Elmore Community Services:

A conversation about ground-breaking research about modern slavery in Oxford - Preventing Modern Slavery

Podcast duration: 55 minutes

Host and Producer: Ben Anderson, Sound Rebel

In conversation with: Fiona Gell, Elmore's Modern Slavery Report Researcher.

Podcast Episode Transcript

Ben Anderson: This podcast was recorded before the potential risks of trafficking and modern slavery from refugees fleeing Ukraine had started to become apparent. Now, more than ever, we need to be alert to the risks for those entering the UK and finding their way to Oxford.

(Music)

Hello, and welcome to this podcast from Elmore Community Services, the Oxfordshire mental health, complex needs and domestic abuse charity. My name is Ben Anderson and I'm delighted to be working with Elmore on a series of podcasts to highlight and dig-in to their brilliant work. This is one of a number of podcasts on the subject of modern slavery.

Recently I spoke to Dame Sara Thornton, the UK's current independent anti-slavery commissioner, about how to spot the signs of modern slavery, how to ensure that victims get support, how we can prevent modern slavery as a society, and of course, enhance future support for victims too.

Dame Sara shared her insights on some ground-breaking research that has been done by Elmore which shows that previous figures on modern slavery in Oxford may have been just the tip of the iceberg. Today, I'm delighted to be speaking to one of the people who completed that research, Fiona Gell.

Fiona, thank you ever so much for your time today.

Fiona Gell: It's very nice to be here. Thank you, Ben.

Ben Anderson: Let's talk about you before we even dig into the research then Fiona. Can you tell me a bit about you and your background?

Fiona Gell: Well, I work as a freelance social development consultant which means that I work on issues of social justice, gender equality, inclusion and empowerment, and broadly human rights. My work ranges from research to policy development, training, evaluations. I worked for a long time in international development, and more recently on local issues in the UK and Oxford, with asylum seekers, refugees, vulnerable migrants.

That's really what my route was into working locally on modern slavery with Elmore Community Services.

Ben Anderson: Before we get to the research then, just for someone who hasn't potentially heard that podcast with Dame Sara, can you give me the definition of modern slavery? And also, talk about the five main types of modern slavery?

Fiona Gell: Well, modern slavery is defined as the illegal exploitation of people, where people are used as commodities for personal, commercial, or criminal gain. People can be bought or sold, controlled by physical and psychological means. Their freedoms are restricted, and their can be appalling levels of brutality involved.

It can take many forms, but generally the five main categories that are recognised are sexual exploitation, and that's where victims are forced into sex work, including in the commercial sex industry. So, that includes pornography, lap-dancing, telephone lines work. There's a massive sex trafficking business both within the UK and globally.

Then there's forced labour. That's where victims are forced to work for offenders in businesses such as construction, farming, car washes, nail bars. The main method of exploitation is not to pay them, or to pay them very little. But they also have to work for very long hours, little safety equipment, very poor accommodation.

Then there's forced criminality. This is where victims are coerced or trafficked into illegal activities such as drug trafficking and county lines. People may know what county lines is; the transportation of illegal drugs, often by children and vulnerable people who are coerced into it by gangs. Perpetrators often use a method called cuckoo-ing which is when a vulnerable person's property is taken over for illicit activities.

Forced criminality can also include forced street crime, such as begging, shoplifting. It can include cannabis cultivation, and also sham marriages, which are false marriages where one party hope to gain an immigration advantage.

Then the fourth area is domestic servitude. This is where victims are forced to undertake household chores and childcare for partners, or partners' relatives, or maybe someone not related to them. They are generally confined to the house. Their documents and freedoms are removed. They're forced to work for very, very long hours, and it's all happening behind closed doors.

Then there's a fifth category which is rare, but still horrendous, called organ harvesting. That's where a person's organs such as their eggs, or other organs, are surgically removed for sale on the black market.

Those are the five generally recognised categories. They may or may not involve the trafficking of the victim into that situation of exploitation. But the hallmark of all these forms of slavery is that victims are lured in by coercion and deception and forced to work against their will. And they are controlled by threats, and violence, and generally unable to leave their situation of exploitation.

Victims are often unaware that the conditions in which they live even amount to crimes of slavery, so that's how they're held captive for often very, very long periods of time.

Ben Anderson: Listening to that, you can't quite believe that these things are happening in modern society, but they are. And your research actually showed that they might be more prevalent than previously thought. Can we talk about the research and the background and rationale behind the research? Was it back in 2018 that this started?

