



May 2023

The London Abused Women's Centre appreciates the opportunity to submit a written brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women on its study: Human Trafficking of Women, Girls, and Gender Diverse People in Canada

The London Abused Women's Centre is a feminist organization that supports and advocates for personal, social and systemic change directed at ending male violence against women and girls. The London Abused Women's Centre is a non-residential agency that provides women and girls over the age of 12 who have been abused, assaulted, exploited, trafficked, and who have experienced non-state torture with immediate access to long-term, trauma-informed counselling, advocacy and support.

Last year, the London Abused Women's Centre (LAWC) had over 11,000 service interactions, including hundreds of interactions with women and girls who had been or were at risk of being exploited and/or trafficked.

According to the Juristat on Trafficking in Persons in Canada 2020, the vast majority (96%) of detected victims of human trafficking were women and girls. In all, one in four (25%) victims were under the age of 18.<sup>1</sup> Women and girls between the ages of 12 to 21 are at the highest risk of being exploited. The average age of recruitment is 13-14 years old. The risk is heightened among particular groups such as Indigenous women and girls, vulnerable youth or those with prior involvement with the child welfare system, LGBTQ2+ persons.<sup>2</sup>

The most common way young women and girls are lured is through the promise of love and a better life. Traffickers will spend time getting to know the young woman or girls to gain her trust and in turn, she will then believe him to be her boyfriend.<sup>3</sup>

In 2014, Canada passed legislation called the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA). PCEPA seeks to ensure the safety of all by reducing the demand and focusing on individuals who purchase sexual services and third parties who exploit individuals, mostly women.

Addressing demand is one of the most important tools for combating trafficking. Canada's legislation criminalizes the purchase of sexual services in Canada. However, it is not enforced the same in every jurisdiction.

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<sup>1</sup> Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2020 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2022001/article/00010-eng.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2020 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2022001/article/00010-eng.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Sex Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation: Keeping Youth Safe, 2018 <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/62b44b0a99854550c4e15363/t/645017c1a8d999533e49b473/1682970563044/Keeping+Youth+Safe+2018.pdf>

Another important tool for combating trafficking is prevention. In order to move toward a Canada free from trafficking of women, girls and gender diverse people, is by investing more in education as a form prevention. This includes continued education around trafficking in grades K-12 as well as targeted messaging to those who purchase sexual services. Long running and well funded national education campaigns, for example, will be essential to help loved ones recognize the warning signs earlier.<sup>4</sup>

The London Abused Women's Centre has many women accessing services who are involved in the sex industry that need more real options. Some women lured into trafficking live in poverty. They have little or no access to income or safe, affordable housing. One of the women who accessed our services said "It frustrates me as someone who has had this experience. I wouldn't want anyone else to go through it...are we trying to make things harder for women and children?"

The London Abused Women's Centre believes the work must start with the goal of shifting the social culture that normalizes the purchase of sexual services from women and girls for future generations. To that, we propose the following recommendations to the committee for the purpose of the study on Human Trafficking of Women, Girls and Gender Diverse People in Canada:

1. The Government of Canada commit to maintaining the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act, discouraging the demand for paid sexual services.
2. The Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act's purpose is to end the demand and shift the criminality from women to the exploiter or profiteer, it is recommended the Government of Canada repeal Section 213 of the Criminal Code.
3. The Government of Canada work in collaboration with each province to develop a national action plan through Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) to recognize the impacts and intersectionality of men's violence against women and girls and trafficking. This plan should implement funding to organizations that provide long-term, trauma-informed support programs and programs for exiting.
4. The Government of Canada commit to the expungement of criminal records for those women who were found guilty under sections 213, 210.1 and 212 of the Criminal Code prior to 2014.

Women and girls deserve safety. The London Abused Women's Centre knows for certain that with changes to the enforcement of the current legislation, proper education in the name of prevention, and an implementation of funding, trafficking can be reduced which will improve protection for women, girls and gender diverse people in Canada.

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<sup>4</sup> Human Trafficking Trends in Canada, Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking  
<https://www.canadiancentretoendhumantrafficking.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ENG-Human-Trafficking-Trends-in-Canada---2019-20-Report-Final-1.pdf>