



Improving our Response to Modern Slavery & Exploitation: Supporting Chinese women

A report by Ruth Van Dyke, Centre for the Study of Modern Slavery,
St Mary's University with Caritas Bakhita House, Rahab and Tamar.

Forward

Modern slavery is a widespread issue which requires a coordinated and multi-agency response to identifying and supporting victims, bringing perpetrators to justice and preventing exploitation. This report began as a case study analysis to understand the trends identified by members of the Modern Slavery & Exploitation (MSE) Group, operating in the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and City of Westminster. Specialist organisations, Caritas Bakhita House, Rahab and Tamar were identifying similarities in cases when supporting Chinese women who were vulnerable to, or had experienced, modern slavery and thought to compare them.

This report is based on over a decade of experience working with members of the Chinese community and supporting vulnerable Chinese women and survivors of modern slavery. It sets out the migratory context and experiences of vulnerability and work. Moreover, it highlights the challenges around identifying victims of modern slavery as well as highlighting the development of best practice. The voices and stories of the women in the case studies remain at the heart of the report and continue to shape the work of the organisations.

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Caritas Bakhita House provides safehouse accommodation for female victims of modern slavery. Supporting women with no recourse to public funds and those not wishing to enter the National Referral Mechanism, Caritas Bakhita House is in a unique position to offer wraparound support.



Rahab provides support for women involved in prostitution and women who have experienced sexual exploitation through outreach, 1:1 case work, residential support and an ISVA service. Rahab also provides advice and training to professionals on how to best support women in their care.



Tamar provides outreach and individual support for women and trans women involved in prostitution, and who have experienced sexual exploitation in Westminster. Tamar has volunteers speaking a range of languages including Mandarin and has built partnerships with community groups in China Town.

1. Introduction

There are many different terms to describe the experiences Chinese women have shared with Caritas Bakhita House, Rahab and Tamar. For the purposes of this report, we will be using two broad terms to highlight the risks and abuses Chinese women suffer, these are modern slavery and exploitation.

Modern Slavery: For the purpose of this report, modern slavery refers to situations where an individual is deceived, coerced or forced into exploitation. Modern slavery is an umbrella term which encompasses human trafficking as defined in the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Adults who are potential victims of modern slavery have the option to be referred to the UK Government's system of support, the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).

Exploitation: For the purpose of this report, exploitation refers to someone else benefitting from the actions performed by an individual who is not appropriately rewarded and/or experiences a violation of their legal rights. It includes labour exploitation in different sectors, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, criminal exploitation and organ harvesting. Exploitation does not always amount to modern slavery, but modern slavery always involves exploitation.

Anyone can be exploited, or become a victim of modern slavery, no matter their age, gender or nationality. This report focuses specifically on Chinese women, due to the experiences of Caritas Bakhita House, Rahab and Tamar. It is hoped that it can support wider understanding of the journey, exploitation and barriers often experienced by this demographic and improve the response by practitioners.

Since 2017, the Chinese community has been the fourth most prevalent nationality of potential victims referred to the National Referral Mechanism and the numbers continue to rise. In 2019, there was a 77% increase in the number of referrals of Chinese nationals, with 798 individuals identified as potential victims of modern slavery and consenting to access support.ⁱ

Despite this, it has long been understood that Chinese nationals often do not disclose their situation of exploitation due to a variety of barriers discussed later in this report, and do not consent to enter the NRM; suggesting that the overall number of Chinese nationals who are victims of modern slavery in the UK could be significantly higher.

This report explores the predicaments and methods that lead Chinese women to come to the UK whilst drawing on the stories of women supported by Caritas Bakhita House, Rahab and Tamar. Touching on the experiences of exploitation, the report explores the indicators and the best practice response for supporting Chinese women who have experienced exploitation.

2. Vulnerability and Exploitation



Mei's Story

Mei's ex-husband lost his shop due to a gambling addiction. He accumulated debts, which they couldn't pay back to loan sharks and they struggled to support their two children.

Mei travelled to the UK in the hope that she could earn money with which to cover at least part of the debt. Mei paid an agent £4000 to help her obtain a visa and was given the contact details of a family in London for whom she could start to work as a nanny. Once she arrived in the UK, she found out that the arrangement was to earn money through involvement in prostitution.

