and all were made subject to Slavery and Trafficking Prevention Orders (STPO) for a 10-year period, which included conditions of 'no contact with children under the age of 18', 'not to have more than one mobile phone in their possession', and exclusion zones across London. The police made it known in court that Liam had not co-operated with their enquiries. The Probation Service was able to align their post release licences with the STPO conditions. One of the exploiters breached the STPO on release from custody and was recalled to prison and sentenced to an additional six months in custody.

Case 2: Forced labour in illegal activities.

Name of victim/survivor: Minh

Age: 49

Nationality: Vietnamese

Type of MSHT: Forced cannabis farming — central England.

1. Cooper, C., Hesketh, O., Ellis, N., & Fair, A. (2017). *A typology of modern slavery offences in the UK*. Home Office.

2. Full details of MSHT types are set out in the article 'Can we lock modern slavery away? The role of prisons in a single whole system approach', also published in this edition of the PSJ.

Minh was recruited in his home village in Vietnam and trafficked to the UK in a lorry where he was forced to cultivate cannabis in a house in central England, sleeping in squalid conditions, with meagre food delivered by his exploiters. Another man lived in the house who had a learning difficulty and the two struggled to communicate with one another. They were both badly beaten on arriving at the house and were fearful of their exploiters who repeatedly threatened them and their families with torture if they tried to leave the property. They were given a mobile phone to use only to contact their traffickers. After 2 years, when one of the exploiters delivered food, the house was raided by the police. All three men were convicted of cannabis cultivation and given four-year prison sentences. Minh was hoping that the judge would see that he had been forced to do this illegal work, but he didn't, citing that he could have used the mobile phone to call for help. Minh decided to serve his sentence as quietly as possible. However, as his release date was confirmed he became highly anxious. He was terrified his exploiters would regain control over him and was scared for his family if he did not comply with their wishes. Eventually he told his prison offender manager what had happened to him, and a referral was made to the NRM. A Salvation Army safehouse in the North of England was found for him and he was met at the prison gate and transported directly to the safehouse.

Case 3: Forced acquisitive crime.

Name of victim/survivor: Melania

Age: 19

Nationality: Czech

Type of MSHT: Retail crime/shoplifting.

Melania moved to the UK when she was 12 years' old. When she was 14, Melania's mother was concerned that she was being groomed by a Czech man and contacted the police and children's services who took no action. Her mother felt powerless when Melania started to see more of him; and he forced her into marriage at the age of 16, and she fell pregnant at 19. Whilst she was in the early stage of pregnancy, Melania's husband forced her and a girl (aged 15) to shoplift in several counties. Her husband would drive for more than an hour to take them to a town where they would clear the shelves and run to the awaiting car. The shop staff never intervened directly but called the police who usually arrived after they had left. On one occasion the police did arrive in time, and Melania and the child

were taken into custody. They consistently denied that they had been forced to steal. The amount taken across three counties was in excess of £12,000. When Melania appeared in court, her husband attended with her and would not let her speak to probation staff alone. Reluctantly he gave Melania her mobile phone so she could arrange to be interviewed for a pre-sentence report. Although a community sentence was recommended as this was her first offence, the court took the view that only a custodial sentence could be justified due to the high value concerned. The court also recommended that, as a Czech national, Melania be deported when released from prison.

Case 4: Forced begging.³

Name of victim/survivor: Cristina;

Age: 56

Nationality: Albanian

Type of MSHT: Forced begging.

Cristina was trafficked out of Romania and initially lived in Germany where she was subjected to sexual exploitation for many years. When she reached the age of 50, she was trafficked to the UK where she was forced to beg on the streets of a city in the south of England. She would be given a blanket to sit on and a paper cup to collect coins for a few days in one location, before being moved to another street. At the end of each day, she would be searched, and she did not attempt to hide any money for fear of violent repercussions. She lived in a multiple occupancy house, on a mattress on the floor and given very little to eat. She urgently needed dental treatment, but her traffickers denied her access to a dentist. Sometimes people who were passing by asked her if she was ok, and she would pretend not to understand them or just smile and ask for change. Shopkeepers alerted the local authority to her actions, and she was given a Criminal Behaviour Order. When she repeatedly breached the order, she was sentenced to 2 months in custody. After she arrived at the women's prison she broke down and told prison staff of her exploitation and that she was relieved to be away from her exploiters. The police were alerted and began an investigation, but Cristina was too afraid to co-operate. Cristina refused to enter the NRM and went back to her exploiters on release as she was too afraid of the repercussions should they trace her.

