RECOGNISING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking is a prevalent crime affecting every country and every industry across the world. While trafficking is a crime that is depicted as straightforward in nature, in reality, because traffickers hide victims in the seemingly mundane of everyday life, detecting an exploitative situation can be challenging. Modern slavery has often been coined as a paradoxical crime that is 'hidden in plain sight' as victims are often visibly 'working' in places that the community engages with on a regular basis, such as in shops, construction sites, hotels, and/or using the same transportation systems as everyone else.

While no single indicator confirms the existence of a particular type of trafficking, there are various factors that once noted can help highlight the possibility of an exploitative situation; or when combined could increase the recognition of when an individual is actively being targeted and recruited. The demeanour of the potential victims, regardless of exploitation type, tend to have common themes. A victim's body language and facial expressions can display anxiety, fear, hopelessness, despondency, dejection or desperation. They may keep their head down to avoid making eye contact; or look to their companion, the likely trafficker, as if requesting guidance/permission if you were to try and engage with them. Such demeanour taken into consideration with the totality of the circumstances may suggest trafficking. While those in the midst of active recruitment or grooming process may not exhibit such demeanour and instead may express excitement and hope, for example, due to a possible job opportunity, other common indicators may still be present. Such common themes which highlight the risk of exploitation may include a lack of specific details regarding the potential victim's travel destination, or other details surrounding the job or living conditions, such as a lack of visa sponsorship. In many cases the employment opportunity simply sounds too good to be true. More importantly, going beyond the 'indicators,' and understanding the context behind different types of trafficking scenarios can help familiarise and demystify the exploitative situation, and ultimately assist in recognising suspected victims of human trafficking.

General Indicators

- The potential victim(s) do not have any details about the working or living situation.

  EXAMPLE *They seem lost and confused wandering around a city and when someone stops to see if they are okay, they say they do not know where they are or the address of where they are staying.*

- The potential victim(s) are being accompanied by someone they do not seem to know.

  EXAMPLE *They are escorted through a hotel and there is no communication between them and the person accompanying them. Their body language looks hostile or submissive.*

- The potential victim(s) are being controlled and/or are not in control of their identification documents.

  EXAMPLE *They check in for a flight in an airport and there is a dominant passenger who is holding the passports and speaking on behalf of the other person.*

- The potential victim(s) have few personal belongings despite the fact that they are permanently moving to a new location.

  EXAMPLE *They move to a new city for work but they have only a small bag with few or even no personal belongings.*

- The potential victim(s) show signs of physical neglect or abuse.

  EXAMPLE *They walk into a coffee shop with signs of physical harm (scars, bruises, burns...etc.) and seem malnourished or dishevelled.*

- The potential victim(s) seem disoriented or lost.

  EXAMPLE *They are seen waiting at a bus station for a prolonged period of time with limited personal belongings and may look anxious, before being met by someone they barely seem to know.*

- The potential victim(s) seem distrustful, fearful or hostile.

  EXAMPLE *They attend hospital with visible injuries and refuse to give personal information, seem fearful or distrustful and anxious to leave as soon as possible.*

- The potential victim(s) are being controlled, abused or surveilled by their employer.

  EXAMPLE *They are a domestic worker working in a private home and act extremely submissive, they do not make eye contact, and are dressed poorly compared to the rest of the family.*

- The potential victim(s) are travelling alone and have frequent phone calls or text messages (from the trafficker) that they seem anxious to respond to.

  EXAMPLE *They are anxiously checking their phone while waiting at arrivals in the airport and appear fearful or uncomfortable when communicating on the phone.*

Working and Living Condition Indicators

While it is unlikely that you will ever see someone's working or living situation, something they tell you might raise concerns.

- The potential victim(s) live and work in the same place.

  EXAMPLE *They sleep on the floor of the car wash where they work.*

- The potential victim(s) live in accommodation that is overcrowded and/or dirty.

