

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

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[Human Trafficking in Canada: A Leadership and Learning Kit for Churches - The Canadian Council of Churches](#)

Human trafficking – also called modern-day slavery by the United Nations – is a crime in which victims are lured into an exploitative situation for the profit of the perpetrators. It is found in all regions and most countries of the world and is the fastest growing crime globally, involving low risk and high reward for the traffickers. Every 30 seconds another person becomes a victim of human trafficking.²⁶ This may occur within a country but can also involve trafficking across international borders. The International Labour Organization's 2017 Global Estimates of Modern Slavery reported that on any given day in 2016, an estimated 40 million people were victims of modern slavery. Out of these, approximately 25 million people were in forced labour.²⁷ The full extent of the crime is difficult to determine because of its hidden nature and the fear or inability of victims to come forward to law enforcement agencies.

Local communities in Canada are not immune from the problem of human trafficking. In a case that made national headlines, police in Simcoe County, Ontario, rescued 49 Mexican migrant workers from a Barrie house who were being exploited by a cleaning company. Police revealed a “very disturbing” operation that brought men from Mexico with promises of work visas, education or permanent residency. Instead, the men were housed in squalid conditions and forced to work as cleaners in Collingwood, Innisfil Oro-Medonte and Cornwall. The traffickers charged the men fees for accommodation and food, making their situation even more financially dependent on those who were exploiting them.²⁸

The same newspaper article reported that in July 2019, four Barrie residents were charged with human trafficking after a young woman met a man online, who then lured her to a party. Police say two men sexually assaulted her at the party and then forced her into the sex trade with the threat that if she ever left, she would be found and killed.²⁹

The relatively easy availability of internet access in Canada contributes to the scope and variety of online abuse. According to a study by Cybertip.ca, Canada ranked in the top 3 of 60 countries measured in hosting human trafficking websites, hosting visual images of trafficked persons and selling these illegal images for profit.³⁰ This technology also enables users to pay money to abuse victims at a distance by logging onto live webcam websites and directing sex acts by those on view.

Human trafficking, whether facilitated by technology or not, is coerced exploitation of one person in response to an illegal demand for the gratification of another or for illegal labour at vastly reduced cost to an employer. Those exploited are not compensated fairly and are frequently forced to live under conditions that enable their captor's control. Often those conditions include physical or sexual violence. Opportunities for abuse are all around us – in our homes (with, for example, cleaning and other domestic services), in local hotels and nail salons, in agriculture or industry places of employment, at highway truck stops and service centres and at large gatherings of people for entertainment or sporting events. Victims may be a teenager from your neighbourhood or someone brought into the local community from somewhere else in the world. The abuse is perpetrated both by those who conduct the trafficking and by those who engage in using the services of trafficked people. However, people may not always be aware that the products or services they consume may be a result of the labour of someone who has been trafficked. Human trafficking thrives on invisibility.

Human trafficking affects men, women and children, often those who are the most vulnerable in society.³¹ The most likely to be at risk are those who are socially and economically disadvantaged and may include Indigenous women and girls, migrant workers and new immigrants. At-risk youth, children in the child welfare system and those with disabilities can be especially vulnerable to traffickers. Migrant workers in particular may have language barriers, a deficiency of access to services and support and often lack basic information about their rights. With promises of a better life and meaningful work, many victims go willingly at first, only to be tricked, held against their will and coerced to give services, physical or sexual, for the financial benefit of the trafficker.

The impacts of COVID-19 have further exacerbated conditions for vulnerable people. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime notes: “The increased levels of domestic violence reported in many countries is a worrying indicator for the living conditions of many trafficking victims... In an environment where priorities and actions are geared toward limiting the spread of the virus, it is easier for traffickers to hide their operations, making victims increasingly vulnerable.”³²

