

News story: Home Office funds University of Bristol research into prostitution

As part of efforts by the government and law enforcement to better understand the nature of prostitution and sex work, the University of Bristol has been granted £150,000 to carry out a new research project. It follows the Home Affairs Select Committee's report on prostitution and will create an impartial evidence base covering the nature and prevalence of sex work in England and Wales.

Minister for Crime, Vulnerability and Safeguarding, Victoria Atkins said:

Our priority is to tackle the harm and exploitation that can be associated with prostitution and sex work, which is why it is so vital we have robust and impartial evidence to work from.

The University of Bristol's experience will help us build up a clear picture of its nature and prevalence and it forms one part of our work to make sure law enforcement have the right tools and guidance to help keep vulnerable people safe.

Formally commissioned by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales, the award follows an open tender process, during which researchers and academics were asked to submit proposals for developing a comprehensive understanding of contemporary prostitution and sex work.

University of Bristol Professor Marianne Hester OBE said:

We look forward to working with the Home Office and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner in Wales to carry out this important new research into the contemporary nature and measurement of prostitution and sex work.

We will also be linking with academics, non-government organisations and a range of agencies to ensure that the research reflects wider experiences and expertise.

The University of Bristol's research will help support law enforcement and government efforts to protect vulnerable people by assessing the different types of prostitution – such as on-street, off-street and online – its extent in England and Wales and any possible links to trafficking for the purposes of sex work.

The research will be carried out over the next year with the university

engaging with a range of groups including sex workers, other academics, law enforcement and healthcare providers.

Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales, Emma Wools said:

In 2016, following the Home Affairs Select Committee report on prostitution, the government accepted that there was a need for further research on the nature and prevalence of prostitution in England and Wales – something we had already recognised here in South Wales.

It is clear that prostitution is evolving and it has never been more complex or multi-faceted than it is at this moment. We have worked closely with the Home Office to commission research to better inform understanding about prostitution and we are delighted that today the Home Office has formally announced that the University of Bristol will be undertaking this research.

[News story: Dstl forensic expertise secures conviction for Parsons Green Bomber](#)

The Parsons Green bomber was jailed for life last week after experts from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) provided evidence at the trial.

As well as Dstl's lead scientist providing expert evidence at the Old Bailey, case officers at the Forensic Explosives Laboratory, part of the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, forensically examined 50 items in relation to the incident at Parsons Green and produced expert witness statements for the court. In the aftermath of the incident two Dstl scientists deployed to the scene to support the Counter Terrorism Command and provide advice on a forensic recovery strategy.

A request for the attendance of third scientist at the home address of the suspect was also supported.

Ahmed Hassan has been described as "dangerous and devious" by a judge as he was jailed for life for planting a bomb on a tube train at Parsons Green in September 2017. Hassan's device partially exploded, injuring 51.

Dstl Chief Executive Gary Aitkenhead said:

This is just one example of Dstl scientists providing world-class

expertise which helps to keep people safe. As well as this high-profile case, our Forensic Explosive Laboratory staff work with our homeland security agencies on a whole range of prevention and investigative tasks.

Speech: Call for Humanitarian Assistance in Syria

Thank you Mr President. Thank you for being here today to underscore the vital importance of this topic, and thank you particularly for your very powerful statement. The United Kingdom supports your call for ICC referral.

Thank you also to the Under-Secretary-General for your continued efforts to keep the Council informed of the need for protection and registration. I support their calls. I will not rehearse the catalogue of suffering that we have heard so eloquently today but that omission should not be taken as any indication that the United Kingdom is not as horrified as others by what is happening on the ground. Specifically Mr President, it is diabolical that access is actually worse in the face of such suffering. Diabolical is a strong word, but there are no others to describe what is happening. The worst destruction and suffering has continued in Eastern Ghouta. Those who support Assad have not taken steps to help stop the violence. Instead of which Assad and his spotters have violated the strong words of this Council in Resolution 2401. This makes a mockery of the Council's authority as Ambassador Delattre set out. Since the 11 March, an estimated 100,000 people have left Eastern Ghouta and are in make-shift reception sites in rural Damascus. Thousands more have been bused to Idlib. Because there are no independent monitoring or provisions for civilians' safety, those fleeing and those staying remain vulnerable, and at risk of mistreatment and abuse by the regime, including being detained, disappeared or separated from their families. Humanitarians, health workers and first responders on the ground report that the regime is deliberately targeting them. This is illegal and those that help the regime are complicit in that illegality.

The situation continues even for those who are left behind. An estimated 150,000 civilians remain in Eastern Ghouta. They suffer from acute food shortages and lack of medical supplies. They are afraid, and above all, they remember how the regime punished the civilians who fled from Eastern Aleppo in December 2016. This is why Ambassador Al-Otaibi's call for protection and registration is so urgent. We welcome UN plans to scale up support to deal with the dire situations in the IDP camps and collective shelters. We call on Russia to use its influence with the regime to ensure that the UN and its partners can also provide assistance and protection for those who remain in Eastern Ghouta.

Whether civilians choose to stay or leave, it is essential that they be protected against attack and have access to the essentials to survive. This is not just a plea on the grounds of humanity; it is a requirement under international humanitarian law. It is the job of the Council and all members of the Council to uphold international humanitarian law. Those who side with regime in its actions are themselves guilty of violating that law.