3. Whereas human trafficking is often associated with secrecy, victims of forced begging will interact with anyone whose path crosses theirs.

4. Sham marriage or civil partnership are forms of immigration fraud to gain legal residency in the UK. It is usually investigated by the Home Office. Criminal investigations: sham marriages (publishing.service.gov.uk)

Case 5: Trafficking for forced sham marriage.⁴

Name of victim/survivor: Lina

Age: 42

Nationality: Latvian

Type of MSH: Trafficking for forced sham marriage.

Lina was born in Latvia but grew up in Poland with no family support and where she developed a gambling problem. She met her boyfriend, Andria, through mutual friends and they moved to the UK together. Under pressure from Andria, she agreed to befriend women in Poland for the purpose of trafficking them to the UK for sham marriages. Five Polish women in their early 20's were befriended by the couple, who persuaded them to agree come to the UK where they would be paid for getting 'married' to non-EU men. They were coached before attending registry interviews with the men during which they lied about their relationship. Andria arranged for five non-European men to pay £900 for each woman. Two of the women were threatened and forced into prostitution before the sham marriage took place. Lina and Andria both received 10-year custodial sentences.

Case 6: Financial fraud (including benefit fraud).

Name of victim/survivor: Yusef

Age: 44

Nationality: Iranian

Type of MSH: Benefit fraud and money laundering.

Yusef gained asylum in the UK, but he was vulnerable and isolated. He was befriended by a man who worked for an employment agency and who promised to get him a job. However, the man said he would need to continue to claim unemployment benefits until he was established in the new job. Yusef knew this was wrong but thought he would only do it for a few weeks. The man also insisted that Yusef provide his new employer with details of a bank account in another name for his wages to be paid into. The man then insisted that Yusef work overtime shifts to maximise his earnings and to pay him back for securing the job for him. This arrangement continued for 10 years and Yusef told no-one about his exploitation during this time. Over the years he built up good relationships with his new colleagues and his manager who always appreciated his willingness to work overtime. When the Modern Slavery Act 2015 came into force, his employer instigated checks against all the workers' identities and their bank accounts. He requested that Yusef attend the office where he was

asked why his wages were being paid into an account that was not in his name, but he could not provide any answers. Yusef did not turn up for work again and disappeared. His manager and colleagues were shocked as they thought they had got to know him well over the years. His manager contacted the police to report him missing but did not receive any further information about his whereabouts

Labour Exploitation

The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) was established after the 'Cockle Pickers disaster' in Morecambe Bay in 2004 where 21 Chinese people, who had been trafficked in containers by Chinese triads into Liverpool, died when they were cut off by the incoming tide. The GLAA provide guidance on how to spot the signs of Labour Abuse.⁵ Forced or compulsory labour is sometimes hidden, but sometimes people may be exploited in plain sight. Forced labour offences in the UK apply regardless of the victim's immigration status or entitlement to work in the UK. People who are subject to forced labour are typically made to work in sectors such as agriculture and fisheries, food processing and packaging, and construction.

Case 7: Exploitation for multiple purposes in isolated environments.

Name of victim/survivor: David

Age: 49

Nationality: British

Type of MSH: Labour exploitation.

David was an only child and had lived with his mother in a rural area in the Northwest of England all his life. He had some learning difficulties but was physically healthy and got by with simple labouring jobs. When his mother passed away, he struggled to pay the bills and was evicted by his landlord. Through one of his labouring jobs, he met a man who offered him accommodation and regular employment. He accepted but was dismayed to see that the accommodation was a caravan in the man's long and overgrown garden. He then found that the man worked with his extended family and quickly began to be forced to work very long hours for £20 per week after his 'rent' for living in the caravan was deducted. There was no running water or toilet facilities in the caravan and David had to use an outside tap to wash and an outside WC. After two years, David's physical and mental health began to deteriorate, and he had constant chest infections. Late one night, David escaped and admitted himself to hospital where he was found to have pneumonia.

5. Labour exploitation - Spot the Signs (gla.gov.uk)

Hospital staff were concerned about his condition and his reluctance to provide an address or next of kin. Eventually he told them about his living arrangements and the police were called. The wider family were convicted under the Modern Slavey Act as a total of eight other men were found to be living under similar conditions. The family received custodial sentences of between 12 months and 8 years.