Fiona Gell:	It did start in 2018, yes, but here was a prelude to that really. The prelude is rooted in the challenges of trying to establish the prevalence of a crime like modern slavery which is so, so complex.

In the UK, the most widely accepted estimate was actually done in 2014 by the Home Office and that suggested there were between 10,000 and 13,000 potential victims in the UK. But widely, that is seen as just the tip of the iceberg.

Then in 2018 there was another estimate by the Global Slavery Index which estimated there were 136,000 people in the UK living in modern slavery. So, there's a huge discrepancy between estimates and little accuracy.

Meanwhile in Oxford, there's been a growing concern in recent years about modern slavery with the city being increasingly targeted by organised crime groups, trafficking and exploiting vulnerable individuals. So, for the three years 2016 to 2019, the Thames Valley Police actually recorded 123 cases of potential modern slavery.

The various organisations responsible for community safety under the umbrella of the Oxford Safer Communities Partnership have been working to identify and support these victims and put in place disruption strategies.

Then in terms of other efforts to try and establish the prevalence of modern slavery in this area, back in 2016 there was a research project carried out by Dr Nadia Wager in conjunction with Elmore. She used statistical modelling to estimate the level of modern slavery across the Thames Valley. She came up with between 500 and 2,500 victims of modern slavery.

So, the numbers are very huge, high figures, but also this wide range, little clarity really as to what was going on, is what led Elmore and the City Council to want to establish more clearly what exactly was happening in Oxford in terms of the scale and nature, the risks, around modern slavery.

So, eventually in April 2018 this research project began and Elmore contracted myself and two other researchers, Jane Shackman and Amanda Webb-Johnson, to work on this project with the aim of trying to get a clearer, and better informed sense of the extent and nature of modern slavery in Oxford.

Ben Anderson: Can we talk about the data? Because I'm really interested to find out how you can put together this picture. You talked about Thames Valley Police, what are your other sources of information when carrying out a research project like this? Because obviously, it's also something that's happening in society beyond the knowledge of the police.

Fiona Gell: Indeed. What we wanted to try and do was to drill down from the statistical projections that have been made by various different bodies, to a more evidence-based approach. So, we used a case-based methodology. We asked a very wide range of front-line services across Oxford how many of their clients or patients they thought may have been potential victims of modern slavery over a three-year period.

We started with a number of organisations that we knew were likely to have come into contact with either known, or potential victims of modern slavery. Then we used a

snowballing technique of asking them who else we should talk to.

For each individual they identified, we asked their age, their gender, their nationality, what type of exploitation they'd experienced, where they'd experienced that exploitation, and whether they'd been referred into the national referral mechanism.

There was a great variation in terms of how much of this data was provided by all organisations. Some had recorded it meticulously, and others were working very much from memory. But it does mean that for every potential victim we counted in this study, there is a specific person it relates to with an associated set of data.

You asked about what those sources of information were. Just to clarify that, the bedrock of our data was the Thames Valley Police because they had been systematically collecting intelligence on modern slavery across the Thames Valley for a number of years.

Our task in this research was to build on that by bringing together more coherently, the combined expertise of a much wider range of organisations beyond Thames Valley Police. So, we basically worked across the statutory agencies and third sector organisations.

We drew on case level data from Thames Valley Police, Oxford City County, Oxford County Council, Oxford Health and Oxford University Hospitals. Then we also went to a wide range of third sector organisations and housing associations.

We wanted to go to private sector organisations as well, but the resources and timing didn't allow us to do that. But it

would be very interesting in the future to go to the private sector in terms of hotels, farms, constructions sites, the hospitality sector, but that was beyond what we could do.

So, in total, we collected data in the end from 42 teams of service providers across the city and we spoke to 290 frontline workers, or their managers, and three survivors of slavery, or one of their family members. It was a wide breadth of engagement. And there were a lot of spin-offs from working across a broad range of organisations like this as many people wanted to know more about modern slavery as a result of engaging with the research.

Some wanted to get involved in the existing modern slavery networks. Others set up training for their staff on modern slavery. So that was an important spin-off from this work.

Ben Anderson: I'd like to talk about the impacts a bit later on because that's really interesting that you're looking to compile the data and get a picture on what's happening within Oxford, but actually just by doing the research you're prompting other outcomes which is great to hear, and we'll definitely dig more into that.

Before we do, this feels like incredibly comprehensive research. What were the key questions that you were hoping to answer through it?

Fiona Gell: We had three key research questions which guided the research. The first one was on the extent and nature of modern slavery. So, how many cases of modern slavery actually occurred in Oxford city in the three-and-a-half-year

period from April 2016 to January 2020? What type of slavery was it? Where did it happen? To whom? By whom? And who remained at risk?

