

Equality, diversity and inclusion in publicly-funded modern slavery research in the UK

Research Summary

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Project led by the UK BME Anti-Slavery Network, part of AFRUCA Safeguarding Children.

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This is a summary of the report: Equality, diversity and inclusion in publicly-funded modern slavery research in the UK, based on research conducted by UK BME Anti-Slavery Network (BASNET), part of AFRUCA Safeguarding Children, and the University of Nottingham in partnership with the University of Sheffield and St. Mary's University Twickenham.

The project was funded through a responsive call for proposals by the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (Modern Slavery PEC), which in turn is funded and supported by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The full report can be accessed on the Modern Slavery PEC website at modernslaverypec.org/resources/edi-modern-slavery-research.

The Modern Slavery PEC has actively supported the production of this Research Summary. However, the views expressed in this summary and the full report are those of the authors and not necessarily of the Modern Slavery PEC.

Background

Modern slavery is a stark social inequality in one of its most extreme forms. It also drives and reproduces further inequality. It is important, therefore, that modern slavery research that responds to this challenge is equal, diverse and inclusive.

This project, commissioned by Modern Slavery PEC, sought to provide an overview of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in publicly-funded modern slavery research in the UK.

We explored EDI as cutting across the different organisations, people and functions involved in research (Figure 1). We included in our analysis EDI within the researcher workforce (people who conduct research in their professional roles or as students); EDI among the people and organisations that advise, guide and review research; EDI among the people and institutions that fund research and EDI among people who are participants in research.

