

ANALYSIS OF SEX TRAFFICKING IN CANADA

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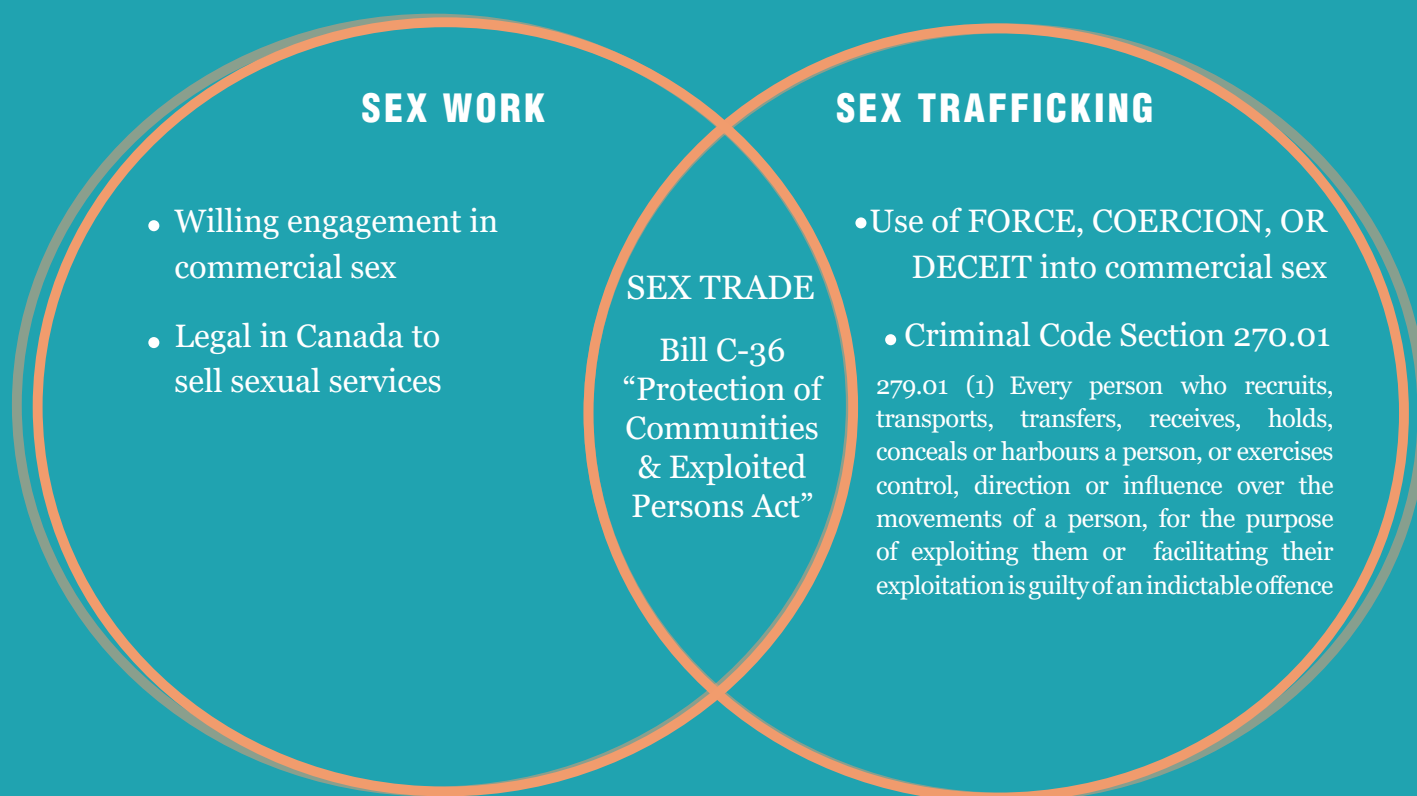
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Executive Summary



