

Modern Slavery

Summary: *Slavery is not a crime confined to the past, but a modern-day reality. It is often hidden in plain sight, but it happens across the world and in every community. It is a violation of human dignity, and represents the opposite of the human flourishing God intends for us.*

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Key points - a clash of worldviews

Modern slavery is an assault against human dignity

- As Christians, we believe that everyone is created "in the image of God", and of inherent dignity and worth: all people are fundamentally of equal value. Nobody should be kept in forced employment, be denied a decent wage, or made to work inhuman hours, and no one should be owned by another person.

Christians are called to provide a voice for the voiceless and to protect the vulnerable

- There are very few in our society who have less of a voice than those trapped in modern slavery. They normally will not be able to leave due to threats, violence, coercion, deception, abuse of power or other forms of exploitation. Some will fear the authorities, or will be unable to communicate due to language barriers. Many will need long-term support to recover from their trauma.

God's desire is for people to be free

- Although the Bible did not explicitly ban all forms of slavery, God heavily regulated it, forbade Israelites from enslaving one another, and through the gospel, sowed the seeds which undermined it: Christians primarily saw one another as brothers and sisters. Christians are called to set the captives free (Isaiah 58:6), and through the likes of William Wilberforce, have led the way in the abolition of slavery.
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Politics

Parliament abolished the slave trade in 1807, and passed laws banning slavery itself in 1833. But modern slavery is a much more sophisticated crime than the slavery of old. To tackle modern slavery, you need modern laws.

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 was a highpoint for the UK's anti-modern slavery laws, and the first major piece of anti-slavery legislation to be passed in almost 200 years. CARE played a leading role in support, and some of our recommendations were taken up.

- The legislation consolidated previous offences relating to human trafficking.
- The new role of the independent anti-slavery commissioner was created.
- Provisions were made for new mechanisms which would allow the assets of traffickers to be seized.
- A new statutory defence was created for slavery victims who had been compelled to commit crimes.
- Advocates specifically for children who had been trafficked were also introduced.

Since the passing of the Modern Slavery Act, bills such as the Illegal Migration Act 2023 have reduced access to victim support, and disincentivised victims from coming forward. The rise in small boats crossing the channel has led to an unhelpful conflation being made between illegal immigrants and people who have been trafficked.

The Walk Free global slavery index ranks each country in the world according to 141 different categories on how they fight modern slavery at the government level. The UK is still ranked highest, closely followed by Australia, the Netherlands, Portugal and the USA.

Modern Slavery is not simply a problem in Britain. Although forced labour is most common in lower-income countries, that is connected to demand from higher-income countries, in production, manufacturing and transportation. It is worth thinking about how we can be ethical consumers, and research the brands we use regularly to see if there are concerns about modern slavery being used in their supply chains.

The UK's battle against Modern Slavery relies on its citizens being vigilant and taking action around concerns. People should be alert to the signs of modern slavery, and report concerns to the Modern Slavery Hotline. It is worth being aware of the following:

- Is someone fearful, avoiding eye contact, unable/unwilling to communicate?
- Do they have few/no personal possessions?
- Do they seem to have poor physical health, malnourishment, signs of abuse?
- Do they work excessively long hours with few breaks?
- Modern Slavery is over-represented in the care sector, in nail salons and at car washes.

Glossary

MODERN SLAVERY - the exploitation of people, for personal or commercial gain, by the use of force, fraud, coercion or deception. It is an umbrella term which covers forced crime, forced labour, debt bondage, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, slavery and more. It happens in rural areas as well as urban environments.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING - the movement (recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt) of people for exploitation, by the use of force, fraud, coercion or deception. Human trafficking does not have to mean movement across borders; it can be within the same country, or even the same town.

PEOPLE SMUGGLING - assisting migrants to enter or stay in a country illegally, for financial or material gain.

Note that people smuggling is in a separate category to human trafficking and modern slavery. It is a crime that only takes place across borders, and sometimes has no element of modern slavery involved. In the media and in Parliament, the two often get conflated, which is unhelpful because people's views about immigration can be strongly held, and can cloud their views on the fight against modern slavery. All Christians should agree that whatever someone's immigration status, to exploit an individual for profit through force, fraud, coercion or deception is a heinous crime.

FORCED CRIME - where victims of modern slavery are forced into criminal activity, thereby making them more fearful about going to the authorities. One famous example is County Lines, where young people and children are forced to traffic drugs around the country. It begins when criminals befriend children, either online or offline, and manipulate them into drug dealing.

DEBT BONDAGE - victims of debt bondage are often brought to the UK with the belief that a good job is waiting for them. They are then told that they owe huge sums of money for accommodation, transport, and other things, and are forced to work in difficult or degrading conditions, for little or no pay, while the trafficker profits.

SEX EXPLOITATION - traffickers can gain the trust of women by pretending to have a romantic interest in them, isolating them from their families, and then forcing them into prostitution.