  EXAMPLE *They share a flat with 10 other men they work with at a construction site.*

- The potential victim(s) are not free to come and go as they please.

  EXAMPLE *They are told they cannot leave the house where they work as a cleaner to go and get food or have leisure time.*

- The potential victim(s) are underpaid or receive no pay.

  EXAMPLE *They are not paid regularly and are often not paid at all because of the 'debt' they owe to their employers for basic amenities such as food or rent.*

- The potential victim(s) work excessively long hours, perhaps without any break.

  EXAMPLE *They work 15 hour days on a fruit farm, are not given any breaks until they have finished their quota for the day and are threatened if they try to leave.*

- The potential victim(s) have a debt that they are working to pay off.

  EXAMPLE *They have not been paid despite having worked in a nail salon for two months because their employer has told them that they have to work to pay off the cost of the travel to the UK.*

- The potential victim(s) are subjected to violence or threats of violence.

  EXAMPLE *They are physically abused as a means of control if they disobey orders.*

**It is important to note that the indicators stated here are not exhaustive and represent only a selection of possible indicators. Moreover, indicators on these lists will not all be present in each trafficking case. However, they serve as a representative sampling of the type of human behaviour that signifies the likelihood of exploitation.*

Specific Indicators for Type of Exploitation

While many of the more general indicators laid out above may be present in all types of human trafficking situations, there may be certain determining factors specific to each type of human trafficking.

SEX TRAFFICKING

- The potential victim(s) use language that mimics familial relationships such as referring to the trafficker as 'Uncle' or 'Daddy', or other victims as 'family'. This language is to enforce loyalty and prevent victims from leaving or speaking out.
- The potential victim(s) are escorted to and from different commercial premises or private residences.
- The potential victim(s) are not able to travel unaccompanied.
- The potential victim(s) have tattoos or other marks indicating ownership by the trafficker.
- The potential victim(s) are in possession of items or clothing that is commonly used for sexual purposes. (e.g. condoms, lingerie, sex toys, etc.).
- The potential victim(s) do not speak the local language, apart from a few words relating to the sex industry or sex-related words.
- The potential victim(s) have no money or personal finances and are dependent on someone else to pay for them.
- The potential victim(s) may have fraudulent or no identity documents or someone else has possession of them.

EXAMPLES

→ *They are travelling to the UK to meet their partner whom they met on social media. They are not in possession of their own finances and believe their new 'lover' will provide for any of their needs.*

→ *They seek emergency medical assistance and have severe bruising that is not easily detected, such as on their head, underneath their hair, so as not to be observed by 'clients.'*

FORCED LABOUR & DOMESTIC SERVITUDE

- The potential victim(s) live in unsuitable housing, such as outhouses, sheds, agricultural or industrial buildings.
- The potential victim(s) have no access to their finances. May have bank accounts opened in their name which they do not have access to or control over.
- The potential victim(s) have no labour contract or an unsuitable or illegal contract such as employment contracts written on paper or sent via social media.
- The potential victim(s) depend on the employer for employment, transportation, housing and meals.
- The potential victim(s) lack suitable training or professional qualifications.
- The potential victim(s) are forced to pay for work equipment, including tools or workwear.
- The potential victim(s) are forced to eat leftovers or insubstantial meals.
- The potential victim(s) are never/rarely allowed to leave premises without the employer or supervision.

EXAMPLES

→ *They state that they live and work in the same location.*

→ *They are only permitted to leave the house where they both live and work when accompanied by the employer.*

→ *They are forced to work in a car wash with cleaning chemicals without the proper equipment, or clothing for the cold weather months.*

ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

- The child is socially and emotionally isolated from friends/family.
- The child becomes withdrawn and/or exhibits secretive behaviour.
- The child spends excessive amounts of time texting or chatting with someone online.
- The child's behaviour and school performance declines.
- The child is not in education or truanting from school.
- The child has gifts that cannot be explained or accounted for.