Mei was initially able to refuse and was given work as a cleaner in the brothel, but she was soon moved to another premises and forced into prostitution. She had to pay further amounts to the madam so continued to incur debt whilst in the UK.

When a customer turned violent and tried to strangle her, Mei jumped out of the window to escape and broke her back. She did not engage with the police because of her immigration status and fears of returning home to the loan sharks without being able to pay off the debt.



2.a Leaving home

People migrate from China to the UK for a variety of reasons, from further education through to business expansion and joining family or friends in the long-standing settled Chinese communities. However, there are a number of factors which may lead someone to move to the UK, which makes them particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Caritas Bakhita House, Rahab and Tamar, from here on referred to as the three non-governmental organisations (NGOs), identified the following as common motivators for travel amongst the women they supported:

- Escaping domestic abuse
- Needing to pay off debt
- Believing there are good job opportunities in the UK

Escaping domestic abuse:

Domestic abuse was a shared experience that led many of the Chinese women supported by the three NGOs to seek work abroad. About one in four married Chinese women experience some form of domestic violence from their husbands.ⁱⁱ

Although a Domestic Abuse Law came into effect in China in 2016, many women continue to be abused by their partners and/or family members. Domestic violence is treated as a civil rather than criminal offense which limits the criminal justice responseⁱⁱⁱ. Moreover, culturally, domestic abuse continues to be viewed as a private issue. Perhaps not surprisingly, few Chinese women are able to access shelters as a means of escaping abusive partners^{iv}.

Having experienced the trauma of abuse, the women travelled to the UK often on very little means and without the support of family; the risk of debt bondage and isolation making them vulnerable to modern slavery and exploitation.



Ping's Story

Ping was married to a violent man but when she spoke to the police in China she was told if there was 'no [dead] body' there was nothing they could do.

Ping's husband had a gambling and drinking addiction and incurred a huge debt; he borrowed money from loan sharks before disappearing. The loan sharks visited Ping and physically assaulted her. As she could not pay the debt, they suggested she travel to the UK to work in a restaurant. Spiralling further into debt, Ping paid £10,000 for a flight ticket and what she was told was a working visa application, which was in fact a tourist visa.

When Ping arrived in London, she was met at the airport and taken to a flat. She was assaulted and given poison to drink before naked photos of her were taken and she was forced to provide sexual services. She was moved from flat to flat and all money paid by the 'customers' was given to the 'boss'. Immigration Officers found her in a raid, and she was referred to the NRM.

Afraid of being in a safehouse where no one spoke her language and unable to work and pay off her debt, she ran away. The second time she was identified, she was taken to a detention centre. By paying money to a 'sponsor', she was released from the centre and is once again being exploited.



Having to pay off debt:

Many of the women the three NGOs supported disclosed they had debt to pay off. In some cases, the debt was their own, in other cases it was their husband or family's debt. Often it was incurred paying for health care, as a result of a gambling addiction, (usually not their own) or failed business initiatives.

Being in debt is a vulnerability that can put people at risk of exploitation. The desire to be free from the debt can result in acceptance of job offers that are not as they appear or lead to borrowing money from loan sharks who increase the debt and offer exploitative options for paying it back.

Believing there are good job opportunities in the UK:

Since the 1980s many Chinese nationals have migrated abroad in search of better job opportunities^{viii}. Many of these are from Fujian province, which is still a developing area in China, and the provincial city of Fujian is a second-tier city^{ix}. Parts of Fujian remain poor and it is expensive to move to first-tier cities in China where competition for jobs is fierce. Many of the Chinese women encountered by the NGOs, particularly those with limited education and from less developed areas such as Fujian, believed they had a chance of better work opportunities abroad and agents encourage this dream.

Many of the women do not speak English so are reliant on people who can then choose the information they relayed and take advantage of the situation. This, paired with the need to send money home to provide for family, can prevent individuals from escaping exploitative situations.

2.b Obtaining a visa

To travel to the UK, Chinese nationals must obtain a visa. Previously, tourist visas were valid for six months but since 2016, the UK Government has issued a two-year visitor's visa⁵. It allows for multiple visits but does not allow Chinese nationals to visit for the two full years; they can only remain in the country for six months in any twelve-month period.

The three NGOs found that Chinese nationals travelling to the UK may not be fully informed about their visa conditions. They may not know that on a visitor's visas they do not have a right to work and they may not be informed that the two-year visa does not allow them to stay in the UK continuously. If they remain longer than six months within a twelve-month period their immigration status changes, as their visa becomes void. Moreover, once they leave the UK, they will not be able to return.

