

Anemic

Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation in Metro Vancouver:
Who, How, and What?



Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation in Metro Vancouver: Who, How, and What?

January 2022

Main Author:

Karen Giesbrecht, RD, MA

This project was led by Union Gospel Mission, with a goal of assessing how local churches are raising awareness and advocating for individuals vulnerable to human trafficking and sexual exploitation in Metro-Vancouver and the Fraser Valley. Needs, key stakeholders, and gaps are explored, particularly considering significant changes made because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank-you to these individuals and organizations for their input, commitment, and guidance: the Agape Ministries (Vancouver), Be Amazing Campaign, Canadian Council of Churches, Catholic Archdiocese (Vancouver), Chinatown Peace Church (Vancouver), Coquitlam Alliance (Coquitlam), Educating Voices, First Christian Reformed Church (Vancouver), Living Waters Church (Langley), North Shore Alliance Church (North Vancouver), Peace Mennonite Church (Vancouver), Resist Exploitation, Embrace Dignity (REED), SA Foundation, Sunrise Church (Cloverdale), Tenth Church (Vancouver), The Way Church (Vancouver), and the Village Church (Surrey).

Union Gospel Mission sites, and many who were interviewed for this report, are located on the traditional unceded lands of the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, Katzie, Kwantlen, Qayqayt and the Sto:lo First Nations. We offer it with gratitude and humility as we continue to learn about the rich, yet often painful and inequitable history of this region.



For clarification or suggestions about this work, please contact churchrelations@ugm.ca.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA;

Updated: January 21, 2022

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	4
AWARENESS-RAISING	5
CHALLENGES FACING CHURCHES.....	6
CHURCH INITIATIVES.....	8
RECONCILIATION	9
REFUGEES AND NEWCOMERS.....	9
OTHER CONNECTED ISSUES.....	10
CHANGES THROUGH COVID	13
UNDERSERVED & UNDERRECOGNIZED	13
WHAT IS NEEDED TO KEEP GOING	15
KEY PANDEMIC LESSONS.....	16
CONCLUSION	17
APPENDIXES	18
APPENDIX A - DENOMINATIONAL INITIATIVES	18
APPENDIX B - NON-DENOMINATIONAL ADVOCACY GROUPS.....	19

Introduction

When a human body does not have enough red blood cells, or the cells are not big enough to transport oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body, the individual is considered *anemic*. Anemia is not a disease, but rather a symptom of other health problems. Anyone with the diagnosis may experience fatigue, headaches, irritability, and an inability to concentrate. Anemia is usually caused by nutrient deficiencies, blood loss, surgeries, and/or poor gut health.

The simplest way to avoid distress is prevention. If someone becomes anemic, an iron supplement may make a difference, but it will not necessarily cure the individual. People need overall nourishing diets, with homes and incomes to allow for adequate meals. Those who are severely depleted, may require supplements and significant time to correct imbalances. If the causes of anemia are more complex, deeper roots must be addressed, too.

In a similar vein, if we cannot in the first place prevent harms of sexual exploitation and human trafficking, we need a collaborative, long-lasting approach to address their complex causes and consequences. To do this well, we need to know what is currently understood and being done to support those who are vulnerable in our neighbourhoods.

We started our research for this report by looking at what is currently done in Metro-Vancouver, the Fraser Valley, and the District of Mission (collectively referred to as Metro Vancouver in what follows) for women who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and human trafficking. We quickly expanded our questions to include others – children, men, and those who do not fit into these categories. We also asked about other forms of trafficking – manual labour, domestic help, and agriculture.

In general, churches in Metro Vancouver recognize that they are best positioned to come alongside organizations that are equipped to support vulnerable individuals through funding, prayer, and meeting practical needs. Some interviewees reported that there are currently few churches directly addressing these issues for vulnerable individuals. One person called the response of the local churches “anemic,” but we found that while much more could and should be done, there is certainly evidence of some significant compassionate care.

This report also reflects our commitment to work towards the recommendations made in the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada¹ as we aim to understand and address the lasting impacts of residential schools and other discriminatory practices.



We are guided by the **Call to Action 19**, which recommends measurable goals to identify and close the gaps in health outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. We hope this work also builds on **Call to Action 41**, the request for a public inquiry into the causes of, and remedies for, the disproportionate victimization of Aboriginal women and girls. *Reclaiming Power and Place*, the Commission of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls delivered in 2019², provides further guidance.