The second question was about the challenges in supporting survivors. We were really trying to find out how the existing support could be improved.

The third question was what level of organisational awareness and capacity there was on modern slavery. So, how much understanding was there amongst support services of how to identify victims, did they know where to report them, how to refer them on and how to support them? And what kinds of challenges were there, and what sort of support was needed?

Ben Anderson: So, can we talk numbers then to start off? What did you find in terms of what is the extent of modern slavery as a whole within Oxford? And then I'd like to drill down into some of those specific areas.

Fiona Gell: Well, we identified between 319 and 442 potential victims of modern slavery in Oxford. These were identified by organisations, as I mentioned, during a three-and-a-half-year period from 2016 to 2020. So, 442 potential cases were actually reported to us, but we know that a good number of those could have been double counted between different organisations. So, we also calculated a likely minimum figure of 319.

I might talk a bit more about double counting, but I just want to say that of those cases, 69% were assessed as very likely cases of modern slavery, and 31% as possible cases. Because

one of the huge difficulties in this area is actually working out what is modern slavery and what isn't? What counts? We just had to ask people to make their best estimate.

The challenge of double counting, I did just want to mention because where you're drawing data from many different sources, individuals can be reported by the police and other community-based organisations, maybe the health service. So, you've got a big problem of potential double counting and you have to try and match the individuals and the data set you've got to check if it's been reported twice.

But you're doing this in the context of data protection where there are limits on what personal data can be shared by the respondents and the sources of the data. So, many organisations understandably didn't want to share names and dates of birth, and so on. But they were willing to share the age perhaps, the gender, the nationality, the type of exploitation.

So, it was our job to try and match as best we could where we thought we might be dealing with the same cases. That obviously puts a limitation on the accuracy of this data and that's we've given this range of a minimum and maximum.

At the end of the day, the figures we came up with, we know will be an underestimate of the real situation because of what's called the dark figure of cases that are just hidden from public and professional view and will far exceed the figures we came up with.

Just to add to that, these sorts of methodological challenges really highlighted some of the barriers to protecting those at risk of modern slavery because there's this reticence to share data and information on clients between organisations. Which is understandable because of the concern to protect clients.

There's a lack of a common understanding of what modern slavery is and how to record and report it.

All of that plays into the hands of perpetrators, so some of our recommendations that I'll come on to address how to create a more agile sharing of data and intelligence across the sector.

Ben Anderson: Even with the taking out the data in terms of the double counting and everything else, as you've just said, there're so many cases that will never even come to light because of the nature of this. These are people who have been in touch with different services. How many haven't been, which is the really shocking and worrying thing.

Can we talk about the different types of exploitation, just before we move on from the numbers? Was there one type of modern slavery that was more prevalent than another?

Fiona Gell: The most common form of modern slavery we found was forced criminality. 36% of our cases fell into that category. Also, sexual exploitation at 34%. A lot of these would be women who have been trafficked to the UK for sex.

After that came forced labour, that was 21% of our cases. And then domestic servitude at 9%. And we found one case of organ harvesting in Oxford.

Ben Anderson: Do those figures match with the Thames Valley Police? Obviously, you said you used them as the foundation for the research. But then all these other different organisations fell

into the research too. Do those percentages match with what the police think?

Fiona Gell: So, that's very interesting because in comparing our range of 319 to 442 potential cases with the 123 that were recorded by Thames Valley Police for a similar, slightly shorter period, what we found was that the number of cases we identified by collating data from 42 teams across the city, was 2.5 to 3.5 times higher than the number identified by Thames Valley Police alone.

Interestingly, the cases that were drawn from that data set from many different sources had a much high proportion of sexual exploitation and domestic servitude than the Thames Valley Police data. These were cases that were mainly being identified by third sector organisations and NHS teams.

This really highlights the richness of the data held by this diversity of organisations across the city, but outside of law enforcement who are also engaged in supporting victims of modern slavery. It really points to the need to capture that data more effectively on an ongoing basis to try and create a more comprehensive data set. And the important of third sector organisations and the NHS and the contributions they have to make here.

Ben Anderson: Is this research welcomes by bodies like Thames Valley Police?

Fiona Gell: I think very much so. There are networks in Oxford, including most importantly the Oxfordshire Anti-Slavery Network which

absolutely includes third sector organisations and all of the statutory agencies that are working. So, there's that network, but what isn't happening is the systematic collection and collation of data from all those organisations into one place to build and strengthen the ongoing data collection that Thames Valley Police are already doing. So, the willingness is there, but the systems aren't there yet.

