

## BRIEF

### Human Trafficking of Women, Girls and Gender-Diverse People - Standing Committee on the Status of Women -

April 13, 2023

- 1. The positioning and innovation of organized crime and procuring as regards human trafficking for sexual exploitation
- 2. The correlation between the forced administration of drugs, substance abuse and drug addiction (particularly psychotropics and opioids) experienced by victims of sexual exploitation and the selling of sexual services
- 3. The importance of developing citizen engagement groups to monitor known sex trade locations, recruitment locations and land and air transportation hubs
- 4. The recognition of the achievements and extremely valuable contributions of community stakeholders

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With assistance from and thanks to our partners in the field of prevention and public safety.

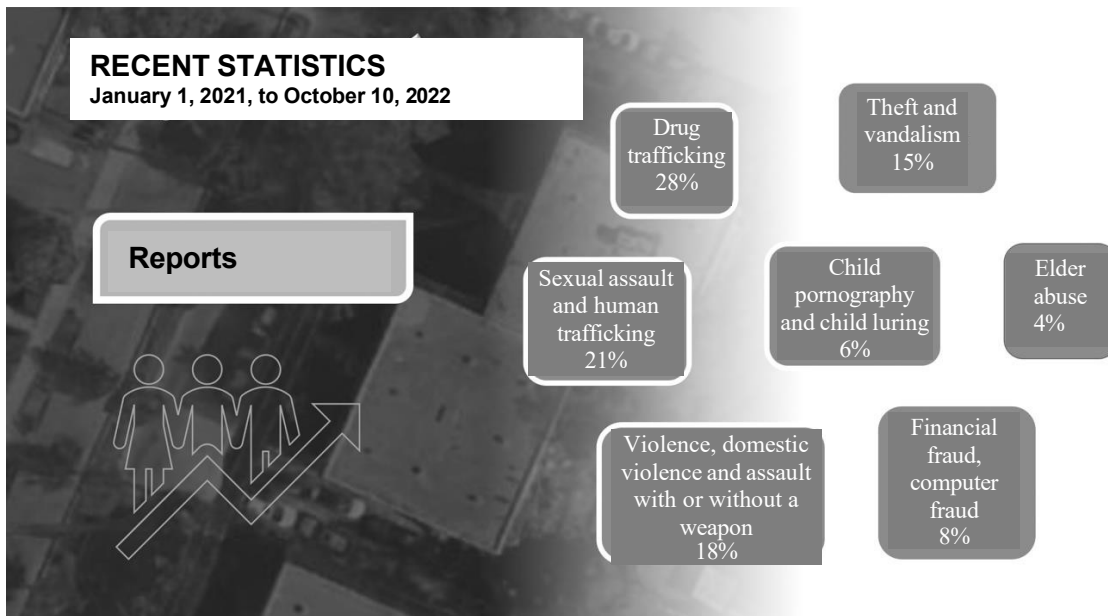
## What our most common tipoffs are about

Anonymous tipoffs about drug production and trafficking account for 28% of our calls and online tips, which is huge. Thanks to our callers, many suspects involved in narcotics trafficking have been tracked and arrested. It takes many small leads to help dismantle large networks and seize substantial quantities of narcotics.

A sharp increase in the number of illegal home laboratories producing new hard drugs such as synthetic opioids, as well as the number of resellers and a more diversified market, are leading us to increase our efforts to analyze and redirect our tipoffs.

The second most common tipoff category is not far behind. Human trafficking and sexual assaults account for 21% of tips by callers who contact us. It should be noted that, in most arrests involving a suspect acting alone or as part of a criminal organization that exercises control over a third party for sexual exploitation, the charge of procuring is almost always accompanied by drug trafficking—it is practically a given.

Tipoffs about sexual exploitation linked to child pornography and child luring account for 6% of reports and highlight an upward trend compared to past years.



## **The positioning and innovation of organized crime and procuring as regards human trafficking for sexual exploitation**

Young unilingual Francophone girls aged 12 to 17 from Quebec are highly sought after by the rest of Canada, particularly Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. Demand is high. A lot of young girls from Quebec end up in Ontario, a hotbed of human trafficking, for two simple reasons. The ease of crossing the border by land and the fact that youth aged 16 or over in Ontario can often evade parental authority under section 65 of the *Children's Law Reform Act*. If a police officer has a bench warrant to try to pick up an underaged girl from Quebec who is being sexually exploited and who has run away from a youth centre, once they cross the border, if she is questioned and says that her life is not in danger, the police officer has no jurisdiction. This is a recurring problem faced by the police. To address this issue, bench warrants from Quebec should be bilingual, with a non-binding indication that they are enforceable anywhere in Canada.