¹ https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

² <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/>

This report begins with a summary of the awareness-raising activities done by local churches and the challenges of addressing the complex issues related to human trafficking. This is followed by some examples of both direct initiatives and indirect interactions that faith communities are undertaking to support those at-risk of exploitation and trafficking. Given that this report was completed almost two years after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, we explored changes experienced, populations who are underserved or underrecognized as being vulnerable, and key pandemic lessons. The report concludes with a summary of what churches and local organizations need to sustain themselves in this work, and then resources for further exploration.

This review does not cover current statistics around human trafficking and sexual exploitation in Metro Vancouver, or all the work that is currently done to directly support individuals caught in or exiting harm. For a summary of the current state of the situation in Canada, see "For Freedom Christ has Set us Free," the 2021 Pastoral Letter from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops³ and the Trafficked Human website⁴. Our provincial *Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons (OCTIP)* coordinates British Columbia's strategy to combat human trafficking. They offer an online course on how to recognize and assist people who may have been trafficked in Canada⁵

Awareness-Raising

Church leaders interviewed talked about how active awareness and engagement in the issue of human trafficking **ebbs and flows** - it is always in the background, or on their radar, and "occasionally gets mentioned," as one pastor said. Others shared that other issues can be more pressing (particularly those seen in the news), or seem more novel and engaging, and/or perceived to be redressable in some tangible way. Key themes around awareness raising include:

For example, Canadian Anglicans cite that their *"involvement locally, involving parishes, dioceses, Mission to Seafarers, the Anglican Military Ordinariate, General Synod and others is currently not well known within the Church. Most church members are not aware of:*

- *The extent or nature of human trafficking and modern slavery in our neighbourhoods, towns, and cities.*
- *Ministries of local parishes with and for vulnerable and trafficked peoples.*
- *Efforts in the public square to stop this egregious harm⁶.*

1. **Global Focus with Limited Local Awareness** - Several of the church leaders we spoke to reported that they have a **global focus on human trafficking**, as it is often considered something that primarily happens overseas, and thus advocacy and support are focused in other countries.

³ <https://www.cccb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CCCB-Human-Trafficking-Pastoral-Letter-2021.pdf>

⁴ <http://traffickedhuman.org/>

⁵ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/criminal-justice/victims-of-crime/human-trafficking/human-trafficking-training>

⁶ <https://www.anglican.ca/issues/human-trafficking/working-on-the-issue/> (Nov 30.21)

- Some individuals in local congregations have **worked or volunteered abroad** with organizations supporting people who have been or are at risk of being trafficked - these individuals often initiate a response in their home church.
 - Local and global attention are bridged when people here watch videos of people being exploited in other parts of the world.
2. **Individual vs. Faith Community Commitment** - Several people reported that it often takes a **committed individual** to take initiative around awareness raising in their congregation (often a parishioner or leader in the women's ministry) before others get involved.
- When those individuals move or invest in other issues, direct engagement and advocacy can wane.
3. **Complexity Leads to Helplessness** - Many shared that, when the problem is so complex, they often do not know where to start, despite a sincere desire to engage. Several churches said their only involvement in anti-trafficking initiatives is to **financially support** organizations.
- Some saw this as passing the responsibility, letting others take care of the problem.
 - Others recognized they did not have the capacity to address trafficking directly, but since "*where our treasure is, there is our heart,*" they believed it is important to fund organizations with the capacity to address the issues properly.
4. **Helping Without Hurting** - Unless we have experienced poverty and vulnerability, we may have a limited understanding of trauma and the complexity involved in exiting a life that was exploitive-yet-familiar (one service provider likened it to culture shock). There must be a commitment to **providing appropriate and trauma-informed care** and be "okay with the rough parts of people."
- One speculated that incest is too common in some cultures, which has rippling effects through the whole community.
 - One talked about the challenges of addressing **complex PTSD** and **trauma bonds** that can form between victims and perpetrators.
 - By asking an **individual to tell their story of exploitation**, we engage on a human level, but this must be done with sensitivity to the shame and re-traumatization someone may experience if talking about their experience to strangers.
 - Several church staff mentioned people coming to their church who have a history of being trafficked, looking for support and community; while churches are committed to responding with compassion, the complexity of needs and trauma is often beyond their capacity and training.

