



Human Trafficking of Aboriginal Women and Girls

The human trafficking of Aboriginal women and girls is an issue that is little understood within Canada. While human trafficking is understood to occur when people are moved across international borders into Canada for the purposes of exploitation, it is less commonly known that Aboriginal women and girls are trafficked inside Canada.

What is Human Trafficking?

- The United Nations' *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*, defines human trafficking as: 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 (UN, 2000).
- Human trafficking includes Aboriginal women or girls who have been forced or coerced into working in the sex trade due to an abuse of power, control and/or vulnerability

There is a Lack of Data on Aboriginal Human Trafficking Victims:

- The difference between sexual exploitation and sex work is not well understood
- The domestic human trafficking of Aboriginal people is not well understood so it is often not identified by police officers, healthcare workers, social workers and other frontline workers who come into contact with trafficking victims
- Aboriginal women have been portrayed as “sexually available” (Sikka, 2009), contributing to frontline workers’ inability to identify Aboriginal victims of human trafficking
- There is no data across Canada that tracks the transient Aboriginal population and their trafficking into the sex trade (Sethi, 2007)
- It is possible that there is a connection between the 600 missing and murdered Aboriginal women and human trafficking of Aboriginal people in Canada

Aboriginal Women and Girls who are Victims of Human Trafficking:

- Research has found that the average age that Aboriginal girls are forced into the sex trade is 11 or 12 (Sethi, 2007)
- Aboriginal women and girls are recruited by traffickers through various methods including schools, bars, ‘boyfriends’ and the Internet
- Girls are sometimes made to work as recruiters by their traffickers, recruiting other victims

- Women and girls who hitchhike or who are recruited as dancers often lose contact with their families and communities, making them vulnerable to human trafficking

The Root Causes of the Human Trafficking of Aboriginal Peoples:

- Colonization and colonial policies that dispossessed Aboriginal women and children of Aboriginal culture, communities and lands
- Residential school, the 60s scoop and the high numbers of Aboriginal children in care
- Aboriginal women and girls experience intersecting discrimination on the basis of both gender and ethnicity
- 75% of Aboriginal girls under the age of 18 have experienced sexual abuse (Correction Service of Canada, cited in Sethi, 2007)
- The ongoing effects of colonization and intergenerational trauma mean that Aboriginal women and girls experience higher rates of poverty and homelessness than non-Aboriginal women and girls
- One report on trafficking and Indigenous women in the sex trade found that 98% were currently or previously homeless (Farley et al., 2011)
- “The inability of the Canadian criminal justice system to view Aboriginal women and girls as ‘victims’ of sexual offences contributes to the inability to recognize them as having been trafficked, and consequently prevents them from receiving the assistance and care that would accompany the recognition” (Sikka, 2009)

Recommendations:

- Aboriginal women must be reinstated at the centre of our families and communities; their roles and knowledge must be honoured and respected
- Aboriginal women and girls require culture-based, wholistic wrap around services; the needs of women working in the sex trade must be taken into account
- Aboriginal women and girls involved in the sex-trade must receive increased advocacy and support, especially in the area of child welfare
- Culture-based and wholistic addictions treatment must be made available
- A public awareness campaign must educate Aboriginal communities and the general public about the extent of human trafficking of Aboriginal people in Canada
- Existing policies must be re-evaluated to determine where Aboriginal women and girls are disproportionately experiencing barriers in support and/or services

References

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