



## Launch of the IASC review Preparing for impact: How we can overcome barriers and cultivate a culture of collaboration, understanding and respect to achieve impact on survivor support

Date: Thursday 8 July 2020  
Time: 16.00 – 17:30 (Virtual meeting)  
Twitter: #preparingforimpact

### Opening remarks by Dame Sara Thornton, Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner

**Sara Thornton** opened the meeting and welcomed participants from academia, service providers and NGOs, law enforcement, government and parliament. She noted being struck by how much research was being done on modern slavery - but is this having an impact on policy and practice? In the context of victims and survivors, we need to know that what we are doing is helping them. As Commissioner, she is keen to help build bridges between those who are creating and using evidence.

Sara also noted the timeliness of this event given Michael Gove's recent [speech](#) for the 56<sup>th</sup> Ditchley Annual Lecture, which strongly emphasised the importance of evaluation, research and evidence.

### Presentations

#### Dr Tristram Riley-Smith, Research Integrator at the [Partnership for Conflict, Crime & Security Researcher \(PaCCS\)](#)

**Tristram Riley-Smith** gave an overview of his role as Impact Champion for ESRC and the Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research (PaCCS). The PaCCS aims to deliver high-quality research that will improve our understanding of global security challenges. Within this, there has been a focus on transnational organised crime including modern slavery.

PaCCS emphasises working in close partnership with non-academic stakeholders, and breaking down barriers between academics and non-academics. Tristram asked participants to consider how they could turn the insights from the review into impact, whether by improving skills or adapting processes, emphasising the importance of ensuring our behaviour reflects the values necessary for impact to be realised.



**Overview by the review’s author Juliana Semione, a researcher from the PaCCS**

**Juliana Semione** introduced her approach as a researcher looking at the nexus of policy, research and practice. Her work as a practitioner compelled her to become involved in modern slavery and survivor support research.

Juliana took the group through her slides, starting with the guiding question of her research: is the evidence base on support for survivors of modern slavery informing policy and the work practitioners in the UK?

Juliana noted that the question of impact on survivor support is not only important because research represents time and money, but because the stakes of unrealised impact are high - when programmes continue in spite of rather than in light of sound findings, the greatest cost is borne by survivors.

According to her findings, there are examples of research having impact but there is room for improvement. It is important to note that this isn’t driven by a lack of research or lack of interest in evidence-based policies and practice.

So, why is the research not always having the impact it might? Juliana outlined two main findings:

- Six barriers to impact: Access, feasibility, funding, preconceptions, relevance, and time
- Three values that underpin impact: Collaboration, understanding, and respect

An underlying cultural shift is at the heart of the work that lies ahead if we want to see greater impact. Juliana summarised the review’s ten recommendations and highlighted threads that run through these:

- We are not used to engaging with each other in the ways we need to if we want to see impact
- We need to make sure research is good – if research is well done, impact is not only more likely, but it will be warranted
- Impact will not happen spontaneously – we need to be proactive and intentional in removing barriers and making this cultural shift

Juliana noted the importance of strategizing to overcome barriers, and concluded by reiterating the vital role of collaboration, understanding and respect. This requires a personal investment not just in impact, but survivor support itself.



## Panel discussion

**Professor Alex Balch**, Department of Politics at the University of Liverpool

Alex Balch emphasised the complexity and nuance of the relationship between research, policy and practice. He invited participants to think about what we mean by impact – the real impact is not when research changes something, it is when that change makes a difference to people’s lives. Change happens through coalitions working together to achieve common aims. This needs to be followed by strong evaluation to test if a policy works. Ultimately, we need to move from the impact of research to understanding policy success. This requires rigorous testing and assessment of policy.

**Patrick Ryan**, CEO of Hestia

**Patrick Ryan** noted the synergy between values that underpin research impact and Hestia’s values, particularly in terms of collaboration and respect. Survivors are a key stakeholder group and should be actively engaged early in the research process. Patrick also emphasised the important role of practitioner organisations in producing good research. Patrick concluded by suggesting a comparative review of the impact of grey literature in this area.