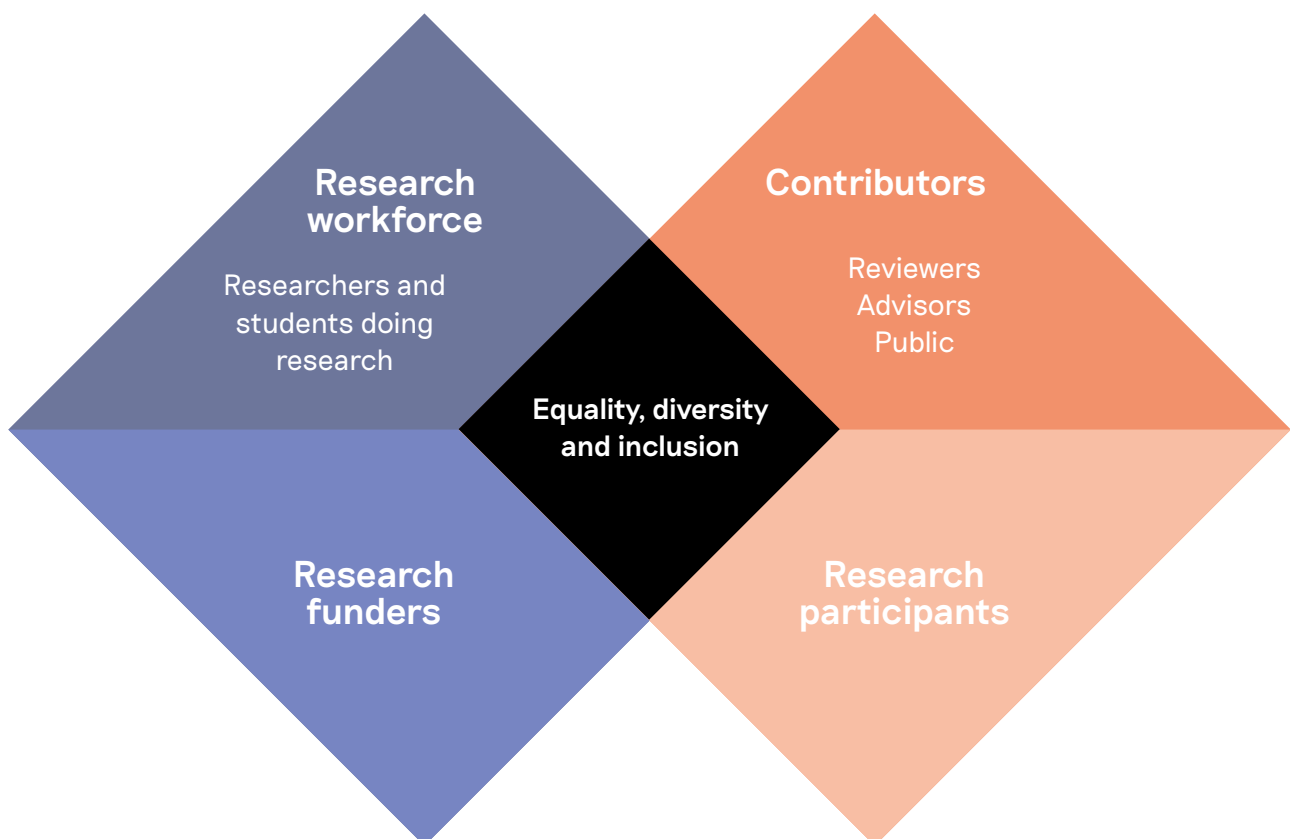
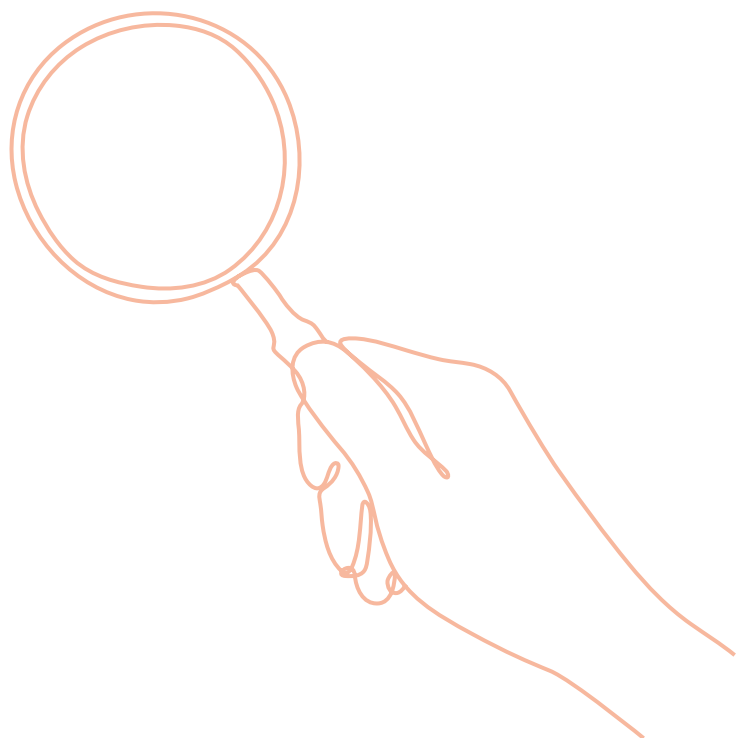


Figure 1. Equality, diversity and inclusion across the modern slavery research landscape

Methodology

The study was designed into four streams of data collection and collation. We drew from both primary and secondary sources. The four streams were:

1. Analysing existing and collected new data on the characteristics of the research workforce. We used UKRI and Modern Slavery PEC diversity monitoring data alongside a bespoke survey with 93 participants.
2. Five focus groups with experts by experience, researchers, community organisations and funders, with 23 participants in total.
3. Documentary analysis of 22 research projects funded by Modern Slavery PEC to identify how EDI was represented in research reporting.
4. Analysis of the formal documentation of 17 research funder organisations' EDI strategies, action plans and activities.



Findings

1. The modern slavery research community values EDI, but demands data on this community that is collected and analysed appropriately and meaningfully

Research participants welcomed the focus on EDI in modern slavery research. There was a demand for generating EDI principles and values that could be applied across the field. Survey and funders' diversity monitoring data showed diversity in some characteristics among those who conducted modern slavery research. Women accounted for well over half of the modern slavery research workforce in the survey and in funders' diversity monitoring data. Socially-advantaged respondents were also overrepresented. One-third of the survey respondents had a nationality other than British and over a quarter reported a minority ethnic background. Reflecting experiences of research in higher education institutions, reports of bullying and harassment in the sector were high and concerning.

