



# HUMAN TRAFFICKING ROUNDTABLE

**Presented by:** Jocelyn Helland, Executive Director, Eva's Initiatives for Homeless Youth

**Hosted by:** House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights (invitation through Ali Ehsassi, Member of Parliament for Willowdale)

**Goal:** The Committee would like to learn more about human trafficking in Canada and about efforts to increase awareness of trafficking, prevent and detect it, and prosecute traffickers. The goal is to make recommendations that address the needs of victims of this horrible crime and other stakeholders.

**Format:** 2-3 minute opening statement by each participant, followed by open discussion and questions.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### DEFINITION

Article 3 of the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Woman and Children, of the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (often known as the Palermo Protocol), defines human trafficking as:

- The act (recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring or receiving).
- The means (threat, use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or position of vulnerability, giving or receiving payments or benefits to achieve consent of a person having control over another person).
- The purpose, including the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation.

This was ratified by Canada and many other countries. **Notice above that “consent” is not a factor in this definition.**

Canadian Women's Foundation (2014) notes that:

- you don't have to cross borders to be trafficked, and 90% of trafficking in Canada happens in Canada
- sex trafficking is inextricably tied to the sex industry, but people are also trafficked for domestic labour, farm work, and the service industry

## RISKS

### WHO IS AT RISK

Canadian Women's Foundation (2014) notes five risk factors for experiencing sex trafficking:

- being female and young
- being poor
- history of violence and/or neglect
- history of child sexual abuse
- low level of education

Other relevant risk factors: lack of local employment opportunities, migrant/new immigrant and/or having low levels of social support; being Indigenous; being homeless; living in care, group homes, or foster care; substance use or mental health issues; history of criminal justice system involvement; and gang association.

For sex traffickers themselves, most:

- are men, but women/girls are increasingly working with men to traffic
- are young (16-32 years old)
- have a history of criminal activity (including assault)
- have been abused themselves and exposed to domestic violence at a young age

**Homeless youth are especially vulnerable to being trafficked.** Covenant House Youth by The Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice & Research and the Loyola University Modern Slavery Research Project (2017) found that 68% of the youth who had either been trafficked or engaged in survival sex or commercial sex had done so while homeless. Other information they found about high risk include:

- LGBTQ youth accounted for 36% of the sex trafficking victims
- 1 in 5 of all cisgender women, more than 1 in 5 LGBTQ men, and more than 1 in 10 cisgender men experienced a situation considered sex trafficking
- Youth with a history of involvement in the foster system accounted for 27% of all youth engaged in the sex trade and 26% of all youth who were labor trafficked

### RISKS FACED BY TRAFFICKED PEOPLE

Canadian Women's Foundation (2014) notes risks of sex trafficking such as:

- Violence and threats of violence, physical and sexual abuse (e.g. forced tattoos)
- Debt bondage
- Control, manipulation, humiliation, emotional abuse, isolation
- Dependency on substances and being pushed to use substances
- Being pushed into dangerous criminal activity (e.g. drug trafficking), criminalization
- Withholding of basic needs and identification papers

Estimated cost of pain and suffering per trafficked woman/girl is \$552,964, and the estimated value of lost earnings and personal costs per trafficked woman/girl is \$205,739. There are lots of

unknown costs to those who are victimized and society (e.g. medical, police and legal system, intergenerational costs). Sex trafficking creates particular burdens on shelters, transitional homes and public housing, and job training programs.

## YOUTH HOMELESSNESS AND TRAFFICKING

### LABOUR VS. SEX TRAFFICKING

There's a lot of public concern about sex trafficking, but other kinds of trafficking are significant too. The 2017 Covenant House and Loyola University study found that 19.4% of homeless youth were victims of human trafficking, of which 15% were trafficked for sex, 7.4% were trafficked for labor, and 3% were trafficked for both.

### SURVIVAL SEX

Sex trafficking can be seen in a context of the broad reality of low economic opportunities and survival sex amongst homeless youth, where young people are pressured to exchange sex for money, substances, or other commodities for survival. 19% of surveyed homeless youth engaged in survival sex solely so to access housing or food, and economic factors make homeless youth most vulnerable to traffickers and unwanted engagement in the sex trade (Covenant House and Loyola University, 2017).

### YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

"Hustle economies" exist where young people lack mainstream economic opportunities and have to navigate precarious environments to survive (Thieme, 2017). These youth may get into the illicit economy to survive but they may develop a great deal of useful entrepreneurial skills with them—research shows that young people with "smart and illicit" aptitudes/behaviors are more likely to become creative business owners later in life (Levine and Rubinstein, 2017). It follows that young people who get into trafficking and/or precariously housed may be talented entrepreneurs who need opportunities to use their skills in safer, legal, and non-exploitative economic activities.