**Miriam Minty**, Head of the Modern Slavery Unit, Home Office

**Miriam Minty** emphasised that it is crucial that both current and future policy are informed by evidence, recognising how important data and evaluation have been in developing understanding of modern slavery. She provided an overview of research undertaken and commissioned by the Home Office, drawing on evaluations of Independent Child Trafficking Advocates / Guardians to demonstrate the benefit of independent evidence. Miriam concluded by noting the vital importance of evidencing the impact of work, particularly in light of the forthcoming spending review.

## Moderated Q&A

**How can we cultivate the sort of culture required to achieve impact?**

Speakers noted the importance of engagement and learning from one another. We should encourage the creation of secondments and opportunities to experience different perspectives. Participants discussed how this principle can benefit survivors. At present there is limited investment in ‘boundary spanning’ opportunities, partly due to the fact that mutual benefit is difficult to measure. However, investment in this sort of knowledge brokering and translation would help to bridge the gap and ensure that the right research questions are being addressed. Equipping survivors to understand the research field and question findings will empower them.

The group also discussed the importance of language. It must be simple, ideas should be communicated with clarity and acronyms should be avoided. More broadly, research must be communicated to all relevant audiences.



### **How can the power bias change in order to generate positive collaboration?**

The group discussed community development research and concerns about the top down bias in community engagement. How do community development workers in different communities have a greater say in impact? In light of this, the review's emphasis on collaboration and positive engagement was welcomed, although it was also acknowledged that addressing these issues will require time and careful consideration.

A strong strand of participatory action research across the country was noted, in which research subjects are proactively involved in formulating questions, analysing data and developing policy and practice solutions. The University of Durham is at the centre of much of this research.

### **How can we consider the wellbeing of survivors as co-researchers and co-participants?**

It was noted that the modern slavery field is not yet characterised by survivor involvement in research to the level discussed. We must go beyond thinking of survivors at their time of basic needs and should therefore think about a diverse group. There are very few pathways for survivors to become principal investigators or co-investigators, and this is something we should aspire to. We also need to understand trauma and how research itself can be part of the recovery journey.

### **How can collaboration on rights-based issues work in the presence of competing policy objectives?**

Rather than being seen as a problem, research could be seen as part of the solution here. If good research can demonstrate the value of rights, this would overcome some of the challenges. Well designed- research that provides impactful findings could be a way to speak to policymakers.

The group also considered how those gathering evidence on the ground often have very simple and urgent needs and solutions. Those formulating policy are constrained by, amongst other things, finances and traditions. Research has a role in picking up nuances of the limitations and barriers. Collaboration must be realistic and understand that change happens incrementally with careful negotiation. The group also discussed the need for greater pace when dealing with such issues.

### **What research gaps were identified during the review, how do we best address these and, ultimately, who decides there are gaps?**

All stakeholders, including survivors, should be able to identify gaps. This is something that engagement and collaboration needs to foster. Key gaps in survivor support research include the impact of Brexit, longitudinal studies involving survivors, non-NRM support research, the shifting landscape of survivor support, and the effects of NRM reform. Knowledge consolidation would help us to understand where the gaps are, how we can fill these and who should do this. This is of great relevance to the work of the MS PEC.



## Resources shared by participants

### Learning on survivor involvement in research

- The [Violence Abuse and Mental Health Network](#) survivor-led consultation to identify the priorities of survivors of domestic and sexual violence for research
- The [survivor involvement in research ladder](#) is a tool that has been produced by Survivors' Voices in collaboration with Simone Kennedy, as part of her MSc in Public Health degree at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine
- Open Democracy [blogs on survivor led issues](#)

### Peer and participatory action research

- Flex blog (May 2019) [Disrupting power imbalances in research: what is Participatory Action Research and why is FLEX using it?](#)
- Changing Lives [peer research](#)

### Other resources

- Rights Lab Brexit [research report](#) and [policy briefing](#)
- Ruth Wilson and Hannah Lewis (2006) [A Part of Society: refugees and asylum seekers volunteering in the UK \(2006\)](#)
- PaCCS [policy briefings](#)
- The Modern Slavery Research Consortium regularly publishes summaries of modern slavery research to a network of almost 550 researchers, policy makers, NGOs, politicians. To join (free and confidential), write to modern-slavery [research+subscribe@googlegroups.com](mailto:research+subscribe@googlegroups.com)