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To the Standing Committee on the Status of Women,

## **Introduction**

I am the CEO of the Exploitation Education Institute, formerly known as SEE (Sexual Exploitation Education). For background, my expertise and experience is as follows: Exploitation Education Institute has been a leading organization working in the prevention of all forms of child and youth sexual exploitation across Canada. Our student educational programs are supported by the Ministry of Education in B.C., and school boards across the country. We also provide consulting services, including a recent research contract to assist the International Cybercrime Research Institute with the presence of human trafficking online through escort websites. I have personally worked directly in this field for 10 years, both in frontline and prevention, and mostly in educating children and youth, front line workers, and law enforcement agencies.

In my time, I have educated over 75,000 Canadian individuals and have received many disclosures as a result. I have seen the issue of human trafficking and sexual exploitation change, morph, and shift throughout the years, especially with the emergence of the digital space.

## **The Current sphere/scope of Sexual Exploitation**

While the traditional methods to sex trafficking and exploitation, such as the boyfriending/ romeo pimp tactic of pimps to recruit minors in person and digitally, continues to exist, social media platforms and influences have now shifted grooming into sex trafficking and exploitation.

The standard vulnerabilities of minors using the internet were confined to them meeting needs such as belonging, connection, and self-esteem. We now see an additional vulnerability relating to “influencing”. Apps such as Tik Tok, Youtube, and Instagram have demonstrated to our younger generations that anyone could potentially come into fame or fortune, with much of this being connected to sexualization and objectification on these platforms.

Profiting off of this, self exploitative platforms such as Only Fans and Feet Finder have now rebranded prostitution as “e-influencing” and those who are in prostitution are now re-labelling themselves as influencers. Language matters. It affects our understanding and behaviours. Minors are now being groomed by these online platforms (for example, there are 1.5 billion views on the hashtag #sugarbaby on Tik Tok) into self exploitation. Traffickers no longer need to

manipulate a minor into sexual exploitation, they merely have to offer management and support for them to gain more “followers”.

Many youth that we have worked with have admitted to being exposed to these platforms and self exploitation relationships (such as sugar babies) and waiting until they turn of age to engage in them.

An alarming majority of youth have also admitted to seeking romantic relationships or flirtatious encounters through the social media platforms they are on.

Young women continue to be objectified and sexualized at an alarming rate and with much more of a global impact due to the border-less digital space, our re-branding of women’s empowerment and influencing, and international male influencers such as Andrew Tate who spread misogyny to younger males and normalize e-pimping.

### **Effective Prevention Education**

Effective prevention education can not be based off of a band-aid approach, or one of shame and fear.

From my years of experience in curriculum development and educational program management, effective prevention involves addressing the root causes of exploitation and providing students with the tools to reduce their individual vulnerabilities, both in person and online. This looks like conversations around exploitation versus empowerment, consent in person and digitally, and healthy versus unhealthy online interactions- both romantic and platonic. It looks like providing resources through legislation from a space of empowering them with tools they can use to protect themselves, versus fear and shame that they may be penalized for their behaviours. It looks like conversations around values and how this applies to their peers and the digital space. It also looks like deglamorization sugar baby relationships, Only Fans, and other forms of self exploitation through facts versus imposing our personal belief systems and a disempowering approach.

Lastly, a very small number of human trafficked victims of sexual exploitation would identify themselves under that umbrella. It is for this reason that our language in how we present human trafficking and pimps must be more accessible. For example, rather than using the language of “Are you being human trafficked?” or “Warning signs of a pimp”, it is more effective to state “Is your relationship leading you into exploitation?”.

I appreciate your time in reading this Brief.

Warmly,

Tiana Shari