

# Information Bulletin

Knowledge - Creating Awareness for Safe Communities



## Human Trafficking

The United Nations defines human trafficking as: *“The act of recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons ... by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person ... for the purpose of exploitation.*

### Human Trafficking in Canada

Many have an image of human trafficking being an issue of persons being transported between one country to another. However, there is growing evidence of the widespread occurrence of human trafficking in Canada. The RCMP reports that Canadian women and girls are exploited in sex trafficking across the country. Persons from aboriginal communities as well as minors in the child welfare system are especially vulnerable. Local gangs, transnational criminal organizations, and individuals are involved in sex trafficking in Canadian cities and towns.<sup>1</sup>

Canada’s *National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking* notes, while it is impossible to truly know the full scope and impact of this problem at the international or Canadian level, we do know that women and children are the primary victims – overwhelmingly so for sexual exploitation but also for forced labour – however, men

and boys are not immune to this crime. Most cases of human trafficking in Canada, involve Canadian youth and women exploited for sexual services.

Sex trafficking is the most common form of human trafficking in Canada. It is primarily domestic in nature and a growing public issue. Most victims are female, Canadian citizens, on average they are 17 years of age, but can be as young as 13. While homeless youth are at high risk of being trafficked, victims may be lured from local malls, schoolyards or online by traffickers who often pose as potential boyfriends. Once ensnared, traffickers subject their victims to the horrors of forced prostitution.<sup>2</sup>

Foreign workers, who may enter Canada legally or illegally, are often at risk to be subjected to forced labour in agriculture, construction, processing plants, the hospitality sector or as domestic servants.

---

### Human Trafficking Risk Factors

Human trafficking and sexual exploitation can and does happen to any individual, regardless of their age, ability, ethnicity, gender, religion, family income, class, or sexual orientation. Traffickers are skilled in detecting vulnerabilities and manipulating them to their advantage, keeping trafficked persons in the cycle of abuse.

- **Poverty:** Traffickers specifically target poor and marginalized communities to offer vulnerable individuals false opportunities to improve their circumstances.
- **Racism and the Legacy of Colonialism:** Traffickers target people who are marginalized due to racism and colonialism, capitalizing on their vulnerabilities.
- **Addictions:** Traffickers use substance dependency and addiction to keep control of the trafficked person. As a trafficked person becomes dependent on a particular substance, the trafficker uses that vulnerability to keep them in the cycle of abuse.
- **Mental Health:** Individuals with mental health issues face challenges that may impact their capacity to consent or offer informed consent, and to assess risk and detect ill-intentions.
- **Gang Involvement:** Gang members recruit and exploit people in a variety of ways, including sexual exploitation, petty crime, manufacturing and transporting drugs, and providing services and labour against their will.
- **Online Vulnerability:** Traffickers maintain an online presence to lure vulnerable adults and children and to coerce an individual to comply with demands. Traffickers often keep compromising photos or video of the people they are exploiting to further their control.
- **Lack of Positive Supports:** Children and youth require positive attention, guidance, and support. When this type of attention is not easily achieved in their home environment, youth may begin to act out or seek attention in negative places. Youth may not recognize the potential risks and dangers of their actions.



# Information Bulletin

## Human Trafficking

### Why Does Human Trafficking Happen?

Exploiters and traffickers exploit individuals because of their vulnerabilities and in some cases lack of life experience. Human trafficking happens because perpetrators directly profit from the exploitation of individuals. Anti-trafficking advocates argue that human trafficking exists because there is a demand for cheap goods and labour and the provision of sexual services.

### Human trafficking is often confused with human smuggling. What are the differences?

**Consent:** The smuggling of migrants, while often undertaken in dangerous or degrading conditions, involves migrants who have consented to the smuggling. Victims of trafficking, have either never consented or, if they initially consented, that consent has been rendered meaningless by the coercive, deceptive or abusive actions of the traffickers.

**Exploitation:** Smuggling ends with the migrants' arrival at their destination, whereas trafficking involves the ongoing exploitation of the victim.

**Transnationality:** Smuggling is always transnational, whereas trafficking may not be. Trafficking can occur regardless of whether victims are taken to another province or only moved from one place to another within the same province.

### Indicators of Trafficking

There is no single checklist of indicators that prove a person has been trafficked. Victims do not often self-identify because of fear, shame, or not understanding that what is happening to them is a crime.

