

The victim's journey: Workshop summary report

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Background

While victims' cooperation in Modern Slavery Human Trafficking (MSHT) police operations plays a key role in effectively protecting them, engaging with victims of trafficking becomes highly challenging. Victims of trafficking are often unwilling to cooperate due to reasons (among many others) related to mistrust of authorities, fears of retaliation (to themselves and their families) and, in many cases, for not recognising their victimisation. To enhance empirical understanding of what factors and practices promote effective police engagement with victims of trafficking and provide outcome-oriented recommendations, Dr Laura Pajon (LJMU), in collaboration with Justice and Care, have worked on a funded research project by the British Academy since May 2025, aiming to: map current victim-centred investigative practices in MSHT investigations and identify factors that might be associated with and influence successful engagement with MSHT victims.

Workshop

On the 25th of June (2025), in collaboration with the MSOIC unit (Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime), members from LJMU ran an interactive workshop with representatives from police forces, governmental and non-governmental organisations.

Workshop participants took part in an immersive workshop activity, moving around the room and, in sequence, engaging in group discussions rooted in three key investigative stages of MSHT investigations:

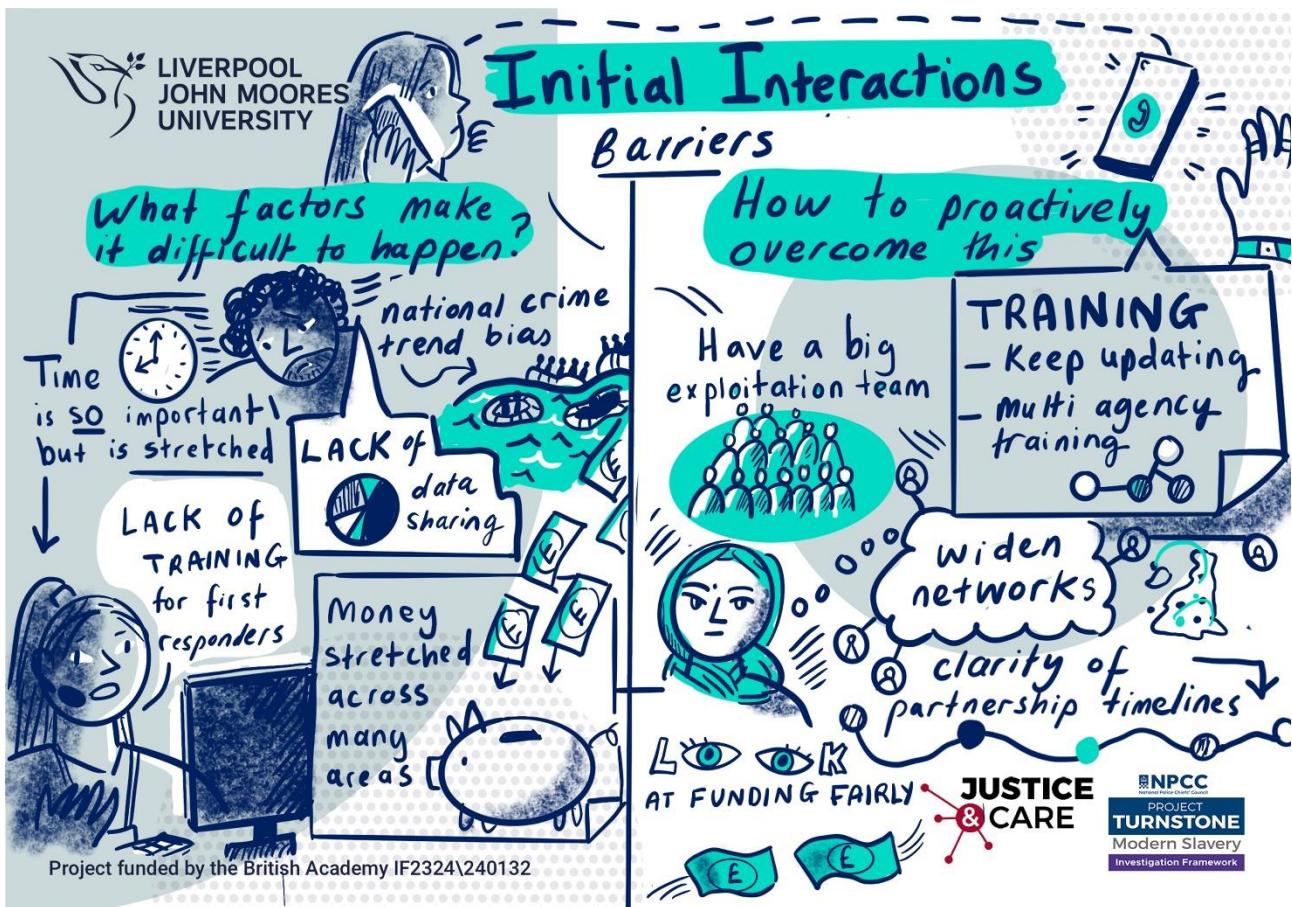
- 1) Identification and initial interactions with victims of trafficking
- 2) Investigative interviewing with victims of trafficking
- 3) Long-term victim engagement

