

Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO) Human Trafficking of Women, Girls and Gender Diverse People

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May 5, 2023

These news stories illustrate some of the harsh realities of human trafficking for sexual exploitation in Edmonton. Stories like these are repeated all across Canada, calling us from outrage to action. ⁱ

April 26, 2023 – Man accused of trafficking two fifteen year old girls faces 34 chargesⁱⁱ, including trafficking, procuring, advertising, material benefit, possession and distribution of child pornography, sexual assault and other charges. Police believe there are two other girls he was attempting to lure into the sex trade.

April 5, 2023– Man gets 6-year sentence for sex trafficking 2 Edmonton teenage girlsⁱⁱⁱ The Judge said he considered the vulnerability of the 16 and 17-year-old girls – both of whom came from poor families. The trafficker psychologically coerced, verbally abused and intimidated the girls. Listening to one of the victims, The Judge said "She was worried he would come after her family if she didn't keep working for him". The girl was also offered cocaine, which she began taking before every instance of being trafficked. For five months, the girl met with a "steady stream" of men. She said she was required to engage in many sexual acts that she didn't want to."

February 22, 2023 – Ponoka man arrested on suspicion of forcing homeless women into sex work in Edmonton^{iv} The Staff Sergeant of the Alberta Law Enforcement Human Trafficking Counter Exploitation Unit stated: "The trafficker would lure these women to hotels by offering **drugs, food and a place to stay**, then exploit them and force them into the sex trade, even taking them to other areas of the province." Police suspect there could be up to 20 young women who were lured by this trafficker. The charges include trafficking, procuring, advertising, material benefit, sexual assault.

Two traffickers are young men, 21 and 22, while the third is 37. A fourth trafficker is a 19 year old young woman. She will be in court soon. Why are young people abusing their power over other young people?¹ If we want to support the victims and survivors of human trafficking, we need to understand the underlying causes and take action to deter young people from becoming perpetrators.

What is the missing piece in these three news stories? Who is invisible? The invisible are those men who search the internet or city streets seeking to pay for access to the bodies of girls, boys, women, men and gender diverse persons. Their actions create the market and motivation for individual traffickers and crime organizations to flourish in the sex trade economy. Sex trafficking is a business where those who traffic others make profits because there are consumers demanding the "product" they sell. Technology-

¹ "More than six in ten (64%) accused persons were men aged 18 to 34. In each adult age group, men outnumbered women among accused persons, accounting for about eight in ten accused or more. Among the relatively small number (110) of youth accused, however, girls outnumbered boys (56% versus 44%)." <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-005-x/2022001/article/00001-eng.htm>

fueled trafficking preys upon children, youth and others in vulnerable circumstances. ALERT Detectives report they have seen an increase from 2,000 ads per day in Edmonton to 5,000 ads each day on sex sites. These ads are becoming more explicit in the photos and descriptions of sexual acts.

Hopeful Initiatives:

The Alberta Human Trafficking Taskforce Report: *The Reading Stone: The Survivor's Lens to Human Trafficking*^v recommended the establishment of an Alberta Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons. The Office will be a hybrid model with the Alberta Government working together with a community collaboration, including Indigenous leadership. This will be implemented sometime in 2023.

The Alberta Government committed \$22.8 million, which includes funding two civilian Safety Network Coordinators to work alongside the ALERT Human Trafficking Counter Exploitation Detectives. Both are young women who can link survivors to community, government and law enforcement support.

Youth Serving agencies have created the Southern Alberta Coordinated Community Response Model to work intensively with sexually exploited and trafficked youth, facilitated by Not In My City (#NIMC).

These and other initiatives are guided by listening to the voices and experiences of those who have survived the trauma of sex trafficking and who want to participate in shaping a future without trafficking.

Recommendations to the Standing Committee:

Uphold Canada's commitments as a Signatory of the Palermo Protocol, specifically Article 9.5.

Prevent sex trafficking by increasing law enforcement operations (Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act S. 286.1.1) and offer Sex Buyer Accountability Programs that educate and build empathy so that men no longer participate in exploitation that contributes to sex trafficking. Funds generated by these programs can be utilized to support healing and transition services for survivors.

Implement a *Guaranteed Livable Income* to reduce the circumstances of poverty, income instability, food insecurity, and housing insecurity that create vulnerability to predators, traffickers and exploiters.

CEASE is an Edmonton-based charity. Our vision is a community of hope, respect and transformation for individuals, families and communities affected by sexual exploitation, sex trafficking and social inequality. We offer programs under three strategies to assist individuals to create improved futures for themselves and their families. Strategies: (1) Heal the Harm, (2) Build for the Future, (3) Inspire Positive Change. Programs include court support and advocacy, financial empowerment, bursaries, 1:1 coaching and system navigation, poverty relief, transitional support and peer support. CEASE facilitates the Sex Trade Offender Program, an Alternative Measures Program for those arrested for attempting to purchase sexual services and participating in the sexual exploitation and sex trafficking of persons.

www.ceasenow.org

ⁱ <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/FEWO/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=1656000>

ⁱⁱ <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/crime/edmonton-man-suspected-of-trafficking-teens-faces-34-charges-alert>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/man-sentenced-for-sex-trafficking-of-two-edmonton-teenage-girls-1.6803129>

^{iv} <https://globalnews.ca/news/9504412/edmonton-homeless-women-sex-work-christopher-becks/>

^v <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/the-reading-stone-the-survivors-lens-to-human-trafficking>