Case 8: Victims work for someone other than offence perpetrators.

Name of victim/survivor: Daniel

Age: 38

Nationality: Bulgarian

Type of MSHT: Labour exploitation and money laundering.

Daniel was one of more than 500 vulnerable and impoverished male victims who were tricked by a family of eight men and three women into entering the UK by bus from Bulgaria with false promises of employment in the hospitality sector. The victims were aged between 18-58, often homeless, had addiction and mental health problems, and many were former prisoners or former armed forces veterans with few job prospects. The family used employment agencies to advertise fake jobs as well as direct recruitment in Bulgaria. Each gang member had a specific role. The victims' identities were used for benefit and bank fraud, with over 70 bank accounts opened per person which were used to launder money. They were forced to live in squalid terrace houses in filthy and cramped conditions infested by rats. There were forced to work in large waste management centres, meat rendering factories, or on farms for 12 hours per day. Victims were controlled by constant use of force, threats, and violence. This included extreme violence such as dousing with petrol, threats to remove organs, and threats to kidnap family members. They were denied healthcare and lived on meagre food rations, with some resorting to eating waste food from skips. Sometimes they would be provided with alcohol but were told that this would be added to their debts. Some victims were forced to work for up to five years before one of the victims alerted the police after escaping. Custodial sentences ranged from 7 to 12 years, depending on the roles of the people involved, and the evidence against them. They were all deported at the end of their sentences. The police

estimated that the gang made between £2-7 million over an eight-year period.

Case 9: Victims work for perpetrators.⁶

Name of victim/survivor: Divya

Age: unknown

Nationality: Indian

Type of MSHT: Labour exploitation — Care Sector.

Divya came to the UK from India to work in the care sector. She was housed with four other care workers. Their employer took their passports, and they were ordered to sign a three-year contract with the care company. Divya worked in domiciliary care. Often her employer would drive her to and from clients' homes. She would complete a 12-hour shift with one client and then be expected to go straight into another 12-hour shift supporting another client, often working more than 24 consecutive hours without breaks. A concerned client let her sleep during a shift, and provided her with food as Divya was not earning enough money to buy provisions. This client called the Modern Slavery Helpline for advice on the situation. The Helpline referred her to the appropriate police force, where her case was reviewed and actioned by their Modern Slavery Team. It is not known if her employer was prosecuted.

Sexual Exploitation

Sexual exploitation means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including (but not limited to) profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. It includes but is not limited to exchanging money, employment, goods, or services for sex. This includes transactional sex regardless of the legal status of sex work in the country. It also includes any situation where sex is coerced or demanded by withholding or threatening to withhold goods or services or by blackmailing.⁷

Case 10: Child sexual exploitation — group exploitation.

Name of victim/survivor: Samantha

Age: 15

Nationality: British

Type of MSHT: Sexual exploitation.

6. Source: unseen-Care-Sector-report-2023.pdf (unseenuk.org)

7. Defining sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment | UNHCR

Samantha had a stable family and no problems at school, but she felt lonely. She was befriended by a man who introduced her to alcohol and drugs at the age of 13, and after a year she started staying out for days at a time, returning home with bruises and torn clothes, and with limited recall of what had happened. Although her family attempted to stop her from going out, men would pick her up from her home. Samantha became pregnant when she was 15 and was forced to have a 'backstreet' abortion. She did not know who the father of the child was. She also contracted sexually transmitted diseases and lost count of the number of men she was forced to have sex with. Samatha said that 'they have destroyed my life and taken away my self-esteem. I feel dirty and disgusting'. She became one of more than 350 children (approximately 300 girls and 50 boys) targeted for sexual exploitation in the East of England over a 15-year period. The properties used for abuse were usually Victorian terraced houses on roads frequently rented by students. Children were trafficked to other venues where they were raped including in hotels, parks, or woods. Ultimately, 53 men of a wide range of nationalities were prosecuted, but there were a core group of men who controlled the children and sexually exploited them for both personal gratification and financial reward, charging £50 for children to be abused. Sentences ranged from 7 years to life imprisonment.

Case 11: Child sexual exploitation — single exploiter.

