

# Modern slavery

RCN guide for nurses  
and midwives



Royal College  
of Nursing

**Over  
45 million  
people  
are trapped  
in modern  
slavery  
across  
the globe.**

(Global Slavery Index, 2016)

# Trafficking or modern slavery is defined in three phases

1

**recruitment** or acquisition of a man, woman or child

2

**means** ie, through the use of force, deception, or coercion

3

**purpose** ie, for the purpose of exploitation or forced labour. United Nations Palermo Protocol (UN, 2003)

## Key legislation

### **Modern Slavery Act 2015**

(England and Wales)

### **Human Trafficking and Exploitation**

(Scotland) Act 2015

### **Human Trafficking and Exploitation**

(Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act  
(Northern Ireland) 2015

# Why people are trafficked

- domestic work
- rural work, farms and agricultural work, factories, construction, food processing, hospitality industries, plantations, fishing, beauty industry, shops
- sex workers/prostitutes
- criminal activity including cannabis cultivation, street crime, forced begging and benefit fraud
- forced or sham marriages
- organ removal.



# Signs of trafficking

If the person:

- is accompanied by someone who appears controlling, who insists on giving information and speaking for them
- is withdrawn and submissive, seems afraid to speak to anyone in authority
- provides vague and inconsistent explanations of where they live, employment or schooling
- has old or serious injuries left untreated
- provides vague information, is reluctant to explain how the injury occurred or reluctant to provide a medical history
- is not registered with a GP, nursery or school
- has experienced being moved locally, regionally, nationally or internationally

- appears to be moving location frequently
- appearance suggests general physical neglect
- struggles to speak English
- has no official means of identification or has suspicious looking documents.



# In addition, children and young people might show the following signs:

- has an unclear relationship with the accompanying adult
- goes missing quickly (sometimes within 48 hours of seeking care) and repeatedly from school, home and care
- gives inconsistent information about their age
- displays an unusual attachment to those around them.



# Health issues may include

- long-term multiple injuries
- mental, physical and sexual trauma
- sexually transmitted infections
- pregnant, or a late booking (over 24 weeks)
- disordered eating or poor nutrition
- self harm, including attempted suicide
- dental pain
- fatigue
- non-specific post-traumatic stress disorder
- psychiatric and psychological distress
- vague symptoms such as back or stomach pain, skin problems, headaches and dizzy spells.

# The role of the nurse/midwife

If you suspect that a person is a victim of modern slavery, this is a safeguarding issue.

Trust and act on your professional instinct that something is not quite right. It is usually a combination of an inconsistent story and a pattern of symptoms that may cause you to suspect trafficking.

If you have any concerns about a child, young person or adult take immediate action to ask further questions and get additional information and support.

Trust and act on your professional instinct that something is not quite right

## **Remember:**

- trafficked people may not self-identify as victims of modern slavery
- trafficking victims can be prevented from revealing their experience to health care staff through fear, shame, language barriers and a lack of opportunity to do so. It can take time for a person to feel safe enough to open up
- be cautious regarding age. If a person says they are under 18 or says they are an adult, but you suspect not, take action as though they were under 18 years old
- support for victims of human trafficking is available.

# Modern slavery

## 13,000

men, women and children are trafficked for exploitation in the UK

## 1 in 5

victims report having come into contact with health care services during the time they are trafficked

## 1 in 8

NHS staff in England think they have seen a victim of trafficking in their clinical practice

(NHS England, 2016)



# What to do next

- try to find out more about the situation and speak to the person alone and in private
- reassure them that it is safe for them to speak
- only ask non-judgmental relevant questions
- allow the person time to tell you their experiences do not make promises you cannot keep
- do not let concerns you may have about challenging cultural beliefs stand in the way of making informed assessments about the safety of a child, young person or adult
- speak to your manager, colleagues or local safeguarding leads for advice.

## In all cases for children, young people and adults:

- do not raise your trafficking concerns with anyone accompanying the person
- think about support and referral
- think safeguarding and safety.

# Useful resources

## Home Office (2014)

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-strategy](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-strategy)

## Modern slavery

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery)

## NHS England

[www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/safeguarding/our-work/modern-slavery](http://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/safeguarding/our-work/modern-slavery)

*Draft Northern Ireland Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery Strategy 2016-2017*

For further information go to:

[www.rcn/modern.slavery](http://www.rcn/modern.slavery)

Supported by NHS England



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Publication code 005 984. Printed May 2017