In each of these three stages, participants systematically considered the opportunities and challenges for effective victim engagement and participated in active discussions around the practices and support systems available at various investigative stages to proactively maximise opportunities for engagement and overcome challenges. Such discussions also provided insight into areas that need to be considered by policy and practice to enhance investigative efforts and promote victim safeguarding.

The following series of graphic illustrations presents visual minutes generated from thematic discussions held by participants on various stages of the investigative process and their reflections on supporting victim engagement. These visual summaries effectively capture the key themes that emerged and reflect the breadth and depth of dialogue among the multidisciplinary cohort of workshop attendees.

The discussions culminated in the identification of several priority areas where practitioners and experts believe meaningful changes are needed in modern slavery policy, practice, and innovation. These insights offer a valuable foundation for future reform efforts.

Opportunities and barriers at various investigative stages

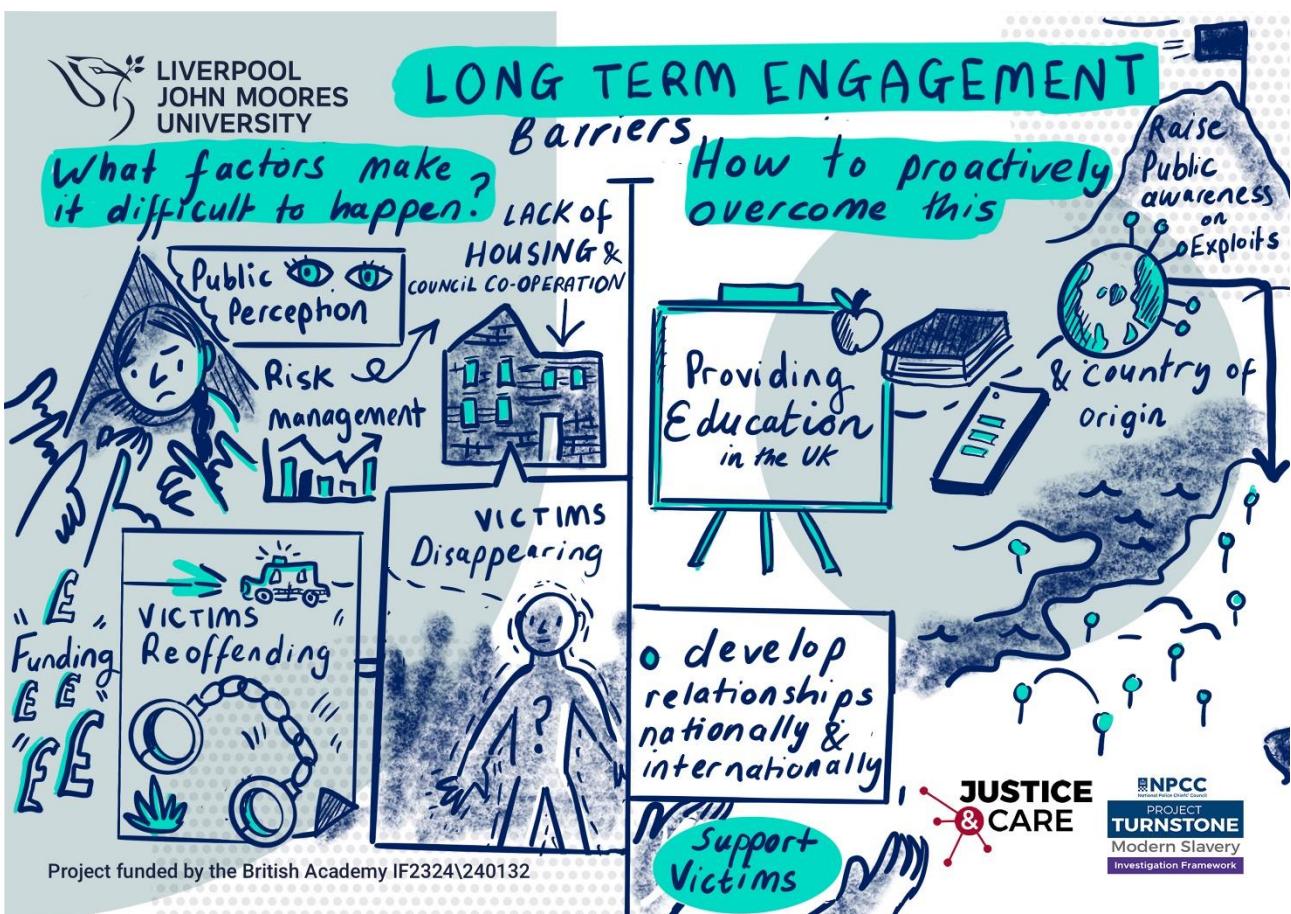






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LONG TERM ENGAGEMENT



Areas for policy and practice consideration

Training

1. Knowledge and training across different policing levels (from frontline officers to more specialised roles) and among professionals within the criminal justice system were recognised as scattered and insufficient.
2. Tacit knowledge, corporate memories and reflective practice were noted as critical for effective practice. Yet, there is a lack of suitable platforms and mechanisms to store and share such knowledge.

PARTICIPANTS' NEEDS