Ben Anderson: Going back to the data then, and the potential victims that you identified, it was 442 potential victims identified over that 3, 3-and-a-bit year period. The most common types of slavery found were cases of forced criminality and sexual exploitation. Can we talk about the demographics of the victims? Age, nationality, gender. Is there a trend?

Fiona Gell: In terms of gender, women just outnumbered men in terms of potential victims. There was a very clear and expected gender pattern with a huge over-representation of women and girls amongst those experiencing sexual exploitation and domestic servitude. To a lesser extent, men were over-represented amongst those experiencing forced labour and forced criminality. You'd pretty much expect that pattern.

In terms of age, the age range was from 10 to 70 years old. 29% of these were children. One very high-risk age group that I wanted to highlight was boys of age 16 to 18 which made up 29% of all male victims. Most of these were boys who'd been forced into criminality or forced labour.

Then in terms of nationality, the victims came from 38 different nationalities. Where nationality was known, 43% of

those were British and 57% were foreign nationals. The predominant nationalities after British were Albanian and Vietnamese, and this very much reflects the picture at national level. Then after that came Pakistan, Romania, Sudan, India and China.

Ben Anderson: So, what you're saying is that there's a huge range of potential victims out there? It's difficult to try and protect one group of people, for example, because different types of modern slavery are targeting different vulnerable people?

Fiona Gell: Indeed.

Ben Anderson: Fiona, we'll move on to some of the recommendations from the research in a minute, but before we do, what percent of the cases that you identified in this research were referred into the national referral mechanism?

Fiona Gell: We found only 35% of the potential cases that we identified had been referred into the national referral mechanism.

Ben Anderson: That's low.

Fiona Gell: It is low. It indicated how using NRM, as it's called, referrals only as an indicator to establish a prevalence of modern slavery in the UK is going to hugely underestimate what's

actually going on. One of the key questions we asked was, if people are not referred into the NRM, why is that?

There were two sets of answers to this. Some of the support agencies were not advising referrals into the NRM because they were worried about the long waiting times for NRM decisions, which sometimes take one to two years, and a lack of protection for their clients while waiting.

Others didn't know about the NRM at all, or they weren't sure enough about the validity of their concern with their client, or they weren't sure what counts as modern slavery. It cuckoo-ing modern slavery? Is someone at risk of modern slavery eligible? There's quite a lot of lack of clarity.

Then also, the potential victims themselves quite often don't want to be referred because they may not regard themselves as a victim, or even at risk. Or maybe they don't want support. Some of them thought that going into the NRM would mean having to move to a safe house out of their area which would be away from their support networks. So, there's really a need to clarify that the NRM also offers outreach and support which doesn't necessarily imply that move out of the area.

Others feared intrusive questions during the NRM process. One woman who had been sexually exploited refused a referral to the NRM and a safe house at the point where she learned what questions were going to be asked of her during the referral process, because she didn't want to have to relive that whole trauma again.

Then others were just unsure about the benefits of entering the NRM. Some were worried that a negative decision could be detrimental to their asylum claim. So, it's a really complex picture in terms of why people don't get referred in.

Ben Anderson: Fiona, is there anything else on the data itself that you'd like to highlight at this point before we talk about recommendations that came from the research?

Fiona Gell: Well, I think that what the research made clear was the wide and diverse range of organisations that may come into contact with victims of modern slavery across the city, and the importance of all of them understanding how to recognise modern slavery. And the importance of coordinated systems to record cases, and to report concerns. And the importance of having an agile means of sharing that data cross the modern slavery partnerships.

All this is really important to improve the coordination of multi-agency operational responses. But it's a real challenge to collate all that intelligence into a coherent picture on an ongoing basis across all forms of modern slavery for both adults and children. And to make sure that it's accessible to all actors who are involved in work on prevention, and protection, and support, and enforcement action.

So, one of the things that the report proposes is a joint data-sharing project to be set up across the Oxford Safer Communities Partnership. That might have three purposes. One is to map and analyse new cases coming in, including new risks and threats.

The second, to develop shared systems for identifying and documenting potential cases. And the third, to develop information sharing agreements to make more agile the sharing of information between partner agencies.