While many believe that slavery is a thing of the past, modern-day slavery occurs each day in the form of sex trafficking. This report will provide insight on sex trafficking in Canada, and the solutions that are in place to combat it. Our goal is to shed light on the gaps and levers that could impact the challenge and solution landscape. As two people with no lived experience, our intention is to bring awareness and stand with survivors, while demonstrating the importance of community support. For the purpose of this report, the term victims will be used to describe people who are presently being exploited and the term survivors will be used to describe those who have exited the sex trade. Along with this, when we refer to the sex trade we are referring to the sex trafficking aspects and are not referring to sex work. We took an empathetic approach in our methodology to dive deeper into the issue and to further understand the epidemic of modern-day slavery in Canada.



What is Sex Trafficking?

Sex trafficking is a broad and complex issue that has evolved over the course of hundreds of years. A general definition of sex trafficking taken from the American Trafficking Victims Protection Act states that sex trafficking is:

*“ ‘ the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act.’ It involves the use of **force, fraud, or coercion** to make an adult engage in commercial sex acts. However, **any** commercial sexual activity with a **minor**, even without force, fraud, or coercion, is considered trafficking ”*

The Government of Canada defines sex trafficking as involving the recruiting, transporting, or holding of victims to exploit them or to help someone else exploit them, generally for sexual purposes or work (Public Safety Canada, 2021). Due to sex trafficking’s exploitative nature, the Government also refers to sex trafficking as a modern-day form of slavery (Public Safety Canada, 2021). While some may consider sex trafficking an international problem, it is occurring domestically in Canada at alarming levels (Baird et al. 2020). Research from Statistics Canada showed that “between 2009 and 2018, police services in Canada reported 1,708 incidents of human trafficking” (Cotter, 2018). It is important to note that sex trafficking is often a hidden crime (Prylinski, 2020, p.339) and it is likely that these numbers are underreported. There is also reason to believe that the prevalence of sex trafficking in Canada is increasing (Cotter, 2018).

Challenge Landscape



Sex trafficking is a complex issue with many interconnected components. The issue is driven by things such as vulnerability, greed, lust, ignorance and power dynamics. Stakeholders that are affected by these factors are: victims, traffickers, johns and communities. All factors and stakeholders must be taken into account to have a complete understanding of the issue and to properly address the challenge.

What Makes Victims More Susceptible?

While the victims of this crime are not to blame for their circumstances, there are factors that make a person more likely to be victimized by sex trafficking. According to Public Safety Canada, 2021, “anyone, from any walk of life, can be a target” but people from certain demographic, psychographic and geographic categories are more at risk. The most significant factor is vulnerability. Traffickers look for individuals “who are susceptible for a variety of reasons, including psychological or emotional vulnerability, economic hardship, lack of a social safety net, natural disasters, or political instability” (Homeland Security USA, 2020).

Causes of Vulnerability

Demographics



The majority of victims are women and are brought into the sex trade at a young age but other components of demographics also play a role. Women of colour are at a higher risk because of the systems of oppression and their intersection with sexism and gender based violence. For example, Indigenous women account for 51% of sex trafficking victims which opens up the examination of deep rooted systems rather than just singular risk factors (Roudometkina & Wakeford, 2018).

Social Economic Status



Financial and social status play major roles in a person's risk of being targeted by traffickers. Lack of meaningful resources contributes to victims being prime targets for traffickers because it is easier to manipulate and coerce a person with no financial and social safety net (Province of British Columbia, 2019).

Domestic Abuse and History of Trauma



Research has shown that “most of the children trafficked domestically have a history of physical and sexual abuse in the home” (O'Brien et al. 2017, p. 266), leading to long term issues that contribute to physical, psychological and relational vulnerabilities (O'Brien et al. 2017, p. 270)

Intimate Relationships



According to Statistics Canada, the vast majority [92%] of victims know and have some level of relationship with their traffickers (Cotter, 2018). By building and nurturing an intimate relationship with the victim, the trafficker is able to create trust and more effectively manipulate the victim into performing sexual acts within the sex trade.

