Modern Slavery Risks for Care Workers During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Covid-19 has placed a significant strain on the care sector and there is increasing concern that there may be a growing risk of modern slavery in the recruitment of care workers (Brady and Emberson, 2020). Research by Nottingham University has illustrated some positives from the new ways of working but also risks to the sector posed by Modern Slavery within the workforce.

Modern Slavery Definition:

Slavery is an umbrella term for activities involved when one person obtains or holds another person in compelled service (unseen, 2020).

Someone is in slavery if they are:
- Forced to work through mental or physical threat
- Owned or controlled by an 'employer', usually through mental or physical abuse or the threat of abuse
- Dehumanised, treated as a commodity or bought and sold as ‘property’
- Physically constrained or have restrictions placed on his/her freedom

(unseen, 2020)

Modern slavery is defined as the recruitment, movement, harbouring or receiving of children, women or men through the use of force, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, deception or other means for the purpose of exploitation (BBC, 2019). It is a crime under the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

Covid-19 Pandemic

In terms of positives from the research, the current pandemic scenario was seen to have potentially increased inter-organisational resource sharing, resulting in a more collaborative and supportive care sector than existed pre-COVID-19 (Brady and Emberson, 2020). In addition, many participants in a recent research project commented on:

“an increased sense of community goodwill and support of care staff, which speaks to an increase in the public’s perceived value of social care, and the social care sector” (Brady and Emberson, 2020).

Despite these perceived positive impacts from Covid-19 working, there is concern about modern slavery impacting on individuals working within social care. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic arrests were made amid allegations that staff at two care homes in the South Wales area were victims of modern day slavery (BBC, 2019). This is a recent example suggesting that modern slavery may be a risk within the social care workforce.

Modern Slavery Risks in Social Care:

In general, the research carried out by Nottingham University identified risk factors including:
- The shift to recruit new staff online, rather than via face-to-face interviews, which potentially enables applicants to disguise the signals for which recruitment staff are trained to identify.
- The increased precarity of care-work whereby social care staff may have insecure employment or income.

In addition, to the research above there may be challenges around having robust recruitment processes in place where there is a need to recruit quickly due the pandemic. Providers can ensure that they are demonstrating robust recruitment despite the current climate.
**Specific risks identified from the research at Nottingham University were:**

| 1. Pre-recruitment Financial Risk | Increased recruitment activity and rise in use of migrant labour, with risk of work-visa debt. |
| 2. Post-recruitment Financial Risk | Wages being withheld, especially with regard to sick pay and travel time; delays in payment through retrospective reconciliation; increasing reliance on “pay-per-minute.” |
| 3. Pre-recruitment Operational Risk | Flexible employment practices in response to workforce availability, including waiving of full DBS checks; media perception of care homes discouraging potential staff, leading to labour shortages; reliance on unregulated temporary staffing agencies. |
| 4. Post-recruitment Operational Risk | Decreasing quality of working conditions, pressure for staff to live ‘locked in’ on-site; audit limitations, isolation of home carers, increased risk for BAME staff; obscured signs of exploitation and unacknowledged home care workload increases. |

**Some general Points Concerning Reducing the Risk**

**To Reduce the risks of Modern Slavery providers can:**

- ✓ Recognise the risks of modern slavery to the potential (or current workforce), the people using the service and the business overall.
- ✓ Implement the most robust recruitment practice possible during this time, including ensuring legitimate references are sought.
- ✓ Comply with latest guidance on carrying out Disclosure and Barring Service checks.
- ✓ Carry out thorough checks to establish the legitimacy of other employment related documents and right to work checks.
- ✓ Ensure that recruitment staff are experienced, competent and trusted.
- ✓ Be familiar with the signs of modern slavery.
- ✓ Using reputable recruitment agencies for temporary staff where needed (in line with Government Guidance or good practice concerning the workforce and infection prevention measures).
- ✓ Access training on modern slavery.
- ✓ Be proactive in sharing concerns about modern slavery with the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority and the police and making referrals for support.

**Modern Slavery Information Resources**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Shropshire Partners in Care – Official advice and guidance (other sources) there are two documents which may be useful concerning recruitment:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Dealing with Reference Requests and DBS Fast Track Barred List Service Information in Adult Social Care during Covid-19 Outbreak. Official advice and guidance (other sources)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Example Reference Risk Assessment Template for COVID-19</td>
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Websites

- Unseen
- Modern Slavery Helpline
- Anti-Slavery
- Gang Masters and Labour Abuse Authority
- Salvation Army
- Migrant Help
- Kalayaan
- Medaille Trust
- Home Office

Films

- Unseen (2017) Modern Slavery is Real – Unseen
- Thames Valley Police (2017) Modern slavery - could you spot the signs?
- GLAA Modern Slavery – Do the Right Thing
- Online Training
- Open Learn (Open University) Modern slavery (free to access)

Reporting Modern Slavery

Modern Slavery Helpline confidentially on 08000 121 700. This is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

You can report it to the police or call on 101 at any time to report an incident.

Should you wish to remain anonymous you can contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

Always call 999 if there is a crime in action or immediate threat to life.

Gang Masters and Labour Abuse Authority - if you have any information about the mistreatment of workers, labour providers operating without a licence or a business using an unlicensed gangmaster please share that information.

By telephone - call FREE from a UK landline on 0800 432 0804, to report your concerns in confidence. Lines are open Monday to Friday 9:00am - 5:00pm, you can leave a message outside of these hours. Please note that some mobile service providers may charge.

You can also call 0115 959 7049 (and leave a message outside of office hours using this number) or 0115 959 7052 to speak to one of the intelligence team. The GLAA has interpreters available and can take calls in any language. These are not freephone numbers so normal charges will apply.

By email - intelligence@gla.gov.uk , click on this link and please give us as much information as you can or use this form.

References:


Unseen (2020) MODERN SLAVERY EXPLAINED https://www.unseenuk.org/modern-slavery