

WHAT IS SEXUAL EXPLOITATION?

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Unit, NCA

Sexual exploitation involves the provision of sexual services or acts by individuals subjected to force, threats, coercion or deception designed to induce them. As with other forms of modern slavery, sexual exploitation is largely motivated by profit, with victims forced to engage in commercial sex work, but it can include exploitation by offenders, motivated by sexual gratification. Although victims can be of either sex, women and girls make up the overwhelming majority of victims of sexual exploitation both in the UK and around the world.

Victims of sexual exploitation are often advertised online via adult services websites (ASWs). These legal websites provide independent sex workers with safer models of operating, enabling them to vet clients and agree services before arranging to meet. However, ASWs provide an easy access point to a very wide market, making them attractive to offenders engaged in sexual exploitation.

Sexual exploitation takes place across the UK, and can occur in brothels, hotels, short-term lets and through on-street sex work. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on sexual exploitation throughout 2020, likely shifting offending primarily to residential properties, as the closure of hotels and short term lets limited the ability of sex workers and offenders to operate in outcall models or pop-up brothels.



WATCH ANITA'S STORY

<https://youtu.be/DnWtHR1cHdU>



QUESTIONS FROM THE FILM

- What struck you from the film?
- Did anything you heard surprise you?
- How did Anita's story make you feel?
- What inspired you?
- What questions does it leave you with?

DID YOU KNOW?



Worldwide women and girls make up

99% OF ALL VICTIMS of forced sexual exploitation⁵



THE SURPRISING TRUTH ABOUT VICTIMS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Alison Logier, Service Manager at Hestia

Anyone can be a victim of modern slavery and sexual exploitation. During my time working in this field, I have supported women with degrees and highly qualified careers in need of our help. One woman had a master's degree in chemical engineering. Traffickers can prey on anyone.

We often see a recurring pattern with women who have experienced sexual exploitation. More than one in three victims of sexual exploitation are from Albania. Unfortunately, my team supports many women who have been lured under false pretences and are ultimately deceived, abused and forced into prostitution by a boyfriend or fiancé.

Traffickers will often coerce their victims for months, even years, telling them they will start a new life in a different country and find employment. Eventually, the women arrive in brothels and are raped by dozens of men, with no chance of escape.

Brothels can exist on any street in the UK. They blend into the community and appear as regular houses. Often, neighbours will have no idea the house next door is operating as a brothel. Despite this, there are still signs to look for.

There may be a constant flow of different men coming and going from the house at all hours but most often at night. It can be challenging to determine who lives there. Therefore, it is quite common for these properties to be unkept or not visually in line with their surrounding neighbours.

Women may be escorted into the property at night and leave in a car the next morning. When in public, victims tend to have someone with them, often a man, who will speak for them and always be at their side.

One example we heard recently involved a local GP and victim. A perpetrator escorted a victim to an examination room. The GP wasn't comfortable with him there so asked him to leave. This allowed the victim to talk freely and get help. Sadly, language barriers mean it isn't always easy for victims to seek help if and when they get an opportunity.

For women who have experienced sexual exploitation, their past trauma can be re-triggered at any time. Something as simple as exaggerated gesturing with your arms, stretching to get something out of reach, or shouting can cause a victim to remember the abusive behaviour of their trafficker.

These women have had their trust shattered and a large part of our work at Hestia is to rebuild this trust but it can take months.

Being able to spot the signs may feel daunting. Whilst many people may feel compelled to intervene, your safety is essential. It is always best to let law enforcement investigate. By calling the confidential Salvation Army referral helpline on 0800 808 3733 or the police on 999, you can provide details anonymously about your concerns.

If something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't, and it is always worth reporting, no matter how small your concern. Help is always available.

HOW HAS COVID-19 AND REPEATED LOCKDOWNS AFFECTED VICTIMS OF MODERN SLAVERY?

Alison Logier, Service Manager at Hestia

The last year has been heartbreakingly difficult for many of the women we support. Their resilience and personal strength continue to inspire me, but the scale of what they are dealing with every day is enormous. Being told to stay inside and concerns over how to access basic supplies are often a trigger

to past experiences of slavery and coercion for many women. We've been responding to this by providing increased emotional support and dropping off emergency food parcels.

On top of this, many of the women I work with are struggling with feelings of isolation, cut off from their support networks and opportunities to aid their recovery. Those that have children with them have often struggled to support home learning. As a team, we have been working with generous supporters to get smartphones and internet access to women so they can continue with online learning and maintain relationships. However, this is a huge job and many still do not have access to technology that we all take for granted.

The women I work with rely enormously on foodbanks and donations and very carefully budget their small allowance. However, the pandemic has meant that, at times, the only items left on shelves are very expensive. In the first lockdown, for example, we had cases of women travelling to a supermarket that didn't have nappies and then not being able to afford to pay for an additional trip to another supermarket. It's also been a much bigger task to support the many pregnant women we work with to access cots, prams and baby essentials that we normally sourced through local charities.

It is a frightening time. We know that trafficking will not stop. Economic hardship will increase the vulnerabilities of the people we support and we are concerned about the growing risk of re-exploitation. However, we also remain hopeful that the wider community will continue to work in partnership with us. Despite the pandemic, we are determined to work with survivors of modern slavery and help them to build the futures they dream of and deserve.



SPOTLIGHT ON HESTIA

Hestia began providing support to adults in crisis in 1970 after founder Jim Horne experienced street homelessness in London. He started a soup run for men and women living on the streets and worked with local authorities to provide accommodation. Within the year, more than 800 people were provided with a safe space to sleep at night. Since then, Hestia has grown to support almost 11,000 adults and children in crisis across London every year.

Hestia is one of the main organisations supporting victims of modern slavery in London. Working in collaboration with local authorities and other partners, it strives to ensure that everyone within its care is equipped with the tools necessary for a life beyond a crisis. <https://www.hestia.org/>



⁵ https://cdn.walkfree.org/content/uploads/2020/10/09024229/Stacked-Odds_201008_FNL1_LR.pdf