Participants noted the need for ongoing education, joint multidisciplinary training and standardised training (especially for NRM-related training). All were considered relevant to enhance practice, adopt a more coordinated and standardised approach, ensure victims receive consistent messages, and promote understanding and expectations management across agencies and organisations.

Participants also referenced the need for accredited programmes for practitioners working with victims of trafficking and exploitation.

More victim liaison officers and specialised roles within the police force (such as tactical advisors) were demanded by participants, seeing them as key roles in supporting both policing responses and knowledge-sharing.

Multi-agency/partnership

3. Partnership was considered critical to effectively safeguard victims of trafficking and exploitation, allowing for the sharing of ownership and responsibility for the safeguarding of victims.
4. The [victim-navigator programme](#) from Justice and Care, the [victims' voices programme](#) from Medaille Trust, or the [Independent Modern Slavery Advocates \(IMSA\) model](#) from Hope for Justice were examples of the direct benefits of involving NGOs in policing operations with positive implications for both safeguarding and prosecution outcomes.
5. Yet, significant limitations for efficient and effective partnership working were noted:
 - a. Limited resources and funding, leading to challenges in securing immediate safeguarding and long-term accommodation.
 - b. Lack of structured and coordinated multi-agency responses involving statutory and non-statutory partners from the start of operations.
 - c. Reliance on professional networks/contacts (as opposed to organisational contacts).
 - d. Limited networks and connections across force areas, national and international boundaries.
 - e. Lack of use of PND markers (or equivalent markers) used when victims relocate.