NATIONAL REFERRAL MECHANISM (NRM) - the government's framework for referring and identifying potential victims of modern slavery, and ensuring they receive the appropriate support. A person cannot self-refer into the NRM; all referrals are made by first responders (e.g. police, local authorities, approved charities). Additionally, being identified as a victim of modern slavery does not guarantee the right to remain in the UK.

Key Bible Passages

Genesis 1:27: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

Exodus 1:11-14: "So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly."

Exodus 2:23-25: "During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them."

Exodus 21:2: "'If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything."

Exodus 21:16: "Anyone who kidnaps someone is to be put to death, whether the victim has been sold or is still in the kidnapper's possession."

Leviticus 25:39-40: "'If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and sell themselves to you, do not make them work as slaves. They are to be treated as hired workers or temporary residents among you; they are to work for you until the Year of Jubilee."

Psalms 10:17-18: "You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror."

Proverbs 31:8-9: "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

Isaiah 58:6: "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?"

Luke 4:16-19: "He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'"

John 8:34-36: "Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.'

Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Galatians 5:1: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

Colossians 4:1: "Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven."

1 Timothy 1:9-10: "We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine."

Philemon 1:15-16: "Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever— no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord."

Revelation 21:4: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

For Further Research

care.org.uk/cause/human-trafficking

theclewerinitiative.org

humantraffickingfoundation.org

ijmuk.org

walkfree.org/global-slavery-index

Baroness Cox: This immoral trade, 2013

The Guardian: 'Trafficked' podcast, 2023

Stephanie Hepburn and Rita J Simon: Human Trafficking Around the World: Hidden in Plain Sight, 2013

Home Office: Modern slavery awareness booklet, 2017

Zana Muhsen with Andrew Crofts: Sold: One woman's true account of modern slavery, 1991

Joanne Phillips with Shannon Kyle: A girl worth more, 2022

Stephen Tomkins: William Wilberforce: A Biography, 2007

Quotes

"Having heard all of this you may choose to look the other way but you can never again say you did not know." - **William Wilberforce**

"If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong." - **Abraham Lincoln**

"I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do." - **Edward Everett Hale, American minister and abolitionist**

"Truly He taught us to love one another; His law is love and His Gospel is Peace; Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother; And in His name, all oppression shall cease." - **John Sullivan Dwight**

"It ought to concern every person, because it is a debasement of our common humanity. It ought to concern every community, because it tears at our social fabric. It ought to concern every business, because it distorts markets. It ought to concern every nation, because it endangers public health and fuels violence and organized crime. I'm talking about the injustice, the outrage, of human trafficking, which must be called by its true name - modern slavery." - **Barack Obama**

"The more people who know about modern slavery, the better. The best investigations we run have started as a result of people reporting concerns." - **Detective Sergeant Martyn Linton, Surrey Police**

"Human trafficking is a multi-billion dollar growth industry because, unlike drugs, which are gone as soon as they are used, humans can be recycled. Because they can continue to be exploited, they're a better investment for traffickers." - **Terry Coonan, Human Rights Professor**

"Human trafficking is an open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ. It is a crime against humanity." - **Pope Francis**

Key Stats

In the UK

- In 2024, 19,125 people were referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), including 5,999 children.
- The UK Government estimates that there are approximately 130,000 victims of modern slavery currently living in the UK.
- The most common forms of slavery (as referred to the NRM) for males are criminal (34%) and labour exploitation (33%). The most common form for females is sexual exploitation (36%).
- The most common nationality of those referred in 2023 was British (25%), closely followed by Albanian (24%), and then Vietnamese (6%). The majority of UK nationals referred were children (78%), whereas the majority of Albanians were adults (also 78%).
- Modern Slavery remains a low-risk, high-profit crime for traffickers. The proportion of prosecutions to NRM referrals is just 1.8%.
- Human trafficking and immigration have become closely linked in recent years. In May 2023, 9% of those crossing the channel in small boats are referred to the NRM on arrival, and 65% of those who have been detained for return were referred to the NRM. (In 2019, just 6% of people who were detained for return were referred.)
- There has been a large expansion in modern slavery cases within the care sector since care workers were included on the Shortage Occupation List: the charity Unseen, which runs an anti-slavery helpline, reported a 606% increase from 2021 to 2022, with 712 potential victims.