Trauma Informed Care is an approach to compassionate work that assumes that clients and program guests have a history of trauma, which impacts their spiritual, physical, mental, emotional, and economic wellbeing. Guiding principles for working with such individuals include prioritizing safety, trustworthiness, peer support, collaboration, choice, and considerations of culture, history, and gender.

Challenges facing Churches

Interviewees shared the following ideas on why human trafficking and exploitation are particularly hard issues to build momentum and support around:

- There are few actions that untrained individuals can take to **tangibly help people** currently being trafficked.
- Without meeting someone with lived experience, individuals tend to be **less engaged**.
- An individual or small group may become invested in raising awareness, but the **congregational leadership** has other priorities.
 - Several individuals talked about how they stopped trying to engage their church, and rather invested in parachurch organizations.
 - When those in leadership are buyers (maybe not of trafficking directly, but related activities like watching pornography), there is a compromised will for them to address the issues.
- Some churches have tried to be intentional about inviting people who have come out of trafficking into their congregation, but then were unprepared to deal with the **deep trauma**, particularly when congregants were some of the clients or perpetrators of the exploitation.
- Related to sexual exploitation specifically, one challenge is that the **context is changing** as our world becomes more virtual - programs that were set up to support people on the streets and in shelters must now adapt new ways of reaching and protecting vulnerable people who are exposed to harm through online platforms.
- Sexual exploitation is difficult to talk about, and we often do not have **language** to describe realities, or the terms we use may have different meanings for some.
 - Some refer to "sex workers," where paid sexual activity is viewed as a legitimate profession, with individuals having choice, agency, and consent to having their bodies bought for sexual activity.
 - Some refer to women as being "sex trafficked" and see pornography, sex work, and related activities as violence (usually gender-based), where consent is impossible and buying access is paid rape.
- **Uncertainty about the laws** and realities.
 - One person referenced a survey that found 50% of Canadians thought buying sex was legal.
 - Another suggested we often see trafficking as human **smuggling**, but people can be *trafficked* or exploited, and still live in their homes locally.

Church Initiatives

While church leaders talked about their commitment to justice for vulnerable individuals, most recognized their actions around local human trafficking were inconsistent, and were often most fruitful when **partnering with organizations** that specifically focus on the challenges. Some activities churches organize include:

- **Sunday Services**
 - One church talked about their practice of “story Sundays” where they would occasionally devote a service to stories of people who were struggling, including live interviews and videos (sometimes with the individual’s face obscured to protect privacy), trying to show how different people experience vulnerability and healing.
 - February 22 is **Human Trafficking Awareness Day**—a day set aside by Canadians to bring particular attention to the issues of human trafficking and modern slavery in Canada and around the world.
 - On this date in 2007, the Parliament of Canada voted unanimously to develop and implement a national anti-trafficking action plan.
 - Several churches mark this government initiative during a Sunday service that week.
 - The Anglican Church of Canada designated Feb 20, 2022, as **Freedom Sunday**⁷, a global movement encouraging faith communities to learn about human trafficking and slavery in Canada today.
- Several churches hosted **evening/half-day forums**, usually one-off events, with guest speakers, panel discussions, and/or videos.
 - These take a significant amount of planning, especially with the changing guidelines around safe gatherings during to the pandemic.
 - Some were creative, such as hosting “Her Journey Rewritten,” by the SA Foundation, an audio-visual experience that reflects the stages of healing from an experience of sexual exploitation.⁸
 - Churches often partner with established organizations like Ratanak International, which present on their work abroad.⁹
 - Some events include an activity like writing letters to local or federal government.
- **Peer-led** initiatives for young people - several churches talked about youth taking initiative to educate their peers (with guidance and support from adults with experience in the field).
- One congregation talked about exploring an initiative similar to one in the United States which had men engage with **online platforms** that reviewed women in survival sex work, with the goal of helping those who paid for sex understand the impact of

⁷ <https://freedomsgiving.org/>

⁸ <https://www.safoundation.com/herjourneyrewritten>

⁹ <https://www.ratanak.org/>

what they are doing. Such an initiative would take careful training, monitoring, and a place where those involved can get together (~1/month).