Ben Anderson:	Can we talk about some of the other recommendations then, in terms of the prevention of modern slavery? You mentioned about education, and this is not just general public education, this is people working within different organisations, increasing their education level, being able to spot the signs of modern slavery.
	Can you run me through some of the other recommendations then? So, obviously data-sharing the project there is a big one. What else did you recommend from the report?
Fiona Gell:	I need to start by acknowledging the incredible work being done by really dedicated staff across the statutory sectors and across third sector organisations in Oxford. Both the work being done to protect those at risk of modern slavery, and support survivors because it's incredibly challenging work. The efforts of frontline workers are really very inspiring. What I'm saying is, what we have to recommend is building on an incredible body of work that is existing.
	We had three main recommendations for preventing vulnerable people falling into situations of slavery. The first was around developing community engagement programmes aimed at those most vulnerable to, or at risk of falling into modern slavery. This is really about outreach into communities to raise awareness of the risks of modern slavery. How to keep safe and protect oneself, where to get support, how to report concerns.
	One of the things that could really help here is the translation and distribution of information on the signs of modern slavery,

and the support available to survivors. Given the predominance of Albanians and Vietnamese victims amongst the foreign nationals we identified, those are the languages we would recommend are prioritised.

But also, important here is the creation of alternative pathways for those at risk so that they can escape grooming situations. There are really good examples of this kind of work in Oxford such as the Blueprint Project which works with young men facing drugs, exploitation and tries to get them into alternative pathways. So, that's the first one.

The second is about educating children and young people, particularly the most vulnerable, about the risks of modern slavery, and how to spot the signs. So, youth programmes are very important here. Many have been closed in recent years, but they can be a very effective way of protecting children and young people.

The third prevention recommendation we had was continued efforts to raise public awareness about how to spot the signs of modern slavery. And to report concerns to the Modern Slavery Helpline, or to the police if there's a threat to life. This could include targeting users of local services where modern slavery often occurs.

For example, there's been a lot of calls for the public to be alert to modern slavery occurring in car washes and nail bars in recent times. So, those sorts of initiatives.

Ben Anderson: It's a term that I'd certainly not heard until a few years ago. I know that I'm in a very privileged position and I'm in a bubble, my friends, family. This is something that you hear about. You

see it on the news and it's happening in some far-flung part of the country, or the world often, you don't think that this is happening on your doorstep. Therefore, I walk around and I'm not aware that this could be happening within my community.

So, when it comes to public engagement with this, where do we start with that? Is this taught in schools at the moment?

Fiona Gell: It's interesting. We would like the research to have gone into schools more to see. There certainly are initiatives in schools. In some schools, I know. I don't know how extensively, but we certainly saw some very interesting conversations between police officers and students in secondary schools on the risks, particularly around county lines. I know anecdotally that there is some inspiring work going on, but a huge push on that, I think, would be very, very important.

Ben Anderson: Fiona, we've spoken about your report's recommendations for preventing modern slavery. Can we talk now about your recommendations for helping and support for victims and survivors of modern slavery?

Fiona Gell: Yes, sure. I'd highlight four areas here, and they're all areas that have been recognised at national level as well. The first one that just came up again and again is housing. A lot of concern was raised about the risk of survivors who have escaped their perpetrators being re-trafficked.

A major problem sighted was lack of safe and appropriate housing. Both short-term emergency housing, and long-term

safe housing. Also, we need to recognise the specific housing needs of survivors according to different vulnerabilities.

So, women with complex needs fleeing violence need refuges and secure supported accommodation. For children at risk of exploitation, the safest option may be to move the whole family perhaps out of area. There's a big issue around housing.

The second, the need for focussed programmes of long-term engagement and sustained one-to-one relationships with survivors where trust can be built up over time. This is really important for those who are very vulnerable. Particularly those with long-standing complex needs and mental health issues who may keep returning to the same situation where they'll be re-exploited time and again. Those working in the homelessness sector were strongly voicing that concern.

The third area was the provision of safe interpreting services. A specific issue was raised over the availability of interpreters trained to work with survivors of sex-trafficking which is an incredibly sensitive area.

Then the fourth area was the need for trauma-informed mental health support for survivors. Because the provision of mental health support is often very challenging given the cultural stigma around engaging with mental health services. This includes recognising the impact of secondary trauma on those working with survivors. That could be front line staff. It could be hosts who are offering accommodation in the community.

Ben Anderson: Let's say that those recommendations are taken on and fulfilled to the absolute full potential that they can be fulfilled

to. What kind of impact do you think that would have on the numbers of modern slavery, in terms of people coming forward? Do you think it would impact that? If they knew for example, that there was a safe place for them to go immediately in the short-term, they'd also receive that long-term support, do you think we would see more people coming forward? Is that an impossible question to answer?