Organized crime and street gangs have come up with a winning formula thanks to Airbnb short-term rentals, which makes the sex trade even more anonymous. The victims will meet with the clients in the Airbnb rental. The short stay and the private nature of an Airbnb rental allows traffickers to fade into the background while maintaining control of the situation and keeping the profit generated by the sexual services. While the official statistic for victims of sexual trafficking is that 96% are women, **it is important to note** that, for every person who speaks out, nine remain silent. Gay men and people from the LGBTQ+ community are certainly subject to human trafficking for sexual exploitation at a rate greater than 4%. In marginalized communities, where there are fewer complaints and reports and fewer resources to help men in difficulty, male victims of sexual exploitation are almost absent from census statistics, but they are indeed there on the ground. This fact must be acknowledged and recognized. By overlooking their suffering, we are causing them harm.

### **1.2 Main recruitment locations**

Locations where people in poverty or psychological distress are likely to go, where minors and young adults are left on their own, and at land transportation hubs, where people are disoriented and disorganized.

- Bars
- Schools
- Large outdoor events
- Youth centres
- Addiction support centres
- Mental health rehabilitation centres
- Bus stations
- Train stations
- Shopping centres
- Skate parks
- Youth homes
- Retail locations (furniture, clothing, etc.)

## **The correlation between the forced administration of drugs, substance abuse and drug addiction (particularly psychotropics and opioids) experienced by victims of sexual exploitation and the facilitation of the control and merchandising of sexual services**

When one person is owned by someone else as an object, a sexual plaything, they are no longer their own person, physically or mentally. That is the foundation of human trafficking for sexual exploitation. The victim is constantly suffering from being drugged, often savagely beaten, raped several times a day, constantly threatened, and they are alone against a group or an entire organization. To protect itself, the brain sometimes dissociates from reality so the victim can survive torture without turning to suicide as an escape. Drugs are the most effective way to keep someone captive, where the victim is no longer their own person, their judgment is severely altered and they become a “commodity” in the sex trade.

Organizers and traffickers want their prey to be fragile. If they are addicted to drugs, they are malleable, docile, easy to control. When the addiction is well rooted, the victim is indoctrinated. Narcotics trafficking is intrinsically linked to human trafficking. This is confirmed by our statistics, the percentage of the tipoffs we receive. The preferred drugs used by traffickers against victims are opioids and psychotropics.

**OPIOIDS:** Fentanyl is 100 times stronger than a dose of morphine, and carfentanyl is 10,000 times stronger than a dose of morphine. They are cut with other drugs in order to not kill the person right away, and addiction is almost instantaneous, so the trafficker can control and dominate his “merchandise,” the mostly women and girls he sells for profit.

**PSYCHOTROPICS:** Ketamine is a drug that creates dissociation. It produces an effect where the body is detached from the mind, which allows the victim to suffer multiple traumas while being unaware of what is happening. She will accept whatever is done to her. GHB is a powerful central nervous system depressant that puts the victim in a state of acceptance of anything that may be inflicted. MDMA removes inhibitions and increases aphrodisiac effects on the body. Drugs containing methamphetamines are VERY popular, even omnipresent, when police conduct seizures during large-scale anti-drug operations across Quebec. Festivals, concerts and large outdoor events are go-to places for traffickers to trap potential prey. There are now mini-syringes designed to go through clothing. The prick is so small that the pressure can barely be felt. Like all conventional medical devices, if the syringe is not sterilized, the person who unknowingly receives the dose is at risk of infection. This phenomenon is so common that it has a name: it is now called “needle spiking.” It became commonplace in night clubs in the United Kingdom and Ireland, but this practice seems to have unfortunately crossed borders to us. GHB is also available in the form of a powder, capsules or a colourless, odourless liquid. The victim might taste a hint of soap or sometimes salt, but otherwise it remains largely undetectable.

If the sexual predator administers too large a dose of the psychotropic, the victim is likely to experience low blood pressure, slowing their heart rate and leading to respiratory arrest and sometimes death. Unlike naloxone, which can bring a person back from an opioid overdose, there is no antidote to counter the effects of a GHB overdose. When the effect is visible and the victim is clearly unconscious, only a few medications can neutralize their decline and stabilize

their physical condition.

