



Submission to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women

National Consultation on Human Trafficking of Women, Girls, and Gender Diverse People

By Nancy Brown, OBC, April 2023

“Any society which claims to uphold the principles of legal, political, economic, and social equality for women must reject the idea that women and children, especially girls, are commodities that can be bought and sold. To do otherwise is to allow a distinct class of women, particularly women and girls who are economically and racially marginalized, to be excluded from the universal protection of human dignity enshrined in the body of international human rights instruments developed over the past fifty years.” **Gunilla Ekberg, Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications, Sweden, 2004**

The government of Canada has repeatedly voiced its goal of gender equality. Yet, human trafficking and the system of prostitution, two gender-based crimes, are flourishing with impunity, making lucrative profits within our country. Despite the efforts of Safety Canada, more needs to be done to protect the most vulnerable and to fulfill our commitments to international agreements. Aligning our human trafficking law with the Palermo Protocol, might ensure greater convictions of traffickers in Canada. Pass Bill S-224, An Act to Amend the Criminal Code (Trafficking in Persons)

Sweden has one of the highest gender equality ratings. Prior to introducing the Nordic Model in 1999, Sweden had a national educational campaign in every level of society including judicial, educational, medical, all levels of government, social services, and law enforcement. Three posters were displayed in 2,215 public locations around the country, including bus shelters, subway stations and on streetcars. (Posters available at <http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/2192>). A paradigm shift took place with 78% of their citizens in agreement with their law!

Most Canadians are ignorant of our law, (PCEPA), inclusive of police forces, judges, lawyers, educators, and others. More education efforts need to happen in strategic areas such as airports, hospitality industry, medical world, schools in both rural and urban areas.

Imagine what could be done if all Canadians were knowledgeable of PCEPA? Change will only happen when sex buyers, pimps and traffickers are held accountable for the harm they cause. Until this happens, Canada will continue with gender inequality. For we all know that prostitution is part of a system of exploitation based on structural inequalities which preys on the vulnerabilities of those on the margins. It is a de-humanizing process, making the marginalized feel that they are invisible and not valued. True equality means equal access to the basic needs that create a dignified human life.

Prostitution is not a single issue, but part of a continuum of oppressions such as child abuse-neglect-homelessness-sextorting-pornography-human trafficking-organ trafficking etc. All forms of exploitation are interconnected, based on a system of male domination and an imbalance of power and control. Who are the buyers and who are the bought? The imbalance is obvious with buyers, pimps and traffickers being primarily male, white, married, educated, employed and wealthy whereas most prostituted persons are female, young, unemployed, less educated, living in poverty, with Asian, Black, or Indigenous backgrounds. If Canada wants gender equality, this imbalance must be addressed!

Human trafficking/prostitution is not possible without the men who make the demands and provide the money. “I was surprised at the type of men that picked me up.” **Nordic Model Now**, Nov. 2, 2018. Canada must end the impunity of traffickers, pimps, and buyers!

Demand is the root cause of the system of prostitution with sex buyers fueling the trafficking markets. Research indicates that holding buyers accountable is a strong and effective deterrent. Note that once the Nordic Model was adopted in Sweden, human trafficking ceased. Legalizing prostitution only increases trafficking as traffickers look for the most lucrative market.

Canada needs to improve its use of technology to identify and apprehend profiteers, traffickers and pimps who are making billions of dollars. Read **Globe and Mail**, March 10, 2023, by Rita Trichur – **Sex Traffickers are Using Shell Companies to Launder Illicit Profits in Canada**. Transnational criminals are reaping billions of dollars from 700 identified illicit massage businesses across Canada.

Canada can and must do better than to accept prostitution as a solution to poverty, racism, sexism, and other underlying social issues. 84% of persons in prostitution are pimped or trafficked. Our women deserve better. PCEPA is a critical tool in eliminating sexual exploitation and gender inequality.

“We say that slavery has vanished from European civilizations, but this is not true. Slavery still exists, but now it applies only to women and its name is now prostitution.” **Victor Hugo, Les Misérables**

I recommend the following:

1. that the government uphold, strengthen, and implement PCEPA in every jurisdiction across Canada. Robust and ongoing training of all law enforcement and justice system focusing on attitude and provisions of PCEPA is critical. Law enforcement plus social services need to collaborate to ensure trauma informed care for survivors.
2. that the government maintain and enforce PCEPA's foundational provisions in the Criminal Code: s.286.1 (Obtaining sexual services for consideration), s.286.2 (Material benefit from sexual services), s.286.3 (Procuring), s.286.4 (Advertising sexual services), and s. 286.5 (Immunity).
3. that the government strengthen other elements of the Nordic Model through a national public awareness campaign, educational programs at all levels and sustained investment in prevention and trauma informed exiting services across Canada. There needs to be an increase in long term housing and addictions treatment programs to facilitate healthy recovery for survivors.
4. that the government immediately put forth legislation to devise filters to protect children from harmful content and to protect children online. Online luring reports to Cybertip.ca has increased 815% in past years. Pass and implement Bill S – 210 immediately to protect children from pornography.
5. that the government make greater use of technology to assist law enforcement and government agencies to identify criminals involved in human trafficking. Follow the money is an effective strategy. Consult **Following the Money: Compendium of Resources and Step by Step Guide to Financial Investigations into Trafficking in Human Beings** – OSCE, Nov. 2019.
6. that the government encourage all major cities across Canada to have a restorative justice program for arrested buyers, pimps, and traffickers to be educated, thus reducing demand.
7. that the government provide a guaranteed viable minimum income, so no woman is forced to sell her body to feed her children.
8. that the government expunge the records of those who in the past, were criminalized for selling sexual services.
9. that the government encourage all businesses to implement a code of conduct and employment policies that respect human dignity and gender equality.
10. that Canada's National Action Plan focus entirely on demand and deterrents to hold buyers accountable for the harms they create.

\*\*\*\*\*

I am a concerned citizen, retired primary and high school teacher, university chaplain and senior manager, ombudsperson, and pastoral counsellor at Covenant House Vancouver for twenty years. Currently I serve on numerous boards and committees, both national and local, that are focused on the elimination of exploitation and violence particularly towards women and youth in our society.