Fiona Gell: One would hope. (Laughter) I think one of the things with young people is that they're very influenced by what their peers are doing. So, if their peers are falling into situations of slavery and exploitation, they can easily be drawn in themselves. If they see some of those young people actually finding alternative pathways out of the relationships with these perpetrators, they may well be influenced.

Similarly, if they have the chance to recover in housing where they feel safe in the long-term, and where they've got adequate mental health support, one hopes that they can be helped in the long-term onto more stable paths. But a lot of this is about the provision of long-term sustainable interventions, because it's the short-term interventions which often lead to young people and vulnerable people falling back into the hands of traffickers.

Ben Anderson: Sticking with young people then, because you've got the four overarching recommendations when it comes to supporting survivors, but there're also specific recommendations for specific vulnerable groups, young people being one of them. Can we talk about those first? What were those recommendations for younger people and children?

Fiona Gell: Children and young people in vulnerable circumstances who have been forced into criminality and sexual exploitation was one of three of our main groups that we found to be particularly at risk. Almost a third of all potential victims we identified in this research were children aged between 10 and 17.

Almost all of the forced criminality related to drugs. The majority of those involved were boys, but not all. The child sexual exploitation was overwhelmingly, but not exclusively, happening to girls.

Those who were most at risk of this were those who were living in vulnerable circumstances marked for example, by social isolation, exclusion from school, leaving care, or those who had had adverse childhood experiences.

In Oxford, there's already a really strong system of support to deal with child criminal exploitation. This started in response to the widespread sexual abuse of teenage girls ten years ago. The focus has much more recently shifted to child drug exploitation and the increasing problem of county lines.

So, recognising that many initiatives are already in place, our research highlighted three different continuing needs. One, as we've really mentioned, is this long-term, sustainable interventions and pathways, away from exploiters, including interventions to prevent the victims becoming perpetrators themselves.

The second one is about integrated services and recognising the overlapping nature of different forms of child exploitation, and the importance of fostering trusting and compassionate

relationships with these children, rather than just focussing on disclosure and prosecution.

The third area is around training and awareness-raising about modern slavery. Both for parents and carers, also for teachers in schools and other educational settings, and for third sector organisations.

This could build on the existing, very good City Council-led initiatives to make taxi drivers and hoteliers aware of the risks, which has been rolled out very successfully in the city. But we feel that training to other service providers that come into contact with vulnerable young people could also be very, very beneficial and ultimately protect these children who are so vulnerable.

Ben Anderson: Another vulnerable group that you specified within this report was adults with multiple and complex needs. Can you tell me about those specific recommendations for that group? Because obviously that's a group that Elmore work with every day.

Fiona Gell: Indeed. Adults with multiple and complex needs include those who are experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping, substance misuse and offending, significant mental ill-health, personality disorder, learning disability, autism. These different needs and challenges often overlap, making it hard for them to engage with support services. It puts this group at particular risk of exploitation and slavery.

So, we found this group to be vulnerable to sexual exploitation, to forced criminality through drugs and county lines, forced begging, possibly money laundering. We found others who had been forced into labour for example, on building sites.

The two main factors that kept coming up that really made this group vulnerable were the homelessness and rough sleeping and the substance misuse. So, we focus quite a lot on those.

It's a very complicated area. It's often hard to know whether people are being coerced and forced into illegal activities, or to what extend they're victims or perpetrators of the crime, and the police have to deal with this all the time, trying to sort this out.

But it was very clear that a major need was improved access to housing. I've mentioned it before. Both short-term housing, and long-term, out of country refuges with prescribing services. Those were said to be particularly important for women with complex needs who were fleeing domestic abuse. But also, safe, good quality, long-term housing, which is where multi-year funding is needed, and also the provision of specialist support workers in those housing situations.

There were a couple of other recommendations that arose in the context of these clients. One was to establish modern slavery champions in different organisations across the city who can work closely together to share learning, provide mutual support, and work together on preventative strategies to stop their clients falling into modern slavery.

The other was the establishment of modern slavery navigators to guide and accompany survivors through the victim support process. There were successful models of this at national level

such as an initiative called The Passage for homeless people which could be adopted.

Ben Anderson: I'm trying to keep up with all of this and the complexities of it all. When you said at the beginning, you talked about the five different types of modern slavery, there're quite clear labels to that, isn't there, in terms of what the actual abuse is. That's the thing I'm trying to get my head around; the number of different things that can lead somebody to become a victim, there are so many different areas to cover here, aren't there?

The next thing I've got on my list is asylum seekers. Can you talk to me about those specific recommendations?

