

Taking a report

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Section 52 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 places a statutory duty on public authorities to notify the Secretary of State if they have reasonable grounds to believe that a person may be a **victim of slavery or human trafficking**.

It is the duty of a local police force (the primary investigative agency) to **begin an investigation** as soon as they believe a modern slavery crime may have been committed, regardless of whether a victim makes an allegation, whether a report is made, whether consent to be entered into the **national referral mechanism (NRM)** is provided or refused, or whether the NRM decision is negative or positive.

Once the scale of the investigation is known, the ownership of it can be reassessed. It is best practice for all investigations and crime reports to be given a crime reference number.

A modern slavery crime must not be approached as an employment or immigration issue at this stage.

It takes courage for a victim to disclose their abuse as they may **fear the consequences**. In any investigation of modern slavery, the welfare of the victim(s) and witness(es) and preservation of any evidence is crucial. This should be foremost in the investigating officer's mind. See **key responsibilities** for further guidance.

It is not always easy to recognise a victim of modern slavery and a victim may not consider themselves to be a victim. Those reporting and receiving reports should have received appropriate training so that they are competent to recognise the signs of modern slavery and know what to do to make the **victim(s) safe**.

Officers and staff may become aware of modern slavery offences through information provided by law enforcement agencies, voluntary organisations, or via a victim, witness or third party. The

channels through which reports can be made include:

- front desk of police station – officers and staff may be approached by a victim, witness, perpetrator or third person (anyone who is not a victim, witness or perpetrator)
- by telephone call – made by a victim, witness, perpetrator, third person or person in a profession or occupation which carries additional trust or responsibility
- on patrol – officers and staff may be approached by a victim, witness, perpetrator or third person, or may arrest a suspect who is a potential victim
- on duty – officers and staff may be given intelligence from external agencies for the criminal investigation department (CID) or the public protection unit (PPU)
- in unconnected operational deployment or in situations of criminal activity
- revealed in other investigations, for example, a missing person enquiry or a child safeguarding meeting
- in custody where a person is being held for minor crimes or offences connected to soliciting/prostitution

If a perpetrator becomes aware that a victim has attended the police station, officers and staff should be aware that the perpetrator may also approach the police station and claim that the potential victim is a relative whom they wish to care for. Be sure to make the potential victim safe, examine the claims of a person claiming to be a family member or other rescuer, and seek advice from a line manager, duty officer, specialist officer or support service (for example, Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Unit (MSHTU)).

Fear of disclosure

Both children and adult victims may fear the consequences of disclosure, including:

- the risk of being re-trafficked
- fear of not being believed – perpetrators may have convinced victims that they have influence within the police service or government agencies
- fear that the potentially illegal activities in which they were involved through coercion will be discovered
- a lack of awareness that agencies and authorities are in a position to help
- fear resulting from belief in spiritual practices, for example, black magic, witchcraft and [juju](#)
- acceptance of their current situation as it is more favourable than their home circumstances

- fear that once they give evidence they will not be paid for their work
- feelings of empathy and attachment with the traffickers (**Stockholm syndrome**)
- fear of discrimination from their cultural/ethnic/religious communities and families
- feelings of shame or guilt about the traumatic and humiliating nature of the abuse they may have experienced

Victims may also be experiencing trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder, which can result in symptoms of hostility, aggression, difficulty in recalling details or entire episodes, and difficulty in concentrating.

Tags

Modern slavery