THE POTENTIAL OF PEER SUPPORT IN RECOVERY FROM MODERN SLAVERY: A RAPID REVIEW

Fair Futures

AUTHORS

Shannon Hobbs, Sherry Wanjiru and Fiona David.

CLIENT

Survivor Connections.

INTRODUCTION

Peer support programs are common practice in recovery contexts, such as domestic violence, mental health, and substance abuse. Yet, there is currently no formal peer support mechanism in place in Australia for survivors of modern slavery. A survey completed by survivors has shown that they often face challenges in accessing services that meet their needs, mental health, and social isolation (Survivor Connections, 2025). Survivor Connections is the first survivor-led initiative in Australia who are setting up a peer support program to overcome these challenges.

This rapid review synthesised 16 literature reviews on peer support in contexts directly related to modern slavery, to support Survivor Connections in developing an evidence-based framework for delivery of a peer support program.

OBJECTIVE

To investigate the application of peer support in a modern slavery context.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What peer support is and how it works.
2. Benefits and challenges of peer support.
3. Recommendations for putting peer support into practice in a modern slavery context.

"Survivor community is crucial. To be seen and supported without stigma, sensationalism and shame by others who have shared similar experiences is so powerful. It makes me feel seen, it reminds me of my strength."

(Survey participant, Survivor Connections, 2025)

KEY FINDINGS

- The foundations of peer support are lived experience, exchange of benefits and a non-hierarchal relationship.
- Benefits for receivers include hope, access to vital services and building relationships and trust.
- Benefits for providers include increased self-confidence and self-worth, and skill development.
- Capacity for providers to perform both instrumental (e.g., cooking, finances) and expressive tasks (e.g., emotional support), which appears to be important in the recovery process for survivors.
- Challenges include difficulties establishing personal and professional boundaries, role ambiguity, and a lack of understanding the value of peer support. All of which can lead to tensions between peer support providers and non-peer colleagues.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PEER SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION

- Ongoing training for peer support providers and people working with them.
- Clearly defined peer support job roles and performance guidelines.
- Collaboration between lived-experience peer support networks and formal service providers.

CONCLUSION

The evidence supports the benefits of peer support for peer support providers, receivers, and broader social and medical systems.

No peer-reviewed research on peer support in the context of modern slavery was found. As such, research evaluating the impact and effectiveness of such a program would be the first of its kind, filling a gap in the academic literature.