Child Welfare System



Individuals who are currently or have been previously involved in the child welfare system are often more likely to be victimized by sex traffickers (O'Brien et al. 2017, p. 265). Indigenous women are affected by these systems at greater levels because of the long history of colonialism and residential schools (Nonomura 2020).

What Leads Someone To Become A Sex Trafficker?



While all traffickers are different, it appears that their reason for doing so is often driven by greed, money, and power (Surtees, 2008, pg. 40). There is a demand for trafficked individuals and traffickers satisfy this demand with the supply of victims that they coerce (National Human Trafficking Hotline, 2007). While data on the reasons one may become involved with sex trafficking is limited in the Canadian context, research from Europe suggests that traffickers came about because of the economic crisis and an opportunity to make money (Surtees, 2008, pg. 43). Significant causes of why people become traffickers are:

Rationalization & Dehumanization

There are multiple psychological reasons why someone could justify sexually exploiting another human. Rationalization is the pathway to excuses and reasoning to justify actions. Another reason is dehumanization which categorizes the victims as “the other” as a way to see them as not human and deserving of exploitation (Reyes, 2016).



Low Risk, High Profit

It is a challenge to prosecute and convict traffickers because of the difficulty of proving guilt (Cotter, 2018). This creates an opportunity to make a large amount of money with a minimal risk of consequences. Greed and power fuels this desire for profit (Farrell et al, 2014).



Overall, supply and demand plays a large role in how traffickers come to be. Asking why people become traffickers is important but another valuable question to ask is why is human trafficking so profitable? (Dunken Law firm, 2020).

Why Do People (Johns) Pay For Sex?



According to one American study “*Comparing Sex Buyers With Men Who Do Not Buy Sex: New Data on Prostitution and Trafficking*”, major themes surrounding why men pay for sex are sexual illusions, fantasies and the presence of sexual aggression. One quote from this study states:

“In related findings that suggest rationalization for rape, sex buyers in this study more often tended to see prostituted women as intrinsically different from other women and to deny the humanity of women in prostitution. Dehumanization of women has been associated with men’s increased aggression” (Farley, Golding, Matthews, Malamuth., & Jarrett, 2017).

Dehumanization, sexual illusions, and sexual aggression are components that stream from the mental model of objectification of women. Like traffickers, the desire for power and control amplifies this mental model.

The Role Communities Play in the Challenge Landscape



An often passive yet important stakeholder is the community in which sex trafficking occurs. From the discussion with a public educator [Brittany Pompilli] from a victim and survivor support centre, it was explained how crucial it is to be aware of the issue. She stated, “knowledge is power” and that traffickers find places where communities do not know about sex trafficking. This is a strategic move as it is easier for them to go about their business undetected. Communities may not have awareness for several reasons, many of which would be unique to every community and region. These could include a range of socioeconomic characteristics, such as race, family status, religion, educational attainment, and income level (Tarver, 2021).

Systems, Structures & Mental Models



Systems and structures like capitalism, and the internet play a role in sex trafficking. Living in a capitalistic society, profit, and supply and demand are primary foci which leads to them being the foundation that fuels sex trafficking (Rioux, LeBaron, & Verovšek, 2020). The internet and media play a role in holding up the misconceptions of the issue, often portraying sex trafficking in incorrect ways (Houston-Kolnik et al. 2020). Along with this, the internet is also a platform for traffickers to recruit, groom, and exploit victims and for Johns to access these victims with ease (O'Brien & Li, 2020). A crucial mental model is the objectification of women. The objectification theory, presented by Fredrickson and Roberts in 1997, discusses the implications of sexually objectifying a woman for both the woman and society. Perceived gender roles, aggressions and power dynamics are all a part of this mental model. All of these systems and the mental model of objectification have impacts on a victims vulnerability. They are so deeply rooted in our society that Canadian communities can become blinded to their existence which helps hold sex trafficking in place.