This complicated process, often not explained to individuals or entirely understood, makes Chinese migrants vulnerable to exploitation. As the visa becomes void after six months in the UK, they can unintentionally overstay their visa and can be detained by the Home Office.

This is paired with a widely held misconception that Chinese nationals who overstay their visa will be able to regularise their status if they have lived and worked in the UK for ten years and not made use of the NHS or obtained benefits. This rumour was perhaps fostered to promote agencies/individuals who benefit from arranging work for undocumented migrants but puts Chinese nationals at further risk of exploitation if they are then isolating from services and not being identified or given opportunities to ask for help.

2.c The role of agencies

With complicated visa processes and language barriers, Chinese nationals may prefer to visit an agency to arrange travel to the UK. In many cities in China it is easy to find an agent's office. Others search online or use Wechat^x to identify someone to facilitate their travel. Friends might also refer them to an agent they have used.

There are agencies in China which provide legal means of helping Chinese nationals travel to the UK; they may help obtain a visa and essential documents for a fee. However, there are also agents that facilitate travel through illegal and unethical means. In some cases, these may be individuals taking advantage of a vulnerable person, and in others, they are part of a wider organised crime group (OCG) operating transnationally between China and the UK.

The agencies may provide fake documents in order to obtain a visa on behalf of their client for a charge. Those whose stories are explored in this report were charged anywhere from £4,000 to £100,000. Agents will charge higher fees in cases where they believe that it will be difficult to obtain a visa due to her/his background and insufficient money in her/his bank account. Costs also depend on travel arrangements and routes, as some may fly to the UK and others are smuggled on boats or in the back of a lorry.

Many people cannot afford the agent's fees but are reassured that they will be able to pay it off once they start earning in the UK. They may not be aware that the visa the agency has provided does not allow them to work legally and they may be trapped in debt bondage for a number of years before they are free to keep any of the money they earn.

Feng's Story

Following years of domestic abuse, Feng sought help from an agent. She was given a passport, put on a plane via Hong Kong to France and then on a lorry from France to the UK. She was told she owed £100,000 for the gang's help. She has paid £34,000 back over the last 11 years.



Chinese nationals from rural communities and/or with limited English may enter the UK with a companion who helps them navigate the border. Once across the border they may be free to make their own arrangements. In other cases, companions may be part of a human trafficking network and the individual is passed on to other members who arrange accommodation and work; trapping the individual in debt bondage and modern slavery.

In the summer of 2019, a Chinese national who works in the UK was able to obtain first-hand information from an agent who helps Chinese nationals travel to the UK:

“When I met the agent, I asked him to help me get a visa for the UK. He told me to open a bank account and put £6,000 into it. He said I wouldn't have to pay anything before I entered the UK. The £6,000 (about RMB 60,000) would be used to prove that I have enough money, so I can travel and support myself in the UK. The agent would have my bank card. If my visa application was successful, a person working for the agent would accompany me on the flight and after we entered the UK, we would find a hotel. I would then need to ask my family to put the rest of the money, at least another £6000, into the bank account. If I can pay the rest of the money, I can go freely, find a job and work illegally.”

This approach to facilitation assumes that if a Chinese national cannot pay the full price or has had to borrow the money, they will have to pay off the debt. It also presumes that as long as the debt is paid the agent has no further contact with the individual, but if the debt cannot be honoured then they would have to work for the facilitator's network, and all money earned would go to them.

2.d Exploitation

Chinese women working in the UK can be vulnerable to modern slavery and exploitation due to the reasons discussed in 2.a, along with insecure immigration status and the manual labour jobs they often work in, which are considered high risk for modern slavery. What is evident from the women the NGOs supported, is that they were not aware of modern slavery and exploitation, so were not alert to the risks. The women believed they were coming to work in the restaurant industry; for domestic work; childcare; as a masseuse; and even at times knew they were coming to work within prostitution; however, they did not consider that these jobs might lead to modern slavery or exploitation.

The UK labour laws are stricter than those in China so there is also the possibility that what is deemed exploitation under UK law – such as long hours with no breaks – may not appear as such to Chinese nationals. Not being aware of their rights, and a limitation in their rights due to insecure immigration status, can prevent people from demanding better working conditions and seeking support when needed. This can be perpetuated by exploiters who use this to their advantage; preventing individuals from learning their rights, instilling fear by reiterating threats of deportation and abuse, and continuing to exploit.