The casualties of human trafficking suffer emotional and physical abuse, often living and working in deplorable conditions, with their basic human rights violated. The CBC's Marketplace investigated allegations of human rights abuses in overseas factories producing personal protective equipment (PPE) that are imported into Canada and used by Canadians, highlight the need for watchfulness of our supply chains even during the pandemic.³³ Victims can be exploited time and again for the financial benefit of the traffickers. In a report titled, "Human Trafficking is Big Business", the International Labor Organization estimates that in 2014 this clandestine crime generated \$150 billion USD, for its perpetrators, second only to profits made in the drug trade, affecting millions of victims worldwide.³⁴ Canada's Criminal Intelligence Services estimated that back in 2010 domestic sex traffickers earned an average of \$280,000 annually from every victim under their control. One convicted male offender from Ontario reportedly earned at least \$400,000 from sexual exploitation of one girl.³⁵

Over the last 10 years, the profile of detected trafficking victims worldwide has changed. Although most detected victims are still women, children and men now make up larger shares of the total number of victims. The share of victims who are trafficked for forced labour has also increased. About four in 10 victims detected between 2010 and 2014 were trafficked for forced labour and out of those trafficked for forced labour, 63 percent were men.³⁶

Human trafficking and human smuggling are often confused, as the two crimes appear to be very similar in nature. But human trafficking always involves exploitation and force, with the victim having no freedom of choice. Human smuggling involves the provision of a service, typically transportation or forged documents, voluntarily paid for to allow illegal entry into a foreign country – often at great risk to those being smuggled and for exorbitant prices. It is also possible that the crime may start out as human smuggling but escalate to become human trafficking.³⁷

One striking example of the tragic effects of human smuggling was the discovery in October 2019, in Essex, England, of 39 people from Vietnam frozen to death inside a refrigerated container truck. They were all from Nghe An Province, one of Vietnam's poorest regions. Criminal gangs regularly exploit young people who are desperately seeking a better life in Europe to be able to send money back to their families. The journey is filled with danger. Physical and sexual abuse are commonplace. Some individuals are fortunate and make it safely to their destination to eventually find employment but many more do not and are coerced into jobs typical of human trafficking. Many women find work in nail salons, where some have to work long hours for little pay and others are forced by their employers to engage in sex work. Young Vietnamese men are lured into work on cannabis farms, living under poor conditions. They are often deprived of their passports, making leaving the situation difficult to near impossible.³⁸ In another situation, a journalist in North Carolina was offered a reporting job for the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games. The talent agent who contacted her said he was hiring American reporters for the Olympics. After a four-month interview process the woman discovered that the "talent acquisition agency" was bogus. The FBI became involved and discovered the agency was most likely a front for a sex trafficking ring.³⁹

Human Trafficking in Canada

Indigenous women and girls are over-represented among people who are trafficked in Canada. One demonstration of this is in British Columbia, where a 724 km stretch of highway between Prince George and Prince Rupert known as the "Highway of Tears" is bordered by 23 First Nations communities and many small towns. This rural area is impoverished and lacks sufficient public transportation, so local citizens will often hitchhike as a form of transit. In 2013, Human Rights Watch released a report, "Those Who Take Us Away", focusing on the need for an inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women on the Highway of Tears.⁴⁰ Many of the issues noted in this 2013 report as contributing to the high rates of violence against Indigenous women and girls are more fully examined in the comprehensive study initiated in 2016 by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The final report of this inquiry delivered 231 Calls for Justice directed at governments, institutions, social service providers, industries and all Canadians.

Diane Redsky is the director of MaMawi Wi Chi Itata Centre in Manitoba, which advocates for Indigenous women and children, specifically sex trafficking victims. Redsky says the history of racism against Indigenous people in Canada feeds into the cycle of violence and exploitation against them. Indigenous Canadians make up just 4 percent of the country's population but more than half of all sex trafficking victims in Canada are Indigenous.⁴¹ Redsky and others in Manitoba are now leading transformative programs to help identify the threats and risks so prevalent in Indigenous communities, including a history of bias and racism that has prevented some members of police services from fully understanding how and why Indigenous girls and women are often the targeted for violence, including human trafficking.⁴²

In a 2014 report of the National Task Force on Sex Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada, the task force states that while many service providers report the average age of recruitment as 13 to 14 years old, some children are trafficked at younger ages.⁴³ Young people from middle class families as well as from poorer neighbourhoods are lured from high schools and shopping malls and enticed through social media with gifts and promises of love.

Many factors contribute to the rise in human trafficking, including long-term unemployment; gender-based inequality; the internet; a globalized, free-market economy; an increase in the demand for cheap labour, goods and services; and increased international mobility.⁴⁴

How is the international community responding?