Name of victim/survivor: *Oliver*

Age: *15*

Nationality: *Slovakian*

Type of MSHT: *Sexual exploitation.*

Oliver was trafficked from Slovakia by his uncle. He was forced into sexual exploitation in a flat in London over a period of 12 months. His uncle controlled every aspect of his life for personal gain. He was able to escape one afternoon and ran to a nearby shop. His uncle received a custodial sentence of 10 years and Oliver was placed into foster care.

Case 12: Forced sex work in fixed location.

Name of victim/survivor: *Sade*

Age: *24*

Nationality: *Nigerian*

Type of MSHT: *Trafficking for sexual exploitation.*

Sade was trafficked to the UK with five other Nigerian women. When her exploiters realised that she

had become pregnant through their sexual exploitation, they moved her to work on the reception desk in the brothel. When the brothel was raided by the police, she was arrested and remanded into custody on the grounds of illegal migration and facilitating prostitution. Her exploiters were not arrested. Sade was sentenced to two years imprisonment when she was six months pregnant. When the time came closer to give birth, Sade began to have panic attacks and extreme anxiety. Eventually Sade confided in prison healthcare staff that she had been cursed and if she told the authorities what had happened to her, both her and her child would die in childbirth. Sade gave birth safely and served her sentence in a mother and baby unit. A referral was made to the NRM, and she was later placed in a safehouse under the Modern Slavery Victim Care Contract with her son.

Case 13: Forced sex work in changing location.

Name of victim/survivor: *Ema*

Age: *25*

Nationality: *Hungarian*

Type of MSHT: *Sexual exploitation.*

Ema grew up in an orphanage in Hungary, after being subject to child sexual exploitation by her family, and there were times where she suffered sexual, physical, and psychological abuse by both the staff and other children. She had minor learning difficulties and struggled to cope with change. When the borders across Europe were opened and travel became cheaper in 2013, she was groomed by a pimp and trafficked to Switzerland. He controlled her by using drugs and psychological manipulation and in her mind she did not think that she was being forced to have sex between five and 10 times per day in a locked room. She was then moved to Germany under the same conditions. She could not speak any other language. She no longer knew who she was being exploited by, as she was being advertised on on-line sex sites and was moved across the country where demand for sex with new women and girls was higher. A further journey brought her to the West Midlands. She could not speak English and did not understand when the police raided the property. Black Country Women's Aid (BCWA) considered her to be one of the most vulnerable and traumatised victims of sexual exploitation they had encountered and found that she was HIV positive. BCWA helped to identify her and support her into the NRM. She was then placed in a refuge for victims of Modern Slavery by the Salvation Army.

8. What is domestic servitude? Definition, examples and statistics | Freedom Fund

Case 14: Trafficking for personal gratification.

Name of victim/survivor: Nadia

Age: 22

Nationality: Jamaican

Type of MSHT: Sexual exploitation.

Nadia had just finished university and was working temporarily as a waitress in Jamaica. A British man who regularly spent his extended holidays there befriended her and offered her a better paid job in his restaurant in Wales and agreed to pay her travel fare. She agreed and was provided with a privately rented furnished flat above a shop. However, he told her that he did not have a vacancy but one should come up soon. At the end of the first week, he told her that he had been paying for her rent, and he would like to start a sexual relationship with her. Nadia liked him and thought that this was the start of a new relationship. However, he began to control every aspect of her life and he often arrived at the property drunk and unannounced, expecting to have sex with her at any time. He then told Nadia that one of his friends was having a difficult time and told her that she would need to visit him. He arranged for her to go to the man's house where she was forced to have sex with him. Nadia summed up the courage to contact her aunt who lived in London, but was initially too ashamed to tell her about her exploitation. Her aunt was suspicious and arranged to visit her; at this point Nadia agreed to return with her to her home and to attempt to start her life again. Nadia contacted the police and handed over her phone with evidence of trafficking. The man received a 2-year custodial sentence for trafficking for sexual exploitation.

Domestic Servitude

Domestic servitude is a form of slavery that traps people in forced labour within private homes, where they may be ill-treated and made to work for little or no pay.⁸

Case 15: Exploited by partner.

Name of victim/survivor: Pasha

Age: 27

Nationality: Turkish

Type of MSHT: Trafficking for domestic servitude.

