

Improving approaches to ethics in modern slavery research

Presentation by: Dr Wendy Asquith (University of Liverpool)

Research Team: Dr Bethany Jackson, Kimberley Hutchison, Professor Helen Stalford, Edmira Bracaj

The Challenge

- **Increasing expectation that lived experience experts meaningfully involved in research**
- Calls for those conducting research to reflect on their own practices.
- Have current ethics and safeguarding kept up with changing approaches to modern slavery research?

What is research ethics? Why does it matter?

- Prompts reflection on how research affects ALL involved in it.
- Uneven approaches leading to very divergent outcomes:

“They’re re-trafficking us, I would say, in terms of doing research. You look forward to doing your research. You’re looking forward to money and there’s nothing. That kills our spirit. It’s like, “Oh, no, you. You’ve been tricked again.” So that’s part of trafficking”

Lived Experience Expert

What did we do and why?

Our Aims & Methods

We had 3 key aims:

- Take stock of current practice and consider its appropriateness
- Share understandings from a range of perspectives
- Make targeted recommendations

Our methods:

- Rapid desk-based review
- Focus group interviews
- Analysis & test findings



What did we find?

Four key areas for improved practice



Ethical Governance

- Focus on management of research: systems, structures, research ethics committees.
- A 'deficit-oriented' approach vs more asset-focus.
- Current funding arrangements in universities lagging behind shifts in the sector.
- Questions about the equity between universities and external partners.



Ethics of Co-production

- Working in partnership, especially with lived experience experts.
- 'Being intentional about co-production can address power dynamics.
- Distinguish between opportunities to get involved in research by role type.
- Carefully consider partnerships to access lived experience expertise through NGOs.



Trauma-informed Approaches

- Support positive interactions with those experiencing impacts of trauma
- Trauma-informed approaches not clearly defined or understood.
- Focus on the care-focused aspects with less attention to voice, choice and empowerment.
- A need for training to prevent exclusionary practices and promote self-care.



Ethical Legacies

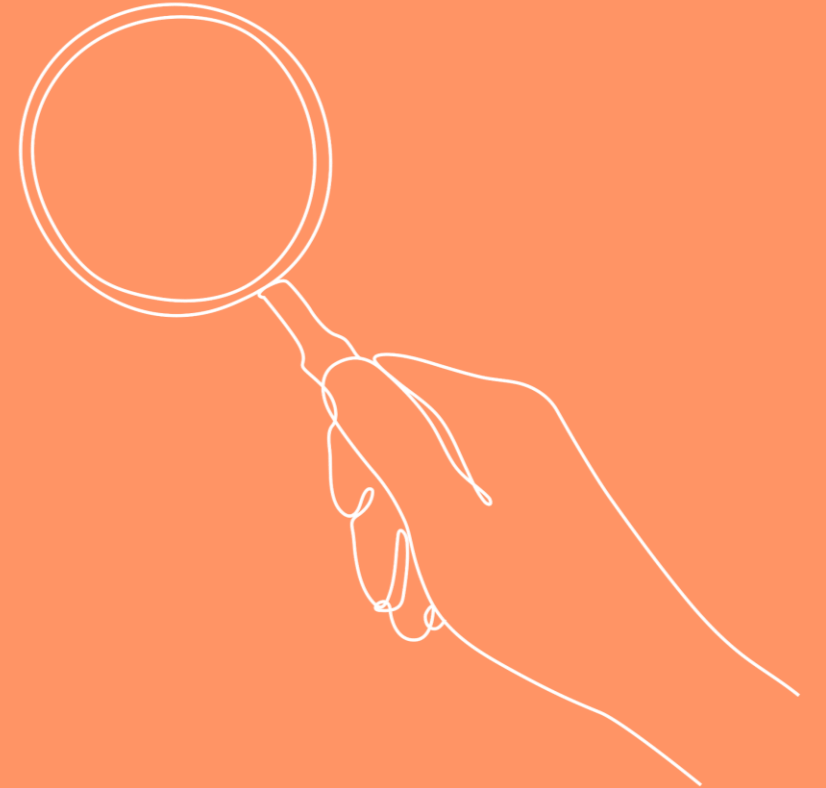
- Focus on realising the positive potential of involvement in research and sharing learnings from ethical challenges
- A need for feedback loops with research participants.
- Positive outcomes undermined by constraints on resources and time.
- Current approaches to ethics review within universities are frontloaded, reducing the scope for learning.



What should be done?

Recommendations

- All stakeholders can begin to take non-costed changes in their practice
- Action is required beyond individual research teams' enhanced engagement with existing ethics review processes
- Continuous review of structural conditions & reflection upon research practice should be fundamental to ethical approaches
- A need for universities and funders to cultivate the conditions in which ethical research can thrive



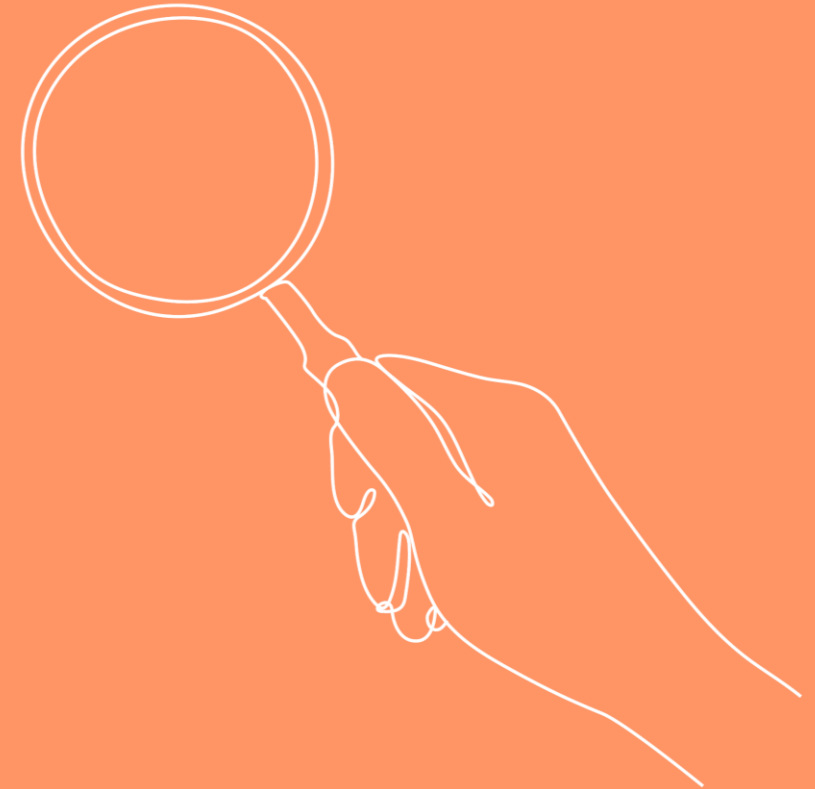
Immediate changes

- **Universities should offer guidance** to researchers and participants **on payment processes**, as well as advice regarding the implications of remuneration
- **Researchers should put clear processes in place to share findings and receive feedback from research participants** – particularly lived experience experts – before the publication of research outputs.



Longer term changes

- Funders, universities and ethics committees should work together to resource the **set-up of a supportive mechanism for sharing honestly and learning from the ethical challenges.**
- Universities and funders **need to reflect at institutional level about what an equitable package of investment in lived experience expertise looks like**, to move from an extractive to an empowering model of research engagement.



modernslaverypec.org

 Search for Modern Slavery PEC

 @SlaveryPEC