



May 2, 2023

Dear Honourable Chairperson and distinguished members of the Committee,

Re: Study on human trafficking of women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals for sexual exploitation in Canada

About the Canadian Centre for Child Protection

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection Inc. (“C3P”) is a registered Canadian charity focused on preventing the sexual exploitation of children. C3P operates [Cybertip.ca](https://www.cybertip.ca), Canada’s national tipline to report the online sexual exploitation of children. [Cybertip.ca](https://www.cybertip.ca) is frequently the entity Canadians contact when issues of concern arise with respect to children in online environments. Since its inception in 2002, [Cybertip.ca](https://www.cybertip.ca) has received 2,005 reports related to sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of persons under the age of 18, and 423 reports related to the sexual advertisement of children online (which sometimes contain child sexual abuse material (CSAM)).¹

The internet and sex trafficking of children

C3P monitors reported case law tied to *Criminal Code* provisions addressing sexual offences against children. Most monitoring includes offences targeting the sex trafficking and sexual exploitation through prostitution of persons under 18. Most reported case law on these offences involves a trafficker who has specifically lured the child (online² and offline) for the purpose of sex trafficking. Out of view of any caregivers, the public, or police, offenders have unfettered access to large numbers of potential victims through various online platforms, many of which are popular amongst children. Traffickers use the intimacy and anonymity of the internet to take advantage of children’s naivety and any vulnerabilities they may have to coerce and manipulate them into sexual exploitation.

As a concrete example of the ways in which children can become sexual commodities online, several reports were made to [Cybertip.ca](https://www.cybertip.ca) about a 15-year-old child who was being sexually exploited for consideration through OnlyFans (an online platform that permits individuals to create sexually explicit content for paying viewers). One report from a member of the public alleged the child had been “trafficked by a pimp since she was 13”, and is being held hostage and forced to produce CSAM. Another reporting person, concerned about the same child, stated that someone was “going to kill [the child] on a live stream” if she does not make enough money.³

As part of its victim-centered strategy, C3P offers support services to children who have been sexually victimized online, including victims of CSAM. Through the operation of these support services, we have seen how communications between traffickers and children occur as much at home as they do at school – leaving children with nowhere to hide. Traffickers target children at schools – not only at the school gate – but also when using school devices at school. We have seen instances where parents limit or monitor a child’s use of devices and the internet to protect them from potential traffickers but the child continues to communicate with the potential traffickers when at school. Without the same limitations on school premises and very little oversight, the result is that children are trafficked through school without the knowledge of parents or school officials. We are aware

¹ Referred to as “child pornography” in the *Criminal Code* (Canada). Numbers current as of July 1, 2022.

² For example see: *R c Vera Camacho*, 2019 QCCQ 6896 (use of Kijiji and Facebook); *R v Alcorn*, 2020 MBQB 183 (use of Facebook); and *R v Bains*, 2021 ABPC 20 (use of Whisper and Snapchat); *R v Robinson*, 2021 MBQB 108 (offender found the victim on an escort site – not named in the judicial decision).

³ Reports made to [Cybertip.ca](https://www.cybertip.ca).



of at least one instance in which a child was abducted from their school (where they had been communicating with the trafficker using school devices) and was transported to the US, where they were located by police.

Recommendation 1. Amend the *Criminal Code* (or create a stand-alone statute) that imposes a duty on online platforms to a) report all instances of sexual exploitation of children for consideration on their platforms (including the advertising of same), and b) devise mechanisms to detect if an individual under 18 is being trafficked or exploited through their platform. This must be done in consultation with law enforcement to ensure that police undercover operations under s. 286.1(2) are not affected.

Recommendation 2. Schools and school boards must take steps to ensure children are safe when on school premises, including being safe online. Use of school devices by students and staff should be a) monitored, b) in accordance with school policies, and c) limited to the software and applications required for school related activities.

Survivor support services

The increased identification of victims that has come with greater awareness of sex trafficking has, unfortunately, not translated into the provision of adequate supports for child victims of sex trafficking. Few individuals who are trained to identify sex trafficking know how to respond to the needs of the child, especially when the child is vulnerable (e.g., experiencing homelessness).

C3P repeatedly encounters situations in which school officials, parents and child victims contact C3P asking what their next steps should be now that they have identified that a child is being trafficked. We have to connect and intersect with multiple entities and government systems before the child can get the resources and supports they require. Without assistance in connecting them to the right resources, most children and parents give up, and if the child has no other supports at home or at school, there is a likelihood they will continue to be trafficked, whether or not the original trafficker is arrested and convicted.

Despite the prevalent use of technology, we continue to see how child sexual abuse material made the in the course of the trafficking and exploitation is not addressed in victim services models and victims are left to deal with the impacts of the imagery alone. Particularly for children who are trafficked entirely online and have very little to no physical contact with purchasers of sex, there is a lack of understanding regarding the extent of harm to the child. The shame, humiliation and guilt experienced by children trafficked in person also manifests when victims are manipulated and coerced to engage in sexual acts or expose themselves on online platforms.

Recommendation 3. Human trafficking strategies need to develop a multidisciplinary approach in which a child victim of sex trafficking is surrounded by a circle of protection, which includes parents/guardians, school, therapy/victim services, child welfare and police. All these individuals and systems must know their role in the recovery process of the child and must share information with the other individuals or systems as needed, to ensure the recovery of the child. Only by providing victims with appropriate supports can we ensure a) that the trauma of sex trafficking is recognized and addressed, and b) that the child is not re-victimized in the future either through sex trafficking or CSAM distribution.

Recommendation 4. Addressing sex trafficking of children needs to be a holistic process. It is not enough to tell children “not to get trafficked”. Awareness and education must be accompanied by the provision of resources for children – more child safe shelters/housing, and funding for grassroots organizations that work with at risk youth.