

Safeguarding Adults Week - Connections between Homelessness and Safeguarding. Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

Gemma Blunt, Corporate Head of Safeguarding shares some insights into the connections between homelessness and safeguarding as well as some information about modern slavery and human trafficking:

On average, homeless people die at just 44 years old. Homelessness is devastating, dangerous and isolating.

People sleeping on the street are almost 17 times more likely to have been victims of violence. More than one in three people sleeping rough have been deliberately hit or kicked or experienced some other form of violence whilst homeless.

Homeless people are over nine times more likely to take their own life than the general population. Homelessness increases vulnerabilities and reduces protective factors. Many entrenched rough sleepers have experienced adverse childhood experiences and were exposed to risk factors at an early age. Homeless people may have complex needs.

Personal characteristics that may increase risk are:

- Not having mental capacity to make decisions about their own safety, including fluctuating mental capacity (associated with mental health or substance use)
- Communication difficulties
- Physical dependency – reliant on others for personal care or daily life activities
- Substance misuse
- Low self esteem
- Experience of abuse
- Childhood experience of abuse (complex trauma)
- Rejection of help

Social/situational factors that increase the risk of abuse may include:

- Being dependent upon others; in unequal power relationships
- Not getting the right amount or kind of care they need
- Social exclusion and isolation
- Stigma and discrimination
- Lack of access to information and support
- Being the focus of anti-social behaviour (and bullying)
- Overcrowded living arrangements
- Insecure living conditions, homelessness

Challenges

- Lack of local connection if rough sleeping or relying on night shelters – may result in being passed around/ barriers to engagement

- Misconceptions about being unable to safeguard if someone has no fixed abode – ambulance service in the NE – or “too difficult” to safeguard because they can’t be easily contacted
- Opportunities for joint working become missed opportunities when professional boundaries become barriers - housing, treatment or mental health services should resolve, it’s not a safeguarding (ASC) issue...
- Timescales – may need timely action to intervene at points of transition (e.g. hospital discharge) to avoid returning to abusive situations
- Assumptions that people are making lifestyle choices/not willing to engage, rather than unable (e.g. relatively high levels of autism in the rough sleeping and homelessness population)
- Complex needs – but may not be seen to meet safeguarding thresholds
- Self-neglect not always understood
- Mental capacity may fluctuate due to substances or variable underlying mental health issues
- Limited trust in “officials”
- NRPF – good resources and advice are available, but often need to challenge and engage legal advice to secure the support people need
- Modern Day Slavery
- Voluntary sector agencies – not always recognised
- Exempt accommodation

Ways forward and what works?

- Building relationships, creating trust, working at an individual's pace
- Recognising complexity and working with the individual around their priorities as a “way in”
- Multi agency working
- Timely and proactive information sharing
- Sharing expertise
- Professional respect
- Working across legislation/policy boundaries if necessary (Leaving Care Act; Care Act; safeguarding)
- Focus on the well-being of the individual, not the convenience of services.

In Kingston we have a Vulnerable Adult Multi Agency Panel (VAMA). This is an appropriate forum to discuss collaboratively and find solutions to help people manage and act upon risk of abuse if they are experiencing homelessness. Referral details can be found [here](#).

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking:

Mike lost his job during the financial crash and was sleeping rough when he was approached by two men. They offered him work near London. He was taken to an old dirty shed with a tin roof where he was to live, shared with another man. Every day they were picked up by a van at 7am. They spent the day knocking doors asking people if they wanted any work done, such as digging patios or making drive-ways. They were picked-up at 9pm. If they didn't get back in time, they were beaten. Mike and the other men were all afraid of the beatings, and worked 6 days a week unpaid. When one of the men tried to escape, he was beaten with a spanner. Mike was

rescued in a police raid. He described how all the workers look 'skinny and unwell, as if we had all been in a concentration camp'. -taken from the human trafficking foundation [website](#).

The Home Office has described modern slavery as “*a serious and brutal crime in which people are treated as commodities and exploited for criminal gain. The true extent of modern slavery in the UK, and indeed globally, is unknown*”.

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 encompasses human trafficking as well as slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour

“Traffickers and slave masters use whatever means they have at their disposal to coerce, deceive and force individuals into a life of abuse, servitude and inhumane treatment.” HM Government

In 2018, 6,993 potential victims from 130 different countries were referred into the [National Referral Mechanism](#) to be identified as survivors of trafficking and to receive support.

In reality, the extent of human trafficking in the UK is likely to be far greater than the NRM statistics would suggest. The Home Office has estimated in its [Modern Slavery Strategy](#) that there may be as many as 13,000 people held in slavery in the UK.

Exploitation in the UK takes a variety of forms, but most commonly forced labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, and forced criminal activity. If you are working with a person and are concerned they may be a victim of modern slavery and human trafficking:

- Crisis risk assessment: in emergency cases where immediate threat to potential victim (PV) or related individuals or emergency medical treatment is needed or PV is still in the place of exploitation please call the police on 999.
- For queries, ring the Modern Slavery Helpline (0800 012 1700) or the NCA (0844 778 2406). A telephone should be made available to contact your local translation services provider to assist in communication with the potential victim if they are not from the UK. E.g. Language line's contact number is 0845 310 9900.
- Contact your Adult safeguarding lead as soon as possible for further instructions

The human trafficking foundation is an excellent resource for further [information](#)