While gathering such knowledge was considered important by focus group participants, there was an emphasis on making sure data was used well and appropriately (e.g. analysing the intersections of dis/advantage such as race, socio-economic background and gender). There was general distaste for EDI initiatives as a 'tick box' exercise.

"[Equality diversity and inclusion] it should be very intentional and very strategic"

Researcher focus group participant

2. EDI is not considered enough throughout the research process or described comprehensively within research reports

Focus group participants wanted to see EDI throughout the research process and in the choices made by researchers.

"Am I inclusive in my EDI selection of the participants as well as the methodology?"

Community organisation participant

For example, Modern Slavery PEC-funded research reports did not always report on EDI in research design, methods selection and research conduct making it hard to judge how EDI was considered in projects. While EDI may have been considered at the design stage, information on the nature of those discussions and decisions were not available to the research team as these were not published. A small number of reports made some elements of research design and conduct explicit and reasonably clear; most were implicit, and a few were absent. Where EDI concerns could be discerned, they varied in their prominence in design and conduct descriptions and justifications.

Good examples of EDI integrated into projects included clear descriptions of the representation of different groups in samples, consideration of inclusive conduct (e.g. ethically-driven participatory models with children), ensuring participation opportunities through partnership with third sector organisations and for speakers of languages other than English. Focus groups reflected on the potential for research to be empowering of those with lived experience.

3. Collaborating with communities and people with lived experience is key to improving EDI funder policies and practice in modern slavery research.

Funders as well as other focus group participants acknowledged that EDI could be improved by changing funding policy and practice. The research discovered a growing field of activity, including new EDI strategies and interventions (e.g. UKRI EDI Strategy, Wellcome Anti-Racist toolkit), however, most are yet to be evaluated.

Focus group participants viewed bringing in a wider constituency of research-interested people into the field as a priority. This especially included people with lived experience of trafficking and exploitation and the community organisations that served them. Bringing in that expertise was viewed as a priority to bring about better and more equal research, but faced several challenges including capacity and eligibility criteria.

We were talking about taking care with each other, that we will get things wrong, we will say things clumsily, we will do things in a way that is with the best intentions but that it comes out wrong. I think setting up a set of principles that allows that to happen and that we're all doing this work in the best of faith, that it's not a tick box but a genuine commitment to EDI for the right reasons.

Community organisation participant

Recommendations

For funders and researchers on EDI in the research process

1.1 Promote modern slavery research as a site for brave, open or courageous conversations

This includes talking about modern slavery and EDI and about how they intersect. For funders this includes talking about EDI in a way that disrupts the notion that it is a bureaucratic exercise. For researchers, this includes intentional curiosity about how and with whom research questions are developed, how they are addressed and who research is intended to benefit.

1.2 Make explicit the values, goals and principles of modern slavery research

These should be generated with affected people and communities, as well as with funders, researchers, community organisations, policy makers and practitioners.

1.3 Show how research reflects those values and goals

Identify pathways from equity-oriented goals to research components, including the generation and selection of questions, choice of research design, methodology and method, research conduct, analysis, validation, dissemination and mobilisation.

1.4 Report methods transparently and openly

More transparent reporting of modern slavery research will surface inclusive practice, diversity in samples and research limitations, enabling clearer judgement of how EDI has been designed into research studies.

1.5 Assess the characteristics of sample populations through consultation with affected people to inform sampling strategies

This could be implemented as a pre-funding requirement.

1.6 Employ and document routine reflexivity

Good research practice requires a reflexive orientation. This should be documented and act as a reference point for improved research practice.

1.7 Validate, co-create and co-produce research with affected people and communities

Reliable, credible research in the field requires the routine involvement of affected people. 'Co-' methods of research production and mobilisation (co-design, co-creation, co-production) offer promising routes to improved EDI in the field.

1.8 Utilise all forms of knowledge and a variety of research methods to enhance EDI

A strength of modern slavery research is its evolution into a field that includes people with lived experience of trafficking and exploitation. The ways and means of better using this strength to democratise knowledge across the field and as a potential way of mobilising knowledge for improving EDI is underexplored and should be considered by funders and researchers alongside issues of ethical engagement and research as a site of empowerment.