Image 1: System of Capitalism

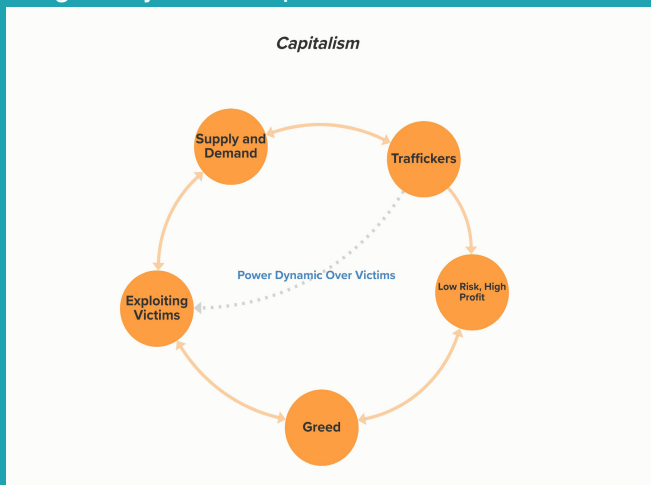


Image 2: System of the Internet as a Platform for Human Trafficking

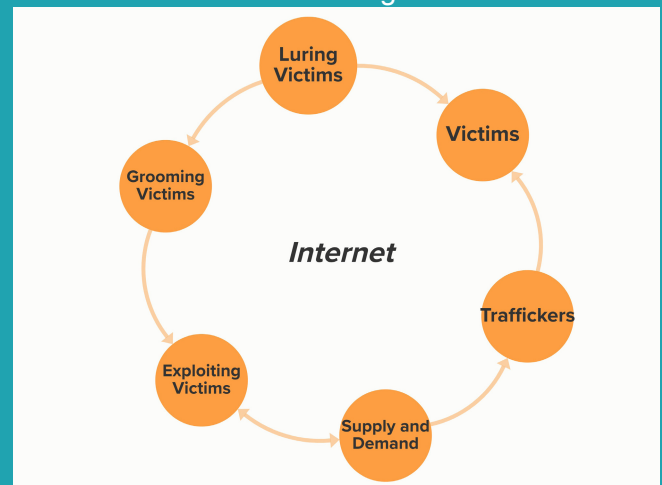


Image 3: System Structure of the Internet & Media Holding Up Misconceptions

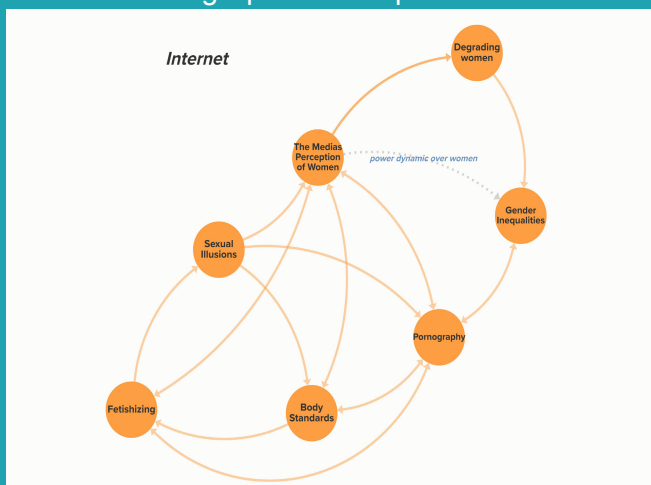
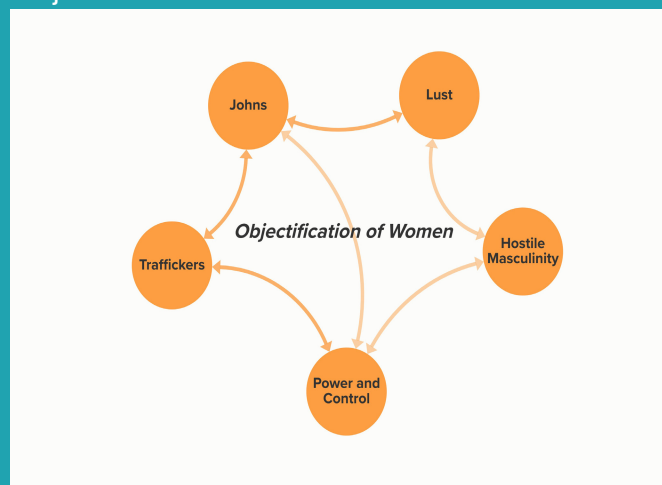