- One congregation talked about training with an American initiative called **Heels to Halos**¹⁰, a ministry where women bring gifts to and build relationships with sex-workers and staff in strip clubs, while men from the congregation stay in cars outside to pray and support as needed.
- Several congregations **promote retail stores** (physical and virtual) that sells things made by survivors and organizations working with people who have been trafficked in all forms, as both a fundraising and awareness raising initiative.
- One congregation supported an individual who worked with a **local outreach team**, providing medical and harm reduction supplies, and ensuring that information about violent perpetrators was shared.
- Some churches participated in the *Intelligent Love* course run by REED.¹¹
 - The 8-week course facilitates theological reflection on the issues of sexual exploitation and educates on the systemic issues of the sex trade including race, colonization, poverty, patriarchy, legislation, and pornography.
 - The overall aim is to encourage individuals and faith communities to commit to the multiple possibilities for change and advocacy.

Reconciliation

Many churches are making a commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous communities and the long-term effects of Canada's settler past, and this must include an understanding of how Indigenous individuals are vulnerable to trafficking. Some were aware of stronger connections between churches and Indigenous Friendship Centers in other cities in Canada, but not in Metro Vancouver. This is certainly an area worth further analysis and exploration.

Refugees and Newcomers

Many organizations that work with refugees and newcomers to Canada work with individuals who were directly sponsored, not necessarily through a trafficked situation. Still, many of these individuals took very indirect routes on their journey to Canada, facing risky circumstances themselves, or often encountering others who had experienced such hardship. Even if they were not directly trafficked, the fear and trauma associated with the risk of it must be addressed compassionately. One church talked about hiring an Intercultural Pastor who focuses on helping New Canadians get established. This is another area worth further exploration.

¹⁰ <https://www.h2h.one/>

¹¹ <https://embracedignity.org/>

Other Connected Issues

Churches often address needs and concerns that are not directly focused on preventing human trafficking, but do address the brokenness, roots, and ripple effects. While the issues must be tackled from different angles, many people connected with local congregations recognize that they have some significant assets and influence when they work together on these challenges:

- **Families** - There is too often lack of examples and support for being a healthy parent, sibling, aunt, uncle, grandparent, and mentor.
- **Healthcare** - individuals who are trafficked or undocumented may have limited access to health and dental care (including vaccines).
 - Likely to need treatment for a sexually transmitted disease (STD) or other communicable or chronic disease.
- **Literacy & Language** - Several churches talked about their English language classes and similar supports not as direct efforts to address trafficking, but as ways to build connections with people who could be vulnerable.
- **Legal Support** - there are some pro-bono legal programs and groups that advocate for justice for people who have been trafficked, but the needs and cost can be significant.
 - Vulnerable individuals often need support in connecting to resources.
 - Efforts exist to help victims who have had exploitative content of them published.¹²
- **Recovery Programs** - alcohol and drugs are often used by those who have been trafficked, which function either as a link into trafficking or as a survival strategy to endure the pain of one's experience.
 - Connecting to a recovery program puts the individual in contact with solid help, but at times also fosters connections with those who will prey on vulnerable individuals.
 - One service provider observed that, "drugs, gangs + prostitution are always connected."
 - Traffickers also use forced substance dependency to keep those trafficked in a state of desperation for the substances.

We could not find data on how many survivors are *anemic*, but given poor diets, stress, and likelihood of violence, we estimate a significant number experience fatigue to the point of despair that anemia and other nutrient deficiencies cause.

For example, REED supports an ally organization, Asian Women for Equality, that helps women remove convictions from their Criminal Record Checks due to drugs, theft, assault, or prostitution.¹³

¹² <https://defenddignity.ca/claimants/>

¹³ <https://www.awcep.org/post/women-do-you-have-a-criminal-record>

- **Cyber Safety** - education around cyber safety is critical, especially for young people who have phones, laptops, and tablets for the first time, and are vulnerable to people who could prey on them.
 - Parents, youth leaders, and other caregivers need tools to teach young people about the risks of connecting with strangers online.
 - We need to learn how to preserve and protect the innocence of children while equipping them to deal with risks (not sheltering too much).
 - **Media awareness** and ability to critically think through messages and social media is also key.
 - We need to advocate for safer online spaces, and greater accountability of websites and social media.