Michael, a British citizen, married Pasha, a Turkish national, in Istanbul. Pasha had not been to the UK before, and all her family remained in Turkey. They had a second ceremony in the UK, and they settled in the North of England, living near his wider family. After the

wedding Michael became very controlling — not allowing her to leave the house and ensuring she did all the chores and forced her to work from home, packing items for his catering business. He forced her to have sex on demand. When she became pregnant, he started to be physically violent to her, pulling her hair and punching her in the face. On one occasion he did this when she was in the back garden. The neighbours witnessed it and reported it the police and he was prosecuted for holding his wife in domestic servitude. He received a custodial sentence of 2 years.

Case 16: Exploited by relatives.

Name of victim/survivor: Ade

Age: 8

Nationality: Nigerian

Type of MSHT: Trafficking for domestic servitude.

Ade's extended family lived in Birmingham and persuaded his parents to allow him to be sent to Birmingham from Nigeria where they claimed he would have the opportunity for a better life. When he arrived, he was given a mattress in a cupboard under the stairs and was forced to clean and tidy the house, prepare food, and be on duty looking after the other children from 6am until 11pm. He was given the left-over food from dinner and other scraps. He was not allowed to speak unless he was spoken to and was made to stand facing a wall for hours at a time. The children of the family humiliated and bullied him. When he was 12, he started to take one of the younger children to school and one of the teachers asked him why he was not in school. This uncovered the abuse, and the police were called. Ade was placed into foster care and started school. His aunt and uncle who exploited him were given custodial sentences of 2 years for domestic servitude.

Case 17: Exploiters not related to victims.⁹

Name of victim/survivor: Mira

Age: 20

Nationality: Filipino

Type of MSHT: Trafficking for domestic servitude.

Mira grew up in a small village in the Philippines, in a large and poor family, and had made the hard decision to approach an agent for work overseas to support her family. In return for her first four months' salary, she was found a job in the middle east and was taken to the UK by these employers when they came to visit a family member.

Mira worked 16 hours a day with no time off and shared a room with the children. She kept all her belongings in a small space under the washing machine. She ate only leftovers and was forbidden

9. Source: Kalayaan. Available at: Case Study 2: Escaped But Failed (kalayaan.org.uk)

10. In similar cases to Mira's, domestic workers have disappeared, being driven underground, and criminalised by their immigration status.

from cooking additional food for herself. While Mira had been paid £100 per month in the middle east, three months into her time in the UK she had received nothing, and she was desperately worried about how her family were surviving without her remittances. Mira escaped to the charity Kalayaan with her passport, but when her visa was examined there was no option within the immigration rules for her to remain in the UK. Kalayaan found Mira legal immigration advice and referred her into the NRM. They found her temporary accommodation and her lawyer is looking at arguments which can be made for her to remain in the UK. In the meantime, she is dependent on the charity of others.¹⁰

Organ trafficking

Organ trafficking includes the illegal organ harvesting from a living or dead individual and the illegal sale and transplantation of human organs.

Case 18: Organ trafficking.

Name of victim/survivor: Soloman

Age: 28

Nationality: Egyptian

Type of MSHT: Selling a kidney / organ trafficking.

Four years ago, men came to Soloman's village in Egypt with promises of employment in the UK. They took him to Cairo as they said he needed a blood test first. However, he was drugged, and doctors removed one of his kidneys. The traffickers gave him \$4,500 and told him not to tell anyone before sending him back to his village. Without medical aftercare Soloman was not able to

undertake the heavy construction work he had previously done to support his family and could only perform light duties. His kidney was sold for \$80,000. His grandmother told him that she knew of at least 15 men who had died when their kidneys had been removed.

Cuckooing

Cuckooing is not yet an offence under UK law. It refers to the taking over a home of a vulnerable person for illegal activity.

Case 19: Cuckooing/criminal exploitation.

Name of victim/survivor: Rita

Age: 64

Nationality: British

Type of MSHT: Criminal exploitation — using a person's home for illegal purposes.

Rita is physically disabled and had been allocated a ground floor flat in Birmingham where she received few visitors and often felt lonely. One of her neighbours started dropping by, and after a month asked for her help and said he needed to use her flat. Keen to help her neighbour, she agreed, and the neighbour provided her with food and alcohol in return. After a couple of weeks another man started to threaten her and moved into her flat and made her sleep on the floor. Lots of people then started to knock on the door to collect drugs or make payments, especially through the night. This continued for several months until another neighbour alerted the council who informed the police and Rita was rehomed. She could not identify the individuals responsible.