Image 4: Mental Model of Objectification of Women

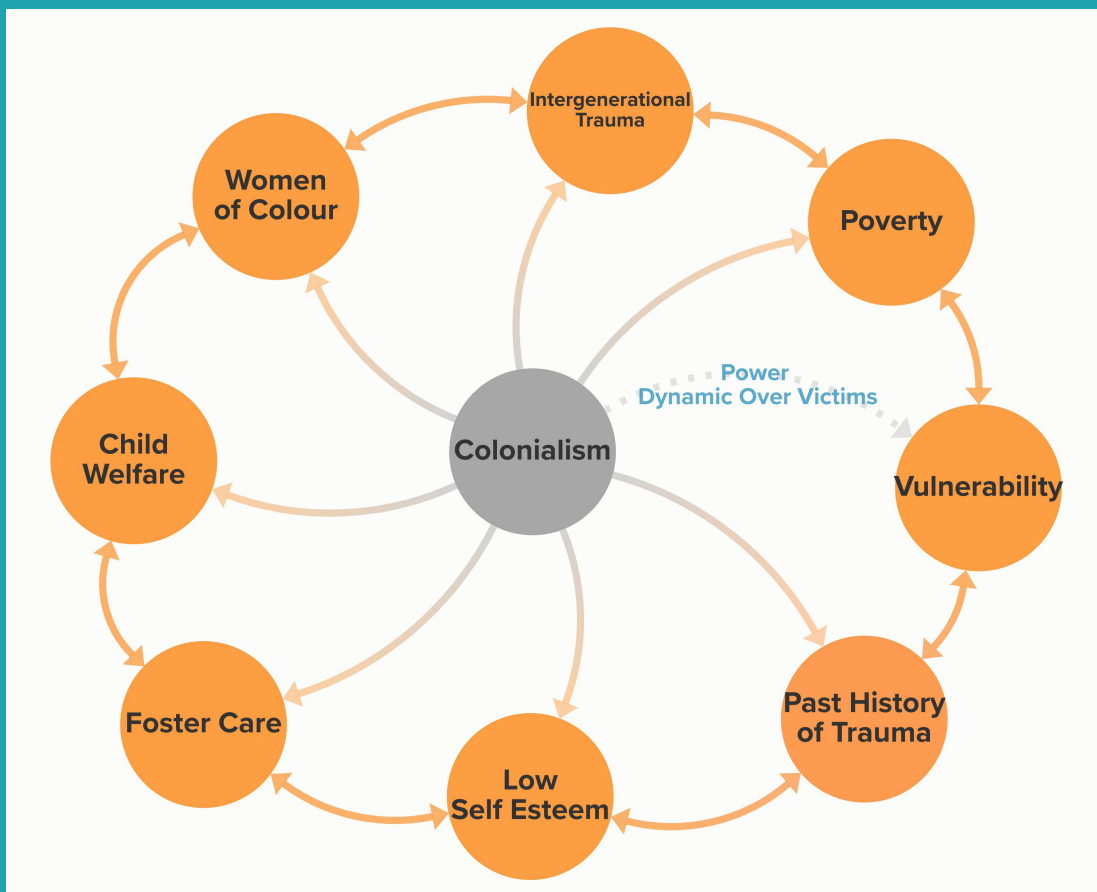


Power Dynamic

“However, human trafficking also entails the continuation of a long history of racialized sexual violence, oppression, and labour exploitation that often goes unacknowledged in white settler societies like Canada. We are less prepared to acknowledge the ways that our own racially and culturally marginalizing policies have shaped, and are currently shaping, this violence and its targets in the first place” (Nonomura, 2020)