- f. Lack of data sharing agreements and delays (and duplication) due to bureaucratic procedures.

PARTICIPANTS' NEEDS

Participants discussed the need to explore opportunities to replicate partnership practices such as those used in other crime types (e.g. Domestic abuse).

The necessity to create protocols and guidance with clear requirements and responsibilities across agencies was also highlighted.

Both were seen as necessary to prevent delays, enhance professional and service resilience, improve safeguarding provisions and access to services, and ensure more proactive and intelligence-led responses.

Criminal justice organisational and strategic priorities

6. Competing organisational priorities and limited resources impacted practitioners' capacity and time to respond to MSHT crimes and their victims.
7. Attendees noted that, on occasions, they need to push against court outcome-related pressures and unrealistic expectations regarding investigative practices (e.g., the length of victims' video-recorded interviews), as such pressures and expectations would undermine victim-centred efforts.
8. Furthermore, delays and negative outcomes on decisions related to accessing services and safeguarding provisions (e.g. NRM decisions) undermined practitioners' trust-building efforts with MSHT victims.

PARTICIPANTS' NEEDS

Participants indicated the need for strong leadership and organisational commitment towards MSHT criminality, including:

- wider education for practitioners within the criminal justice system on matters related to victims' vulnerability, needs, and victim-centred responses.
- Stronger policing links with PCC networks for commissioning support services and assistance to vulnerable victims of exploitation, for more effective and efficient safeguarding and expenditure of public funds.

Working with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) from the early stages of MSHT operations was considered necessary and beneficial both to build CPS knowledge and understanding of the case and for early identification of opportunities for, and likelihood of, prosecution.

The creation of special courts for MSHT cases was also mentioned by attendees.

Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime Unit (MSOICU) and Project Turnstone

The Modern Slavery and Organised Immigration Crime Unit (MSOICU) are a national unit funded by the Home Office. The Unit is responsible for delivering a framework for investigating Modern Slavery in response to the Government's Modern Slavery Action Plan. The overarching aim of the framework is to promote and embed best practice in policing in 3 key areas - Victim Engagement, Offender Management and Identification of Risk.

Key documents and guidance that MSOICU have produced include the Investigating Offences Under the MSA 2015 guide, which includes a Victimology section. You can request a copy of the guide to the MSOICU (msoic@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk) and access further information on victim safeguarding at: <https://www.npcc-msoicu.co.uk/about-msoic/identifying-and-safeguarding-victims/>

The Unit has also produced a series of cultural guides to support engagement of victims, especially at the initial stages of identification. Each of the guides, the cue cards and further resource documents can be downloaded [here](#).

This financial year, the MSOICU core focus of work is to develop a National Framework for modern slavery investigations, as outlined in Action 10 of the Government's Modern Slavery Action Plan. This piece of work is termed Project Turnstone. The Framework will consist of 3 pillars:

1. Turning the stone – effectively and proactively identifying modern slavery, turning the stone, to identify hidden harm through training and awareness raising, national tools, interventions and intelligence.
2. Victim engagement – enhancing the identification with tools and cultural insights, embed trauma-informed and survivor-centric approaches and best practice evidence.
3. Offender management – disrupting networks, prosecuting offenders, protecting the public, strengthen disruption tools, expand financial disruption capabilities and improve intelligence on emerging risks.

Further information

For further information about the workshop, the research project, and the upcoming outputs, please contact the Principal Investigator, Dr Laura Pajon (L.pajonmoreno@lmu.ac.uk).

For further information about Project Turnstone, please contact msoic@devonandcornwall.pnn.police.uk. Further information on the Unit's resources and guidance documents can also be found on the Knowledge Hub.