

# UK research reveals hand car wash sector is awash with exploitation

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The risk of slavery in hand car washes across the UK has been exposed by new data from Nottingham Trent University (NTU) and modern slavery charity, The Clewer Initiative. It reveals a prevalence of

indicators that make exploitation and slavery more likely.

Researchers at NTU had expected to be able to segment the hand car wash sector and identify businesses that were more or less likely to use unlawful and potentially criminal modern slavery practices on their sites.

However, their analysis—which coincides with the sixth anniversary of The Clewer Initiative's Safe Car Wash App—reveals that the correlation between the location of a hand car wash and the presence of slavery is not strong enough to eliminate any specific business and the risk is everywhere. Therefore, consumers and [police officers](#) in every community need to be vigilant to spot the signs of slavery and other unlawful behavior—no hand car wash is immune.

This deep dive into the endemically unlawful and under-regulated sector:

- Connected the current data on hand car wash locations held by The Clewer Initiative's Safe Car Wash App and NTU's research data
- Enabled the team to model the type of neighborhood where a hand car wash business is likely to be located
- Explored the type of neighborhoods where you are more likely to find a hand car wash business which has been reported through the App as showing warning signs of exploitation and slavery
- Highlighted that more than 90% of hand car washes are likely to be employing workers illegally, without proper pay, records, PPE or first aid measures
- Created a visual map for police and other agencies to use to understand where the greatest threat of modern slavery could occur.

Dr. James Hunter, center co-director and researcher at NTU's Work, Informalization and Place Research Center, explains, "By combining

data from The Clewer Initiative's Safe Car Wash App and Nottingham Trent's Work, Informalization and Place Research Center (WIP), we have identified a number of drivers that increase the likelihood of exploitation being present. For example, there is a 2.2 times greater chance of finding exploitation in a hand car wash in a neighborhood containing a vehicle repairs business and a 1.75 times greater chance of finding exploitation in a hand car wash in a neighborhood with a petrol station.

"However, the variation between our original model and the Safe Car Wash App based analysis is statistically small and leads us to conclude that, in reality, modern slavery and exploitation can occur in any business. This is more worrying than if there had been a particular pattern. No community, consumer or police force can take their eye off the ball."

Rich Pickford of WIP adds, "When The Responsible Car Wash Scheme attempted to introduce a Code of Practice, hardly any hand car washes met all the criteria. The entire sector is endemically unlawful and non-compliant. Our work through the Home Office's Modern Slavery Prevention Fund also highlighted the scale of non-compliance and unlawful practice across three local authorities in the UK."

Caroline Virgo, director of The Clewer Initiative, concludes, "Statutory organizations are already stretched and yet our data proves no community is immune from modern slavery. The risk is everywhere. We need many more consumers to use the Safe Car Wash App and submit their reports so we can provide more detailed insight to the Police and GLAA.

"A large number of police forces across the country use the data from the Safe Car Wash App to inform their investigations and so the more intelligence we can triage for them, the more effective their policing will

be. To mark the sixth birthday of the Safe Car Wash App, we are calling on consumers to download the app and submit reports every time they visit a hand car wash. We are reliant on the general public to be our eyes and ears and drive out exploitation across the sector.

"Working with WIP researchers has confirmed our suspicions about modern slavery and provides additional weight to our belief that we must tackle modern slavery across the UK."

Since the launch of the Safe Car Wash App in June 2018, it has been downloaded 40,000 times. Reports that score over the threshold of concern for [modern slavery](#) and exploitation are referred to Modern Slavery Helpline and passed on to the Police where appropriate. The data from the App has enabled [law enforcement agencies](#) to follow-up on numerous businesses that may be exploiting their workers.

Provided by Nottingham Trent University

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