Human trafficking is one of the issues the United Nations is working to counter. The Palermo Protocols were adopted by the United Nations to supplement the 2002 Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime. The first protocol is to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in human beings, especially women and children. The protocols came into force in December 2003 and have been ratified by 187 states, Canada among them. In so doing, these nations pledged to take a series of measures against transnational organized crime. With enhanced international cooperation, the state parties can have a real impact on hindering the ability of international criminals to operate successfully.

Effective implementation of the Palermo Protocols would help ensure that vulnerable citizens across the globe can live in safety and dignity, in their homes and communities. This would align with United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.⁴⁵

What is Canada doing?

Human trafficking was listed under the Criminal Code of Canada in 2005.⁴⁶ The Government of Canada's approach to addressing human trafficking is guided by the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Palermo Protocols.⁴⁷ In September 2019, the Canadian government announced a five-year National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking with a budget of \$58.22 million and thereafter \$10.25 million annually in federal funding.⁴⁸ The pillars of the plan include: Supporting victims and survivors; steps to increase prevention; addressing gaps in existing supports and providing culturally-informed services; prosecution of human traffickers; building appropriate partnerships to better address human trafficking.

The National Strategy was designed to be adaptable, recognizing that human trafficking is a crime that is often hidden and evolving. One important part of the strategy to help inform how it is carried out, is the establishment of an advisory committee comprised of survivors of human trafficking to provide a platform in which individuals with lived experiences can inform and provide their unique and invaluable recommendations to the Government of Canada on current and future federal anti-human trafficking policies and initiatives.⁴⁹

Civil society groups are also working to end human trafficking. An example is Project Maple Leaf, a public awareness campaign, launched by the Canadian organization Courage for Freedom (courageforfreedom.org) on July 30, 2019. The campaign used a series of videos with tips to identify potential human trafficking and encouraging the public to report any suspicious activity. The videos played at service stations along 400 series highways in Ontario. These highway corridors are some of the busiest roadways in Canada and are being used to transport victims of human trafficking around the province and further afield, often in clear view of the driving public. It is estimated that 60 percent of all human trafficking in Canada is initiated along the 400 series of highways and campaign organizers estimate that the videos were viewed more than 16 million times.⁵⁰

There is also a Canadian Human Trafficking confidential hotline at 1-833-900-1010 that is managed 24 hours daily and serves to connect survivors and victims with local support services in communities across Canada. This initiative has funding support from Public Safety Canada and collaborates with the anti-human trafficking and global hotline experts at Polaris in the United States.

One essential part of combating human trafficking is to address the needs of trafficked victims for such things as food, shelter, education, employment and personal safety. The Government of Manitoba has committed more than \$10 million a year to fund Tracia's Trust, named in memory of 14 year old Tracia Owen, an Indigenous girl who was sexually exploited before she died by suicide in 2005. Tracia's Trust outlines a strategy developed from input from 54 organizations, stakeholders, front-line service providers, community members, Indigenous elders, law enforcement and exploited Manitobans to combat sexual exploitation and sex trafficking of children.⁵¹ While the

content is specific to Manitoba, Tracia's Trust offers a useful model to develop a strategy to address online exploitation and trafficking and provide supports for youth who are at risk.

In our own time, the church is called to action against the evils of human trafficking whereby people are enslaved, human dignity is degraded and in extreme cases fatality occurs. "Is not this the fast I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke?" (Isaiah 58:6). For a focus text in its 2014–2015 study on human trafficking, the Women's Missionary Society (WMS) chose Proverbs 31:8–9: "Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy."

The 2014 International Ecumenical Consultation on Migration and Human Trafficking: Modern Slavery? declared that trafficking in human beings is a serious justice and human rights violation. It is one of the most horrific results of the economic and social disparities that increase the vulnerability of millions of people. Migrants constitute the greater number of victims of trafficking. Such vast inequality allows many within our societies to be considered little more than disposable commodities. In opposing corrupt practices and abuses of power against human beings that are inherent in the "modern day slavery" of human trafficking we are drawn to focus on and continue to trust the passionate love of Jesus Christ for all people and the way in which Christ identifies with and accompanies the vulnerable.⁵²

What can we do?

