

Brief Submission to the Status of Women Committee's Study: Human Trafficking of Women, Girls, and Gender Diverse People in Canada

May 3rd, 2023

*The crime of human sex trafficking has surpassed gun and drug trafficking for the first time in history, with the average age of victims who represent 70% of victims in the Greater Toronto Area being between 12 years of age and 24 years of age*¹

While recognizing that 96% of human trafficking victims in Canada are women and girls², the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) welcomes the inclusion of gender diverse people to this study, who, along with Indigenous women and children are trafficked at disproportionately higher rates relative to their population.³

This brief, however, will be directed to calling for action addressing the harms and insufficient focus on protecting all of Canada's children and youth (children 0-18), who, according to government data⁴ account for 25% of all human trafficking victims nationwide. We also call for the committee to address online sex trafficking/cybersex trafficking, where coerced sexual acts and/or rapes and abuse are recorded, livestreamed, and monetized on the internet via webcam, digital media and videos with traffickers receiving online payments from predators and pedophiles and other Canadians who consume child sexual exploitation material.

Case in point: In 2017 a Saskatchewan man was successfully prosecuted for child pornography and his involvement in cybersex trafficking involving children ranging in age from infants to 14 years old.⁵

The following recommendations are put forward to strengthen efforts to address the crimes currently being perpetrated against vulnerable adults, youth, children, toddlers, and infants.

We call for funding and concerted efforts to develop and support better:

1. **DATA COLLECTION:** Comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data and analysis/research into trafficking is needed to better inform policy makers and legislators.

2. **AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS:**

¹ [Human sex trafficking \(peelregion.ca\)](https://www.peelregion.ca/trafficking/)

² [Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2021 \(statcan.gc.ca\)](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-625-x/2021001/article/00001-eng.htm)

³ [Human Trafficking Trends in Canada \(2019-2020\) – The Canadian Centre To End Human Trafficking](https://www.cccet.ca/human-trafficking-trends-in-canada-2019-2020/)

⁴ [Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2020 \(statcan.gc.ca\)](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-625-x/2021001/article/00001-eng.htm)

⁵ [Saskatoon investigation led to life sentence for woman convicted of child sex trafficking in Philippines | The Star Phoenix](https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2017/05/17/saskatoon-investigation-led-to-life-sentence-for-woman-convicted-of-child-sex-trafficking-in-philippines.html)

- Comprehensive and obligatory educational programming with input from survivors directed to law enforcement personnel, judges, educators, and those in the healthcare system.
- Ongoing public awareness campaigns

3. ADDRESSING THE DEMAND:

- We call on the Government of Canada and parliamentarians to prioritize the protection of children and to ensure Canada's continued commitment to the Equity/Nordic model by upholding the [Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act. \(PCEPA\)](#) that specifically calls for the protection of children from the harms caused by prostitution; as well as addressing the demand for prostitution and its incidence.
 - Parallel to this we recognize that without targeted intervention efforts to address the demand that fuels human trafficking, child and non consensual forced sexual exploitation, our criminal, legal and policing efforts will not curtail repeat offenders. To that end we encourage more research, funding, and development of correctional rehabilitation programs for offenders. Further, recognizing the connection between exposure pornography and the luring, coercing and desensitizing of children being groomed as well as the developmental harm associated with children's exposure to pornography we call for support for [Bill S-210: An Act to restrict young person's online access to sexually explicit material.](#)
4. Committee members are called upon to ensure that Canada is
- MEETING OUR INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATION TO UPHOLD:**
- the intent of [Article 6](#) of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW – 1979)
 - the intent of [Articles 34 and 35 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child](#) (1989)
 - the intent of the [Optional Protocol on the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography](#) (2000)
 - The intent of the ILO [Convention Concerning the Prohibition And Immediate Action For The Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour](#) (1999)
 - the intent of Articles 1, and 2 of the [UN Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others](#) (1949)

These conventions that span half a century, (1949-2000) underscore the pressing necessity to move from discussion and debate to action. Seven decades of children have suffered despite legislation being in place. The internet only adds to the number of victims being exploited. Though a dramatization, we encourage members to take 4 minutes to view [Super Maarko](#) a YouTube production released by International Justice Mission (Canada) on the cybersex trafficking of children.

5. **SUPPORT FOR NEW BILLS:** The NCWC encourages members of the study group and parliamentarians to support [Bill S-224, An Act to Amend the Criminal Code \(Trafficking in Persons\)](#) that specifies what constitutes exploitation for the purpose of establishing whether a person has committed the offence of trafficking in persons. We further encourage a concerted effort to prioritize children's wellbeing and safety when crafting legislation that, like [Bill S-210](#) addresses issues of **INTERNET SAFETY** particularly as it relates to protecting children from traffickers and exploitation.

Believing that the best interest of children and youth is a principle and point of reference that guides your decision-making we call on this committee to encourage decisive and expedient responses to human trafficking in all its manifestations, recognizing that the lives, wellbeing, safety and future health of vulnerable adults and children are now in your hands. This is personal because the victims are real.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Leson
President National Council of Women

The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) works in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, acknowledging Canada is the traditional territory of Indigenous and Metis People. We are grateful to join with others in peace and hope, advocating for an improved quality of life for women, children, families, and society.

Note; The original draft of this document was composed by Penny Rankin, NCWC Convenor for Children and Youth.