Fiona Gell: Asylum seekers are particularly vulnerable to modern slavery because of their lack of secure immigration status. Low income, no recourse to public funds, language barriers, fear of authority. We found that half of the foreign national children that we identified in this study as potential victims of modern slavery were unaccompanied asylum seekers. Most of them were male and predominantly they were from Albania, Vietnam and the Horn of Africa.

Ben Anderson: How old are they?

Fiona Gell: Asylum seekers between 10 and 18. But also, the other very vulnerable group we found were former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. So, those who then leave the care

system at 18 are particularly vulnerable to falling back into the hands of traffickers and so on.

The kinds of exploitation that they experienced included forced labour back in their home countries. And some of the experiences that were cited were in agriculture, or smuggling alcohol and tobacco across borders. Sexual exploitation, particularly on the trafficking route to get to the UK. And then once they're in Oxford, forced criminality, particularly involving drugs. Those were the things that were happening to these children.

So, our recommendations again were, as always, temporary safe housing, that was the big one. And longer-term housing solutions particularly for when they move on from supported accommodation and beyond the age of 18. And also, the need to good access to legal representation for these children.

We also felt it was very important to have a multi-agency approach to explore really, what are the best, effective ways to support and protect these children, and give them pathways out of their vulnerability to being re-trafficked, after they turn 18.

One of the things we found from third sector organisations was they wanted to be brough more closely into the information sharing with statutory agencies, particularly in crisis and high-risk situations. Because there's good coordination between statutory organisations, but there's clearly a need for better linking with the voluntary sector, third sector organisations. That was felt to be potentially important.

Ben Anderson: It's just absolutely shocking to hear that unaccompanied children, 10 years old, they're feeling trauma from wherever they're looking to seek asylum from, from the UK. They are potentially experiencing trauma on the way to the UK and then when they get here.

The final specific vulnerable group that was recognised as part of this research was women in domestic servitude. This is a particularly hidden form of modern slavery, isn't it?

Fiona Gell: Yes. It's very hidden. We definitely found it to be the least understood and known about form of modern slavery in Oxford, which I think is true at national level as well, and with the least resources dedicated to tackling it.

There was concern about it, and that it's so invisible because victims are so often locked away behind closed doors. It's very hard to get to them. So, there's a concern that it could be much, much more widespread than we found and is known about.

Interestingly, we found that the majority of the potential victims of domestic servitude that were reported to us were either of Asian or African heritage, and the vast majority were women. Some of them were young wives being exploited by husbands and by the husbands' families. Often these were women living in very poor conditions forced to work very, very long hours, controlled in their movements and sometimes subjected to physical and sexual violence.

Others were forced to undertake domestic chores for offenders not related to them, sometimes having been trafficked from abroad. Perhaps, having been offered

education, or marriage, or accommodation in the UK, but then finding themselves trapped in servitude once they got here.

Because so little is known about this group, we really strongly recommended that a working subgroup on domestic servitude is set-up in the city to try and better understand what is going on with this group. That would include what are the best ways to reach women who are trapped in domestic servitude, and how do we start to shift attitudes in communities where domestic servitude is still deemed acceptable. How can we improve their access to emergency refuges and shelters?

One of the things we felt talking to frontline staff would be helpful, was setting up a local specialist consultation line to provide specialist advice and support. You had some workers whose line of work is not domestic servitude at all. They might be health workers, or whatever they were doing, but they're coming across these and they have no idea what their role is, what they're supposed to do, how to report it. And there was really a call for dedicated advice and support for them.

Ben Anderson: Fiona, thank you for going into everything in so much detail. I think you can probably sense from my mood as the conversation has gone on, I knew that this was a detailed and complex area, I didn't quite understand just how detailed and complex it was. And also, there's not one demographic here that we need to try and protect as a society. Children are vulnerable, women are vulnerable, men are vulnerable. People are vulnerable because of the country that they come from, because of the complex needs that they may have.

I know that you're looking at this from a very analytical point of view and the recommendations that you're giving are

structured recommendations, tangible recommendations that can be carried out now.

I think for me, the emotional weight of it I suppose hearing just how many different people are potentially vulnerable to this shocking thing. Before we end, is there anything else from the report itself that you'd like to highlight before I ask you my final question?

Ben Anderson: Well, one of the things, we've talked about the cooperation between agencies as being really critical to try and reduce some of the work of these perpetrators. But it's very clear that in Oxford, the inter-agency cooperation, and by that, I mean the structures, and policies and systems for children at risk of modern slavery was found to be very strong and there are a lot of really good initiatives. There's been a lot of work over the last few years.

