Human Trafficking of Women and Girls: Forced Prostitution and Sexual Exploitation in Canada

Human trafficking of girls and women is a serious issue around the world and right here in Canada:

- Trafficking of girls and women is illegal, a human rights violation and an extreme form of violence against women.
- Girls and women are being trafficked into forced prostitution inside Canada, to Canada and across Canadian borders.
- Girls and women who are bought and sold from inside Canada are most often marginalized young girls and women (Aboriginal, racialized, immigrant and abuse survivors).
- The anonymity of Internet helps fuel trafficking by creating conditions that enable luring and trafficking of girls and women for the purposes of forced prostitution.
- Traffickers in Canada can receive an annual financial gain of $280,000 for each girl or woman they have trafficked and forced into prostitution.¹
- Traffickers receive a higher financial gain for girls under the age of 18, making vulnerable young girls particularly at risk of being forced into prostitution by traffickers.²
- Through reports and our consultations with 250 Canadian organizations and 150 survivors of sex trafficking, we have learned that many girls in Canada are first trafficked into forced prostitution when they are 13-years-old.³
- Sex trafficking may be referred to as “modern day slavery.”

The Canadian Women’s Foundation is working to help end the human trafficking of girls and women in Canada.

- Since 1991 the Canadian Women’s Foundation has raised funds and invested in over 1,300 community programs to help move women and girls out of poverty, out of violence and into confidence.
- The solutions to end sex trafficking of girls and women are intrinsically linked to all of our key priorities:
  - Helping women transition out of poverty
  - Ending violence against women- with a focus on prevention, anti-violence work including domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and healthy relationships, rebuilding lives after violence
  - Building strong, resilient girls -empowerment and leadership, media literacy, and critical thinking
  - Public education and advocacy
- The Canadian Women’s Foundation is investing nearly $1 million to fund grassroots organizations across Canada that prevent trafficking and help girls and women escape sex trafficking and rebuild their lives.
- The Canadian Women’s Foundation is particularly focused on addressing the needs of vulnerable young girls who have been lured, groomed, coerced and forced into prostitution.
- In addition to our work with trafficked girls and women we also support programs for women who are in prostitution by circumstance resulting from poverty, addictions, family breakdown and mental health.

*Investing in the strength of women and the dreams of girls.*
The Canadian Women’s Foundation is taking leadership to stop human trafficking with the launch of the Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada.

- The Canadian Women’s Foundation is investing nearly $2 million over three years to provide funding to organizations, conduct research and bring together experts on the Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada.
- The Canadian Women’s Foundation travelled across Canada in 2012 and 2013 to conduct in-depth consultations in eight cities with over 250 organizations, 150 young women/survivors of sex trafficking, and all levels of government.
- The Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada is convening a National Round Table of experts from across the country who are working with girls and women who have been trafficked (front line community organizations, legal, medical and policing). The Task Force is also convening a National Round Table of women who are survivors of sex trafficking in Canada.
- The Task Force on Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada is developing a National Anti-Trafficking Strategy that addresses issues and solutions in six priority areas:
  - Service needs and gaps for trafficked and sexually exploited girls and women
  - Public awareness and prevention strategies
  - Relevant legal and policy issues
  - Sector capacity building and training
  - Government policy and funding
  - Philanthropic strategies
- The Canadian Women’s Foundation conducted National Angus Reid public opinion polls that have uncovered the following:
  - 78% of Canadians agree that girls under the age of 16 are not in prostitution by choice
  - 67% of Canadians agree that Canadian girls under the age of 16 are being recruited/trafficked to work in prostitution against their will
  - 70% of Canadians agree that women are brought into Canada from other countries and forced to work in prostitution against their will
Please note: the following contains information that may be upsetting or disturbing to some readers.

~ Frequently Asked Questions ~

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What is the United Nations Definition of Human Trafficking?
• The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights defines “trafficking in persons” as:
  o The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of 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.
  o Exploitation shall include, at a minimum:
    ▪ the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation
    ▪ forced labour or services
    ▪ slavery or practices similar to slavery
    ▪ servitude
    ▪ or the removal of organs
• The three basic elements of trafficking are:
  1. The act (recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt)
  2. The means (threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or position of vulnerability, giving/receiving payments / benefits to achieve consent of a person having control over another person)
  3. The purpose of exploitation
• The Canadian Women’s Foundation is focusing our work on the trafficking of girls and women into forced prostitution and sexual exploitation in Canada.