- **General Work and Living Indicators:** The individual is believed to be working against their will. The individual cannot leave or come and go on their own volition; is escorted wherever they go. The individual works excessively long or unusual hours, is unpaid or paid very little. The individual suffers injuries or impairments typical of certain jobs or control measures. Has clothes that are mostly the kind typically worn in the sex trade industry.
- **Mental Health and Behavioural Indicators:** The individual is generally fearful, anxious, tense or submissive. The individual may be unable to communicate freely with others, or allows others to speak on their behalf. There may be a distrust for law enforcement and those in positions of authority. Has a tattoo of a gang symbol or a name on their neck or elsewhere that suggests ownership, or wears gang colours or jewellery. Suffers from drug or alcohol addiction, or from malnutrition
- **Indicators a child or youth may be trafficked:** The child does not have or cannot reach a parent or guardian, or lives with someone not related to them and not a guardian. The child may be in the company of an older boyfriend or girlfriend. The child may have new jewellery, a new hairdo, polished nails, or new clothing that parents or guardians did not pay for. Being engaged in work that is not suitable for children. Behaves in ways and uses language not typical of children their age.

### Barriers to Leaving

A person who has been trafficked may not recognize they are being exploited and many remain in a trafficking situation due to a number of complex reasons. These reasons may include:

- **Fear of Police and Other Authorities:** because they are engaging in illegal activities, or their trafficker has threatened them with violence if they talk to the police.
- **Fear of, or for, the trafficker:** A trafficked person may be convinced that if they seek help, the trafficker will carry out the threats they have made to the individual or their loved ones. A trafficker may also create a situation where the trafficked person is dependent on the trafficker, despite having been exploited.
- **Fear of not being believed** or being blamed for their situation. Lack of familial/community support. Many trafficked persons have been subjected to traumatic events prior to and during their experience. Violence, isolation, persistent fear, and psychological manipulation are some of the factors that can cause a person to become traumatized.
- **Need for money or an addiction that is being supported by the exploitive situation:** Many people are vulnerable to traffickers because they need money or the situation is supporting an addiction. A trafficked person may be reluctant to leave the trafficker because they need whatever money they can make, even though they know they are being exploited in the current situation.

## Human Trafficking

### Impact of Human Trafficking\*

Although each survivor has their own story, research shows their experiences often follow a common pattern:

- Victims of sex trafficking are typically lured through a betrayal of trust.
- The trafficker acts quickly to establish their control. Traffickers use a complex combination of emotional coercion and physical abuse to control their victims.
- Many victims become hopeless. Many are too afraid to escape and too ashamed to reach out for help. Many are numbed by drugs or alcohol.
- Some victims become “trauma bonded” to their trafficker, a powerful emotional attachment to an abuser.
- A crisis may lead to escape. A few brave—and lucky—survivors do manage to break free.
- But the road back is long and lonely. Without proper support, most survivors live in poverty and struggle to rebuild their lives.

Human trafficking is a violation of one’s human rights, such as the right to life, liberty, and security of the person, and the right to freedom from slavery and degrading treatment. Traffickers treat trafficked persons like commodities, infringing on their basic rights to make their own decisions, to move freely, and to work where and for whom they choose.

*\*Canadian Women’s Foundation*

---

### Tips for Parents: *I’m Not for Sale – Reducing the Risk of Human Trafficking and Exploitation*<sup>3</sup>

Rather than focusing on what a trafficker may look like, parents should focus on having discussions with youth about warning signs and tactics for recruitment and control.

**Spend Time, Not Money:** A trafficker or exploiter will groom a child by promising to buy them trendy clothes, take them shopping or pay for haircuts and manicures to gain their trust and affection. When a child believes that materialistic things will enhance their lifestyle or mean greater happiness, their judgment is skewed and they become more vulnerable to being sexually exploited. It is important to help children understand that money and material things do not equal self-value and self-worth. Spending quality time instead of buying material items can provide children with a sense of connectedness and belonging.

**No More Stranger Danger:** A trafficker or exploiter will befriend a youth during the grooming period. This can happen over weeks, months, or even years. By acting and posing as a boyfriend/girlfriend, friend, confidant, or support person, exploiters gain the trust of youth and are not viewed as strangers. Traffickers and exploiters do a very good job of pretending to be these fictitious friends. By the time the youth feels ready to step away from online interactions and meet up in real life, the person they are meeting is not a stranger. Parents need to connect with youth to discover and understand who their online ‘friends’ are.

**Exploring Sexuality:** During adolescence, youth begin to explore their sexuality and figure out who they are. During the initial grooming phase, traffickers may expose youth to sexually inappropriate language or images in their conversations. Alternatively, traffickers may have youth engage in sexual acts, behaviours, or poses and then save or screenshot the images/videos on their device. Youth may not recognize that boundaries are being crossed and this behaviour is not acceptable. Parents must demonstrate their approachability on a variety of topics in order for the youth to trust that they can go to them regardless of the topic.