- **Political Advocacy** - ending trafficking will require political action, but many in churches are hesitant to do so as they do not see it as their place, and/or do not believe their small efforts will make a difference.
 - One person observed that, “social science chatter turned people off” in her congregation.
 - There are often multiple perspectives on laws, as many can be used to both harm and protect individuals.
 - Politicians and others with influence are not always aware of what our laws are, and how they impact people, but it is not easy to address this.
 - Several people we interviewed talked about supporting our current laws on trafficking, and actively monitoring the government review process, to ensure they do not get overturned.
 - Several also talked about being disappointed or frustrated with **Vancouver City Council’s** stance on sex work, and their inability to engage city staff to understand how current bylaws and practices impact vulnerable people.
 - Some talked about efforts to work with local police boards, to ensure their operating principles are in line with current laws and evidence.

Canada adopted the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* in 2014¹⁴ - leading up to this, many were engaged in advocacy campaigns through organizations like REED.

- Many advocate for the Nordic Model¹⁵. There are some aspects of the model that are not addressed by this Act, and so some are still advocating for changes to existing laws (expected to go to court in the summer of 2022).
- When the Act was passed, some thought the advocacy was done, but the Act was meant to be reviewed in 5 years (2019).
- The government has not conducted that review, and some are concerned that without ongoing attention, the laws protecting vulnerable people could be overturned.

¹⁴ https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/annualstatutes/2014_25/page-1.html

¹⁵ <https://nordicmodelnow.org/what-is-the-nordic-model/>

- **Compassion Fatigue** (or burnout) - a reality for some caregivers and advocates, especially when the need is bigger than the supporters can respond to.
- **#MeToo** - this international movement gained momentum in 2017 when a tipping-point of women who had been sexually assaulted were heard. The solidarity fostered a widespread courage for more women to tell of their experiences of harassment and abuse of power and demand accountability.
 - It is healing and empowering for many, but there are still many who cannot speak up or gain support.
- **Personal Brokenness** - often those who are drawn to engage with people who have experienced something as hard as human trafficking have also experienced their own challenges.
 - While they empathize with the pain and fear others have experienced, their own brokenness and anxiety-triggers may also need significant support.
- **Pornography** - normalizes the demand for violence and access to other's bodies, which fuels sex work and trafficking.
 - Some churches are exploring how to address this addiction and associated hidden, harmful behaviours.
 - Pornography is rarely seen as an issue of justice, and little is done for the women in the images and videos who are repeatedly exploited.
 - Several interviewees talked about how we must acknowledge pornography as the dehumanizing act that it is and take steps to free the oppressed, not just focus on those with the addiction.
 - People are wired to connect with others, and we recognize that our society fosters **isolation** for many (particularly during the pandemic), who then turn to exploitative means of filling needs.

Pornhub reports that worldwide traffic continues to be higher than it was before the Coronavirus pandemic spread globally. The peak increase of almost 25% happened on March 25, 2020, after Pornhub Premium was made free to encourage people to stay indoors and distance themselves physically.

Organizations like REED added their name to the advocacy documents put together by All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) to End Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, speaking against exploitive content on Pornhub. Through the first year of the pandemic, this collective advocacy resulted in Mastercard and Visa suspending their relationship with MindGeek, the host of Pornhub.¹⁶ In December 2020, an \$80 million lawsuit was launched in the U.S. by 50 women against MindGeek for knowingly profiting off exploitation. It was settled out of court.

¹⁶ <https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/pornhub-falling-visa-and-mastercard-cut-ties-with-mindgeeks-cash-cow/>

Changes Through COVID

For many, the COVID-19 pandemic upended life so significantly that it took most of their resources to simply cope, leaving little capacity to address larger social issues. Some interviewees though, talked about how the pandemic increased their congregation's **sense of urgency** to do something for vulnerable people. Some agencies reported **no significant change** in referrals and need for services through COVID, as the needs existed before the pandemic, while others reported an **increase in requests** for support. We also heard about these changes through the pandemic:

- Several talked about how they saw or heard about an **increase in violence** against women, domestic abuse, and porn use accessed during the pandemic, often connected to the isolation, desperation, and escape-seeking many experienced.
- Brothels were considered an **essential service** by some, and in many cases, sex-work was not stopped, so focus shifted to increasing safety for individuals.
 - The BCCDC Put out a Safety Guide for Sex Workers.¹⁷
- Advocacy and engagement often need direct **connection** and **relationships**, which was lost with the distancing recommendations.
- **Young people** who have become targets and/or victims of exploitation are often hesitant to speak up, but may do so in/after a class presentation, though these connections can not be made unless a trained facilitator is present.
- Our shift to **virtual communications** has made connecting and knowledge sharing easier, particularly with those farther away.
- Increasing number of vulnerable people experienced **financial** and **social distress**, compounded by school + supportive program closures, COVID infections, quarantines, reduction of work hours, increase in food prices, and similar challenges.
- Some congregations planned a response or advocacy event, but, like many events through the pandemic, its launch was **postponed** as organizers were ill, or had to isolate, or attend to other priorities.

Underserved & Underrecognized

Populations that were identified by those we interviewed as particularly vulnerable include:

- Impoverished **young people**, especially girls.
 - Some young people see sex work as a way to make money, without understanding the violence and long-term harm involved.
 - Many are addicted to substances, or become so under duress.

¹⁷ http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID19_SexWorkersGuidance.pdf

- Many experienced abuses as children, and may not believe they are worthy of safety, security, and love.
- Increasingly, pre-teen youth are exposed to exploitative images.
- Some noted the way young girls are groomed, increasing their vulnerability.
- Children who were in unstable **foster care** settings, or who aged out of care.
 - Indigenous children are overrepresented in the foster care system, and should be ideally supported to reconnect with their families and cultural ways of healing.
- **University Students**, who are often away from their home communities for the first time, face both limited finances and the normalization of porn and the sex industry.
- New **Immigrants**, particularly **Asian women**, and those with **limited English**.
 - May need assistance to find safe housing when they cannot live with families, supportive organizations (i.e., Kinbrace¹⁸), or other hosts.
- **Indigenous** individuals - some we interviewed suggested that many indigenous communities have good systems of support for both those living on and off reservation, but like in all communities, those from broken families and on the margins of the community are vulnerable.
 - **Young Indigenous women** are particularly a concern.
- Those in particularly **vulnerable neighbourhoods**, such as Vancouver's Downtown EastSide (DTES), where most sex workers are "owned" by a pimp or gang.
- Anyone who is **homeless, underhoused**, or who is forced to choose **high-risk housing**, such as a low-rent suite in a building controlled by a gang, and/or who is pressured to exchange sex for rent or other necessities.
- **Migrant workers**, particularly those brought for **domestic work, construction, and agriculture** work.
 - We often do not see them, as they may be rarely let off the work site and residence.
 - May have documentation and/or pay confiscated by their handlers, and thus cannot walk away.
- Anyone working in a **massage parlor**.
 - Some observed that they have tried to work with Vancouver City Council on regulations around massage parlours, but have not been able to learn about how business licenses are given, or how businesses are monitored.
- **Single mothers** on fixed income, who have often lost some of their precarious income because of COVID, and feel they must (re)turn to sex work to cover their basic expenses.

¹⁸ <https://kinbrace.ca/>

- They are often overwhelmed with childcare (especially when schools and daycare is closed), and do not have extended family to support them.
- People in substance **recovery** - substance use often stemmed from experience of exploitation, and they are still vulnerable to negative influences in a recovery center.
- **Mental health challenges** can confound vulnerabilities.
- **LGBT2Q+** individuals may be cut off from their communities of support and be drawn into exploitative situations.

Vulnerable people often need bridging support, including finding and travelling to resources, accompanying to appointments, and paying for things like unexpected expenses, minor house repairs, and celebrating special events. Several interviewees noted that when we do support people directly or financially, we must do it with sensitivity, as people often do not want to be recognized, or will find it humbling to accept help.

What is Needed to Keep Going

Beyond awareness, which is a significant start, many interviewees mentioned that they and their congregations do not know what to do to address trafficking and exploitation in their cities and neighbourhoods. Those who do currently operate direct supports suggested the following would help them continue:

- Like all initiatives, nothing will happen without **capable, committed leadership**, whether that be staff, board members, or volunteers.
- **Funding** - support must be tailored and usually one-on-one, so more funds can lead to more staff, and more support.
 - **Financial assistance is also made available** for women in, exiting, or at risk of returning to sex work.
- **Greater engagement** - when those who are engaged in anti-trafficking efforts can draw in their **broader community**, influence will spread.
- **Collaboration** - there are many individuals, congregations, and groups addressing the complex issues of trafficking, and significant connections between churches and organizations. However, several interviewees expressed a desire to know more about

The Women Rising Bursary¹⁹ is a scholarship for Aboriginal women looking to increase their education and job readiness. Designed for those with a history of sexual exploitation, the fund assists women escape abuse by furthering employment possibilities and advanced learning.