The cases identified by the three NGOs point to a continuum where some women work for low wages and for long hours, whilst having freedom of movement, the ability to change jobs, money to send home and accommodation not under employers' control. At the other end of the continuum the women receive little or no pay, their movement is controlled, they are transported around the country and may be subject to threats and abuse.

Some of the women supported by the NGOs were trapped in sexual exploitation during their time in the UK, whilst others were moved between sexual exploitation and forced labour in massage parlours, restaurants, homes and factories. It is not uncommon for Chinese women to be exploited multiple times by various people, and by both men and women. In some cases, what appears to be a friendly offer of support leads to further exploitation in a different form. Law enforcement needs to be aware of these often-complex histories during investigation.

Individuals can be passed between exploiters with no knowledge of or access to outside services or support. At times, the women the three NGOs supported were deceived or coerced into modern slavery, and at others they had paid someone to find them work whilst in the UK, which lead to exploitation. The women used a variety of terms to refer to people who act as recruiters, facilitators, or exploiters and who may be part of an OCG, such as loan sharks, gangs, bosses, agents, and friends. These may not all refer to perpetrators as the words can be interchangeable.

Chery's Story

Chery was married to a man who was an alcoholic and was physically and sexually abusive. His mother and brother also abused her.

Chery found an agent on the web who would arrange her flight tickets, visa, and employment in the UK and lend her the money for the fee of RMB100000 (£12,000). Chery did not know she was travelling on a visitor's visa that did not allow her to work. She thought any hardworking person could earn a living, like in China.

When Chery arrived in the UK, there was no work lined up for her. She sought help from members of the Chinese community, who charged her for them to introduce her to potential employers. She was continuously offered massage work, which involved providing sexual services.

Eventually Chery took a job as a masseuse as she had no other means of income. She needed money to survive in the UK, money to send to her friend in China looking after her daughter, and money to pay the debt.

Chery was identified during a welfare visit by staff from an NGO, the police and Immigration Enforcement. A telephone translation service was used for introductions and to risk assess her situation. Chery avoided eye contact, she was shaking and did not disclose her situation. She was arrested for overstaying her tourist visa.

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3. Identifying Victims

3.a Recognising Indicators

Identifying victims of modern slavery and exploitation requires a pro-active approach, professional curiosity and a clear understanding of this type of offending^{vi}. The following indicators, although not a definitive list, can help professionals to recognise the signs:

Behavioural Indicators:

- Distrustful/ fearful of authorities
- Expression of fear or anxiety
- The person acts as if instructed by another
- Limited social contact / isolation
- Provides little information to outreach workers or police
- Understand/speaks little or no English

Physical Indicators:

- Disclosure of force, coercion or deception (i.e. anticipated coming to UK to work in a different job)
- Subject to physical or sexual abuse
- Neglect (access to food or healthcare is limited)
- Indicators of sexual exploitation (How many clients do they see? Can they refuse clients or certain services? Are they expected to be available 24/7? Untreated sexual health infections)

Environmental Indicators:

- Found in or connected to a type of location likely to be used for exploitation
- Restriction of movement and confinement (Where is the victim able to go? Are there locks on the door? Where have they been in their local area?)

Economic Indicators:

- A third party, often described as a loan shark, agent, gang, boss or friend, arranged or facilitated their travel
- Debt to be paid
- No/limited earnings or money deducted from wages
- Fear loan sharks may harm family or will publish material (such as naked photos), that will bring shame on the family

The case studies in this report show Chinese women being identified in a number of different settings. These have included at English language classes, multiagency welfare visits, police operations, Immigration Enforcement activities and at Immigration Removal Centres.

The work of the three NGOs show that an understanding of the journey and history of a victim can help identify the types of abuses they may have experienced. For example, in addition to being sexually exploited, a woman may be babysitting, cleaning, and/or working in a restaurant. She may have been able to escape premises linked to the selling of sexual services and try to find work in China Town, only to return to a massage parlour or a residential flat. As a result, being asked by a professional about her experiences of sexual exploitation may not fully capture the abuse she has experienced.