As a society, we can seek to address systemic injustices such as poverty, racism, barriers to accessing education and health services and economic insecurity. Addressing these injustices will reduce the vulnerability of people who are targeted for human trafficking. Human trafficking is driven by demand that leads to the exploitation of others. As Christians who believe in the dignity of all human beings with the right to live in peace and freedom, we can take positive steps in prevention by advocating for peace and opposing all forms of exploitation and violence. We can take a stand and challenge those who make racist or sexist remarks, which contribute to making targeted groups more vulnerable to exploitation.

We can make choices every day that encourage gender equality for individuals. We can become involved in supporting Indigenous communities in Canada in their efforts to lessen poverty that disproportionately affects them. We can support micro credit plans to allow people to have meaningful work that alleviates the poverty that is often a doorway to trafficking others or being trafficked. Education is key to combatting human trafficking. Rather than avoiding the difficult topics like physical abuse and sexual exploitation we can develop awareness that leads to prevention and that provides support for those affected by human trafficking. Church leaders can work to create a culture of openness and compassion, instead of judgement. By being more intentional about these efforts, churches can make headway in identifying, preventing and ending human trafficking. Congregations can support learning initiatives about human trafficking. Prayers can be made both for the victims and perpetrators of human trafficking that their dignity and freedom be restored. Elected officials at all levels of government can be contacted about actions taken and being considered to address problems associated with human trafficking. We can consider where goods are made and under what conditions they are fabricated and support Fair Trade production and policies and be vigilant about the working conditions under which people are providing services that we are consuming. We can campaign for just refugee and immigration policies and safe paths of migration.

Resources

In April, 2008, the Commission on Justice and Peace (of the Canadian Council of Churches) identified human trafficking as a common concern and established the Human Trafficking in Canada Working Group to facilitate learning, theological reflection and common action.⁵³ This was done with the hope that all churches in Canada would become more aware of human trafficking in Canada and advocate together when appropriate, share and develop educational materials and provide a forum for theological reflection on the topic.

The commission produced a study guide, Human Trafficking in Canada: A Leadership and Learning Kit for Churches (available at councilofchurches.ca). The guide provides a series of reflections, awareness-raising exercises to help recognize indicators of abuse and exploitation, Bible studies and background materials. In an attractive and user-friendly layout, contributions from more than a dozen Christian traditions come together on one of the most pressing social justice issues in our context.

The Anglican Church of Canada created a documentary aimed at raising awareness about the realities of sex trafficking in Canada. It is posted online at youtu.be/-Bmfne5Dcwg. Courage for Freedom is a Canadian-based

organization that supports victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation and provides resources to increase public awareness of how to recognize and respond to human trafficking through Project Maple Leaf (mentioned earlier in this report), a hotline 1-833-900-1010 and a hashtag for social media: #KnowHumanTrafficking.

Congregations are also encouraged to learn of the work of ARISE Ministry, (ariseministry.ca), an outreach mission of the Presbytery of East Toronto for those who are or have been involved in the sex trade and those at risk of sexual exploitation. This ministry is directed by the Rev. Deb Stanbury and is supported by Presbyterians Sharing. The WMS has a study that includes a session on human trafficking. It is online at wmspcc.ca/wp-content/uploads/Social-Justice-Study-2.pdf.

The following poem was written by Angel Power, a peer support worker with ARISE Ministry. It may be a useful catalyst for discussion. Used with permission.

“Lessons Learned”

Our choices
Will impact our life.
Our voices
Can win the fight.

As powerful as loud and proud is silent and humble.
What do we all require in the dark?
A light or a guide so we don't stumble.

It is imperative that we always protect ourselves
Because you are a precious gift inside a soft shell.
Worrying about where you may be in the future or regretting what you did in the past is a waste of time
Because you end up missing the present moment and in that moment you could discover what you're here to find.

Spend time with animals, be cautious of man and always respect thy land.
Daydream and soul search, go to your inner church, diligently do self-work. Study, practice and question until you understand.
And if you see someone trying to find the light and are in a position where you can, always lend a helping hand.

Power, Angel. *The Darkness & the Light*, AuthorHouse, 2016