¹⁹ <https://embracedignity.org/women-rising-bursary/>

what others are doing and suggested there would be value in more coordinated communication between churches and agencies.

- While in-person dialogue around sensitive and complex issues is invaluable, most of us are getting more comfortable with **virtual learning**, which opens opportunity to connect with those who live in **other parts of Canada** (and beyond) where trafficking is more prominent, such as Red Deer, Alberta, or the Highway of Tears in Northern BC.
- Some interviewees involved in advocacy work also talked about tensions and differences of opinion with others also addressing the same issues. While some conflict will happen with such a complex, difficult problem, we must ensure that our conflicts do not distract us from our larger, shared goals. There are forces of evil working against the light of love and connection.
- **Long Term Aftercare** - people who have been through an experience as horrific as trafficking will need support for years after they are safe and stabilized, but it can be harder to maintain funding and programs beyond immediate needs.
 - One of the biggest needs is for **gradual support** - survivors get significant support when they live in a safe house, but when they leave, they need long-term support to foster connections to services, housing, education, work, etc.
 - Families and friends of loved ones who are missing or caught in some form of exploitation also need care and guidance.
- **Media and Communications** - to raise awareness and support, many groups use videos, publications, and social media, but to do this well, it takes significant skill, time, and budget.
- Where legal and police services do exist, those who need the services often need support in **connecting to (and affording)** their help, or with traveling back to their home communities.
- Understanding and addressing what fuels the **demand** for sexual exploitation and human trafficking, particularly pornography and online child sexual exploitation.

Key Pandemic Lessons

This unprecedented season led us to prioritize safety as we never had before, and we had to figure out what that meant practically. Those we interviewed also highlighted these key lessons learned through the pandemic:

- Staff had to keep showing up for the clients, even when we did not know what was safe; they took all the precautions they knew and kept at it. We must **keep supporting our front-line workers**.
- The Church must keep working towards making **physically** and **emotionally safe** communities, especially for those who have known significantly unsafe seasons.

- Although not a new lesson, but we learned in a deeper way that picking up the pieces of a broken life is costly - it is so much easier to **prevent** people from becoming exploited than to have to support them out of a difficult situation.
- Just as we longed for connection as individuals when forced into isolation, we also need to connect as organizations to learn how prevalent these problems are. We all hold a piece of the puzzle, and some of the tool necessary to prevent harm.

Conclusion

Like anemia, we cannot correct human trafficking with simple, one-off interventions. It will take caring, attentive, teachable, Spirit-led individuals with different skills - law enforcement, medical care, spiritual direction, educators, advocates, and more - to prevent exploitation and support the individuals who have been harmed. Walking alongside survivors will be a long, deep, holistic journey. Much of this work must be done by those who are equipped and have the capacity to do it well, and indeed, we can cause more harm to vulnerable people with inadequate efforts to address their challenges.

And still, there are many things we can do for our neighbours in need. We must start with learning about the issues that fuel demand and doing all we can to protect the vulnerable. We must advocate for strong, protective laws, with our commitment to social justice grounded in our spirituality - shrewd as snakes and inoffensive as doves. And then, rather than challenges like anemia, trafficking, and exploitation, we can all experience the gift of a well-nourished body - our physical bodies, and the body of Christ.

Appendixes

Appendix A - Denominational Initiatives

Several denominations have a national body that addresses trafficking, and so local churches point to that as their involvement. This is not an exhaustive list of denominations in Canada.

