

Trilateral Research: Understanding human trafficking and modern slavery through data

Lydia Tyler. BA (hons) Criminology



A step-change in
quantitative social
science skills

Funded by the
Nuffield Foundation,
ESRC and HEFCE

Project Honeycomb, which is being run by the University of Manchester in collaboration with Trilateral Research (a research and technology development company), aims to help Greater Manchester's authorities take a more robust approach to combatting modern slavery and human trafficking in the region. This includes developing relationships across the private, public and civil society sectors, with the intent of improving data recording. Data, which is spread across different stakeholders, will also be collated and analysed, in order to create a more informed understanding of modern slavery across Greater Manchester.



Objectives and methodologies

The pilot analysis used international scale data obtained from a data forum, which provided a comprehensive list of modern slavery survivor stories and news reports. Following the conversion of the data files into a usable format, the data was input into Python. Pre-processing was carried out to cluster words, and then topic modelling was applied. This analysis, whilst a pilot study, produced groupings of abstract 'topics' which occurred throughout the texts. A list of specific coding recommendations was produced to refine the method.

The abstract 'topics' identified in this analysis formed the basis of the work which followed, which was the formation of a modern slavery lexicon. Identified themes include person, place, recruitment, definition, recruitment, transport, violence, injury, escape, post slavery and causes.

Skills acquired:

- Producing a literature review
- Conducting meetings with stakeholders
- Use of new software (Python)
- Producing a lexicon
- Writing a blog post
- Creating my own dataset

Producing a dataset

I also produced my own dataset, which compiled 'points of interest' i.e. locations that had links to the communities/nationalities of those in Manchester that are most at risk of being a victim of modern slavery. It is well known that many victims of modern slavery may feel unable to report their situation to authorities or the police, for various reasons, so we believed that contact with those that have links to the community, whether that was shops or churches for example, to raise awareness of modern slavery, could potentially increase the identification of cases. These data points will be plotted in an interactive map, along with locations known to be exploiting individuals within modern slavery.

Significance of a Modern Slavery Lexicon

The importance of formulating a data lexicon for modern slavery was highlighted when I attended a virtual conference with various organisation and stakeholders working to combat modern slavery and human trafficking, and an advocate for victims of such crimes, and a survivor herself, highlighted the fact that current policy surrounding human trafficking and modern slavery is based on survivor stories of other crimes, such as domestic violence. A comprehensive understanding of the lived experience of victims will improve future work.