3.b Understanding Barriers

It is important to know and understand the barriers that Chinese women face in disclosing abuse and in seeking support. Work by the three NGOs have found some of the key barriers Chinese women face include, but are not limited to:

- Lack of trust/fear of authorities
- Fear of reprisal/threats to self or family
- Language barriers
- Do not self-identify as a victim
- Mental health: trauma impacts memory/wish to avoid reliving the experience
- Fear of revealing immigration status
- Involvement in criminal activity

In addition, the case studies show:

- Some women did not understand what the NRM was and what support it could offer them. Without being clearly told about its purpose, some women did not consent to a referral.
- Some women did not consent to an NRM referral because they were still involved in prostitution and/or other exploitative situations as they had to financially support their family. This was the case even where the money they received was very limited.
- Some women felt that they did not have the right to ask for help because of their involvement in prostitution.
- Some women did not disclose as they may not deem their current situation as bad as a previous one. For example, women fleeing domestic abuse.

Work by the three NGOs show a lack of trust in authorities, shame, and fear all underpin the need for agencies, including the police and the Home Office, to adopt a trauma informed approach to aid disclosure. This means that agencies cannot adopt unrealistic expectations that a victim will disclose to someone they are meeting for the first time.

Disclosing abuse and having to describe their experience can cause anxiety and avoidance, and lead people to minimize or tell alternative stories as a way of managing trauma.

Work by the Helen Bamber Foundation found that experiences of trauma affect a victim's memory which impacts on how they recount their experiences^{xi}. For example, a victim's experience may not be linear, or it may have gaps in detail. As a victim's confidence grows, she is likely to add to or change details of her story. This reflects anxiety and not dishonesty.

According to Chinese women interviewed while detained in Yarlswood Detention Centre, disclosure about modern slavery and exploitation was difficult 'because of the severe trauma they have experienced, sometimes because of feelings of shame, as well as fears of potential repercussions from the people who have trafficked them'^{xii}.

The report by Women for Refugee Women noted that where women did disclose, they were often not believed, or officers did not act on Adult at Risk Protocol or complete an NRM. Being in detention has been identified as having adverse effects on women's mental health, and this may compound trauma experienced as victims of modern slavery.

Women may not disclose because they have limited information on who is exploiting them and how. Significantly, they may also be afraid of the consequences of disclosing and as a result withhold information to avoid being seen as a troublemaker within their networks. This fear of reprisal includes threats to family members still in China and threats of intimate photographs being circulated. Revenge porn has often been used as a means to control victims of modern slavery.

It is important to understand that there are a number of barriers which victims face. These barriers are often put in place by abusers as a way to deny women their human rights and access to support.

However, it is important to recognise the additional barriers in place as a result of practitioner processes and approaches. In order to effectively respond to and support victims, professionals need to be aware of these barriers and how they may inadvertently be reinforcing them.

The next section in this report outlines best practice in supporting victims and survivors of modern slavery.

4. Recommendations for Supporting Survivors

Supporting victims and survivors of modern slavery and exploitation is best undertaken when led by the needs of victims. This section outlines what best practice looks like by drawing on the work of Caritas Bakhita House, Tamar and Rahab.

4.a Effective communication

Translation:

The three NGOs found that there are a number of communication challenges associated with engaging with vulnerable Chinese women, some of whom are victims of modern slavery.

During police welfare checks, most of the women who were being exploited in massage parlours spoke very little English and a translator was needed.

Questions related to work around providing sexual services can get lost in translation. Chinese women may deny providing sexual services because they think this only means intercourse. Sensitively asking them what activities they do with clients is more likely to elicit the detail which will help identify them as a victim of sexual exploitation.

Often google translate is used to communicate with the women. However, there are issues of accuracy in using this method because the Chinese grammar system is different to the English one.

This example shows how things can get lost in translation and vital information missed:

Accuracy of Google translation between English to Chinese (vice versa)

Question: Can you keep the money you earn?
(In Chinese: 你赚的钱可以自己留着吗?)

The Chinese translation of the above question is accurate.

However, if the potential victim answered in Chinese: 是的, 我赚的钱我可以自己留着

This means 'Yes, I can keep the money I have earned.'

But Google translate will translate this to 'I can make the money I keep' which might cause confusion.

Tamar, Rahab and Caritas Bakhita House suggest the use of an interpreter who is trained in cultural competency and is trauma informed, and to avoid the use of google translate. Interpreters play a key role and act like a bridge between authorities/legal representative and victims of abuse.