Recommendations for funders and employers on EDI in the research workforce

2.1 Build improved EDI in the workforce

Build in diversity in the workforce by drawing from a wider population of people with capacity and skills. Options include funded bilateral fellowships, secondments, internships and placements between research and community organisations.

2.2 Careful specification of funding calls, job roles and clear job descriptions

Recruitment practices, funding calls and assessment criteria need careful construction or adaptation to encourage diversity in the field. This particularly applies to the inclusion of people with lived experience as leaders of or contributors to research teams.

2.3 Ensure researchers are supported to build skills in involving persons with lived experience across all research topics

Researchers may need support to develop skills in involvement and engagement, particularly if topics are seemingly removed from survivor experience (e.g. supply chain or finance-based projects).

2.4 Continue to collect and collate routine EDI data to monitor progress

Use analyses to identify areas of EDI work that require greater focus.

2.5 Address an urgent need to understand and rectify issues of bullying and harassment across the researcher base

This has been identified as an issue within academia more generally, but the modern slavery field could lead the way in exploring researchers' experiences and how issues could be addressed.

Recommendations on EDI in funder and employer policy and practice

3.1 Embed EDI into research systems and infrastructure

This infrastructure includes supporting work to implement recommendations to define and make explicit shared goals and principles around EDI in modern slavery research. Funders and employers can also develop mechanisms of support (e.g. guidelines, protocols, templates, checklists and toolkits) for the research workforce at all levels and across the full research cycle.

3.2 Focus on researcher training, support and improved guidance on how to embed EDI into research

Develop and promote EDI training and guidance so that researchers can carry out their jobs inclusively. Some of this may be generic and drawn from other resources (e.g. how to enable open, non-threatening discussions on EDI within professional communities), some may use a more bespoke approach (e.g. addressing diversity and inclusionary practice in experts by experience advisory groups).

3.3 Fund research within research

Support the development of research on EDI by including EDI questions *within* existing research studies. This may bring the added benefit of cost efficiency.

3.4 Avoid rapid response where possible

Diversity and inclusivity are better supported when research timelines are not heavily pressured and when projects are properly resourced.

3.5 Specifically, for modern slavery research funders (especially Modern Slavery PEC):

- Routinise EDI requirements on methodological reporting: Appendices/ supplementary material provide greater EDI transparency. Standard reporting guidelines are available (examples of reporting guidelines on EDI in other fields such as health sciences could be adapted e.g. [The Equator Network](#) are available) and drive higher standards of research in general. Adopting principles of open research should be made explicit by Modern Slavery PEC, in line with the requirements of the UK Research Councils.
- Greater support for EDI in research design: The work of the new [UKRI EDI Caucus](#) recognises this gap in researcher support. While some support material is available (e.g. a toolkit for Gender Equality Statements for [UKRI Global Challenges Research Fund](#) research), the suite is limited and Modern Slavery PEC may wish to consider developing bespoke materials for researchers in the modern slavery field.
- Support and guide researchers to meet stated expectations about EDI in funding calls.
- Reflect on and, if appropriate, redesign the way research agendas are formed and decided upon. Consideration of the missing topics raised in focus groups (e.g. LGBTQ+ issues) may support this task.
- Continue building community/NGO sector research leadership: Capacity-development in research needs to be i) sufficiently funded, ii) supported with training or funding for it, and iii) reflected in realistic timescales to build genuine research capacity.
- Embrace the opportunity modern slavery research, as a relatively young field, presents in leading best EDI practice in social science research: Modern Slavery PEC is in a strong position to lead the development of a field with an explicitly EDI orientation. Commitment and action in this area may offer insight to other, more established or traditional fields, of research.

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The Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (Modern Slavery PEC) was created by the investment of public funding to enhance understanding of modern slavery and transform the effectiveness of law and policies designed to address it. The Centre funds and co-creates high quality research with a focus on policy impact, and brings together academics, policymakers, businesses, civil society, survivors and the public on a scale not seen before in the UK to collaborate on solving this global challenge.

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