Within the systems previously mentioned and the mental model of objectification of women is the deeply rooted power dynamics of the systems of oppression. Sexism, racism, and colonialism create space for the unhealthy power dynamics which allow for the issue to take place. Ignoring the power dynamics and their consequences creates an incomplete and misinformed perspective of the issue. For example, Indigenous women are more likely to be impacted by objectification and sex trafficking because of the deep roots of colonialism in connection to residential schools and intergenerational trauma (Nonomura, 2020).

Image 5: System of Oppression: Colonial Sexualization



Solution Landscape



In 2009, the United Nations came out with an international framework for action to combat human trafficking with the focus on 3P's which are Prevention, Protection, and Prosecution (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime).

Canadian Efforts Against Sex Trafficking:



Prevention

- Increased Government Prevention Efforts
- New 5 Year Anti-Trafficking Plan
- Organizations & Governments Worldwide are Raising Awareness
- Increasing Education
- Increased Funding
- Utilizing Input from Survivors
- Working with Financial Institutions
- Solving Vulnerabilities in Immigration Policies
- Federal Government budget for Gender Based Violence prevention



Protection

- Increased Government Protection Efforts
- Government Collaboration with NGOs
- Shelters
- Housing
- Trauma Care
- Health Care Services
- Sex Trafficking Hotlines
- Psychological Support Services



Prosecution

- Six Offenses in Criminal Code Around Human Trafficking
- Training Law Enforcement on the Issue
- Minimum Four Years In Prison
- Immigration & Refugee Protection Act
- International Treaties
- Victims Protected by the Crown
- "John" Schools for sex offenders as a form of rehabilitation

Figure 2: Solution Landscape. (Bogdan, 2020), (CEASE, 2015), (Government of Canada, 2021), (owjn, 2018), (Roots, 2013), (United States Department of State, 2020)

Partnership



"Since no single professional, agency, or system can effectively serve Human Sex Trafficking survivors in isolation, effective services must integrate multidisciplinary expertise, survivor input and leadership, and cross-sector partnerships" (Judge, 2018, p. 294).

There are many solutions currently employed in Canada to fight sex trafficking. Prevention, protection and prosecution efforts are all individually valuable, however many agree without partnership between them, their impact will not be maximized. Having partnership among people, organizations, and government means being more trauma informed and working together to lift up survivor voices to end sex trafficking.

Effective International Solutions

Chicago, USA is a city that has approached the issue of sex trafficking in a quite different way than many other places. Response efforts are being led by survivors which makes those efforts far more effective. There has also been increased investigation and exposure of the issue. They have discovered what the real statistics are, and what is really happening on the streets. Survivors leading the charge have stated that “they want pimps to stop pimping, men to stop buying, safe and affordable housing, drug-treatment facilities, and places where abused children can escape abuse without having to endure more abuse.” (Hoffer, 2010).



The European Union has the best and most systemized data collection model for trafficking. This allows the EU to make more educated decisions when it comes to addressing the issue. The EU has implemented more specific legislation relating to sex trafficking and this has increased convictions. The EU has committed themselves to improving data collection and how they share information amongst countries. This partnership will allow for a more full and comprehensive response by all European Union nations. These examples of the EU responses are reasons why there are more criminal proceedings for sex trafficking in EU nations than in other countries (UNODC, 2009).



Gaps & Levers of Change

Gap: Victim Focused

Research on sex trafficking seems to generally focus on victims and how they may have gotten into the situation. Providing supports and solutions in aid of victims is crucial but misses a piece when it does not look further at what causes the issue.