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[Translation] “The subject emphasizes the effects of crack, including a form of depersonalization that leads the user to totally submit to the will of others, an aspect largely exploited by the sex industry.”<sup>1</sup> *Sandrine Ricci – Lyne Kurtzman – Marie-Andrée Roy, 2012*

[Translation] “It is clear that drugs help people being prostituted to endure their prostitution. However, their addiction leads them to continue or increase their prostitution in increasingly risky conditions in which help is almost non-existent.”<sup>2</sup> *Richard Poulin, 2008*

[Translation] “Respondents noted many obstacles, identified many needs, proposed some courses of action and made recommendations. The difficulties identified included problems related to the use of drugs, alcohol and medication at a rate of 91.6%.”<sup>3</sup> *Carole Boulebsol, 2018*

[Translation] “Some individuals begin or increase their substance use to numb the pain and endure what they are experiencing in prostitution. Then, for some, the sale of sexual services will provide financial support for the purchase of substances, thus creating an addiction (Chen et al., 2004).”<sup>4</sup> *Anne Tatu, 2022.*

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Must we wait for the substance abuse problem to be firmly entrenched by responding only once it has become an emergency, or can we act at the very start of the process by equipping potential victims before they experience the trauma, which would be easier? There is a lack of data on victims of the date rape drug, their circumstances and their situation because of insufficient resources. As these drugs do not stay in the body for long, the distribution of free tests at the provincial government level must be facilitated and streamlined.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** Given that staff are sometimes paid by clients to put substances in a targeted victim’s drink, **it is now essential** that a large-scale awareness campaign be launched to give **mandatory and free** access to GHB and ketamine screening tests in bars, hotels, bistros or any business with an alcohol licence, and large outdoor events, such as festivals and concerts.

On March 15, 2023, the Quebec National Assembly unanimously adopted a motion stating that rape drugs are a scourge and that the availability of screening tests must be increased at all hospitals.

This awareness comes 30 years after the illegal market for psychotropics was established, with drugs that are overwhelmingly used to beat and rape girls and women, trap them and keep them in submission. These tests should have been distributed for free at least 15 years ago. Alco Prevention Canada offers reliable GHB and ketamine detection tests in the form of bracelets and coasters, but they are paid products.

## **The importance of developing citizen engagement groups to monitor known recruitment locations (1.2) and land and air transportation hubs**

As our mission indicates, we are in favour of citizen engagement. We help facilitate completely anonymous tipoffs from the public about crime.

With respect to human trafficking, an excellent example of citizen engagement is *Truckers Against Trafficking Canada*. Their mission is to identify and disrupt human trafficking networks. They mobilize an army of transportation professionals to help law enforcement recognize and report human trafficking with a view to bring the victims to safety and arrest the perpetrators.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** A funding program for non-profit organizations must be put in place that promotes the development of citizen groups that can monitor transportation hubs in cooperation with provincial and municipal governments—locations such as bus stations, train stations, outside facilities and parking lots at airports, truck stops, etc.

The organizations could develop partnerships and sponsorships with large passenger bus and rail companies in Canada to offer training for drivers and staff on detecting human trafficking, while placing their own volunteers on the ground at strategic transportation hubs along key human trafficking corridors in Canada. They would be a source of assistance for law enforcement by acting as scouts.

For example:

- Megabus
- Orléans Express
- Greyhound
- FlixBus
- Rider Express
- Red Arrow
- VIA Rail Canada
- Amtrak
- Transport Ferroviaire Tshiuetin Inc.

## **The recognition of the achievements and extremely valuable contributions of community stakeholders**

In conclusion, the current system is one of reacting to emergencies involving the growing issues of sexual exploitation and human trafficking. There is very little emphasis on prevention at the source. Police officers are essential workers trained to act on complaints and emergency calls. Their work is crucial. To meet the needs and FINALLY engage in prevention activities on a scale commensurate with the tragedies that are taking place, there must be societal validation and wage increases for **street outreach workers, social workers, community police and neighbourhood police**. Give credit where credit is due.

Like citizen groups that can monitor transportation hubs, only the stakeholders listed above have the unique skills needed to infiltrate or get close to sex businesses (massage parlours, strip clubs, hotels, transitional housing, red-light districts) and recruitment sites (1.2) to try to help victims at their pace and ultimately remove them from their toxic environments.

**\*\*\* Significantly increasing the number of local workers would upset the sexual exploitation market.**

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