

Brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women

National Consultation on Human Trafficking of Women, Girls, and Gender Diverse People

Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver

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The Archdiocese of Vancouver finds it encouraging and commendable that the Status of Women committee is inviting the public to share their concerns for preventing human trafficking in Canada. While there are many ways to address human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, the main focus must be on the **DEMAND** side. It is only when the demand is addressed that real and permanent change will happen. The laws that exist for trafficking do not by themselves cover the whole issue around the buying of sex and profiting from the exploitation.

Canada has an excellent law that would, in conjunction with the trafficking laws, ensure that anyone who is sexually exploiting women, girls and gender diverse persons, would be held accountable and face a punitive outcome. Unfortunately, throughout Canada, enforcement of this law has been lacking. Some jurisdictions have neglected to implement and enforce the **Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA)** which was enacted in December 2014. Enforcing these laws would affirm Canada's position that traffickers are not welcome. Federal/Provincial/Local governments must unite to stop tolerating any exploitation from happening openly in our cities; most specifically in entry-level operations such as strip bars, brothels, massage parlours and nail salons. Wake up Canada, stop pretending that human trafficking does not exist in our country.

Who are the trafficked victims?

"Women who lack access to resources, such as housing, land, property, and inheritance, are at increased risk. Homeless people, LGBTQ+ people, migrants, and marginalized racial, ethnic, and socially excluded communities are more likely to lack access to such resources and be at greater risk, due to the additional levels of discrimination they face in their intersectional identities."ⁱ

Sadly "About four in ten incidents of human trafficking have another type of violation, most often related to the sex trade."ⁱⁱ In order to exit permanently victims of human trafficking require special consideration such as trauma counselling, physical rehabilitation, and assurance of sustainable housing. Many survivors of trafficking will require lifelong care to be able to rejoin society as many have lost all agency over their lives and bodies.

Most prostituted/trafficked women end up suffering from mental health problems, high rates of head injuries, damage to their sexual organs, high rates of attempted suicide, PTSD, dissociation, and mortality rates 40% higher than the average for women. 70-90% of them experience physical assault; 60-75% have been raped; 95% have experienced sexual harassment that in any other industry would result in legal action.ⁱⁱⁱ

In Canada, Indigenous women and girls are disproportionately affected by the system of prostitution. While they represent less than 4% of Canadian women, they are estimated to make up 50-90% of

prostituted women in Western Canada.^{iv} Children from First Nations communities also represent 90% of the victims of sexual exploitation where the Indigenous represent less than 10% of the population.^v We are all aware of the large number of Indigenous women and girls who have gone missing or murdered in Canada. Strengthening and respectfully enforcing our laws is essential for our Indigenous population as “Indigenous girls under 18 were the most overrepresented victims of violence in Vancouver over the past 12 months, according to new data compiled by the Vancouver Police Board.”^{vi}

Canadians Have Spoken

A recent survey conducted by NANOS (July 2020) found that, “Canadians are five times as likely to support than oppose Canada’s current prostitution legislation, which does not criminalize women and others who sell sex, but makes pimping, trafficking, buying sex and brothel ownership/operation illegal. A majority of Canadians agree that provincial and federal government should provide appropriate funding to organizations working with women in prostitution to provide long-term counselling and support services.”^{vii}

More efforts, strategies and policies are needed to assist those involved to exit human trafficking in a humane way especially throughout the legal procedures. How can police and court proceedings be made more reasonable and not retraumatize the survivors? No victim ought to fear the police or their immediate deportation.

Prostitution and human trafficking are interrelated and can not be separated. In a recent Supreme court appeal against a pimp, Justice Trimble rightly ruled against this challenge and has stated in his conclusion (79) (80) that “preying on people who sell their sexual services promotes human trafficking and exploitation”.^{viii}

“Brothels, illicit massage parlors, escort agencies, and online platforms are overlapping systems of prostitution and sex trafficking occurs in all of them. The normalization of prostitution expands demand for paid sex. This emboldens sex traffickers who see this as a conducive “business” environment.”^{ix}

Prostitution and human trafficking are acts of violence against women, girls and gender diverse persons. Domestic abuse is violence against women. Child abuse is violence against children. The Status of Women committee needs to advocate for the end of all violence against women in Canada.

Canada can do better to ensure that trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation is eliminated. Let’s promote a culture in which it is not acceptable to buy and sell women, girls, or gender diverse people. Let’s ensure that all women are safe and able to live productive lives. Stop male entitlement. Say “no” to allowing men to buy the bodies of women for male sexual gratification.

Recommendations – Work with all levels of government to strengthen the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA) by:

1. **Committing to an extensive educational campaign** for all Canadians, advocating on behalf of those being exploited and demonstrating the effectiveness of the law (Swedish model).
2. **Educating and funding all stakeholders in our judicial system and law enforcement** so that they understand how to enforce and prosecute under PCEPA.
3. **Enforcing PCEPA consistently in all provinces** across Canada to reduce the demand for prostitution/trafficking.

4. **Hiring social workers to assist the victims** while police focus on the buyers, pimps, and traffickers.
5. **Providing long-term trauma-informed services** for all those exiting prostitution.
6. **Focus the National Action Plan re. Human Trafficking** on concrete efforts to end demand.

Who Are We?

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver (the “Archdiocese”) is a geographical unit of the worldwide Roman Catholic Church covering an area of approximately 120,000 km², including the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

The Archdiocese includes more than 405,000 Catholics in 77 parishes and seven missions, served by 205 priests, 92 religious sisters and 18 religious brothers. More than 80 organizations, associations, ministries, and clubs facilitate the mission and work of the Archdiocese. The Archdiocese includes 52 Catholic schools, three Catholic colleges, and eight Catholic health care facilities.

The Archdiocese serves the broader community through a range of outreach programs that assist thousands of people in impoverished areas such as Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, many of whose inhabitants are not only among the poorest of the poor in Canada, but also suffer extensively from mental illness, drug addiction and the dehumanizing effects of prostitution.

ⁱ Equality Now <https://www.equalitynow.org/trafficking-for-sexual-exploitation/>.

ⁱⁱ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-005-x/2022001/article/00001-eng.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.prostitutionresearch.com/pdf/Prostitutionin9Countries.pdf>

^{iv} Louie D., [Sexual Exploitation Prevention Education for Indigenous Girls](#), Canadian Journal of Education, 2018.

^v Kingsley C., Mark M., Sacred Lives: [Canadian Aboriginal children and youth speak out about sexual exploitation, Vancouver](#): Human Resources Development, 2001

^{vi} Mike Howell, [Indigenous girls overrepresented as victims of violence in Vancouver](#). Glacier Media. April 25, 2023.

^{vii} <https://www.nanos.co/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2020-1689-LAWC-July-Populated-Report-FINAL-Updated-with-Tabs.pdf>

^{viii} <https://www.canlii.org/en/on/onsc/doc/2023/2023onsc300/2023onsc300.html>

^{ix} <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-human-trafficking-shell-companies-money-laundering/>