Alliance Canada	https://www.cmacan.org/ministries/defend-dignity/
Anglican Church of Canada	https://www.anglican.ca/issues/human-trafficking/working-on-the-issue/
Baptist	https://baptist-atlantic.ca/news/human-trafficking-101/ https://baptistwomen.com/21-things-you-can-do-to-end-human-trafficking/
Catholic	Archdiocese of Vancouver: https://rcav.org/anti-human-trafficking Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops: https://www.cccb.ca/justice-and-peace/human-trafficking/
Church of the Nazarene	https://www.ncmcanada.ca/anti-human-trafficking-ca
Christian Reformed Church of Canada	https://new.crcna.org/PublicDialogue/resources/human-trafficking (Includes resources, suggestions for national awareness day, and a template for writing to Members of Parliament)
Evangelical Free Church of Canada	https://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/HumanTrafficking
Lutheran	https://elcic.ca/CompassionateJustice/AddressingHumanTrafficking.cfm
Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada	Have some focus on anti-trafficking efforts overseas, but not specifically identified issue for Canada: https://paoc.org/canada/priorities
Presbyterian Church in Canada	Point to https://www.canadiancentretoendhumantrafficking.ca
Quaker - Religious Society of Friends	https://quakerservice.ca/our-work/justice/
Salvation Army	Illuminate - Ending Human Trafficking [https://www.illuminateht.com/] which exists to “boldly disrupt the cycles of human trafficking by illuminating public awareness through education, providing relentless intervention strategies, creating safe spaces for Survivors to heal, and establishing networks that build back extraordinary lives for those affected in Canada.”

Appendix B - Non-Denominational Advocacy Groups

Ally Global	https://allyglobal.org/ - work to prevent trafficking and support survivors through safe homes, education and work opportunities in Nepal, Laos, and Cambodia.
Be Amazing Campaign	http://www.beamazingcampaign.org/ - Raises awareness on human sex trafficking/sexual exploitation to politicians, police, and the public.
Canadian Center to End Trafficking	www.canadiancentretoendhumantrafficking.ca - a national charity dedicated to ending all types of human trafficking in Canada.
Chabdai	https://www.chabdai.org/ - a national and global network for protection and support, working toward a world free from modern slavery and human trafficking.
Defend Dignity	<p>https://defenddignity.ca/ - raises awareness on the realities of all forms of sexual exploitation through events and resources, provides aid to survivors through financial and practical resources, and advocates for law and policy reform with all levels of government and companies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposing Exploitation (Youth Focused Curriculum) - for youth workers, teachers, and pastors who have positive relationships with vulnerable youth, a key to staying free from exploitation (Updated in 2021)
Dressembler	https://www.dressembler.ca/ - a community of international advocates utilizing fashion + creativity to help end human trafficking
Educating Voices (Formerly EVE - Exploited Voices now Educating)	https://educating-voices.com/ - a non-profit organization composed of former sex-industry women dedicated to naming prostitution as a form of violence against women and seeing its abolition through political action, advocacy and awareness-raising that focuses on ending the demand for paid sexual access to women and children's bodies
EPIK	https://www.endslaverynow.org/epik - seeks to engage men in two simple but critical ways: teach men how to leverage their influence for change and make a way for men to champion the front-line work of victim restoration
Exodus Cry	https://exoduscry.com/ - exists to break the cycle of commercial sexual exploitation and help those who have been sold for sex because every person should be free
International Justice Mission	https://www.ijm.ca/ - rallies Canadians to the fight to end slavery and violence in our lifetime
Nordic Model Now	Has a guild specifically focused on University Students: https://nordicmodelnow.org/the-nordic-model-now-handbook-for-universities/
Public Service Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vancouver Police Department - Counter Sexual Exploitation Unit and Youth unit (team with trained police officer and social worker) • Canadian Border Services Agency - officials at the airport and other border crossings scan for vulnerable people, and address when able
Ratanak	https://www.ratanak.org/ - works with Cambodians to restore those robbed of freedom and protect the vulnerable
REED	https://embracedignity.org/ - exists to resist exploitation by addressing the male demand for paid sex... (Justice), and to embrace dignity by entering into transformative relationships with women who are harmed by the sex industry and lift up the voices of those who are silenced (Kindness)
SA Foundation	https://www.safoundation.com/ - provides refuge, training and employment for women escaping human trafficking and sexual exploitation in Vancouver and around the world
Servants Anonymous	https://www.safoundation.com/ - provides refuge, training and employment for women escaping human trafficking and sexual exploitation
VCASE	Vancouver Coalition Against Exploitation: https://www.vcase.ca/ - a non-partisan group working to end all forms of sexual exploitation