**Resisting Threats and False Promises** Traffickers and exploiters manipulate and sexually exploit youth by promising them bright futures as well as threatening them verbally, mentally, and physically. It is important to teach children to resist such threats and about false promises and that if it seems too good to be true, it usually is. Youth need to look beyond the surface of what is being promised to them to gain a better understanding of potentially exploitative situations.



# Information Bulletin

## Human Trafficking

### Resources:

**Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons:** Develops and coordinates BC's response to domestic and international human trafficking. Provides publications, resources and training to assist communities respond to human trafficking.  
[www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/criminal-justice/victims-of-crime/human-trafficking](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/criminal-justice/victims-of-crime/human-trafficking)  
 604-660-5199 (General inquiries) email: [octip@gov.bc.ca](mailto:octip@gov.bc.ca)

**Children of the Street Society:** Dedicated to the prevention of sexual exploitation and human trafficking of children and youth in BC through education strategies, public awareness initiatives, and family support.  
[www.childrenofthestreet.com](http://www.childrenofthestreet.com) 1-877-551-6611 email: [info@childrenofthestreet.com](mailto:info@childrenofthestreet.com)

**Salvation Army Anti-Human Trafficking Programs:** Deborah's Gate is a national, specialized program of care serving international and domestic women age 18 and up who have been trafficked into situations of sexual and/or labour exploitation, and are in need of protective and restorative housing and healing.  
[www.deborahsgate.ca](http://www.deborahsgate.ca) 604-915-5678 email: [info@deborahsgate.ca](mailto:info@deborahsgate.ca)

**VictimLink BC:** Free and confidential services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in over 110 languages, providing crisis and referral information.  
[www.victimlinkbc.ca](http://www.victimlinkbc.ca) 1-800-563-0808

**RCMP Human Trafficking National Coordination Centre:** A focal point for law enforcement in their efforts to combat and disrupt individuals and criminal organizations involved in Human Trafficking activities. Develop tools, protocols and guidelines to facilitate Human Trafficking investigations and coordinates national awareness/training initiatives.  
[www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/ht-tp/index-eng.htm](http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/ht-tp/index-eng.htm) 1-855-850-4640

**The Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking:** Established as the national "backbone" organization working with the various stakeholders (government, businesses and non-profit) dedicated to this issue, while advancing best practices and eliminating duplicate efforts across Canada.  
[www.canadiancentretoendhumantrafficking.ca](http://www.canadiancentretoendhumantrafficking.ca) 437-993-7867 email: [info@ccteht.ca](mailto:info@ccteht.ca)

**Polaris:** Dedicated to systematically disrupting the human trafficking networks in the US.  
[www.polarisproject.org](http://www.polarisproject.org) 202-790-6300 email: [info@polarisproject.org](mailto:info@polarisproject.org)

### References and More Information:

1. *Human Trafficking in Canada*, Peoples Law School 2014. The material focuses on Canada's laws on human trafficking in a simple to understand format. The booklets are available in English, French, Punjabi, Spanish, Tagalog and Chinese. [www.peopleslawschool.ca/publications/human-trafficking-canada](http://www.peopleslawschool.ca/publications/human-trafficking-canada)
  2. *Covenant House Toronto Press Release*, September 19, 2017, [www.covenanthousetoronto.ca/homeless-youth/Call-for-National-Anti-Human-Trafficking-Hotline](http://www.covenanthousetoronto.ca/homeless-youth/Call-for-National-Anti-Human-Trafficking-Hotline)
  3. *Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking of Children and Youth in Canada: A Prevention and Early Intervention Toolkit for Parents*, Children of the Street Society
- *National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking*, 2014, Public Safety Canada. Details the Government of Canada's response and commitment to address human trafficking. [www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/ntnl-ctn-pln-cmbt/index-en.aspx](http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/ntnl-ctn-pln-cmbt/index-en.aspx)
  - *An Exploration of Promising Practices in Response to Human Trafficking in Canada*, International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy, undated. [www.icclr.law.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/An-Exploration-of-Promising-Practices-in-Response-to-Human-Trafficking-in-Canada.pdf](http://www.icclr.law.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/An-Exploration-of-Promising-Practices-in-Response-to-Human-Trafficking-in-Canada.pdf)
  - *Local Safety Audit Guide: To Prevent Trafficking in Persons and Related Exploitation*, 2013. Public Safety Canada [www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/lcl-sfty-dtgd/lcl-sfty-dtgd-eng.pdf](http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/lcl-sfty-dtgd/lcl-sfty-dtgd-eng.pdf)
  - *Human Trafficking: Reference Guide for Canadian Law Enforcement*, 2005 International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy. [www.icclr.law.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/HT\\_Canadian\\_Law\\_Enforcement\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.icclr.law.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/HT_Canadian_Law_Enforcement_Guide.pdf)