How are trafficking, prostitution and sexual exploitation connected?
• Trafficked girls and women in Canada are forced into prostitution by traffickers or pimps who financially gain from their sexual exploitation.
• Sexually exploited women are in prostitution by circumstance resulting from poverty, addictions, family breakdown and mental health.
• Sexually exploited girls may be forced to exchange sex for drugs, shelter, food or protection.
• It is important to note that not all women in prostitution are trafficked and some women are in the sex trade by choice.
• The Canadian Women’s Foundation Task Force is focused on helping vulnerable young girls and women who are lured and trafficked into forced prostitution or who are sexually exploited.

How are young girls and women trafficked into forced prostitution in Canada?
• Trafficking of women and girls in Canada is very organized, methodical and targeted.

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• Traffickers use deception and coercion to lure young girls and marginalized women with promises of a better life, romantic relationship, false job opportunity or by abduction.
• Girls and women who become trafficked and forced into prostitution are recruited by organized crime groups, gangs, pimps or peers.
• Vulnerable girls and women are lured on the Internet (i.e. social media and dating websites) from remote or marginalized communities or are recruited in urban centres where traffickers can find vulnerable young girls (shopping malls, bus stations, group homes, schools, etc.)
• Many trafficked girls and women have a history of previous sexual abuse, poverty or addictions.

How do traffickers exercise power and control over women and girls and force them into prostitution?
• Traffickers have pimp manuals that teach tactics to condition and exploit girls and women. Their methods include confinement, physical abuse, rape, gang rape, threats of violence to the victims and the victims’ families, forced drug addiction and the threat of shaming their victims and their families.
• Traffickers of Canadian girls and women often manipulate victims to form an emotional dependence with the trafficker acting as boyfriends or peers.
• Traffickers of international women and girls deceive them with false job promises, take their passports, isolate them and threaten family at home in order to exercise control.
• Traffickers often use debt-bondage: telling young girls and women that they owe them (for things like transport into the country or living expenses), and then force victims into prostitution to repay their debt.
• Traffickers often move girls and women around to isolate and separate them from their families, friends and communities and to avoid detection by police and local groups working to help.
• Girls and women are sometimes tattooed as the property of traffickers/gangs as a tactic to prevent escape.
• There is a shift from street sex trade (visible) onto the Internet and into illegal brothels, massage parlors, strip clubs and escort agencies (invisible).

Why should we use the term “child abuse” instead of “juvenile prostitution”?
• There is a problematic misconception in Canada that young women and girls who are forced into prostitution are to blame for their own sexual exploitation. They are not seen as girls who are under the control and power of an exploiter and there is no sense of urgency to help them.
• Girls who are trafficked and forced into prostitution are victims of child abuse.
• It is illegal to have sex with an underage girl in Canada – even if the girl is given money. Underage girls cannot legally consent to their own sexual exploitation.
• The real question is: why are men abusing under-aged girls by buying sex in Canada?
• In a 2013 Canadian Women’s Foundation Angus Reid public opinion poll, 78% of Canadians agree that girls under the age of 16 are not in prostitution by choice.

Is trafficking and forced prostitution fueled by demand to buy sex?
• The trafficking of girls and women into forced prostitution and sexual exploitation is driven by the demand to buy sex in Canada.
• Poverty, history of sexual abuse and other factors also increase the vulnerability of girls and women who are trafficked into forced prostitution and sexual exploitation.
• It is important not to confuse prostitution with the trafficking of girls and women. Trafficking is forced prostitution.

Why is human trafficking sometimes called “Modern Day Slavery”?
• Under international law, slavery is defined as “the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised.” More simply, slavery exists when individuals are sold, traded, used, abused, and discarded.

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• Young girls and women who are trafficked into forced prostitution may, therefore, sometimes be called slaves or sex slaves.

How many girls and women are trafficked into forced prostitution or sexual exploitation in Canada?
• Canada does not currently have a standard, coordinated system to track the number of girls and women who have been trafficked into forced prostitution. Additional resources are necessary to provide for sustainable data collection.
• It is difficult to track the number of trafficked girls and women because of the criminal nature of trafficking (it’s a highly lucrative, and underground business).
• Girls and women rarely come forward to report being trafficked and/or are often treated as criminals and are therefore not counted as victims.
• Less than 10% of sexual assaults are reported to the police and it’s estimated that women and girls who are trafficked are even less able to report incidents of trafficking.
• The Canadian Women’s Foundation met more than 150 women who were survivors of sex trafficking in our consultations across the country. The majority of these women told us they were trafficked for the first time at age 13 or younger.2

Footnotes:
2 Source: Canadian Women’s Foundation national consultations held in 2012 and 2013 in 8 Canadian Cities, with 150 survivors of human trafficking.
3 Source: http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/youth/pdf/sex_exploit.pdf - page 15
4 Source: Angus Reid Omnibus Study, Canadian Women’s Foundation, September 2013.
5 Source: Invisible Chains - Canada’s Underground World of Human Trafficking - Benjamin Perrin - page 67