Research on interpreters^{xiii} revealed that some are not translating conversations fully or may be adding their own views, while some others may even be part of an organised crime network. For this reason, it is vital to go through a reputable organisation.

Understanding Terminology:

Experience shows that most victims of abuse are not familiar with the technical terms that professionals use to explain the abuse. This is particularly true if a translator is also needed.

Terms such as modern slavery and exploitation are not commonly used or easily translated so victims may not be able to identify with them. Context and explanation are needed and asking questions based on indicators might be more helpful and less open to interpretation.

The three NGOs found it helpful to explore the following in a conversational style:

- how they came to the UK
- how they made and financed their travel arrangement,
- their expectations in coming;
- the reality on arrival;
- their work histories,
- working conditions and income;
- restrictions on movement;
- access to food; and
- ability to send money home.
- Asking questions such as, are you afraid or has someone harmed you?

In addition, the three NGOs found that Chinese women were not familiar with the work of charities or organisations which support women, as in China not all NGOs are independent from the government.

Instead, the three NGOs found the following ways to engage with potential victims as more effective:

“I am from Rahab, a UK organisation that helps women involved in massage, escorting or prostitution. We are not police offices and don’t work for the government or immigration. We can talk confidentially and give support.”

“I am from Tamar, an organisation like the Red Cross (Chinese nationals are often familiar with the Red Cross, so it provides an understandable reference point. Moreover, it acts as a symbol that indicates help, heal, and humanitarian aid in contemporary Chinese culture). We are here to offer you support. Here are some of the different ways we can do that. I can help you register with a GP, go with you to a Home Office appointment or explain procedures or official documents you have. We also offer free English lessons.”

4.b Safeguarding

All work with victims of modern slavery and exploitation must be led by safeguarding principles and protocols. The option to be referred to the NRM is one way an adult victim of modern slavery can be safeguarded if they provide consent. Where victims do not consent and there are concerns about their safety, a concerning practice has been identified by members of the Labour Exploitation Advisory Group (LEAG) whereby ‘government authorities [are] using [immigration] detention to convince victims to enter the NRM and promoting detention of victims as a safeguarding measure’^{xiv}.

LEAG rightly argues that detention should never be used for safeguarding purposes. Instead ‘potential victims should, instead, be taken to a safe place, given time to recover, before being interviewed and given time to decide whether or not they would like to enter the NRM.’^{xv} Guidance has been created around early support provision for victims of modern slavery.^{xvi}

4.c Health provision

Chinese women who are vulnerable to, or have experienced abuse, will need physical and mental health assessments and support. Their sexual health needs must also be met. NHS sexual health services will usually provide testing, treatment and contraception without requirement of identification, address or payment. Charities like Doctors of the World help people access healthcare. They run clinics and advocacy programmes in London that provide medical care, information and practical support to excluded people such as destitute migrants, those involved in prostitution and people with no fixed address.



Bao's Story

Bao's husband had incurred debts and they were struggling to support their young son and elderly parents. Bao's husband arranged a visitor's visa and flight to the UK through a 'gang' in China so that she could earn money for 6 months to send home.

Bao was identified by the police as selling sexual services in a residential flat and was taken to a safe house. She left the safe house as she felt she needed to earn money and a few days later the police found her in a different brothel.

Back in the safe house, Bao agreed to have counselling, but the therapy centre did not have any Mandarin speaking therapists at the time. She was supported to claim asylum, participated in activities such as English classes and was accompanied to appointments relating to an underlying health condition.



4.d Befriending:

Creating a safe space:

Asking about experiences of modern slavery and exploitation must be in a safe space. A safe space can mean:

- Immediate safeguarding needs are addressed
- The individual is given an opportunity to change clothes if relevant
- The individual is able to sit down and be comfortable
- Where possible, a female should ask the questions
- The conversation is had when the potential victim is on her own and not likely to be interrupted or influenced
- Awareness and mitigation of power imbalance

The three NGOs have all indicated that it is not often that a victim will share their full or accurate experience of abuse in an initial conversation or encounter because of issues of confidence and trust. Tamar and Rahab seek to build rapport and confidence through befriending and/or outreach over medium to longer periods of time.

