

Building a Safe Space:

Optimising Maternity Care for Survivors of Modern Slavery by Co-creating Supporting Resources for Women and Professionals

A guide for people with lived experience of modern slavery and exploitation

Project Leads: Dr Sara Borelli, Prof Helen Spiby

Co-Investigators: Dr Minh Dang, Dr Elizabeth Such, Dr Nicola Wright, Dr Matthew Young

Researcher: Dr Habiba Aminu

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EVERY WOMAN IN THE UK SHOULD HAVE EXCELLENT MATERNITY CARE.

That means feeling **safe, listened to, and supported** during pregnancy, birth, and after your baby is born.

But some women face extra challenges - especially those who have experienced exploitation or modern slavery.

A team of researchers, midwives, and charity workers worked together with a group of survivor mothers to find out more. We wanted to **understand what makes good care hard to get, and how to fix it** so all women can get safe, respectful care.



A **survivor advisory group** guided the project, making sure everything we did was safe and relevant to survivors.



We held **interviews and focus groups** with women, making sure they could choose what they spoke about, could access support and felt safe.



We interviewed **professionals** to hear different experiences and ideas.



We ran workshops where **survivors, midwives, and other professionals** designed solutions and resources together.

WHAT DID WOMEN AND PROFESSIONALS TELL US ABOUT WAYS TO IMPROVE MATERNITY CARE AND SUPPORT?

We found **five important areas** that are most important for women through the maternity journey.



1. Women should feel safe and heard

- Women should always have choice, privacy and feel respected when accessing care.
- Clear messages that seeking care is safe, and staff are available to support, help build trust.
- Simple explanations about confidentiality, consent, and how information is used help women feel safe.



2. Care and support should be easy to access all the time

- Care should always be easy to access, with flexible times, transport support, interpretation and options for professionals to meet women at home or in safe spaces.
- Women should be connected to support services in their own community, where they can meet people.
- Professional interpreters should be used so women understand what is said and feel heard.
- Clear information about rights and choices in multiple languages will help more women know where and how to access care.



3. Women need joined-up, personalised support

- A named midwife or small maternity team help women build trust and know how to get support.
- A personal care plan that follows women, even if they move to different workers or cities, help women avoid having to repeat their story.
- A trusted professional should support women with more complex situations by coordinating care, speaking up for them, and helping them navigate services.
- Women want to make choices about maternity care that respect their cultural needs and birth plans.



4. Mental health support is very important

- Gentle questions about how they are feeling during pregnancy and after birth give women the chance to share feelings and ask for help.
- If survivor mothers share mental health problems, they want to get the support they need quickly and easily.
- Having talking therapies and peer support, with interpreters when needed, can avoid problems getting worse.



5. When professionals work together and have the right training, care may improve

- Healthcare and third sector professionals should work together to make sure survivors get what they need.
- Women should be involved in decisions about what information is shared about them.
- Women should be able to move between different support services easily and always know who the best person is to contact for different needs.
- Professionals should get training on trauma, modern slavery, maternity care systems and using interpreters so they can give better care.

WHAT WE MADE TO HELP IMPROVE MATERNITY CARE AND SUPPORT

The research team made a list of **recommendations for NHS and charity services**, and worked together with survivors and professionals to make **posters (called infographics) which can be used by survivors, health and charity professionals**. They share the findings and recommendations of the research in a really easy to follow way. The infographic for survivors shares their rights and how to access support.

WHAT'S NEXT?

We are **sharing the project recommendations and resources at meetings and conferences, and with organisations (including hospitals and charities)** so that these can be included in everyday practice and staff training.

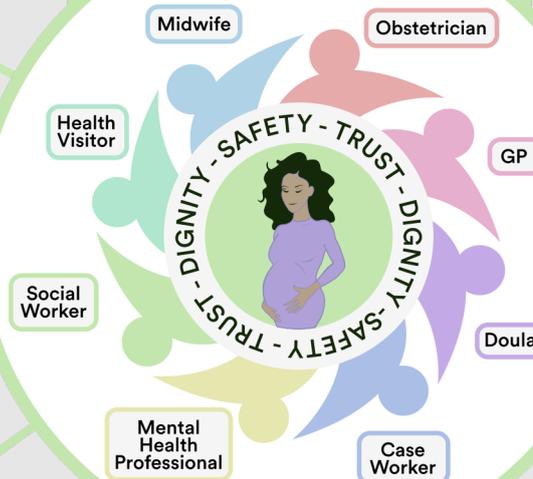
If you've experienced control, exploitation, trafficking or abuse, this could be modern slavery.