Worldwide

- An estimated 50 million people are living in modern slavery on any given day, an increase of 10 million people since 2016. 28 million of these are estimated to be in forced labour. 22 million are estimated to be in forced marriages. More than 6 million are in forced sexual exploitation.
- Globally, it is estimated that around 1 in 4 victims of modern slavery are children.
- Women and girls constitute 99% of those in the commercial sex industry, and 58% of all those in slavery.
- 11 million people are estimated to be in slavery in India, the most of any country. Around 6 million in China are believed to be enslaved, 2.6 million in North Korea, and 2.3 million in Pakistan. North Korea has the highest proportion of people in modern slavery of any country (10.5%), followed by Eritrea (9.0%) and Mauritania (3.2%). The lowest prevalence of modern slavery is in Switzerland (0.5%) and Norway (0.5%). The prevalence of modern slavery is sometimes linked to other global problems, such as conflict, droughts and famine, and climate change.
- 137 countries have criminalised human trafficking. 87 have criminalised forced labour and just 50 have criminalised forced marriage.
- Estimates suggest that the UK imports around £20 billion of goods that are at risk of having been made using forced labour. Electronic goods and clothing make up the vast majority of this.

Stories

Mo Farah was born in Somalia as Hussein Abdi Kahin. When he was four, his father was killed in the Somaliland War of Independence. At 8, he was sent to live in Djibouti with his uncle, but shortly afterwards, he was trafficked to the UK, having been brought across by a woman he did not know and told to use the name Mohamed Farah. In London, he was forced to work for the woman and her family, by doing housework and providing childcare "if I wanted food in my mouth". He was threatened: "If you ever want to see your family again, don't say anything". He was finally allowed to start school aged 12, although he hardly had any English. He discovered he had a talent for athletics, and eventually confided in his PE teacher, Alan Watkinson, about his identity and forced servitude. The teacher contacted social services, and helped Farah to be fostered by another family. Farah became one of Britain's greatest athletes, and has won four Olympic gold medals.

Analiza Guevarra was first caught in modern slavery when she moved to Qatar as a domestic worker, caring for a family with 8 children. Her employer would scream at her for not working hard enough, and encourage the children to abuse her as well. Things got worse when she travelled to the UK with her employer. Her passport was taken, and she was paid £340 a month, to work 18 hours a day, 7 days each week. She wasn't given food, and so had to steal and scavenge. She was beaten and abused. She was made to sleep on the floor of the children's nursery. She didn't know that she had rights, or that she could get help. She eventually escaped, and was able to attend a church, which was home to an organisation raising awareness about the exploitation of domestic workers. They said to her, "You are in good hands. You are no longer a slave." Now Analiza works to free others from modern slavery.

Gemma was just a teenager when she got caught up in county lines. Her mum had a new boyfriend who she hated, and the leader of a gang showered her with attention, calling her his new girlfriend, so she started hanging out with his gang. Everyone else took drugs, and she didn't want to stand out, so she began taking them too. One day, once she was addicted, he said to her: 'I can't give them to you for free no more. You've got to work for them.' Her job was to take the heroin to the person who ordered it and bring back the cash. Sometimes she even had to carry the drugs inside her own body. She felt trapped, with no way out. Eventually, Gemma was spotted by the police. They reached out and rescued her, taking her to a safe house. Gemma says, "Trying to rebuild my life is hard. Getting off drugs is hard. I don't think I'll ever trust anyone again. And I'm still scared."

Pastoral Issues

Someone struggling with what the Bible says about slavery

- Many Christians struggle with the presence of, slavery in the Bible. For example, Leviticus 25:44-46 allows for the purchase of slaves, lifelong enslavement, and the passing of slaves on to your children when you die. This can also be a barrier in evangelism, with people citing the Bible's position on slavery as a reason to dismiss it.
- The Old Testament neither institutes slavery nor ends it, but regulates it. Old Testament law was different in that it gave rights to slaves, and protected slaves from mistreatment at the hands of their masters. It demanded that masters did not use slaves for commitment-free sexual gratification, but entered into marriage (Deuteronomy 21:10-14). It made provision for the release of slaves, including providing them with material possessions (Deuteronomy 15:13-14). It provided for the release of all slaves at the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:47), and

earlier if the redemption price was paid.

- Contrast this with the position in ancient Rome. Tom Holland writes that, "In Rome, men no more hesitated to use slaves and prostitutes to relive themselves of their sexual needs than they did to use the side of a road as a toilet."
- In the New Testament, Jesus did not demand the emancipation of all slaves. Instead, he sowed the seeds that would undermine slavery, by affirming the brother and sisterhood of believers, and by affirming the equality of all through his death for all, slave and free.
- Ultimately, this meant that from the earliest days of the church, many treated slaves as equals, and campaigned for the abolition of slavery. That it took 1800 years for slavery to be abolished in the western world speaks to the engrained nature of slavery, but also the hard work of Christians, culminating with William Wilberforce.

Someone concerned about a potential victim of modern slavery

- Current advice is not to approach or confront someone in slavery, as it can cause a scene and potentially lead to increased harm.
- If someone is in immediate danger, call the Police on 999. Otherwise, call the Modern Slavery Hotline on 08000 121 700, or report it online at **modernslaveryhelpline.org**
- Law enforcement in the UK heavily rely on information from members of the public, and so if in doubt, you should report concerns.