



Healthcare

High Risk of Modern Slavery



“The wellbeing and health of our patients may be costing the safety and health of others”.

Abbott, 2020

Opportunity

The size and scale of global medical procurement means enormous opportunities for a transition in sustainable production and consumption. Mitigating the risks of modern slavery and taking action on policy reform and remediation, will help lead other sectors into transformative action against modern slavery.

The healthcare sector is unique in that healthcare professionals have the opportunity to make a direct impact on survivors of modern slavery. Survivors may come under the care to healthcare professionals for treatment related to exploitation in the workplace or in the community. Given this, the healthcare sector has the responsibility to train healthcare professionals to recognise the signs and symptoms of modern slavery and to push for the reform of policies and governance to support survivors. (AHRC, 2021)

Risk Factors

Vulnerable Workforce

Modern slavery risks are present within the supply chains of healthcare providers of goods and services. Most medical goods are made in high-risk geographies where labour rights abuses have been found. Research shows that child labour and forced labour are directly associated in the processing of raw materials, production and manufacturing of medical goods.

Domestic risks of modern slavery are found in recruitment companies such as hiring cleaning, construction and security services for health facilities.

Low-tier suppliers in high-risk geographies

With the nature of medical goods, such as PPE, being cheap and disposable, many suppliers hire cheap labour to manufacture these goods from locations with a high risk of modern slavery. This may be due to conflict, displacement, the weak rule of law, corruption, and the state's failure to protect human rights.

Lack of transparency in supply chains

Sourcing essential health goods involve complex multi-tiered supply chains, resulting in limited visibility of modern's slavery risks. These risks are most prevalent in the procurement of medical goods such as PPE (medical gloves & uniform), medical devices, equipment, electronics and consumables.



Case Study

Modern Slavery: Pakistan's surgical instruments



of the world's reusable and disposable surgical instruments are produced in Sialkot, Pakistan.



A young boy is making surgical instruments in Sialkot, Pakistan. Laura Salvinelli, 2013. Used by permission.

It's estimated that **over 95%** of the production of surgical instruments in Pakistan is outsourced, where worksites are unregistered and carried out in small unsafe rooms and family homes. The informal sector is unregulated and where evidence of modern slavery occurs. Examples of this are extreme forms of child labour, forced labour, unsafe working conditions, excessive working hours, low wages and the extreme vulnerability to abuse and exploitation. **(Ethical Trading Initiative, 2020)**

People working in these conditions are largely paid on a 'piece rate' without contracts. Therefore they do not have access to benefits, unions or minimum wage protection. They work in hazardous conditions and without protective equipment.

(Ethical Trading Initiative, 2020)



Additional Resources



Human Rights Commission - Modern Slavery in the Healthcare Sector



The Bulletin of the Royal College of Surgeons of England - Don't Forget the people: protecting labour rights in supply chains is a key part of sustainable healthcare.

Sector Collaboration



Unchained offers e-learning modules on the healthcare sector's intersection with modern slavery. Unchained is also developing a toolkit for health professionals to use to identify modern slavery in healthcare settings. This is aimed to be rolled out in the health sector and used as standard practice. Currently, there is no standard for health professionals to follow.



Building on Business Practices



Engage

Education and commitment

- Provide **training** for staff and suppliers to build awareness about modern slavery risks and impacts.
- Create a **working group** to action changes within a company's processes, systems, and supply chains.

Assess

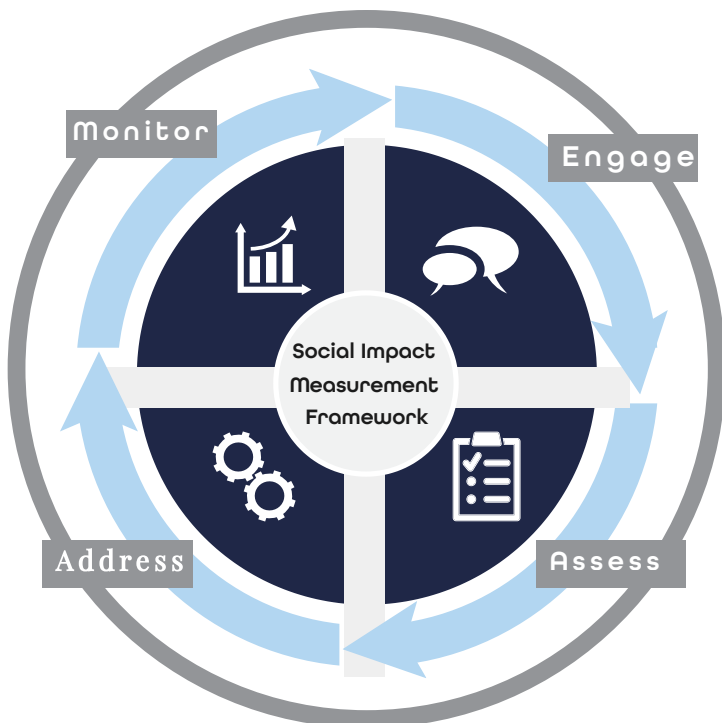
Map operational and supply chain risks

- **Map** the organisation's structure, businesses, and supply chains.
- Perform a **risk assessment** – identifying those parts of the business operations and supply chains where there is a risk of modern slavery.
- **Investigate** high-risk suppliers by carrying out further due diligence.
- Formulate **policies** in relation to modern slavery – this will involve collating current policies, identifying gaps, adapting existing policies and formulating new policies, as needed.

Address

Mitigate risk and build capacity

- **Engage** with suppliers to strengthen understanding of modern slavery and build capacity.
- Improve **purchasing practices** (such as forecasting, contract negotiations, and prompt payment to suppliers) to alleviate undue pressure on suppliers.
- Use **positive leverage** and incentives to encourage and reward the provision of stronger labour standards by suppliers.
- Ensure **third-party recruitment agencies** are ethical and certified.
- Develop **remediation** policies to outline actions required and carrying out those remedial steps if cases of modern slavery are identified.



Monitor

- Elevate worker's voice (both internally and externally) through access to credible **grievance systems** including **whistle-blower mechanisms**.
- Establish **processes** and **KPIs** to monitor the effectiveness of the steps taken to address modern slavery risk.



Case Study

Partnership to combat human trafficking in the health industry



CommonSpirit Health, one of the largest non-profit health systems in the U.S., have a program to combat human trafficking and forced labour. The team is led by Elise Nagowski, a surgical sourcing contract manager, and supported by Laura Krausa, system director of advocacy programs. The first objective is to create awareness and develop internal education.

They meet regularly to align short and long-term goals, provide updates and discuss partnerships. The organisation has an interdisciplinary team that links to others for support in the area of education and to identify partners willing to share tools, including vendors, suppliers, distributors and/or Group Purchasing Organisations (GPOs).



Obligations under the Modern Slavery Act 2018 (Cth)



READ MORE

Further questions

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References

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