Do you need maternity care and support?

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Support is available, and it's okay to ask

You may meet a range of professionals throughout your maternity journey, including:



YOU CAN GET CARE

You can get the maternity care and support you need quickly and easily, no matter where you come from or what your immigration status is.



YOU WILL MEET A MIDWIFE

They help you during pregnancy, birth, and after your baby is born. You can ask them to visit you at home or where you feel safe.



YOUR FEELINGS ARE IMPORTANT

If you feel sad, worried, or alone, ask for help. You deserve to feel well and safe.



YOU CAN ASK QUESTIONS AND MAKE CHOICES ABOUT YOUR CARE

This includes decisions about birth options, feeding, and local support to find what's best for you and your baby.



YOU CAN ASK FOR A PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETER

You should understand what people say and be understood.



SAY WHAT YOU NEED

Tell your midwife, doctor or case worker what would help you and your baby. They will put you in touch with the right services.



YOU CAN TALK ABOUT YOUR SAFETY

Tell a midwife, doctor or case worker if your situation feels unsafe. You can ask to talk alone with them.



YOUR HOME SHOULD BE SAFE, CLEAN AND COMFORTABLE

Tell your midwife, doctor or case worker if you do not have a safe place to stay.



Are you a healthcare professional caring for pregnant women or mothers who have experienced control, exploitation or abuse?

This may include people affected by modern slavery.



BUILD SAFETY AND TRUST

- When providing care, make sure the space is safe, private, quiet, and confidential
- Be aware of past trauma and avoid re-traumatisation
- Don't pressure disclosure of exploitation, listen and respond sensitively
- Find out about housing situation and what help is needed
- Offer a face-to-face visit at home if possible, or in a safe place



OPTIMISE ACCESS AND PROMOTE ENGAGEMENT

- Facilitate prompt access to statutory and non-statutory support services
- Consider language needs and use professional interpreters at every contact
- Respect individual cultural needs



SUPPORT PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH

- Facilitate connection with local groups and communities to prevent isolation
- Be alert to different mental health needs
- Arrange prompt referrals to mental health support that suits the individual's situation



PROVIDE CONTINUITY AND PERSONALISED SUPPORT

- Make sure the same team or professional provides maternity care for continuity
- Provide clear information, answer questions and support informed decision-making
- Work together with the survivor mother to create a personalised care plan
- Talk about practical and financial needs
- Offer length of hospital stay based on support available, housing, mental health and safety
- Provide pain relief and other medication to take home
- Offer early postnatal care, including feeding, parenting, and emotional support



ENGAGE WITH MULTIDISCIPLINARY WORKING AND TRAINING

- Take part in local multidisciplinary working and training
- Develop relationships with local community and voluntary organisations

Are you a third sector worker supporting pregnant women or mothers who have experienced control, exploitation or abuse?

This may include people affected by modern slavery.



HELP MOTHERS TO ACCESS AND ENGAGE WITH MATERNITY AND OTHER SERVICES

- Explain why and how to access maternity services in the UK
- Support early access to maternity services
- Provide information about rights and entitlements



WORK AND TRAIN WITH OTHER PROFESSIONALS

- Work with other professionals (like midwives, health visitors, housing teams) to support mothers together.
- Build connections with maternity services and key contacts
- Participate in training about modern slavery, trauma-informed practices and maternity support needs.



BUILD SAFETY AND TRUST

- Ensure safety, privacy and confidentiality
- Be trauma-aware and avoid re-triggering questions or language
- Listen to mothers and let them share at their own pace
- Assess housing situation, identify needs and link with local providers



SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

- Signpost to local groups and communities to avoid isolation
- Consider if there are mental health difficulties
- Support referral to mental health services if needed and agreed

PROVIDE CONTINUITY AND PERSONALISED SUPPORT



- Offer consistent, personalised support and advocate when needed
- Check for practical or financial needs and signpost
- Provide clear information to support informed maternity decisions
- Arrange postnatal support at home
- Signpost to feeding, parenting, and emotional support