## WHAT WE SEE AT EVA'S

We haven't done formal studies/analyses at our facilities for homeless youth, but these are trends we have informally noticed with respect to sex trafficking. These trends match the broader literature in many ways.

- The young person being trafficked often gets in touch with their trafficker while in the shelter system
- The relationship between the person being trafficked and the person doing the trafficking is often framed as a boyfriend/girlfriend
- The young person being trafficked is often age 16; they tend to have little life experience and come from abusive environments
- When our team suspects a person has been trafficked and tries to engage them, they are at high risk of leaving for another shelter or service

- 📌 We don't only see young people from urban contexts; we see many young girls from small rural communities being trafficked

## WHAT WILL CHANGE THINGS FOR THE BETTER?

### IMPROVED PREVENTION/INTERVENTION CAPACITY

- 📌 Service sites for homeless youth are where those with very high risk of trafficking go—these are the “hot spots” to resource for prevention/intervention
- 📌 Service sites should have access to funding to be able to: get their workers at an expert level at prevention/intervention (e.g. recognizing signs, engaging victimized people who are scared to talk), do proactive awareness programming with youth who come to them
- 📌 Service sites should be resourced to implement systems to better share information/expertise/support across each other, with schools, and with police services
- 📌 Service sites should be resourced to take survivor-centred approaches to intervene in non-traditional, non-criminalizing ways (e.g. peer-to-peer)
- 📌 Safe beds in shelter for trafficked youth
- 📌 Funding of Indigenous-led approaches with lens on the impacts of colonization and intergenerational trauma are necessary
- 📌 Funding of programming approaches that reflect identities/experiences/survivors of those at highest risk (e.g. LGBTTIQQ2SA youth, newcomer youth) from a harm reduction perspective, suitable for people of diverse beliefs/backgrounds/faiths
- 📌 Robust initiatives to build up and encourage safer, non-exploitative, non-predatory economic opportunities for young people with entrepreneurial aptitudes, particularly in poverty-affected neighbourhoods
- 📌 Targeted interventions for youth in care through child protection services
- 📌 Human trafficking training for law enforcement and legal actors (including judges, crowns)
- 📌 Funding of robust in-school curricula/programming to address and challenge toxic masculinity and gender-based violence prevention from an intersectional lens

### POLICY AND LEGISLATION STRATEGIES/TOOLS

- 📌 Child and Youth Trauma-Reduction Strategies to provide a lens for service/education provision that aims to reduce young people's vulnerability to predatory behavior
- 📌 Protection and non-criminalizing support for young people manipulated into helping traffickers or who get into trafficking at a young age because of intergenerational influences
- 📌 Policies to encourage mainstream economic stimulus/opportunities to benefit young people in low-income areas

From Covenant House and Loyola University (2017):

- 📌 Extend the Child Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking Act in Canada (Covenant House and Loyola University)
- 📌 Pass "Safe Harbor" laws to allow young trafficking survivors to be treated as victims
- 📌 Raise the age for aging out of foster care to 21 across Canada

## SOURCES

Bill O’Grady and Stephen Gaetz. 2009. “Street Survival: A Gendered Analysis of Youth Homelessness in Toronto”. In *Finding Home: Policy Options for Addressing Homelessness in Canada*. <http://homelesshub.ca/findinghome>

Canadian Women’s Foundation. 2014. “NO MORE”: Ending Sex-Trafficking In Canada Report of the National Task Force on Sex Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada. [https://www.canadianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/CWF-TraffickingReport-Auto-1\\_0.pdf](https://www.canadianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/CWF-TraffickingReport-Auto-1_0.pdf)

Covenant House Youth by The Field Center for Children’s Policy, Practice & Research and the Loyola University Modern Slavery Research Project. 2017. *Labor and Sex Trafficking Among Homeless Youth*. <https://covenanthousestudy.org/landing/trafficking/>

Ross Levine and Yona Rubinstein. 2017. “Smart and Illicit: Who Becomes an Entrepreneur and Do They Earn More?” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 132(2), p. 963–1018. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjw044>

Tatiana Adeline Thieme. 2017. “The hustle economy: Informality, uncertainty and the geographies of getting by”. *Progress in Human Geography*, p. 1–20. <http://www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/people/academic-staff/tatiana-thieme/ThiemeTheHustleEconomyPinHG2017.pdf>