Lever: Focus on the Perpetrators



The problem exists because there is a demand for commercial sex with exploited women. Pulling on the lever of focus on the perpetrators would change the framework of prevention efforts. By better understanding two key stakeholders, there would be a better understanding of the cause of the problem (Davy, 2016). Having a deeper understanding on why Johns pay for sex, why traffickers traffick, and the power dynamics involved; governments and organizations would be better equipped to stop sex trafficking. This lever could have impacts on the effectiveness of preventative measures, laws and legislations and help better serve victims.

Gap: Understanding Objectification

Objectifying and devaluing women has become a societal norm. From a young age, men see and often emulate these behaviours which builds the foundation for someone to become a trafficker or a John (Seabrook et al. 2019).



Lever: Education



Education is an important first step in addressing any issue. Pulling on the lever of education would bring awareness and understanding that could shape how society views women. Current education programs focus on young girls and how to not be groomed but lack the importance of teaching young boys to value women.

Gaps & Levers of Change

Gap: Economic Safety Net

A crucial component of vulnerability relates to poverty. Not having an economic safety net makes people more susceptible to being victimized by traffickers (Province of British Columbia, 2019).



Lever: Liveable Wage



A common entrapment strategy used by traffickers is “grooming”, whereby they will provide basic needs for victims like food, shelter, and money (Baird et al. 2020, p.2). Victims experiencing poverty would not be as susceptible to this method if they had sufficient financial means of their own. Pulling on the lever of liveable wage would remove, or at least lessen, the effects of some crucial factors that can lead to sex trafficking.

Gap: Mistrust & Lack of Faith

The traumatic impacts of sex trafficking experienced by victims creates a mistrust of people in positions of power who they once looked to for care and support. Along with this, prosecution rates are low, so survivors often have little confidence in law enforcement’s ability to help (Cotter, 2018) (Province of British Columbia, 2019).



Lever: Relationship with First Responders



Due to the mistrust and lack of faith between victims and first responders, such as law enforcement, paramedics, crisis response workers, counsellors and nurses, first responders are unable to effectively aid victims and survivors. Without these relationships being improved, victims and survivors will continue to be underserved and lack the important trust that must exist for any solution to be successful (Anonymous Informant 1, 2021).

Why You Should Care: The Impact

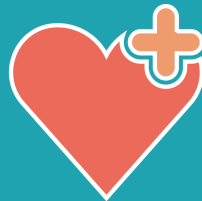
Social

The most significant social impact is that anyone can become a victim of sex trafficking no matter what race, age, gender or demographic (Public Safety Canada, 2021). It could happen to your friends, your family members, or even yourself.



Health

Victims of sex trafficking are at risk of severe mental health issues, physical harm, addiction, and sexually transmitted infections (Impacts of Human Trafficking on Victims and Survivors, 2006).



Economic

Sex trafficking is a costly issue for society as many resources are needed for prevention, protection, prosecution, and care. Along with this, the process to reintegrate survivors into society comes with economic challenges, such as finding a career and rejoining the general public (Bocinski, 2020). To help victims in reintegrating, the government has to invest in resources and support initiatives. These costs are ultimately paid by citizen's taxes and donations.



COVID-19 Connection



COVID-19 is impacting the challenge landscape and what it will look like in future years. People are now more vulnerable due to long periods of social isolation, job losses, and increased unsupervised internet usage by children. Additionally, resources among health and social services typically available to survivors and victims have been spread thin to focus on the pandemic. There is also no social distancing in the world of sex trafficking, so victims are at an increased risk of contracting the virus (Murphy et al. 2020).

Key Takeaways & Lessons Learned



Our key takeaway from this experience is how much power is given to the issue when it stays hidden. Trafficking is happening all around us and we have learned that it is not always occurring in the way that it is presented in the media. Correctly informed awareness of the issue is an important starting place in fighting against the misconceptions that exist in Canada. As individuals, we all have a responsibility to know what is going on in our communities and to care for one another. Our hope is that through our increased awareness and knowledge, we may be able to shed more light on the prevailing issue of sex trafficking in Canada.