Mr President, I would like in closing to highlight two further areas. The suffering of the Syrian people continues in Idlib, where civilians have been under attack by regime forces for many years. More than a million internally displaced Syrians live there, including those who have fled Eastern Ghouta. In Afrin, we recognise Turkey's legitimate interest in the security of its borders, but at the same time we remain concerned about the impact of operations on the humanitarian situation. And my Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have raised the need for both protection of civilians and access with President Erdoğan and his Ministers. It was good to hear from the Under-Secretary-General that there may at last be signs of progress in Afrin.

Mr President, after seven years of conflict, over 13 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria. The Assad regime has created the situation and is now preventing humanitarian actors from relieving some of the horror it has inflicted. We call on Russia to use its influence to ensure that, at a minimum, the UN can fulfil its mandate to ensure humanitarian assistance and protection for Syrians on the basis of need, regardless of any other considerations.

Mr President, I was at Geneva in 2012. I think we all feel that that was a huge missed opportunity in the light of events. The situation has escalated every year since that time, and as the Undersecretary General said, the level of access is worse. The Council has a small opportunity to put measures in place to reduce the risk of reprisals. As you said Mr President, if this Council cannot do it, who can?

Thank you.

News story: Third Tide-Class Tanker Arrives in UK

The arrival of RFA Tidesurge comes just weeks after her sister ship, RFA Tidespring, met up at sea with aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth for the first time.

The 39,000-tonne tankers can carry up to 19,000 cubic metres of fuel and 1,400 cubic metres of fresh water in support of Royal Navy operations all over the world.

The detailed customisation work to prepare RFA Tidesurge and her sister ships for operations is being undertaken at the A&P shipyard in Falmouth, sustaining around 300 jobs.

Minister for Defence Procurement Guto Bebb said:

The arrival of RFA Tidesurge in Cornwall marks another key milestone in the Tide Class programme. Tidesurge will soon join her sister ships in providing the integral support which powers our warships and helps our Royal Navy maintain a truly global presence.

While in Falmouth RFA Tidesurge will be fitted with UK specific armour, self-defence weaponry and communications systems, with the total UK work content, including A&P, in the Tide Class programme worth around £150 million and sustaining further jobs at 27 UK-based companies.

The customisation work is expected to take around four months after which RFA Tidesurge will begin final sea trials before entering service in Autumn this year.

Meanwhile, RFA Tidespring, which was preparing to conduct a Replenishment at Sea (RAS) refuelling when it met with HMS Queen Elizabeth in February, is currently acting as the training tanker for the Navy's Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST) and will take part in exercise Joint Warrior in the Spring. RFA Tiderace, which is currently docked at A&P Falmouth, is undergoing preparations for her capability trials which are expected to commence in early April.

Sir Simon Bollom, Chief of Materiel (Ships) at Defence Equipment and Support, the MOD's procurement organisation, said:

I'm proud to say that the delivery of the tanker programme will provide vital support for the Royal Navy, providing it with fuel and fresh water, while also being able to undertake a wide range of maritime operations, including humanitarian relief.

The fourth of the Tide Class vessels – RFA Tideforce – is expected to be delivered later this year.

A&P Group has held the contract to support and maintain RFA ships at home and abroad since 2008. Under the Cluster Support Programme, A&P Group provides maintenance support to groups of MOD vessels, which include RFA Argus and the RFA Bay Class vessels Mounts Bay, Cardigan Bay and Lyme Bay.

News story: Women to have dedicated midwives throughout pregnancy and birth

Health and Social Care Secretary Jeremy Hunt has announced that the majority of women will receive care from the same midwives throughout their pregnancy, labour and birth by 2021.

The first step towards achieving this will see 20% of women benefiting from a 'continuity of carer' model by March 2019. Research suggests that women who use this model are:

- 19% less likely to miscarry
- 16% less likely to lose their baby
- 24% less likely to have a premature baby

To help achieve this, the NHS plans to train more than 3,000 extra midwives over 4 years. There will be 650 more midwives in training next year, and planned increases of 1,000 in the subsequent years.

Mr Hunt said:

There are few moments in life that matter more than the birth of a child, so the next step in my mission to transform safety standards is a drive to give mums dedicated midwives, who can get to know them personally and oversee their whole journey from pregnancy to labour to new parent. The statistics are clear that having a dedicated team of midwives who know you and understand your story can transform results for mothers and babies – reducing stillbirths, miscarriages and neonatal deaths, and the agony that comes with these tragedies.

This profound change will be backed up by the largest ever investment in midwifery training, with a 25% expansion in the number of training places, as well as an incredibly well deserved pay rise for current midwives.

There will also be further investment in maternity support staff, including:

- professionalising the Maternity Support Worker (MSW) role – a defined role and national competency framework will be developed and a voluntary accredited register will be established to provide assurance to the public that they are appropriately trained to high standards
- working with the Royal College of Midwives and other partners to develop new training routes into midwifery – this will help talented support workers to develop and move quickly to become registered midwives and help the midwifery profession attract and retain talented staff

These measures support Mr Hunt's ambition to halve the rates of stillbirths, neonatal and maternal deaths, and brain injuries that occur during or soon after birth by 2025.

Sarah-Jane Marsh, Chair of the NHS England Maternity Transformation Programme, said:

Taken together, this set of announcements has the potential to be the turning point in the health of a generation, and we look forward to welcoming thousands more midwives to the NHS frontline.

Midwives are the lifeblood of maternity care and these additional numbers will make a huge impact, enabling the majority of mothers in this country to have the same midwives throughout their entire maternity journey, including during childbirth.