

Trafficking during Covid

I am a survivor of 8 years of sex trafficking in London Ontario and along the 401 corridor and am sure that I am on Pornhub although have not looked as it would kill me. I work full time with trafficking victims and those at risk. I have been doing this work for over 15 years and with the rise of covid what we are seeing in this area is changing drastically and quickly. The usual methods of trafficking are becoming different and the ages of the victims is dropping significantly. Historically the average age of entry has been approximately 12 -14. We are now seeing that age become 8 -9 because familial trafficking is on the rise. Families are losing their jobs and sources of income, and are now looking to their children to do it. This form of trafficking which has always existed is now very prominent and it is much harder for service provider to detect. Many children are doing online schooling and often there is no data base and no tracking methods as of yet to show who is actually participating and teacher can not tell from physically interacting with them if their behaviours are changing. As we well know men are leaning more and more towards using child exploitation material and this is an area parents (traffickers) are making use of. Not only are youth being forced to do this but the women and men who were previously been trafficked and delivered physically from one perpetrator to the next are making them do live web cams and pornography. We know this to be true as the recent publicity around Porn Hub has shown us to some of the degree it is happening. There are other and many other platforms that are being used. The people I am working with are being asked by online purchasers and being forced by those controlling them to do horrific acts, there is a well documented case of a woman being forced to strangle herself online to the degree that she died. We are physically hurt for not performing. I have had my nipples amputated.

Children are being given to five men at a time. These victims are not being allowed to use any form of protection like birth control or condoms and they are not allowed to wear masks. I want to address these issues as literally millions of children are at high risk as we speak. Covid has changed the face of trafficking and frontline service providers need to be aware. There are issues unique to minors here. If they land in an emergency department, how do we separate a minor from a [aren't or guardian to ask the relevant questions? I am currently working with Doctors to create curriculum for residents around this. One tool we are developing is for the doctors to order things like x rays that are not needed and training radiologists in how to question from a trauma informed perspective. We are teaching the health care profession about the use of language, for example, not to ask a child if they are being asked to do "yukky" things as this creates a sense of shame and they may not disclose.

There are some things that can be done to address this issue and they need to be not only talked about but implemented universally. I am continuously getting calls from victims and often their families. How do they get the images taken down off the internet? NAFTA has to be addressed here and changed so that platforms are held liable. Bill C 36 must continue. It is not about legislating morality. I have been to Amsterdam, and Germany. They are two countries that have proven legalization does not work. In Germany, of the approx. 400.000 prostituted people, 80% are human trafficked. Organized crime has taken over to the degree that Germany is actively looking at implementing the Nordic Model. It is a social experiment that has failed miserably at the expense and cost of millions of lives. This country will become a sex tourist destination and there is no way to control it. A neighborhood here did a community survey and the only place the children felt safe at nigh was in their bedrooms because of men trolling their neighborhoods. How dare we allow this to happen to them?

I can personally speak to the immeasurable toll it has taken on me having to sell the inside of my body to strangers. Not only the physical, but mental and spiritual toll. It is the only industry where the youngest and those with the least experience are the most desired. Please do not forget that while you sit reading this, I and many others are literally in the trenches every day picking up the pieces of what is left of the victims.

Sex is not a human right, food, water, air, safety, education and freedom are.

I sincerely hope you will take what I have said into consideration as I have literally lived it.

Caroline Pugh-Roberts