



BRIEF SUBMISSION TO THE STATUS OF WOMEN COMMITTEE

TOPIC: Human Trafficking of Women, Girls and Gender-Diverse Individuals for Sexual Exploitation

Submitted by:

The Ottawa Coalition to End Human Trafficking

Date: April 10, 2023

Who are We?

The Ottawa Coalition to End Human Trafficking (“OCEHT” or “The Coalition”) works to meet the acute, immediate, and long-term resources and support needs of persons impacted by human trafficking, including those who have exited a trafficking situation, their families, and communities, as well as persons who may be at risk of sexual exploitation, labour exploitation and/or organ removal/harvest.

The OCEHT also provides training to volunteers and service providers to assist and educate them to identify signs of trafficking and to know how to respond appropriately. We are a community-based network made up of various local organizations, service providers and community members from a wide range of diverse backgrounds, both educational and occupational. Our approach to human trafficking is a preventative one.

We are committed to creating and sustaining a continuum among organizations, service providers, community members and volunteers that provides a uniform, timely and appropriate response to those who seek access to supports, services and resources because they have been affected by human trafficking, irrespective of their age, gender, religion, sexual orientation and ethno-cultural background. Irrespective of the avenue through which a person seeks assistance, our commitment is to work together within and outside our network to ensure that the response is equally appropriate and effective.

What is our stance?

Target Factors

According to a 2021 Statistics Canada Report, 96% of police-reported human trafficking victims between 2011-2021 were women and girls. The majority are Canadian-born teenage girls, some

as young as 13, who are recruited in various ways, including at school, through social media, and at shopping malls.¹

Overrepresentation of Indigenous Women and Girls

The Coalition seeks to draw attention to the root causes of the over-representation of Indigenous peoples being trafficked in Canada. The Coalition recognizes, first and foremost, that Canada's colonial history is the main culprit of current and historical violence against Indigenous peoples. This has spiraled into increased human trafficking of Indigenous peoples, especially women and girls. Prior to colonization, Indigenous communities were matriarchal in nature; they valued, honoured and respected Indigenous women and their role within Indigenous communities. This attitude shifted when colonization emerged, and shortly thereafter, the representation of Indigenous women and girls started to dwindle.

The Coalition is also concerned with the overrepresentation of Indigenous girls within the Child Welfare System. According to social advocate and human trafficking survivor, Timea Nagy, foster care, group homes and youth shelters have been described as “a trafficker’s Costco. They know where the group homes are and that children don’t feel welcome.”² Statistics show that 72 percent of trafficked victims in Canada are under the age of 25, and 51 percent of trafficked girls have been involved in the child welfare system. Furthermore, statistics in 2008 showed that “The number of First Nations children in care outside their own homes [was] three times the number of children in residential schools at the height of their operation.”³ In the 2016 census, 52.2% of all children in the Canadian foster care system were Indigenous.⁴ The Coalition seeks to highlight the importance of protecting Indigenous children within the child welfare system and those aging out of the system. While the child welfare system is by no means perfect, there is a semblance of protection within it; however, the system lacks appropriate ‘exit plans’ for children. Children in the system, especially Indigenous girls, are often released from foster care with no knowledge of money management skills, no access to mental health resources, and no access to key social programs that they need in the early stages of adulthood. Once on the streets, many experience homelessness and/or poverty. Either of these may lead to a dangerous path, rife with sexual exploitation.

Overrepresentation of and Lack of Research on Gender Diverse Populations

¹ Ally Global Foundation (2022) *Human trafficking in Canada*, Available at: <https://ally.org/human-trafficking-in-canada/>

² “*Hidden in Plain Sight: Sex Trafficking in Canada* | Inter Press Service, 25 July 2019, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2019/07/hidden-plain-sight-sex-trafficking-canada/>.

³ Hargreaves, Allison. “*Violence against indigenous women: literature, activism, resistance.*” Wilfred Laurier Press, 2017. Page 13.

⁴ Government of Canada. *Reducing the Number of Indigenous Children in Care*. August 19, 2020. <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1541187352297/1541187392851>

Approximately 75,000 people living in Canada are transgender or gender diverse, representing 0.24% of the Canadian population aged 15 and older.⁵ According to a report by the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, from 2019-2020, 2% of victims/survivors were transgender women and men, and gender nonconforming individuals, a rate that significantly exceeds their relative share of the population (0.24%).⁶

Recommendations:

- The Coalition recommends increased funding and efforts to bring human trafficking prevention education into every school and community across the country. This education should be accessible, culturally-relevant, adaptable, age-appropriate, and customizable to each and every community. We also recommend that it be available in many languages, including English, French, Spanish, Indigenous languages, and others as required.
- The Coalition recommends increased funding and efforts to bring human trafficking education into the sectors where employees may interact with human trafficking victims, such as healthcare, hospitality, transportation, and law enforcement.
- The Coalition recommends increasing access for children and youth in the child welfare system to attend summer and day camps geared towards empowerment, healthy relationships and building protective barriers.
- The Coalition recommends increased research on gender diverse populations.
- The Coalition recommends increased funding and efforts for programming geared towards gender diverse populations.
- The Coalition recommends applying a survivor-led, trauma-informed and intersectional lens to all work in this area.
- The Coalition recommends increased research on the human trafficking of women and girls in rural areas across Canada.
- The Coalition recommends increased research and action on improving the housing situation for women and girls who have exited a trafficking situation.

⁵ Women and Gender Equality Canada (2022, February 7). *What is gender-based violence?* <https://women-gender-equality.canada.ca/en/gender-based-violence/about-gender-based-violence.html#trans>

⁶ Froutan, A. (2022, September 26). *Human Trafficking Trends in Canada (2019-2020)*. The Canadian Centre To End Human Trafficking. <https://www.canadiancentretoendhumantrafficking.ca/human-trafficking-trends-in-canada-2019-2020/>

We would like to thank the committee for the inclusion of our brief, and we appreciate the opportunity to present our opinions, ideas, and recommendations to the standing committee on this issue. The Ottawa Coalition to End Human Trafficking is hopeful that this will lead to real positive change and will bring attention and action to the pressing and prevalent issue of Human Trafficking of Women, Girls and Gender-Diverse Individuals for Sexual Exploitation.