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Enforced prostitution claims spark probe into trafficking

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Crime Reporter

POLICE are investigating a case of human trafficking in Edinburgh after an Eastern European woman claimed she had been brought to the city and forced into prostitution.

The woman turned up at a sexual health clinic in the Capital last week telling NHS staff she feared for her life at the hands of her violent partner and begging for help.

Support workers arranged for the woman to be taken out of the city to a secret

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location while detectives probe allegations that she had been smuggled into Scotland.

Police chiefs today said that "inquiries are currently at an early stage".

As well as telling authorities she was forced to sell sex, the victim alleged that her partner had murdered another woman in the past and she feared she would meet the same fate.

City council officials found emergency accommodation for the woman after she came forward last week, before workers for the Migrant Helpline charity moved her to a safe house.

It came as bosses at NHS Lothian warned that the extent of human trafficking "could be on the increase" and may be "happening right under our noses".

Despite a number of suspected reports of women being trafficked into Edinburgh and forced into the sex industry, Lothian and Borders Police are yet to record a single confirmed case.

The woman who sought refuge at the NHS clinic last week said that she knew no one in Scotland, while her family back home had disowned her. She told authorities that her partner had forced her to steal from relatives and inform them that she was willingly travelling abroad to work as a prostitute.

The police were contacted despite her fears over possible repercussions for herself and her family from her partner and his associates in her home country.

A police spokesman said: "We can confirm that we are investigating a report of alleged human trafficking.

"Lothian and Borders Police is committed to identifying victims of human trafficking, and we will fully investigate any report or intelligence we receive."

The case was also discussed at an NHS Lothian board meeting this week in the wake of a request by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) for help in gauging the extent of human trafficking. The EHRC has asked medical staff to provide evidence of alleged trafficking in a bid to determine the scale of the problem.

NHS Lothian vice-chairman Eddie Egan said: "This seems to be a problem for a particular ethnic minority group.

"This could be something that could be on the increase and more awareness is needed.

Page 1 of 2

[Next Page »](#)

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