But there was definitely a feeling that for adult victims, things were not quite so good. And there was felt to be more of a siloed approach to responding to different forms of modern slavery.

So, what we recommended in the report was the setting up of an Oxfordshire multi-agency operational partnership with the aim of more effectively sharing intelligence and coordinating responses to adult victims of all forms of modern slavery, including those at risk. There's a very good model of this already operating in Sandwell, in the West Midlands, which could be emulated.

And then building into that partnership, smaller response teams with wraparound care for adult survivors, and their

often very complex needs. That's a model that we would love to see discussed and debated to see if there's a potential for taking that forward.

As part of that, we made several recommendations for organisations to strengthen their capacity to tackle modern slavery, which would also benefit from the stronger coordination. That would include really strengthening the leadership around modern slavery.

So, leadership that nurtures organisational cultures where spotting the signs of modern slavery and acting on it becomes part of the role of every single staff member in that organisation.

Then training, which is really important, and continuing to roll out the existing, very effective training on modern slavery for staff on an ongoing basis. There was wonderful training going on from the Willow Project during the time of our research, which many, many people appreciated and found helpful.

Then thirdly, we recommended the creation of a local information hub on modern slavery which could resource frontline workers with how to identify victims of modern slavery, how to report it, how to support survivors.

Ben Anderson: Fiona, this is obviously a huge piece of work. As you know, I interviewed Dame Sara Thornton recently, the UK's independent anti-slavery commissioner. She praised this report for providing the basis of an action plan which is not being drawn up to take forward your recommendations from the report.

I suppose, my final question is what's going to happen to the report now? I know we've talked about collaboration between different services and the ongoing data-sharing etc. But who will take forward these recommendations now? Who is responsible for what happens with the findings of what you have concluded?

Fiona Gell:

Our recommendations were made to the Oxford Safer Communities Partnership board. They're the ones that oversee all aspects of safety for the city. We're waiting to hear how they proposed to take the recommendations forward. But a key vehicle for that is going to be this action plan that you mentioned for tackling modern slavery across Oxfordshire.

That is being drawn up by the new anti-slavery coordinator at Oxford City Council. We're very pleased to hear that she's drawing heavily on the recommendations of this research, so that is wonderful.

It also seems there's commitment to take action from the City Council. We just hope that the commitments being made are going to be backed up by resources to turn the plans into actions because it just comes down to resources at the end of the day.

But there are specific initiatives already underway. Elmore, together with the Oxford City Council and the Anti-Slavery Network have started to adapt materials produced by the West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network. Two sets of documents.

One is how victims of modern slavery can access support through the national referral mechanism which has been translated into 11 languages, so that is a fantastic resource.

The second is a leaflet on how to provide better support to survivors of modern slavery from Albanian and Vietnamese communities through having a better understanding of their cultures. Those are both really positive steps forward which respond to some of the challenges identified by our research.

One of the other impacts of the research process itself was to increase awareness amongst organisations on the issues of modern slavery and how to tackle it. One of our hopes is that the interest generated amongst the people who participated and contributed data and knowledge to the research will really help to strengthen the partnership of organisations and that it will help their work in coming together to take forward the recommendations in a co-ordinated, multi-agency approach.

Of course, we've got the Oxfordshire Anti-Slavery Network which is a perfect vehicle for that. So, that's wonderful. The other thing is the report is available on the internet, so we hope people will have a good look at it. I've just shared the headlines. There's a lot more detail there.

I just would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the incredible input of many people across Oxford who contributed to this research by sharing their understanding of the issues with us, and often spent a lot of time, often hours, collating data on their clients for us. Because this report is basically a pulling together of their combined knowledge.

It just demonstrates how much is collectively known about the risk of modern slavery in Oxford, but also what can be done to prevent it and to support survivors. We just need the systems and coordination in place to share the intelligence and response plans, and of course, the resources to make that all happen.

Ben Anderson: Fiona, I'd like to thank you ever so much for your time today. This conversation has been shocking, thought-provoking, fascinating in some cases as well, in just digging into the numbers and how you've actually put together that research to come up with the numbers that you have done. It's been a really interesting conversation, so thank you ever so much.

As you said, if you'd like to read the report, you can go online. This has been a podcase from Elmore Community Services, the Oxfordshire mental health, complex needs and domestic abuse charity. You can read the report at elmorecommunityservices.org.uk, and of course listen to the previous podcasts there too, including the podcast with Dame Sara Thornton.