



April 20, 2023

To: The House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women
Re: Human Trafficking of Women, Girls, and Gender Diverse People

We are thankful that the Status of Women Committee is studying human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Human trafficking always involves commercially exploiting people, but sex trafficking compounds the harm by commodifying a person's sexuality. The vulnerability of people who are trafficked or at risk of sex trafficking makes this issue especially pressing.

In February 2021, ARPA Canada submitted a [written brief](#) to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy, and Ethics. Our brief called for privacy protections against pornography platforms which often provide content that was created or shared without consent. In February 2022, we submitted a [written brief](#) to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights regarding its review of the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA). Pornography, prostitution, and sex trafficking are intricately connected in the market they serve and in their shared objectification of women and girls.

Sex Trafficking & Prostitution

Legalizing prostitution in parts of the United States and Australia resulted in more women and children being trafficked for sexual purposes.ⁱ In prostitution and sex trafficking, people are treated like commodities subject to changes in supply and demand.ⁱⁱ Canada's PCEPA legislation appropriately targets and suppresses demand by criminalizing pimps and johns, not prostituted women themselves, to combat the exploitation of vulnerable Canadians. This legislation should be maintained, and efforts made at continual improvements in enforcement.

Sex Trafficking & Pornography

In 2020, the New York Times [published an exposé](#) on PornHub, operated by the mega-corporation MindGeek, revealing how many easily accessible videos featured underage participants, dubious consent, and acts of violence against women. That videos of sexual exploitation are so easily shared on profit-generating platforms makes it easy to profit from exploitation, which increases exploitation and related sex trafficking.

The House of Commons' Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy, and Ethics, in June of 2021, [recommended](#) (among other things) that the government of Canada explore ways to hold online platforms liable for allowing videos of childhood sexual abuse or non-consensual sexual activity to be shared on their platforms, or for allowing any video to be shared without the consent of the persons who appear in the video. They also recommended that the government require any website hosting pornographic content to verify the age and consent of the people involved. These recommendations have not yet been implemented by the federal government. **We ask this Committee to call on the government to implement these recommendations.**

We also ask the members of this committee to support Bill C-270, the *Stopping Internet Sexual Exploitation (SISE) Act*, which would add two offences to the Criminal Code:

- making it an offence to create pornographic material for a commercial purpose without verifying the age and consent of the individuals shown, and
- making it an offence to distribute pornographic material for a commercial purpose without verifying the age and consent of those shown.

The *SISE Act* would also address cases where consent has been withdrawn, which would support those exiting exploitation, and would increase penalties for sharing material that depicts minors.

Recommendations

1. **Call on Parliament to pass the *SISE Act*** as soon as possible. This will ensure the onus to prove consent for pornographic images is always on the corporation, not the individual and will allow anyone to withdraw consent at any time, requiring corporations to remove pornographic content in which that individual is depicted.
2. **Facilitate education.** Canadians must be taught to recognize signs of sex trafficking or under-age prostitution. Teachers and students in our education system should be provided with resources to identify signs of human trafficking, grooming, and exploitation. The RCMP's sexual exploitation unit should be given the resources to develop accurate educational resources to help with crime prevention and awareness around sexual exploitation and human trafficking. A special community liaison officer should coordinate with trusted community partners to assist in educating parents on the potential risks of social media and app use by girls, with a goal of preventing predators from accessing vulnerable young people.
3. **Better exit support.** One study of prostituted women in nine countries revealed that 89% want to escape prostitution. In Canada, that number was 95%.ⁱⁱⁱ Canada can improve on ways to help women exit prostitution. Effective collaboration between law enforcement, health care and housing providers, mental health and substance use agencies, job training organizations, and the various levels of government is critical to helping people exit exploitative environments.^{iv} The government should also partner with non-government organizations with cultural and faith-based community support networks to help women and girls exit the sex trade.

Parliament has a duty to protect vulnerable people from abuse and exploitation. Sexual exploitation has a brutal dehumanizing effect, as bodies are reduced to commodities and there is no recognition of a person's inherent worth and dignity as a unique individual made in the image of God. Sexual exploitation and abuse deny the humanity of vulnerable people and we support any effort to combat such exploitation.

On behalf of ARPA Canada,

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The mission of ARPA Canada is to educate, equip, and encourage Christians to be politically engaged and to bring a biblical perspective to Canada’s civil governments. As part of its mission, ARPA Canada works to promote awareness and engagement on issues like prostitution and human trafficking in order to protect vulnerable people from harm and defend their dignity.

ⁱ Monica O’Connor and Grainne Healy, [“The Links Between Prostitution and Sex Trafficking: A Briefing Handbook,”](#) Joint Project Coordinated by the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) and the European Women’s Lobby (EWL), A Swedish and United States Governmental and Non-Governmental Organisation Partnership, (2006), 29-30.

ⁱⁱ Lisa Thompson, [“The Critical Role of Market Dynamics in Combating Sex Trafficking,”](#) *National Centre on Sexual Exploitation*, (March 11, 2021).

ⁱⁱⁱ Farley et al. “Prostitution and Trafficking in Nine Countries: An Update on Violence and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.” *Journal of Trauma Practice* (The Haworth Maltreatment & Trauma Press, an imprint of The Haworth Press, Inc.) Vol. 2, No. 3/4, 2003, pp.33-74, p 51.

^{iv} A. Noble et al., [Getting Out: A National Framework for Escaping Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation in Canada](#), Toronto, ON: Covenant House Toronto & The Hindsight Group,” (2020), 33.