This befriending can take different forms and can be sequential or simultaneous. For example, support workers will offer to text, call or visit the woman again in the near future in order to keep in touch. They will offer to help women register at a GP if they need health care or ask them if they would like to access English classes. Befriending might also entail inviting them to participate in creative activities which may be tied to the Chinese calendar. Through these activities, Chinese women are seen to gain more confidence and are supported to disclose and receive support for the abuse they have experienced.

The three NGOs have found that victims may disclose a little and see how professionals respond, and then may decide to tell professionals more. Because of this, befriending over a period of time builds the confidence of victims and survivors.

4.e Welfare Visits

The Metropolitan Police Central Specialist Crime Team undertake welfare visits to brothels as part of their proactive approach to identifying victims of modern slavery. Rahab or Tamar will join them, providing an opportunity for women to speak to someone other than the police about their personal safety, health and well-being.

The aims of welfare visits are:

- Improve identification of women affected by prostitution;
- The ability to assess safety, vulnerability, risk and exploitation as a priority;
- Improve access to immediate protection and support; and
- Increase disclosure and reports made to the police by women affected by prostitution

Process guides, resources and training on conducting welfare visits have been developed and can be shared by contacting Rahab.^{vii}

4.f Addressing fears about debt and stigma

Supporting individuals means understanding fears around stigma and their concerns about how they can continue to support their family back in China. These fears may lead to Chinese women leaving services such as safe houses, in order to seek work to send money home or to pay their debt to 'loan sharks' and exploiters who present a threat to their family.

The three NGOs found that Chinese women are at risk of further exploitation due to this.

The three NGOs' recommendation is therefore to ensure that more than one opportunity for intervention is offered. Women should be made aware of their rights and the support that is available. Even if they are unable to disclose their abuse or agree to accepting support to exit the situation, they should still be able to access services and a long-term approach should be taken.

4.g Legal and asylum advice

The three NGOs found that many of the Chinese women they work with have been provided inaccurate legal advice which has resulted in them accruing additional debt.

Chinese victims of modern slavery need to be able to access legal and immigration advice and apply for legal aid where applicable. Good advice about the process of making a claim and the support available enable victims of abuse to have a better understanding of their options and make informed decisions.

Conclusion

Every woman's journey and experience of exploitation is different. By appreciating the nuances and studying the similarities, practitioners can begin to grasp an understanding of the pressures and factors which drive Chinese women to seek work abroad, and the vulnerabilities which exploiters look to utilize and exacerbate.

By acknowledging trauma and barriers, both to disclosure and escaping exploitation, practitioners can create rapport and rebuild trust. Time constraints within roles, systems and processes can often distract from the ultimate purpose of supporting victim/survivors.

By being trauma-informed, survivor-led and working with multi-agency partners to ensure the full picture is gathered and needs are met, a coordinated community response to identifying and supporting victims, bringing perpetrators to justice and preventing exploitation is not only possible but achievable.

Chen's Story

Chen borrowed more than £70,000 from loan sharks to cover a gambling debt and for investment in her business. She did not have an asset to borrow the money against, so the loan sharks took nude photos of her. The threat was that if she did not pay, they would show them to her family.

When business was not good it was difficult to pay the loan sharks. If she missed a payment, the loan sharks threatened to hurt her child. Through internet research she found an opportunity to work as a masseuse in the UK and was told she would be highly paid. She paid £4,000 for an

agency to arrange everything for her. She did not know she could not work on a tourist visa.

She was met on arrival at the airport and moved around every 1-2 weeks and forced to provide sexual services to between 3 -13 men a day. The only money she kept was if she was given tips, which she would hide. After a number of months, she managed to escape.

Chen continued to be independently involved in prostitution so that she could pay the loan sharks and agency in China who had threatened to take her to Cambodia and force her into prostitution there.

Chen disclosed her experiences of modern slavery during a proactive welfare visit between one of the three NGOs and the police. Whilst access to protection and support was offered, Chen declined saying that she needed to continue to earn money, to pay off her debts to the loan sharks to prevent reprisals of physical violence threatened to her son and family.

Although Chen did not access the NGO's offer of outreach support at the time, five months later she got in touch via text to ask for support around an unwanted pregnancy. She did not know if she was able to access health care as she had overstayed her tourist visa.

After attending hospital appointments with Chen, the NGO arranged for her to meet a solicitor who gave immigration advice and she claimed asylum. She entered the NRM and received a Positive Reasonable Grounds decision. She has since been granted refugee status. 

References

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