EXAMPLES

→ *They become emotionally and socially withdrawn from family and peers, but spend excessive amounts of time unmonitored online.*

→ *They have emotional or mental barriers that impact their social engagement, but they develop a sudden close friendship with someone who forces them to keep secrets.*

→ *They develop a romantic relationship with someone who is significantly older who showers them with affection and extravagant gifts.*

FORCED CHILD CRIMINALITY

- The child frequently truants from school for days at a time and has unexplained travel receipts.
- The child has numerous phones or possessions that do not belong or were given to them.
- The child is found in another town or part of the country without any direct connection to the location.
- The child is unwilling to explain where they have been going during the day.
- The child becomes emotionally isolated from their parents or guardians even if they continue to live in their own home.
- The child shows signs of extreme distress or anxiety when engaging with someone unfamiliar.
- The child is unsupervised, seems anxious or is acting under the instructions of someone else.

EXAMPLES

→ *A child is found in the back of a car being driven by a much older adult in which the relationship is unknown and the child has possession of illicit drugs.*

→ *A child is identified by the authorities travelling on a train alone hours away from their home.*

→ *A child has multiple phones that are constantly ringing or buzzing and the child appears anxious to respond.*

**Note: Child exploitation can take on a variety of different formats. The types of child exploitation highlighted in this resource are not comprehensive, and merely reflect two of the most prevalent forms currently in the UK.*

Responding to Suspected Human Trafficking

While there are many indicators that were previously listed, one of the most common signs consistently detected is the close monitoring or surveillance by another person. As a result, it is important to recognise the signs to determine if potential victim(s) are being closely monitored before engaging in order to properly safeguard them and minimise risk of harm.

IDENTIFYING A POTENTIAL TRAFFICKER OR CONTROLLER

Often victims will be escorted or accompanied by their trafficker or a controller to ensure compliance and evade detection. Some potential signs that might identify that a trafficker is accompanying the victim are:

- The controller might insist on speaking on behalf of the victim or act as an interpreter.
- The controller may be resistant to officers speaking to them or the victim.
- The controller and victim are travelling together but there is no verbal or very little verbal communication.
- The victim and controller may not interact in a manner consistent with the stated relationship.
- The body language of the victim suggests fear, tension or agitation around the controller.
- The controller may be holding onto all of the victim's identification documentation or paperwork.
- The controller may be a frequent traveller meeting different people or travelling out alone but returning with different people.

HOW DO YOU ENGAGE WITH A POTENTIAL VICTIM?

It is important to not raise any concerns of exploitation with the victim if they are in the presence of their facilitator or trafficker. Potential victims should be separated from the person travelling with them even if it is a family member or romantic partner as they could be complicit in facilitating exploitation. Also, many individuals may not even recognise their own victimisation as a form of human trafficking which would likely impact any disclosure of their circumstances. Some victims who experience sexual exploitation for example, may be so manipulated by the trafficker that they believe that they have willingly engaged in a certain 'lifestyle.' Foreign national victims who may have entered the UK without documents may be concerned about their immigration status and their own violations of the law.

Traffickers will often traumatise their victim through severe methods of coercion and control to keep them from seeking help. A trafficker may misrepresent how authorities will respond to the victim if they reach out. They may go so far as to threaten that the authorities will deport, arrest or bring criminal charges against the individual instead of safeguarding them. Therefore, even if the potential victim declines assistance at that time, providing informational handouts or emergency contact numbers could support future self-identification and recovery.

When engaging with a potential victim of trafficking it is essential that a victim-centred approach is used to minimise re-victimisation and allow for open communication. A victim-centred approach is trauma-informed and prioritises the victim's needs and concerns while engaging with the victim in a sensitive manner and without judgment or fear of reprisal. Trauma-informed care is an approach that considers the psychological impact of trauma on an individual and considers that trauma when interacting with and responding to the victim.

For further information on identifying a potential victim and implementing a victim-centred approach please refer to Victim-Centred Approach Resource & Identification vs Recovery Resource.

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